



AGORA



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of UBC Classical, Near Eastern and Religious Studies
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Dear Reader,

It is with great pleasure that we present the first issue of *Agora: the Undergraduate Journal of UBC Classical, Near Eastern and Religious Studies*. Though the idea for this journal has been in the works for some time, it is only this past year that, thanks to the undying enthusiasm of a few select students, we have been able to put together what we hope to be the first of many annual editions.

The *Agora* means a "place of assembly", and in ancient times served as a marketplace, a centre for commercial transactions, political discussions, and the focus of city life. The Agora was an all-purpose space where all topics were discussed. It is therefore a fitting title for a journal that encompasses the vast topic of Classical, Near Eastern and Religious Studies. Within this department History, Art History, Archaeology, Philosophy, Literature and Religion are studied, and we have therefore attempted to select papers to represent each facet of the various disciplines.

From such a wealth of possibilities, we hope that this journal includes papers that will spark the interest of a variety of readers, and encourage individuals to read on and explore the ancient world on their own. Though we are a small department, the passionate dedication of the undergraduate students in CNERS is evident in the representative examples included in the following pages. We hope that this spirit continues, and future undergraduates will put forward their work to continue to engender interest in this fascinating branch of the social sciences.

We would also like to acknowledge the students, faculty and staff without whose help this journal would not have been possible.

Sincerely,

Carrie Arbuckle and the editors of *Agora*.

Appreciating Femininity: Women's Lives in Archaic Greece

ODESSA CADIEUX-REY

The Archaic Age has been unanimously recognized as a crucial period of transition and change affecting all the inhabitants of Greece to some degree or another. With the emergence of a new set of cultural and political ideals, the extent to which woman's role was intimately entangled with the rest of society became evident. Consequently, women too were caught up in the sweeping social revolution that would culminate in the codification of their status for centuries to come. The nature of this transition and its implications for the institutions of Classical Greece is fascinating subject matter in itself.¹ However, the aim of this essay is not to offer an analysis of this period as an evolutionary link between Dark Age and Classical Greek attitudes, but to assess woman's position in archaic Greece independently of later developments. Looking back on any period from the notoriously severe Classical Athenian model, it is easy to be especially pessimistic about attitudes towards and experiences of women, but by ignoring subsequent stigmatization that has become the dominant image of women in ancient Greece, one finds that the perception and life of women in archaic Greece was overall very positive. It is important to look at the image of women in this period and explain how it came about, so that the negative aspects of it can be understood and reassessed alongside other

evidence, which will be presented in two forms: the appreciative attitude towards women as expressed by men and the contentment with their role as expressed by the women themselves. By proving the positive nature of woman's life in this period, there is potential to shed new light on the nature of woman's role in the Classical age.

The deep roots of woman's image in archaic Greece are not surprisingly similar to those of any other culture. It is shocking then that we are so repulsed by the myth of Pandora and the cutting satires of Semonides while remaining silent on the entire course of cultural history. No matter how women are treated in actuality, there has almost always been a misogynistic subconscious not unlike that in ancient Greece. Rather than an aimless tirade on this unfortunate facet of human thought, perhaps it is more valuable to accept it as inevitable and turn our attention to the psychological and practical origins of this image in the case of archaic Greece, seeking to understand rather than condemn it. Such an effort provides a base for reconstructing the realities of woman's life rather than obsessing over an abstract ideology.

Most important to understanding this attitude is the psychology of man's perception of women. The core explanation is hardly revolutionary: men had an intense fear of women's sexuality. Peter Walcot reveals by analysing mythology that men genuinely believed women were "incapable of not exercising their sexual charms and that the

¹ For an excellent summary, see: Arthur, "Early Greece: Origins of the Western Attitude Toward Women", *Women in the Ancient World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), 7-58.

results were catastrophic.”² When Hesiod describes Pandora as a “tempting snare / from which men cannot escape,” he typifies this paranoia.³ Likewise, in Semonides’ famous poem many of the attributes of a ‘bad wife’ are related to sexuality.⁴ A vivid example is the weasel-women who will make any man she climbs aboard seasick.⁵ The result is clear; It was paranoia about woman’s overwhelming sexual sway that led masculine culture to idealize and seek out a safely sexless wife. This fear perhaps relates to the Greek cultural phenomenon of celebrating affectionate, often sexual, bonds between men and youths and occasionally men and their equals. Look at the often cited passionate relationship between Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad* as contrasted with the calmly affectionate relationship of Hector and Andromache.⁶ Although Hector displays genuine love for his wife, even putting her safety above all other concerns in the war, it is no match for Achilles threatening to take his own life upon hearing of the death of his friend.⁷ Although Homer makes no reference to explicitly sexual relations between men, it is clear that by the late sixth century in the time of the lovers Harmodios and Aristogeiton, who became cult figures after their murder of the tyrant Hipparchos, it was widely accepted.⁸ The kind of love we now often see between a man and a woman was avoided by men in archaic Greece

who formed intense pederastic, homosexual, or platonic bonds with each other. Surely there were a number of reasons underlying this phenomenon, but there is little doubt that one of them was that it provided a safe means of expressing passionate love without entangling oneself with an inscrutable and deceitful woman. The existence of this trend would have pushed women even further into the shadows— unless they were able to shine through as ideally chaste wives.

Undoubtedly, there were other economic, geographical, and political aspects of archaic Greece more properly unique to the time that contributed to woman’s image. The development of the *polis* meant that it became increasingly more important for women to stay in their place. In a more egalitarian society, the functioning of the *polis* was directly dependant upon the functioning of the *oikos*.⁹ As Marylin Arthur says, it is not surprising that women were becoming more threatening: one woman’s moral failing could affect the entire *polis*.¹⁰ Now women posed not only a personal threat to the individual man, but a threat to the entire community. Sue Blundell makes another often overlooked but important point when she suggests rapid population growth could very well have resulted in “a diminution in the biological value of women.”¹¹ On top of that, she points out that the switch to a more agrarian, labour-intensive society meant that women were no longer as useful and on the surface looked like they were not doing their share of the work.¹² In addition to everything else, there were now practical excuses for disdaining women. Disheartening as it may be, Jonathan Hall

² Walcot, "Greek Attitudes Towards Women: The Mythological Evidence", *Women in Antiquity*. Vol. 3. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 93.

³ Hes. *Theog.* 589-90

⁴ See Walcot, 99-100

⁵ Simon. 7.53-54

⁶ Hom. *Il.* 16.7-10; Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 72.

⁷ Hom. *Il.* 6.539-56; 18.91-109.

⁸ Dillon and Garland, *Ancient Greece: Social and Historical Documents from Archaic Times to the Death of Socrates* (London: Routledge, 1994), 423.

⁹ See Arthur, 22ff.

¹⁰ Arthur, 23.

¹¹ Blundell, 76.

¹² *Ibid.*, 76.

makes the observation that the negative attitudes expressed by Hesiod and his fellow critics are typical of peasant societies in general.¹³ The image of women that formed in the Archaic Age was a combination of a fear common to all of mankind, and a natural product of the times. Despite the negative image that comes down to us from archaic Greece, mainly through literature, we are fortunate to have a multitude of examples to prove that the reality of the situation was far less severe.

It is easy to read some archaic authors, in particular Hesiod and Semonides, and stop there in shock at their uninhibited misogyny. But if we do look to other sources we find a second opinion. Religion and ceremony, other literature, and material culture put Hesiod and Semonides in their place as only a small part of a much larger, more encouraging picture. Nevertheless, it is necessary to touch on, and attempt to understand, where Hesiod and Semonides were coming from. It is likely that they shared the fears of women outlined above, and had similar reasons for those opinions. However, in both their cases, there are extenuating circumstances that would make their negative perceptions of women even more pronounced. It is known that Hesiod's writings reflect the opinions of a middle-class struggling to come to terms with a changing world.¹⁴ Sarah Pomeroy draws attention to the fact that his hostility towards women was actually only a part of his wide-ranging bitterness towards social change.¹⁵ In addition to this, it is often ignored that while Hesiod had nothing but contempt for "a woman who wags her tail / as she chatters

sweetly with a greedy eye on your possessions,"¹⁶ he truly does believe that "nothing is better for a man than a good wife."¹⁷ Though his works are rife with biting criticism, it must be taken within the context of his position and personality and measured against the hints of thanks he does express. Semonides begins his infamous satire on women with, "From the start, the gods made women different,"¹⁸ and goes on to viciously describe every animalistic manifestation of woman. While arguably even more callous than Hesiod, he is in fact easier to deconstruct. It has been claimed both that he was politically active and that he was the first of the lyric poets to write for money.¹⁹ If true, both these facts raise suspicions about the purpose and voice behind Semonides' poem. Could it have been commissioned propaganda? No one can say, but it is important to consider. We do know more about Semonides' audiences: he was writing for a group of men carousing and drinking together in the symposium.²⁰ Hall describes it as a "masculinist environment in which expressions of bravado and machismo served as rituals of male bonding."²¹ This reveals a lot about the nature of his poetry and few could deny that parallels can be drawn between this and gatherings that occur today, among both sexes, where the other sex is torn apart in wicked satire to entertain the group. Hesiod and Semonides are expressing only part of a wider masculine consciousness.

As mentioned earlier, paranoia about women emerged with the development of the

¹³ Hall, *A History of the Archaic Greek World : Ca. 1200-479 BCE* (Grand Rapids: Blackwell Limited, 2007), 198.

¹⁴ See Arthur, p. 20.

¹⁵ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 48.

¹⁶ Hes. *Op.* 373-4.

¹⁷ Hes. *Op.* 702.

¹⁸ Simon. 7.1.

¹⁹ Arthur, 45; Osborne, *Greece in the Making: 1200-479 BC* (London: Routledge, 1996), 226.

²⁰ Osborne, 226.

²¹ Hall, 199.

polis and the increasing importance of woman's role. Society was moving from the traditional, androcentric ideal of the hero to a new ideal where family relationships were supreme.²² Woman earned new respect in a society that depended so heavily upon her role as a mother. The same changes that frustrated and provoked Hesiod and Semonides also inspired widespread recognition and praise, manifest in examples from religion, literature, symbolism, archaeology, and art.

Religious practice has especially important implications because it often represents beliefs with origins in a prehistoric past. Much like the myth of Pandora reveals ideological foundations for the stigmatization of women, certain ceremonies and festivals in which women played a crucial role reveal gratitude and admiration. The most famous exclusively woman's festival is the Thesmophoria, a secretive celebration involving peculiar rituals, but most important is its symbolism. It is a promotion of agricultural fertility reserved for women, whose fertility as procreators is seen as equal in importance to that of the land.²³ Though some men resented the secrecy of the Thesmophoria, the long-standing tradition is a cultural acknowledgement of women and their significance. Along with being linked to birth and fertility, women also played the leading role in funerary ceremonies; they dressed the corpses, sang laments, and grieved theatrically. Blundell sees them as the bonds which united a family, before and after death.²⁴ So, in birth and in death, women received their due respect and were granted

an opportunity to express themselves independently of men.

One of the most famous women of archaic literature and the archetypal 'good wife' is Penelope. Sheila Murnaghan convincingly argues that in the *Odyssey*, "there is scope for a female character to display a heroism comparable to that of men."²⁵ While Odysseus heroically faces hardship after hardship, Penelope experiences her own epic struggle in her domestic sphere, warding off suitors and enduring her pain, steadfastly awaiting her husband's doubtful return. Another woman, Odysseus' mother, is able to recognize this, saying to her son, "her life is an endless hardship like your own..."²⁶ and even Agamemnon, in his rage against his own treacherous wife Clytemnestra, recognizes and praises her: "The immortal gods will lift a song for all mankind, a glorious song in praise of self-possessed Penelope."²⁷ Agamemnon's proclamation provides further confirmation of the profound gratitude men had for a bravely faithful woman. Perhaps to our eyes Penelope's behaviour is upsettingly complacent, but it is wrong to make such an assumption and to infuse this cultural ideal with modern ones. As will be shown, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that women in the real world were perfectly content to play the part of Penelope.

Interpretation of material culture supplies some affirmation in regards to society's gratitude for its women. In Athenian grave excavations the sex of the deceased can be established based on the objects interred with them. Women's offerings include spindle

²² Arthur, 12.

²³ Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion* (London: Routledge, 2002), 120

²⁴ Blundell, 72.

²⁵ Murnaghan, "Penelope's *agnoia*: Knowledge, Power and Gender in the *Odyssey*", *Rescuing Creusa: New Methodological Approaches to Women in Antiquity* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech UP, 1987), 103.

²⁶ Hom. *Od.* 11.208.

²⁷ Hom. *Od.* 24.213-18.

whorls, cooking pots, and jewellery, while men's include spears, shield bosses, and drinking cups.²⁸ These offerings symbolically illustrate the ideal roles of both sexes. The woman's spindle whorl has no less symbolic weight or importance than the man's spear. While man played his defensive role as a soldier, woman played her equally vital economic role as producer of textiles.²⁹ Men and women in these graves are clearly differentiated according to cultural norms, but those should not be taken to be an imposition on either party. Another striking public acknowledgement of women starts popping up all over Greece around 650 BCE in the form of the *korai*, large statues of young women dedicated at cemeteries and sanctuaries.³⁰ Along with their young male counterparts, the *kourai*, they no doubt reveal an admiration worthy of being represented widely in art.

Demonstrating that women were appreciated only paints half the picture. Regardless of how highly men regarded and respected them, it needs to be asked: did women have a voice that was equally respected? The woman whose voice rings out the loudest from the Archaic Age is the poetess Sappho who lived on the island of Lesbos around 612 BCE. Her voice was revered throughout the Greek world, even prompting Solon, whose Athenian law code was infamously strict on women, to exclaim that he could die happy having learned her poetry.³¹ Although she is probably exceptional, it says something that people were able to look past her gender and appreciate her art for the marvel it was. A woman with a political voice in Herodotus is Gorgo, the proud wife

of Leonidas. In a remarkable passage, she is portrayed as a young girl advising her father Cleomenes not to trust the messenger from Ionia seeking his support, advice that her father unhesitatingly takes.³² Here Gorgo represents not only women but children, two marginalized groups, and whether or not Herodotus' account is apocryphal, he passes no judgment on the Spartan girl's influence, which she will continue to wield throughout her lifetime. As another example, Herodotus has nothing but praise for Artemisia, the remarkable female tyrant of Halicarnassus who played an active role in the Persian Wars.³³ This brings to light an important point. These women from Lesbos, Sparta, and Ionia are nothing like the women of Athens, who form so many of our perceptions and judgements that we are blinded to other parts of the Greek world. These realities must be recognized as significant departures from the Athenian ideal, and proof that customs were not so rigid that they could not be overcome, and that women who did overcome them were shown awe and respect.

Aside from these exceptional women who rejected the norms, how did the vast majority of archaic women feel about the ideals they were meant to embody? There is a surprising amount of evidence to support that, at least in the Archaic Age, women were quite content to be an Andromache, staying indoors and lovingly rearing their children. Some interesting insights come from the female Pythagorean philosophers. Pythagoras lived and philosophized in the late sixth century, toward the end of the Archaic Age.³⁴ Porphyry, a third century philosopher, relates

²⁸ Pomeroy, 43.

²⁹ Blundell, 72.

³⁰ Blundell, 92.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 83; Aelian, frag. 187.

³² Hdt. 5.51

³³ Hdt. 7.99

³⁴ Waithe, "Early Pythagoreans: Themistoclea, Theano, Arignote, Myia, and Damo", *A History of Women Philosophers*, Vol. 1 (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 11.

Pythagoras' belief that "all things that come to be alive must be thought akin," and further declares, "Pythagoras seems to have been the first to introduce these opinions to Greece."³⁵ In the sixth century, Pythagoras was the first to see women as equal to men and they played a large role in shaping his doctrines, particularly his own wife Theano and his purported daughter Myia. These women are credited with writings in which they discuss the principle of *harmonia*, a kind of balance, as it applies to woman and the household.³⁶ Mary Ellen Waithe encapsulates it:

Women philosophers have the task of teaching other women how to live harmoniously in their souls and create justice in their homes. No different is the duty of male Pythagoreans to teach men to temper themselves in order to keep justice within the *polis*.³⁷

These women at least were happy in their role as wife and considered their contribution to society to be equally valuable to that of their male counterparts. Pythagoreanism allowed women to have a voice in philosophy, and from them we hear of contentment or, at the very least, a coming-to-terms with their position. Other women had even more adamant pride in their role. Take the saying (attributed again to Gorgo) that Spartan women are the only women who give birth to men.³⁸ As Bella Zweig points out, the confidence of Spartan women had its roots in their intense sense of pride in their vital contribution as mothers.³⁹ Although Spartan

women were known for their headstrong nature, it can safely be assumed that in Athens, and throughout Greece, women at least took some pride in the rearing of children as well because, as we have seen, they were thanked and recognized for it. Zweig points out that our assumption that women were not happy comes from, "the severe deprecation of women and the institution of motherhood in western society."⁴⁰ We have a habit of leaping to conclusions about the feelings of women in archaic Greece and beyond based on the way a woman today would feel in her place, rather than the way a Greek woman in the context of her time would have felt.

Finally, something needs to be said about the change in living arrangements that affected women in this period. Some believe that women were kept in utter seclusion and that house plans reflect concretely gendered space.⁴¹ Ian Morris looks at excavations at Zagora with respect to the Archaic Age, and remarks that the courtyard houses appearing there c. 700 BCE did represent a move towards gendered space, but the primary purpose was to cut off the entire *oikos* from the outside world, not just the women.⁴² This reflects a changing community organization and ideology more than decreasing respect for women. Regardless of how they may have been differently integrated into society before, women in the archaic house were not necessarily worse off.

Beyond her acceptance of and happiness in her role as a mother and

³⁵ Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras* 19 = 14.8a.

³⁶ Waithe, 14-17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁸ Plut. *Lyk.* 14.8

³⁹ Zweig, "The Only Women Who Give Birth to Men: A Gynocentric, Cross-Cultural View of Women in Ancient

Sparta", *Woman's Power, Man's Game*. (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1993), 45.

⁴⁰ Zweig, 45

⁴¹ Morris, "Archaeology and Gender Ideologies in Early Archaic Greece", *Sex and Difference in Ancient Greece and Rome*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 265-67.

⁴² Morris, 269-71.

supporter of her husband's *oikos*, woman had other sources of enjoyment. Walcot suggests that the very separatism that existed between men and women allowed them to enjoy private spheres of existence and form closer ties with each other.⁴³ Women in archaic Greece were certainly not kept locked up as the Athenian ideal leads us to believe. There were, no matter how suspicious it made their husbands, opportunities for them to meet and bond with other women. One of these, the Thesmophoria, has been mentioned already. In Sparta, the love between women in choruses is celebrated in the poetry written for them by Alkman. He has one girl express her feelings for another of her peers: "And I sing of Agido's radiance: I see her as the sun, which Agido calls as witness to shine for us."⁴⁴ Educated together in these choruses, the girls undoubtedly developed strong attachments to each other. Blundell takes Alkman's poetry as evidence that public voicing of strong feelings between women in Sparta was acceptable and encouraged.⁴⁵ Nor were such intense friendships restricted to Sparta. Sappho writes from Lesbos, and as Osborne says, reveals the existence of another archaic city where there existed "a social space outside the family circle in which women could become intensely attached to one another."⁴⁶ Sappho in a poem says farewell to a woman she loves deeply: "Go happily and remember me, you know how we cared for you, if not, let me remind you ... the lovely times we shared."⁴⁷ Sappho reveals the intensity of the love behind her friendship with this woman, and how her

⁴³ Walcot, 92.

⁴⁴ Rayor, *Sappho's Lyre: Archaic Lyric and Women Poets of Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), 34; Alkman *PMG* 1 L.39-43.

⁴⁵ Blundell, 81

⁴⁶ Osborne, 227-228

⁴⁷ Rayor, 60; Voigt, 94 L.6-10.

other friends loved and cared for her also. A love like this could only have been born out of an arena exclusive to women. Groups of women forming friendships like these are comparable to the separate male sphere of the symposium. The split between the sexes in archaic Greece was more of a separation into different areas of interest and capability than a relegation of women to an inferior status. This existence of woman as an entity in her own right allowed her the opportunity to create a solely female identity among her peers.

There is little doubt that the attitudes towards, and experiences of, women in archaic Greece were part of a fading trend. It was not until Solon consolidated the new role of women in the *polis* that they became locked into a much more restrained lifestyle.⁴⁸ At least, that is how the literature of the day represents it, as in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*. What is important to see is that any culture's authors and artists are representing an ideology. Whether it is their personal ideology or the presiding ideology of the times, it underlies everything they hand down to us for interpretation. A new ideology, which seemed to emanate from Athens, was spreading all over Greece towards the end of the sixth century. Examining archaic Greek women allows us to pinpoint them in a time of transition, when their role had not yet been ultimately defined. The evidence of women that comes down to us from archaic Greece is fluid; easier to dissect in order to attempt to find the underlying truths, many of which would have prevailed, not only in the Archaic Age but throughout Greek history.

⁴⁸ Arthur, 22.

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New Peace by New Means: An Exegesis of the Gospel of John 14:27

PETER J. BARBER

The focus of this analysis is the exegesis of Jesus' words in the Gospel of John 14:27, which form a part of the Farewell Address: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid" (John 14:27 NRSV). According to some scholars this verse is the central element of the Farewell Address, and even of John's entire Gospel.¹ It contains the central dialectic of two kingdoms based on two sets of social ordering principles; two opposing ways of obtaining and maintaining personal and communal victory and peace.² These are the Kingdom of Satan (though variously termed) and the Kingdom of Heaven. The verse also contains an important exhortation willed by Jesus upon his disciples to prepare them for what is about to begin. This Exegesis will be preceded by a socio-historical analysis contextual to the time of Jesus of Nazareth and the writing of John's Gospel. This will be followed by a narrowing literary analysis which will converge upon this address and finally this moment and saying of Jesus in John's narrative.

The Gospel of John is thought to have been written for reasons that are unique from the reasons for which the synoptics were written. This Gospel is considered to have been written for two purposes, or two audiences. It is a classical biography of Jesus of Nazareth: his life, ministry, passion and

resurrection.³ It is also a "missionary tract" specifically designed to address the ongoing unrest in the Jewish community, known as the "Johannine Community," in which the author was a central figure.⁴ According to Martyn, "Both for John and for his conversation partners in the synagogue, the technical issue of Jesus' messiahship is of paramount importance."⁵ It is thought to be for this reason that John is the only of the four canonical Gospels to openly use the term "messiah" to describe Jesus. This issue is the reason for the central theme running through this Gospel of belief; belief in Jesus' messiahship. This was at the center of the divisive debates in the Johannine community, and was also at the core of the claims made by Jesus and his followers. It was a central distinguishing factor for this burgeoning sect of Judaism in the first century.

At the time of the writing of this text the Jews in the Roman Empire were looking for and expecting a messiah to save them from their ongoing abysmal treatment by foreign powers. The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the massacre accompanying that event were likely fresh in their hearts and minds. But the messiah they were expecting was not the same for each sect of Judaism, and this was a subject of constant consternation and debate, with many self-professing

¹ Segovia, *The Farewell of the Word: The Johannine Call to Abide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 66.

² Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. Williams (Ottawa: Novalis, 2001), 79-81.

³ Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian*

Writings (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 164.

⁴ Kruse, *The Gospel According to John: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 35.

⁵ Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 81.

messiahs coming and going during this period, each receiving the belief and support of various followings. As Painter states, "This... draws attention to a mass of ill-defined expectations prevalent in the first century, much of which could be, and probably was designated messianic."⁶ The canonical Gospels indicate that at the time of Jesus' ministry, the people desired a political messiah, who would establish an autonomous Israel by 'the world's means' – by violence – much like the last Jewish monarchy, the Hasmonaeans, had done. As Gaebelien states, "The demand of the Jews for a declaration of messiahship at the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) reflects the desire for a renewal of political liberation such as the Maccabees had achieved."⁷ Evidence for this is found in the account of Jesus' 'triumphal entry,' when Jesus traveled south to Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, the time of the commemoration of the victorious reestablishment of 'home rule' by the sons of Hashmon over a hundred years earlier. In this account it is clear that the people desire and expect Jesus to take on this mantle of violent, political revolutionary. The palm branches waved by the crowd were a symbol of victory for both the Greeks and the Babylonians before them (John 12:12-13). After Jesus time, the palm branch was a symbol of the divine victory of the Bar Kosiba revolution.⁸ A week after Jesus enters the city, the crowd realizes he is not going to give them what they desire, so they want him killed in exchange for the release of a violent revolutionary named Barabbas from Roman

⁶ Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature and Theology of the Johannine Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 11.

⁷ Gaebelien, *The Expositors Bible Commentary*. Vol. 9 (John - Acts) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 15.

⁸ Romanoff, "Jewish Symbols on Ancient Jewish Coins," *JQR* 33.1 (1942): 2.

detainment. Before this event occurs, when Jesus first mentions his intent to go to Jerusalem and there to suffer, the disciple Peter rebukes him for speaking this way, but Jesus then rebukes Peter saying, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (Mark 8:33b). Jesus follows this fascinating rebuke with a lesson concerning taking up one's cross instead of pursuing the ways and means of the world and losing one's soul. This passage parallels the temptation of Jesus by Satan in the wilderness after his baptism, in which Satan offers him all the kingdoms of this world. Girard observes the intention of Peter in his attempted rebuke, "Disappointed by what he takes to be the excessive resignation of Jesus, the disciple (Peter) tries to breathe into him his own desire, his own worldly ambition."⁹ Peter desires and expects Jesus to be another kind of Messiah than Jesus has himself been claiming to be. Peter does not understand, and Jesus finds himself still trying to get his followers to understand up until the very moments before his death, and even still after his resurrection.

Although the Bar Kosiba revolt occurred later – in the century after Jesus of Nazareth – the accounts of both characters are written in the same time period, and the nature of their perceived messiahships are openly contrasted in various works. As Lenowitz states, "The accounts we have of Jesus and Bar Kosiba developed together, responding to each other, though the men were not contemporaries."¹⁰ Lenowitz observes this open distinction between a suffering, non-violent revolutionary in Jesus as opposed to the violent, political

⁹ Girard, 33.

¹⁰ Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to the Crown Heights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 32.

messiahship of Bar Kosiba. He writes, "Their texts place the two messiahs in opposition to each other in several important ways... Shim'on Bar Kosiba appears as a southerner and a this-worldly messiah, conservative in his religion and militant in his conduct; Jesus, a Galilean, is a messiah speaking for another world, not for the kingdom of humans."¹¹ For these reasons, Painter recognizes that the author of John's Gospel merges the prevailing conceptions of messiah, forming a character in Jesus which is more complex than people seem to understand or typically seek after. He writes, "One can only say that at this point Johannine Christology and Jewish messianic expectations widely diverge though the former has its roots in the latter especially in the merging of the diversity of expectations that could broadly be called messianic."¹² It is for this reason that this Gospel moves beyond the term messiah to the use of the term "*theos-aner*" – "the divine man."¹³ Painter continues, "Consequently the finished Gospel allows for a number of levels of perception so that Jesus is understood as the fulfillment of various messianic conceptions. Ultimately the evangelist is intent to show that, whatever the conceptual starting-point of the quest for the Messiah, it finds its fulfillment in Jesus."¹⁴ So the Gospel of John evidently engages in extensive theological assertions in a way that the synoptic Gospels do differently, perhaps developing a more complex understanding of the person of Jesus of Nazareth, with radical assertions of what he is doing and what he is offering the world.

What remains is a more focused literary analysis of the text itself. The juxtaposition of

two means of messiahship is easily viewed as part of a dialectic of two kingdoms in John's Gospel as well as elsewhere in the canonical Gospels and writings. It is an open comparison between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of the Father in Heaven. There is a passage in the "Passion" narrative, where Jesus declares to Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). The "as it is", is more precisely translated as "now," which may well indicate that Jesus is asserting his confidence that his kingdom is now understood, accepted and supported by his followers enough, following his farewell address to them, that he can safely assert that its arrival has come and will continue to grow under their efforts. Both Crossan and Girard equate the phrase, "this world" to all human civilizations. This is clearly seen in John 14:27. Jesus explains that perhaps the central empirical characteristic of his kingdom which differentiates it from all kingdoms of this world ('the kingdom of Satan') is its non-violence; its absolute peace founded on selfless-love. A peace so determined and radical that its ruler and its members will not even use violent means to defend its sovereign from false-accusation and murder.¹⁵ Crossan writes, "the crucial difference...between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Rome is Jesus' non-violence and Pilate's violence. The violence of Roman imperialism, however, was but one incarnation at that first-century time and in that Mediterranean place of "this world" – that is, of the violent normalcy of

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 33-4.

¹² Painter, 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁵ Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 4.

civilization itself.”¹⁶

Girard develops a reading of the explicit nature and *modus operandi* of this view of Satan in the Gospels with the exegesis of a saying found in the synoptic Gospels where Jesus makes one of his typical ‘conversation stoppers’ in a debate with some religious leaders by posing the question, “How can Satan cast out Satan?” (Mark 3:23-26). He then goes on to describe just how it is, quite technically, that Satan does this. Girard states that here Jesus is describing Satan simultaneously as a social disordering and ordering principle of “mimetic contagion” in a community. Communities experience periodic escalations of violent rivalries which cycle toward the triggering of “single victim mechanism”, the unanimous accusation and murder of a marginal member of the community by the majority.¹⁷ The collective murder has a cathartic and pacifying effect, and the power which brought the restoration of the community is attributed to the dead victim, granting him a deified status in the view of the community. This mechanism is repeated by the community, whenever the need arises, to maintain the social order that the first murder established.¹⁸ Girard asserts that all human communities – all societies and civilizations – are founded and maintained by this process. This mimetic cycle, or Satan (the kingdoms of this world, the cosmos, human civilization), is founded and perpetuated by means of this sacred illusion. The lie is firstly the guilt of the murdered for the community's strife, and secondly the divinization of the murdered when the people collectively experience a profound unity and peace in the wake of the death of the scapegoat

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷ Girard, 24, 45.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79-81.

(*pharmakos*), which only a true god could accomplish.

Girard also cites a key passage on the two opposing kingdoms present in John's Gospel where Jesus speaks in terms of two fathers. Speaking to a group of Jews who had just decided to believe in his Messiahship, he says:

If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. Why don't you understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:42-44)

The Jews are deeply offended and change their minds because of Jesus words.

Concerning this passage Girard states, “These people have the Devil for a father because it is the desires of the Devil that they want to fulfill and not the desires of God. They take the Devil as the *model* for their desires.”¹⁹ This method for describing the difference between the kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of Satan is used by Jesus again in the Farewell Address to his disciples, where Jesus focuses on describing his own imitation and loving obedience of his Father, and his encouragement of his disciples to do the same. They are to do the Father's will and not their own or any other's, to choose Jesus and therefore his Father as their model instead of the Devil and the communities of this world.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

As stated in the introduction, in John 14:27, Jesus openly contrasts what he 'is' with what the world 'is.' He openly states that he offers a peace that the world does not offer. While the kingdom of this world is explained elsewhere in John's Gospel, in the Farewell Address (roughly John 13:1 – 17:1, depending on the scholar), Jesus speaks of Satan and his kingdom only to say that he will suffer under this deceptive and murderous system just as all the true prophets before him have suffered, from Abel to Zechariah (Matthew 23:35, Luke 11:51), and most recently John the Baptist. In this section, Jesus focuses on describing the nature and source of the peace he is offering; the foundation and sustenance of those belonging to his new kingdom.

As Keener states, "'Peace'...is...an eschatological hope for Israel."²⁰ But Jesus explains that the peace he offers is unlike any that the world has seen before, and therefore not exactly the peace his followers had been anticipating. Because Jesus openly declares his imminent death (John 13:19, 33), and yet views this as the greatest victory (John 13:31-32, 16:33), his disciples are both dismayed and confused. Jesus has already explained how it is that the cross is a victory (how Jesus has overcome the world, the kingdom of Satan), and he does not seem to think he must explain this any further. To reassure the disciples in their dismay, he openly addresses their depressed faces (John 16:6), and repeats phrases such as the following in order to ensure their faith despite the events at hand, "I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe" (John 14:29, also 16:1 and 4). But along with expressing the victory of his imminent death and resurrection, and bolstering the faith of

his followers, Jesus spends the bulk of this discourse explaining the peace he offers. He describes it primarily as a deep unity with the Father rooted in loving obedience to Him (John 14:23-24). Jesus invites his followers to imitate him, because he exemplifies this unity. He explains the unity and peace his followers are to have with him and his Father with the imagery of a vine (Jesus), its branches (the followers) and the vinedresser (the Father) (John 15:1-17). This imagery demonstrates a close relationship of interdependence which expresses new notions of foundation and sustenance in a source 'the world' is not founded on, that source being called 'love'.

Jesus also explains to his disciples that in order to be in unity with him as a part of the new kingdom, they too will have to suffer as he has suffered, and is about to suffer even more (John 15:18-25). This section is a continuation of the contrast between his kingdom and 'this world.' In keeping with Girard's analysis, Jesus is clearly stating that his words and deeds have marginalized him from the Jewish community and the foreign powers that rule them, making it easy for him to take the place of victim of the world. And he assures his disciples that following him ensures that they will also be treated in this way. But Jesus ensures, even by means of the warning, his followers' peace and continued faith throughout. Kruse writes, "When afterwards the disciples felt ashamed and remorseful because they deserted Jesus in his time of need, they would be able to recall that he knew about these things beforehand and was still committed to them and still loved them."²¹ And Girard agrees, saying:

The disciples themselves are no exception to the common law of scandal.

²⁰ Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Vol. 2 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 982.

²¹ Kruse, 337.

When Jesus becomes the universal scandal, they are all influenced, in varying degrees, by the universal hostility. This is why, a little before the Passion, Jesus speaks to them in the vocabulary of scandal, with a special warning to caution them about the failures that await them, to ease their remorse, perhaps, at the moment when they will understand the shame of their individual and collective abandonment of Jesus: 'You will all be scandalized because of me'²²

In this entire address, Jesus is engaged in a redefinition of peace, centering around John 14:27. The peace is not achieved through the violent means of the world, nor can it be equated to contemporaneous Stoic notions of peace during adversity. As Keener states, "In the context of John's Gospel and early Christian eschatology, this note of triumph is not merely the Stoic notion of being unconquered no matter what the suffering but a promise that evil and suffering do not ultimately prevail for Christ's followers."²³

Girard explains the unique and revolutionary view of the Christian message by observing that all humanity, as part of all the kingdoms of this world, are trapped within an "invisible prison," and not seeing it, are unable to escape its endless cycling of violent persecution and suffering. Jesus gains his victory over the world's system (order founded on violence) by himself suffering under that very victimizing system. Girard references Paul's letter to the Colossians (2:14-15), where Paul uses the metaphor of a Roman general's victory procession to describe Jesus' public display – this exposition itself being Jesus' victory – of the "powers" (that invisible

prison) on the cross of his crucifixion. The false accusation and murder of Jesus by a collective mob consisting of representatives of various kingdoms of this world (the "powers" cited in Colossians) is challenged by the small band of his followers (the disciples) who are not entirely complicit with the unanimous violence of the Romans and Jews.²⁴ This is likely because Jesus warned them openly in advance, which explains his confidence while speaking with Pilate that his kingdom is 'now.'

Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to his few followers enables them to speak boldly and write their subversive account of the events, effectively continuing to dismantle the illusion of Satan's kingdom. Human civilization is an illusion (with real consequences), and this point can be considered the beginning of an incredible 'unraveling' even as something new is forming. This is because people will – in escalating numbers and places – reject the world's societies and ways to embrace this new foundation (the 'chief cornerstone' - Ephesians 2:20). The imitation of Christ is a new *modus operandi* for individual and community. It is through this reasoning that Girard asserts that Jesus' death on the cross is the beginning of a new order in the world because it exposes the world's system as deceptive in its false accusations, and murderous for killing the falsely-accused to maintain its own peace (John 18:36).²⁵

And so, Jesus talks at length and in detail about the peace he has in unity with his Father as the peace he is offering his followers, and he compares this with the peace offered by the world. Jesus is recorded as saying:

As the Father has loved me, so I have

²² Girard, 23-24; he cites Mark 14:27 and Matt. 26:31.

²³ Keener, 1049.

²⁴ Girard, 123.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:9-11)

Once Jesus has made it clear what he is doing and what his followers are to do – how the new kingdom and the new peace is founded and maintained – he engages in bolstering the faith of his followers, seeing the fear and doubt in their faces as disillusionment takes them (John 16:6). Jesus says his ‘wish-prayers’, such as, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid” (John 14:27, 29; 16:1, 4). He predicts his followers’ response to his persecution to help them remain firm after Jesus’ torture and death, as well as to aid them in their own future persecutions as members of Jesus’ newly established kingdom.

The Gospel of John and the Farewell Address are written to incite the belief in a radical, composite messiah who suffers in love to bring peace through a means the world has never before seen. Jesus teaches his disciples to understand and imitate him in the work of the Father by being in and bringing about the new kingdom. This is the meaning and purpose of Jesus’ statement in John 14:2.

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The Meaning Behind the Mantra

NAOMI GOLDMAN

“Mantra has power and the source of that power is the truth and order that stands at the very centre of the Vedic Universe.”

(Gonda 1963b, 257 ff; cited in Findly, 17)

Mantras belong to a small group of nouns whose designation is understood only in an indirect manner. The mantras themselves have a primary meaning that is similar to a “past participle: what is stretched; what is given; what is thought or spoken.”¹ Mantra may be defined as a conduit of speech, sacred text and thought. They are a “chant formula composed of words and syllables in the Sanskrit language” and “are considered in most cases equivalent to ritual acts themselves and carry a unique form of meaning.”² The mantras are used primarily in the rituals and rites of the Hindu tradition, including both in public, sacrificial rituals known as *Srauta* and household rituals, known as *Grhya*. During the early Vedic Period (1500-900 BCE) and the Middle Vedic Period (900-400 BCE) the Rg Veda mantras were usually a single verse, although the verse could range from a few sentences to a single word, with a specific purpose in mind. This purpose may be to advance the actions of the ritual or to invoke and praise a certain deity.³ It is interesting to note that although the mantras are an integral part of the Vedic rituals, the word “mantra” is only mentioned 21 times in the *Rg Veda*.⁴ The

importance of the mantra leads to the question of whether or not the mantra itself is meaningful or meaningless. Mantras are defined as to whether or not they are speech acts and if they contain integral information in the “forwarding of the plot” of the ritual itself. Mantras are a meaningful form of utterance which can be seen through the element of the structure of the mantra and the integral part that it plays in the performance of rituals.

When looking at the various texts concerning mantras and their significance in ritual, it is important to remember that many authors often take for granted that mantras are meaningful. There are a small group of academics that believe that mantras are meaningless, such as Fritz Staal and, to a lesser extent, Guy L. Beck in his book *Sonic Theology*. Staal argues:⁵

- 1) that mantras are best viewed as a type of sound;
- 2) that this sound is a temporal structure that can be viewed as a biological component of human behavior;
- 3) that ritual behavior, too, shares this basic biological structure that mantra as sound possesses;
- 4) that the meaning of both mantra and ritual lies in its ability to create repetitious, transportable patterns;
- 5) that semantic, “referential”, poetic, or aesthetic properties of both mantra and

¹ Findly, “Mantra kavisasta: Speech as Performative in the Rgveda,” *Understanding Mantras* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 26.

² Beck, *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 30.

³ Patton, *Bringing the Gods to Mind: Mantra and Ritual in Early Indian Sacrifice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 60.

⁴ Findly, 15.

⁵ Cited in Patton, 61.

ritual are secondary, if at all relevant, to this basic biological universal.

It is very important to recognize this alternative opinion, as it can aid in the understanding that mantras are in fact meaningful. Staal is not completely incorrect in his theory but it must be remembered that although there are many biological elements in ritual and ritualistic practice, it does not mean that these ritualized behaviors have no meaning.⁶

First and foremost, I will be looking at mantra through the lens of speech act theory. This theoretical form is a basic starting point from which it can be made clear that mantras are meaningful. The basis of speech act theory rests in the idea that meaningful language must be spoken with a certain intention in mind that will lead to a certain action. This is expressed in the following quote: "What is merely vocalized without being understood, like dry wood without fire, never ignites."⁷ I must mention that this concept can also work the other way with the carrying out of the action allowing for the intentions to be realized and expressed.⁸ When looking at whether the words are communicating a certain intention, you must look at whether it was "produced with an intention to bring about some reaction or response in the reader or hearer, [whether it was expressed] to establish awareness of some state of affairs, or [whether it was expressed] to bring a state of affairs into existence."⁹

The concept of mantras having a grammatical structure leads to my next point

⁶ Patton, 61.

⁷ Nirukta 1.18 cited in Taber, "Are Mantras Speech Acts? The Mimamsa Point of View," *Understanding Mantras* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 144.

⁸ Taber, 145.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

concerning the integral importance of mantras in Vedic ritual. While keeping the concept of speech act theory in mind, I will look at rituals in general and in the involvement of mantras throughout the rite. In demonstrating the significance of the mantras in ritual, I will show that mantras are in fact meaningful.

Structure:

During ritualistic sacrifice mantras indicate the procedures of the ritual through indicative statements, mantras as a form of petition, expressions of hope and the sacrificial details.¹⁰ The mantras allude to what is happening in the sacrifice and what the priest, who is acting out the ritual, must do next. In this way it acts as an indicative statement. Mantra as a form of petition refers to a mantra that speaks directly to the gods, invoking them to aid the performers of the ritual: "O, Lord, who protects the world, graciously be present in this *Linga* till the end of the worship...O god of gods...come for Apisekam, for the protection of the soul."¹¹ As an expression of hope, a mantra was often spoken at the end of the ritual that expresses the desire for which the ritual as a whole was performed.

Indra-Agni, slayers of Vrtra with the beautiful thunderbolt, prosper us with new gifts.

O Indra, bring treasures with your right hand.

O Agni grant the enjoyments of a good household; divide among us honors.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹¹ Cited in Wheelock, "The Mantra in Vedic and Tantric Ritual." *Understanding Mantras* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 112.

O Agni-Soma, to him, who today
dedicates this speech to you two,
give manly vigour, wealth in cattle,
and possessions of good horses.¹²

Mantras as sacrificial details will be explained in the second section of my paper.

When indicator mantras are recited in the proper way, they help to guide the priest and in turn provide a running commentary of what is taking place in the ritual. Aside from the procedural (*itikartaavyata*) role that the mantras play, they are also a “proper means” (*pramana*) to reach the understanding of one’s *dharma* or place in the context of the Vedic ritual.¹³ As mentioned previously, some scholars, particularly Fritz Stall, have argued that some mantras seem to have no particular meaning; that they do not have a procedural purpose in the rituals nor do they help in the understanding of one’s own *dharma*. According to Sabara (a teacher of the Mimamsa school of thought), “mantra [expresses] the meaning of [*dharma*: and] ‘in the case where the meaning is not intelligible, it is not that there is no meaning; it is there always, only people are ignorant of it.’”¹⁴ In this way, the teaching of the *dharma* in Vedic ritual through mantra means that the mantras themselves must have meaning. John Taber, in his article “Are Mantras Speech Acts?” speaks about the idea that perhaps some of the mantras that seem to be unimportant or meaningless in the ritual may be looked at as eulogies. An *arthavada*, “the statement of a meaning, or of a thing, or of a state of affairs,” essentially acts as a sort of

eulogy.¹⁵ The *arthavada* does not have anything to do with the procedure (*itikartaavyata*), nor with the result of what is to be affected (*sadhya*) by the mantra, nor does it have anything to do with the means that allow for the result to be achieved (*sadhana*).¹⁶ In this way it may seem as though the *arthavada* is not a speech act, as it does not warrant the actor of the ritual to perform a certain action. This is incorrect. The mantra as eulogy acts as a type of motivator for the priest in the continuation of the ritual. This type of mantra activates a certain part of the ritual by implying references to ritual details but does not act as an indicator to the priest concerning the procedures.¹⁷ In terms of speech act theory, this form of mantra is a speech act because when it is uttered it leads the priest to continue on with the ritual, thus it is spoken with the intention to motivate the priest and, in turn, the priest continues on with his actions.

Mantras are often explained by scholars through the linguistic categories of John Searle (an American philosopher). The categories are as follows:¹⁸

- 1) assertives, whose function is to commit the speaker to the truth of an expressed proposition;
- 2) directives, which aim at getting the hearer to do something;
- 3) commissives, whose point is to commit the speaker to some future course of action;
- 4) expressives, which express some psychological attitude toward the proposition;

¹² *AsvSu* as cited in Wheelock, 116.

¹³ Taber, 149.

¹⁴ Coward, “The meaning and power of mantras in Bhartrhari’s *Vakyapadiya*,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 11.4 (1982): 366.

¹⁵ Taber, 147.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁸ Patton, 60.

- 5) declarations, whose function is to bring about the state of affairs indicated in the proposition by the mere fact of their being said.

These five categories directly relate to the previously mentioned ideas about speech act theory and how the theory applies to mantras. Mantras, in the category of the first three points, would be considered to be indicative mantras. The fourth point can be seen as mantra as eulogy. It is less clear as to what category the fifth point would fall under. Perhaps it may also be seen as a sort of indicative statement.

Mantra is both a means of knowledge and a way to achieve moksha (release from the cycle of samsara or reincarnation) and fundamental to this idea is that language and consciousness are inseparably connected.

“When the absolute is awakened and meanings are manifested through words then the knowledge and power which is intertwined with consciousness can be clearly perceived and known.”¹⁹ Because consciousness and language or “word-meaning” are so inseparable, a meaningless mantra would imply that there was a piece of consciousness without a “word-meaning” attached. When choosing a word, we do not think of the word and then consciously think of a thought to connect it with, nor do we have a thought and consciously think of a word to connect it with. These actions come naturally and are inextricably intertwined thus playing an important role in how we communicate. In this way, the words of a mantra are naturally connected to consciousness, thus there is no possible way for the mantra to be meaningless. If a mantra does seem meaningless, as mentioned earlier, it only means that the person misunderstanding the

mantra is ignorant of the meaning.²⁰

There is also discussion over the meaningfulness of single word mantras. These single word mantras may be looked upon as meaningless, as they may seem to have no place in the progression of the ritual. The meaning that may be obtained from a word is considerably less than the meaning that may be found in a sentence. Harold Coward explains: “since the fundamental unit of meaning is a complete thought (*vakyasphota*), single words must be single word sentences with the missing words being understood.”²¹ Like when a child cries out “up” when wanting to be picked up they are actually expressing the sentence “pick me up,” in turn that is how the single word mantras can express a full meaningful sentence.

Ritual:

Through speech act theory and by looking at the structure of the mantras it is possible to see that mantras must be meaningful. It also becomes obvious that mantras are meaningful when looking at their importance in the rituals themselves. Mantras “give the history and character of the ritual elements or actions that connect it to the gods and conversely why the gods must be the connection to the ritual action in the first place.”²² As Patton states:

Particular ritual actions (associated with particular materials) are to be done according to the characteristics contained in the mantra, such as the name of a deity, the quality of the deity, and so on.²³

¹⁹ Coward, 368.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 368.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 371.

²² Patton, 63.

²³ *Ibid.*, 64.

This statement shows that ritual action and mantras are strongly connected and they are integral to the effectiveness and understanding of the ritual as a whole.²⁴

Ritual language is not directly a means of communication, rather it “create[s] and allows[s] participation in a known and repeatable situation.”²⁵ Mantras effect this “general purpose” by way of four types of utterances, as mentioned by Wheelock in his article “Mantra In Vedic and Tantric Ritual”. These four types of utterances are similar to the categories that were previously mentioned, but these categories pertain to the mantra’s specific involvement with regards to certain aspects of the ritual:²⁶

- 1) Presentation of Characteristics: indicative utterances that define the identities and qualities of the components of the situation;
- 2) Presentation of Attitudes: statements of personal feeling about the situation, such as optative expressions that define a participant’s wishes;
- 3) Presentation of Intentions: first-person future statements of commitment to action;
- 4) Presentation of Requests: commands by which the speaker establishes a petitionary relationship with a second person and defines its nature.

The first aspect, “Presentation of the Characteristics,” is based mostly upon the indicative mantras. Throughout the ritual, mantras are used to transform the objects that are used in the rite. Before purifying the objects and the area in which the ritual will

take place the one who is performing the ritual must purify his own body. This is done through the repetition of several “non-sentence” mantras known as *bija*. These mantras are repeated while touching different parts of the body. The *bija* are made up of four Sanskrit “semivowels” that represent the four basic “cosmic elements”: *yam* (wind), *ram* (fire), *lam* (earth) and *vam* (water).²⁷ At this point in the ritual the process of *Bhutasuddhi* (purification of the elements) is performed wherein the enactor of the ritual visualizes “the refining of the worshipper’s own body by process of inwardly re-enacting the destruction of the cosmos and the reabsorption of the basic elements into primal, undifferentiated matter.”²⁸ In this way the body of the person performing the ritual is transformed into the divine image. Pertaining to the repetition of the said mantras, the words themselves may be single word mantras, but, as mentioned before, the single word represents an entire sentence (e.g. by saying “fire”, you are exclaiming the sentence “I am (or have become) fire”).²⁹

I must mention that there are three “performers” that take part in the ritual: the *adhvaryu* priest, the *hotr* priest and the *yajamana* (the “patron”). In preparing the materials and area where the ritual will take place, the *adhvaryu* recites mantras which indicate that their actions are actually being performed by a god, thus implying that they themselves have been transformed into a god; “With the arms of Indra, I pick you up.”³⁰ The *hotr* plays the role of the human in the ritual. He does not enter the ritual area until the *adhvaryu* has completed his preparation

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁵ Wheelock, 99.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁸ Wheelock, 102.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 102-7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

and upon entering he explains that Agni is the divine *hotr* and then says “I am [the] human [*hotr*].”³¹ Finally, the *yajamana* enacts the ascent to heaven, where he is momentarily godlike, which has been caused by the ritual sacrifice.³²

The next step of the ritual is the process in which the ritual objects and the area where the ritual will take place are transformed. Before transforming the objects, the *adhvaryu* repeats a mantra which will dispel evil from the area. While repeating the mantra he digs the place for the altar, sprinkles the area with water and uses a wooden “sword” to draw out and in turn protect the area where the ritual will take place. The repeating of the mantra during this process is very important as, once said, this indicates that the area is free of evil; without the mantra, the area would not be deemed free of evil. After the area is spiritually clear the ritual objects themselves must be transformed. “A very sizeable proportion of the entire mantra corpus is composed of direct second-person characterizations of the ritual objects.”³³ In this way the inanimate object, when referred to in the second person, becomes animate (e.g. “You [wooden sword] are the right arm of Indra, with a thousand spikes, a hundred edges”). The *adhvaryu* may also ask the transformed ritual objects for a specific blessing. This would be done through the use of a mantra.³⁴

The second category of the four types of utterances that Wheelock speaks about is the “Presentation of Attitudes.” In this category the enactor of the ritual expresses his desires through the form of a wish; he may

ask to gain the appropriate attitude or desire to accomplish the ritual. In the Vedic tradition a wish to gain prosperity is very prevalent within the context of the liturgy. This desire may be expressed in the ritual itself through the speaking of a mantra.³⁵ These may seem similar to the “presentation of requests” but, unlike the request, this category is more like a wish to perform or to have performed the ritual in the best possible way:

By the sacrifice to the gods for Agni,
may I be food-eating.

By the sacrifice to the gods Agni-
Soma, may I be Vrtra-killing.

By the sacrifice to the gods for
Indra, may I be powerful and food-
eating.

By the sacrifice to the gods for
Mahendra, may I attain to
victoriousness and greatness.³⁶

The third type of utterance, being “Presentation of Intention,” is a smaller category and in that way is similar to the “Presentation of Attitudes.” At the start of the morning prayer (*sandhya*) the statement “I will worship the Lord by this lordly action known as the prayer of the morning twilight” is recited.³⁷ This statement shows the speaker’s intentions to complete his daily ritual duties.³⁸

Both “Presentation of Attitudes” and “Presentation of Intention” are very important in the ritual liturgy. They remind the deities of the enactor’s wishes and intentions pertaining to the daily ritual. I am focusing my argument on the use of mantras in the service of the

³¹ *AsvSu*, cited in Wheelock, 106.

³² Wheelock, 105-6.

³³ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 107-110.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁶ *BaudhSu* and *ApSu*, cited in Wheelock, 110.

³⁷ Cited in Wheelock, 100.

³⁸ Wheelock, 100.

ritual sacrifice in which the mantras of these categories are a part of, but do not play a directly prominent role. In turn, my description of these types of utterances is brief.

The “Presentation of Request” (the fourth category of Wheelock’s four types of utterances) begins with the invocation of the gods. The ritual is only able to commence when the gods have arrived at the ceremony. After the enactor of the ritual and the ritual objects are transformed the god(s) is called: Agni: “O Agni, being praised, come to the feast that gives oblations.”³⁹ When summoned, a particular god may be asked to perform a part of the ritual himself or herself. “Bring the gods for the sacrificer. O Agni, bring Agni. Bring Soma, Bring Agni. Bring Prajapati ... Bring Indra-Agni ... Bring the gods who drink the clarified butter.”⁴⁰ Calling the gods and praising them is an integral part of the ceremony which is done through the use of mantras.

After the god or gods have arrived, the next step in the ritual is the offering of praise to the god(s). The *hotr* recites mantras which extol the great status and function of the god(s) or mythical deeds that the god(s) had performed in the past. It is interesting to note that in Vedic ritual, as opposed to Tantric ritual, the god(s) physical appearance is rarely mentioned. As part of the offering of praise, a physical offering may also be made to the god(s). This is accompanied by the repetition of mantras that explain and define the act of offering. During this portion of the ritual, mantras “express both concern for the god’s feelings and the appropriate intentions by the worshipper.”⁴¹ The mantra that is said

in praise of the god(s) may either contain a verb and be stating an action concerning the offering of the praise, or the mantra may contain the exclamatory use of the god’s name followed by the specific action that is being enacted. As part of the ceremony, mantras are also said to request the god(s) to receive and be delighted by the offering. In the Vedic Ritual mantras are also chanted that express that the god(s) did in fact enjoy the sacrifice.⁴²

The final element of the “Presentation of Request” and of the ritual itself is the petition. These mantras explain the true desires of which the enactors were motivated to perform the ritual. In Vedic ritual these are often “wishes for earthly prosperity.”⁴³

The four types of utterances and their inclusion in ritual practice feature mantras as an important and integral aspect of the practices themselves. Without the mantra the enactor would not be guided through the ritual, the body and ritualistic objects would not be transformed, the gods would not be invoked or praised and there would be no possibility of making any requests to the gods. If mantras have no meaning, then they would not play such an integral role in the ceremony. If, as mentioned by Staal, mantras are only sounds that are viewed as a “biological component of human behavior,”⁴⁴ then their involvement in the ritual would be meaningless and, in turn, the rituals themselves would be meaningless.

The structure of the mantra allows for the furthering of the ritual. Whether it be indicating, expressing hope, petitioning or describing the elements of the ritual, the mantra becomes inseparable from the ritual itself. Mantras are scattered throughout the

³⁹ *AsvSu* cited in Wheelock, 112.

⁴⁰ Cited in Wheelock, 112.

⁴¹ Wheelock, 114.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 111-5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁴⁴ Patton, 61.

rituals “forwarding the plot” and aiding in the development of every aspect of the said ritual. Both of these elements prove that mantras are in fact meaningful. The power of the mantra is based on the fact that, when spoken from the heart, it is true, and when it is well pronounced a true mantra will work in all of its intentions.⁴⁵

We would pronounce this mantra well which was well fashioned for him from the heart; he will understand it, to be sure: By the power of his Asura-strength, the lord Apam Napat created all creatures.⁴⁶

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⁴⁵ Findly, 20.

⁴⁶ Cited in Findly, 20.

Agrippina the Elder: Reflections on an Imperial Woman in Art

ELYSIA ALLEN

Writers and artists have long been fascinated with the lives, the characters and the deeds of imperial Roman women. Certainly, Agrippina the Elder (14 B.C.E. – 33 C.E.) was such a remarkable Roman woman. This notable granddaughter of Augustus not only excited the interest of writers like Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius, she inspired capable artists to portray her in many mediums including marble, cameos, and oil on canvas. Drawing on significant translated passages from the “Annals” of Tacitus, “The Twelve Caesars” of Suetonius, and Dio’s “Roman History,” this researcher will carefully examine and deduce what three singular works of art, the Capitoline Museum’s portrait bust of Agrippina Major (37-41 C.E.), the “Gemma Claudia” sardonyx cameo (49 C.E.), and Benjamin West’s “Agrippina Landing At Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus” (1768), each reveal about the celebrated imperial Roman woman known as Agrippina the Elder and how each work serves as propaganda or publicity for its time.

Examining the Capitoline Museum’s portrait bust of Agrippina Major executed between 37 and 41 C.E., the observer beholds a young woman’s strong, handsome face (Figure 1). Beneath the tidy, elegant coiffure of tight flowing curls, two longer locks, from the back of each ear, fall cascading across the nape of a muscular, athletic neck. Below a broad, smooth forehead and plucked, arched brows, large, contemplative almond shaped eyes attentively regard someone or something just to the immediate right of the viewer. Her nose is broad, well shaped and straight; her lips

generous and full, she waits patiently, her expression civil yet pensive. Even, fair, unblemished cheeks, suggesting only the hint of a dimple, come together at the corners of a mouth contoured by gently pursed lips. Completing this proportioned, sophisticated face, her chin is strong, prominent, resolute.

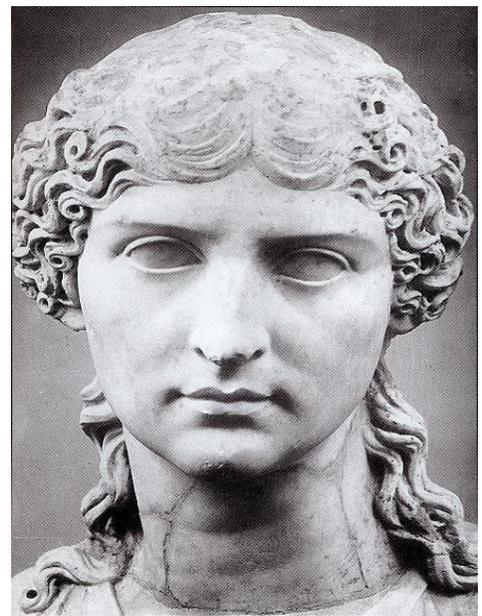


Figure 1

The portrait bust of Agrippina Major was created, not during Agrippina’s lifetime, but four years after her death in 33 C.E., during the reign of her son, Emperor Gaius “Caligula.” Suetonius writes that after the death of Emperor Tiberius in 37 C.E., “some believe that he had been given a slow, wasting poison by Gaius Caligula.”¹ Suetonius observes, “people ran about yelling: ‘To the Tiber with Tiberius!’” and Caligula would often boast of “avenging his mother and

¹ Suet. *Tib.* 75.

brothers.”² Participating in the death of Tiberius is certainly a direct method of vengeance, but so is creating this statue of his mother looking her very best: young, intelligent, beautiful, and most noble. If Suetonius is correct, that “Gaius’s accession seemed to the Roman people...like a dream come true,” Caligula was politically astute to emphasize “the memory of Germanicus” and “compassion for (his) family that had been practically wiped out by successive murders.”³

After all, Caligula was there in 14 C.E., when confronted by rebellious, hostile Roman troops on the Rhine, his father Germanicus, commander of the forces of Germania, decided it would be prudent to send his pregnant wife Agrippina away with their little son Gaius Caligula. Tacitus records that, upon hearing this plan, “his wife (Agrippina) spurned the notion, protesting that she was a descendant of the Divine Augustus and could face peril with no degenerate spirit.”⁴ Her example, moreover, to be resolute despite the danger all round her caused many rebel legionaries to feel contrite. “They felt shame and pity, and remembered...her grandfather Augustus, her father-in-law Drusus, her own glory as a mother of the children, her noble purity...and her little child, Caligula.”⁵

The Capitoline portrait bust, dated ca. 37 CE when Caligula became emperor, clearly hints at Agrippina’s determination to stand by her beleaguered husband and her vulnerable son. Imbued with the divine spirit of her grandfather Augustus, Agrippina is not one to run when honour and steadfastness must be demonstrated. The strength and integrity of

Agrippina evident in the sculpture is heightened when Tacitus recalls that in the same year that Caligula’s mother dramatically proved the mettle of her pasture, Julia, her mother, “ended her days.”⁶ Exiled to the tiny island of Pandateria for adulterous liaisons and treachery by her father Augustus, who had powers of *patria potestas* over her life, Julia the Elder would be remembered for her “profligacy...disdain...banishment and disgrace...destitution...obscurity...disobedience and hatred towards her husband.”⁷ If Julia was weak and morally bankrupt, the steadfast, loyal Agrippina, the incarnation of what was best in her grandfather Augustus, brave daughter of her father Agrippa, hero of the Battle of Actium (21 BCE), designer of the Pantheon, however, was going to be remembered for so much more.

Gazing once more upon the Capitoline bust of Agrippina the Elder, it is not difficult to imagine these handsome, vigorous features animated by a selfless, heroic call to action. Tacitus reports that while Germanicus was away attending to matters involving the Roman fleet, “a rumour had spread that our army was cut off, and that a furious German host was marching on Gaul.”⁸ Fearing invasion and slaughter at the hands of the German barbarian horde, many counselled that the bridge over the Rhine River should be destroyed. Agrippina, however, did not agree with this proposed strategy for destroying the bridge as it would also cut off an escape route for Roman soldiers returning from the front. Drawing on the example of her father Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, veteran of the Battle of Philippi, hero of Actium, and Octavian’s supreme general, Agrippina occupied the end

² Suet. *Cal.* 12.

³ Suet. *Cal.* 13.

⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 1.40.

⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 1.41.

⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 1.53.

⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 1.53.

⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 1.69.

of the bridge and declared her decision to keep it open come what may. Tacitus writes on this event:

And had not Agrippina prevented the bridge over the Rhine from being destroyed, some in their cowardice would have dared that base act. A woman of heroic spirit, she assumed during those days the duties of a general, and distributed clothes or medicine among the soldiers... she stood at the extremity of the bridge, and bestowed praise and thanks on the returning legions...Agrippina had now more power with the armies than officers, than generals. A woman had quelled a mutiny which the sovereign's name could not check.⁹

Probably executed in the first two years of Caligula's reign, a time marked by noble and popular reforms by the emperor, the portrait bust of Agrippina the Elder is an excellent example of Caligula's canny political sense. As Suetonius observed, "Gaius strengthened his popularity by every possible means."¹⁰ Clearly, his attention to reviving the memory of his family and efforts to redress the wrongs done to their memories were respected by the people.

Caligula "sailed for Pandataria...to fetch back the remains of his mother" and, at Circus Games, honoured his mother by ensuring that "her image would be paraded in a covered carriage."¹¹ Caligula was riding high. The Senate "immediately and unanimously conferred absolute power upon him," and his decision to honour his father's memory by "renaming the month of

September Germanicus" met with public enthusiasm.¹² Is there any reason popular statues of his noble, heroic mother, like the portrait bust of Agrippina the Elder, would not be sculpted in sizes large and small and carried through the streets of Rome as a way to publicize Caligula's admirable *mater* and thereby produce more political capital? Caligula proclaimed, "it would be entirely in his interest that posterity should be in full possession of all historical facts"¹³ and then Caligula chose the facts, like this idyllic statue of Agrippina the Elder that he wanted and needed to share.

Nearly eight years later, Claudius, Caligula's successor, also invoked the image of Agrippina the Elder to fulfill a political need. Even though "Claudius...undid the unjust acts performed by Gaius and by others at his instigation," and was "praised by everybody," by 48 C.E., Claudius's reign was endangered by his wife Messalina, "the most abandoned and lustful of women" and "her freedmen...puffed up with conceit."¹⁴ His imperial power was coveted by ambitious nobles and knowing that he had to act to bolster his authority, Claudius executed his wife and her ilk. "Almost at once...he planned...to marry...it was Agrippina, daughter of his brother Germanicus, who hooked him."¹⁵ Clearly, Claudius was playing a dangerous game. Claudius "persuaded a group of senators to propose that a union between him and her should be compulsorily arranged, in the public interest; and that other uncles should likewise be free to marry their nieces, though this had hitherto counted as incest."¹⁶ It is interesting that Claudius who

⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 1.69.

¹⁰ Suet. *Cal.* 15.

¹¹ Suet. *Cal.* 15.

¹² Suet. *Cal.* 15.

¹³ Suet. *Cal.* 16.

¹⁴ Dio. 60.14 and 61.30.

¹⁵ Suet. *Claud.* 26.

¹⁶ Suet. *Claud.* 26

“never missed a chance of keeping green the fame of his brother Germanicus” risked charges of the taboo of *incestum*, an illegitimate blood relationship with his brother Germanicus’ daughter, in order to legitimize his throne.¹⁷ This is where the second work of art, the sardonyx cameo of “Gemma Claudia” (49 C.E.) or “Marriage Cameo” is revealing.



Figure 2

Looking into each others’ eyes as equals, the gem depicts, from left to right, Claudius the emperor and his brother Germanicus in the foreground with Agrippina the Younger and Agrippina the Elder in the background. Claudius wears the oak wreath of authority and a breastplate representative of Jupiter. Agrippina the Younger also sports a “mural crown encircled by a corona spicea, two sheaves of grain and a poppy, attributes of the goddess Tyche, the protector of cities.” Agrippina the Elder, suggestive of “the war goddess Minerva,” wears a classical armoured headpiece, symbolic of her famous courageous stand at the bridge of the Rhine.¹⁸

Germanicus wears the military paraphernalia of a Roman commander, a cape and a circlet of oak leaves. Man to man, woman to woman across the generations the torch of power and nobility is passed with an intense and sombre gaze. Behind each successful man is an Agrippina.

The profiles of Claudius and Germanicus rest atop discarded armour symbolic of Germanicus’ land and sea victories over the German barbarian hordes; Claudius, on the other hand, according to Suetonius, “had fought no battles and suffered no casualties, but reduced a large part of [Britain] to submission.”¹⁹ Both generations, one deceased and the other alive at the time, are depicted in the full flower of their youth so there is a distinct effort put forth here to immortalize the quartet in body and spirit. The prevailing spirit of the piece is one of contact and connection. Of interest, the cornucopias from which Claudius and Germanicus emerge are decorated with tiny flowers, delicate vines, and luscious fruit: “grapes, corn ears, poppies, pomegranates and...quinces,” symbols of natural bounty and fortune.²⁰ The cornucopias, the contact of the eagle with its wings spread wide gazing toward the living emperor and the unfaltering almost hypnotic gaze between brothers and mother and daughter, the qualities of noble Germanicus and heroic Agrippina the Elder seem almost mystically channelled into the newly married couple. The beauty of the gem is completed by a thin band of precious gold that encircles the portrait.

Perhaps Tacitus had this Marriage Cameo in mind when he wrote, “Pallas (a Greek freedman)...selected Agrippina for

¹⁷ Suet. *Claud.* 11.

¹⁸ Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina: Constructions of Female Power in the Early Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford

University Press, 2006), 92.

¹⁹ Suet. *Claud.* 17.

²⁰ Ginsburg, 92.

special commendation because she would bring with her Germanicus's grandson, who was thoroughly worthy of imperial rank, the scion of a noble house and a link to unite the descendants of the Claudian family. He hoped that a woman who was the mother of many children and still in the freshness of youth, would not carry off the grandeur of the Caesars to some other house."²¹ Claudius and his supporters probably hoped that the symbolic propaganda implicit in the Gemma Claudia would help convince Roman citizens that by marrying Agrippina the Younger, he was a legitimate heir who possessed the power and the right to continue to rule. Gems like this famous one had a function; not just gifts, they were open statements placed on display, "a means of conveying and disseminating complex ideological messages," messages which Claudius and Agrippina Minor, "who hoped to invoke her mother's memory in support of ...ambitions," wanted and needed to convey.²²

"Engraved cameos... (often were) intended for (a) more limited private audience consisting of the imperial court and its supporters."²³ The Gemma Claudia, however, is most likely a gift from a wealthy supporter or a special artistic piece, created by the emperor himself to spread propaganda. Significantly, the Gemma Claudia of 49 C.E. appears to have worked. Claudius ruled for another six years before his death in 55 C.E.

More than seventeen centuries later, Benjamin West, an English artist who was born and raised in the American colony of Pennsylvania, painted the allegorical "Agrippina Landing At Brindisium with the

Ashes of Germanicus" (1768). A close friend of Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin West appears to have been aware of the growing friction between the colonial people of America and their increasingly authoritarian king and his governors. Interestingly, Benjamin West studied art in Italy and was hired in 1763 to paint King George III, his imperial family, and historical paintings for the royal court including the famous "Death of General Wolfe" (1771).



Figure 3

Appreciating "Agrippina Landing At Brindisium with the Ashes of Germanicus" begins with a return to the "Annals" of Tacitus and his detailed description of the scene:

Meanwhile on hearing of [Agrippina's] arrival, all her intimate friends and several officers...who had served under Germanicus, many strangers too ...thronged eagerly to Brundisium...but the city walls too and the roofs and every place which commanded the most distant prospect were filled with crowds of mourners, who incessantly asked one another, whether, when she landed, they were to receive her in silence or with some utterance of emotion...When Agrippina descended from the vessel with her two children, clasping the funeral urn, with eyes

²¹ Tac. *Ann.* 12.2.

²² Ginsburg, 91 and Wood, "Memoriae Agrippinae: Agrippina the elder in Julio-Claudian Art and Propaganda," *AJA*, 92.3 (1988): 421.

²³ Ginsburg, 91.

riveted to the earth, there was one universal groan.²⁴

Examining the painting, Agrippina dressed in mourning, carrying Germanicus' ashes in a precious urn, flanked by her two small children Caligula and Agrippina the Younger, takes centre-stage in the funeral procession at Brindisium. Young, slight of figure, her eyes demurely downcast in sorrow for the loss of her beloved husband, the father of their legitimate children, Agrippina the Elder cradles the urn with a firm yet gentle touch. The simple gray-white robes of the mourners contrast with the warm hues of the clothing worn by the multitudes who have come to observe the procession and grieve for the "untimely death" of Germanicus, a leader of "outstanding physical and moral excellence."²⁵ Surrounding the bereft, virtuous widow, her children and her entourage are soldiers and sailors, aristocrats and commoners, philosophers and merchants, the young and old who have come together in reverential silence and respect to witness the passing of noble Germanicus. While light breaks through the shadows to spotlight Agrippina and her procession, storm clouds begin to form over the citadel, an indication that Agrippina's journey is far from done. Dignified, courageous, mourning her husband's loss, she is also dedicated to the dangerous business of returning to Rome, calling Tiberius to account, and possibly enraging "by political rivalry those who were stronger than herself."²⁶

Although it is nowhere written, Benjamin West's Agrippina sends a frank message to King George III and his ministers:

look on and remember the story of Agrippina, learn what tragedy is wrought by the tyrant who would take the life of a young, loyal, respected man such as Germanicus. West may have been hoping that his epic representation of Agrippina might enlighten the monarch, King George III, who in 1768 still had it within his power to rule his dominions with the virtue and passion of Agrippina the Elder, to treat his colonies and their people with justice.

In conclusion, the portrait bust from the Capitoline Museum, the "Gemma Claudia" marriage cameo, and the oil painting of "Agrippina Landing at Brundisium With the Ashes of Germanicus" taken together exemplify an ideal Agrippina the Elder. Caligula used a charismatic image of this aristocratic imperial Roman woman, his mother, to help popularize his reign; Claudius used her noble family image to help legitimize his power; Benjamin West used her allegorical image to help persuade a king that he should mind his American subjects who trembled precariously on the brink of rebellion. Perhaps Tacitus captures the quintessential nature of what these art works portray: "nothing impressed Tiberius more deeply than the enthusiasm kindled in favor of Agrippina, whom men spoke of as the glory of the country, the sole surviving off spring of Augustus, the solitary example of the old times, while looking up to heaven and the gods they prayed for the safety of her children and that they might outlive their oppressors."²⁷

²⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 3.1.

²⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 2.71; Suet. *Cal.* 3.

²⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 2.72.

²⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 3.4.

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Women in the *Oikos*: The Variability and Flexibility of Athenian Households

GINO CANLAS

I. Contemporary thought on women in the *oikos*

Scholars have made much of the seclusion of Athenian women in the home during the Classical period. The emphasis of the discussion has been the regulation of contact between women and unrelated men, which involved not only isolation within the home but also isolation to certain parts of the home.¹ It is the prevailing view in contemporary scholarship that the strict seclusion of women discussed by our literary sources was an ideal mainly afforded by the elite, being much too impractical for most of the populace.² However, in the archaeology of Greek domestic spaces, this ideal is still often superimposed on the interpretation of archaeological remains. There is an emphasis on identifying gender-specific areas of the home (such as the *andron* and the *gynaikon*) as well as architectural arrangements which point to segregation.³ This approach is problematically applied not only to Attic

houses but also to houses throughout the Greek world, including non-elite houses.⁴ While I am not challenging the view that women were segregated in some households, the fact remains that many domestic buildings display no certain sign of female seclusion. Therefore, variability among Greek houses in the archaeological record needs to be taken into account. The first part of this paper will discuss the problems and limitations of the textual and material evidence for the seclusion of women in the home, while the second part will present case studies of variability among Athenian houses.

The development of scholarly thought concerning the archaeology of gender interactions in Greek households warrants a brief introduction to understand the nature of the current problems. The discussion of women in the *oikos* has been relatively recent. The study of Greek housing was originally preoccupied with classifying houses into typologies.⁵ These typologies served to show continuity from the Bronze Age to the Hellenistic Period and attempted to match archaeological remains with descriptions in literary sources (many of which came from the Roman period), as was done in the interpretation of Olynthus.⁶ When Greek women were finally entered into the discussion many works projected modern values onto the Greeks, some tended to

¹ Walker, "Women and Housing in Classical Greece: the Archaeological Evidence," *Images of Women in Antiquity* (London: Croom Helm), 81-91; Golden, *Childhood in Classical Athens* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1990), 122-3; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 58; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life from Conception to Old Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1990); Antonaccio, "Architecture and Behaviour: Building Gender into Greek Houses," *CW* 93.5 (2000): 517-533.

² Rotroff and Lamberton, *Women in the Athenian Agora* (Athens: American School of Classical Studies, 2006), 28-9; Patterson, *The Family in Greek History*, (London: Harvard University, 1998), 125-126; Nevett, *House and Society in the Ancient Greek World* (New York: Cambridge University, 1999); Cohen, *The Athenian Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000), 37-8.

³ Antonaccio, 527-9; Walker, 83-91.

⁴ Nevett, *House and Society* 80-126.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶ Hoepfner and Schwandner, *Haus und Stadt im klassischen Griechenland* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1986). For a Roman description of the *andron*, see Vitruvius 6.7.4.

highlight the repression of women by this patriarchal society.⁷ Some scholars presume that a division of gender roles points to the contemptuous treatment of women.⁸ Consequently, some scholars tended to turn Greek women into “the Other,” objects that were completely alien from our modern experience.

During this phase in the study of Greek women, ethnographic parallels were drawn between the architectural remains of Greek houses and the use of space in houses from modern Islamic societies.⁹ This ethnographic comparison has its merits since both societies were concerned with the control of women's reproductive functions.¹⁰ However, caution must be taken in the application of this comparison because of the paucity of clear evidence for the nature of female seclusion in Greece and the fundamental differences in the motivation behind the regulation of male-female interaction in the two cultures. Unlike in Islamic societies, there is no strong religious motivation behind the seclusion of Greek women. In fact, anthropological studies show that the patterns of gender roles in Classical Athens and contemporary traditional Mediterranean society have changed relatively little.¹¹ According to David Cohen, a woman's role in a modern Greek village is predominantly domestic, being in charge of household management just as in ancient

times, but the women are neither powerless nor submissive.¹² Recently there has been some interest in ethnographic comparisons between ancient and modern rural Greek houses as there is actually continuity from the architecture of ancient houses to present-day rural houses in mainland Greece.¹³ The relationship between gender and domestic space in Ancient Greece is a complex issue that is not justified by scholars' simplistic interpretations of the archaeological evidence.

II. *The textual and material sources and their problems*

The literary sources provide a confusing view of women in the household. It is well-worth noting that all our sources were written by wealthy Athenian men, whose views were probably not representative of the whole population.¹⁴ In fact, the views of these authors also differ from one other; some suggest that women were strictly prevented from coming into contact with unrelated men and that the house was segmented into male and female areas, contributing to the notion that women were isolated in the home.¹⁵ The logographer Lysias writes in a court speech that the widow of Diodotus had never before spoken in the presence of other men prior to her misfortunes.¹⁶ This might have been an exaggeration since a court speech was intended to please a jury. It, however, reflects an Athenian ideal that a modest woman did not associate with strange men. In another speech of Lysias, Euphiletus's wife is seduced

⁷ For example, see Wright, *Feminism in Greek Literature from Homer to Aristotle* (London: Routledge, 1923), 1.

⁸ Gould, “Law, Custom and Myth: Aspects of the Social Position of Women in Classical Athens”, *JHS* 100 (1980): 46-7.

⁹ Walker, *passim*; Nevett, “Separation or Seclusion? Towards an Archaeological Approach to Investigating Women in the Greek Household in the Fifth to Third Centuries”, *Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 104-10.

¹⁰ Walker, 84-6; Nevett, “Separation or Seclusion”, 104; Nevett, *House and Society*, 30.

¹¹ Friedl, “The Position of Women: Appearance and Reality.” *AnthQ* 40.3 (1967): 104-106.

¹² Cohen, “Seclusion, Separation, and the Status of Women in Classical Athens.” *Gar* 36.1 (1989): 4-5.

¹³ Haagsma, “The Houses of New Halos.” *Housing in New Halos: a Hellenistic Town in Thessaly, Greece* (Exton, PA: A.A. Balkema, 2003), 39-42.

¹⁴ Grant, *A Social History of Greece and Rome* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992).

¹⁵ Nevett, *House and Society*, 17.

¹⁶ *Lys. Against Diog.* 32.11 in Lefkowitz-Fant §82.

by a man named Eratosthenes whom she met at a funeral, making it seem as if women were rarely seen in public. In this text, Euphiletus' house was also divided into the men's quarters downstairs and the women's quarters upstairs.¹⁷ Physical descriptions of the segmentation of the *oikos* also occur in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* in which Ischomachus is showing his new wife the women's quarters (*gynaikonitis*) which was divided from the men's quarters (*andronitis*) and whose door was bolted at night.¹⁸ The mention of a locked *gynaikon* in *Oeconomicus* is also problematic because Ischomachus' purpose for this separation was to prevent the theft and the interbreeding among slaves, not to regulate male-female interaction.¹⁹

The literary sources, however, are not consistent in their presentation of female seclusion. In Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, the title character calls a women's meeting to which most of the women are late. Her friend Calonice explains this by stating the problems that women have in leaving the house:²⁰

You know, it's a lot of trouble for wives to get out of the house: we're giving hubby a hand, or waking up a slave, or putting the baby to bed, or bathing it, or feeding it a snack.

In this passage, Aristophanes does not suggest that a woman is kept from leaving the house by her husband or strict convention; rather, it is the amount of household work that keeps her. Hyperides, another logographer, writes that not all women were expected to avoid

being seen in public. "A woman who travels outside the house must be of such an age that onlookers might ask, not whose wife she is, but whose mother."²¹ There seems to have been no stigma for post-menopausal women to be seen in public, therefore it would be incorrect to assume that they too were required to stay in certain areas of the house.²² Furthermore, in Lysias' speech against Eratosthenes, Euphiletus says that the *andron* and the *gynaikon* were switched to accommodate child-rearing.²³ This demonstrates that the use of space in Greek houses was flexible and that rooms did not carry permanent labels. In fact, the spatial organization could change from day to night or from season to season.²⁴ If that was so, then we must reconsider the merits of searching for male-female sections of the house in archaeological remains.

The archaeological evidence also has many limitations due to the nature of its preservation and the selective nature of archaeology. Relatively few private buildings have been excavated in comparison to public buildings.²⁵ Those that have been excavated tend to be larger, wealthier houses. Smaller houses were far less likely to survive because the building materials used would have been of a lesser quality and the ancients would have had as much interest in preserving them as archaeologists have in excavating them. The fact that archaeologists have excavated a greater number of larger houses is not a coincidence. When residential districts are

¹⁷ Lys. *On the Murder of Erat.* 7 in Lefkowitz-Fant §88.

¹⁸ Xen. *Oec.* ix.5; Antonaccio, 527 distinguishes the *andron* (men's dining room) from the *andronitis* (male areas of the house).

¹⁹ Xen. *Oec.* ix.5-6.

²⁰ Ar. *Lys.* 15-19.

²¹ Jensen fr. 205 cited from Golden, 122.

²² Golden, 122; Garland, 243.

²³ Lys. *On the Murder of Erat.* 9 in Lefkowitz-Fant §88.

²⁴ Antonaccio, 517-533.

²⁵ Ault and Nevett, "Summing Up: Whither the Archaeology of the Greek Household", *Ancient Greek Houses and Households* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005), 160.

detected in archaeological surveys, financial constraints often lead excavators to excavate larger buildings over smaller ones.²⁶ This selectivity confines most of our knowledge to wealthier houses, with a comparatively smaller understanding of the majority of the population.²⁷ This distorts our interpretation of the archaeological record in favour of the elite, who belonged to the few that could afford to implement gender segregation.

There also exists a problem in interpreting gender-specific areas of the *oikos*. Literary sources usually describe the *gynaikon* as being in the upper stories; however, since only the foundations of private buildings ever survive, it is virtually non-existent in the archaeological record.²⁸ There have been attempts to locate it in the distribution of loomweights throughout the household because when the second story of an abandoned house collapses, the artifacts fall straight down to the floor below them. This is problematic since loomweights are also found in open courtyards which had no upper level above them. It is uncertain whether the *gynaikon* refers to a specific area in the house or if it simply refers to everything else outside of the *andronitis*.²⁹ *Andrones*, the settings for *symposia* in our sources, are almost equally hard to locate.³⁰ They are usually characterized by their square shape, offset

entrance from the courtyard, raised benches and mosaic floors.³¹ In some cases, an *andron* is easily identifiable but it is more often unrecognizable. In many houses, they do not exist at all.³² I would again reiterate that the flexibility of space in Greek households probably contributed to the lack of a permanent *andron* in many houses. Finally, it must again be noted that our literary sources are largely Athenian. Many scholars fall into the trap of applying the Athenian ideals onto houses throughout the Greek world, as was done in Olynthus.³³ Since the Greek world was not a unified political and cultural entity, it is important to consider regional variations in Greek housing. These variations show the merits in examining a region independently. Taking regional diversity into account, the rest of this paper will focus on the material evidence for variability in the social organization of houses in Athens while considering the problems and limitations stated above.

III. Differences among Athenian oikoi

Unlike the houses at Olynthus or Piraeus, Classical Athenian houses were not arranged on an orthogonal grid plan but developed organically due to the area's long occupation, its rocky topography and the scarcity of water.³⁴ Athenian houses did not have a standard size or layout but the typical house basically consisted of rooms grouped around a central courtyard that provided light and had only one entrance from the street.³⁵

²⁶ Morley, "The Use and Abuse of Sources." *Writing Ancient History* (London: Duckworth, 1999), 66-7. See Haagsma et al., "Scratching the Surface. A Preliminary Report of the first Two Seasons of Fieldwork at Kastro Kallithea, Thessaly." *Mouseion* 50 (2006): 91-135 for a site in which housing blocks were discovered but the house marked for excavation was the largest despite many smaller houses.

²⁷ Grant, 59: the poor were the majority of the population.

²⁸ Rotroff-Lamberton, 28.

²⁹ Nevett, "Separation or Seclusion", 108.

³⁰ Tsakirgis, "Living and Working Around the Athenian Agora: A Preliminary Case Study of Three Houses", *Ancient Greek Houses and Households* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005), 69.

³¹ Nevett, *House and Society*, 89.

³² See Appendix.

³³ Hoepfner and Schwandner attribute the orthogonal organization of Olynthian houses to *isonomia*, which was an Athenian ideal, cited from Nevett, *House and Society*, 27.

³⁴ Camp, *The Athenian Agora: Excavations in the Heart of Classical Athens* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 148; Tsakirgis, 69.

³⁵ Thompson, *The Athenian Agora: a Guide to the Excavation*

They were relatively small and modestly-decorated, if decorated at all.³⁶ Like houses in most parts of mainland Greece, Athenian houses were built on stone foundations with a mud-brick super-structure.³⁷ The functions of the rooms are generally difficult to determine but both domestic and industrial activities took place in the house.³⁸ Many of the extant house remains are located around the Agora, on the north, south and west slopes of the Areopagus, a location which the upper classes did not consider prime real estate.³⁹ Consequently this area contains a diverse array of private buildings, making it the ideal setting for the examination of mutability in the social organization of domestic spaces.

Variability in spatial organization is superbly demonstrated by a group of three 5th century houses on the northeastern slopes of the Areopagus (Fig. 1).⁴⁰ The westernmost house has a small area of 152 m² and an irregular polygonal layout. It is thus shaped because it presses against the steep scarp of the Areopagus on its southwest corner.⁴¹ The courtyard is entered directly from the street through a single courtyard. The house has seven rooms, four of which are entered directly from the courtyard. None of these rooms have a distinguishable function but Shear has postulated that the central room on the east side with the mud-brick hearth in the middle was an *andron* simply because it was

large enough to accommodate five dining couches and its entrance was off-centre to the south.⁴² Nevett argues that there are no traces of plaster flooring or emplacements for couches, nor is there enough evidence in the artifact assemblage that would definitively mark this room as an *andron*, rendering the house devoid of any trace of specific use by gender.⁴³

The western house presses right against the central house. It is the largest of the group measuring 300 m². It is clearly the wealthiest of the three, being the most elaborately decorated and the only one with a peristyle courtyard.⁴⁴ Nine out of ten of its rooms open directly to the central courtyard, three of which had mosaic floors. Shear and Nevett both agree that the mosaic-paved room at the southeast corner of the house can be positively identified as an *andron* because of its visible separation from the other rooms, its elaborate decoration and its characteristic raised couches.⁴⁵ It is also important to note that to enter this house, one must come from a narrow alleyway in the east and then enter a narrow entrance-corridor into the central courtyard, maximizing privacy.

The last and easternmost house is separated from the central one only by a narrow alley. It is approximately the same size as the western house but is a very regular square-shaped house.⁴⁶ All six of its rooms can be supervised directly from the central courtyard, which opened right onto the street, displaying a smaller concern for privacy.

and Museum (Athens: American School of Classical Studies, 1962), 115; Camp 148-9; Nevett *House and Society*, 65.

³⁶ Camp 149.

³⁷ Camp 148-9; cf. Haagsma, "Housing in New Halos", 39-42.

³⁸ Cahill, "Household Industry in Greece and Anatolia", *Ancient Greek Houses and Households* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005); Camp 149; Tsakirgis 69.

³⁹ Thompson. *The Athenian Agora: a Short Guide* (Athens: American School of Classical Studies, 1976), 26.

⁴⁰ Shear, "The Athenian Agora: Excavations of 1971", *Hesperia* 42.2 (1973): 147-9.

⁴¹ Shear 147-8; Nevett, *House and Society* 91.

⁴² Shear 147; cf. three houses in Priene in which rooms with central hearths have been interpreted as living rooms for the family rather than just male use: Graham, "Notes on Houses and Housing-Districts in Abdera and Himera", *AJA* 76.3 (1972): 297-8.

⁴³ Nevett, *House and Society* 91.

⁴⁴ Shear, 151-2.

⁴⁵ Nevett, *House and Society*, 90; Shear, 152.

⁴⁶ Shear, 150; Nevett, 91.

Neither the artifact assemblage nor the arrangement of the rooms can point to any segmentation of gender within the home.

It is evident in these three houses that wealth does play a role in the social organization of domestic space. The central house, obviously belonging to wealthier occupants, displays a greater concern for privacy. More effort was put into preventing visibility from the outside as well as restricting entrance to the inside. Furthermore, an area which is traditionally masculine is identifiable, and it is noteworthy that it is separated from the rest of the house, making it possible to regulate interaction between guests and female members of the household. In contrast, the other two humbler houses are less concerned with either privacy or regulation of interaction with guests. Both have courtyards which open directly to the street and have no architectural means of preventing visibility. These houses also show that the physical environment can have an effect on spatial organization just as much as social ideology. The fact that the western house pushed right up a hill affected the way in which the rooms were arranged.⁴⁷ This architectural adaptation to the topography may also have been the product of the owner's inability to afford better land on which to build an ideally-shaped house. This house demonstrates the inability of many Athenians to make their houses suitable for gender segregation, therefore Greek women from different wealth brackets would have had different experiences with regards to restrictions in and out of the home.

The second set of houses is a 5th century

⁴⁷ For example, Building 10 in Kastro Kallithea had to be built on terraces to adapt to the topography: Haagsma et al. "Kastro Kallithea" in C. Morgan, "2007 Archaeology in Greece", *AR* 53 (2008): 60-61.

residential block on the north slope of the Areopagus (Fig. 2). The small, closely-clumped houses are arranged in two rows, back-to-back with no alley in between.⁴⁸ There are clearly two houses on the eastern side and there are possibly four houses on the western side, all of which have their own central courtyard. The four houses on the western side open directly onto a street, while on the eastern side the northern house opens onto an alleyway and the southern house opens onto a street. Walker labels a backroom in one of the western houses (second from the top) an *andron*.⁴⁹ There is nothing in the archaeological evidence that suggests this except for the large size of the room. In fact, the size of the housing units is far too insubstantial to be able to support any segmentation of the house into male-female areas as Walker is suggesting. Even with an upper *gynaikon*, these houses would share only 100 m² among themselves, making segregation impractical.⁵⁰ This further supports the idea that the division of a household to prevent certain gender interactions is a luxury that the poor could not afford.

The final housing group I will discuss is a *synoikia* (multiple-occupancy structure usually associated with the poor) in Kerameikos dating from the 5th to the 4th century (Fig. 3).⁵¹ The building is large, occupying a 600m² plot containing fifteen rooms grouped around two courtyards. Three rooms (1, 2 and 3) were decorated and were possibly banqueting facilities because of the amount of fine ware pottery discovered in

⁴⁸ Nevett, *House and Society*, 86-7; Walker 84.

⁴⁹ Walker, 84 -7.

⁵⁰ Nevett, *House and Society*, 87.

⁵¹ For *synoikiai*, see Ault, "Housing the Poor and the Homeless in Ancient Greece", *Ancient Greek Houses and Households* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005).

these rooms.⁵² The nature of this building has been debated by scholars. It is clearly a complex in which multiple occupants cohabited. Kiderlen suggests that this large building is a large, private house due to the domestic nature of its artifact assemblage (e.g. loomweights, and pottery associated with food and drink) and architectural features such as central courtyards.⁵³ Ault, however, argues that this building was a *porneion* or brothel because it does not resemble other domestic buildings in the fifth century and because jewellery and amulets were found here.⁵⁴ He further states that in its earliest occupation phase, this building might have been a hostelry, again demonstrating that this was a multiple-occupancy building.

If this was not a *porneion* but a domestic building, then this would be an important source for the study of the social organization of domestic spaces. If this was home to anyone, it would have been those from the lower classes who could probably only afford to rent living spaces.⁵⁵ The artifact assemblage clearly shows the presence of women in this residence, but the arrangement of the rooms shows that there was a lot less privacy and a lot more shared facilities (the courtyards and dining rooms). In settings such as this, the seclusion of women does not even seem to be a factor, supporting the fact that non-elite households did deviate from social ideals.

The majority of the material and textual evidence for the study of women in the *oikos* offers a very narrow view of the ancient reality. The evidence is representative mainly

of the elite in Athens since all the literary sources were written by wealthy Athenian men (who do not offer a unified view) and the archaeological remains excavated are primarily larger buildings. In addition to these limitations, we see that in the development of the study of this subject, scholars often fall into the following traps: a) over-emphasizing otherness in the ancient Greeks, b) over-applying concepts from conflated literary sources and c) disregarding regional variations among Greek households. We can deduce from our evidence that the strict regulation of women's interaction with unrelated men in the household was primarily ideological. By examining the houses in the archaeological record, we see that it is the wealthier Athenian houses that tend to display segmentation into male-female areas and increased concerns over privacy. Few (if any) of the non-elite houses discussed displayed any signs of female seclusion at all. In fact, gender was usually difficult to detect in these spaces. In order to gain a broader understanding of the roles of Greek women in society, it is important to consider evidence that is representative of more people than just the wealthy. As it stands, an extensive study on the social organization of houses belonging to the less-than-elite remains a *desideratum*. Tempting as it is to imagine all Greek women as secluded in small, dark spaces, the archaeological evidence that we do have suggests that their experiences would have varied.

⁵² *Ibid.* 148-9.

⁵³ *Ibid.*; Kiderlen, 39-42 cited in "Review of *Megale Oikia. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung aufwendiger griechischer Stadthausarchitektur von der früharchaik bis ins 3 Jh. v. Chr.* by M. Kiderlen", *JHS* 118 (1998): 244-245.

⁵⁴ Ault, "Housing the Poor" 149-50.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 144.

Appendix

Figure 1 - Three private houses on the slopes of the Areopagus.

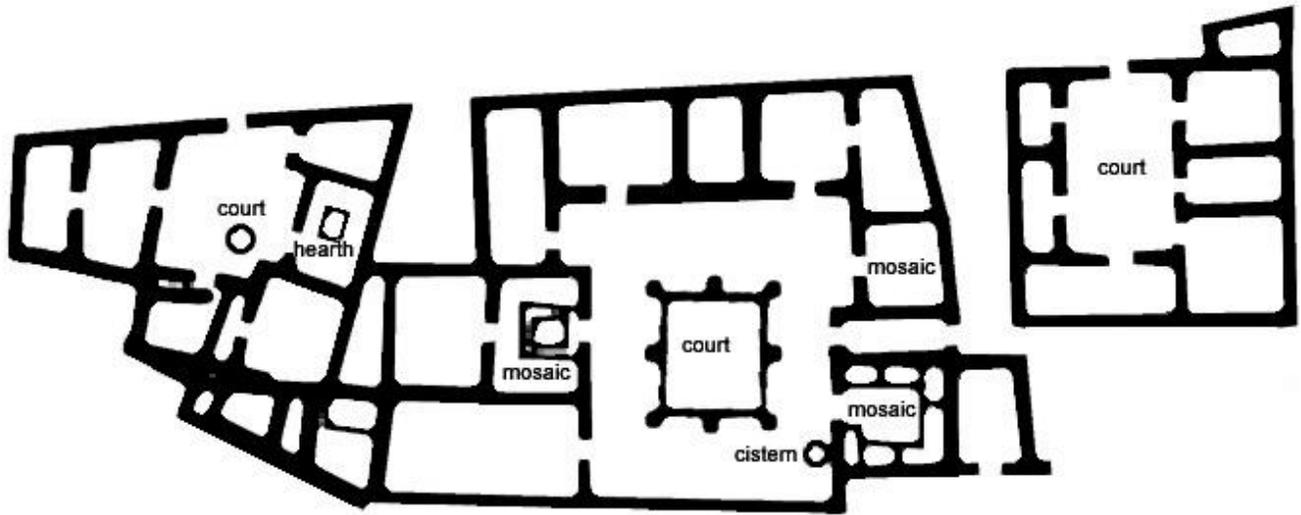


Figure 2 - Housing block on the north foot of the Areopagus.

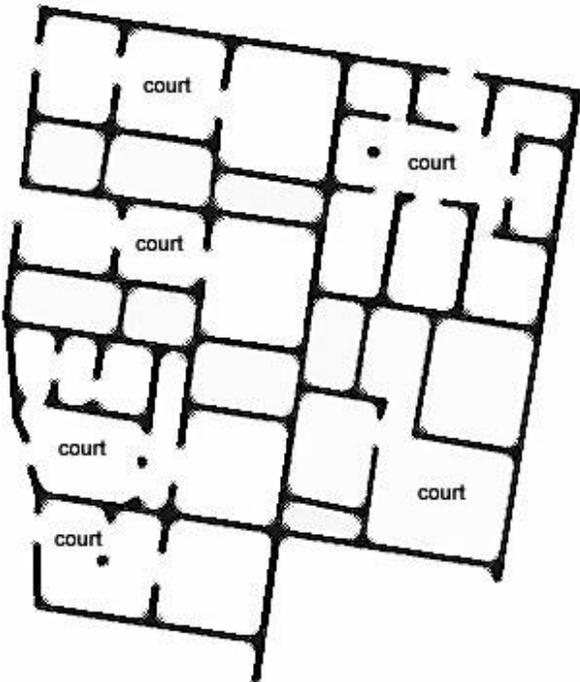
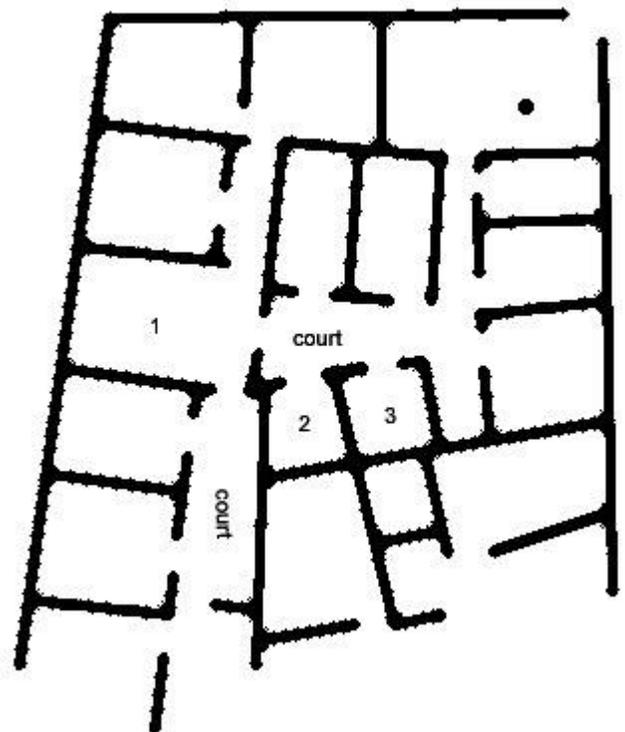


Figure 3 - Building Z1, Kerameikos.



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The Changing Status of Jews in Alexandria from Ptolemaic to Roman Rule

ANDREA FRANCES BEHAN

There are three recensions of the *Acta Isidori*: the Berlin-Cairo fragment, the London fragment and the Berlin fragment published by Uxkull-Gyllenaband. All fragments are of papyrus and all three have unknown proveniences. The first, the Berlin-Cairo recension, is in two parts: one that was in Berlin before it disappeared sometime during the Second World War, and one that is in Cairo. Both date to c. 200 CE. The recension that is currently in the British museum, as well as the Berlin fragment published by Uxkull-Gyllenaband, date to the third century.¹

The papyri all record the events of the arbitration in Rome brought by Isidorus and Lampon against one Agrippa, presumably the King of Judaea at the time, and overseen by Emperor Claudius. Since the date of the trial is still a matter of contention (it is unclear as to whether it is Agrippa I or Agrippa II) archaeologists and historians favour to date the trial to either 41 or 53 CE. The papyrus records Isidorus making heated remarks and slanderous accusations on the status of Jews in Alexandria, and Agrippa in return defending the Jewish position.² The two viewpoints come with their own biases, Agrippa being the King of Judea and Isidorus being a Greek from Alexandria. These diverse opinions have led to this investigation of the possible status of Jews in Roman-ruled Alexandria.

There had been a Jewish population living in Alexandria for hundreds of years

¹ H.A. Musurillo, *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs: Acta Alexandrinorum*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954) 117-119.

² Musurillo, *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs: Acta Alexandrinorum*, 117-119.

before the Romans assumed control of Egypt. This paper will look at the attitudes of the Greeks and then of the Romans in order to ascertain the position of the Jews in Greek- and Roman-ruled Alexandria and how it ultimately led to violence.

To understand the effect that the Roman annexation of Egypt had on its Jewish population one must look at their place in Ptolemaic Egypt. There are many sources which suggest that the Jews enjoyed a high status under Alexander and his successors. The Greeks, like the Romans, had a very clear idea of class distinction; they had the *Hellenes* and the *barbaroi*, those who spoke Greek and those who did not. In Ptolemaic Egypt the Jews were included in the dominant group, the Hellenes, the Greek-speaking conquerors.³ The status of Hellene and Alexandrian citizen offered personal, fiscal and administrative privileges that the Jews seemed to enjoy as well.⁴ Josephus outlines the difference between the Jews and the native Egyptians who were considered *barbaroi*:

At Alexandria there had been incessant strife between the native inhabitants and the Jewish settlers since the time of Alexander, having received from the Jews very active support against the Egyptians, granted them, as a reward for their

³ Joseph Meleze-Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: From Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995) 161; Alan K. Bowman and Dominic Rathbone, "Cities and Administration in Roman Egypt," *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 82 (1992), 109.

⁴ Bowman and Rathbone, "Cities and Administration in Roman Egypt," *JRS*, Vol. 82 (1992), 109.

assistance, permission to reside in the city on terms of equality [ex isomoirias] with the Greeks.⁵

This was the situation in 30 BCE when Augustus entered the city of Alexandria, which fell with almost no resistance; the kingdom was then annexed as a Roman province.⁶ The Hellenes and consequently the Jews were now the conquered people, since Cleopatra had committed suicide, ending the Ptolemaic rule in Egypt.

Egypt was now under Roman rule and as such the status of its inhabitants would need to be determined. In these matters the Romans tended to be quite inflexible, one was either a Roman citizen or not.⁷ In Egypt, however, status could not be assigned so easily. The Hellenes were too heterogeneous for the Romans to understand, thus difficult to categorize.⁸ Further problems arose for the Jewish population when one considers how they were viewed by the Romans in general. For the Romans, worshippers of a pantheon of gods, the monotheistic Jews were seen as inflexible and even obstinate in their rigid code of beliefs and at times even considered to be dangerous.⁹

It was Augustus who imposed a social hierarchy which left the legal, administrative and fiscal privileges in the hands of the landowning elite.¹⁰ Though Augustus sent

equites from Rome to administer the province, most of the administration and finances were again left in the hands of the Greeks that formerly ran the country; they were encouraged to behave like the older Greek cities save for their lack of a *boule*.¹¹ These privileges included an exemption from a poll-tax that was levied on the Egyptian population.¹² It is still unclear where the Jews fit into this system; however, it is believed that Augustus would have left the Jews in a higher class despite religious differences.¹³ There are many examples of the Jewish peoples being of great assistance to the Romans and to Augustus.¹⁴ Therefore it seems likely that the Jews would indeed have been treated better than the native Egyptians, however, their place is still unclear.

In order to better understand their place in Alexandrian society one could look at whether or not the Jewish population paid the poll-tax, the exemption from which was a sign of status. There is, however, considerable disagreement on this issue. It is clear that the Jews, as well as the Greeks, from outside of major Hellenic cities such as Alexandria, were not exempt from the poll-tax.¹⁵ There was a process of qualification for those that lived outside major cities called the *epikrisis*; there is not a single Jewish name on the numerous extant documents left from these proceedings.¹⁶ This could mean that the Jews were not considered eligible to even apply,

⁵ Josep. *BJ* 2, 437-89; Modrzejewski, 165.

⁶ Mary T. Boatwright, Daniel J. Gargola and Richard J. A. Talbert, *The Romans: From Village to Empire*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 288.

⁷ Modrzejewski, 161.

⁸ Modrzejewski, 161.

⁹ Lesley and Roy Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome*, (New York: Facts on file Inc.: 1994) 291.

¹⁰ Rathbone and Bowman, "Cities and Administration in Roman Egypt," *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 82 (1992), 108; Andrew Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence in Roman Egypt: The Case of the Acta Alexandrinorum*, (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 2008) 212.

¹¹ Bowman and Rathbone, 108; Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence in Roman Egypt: The Case of the Acta Alexandrinorum*, 212.

¹² Harker, 212.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁵ Musurillo, *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs: Acta Alexandrinorum*, 139.

¹⁶ Modrzejewski, 163.

that they did not bother to apply, or simply that the evidence simply has not been found.

What of the Jews inside the major Greek cities such as Alexandria? There are some clues to this in the Acta Isidora mentioned above. Isidorus says of the Jewish population:

“...they are different from the Al[exandrians] | in feeling, but in the manner of the Egyptians [- - -] | are they not like those who pay the poll-tax?’ | *vv* Agrippa: *vv* | ‘Their rulers have put taxes on *Egyptians* | | [- - -] but nobody (has put them) on the (Jews)’”¹⁷

This passage suggests that the Jews in Alexandria did not pay the poll-tax. However, it has been suggested that they did pay poll tax but under another formality.¹⁸ It is asserted that the Jews were not citizens but still held some privileges.¹⁹ Not paying the poll tax or the formality of having it under another name may have been a delicate attention in their favour. This small concession does not mean that they were Alexandrian citizens and part of the group of Hellenes like they once were.

Along with the question of whether or not they paid the poll tax, it is necessary to look into the administrative privileges the Jewish population held. For the Jews these privileges came in the form of the *politeuma*. This was the Jewish population’s own political organization.²⁰ Strabo describes the Jewish political hierarchy placing the *ethnarchos*, or community leader, who presided over separate courts for the Jewish people at the top.²¹ This social stratification and the right to

their separate system of law survived the annexation of Alexandria by Rome with the only alteration being when Augustus instituted a *gerousia* to replace the *ethnarchos* as the Jewish leader in 11 CE.²² These were not the same freedoms enjoyed by the Greeks; however, the Jews did seem to have some rights to self governance.

In addition to the right to self-governance, the Jewish population still enjoyed a certain religious freedom. The Jews were exempt from attending court on the Sabbath and the theft of their sacred books was now considered a serious crime and was punishable as such.²³

On paper the Jews seemed to enjoy similar privileges under the Roman rule as they did under the Greek rule. The Jewish population was, under the Greeks, kept from the status of *ephebe* which granted entry into the Greek gymnasium where all the important business and education is supposed to have occurred.²⁴ Andrew Harker, in his look at Roman Egypt, asserts that the violence was caused by the Jews attempting to assert the power of their *politeuma* and to raise its distinction as the Greeks attempted to suppress it.²⁵ Then it would seem that the Romans were not suppressing the Jews but rather they were being suppressed by the Greeks in the competition that Roman rule created.

Perhaps the best evidence for the privileges the Jews enjoyed is in what they continued to lose. The Roman prefect for the Egyptian province during parts of Tiberius and Caligula’s reign was a Roman called Flaccus. The golden age of Augustus was over

¹⁷ Robert K. Sherk, *The Roman Empire: Augustus to Hadrian*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 88.

¹⁸ Musurillo, 139

¹⁹ Harker, 214.

²⁰ Vander 156; Modrzejewski, 163.

²¹ Bowman and Rathbone, 117.

²² *Ibid.*, 107.

²³ Modrzejewski, 64.

²⁴ Sherk, 85-86.

²⁵ Harker, 213.

and it seemed that so too were any freedoms that the Jews formerly had. Philo gives an account of a decree given by Flaccus that he felt condemned the Jews. "For only a couple of days later he issued a decree in which he stigmatized us as foreigners and aliens and gave us no right to plead our cause but condemned us without trial."²⁶ Flaccus declares the Jews foreigners in Alexandria; this suggests that their status was previously not so poor and that they were once considered to be Alexandrians.²⁷ The result of the decree being that the Jews were deprived of their homes, their land, were no longer considered citizens and as such might suffer violence such as mobs breaking into their shops and making off with their belongings.²⁸ Flaccus publicly declares his lack of respect for the Jewish community and therefore revoked any protection they formerly had. Finally after much violence the emperor Claudius was forced to attempt to rectify the situation. In a letter to the Alexandrians he asked the Greeks to stop the violence against the Jews and asked the Jews to discontinue asking for more than they had in the past.²⁹

Again, when the Romans took possession of Egypt, neither the first Caesar [Augustus] nor any of his successors would consent to any diminution of the honors conferred on the Jews, since the time of Alexander. They were, however, continually coming into collision with the Greeks, and the numerous punishments inflicted daily on the rioters of both parties by the authorities only served to embitter the quarrel.³⁰

²⁶ Philo, *Flacc.* 54.

²⁷ Harker, 214.

²⁸ Philo, *Flacc.* 56-58

²⁹ Sher, 85.

³⁰ Josep. *BJ* 2, 437-89; ed. H. St. J. Thackeray; Modrzejewski page 165.

Whether or not they were Alexandrian citizens varies from one ancient source to another. The reason for the decline of the Jewish position in Alexandria seems to have been as much caused by the competition for prestige between the lesser ruling classes as it was from Roman subjugation itself. What is clear from the information we have is that the Jewish population flourished in Ptolemaic Egypt, managed to survive quite well under the Augustan empire, however, as the situation progressed the clashes between them and the ruling classes led to further degeneration and the much lamented riots of the Julio-Claudian period.

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