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## Women and Property

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### Female Property Ownership and Status in Classical and Hellenistic Sparta

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#### 1. Introduction

The image of the liberated Spartiate woman, exempt from (at least some of) the social and behavioral controls which circumscribed the lives of her counterparts in other Greek poleis, has excited or horrified the imagination of commentators both ancient and modern.<sup>1</sup> This image of liberation has sometimes carried with it the idea that women in Sparta exercised an unaccustomed influence over both domestic and political affairs.<sup>2</sup> The source of that influence is ascribed by certain ancient writers, such as Euripides (*Andromache* 147-53, 211) and Aristotle (*Politics* 1269b12-1270a34), to female control over significant amounts of property. The male-centered perspectives of ancient writers, along with the well-known phenomenon of the “Spartan mirage” (the compound of distorted reality and sheer imaginative fiction regarding the character of Spartan society which is reflected in our overwhelmingly non-Spartan sources) mean that we must treat ancient images of women with caution. Nevertheless, ancient perceptions of their position as significant holders of property have been affirmed in recent modern studies.<sup>3</sup>

The issue at the heart of my paper is to what extent female property-holding really did translate into enhanced status and influence. In Sections 2-4 of this paper I shall approach this question from three main angles. What was the status of female possession of property, and what power did women have directly to manage and make use of their property? What impact did actual or potential ownership of property by Spartiate women have upon their status and influence? And what role did female property-ownership and status, as a collective phenomenon, play within the crisis of Spartiate society? First, however, in view of the inter-disciplinary audience of this volume, it is necessary to give a brief outline of the historical context of my discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was researched and written during my tenure of an award under the Research Leave scheme of the U.K. Arts and Humanities Research Board. I am grateful to the editors of this volume for their invitation to take part in the inter-disciplinary colloquium on Women and Property and to my fellow participants in the colloquium for their stimulating and helpful discussion.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., most recently, Pomeroy 2002, esp. 136-7.

<sup>3</sup> Cartledge 1981; Millender 1999, 370-3; Hodkinson 2000, 94-103; Pomeroy 2002, 76-89.

## Historical Background

From c.550 BC to c.370 BC, Sparta was one of the most powerful poleis in the Greek world. Her external power was rooted in the creation of political and socio-economic institutions whose basis was the organization of her male citizens into a cohesive elite body of *homoioi* (“Peers”) known as the “Spartiates.” The Spartiates, who resided in the five modest-sized villages of Sparta itself, controlled a territory of some 8,500 square kilometers of the southern Peloponnese, dominating two numerically larger populations: the free *perioikoi* (literally, “dwellers around”) and the unfree helots, who farmed the Spartiates’ landed estates and performed personal and domestic service in Spartiate households. The Spartiates numbered some 8,000 male citizens around the year 480 BC (Herodotus 7.234). Subsequently, their numbers underwent a steady decline: after Sparta’s defeat at the battle of Leuktra in 371 BC there were fewer than 1,000 Spartiates (Aristotle, *Politics* 1270a29-31). The root cause of this decline was the growing concentration of property and consequent impoverishment of ordinary citizen households, which left many Spartiates unable to deliver the monthly dues to their common mess groups, membership of which was a requirement of citizenship. Failure to produce the dues led to exclusion from one’s mess and the loss of citizen rights.

In the period after Leuktra Sparta lost over half her territory and rapidly declined to the status of a second-rank power. This period also witnessed the decay of the civic institutions which had sustained her classical citizen organization. By the early 240s BC male Spartiate numbers had apparently dropped to a mere 700, of whom only 100 possessed significant resources (Plutarch, *Agis* 5.4). The following 20-25 years witnessed two attempts led, respectively, by Kings Agis IV and Kleomenes III, to “recreate” the institutions of Sparta’s classical citizen organization and restore Spartiate numbers through a redistribution of land into state-controlled plots. Although ultimately unsuccessful, these attempts – often termed the “third-century revolution” – are important both historically, for the role played by wealthy women, and historiographically, owing to the “invented traditions” created by the revolutionaries regarding the character of Sparta’s classical property system.

## Private property-holding and female inheritance

According to these invented traditions, the revolutionaries’ property reforms were merely a restoration of measures originally instituted by Lykourgos, the Spartans’ legendary lawgiver. Lykourgos, it was asserted, had taken landed property into public control and divided it equally among Spartiate citizens, and these arrangements had survived intact for several centuries until corrupted in the early fourth century. Thanks to the influence of Plutarch’s “biographies” of Lykourgos and of Kings Agis and Kleomenes, this invented tradition became the dominant image of Spartiate property ownership conveyed by antiquity to the modern world. It exercised a remarkable hold over nineteenth- and twentieth- century scholarship (Hodkinson 2000, 9-64).

In recent years, however, scholars have turned away from the late evidence of Plutarch to the contemporary sources for classical Sparta, which unanimously attest the existence of an essentially private system of property-holding characterized by marked inequalities among the Spartiate elite.<sup>4</sup> Briefly: individual Spartiates held private landholdings, which were transmissible to their children (or other residual heirs) by means of partible inheritance, but which the individual owner also had certain rights to alienate by means of lifetime gifts or testamentary bequests, though not by sale. Spartiates also had private ownership of a range of items of movable wealth: livestock, various kinds of valuables, and even foreign coinage (the last was prohibited only for a brief period after 404 BC.) The polis maintained certain public rights over private property. The most important of these rights has already been mentioned: the requirement upon all adult males to deliver monthly dues, mainly in kind, to their mess groups.

The question of property-holding by Spartiate women is a matter of controversy, partly due to the paucity and brevity of explicit statements in the ancient sources. It is clear, however, that women were

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<sup>4</sup> The following summary is based upon the extended discussion in Hodkinson 2000, 65-208.

significant holders of landed property. The key piece of evidence is Aristotle's statement (*Politics* 1270a23-5), made in the later fourth century, that,

... approximately [or "nearly" (*schedon*)] two-fifths of all the land is possessed by women (*esti tôn gynaikôn*), both because of many heiresses (*epiklêrôn*) that appear, and because of the practice of giving large dowries.

By "heiresses" Aristotle means daughters who inherited their parents' property in the absence of any sons. His reference to large landed dowries, however, indicates that even daughters with brothers could expect to receive significant amounts of land at the time of marriage. Some scholars believe that these dowries were voluntaristic marriage-settlements given by a girl's parents, their size being a reflection of competition for high-status marriages (Cartledge 1981, 98). My own interpretation is that the dowry was not merely a voluntary gift but an anticipation of the daughter's rightful share of the inheritance. My suggestion is that a Spartiate daughter had rights of inheritance similar to the inheritance rights of daughters specified in the Law Code of Gortyn in Crete (Link, this volume): namely, half the portion given to a son.<sup>5</sup> I have termed this inheritance system "universal female inheritance," inasmuch as every woman gained some landed inheritance from her parents, either receiving a half-portion in a division with her brother(s) or inheriting as sole heiress or jointly on equal terms with her sister(s). Aristotle's comments above relate to inheritance of land. We do not know whether Sparta's inheritance laws reserved any items of property specifically for male heirs, as did the Gortyn Code, which excluded town houses, the contents of untenanted country houses, and livestock from the daughter's half-portion. As we shall see below, however, there is evidence for female possession of the full range of movable property mentioned above.

## 2. Women's ownership and use of property

Female ownership and the *kyrieia*

What did female inheritance of property signify? Were women legally the owners of property in their possession? We can gain some insight into these questions from one item in the list of the prerogatives of Spartan kings provided by Herodotus in the later fifth century (6.57.4):

The kings are the sole judges of these cases only: concerning an unmarried heiress (*patrouchou te parthenou*), to whom it pertains to have [her], if her father has not betrothed her...

Herodotus describes the heiress by a different term (*patrouchos*) from that used by Aristotle (*epiklêros*). There is reason to believe that Herodotus' list of royal prerogatives stems from an official Spartan source (Carlier 1977; 1984) and that his term is the authentic Spartiate one, whereas the Athenian-influenced Aristotle has misleadingly borrowed the equivalent term used in contemporary Athens (Wolff 1957, 166-7; Cartledge 1981, 97). The term *patrouchos*, a compound of *patrôa* and *echein*, means "holder of the patrimony." It corresponds to the term *patrôîôkos* in the Law Code of Gortyn. A *patrôîôkos* in Gortyn, as long as she conformed to the laws specifying whom she was to marry, remained the legal owner of her father's property throughout her life, unlike the Athenian *epiklêros*, who ceded the property to her son(s) when (t)he(y) came of age.<sup>6</sup> The similarity of terms suggests that the Spartiate *patrouchos* enjoyed legal rights of ownership over the patrimony comparable to those of her Gortynian counterpart. Likewise, on my

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<sup>5</sup> *Gortyn Code* 4.37-5.9, esp. 4.39-43 (text and English translation in Willetts 1967); cf. Ephorus, *FGrH* 70F149, *ap.* Strabo, *Geography* 10.4.20. The grounds for this hypothesis cannot be fully discussed here; but, most strikingly, it can be shown mathematically that – under a range of plausible permutations of family composition and survivorship postulated by historical demographers for self-reproducing, "natural fertility," pre-industrial populations – a system of inheritance in which daughters inherit land at half the rate of sons will tend to produce a distribution of land-ownership between the sexes in which the proportion owned by women is a little under 40%, precisely as Aristotle indicates (Hodkinson 2000, 100, and the calculations on p.111 n.69).

<sup>6</sup> *Gortyn Code* 7.15 - 9.24. On the Athenian *epiklêros*, Harrison 1968-71, i.132-8; Schaps 1979, 25-42.

interpretation that the dowries given to Spartiate women were *pre-mortem* inheritances, it would follow that these too were the woman's legal property.

These arguments have recently been challenged by Jean Ducat (1998, 393), who denies that Spartiate women were properly owners of landed property in their possession, owing to the operation of the institution known as the *kyrieia*: the legal guardianship of a woman by her nearest male relative or (within marriage) by her husband. In response to Ducat, it should be noted that scholars are divided over the existence of the *kyrieia* in Sparta: the few relevant texts are not fully explicit.<sup>7</sup> But, even if we grant the existence of the *kyrieia*, that does not in itself prove that the power of a woman's *kyrios* extended into the sphere of property, nullifying her legal ownership or controlling the use of her possessions. This is clearly demonstrated once again by the evidence of the Gortyn Code, which abolished the economic control of the *kyrios* (e.g. 6.9-25; Schaps 1979, 58-9; Link, this volume). In spite of the *kyrieia*, Gortynian women after the promulgation of the Code legally owned and exercised personal control over their own separate property (e.g. 4.23-6). Gortyn was not the only Greek polis in which a woman's *kyrios* had no attested economic role. Manumission inscriptions from Delphi, Naupaktos and Elatea, for example, attest women freeing slaves without any reference to a *kyrios* (Schaps 1979, 49-50). The meager epigraphic evidence from Sparta does not include the kind of documents which would furnish definitive proof of female independence from her *kyrios* in economic affairs. But, equally, in none of the evidence for female possession or use of property is there any indication of the controlling hand of a *kyrios*.<sup>8</sup> Ducat claims that Spartiate women lacked the right to alienate their property; but there is no ancient evidence to support this assertion. Aristotle (*Politics* 1270a19-21) states that, while the Spartan lawgiver "made it dishonorable to buy or sell land in someone's possession, he left it quite open to anyone, if they wished, to give it away and bequeath it." There is no differentiation here between male and female owners, no hint that women did not possess the rights of gift and bequest. And, in writing this passage, Aristotle surely had women very much in mind, since it is a mere nine words later that he begins his statement (quoted above) regarding female possession of two-fifths of the land.

Given the available evidence, therefore, there are no grounds for regarding female property ownership in Sparta as inferior in character to the ownership of property by men. I phrase this conclusion in a relational manner, partly because in discussing female status we are dealing not with absolutes but with the status of women in relation to that of men, partly because in most societies – and in Sparta, in particular – "ownership" itself is not an absolute phenomenon. In addition to the prohibition of sale, the Spartan polis, as already noted, exercised certain public claims upon private property: levies upon agricultural produce for the common mess dues; common rights to make use of certain kinds of private property (helots; hunting dogs; horses; surplus provisions on hunting expeditions); the practice of legitimized theft by Spartiate boys; and (probably a relatively late introduction) taxation for military purposes based upon the extent of one's landholdings.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting, in a relational context, that these public rights bore less heavily upon women's property than upon men's, since they did not participate in the common messes or in hunting activities; female exclusion from men-only activities meant fewer drains upon their personal resources.

### Restrictions on women's use of wealth

The argument that a woman's property rights were unfettered by economic control from her *kyrios* might appear to imply a degree of independence in the personal management of her possessions and a scope for

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<sup>7</sup> Against the existence of the *kyrieia*, Bickerman 1976, 20; Kunstler 1986, 48 n.102. Uncertain: Beasley 1906, 251-2. In favour: Cartledge 1981, 99-100. The key texts are Xenophon, *Polity of the Lakedaimonians* 9.6; Polybius 12.6b.8; *Sayings of Lakonian Women*, Anon 23, ap. Plutarch, *Moralia* 242b.

<sup>8</sup> The only text which might conceivably be interpreted as implying a *kyrios*' power over economic matters is Aristotle's statement (*Politics* 1270a26-9) regarding the marriage of an heiress: "But, as it is, one [i.e. a father] may give an *epiklêros* in marriage to any person one wishes; and, if a man dies without making a will, the man he leaves as heir-apparent (*klêronomos*) gives her to whomever he likes." The passage, however, indicates no more than a temporary influence of the *klêronomos* over the devolution of the heiress's property; there is no hint of male control over the property itself.

<sup>9</sup> For detailed discussion, Hodkinson 2000, 187-208.

deploying them which would have been the envy of women in certain other Greek poleis. The contrast seems especially strong with the situation in contemporary Athens, where the legal authority of a *kyrios* was more extensive, the *epiklêros* had no option except to preserve her inheritance intact for her son(s), a woman's personal ownership of her dowry was rather less clear-cut, and where in law women were not capable of performing transactions beyond the value of a *medimnos* of barley.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst not wanting to deny the reality of this contrast, I would suggest that it was by no means as sharp as might first appear. As regards independence in the management of property, law is not always a perfect guide to practice. This point has been forcefully highlighted in Amy Louise Erickson's detailed study of women and property in early modern England. In spite of the operation of a common law system which enforced male control far more strongly than the Athenian *kyrieia* – through the law of *couverture*, according to which a woman's property became on marriage legally her husband's – “in practice wives maintained during marriage substantial property interests of their own” (Erickson 1993, 19). As Martin King Whyte has noted in his cross-cultural study of the status of women in pre-industrial societies, women in almost half of the cultures within his study had more informal influence than would appear from the formal rules (Whyte 1979, 88). Likewise, in classical Athens the legal ceiling on transactions did not in practice prevent certain Athenian women from engaging in more valuable transactions (Schaps 1979, 52-3). Within the household, moreover, it is often the personality and temperament of its members as much as the law that determines the role each plays in economic decision-making and activity (cf. Schaps 1979, 11). This is particularly so because, as Lin Foxhall (1989) has emphasized, in everyday life households often operate as a single economic unit, making collective decisions about their property and deploying it corporately, regardless of who exactly owns it. There was, consequently, always the potential for a forceful Athenian wife to exercise as much as influence over the management of the household property as a Spartiate wife who was willing to give her husband a say in the deployment of her personal holdings.

The scope that Spartiate women had for the deployment of their economic resources was also limited by two sets of factors which did not apply to Athenian women. The first set of limiting factors was structural (Hodkinson 2000, 210-13). One such factor was the comparatively communal character of the helot servile labor force, which comprised an indigenous population bound to their condition (unless by public decree), rather than chattel slaves acquired through private commercial exchange: hence, unlike their counterparts elsewhere, Spartiate women could not manumit their personal servants. Another factor was the comparatively low level of liquidity within Spartiate household economies, stemming from the overwhelmingly agrarian character of Spartan society and a relatively low level of market demand for agricultural products. The lesser degree of liquidity in the economic framework was reinforced by a socio-political system which minimised cash expenditures by excluding both private acts of communal patronage and public liturgies: hence there were no opportunities for the types of euergetic benefactions practiced by women in Hellenistic and Roman Greece (van Bremen 1983; 1996). In keeping with these characteristics, Spartiate dowries (as we have seen) consisted of land, whereas among upper-class Athenian families they normally comprised money, furniture and other movable goods.

The second set of limiting factors was a series of specific restrictions placed by the Spartiate community upon the deployment of personal resources in particular spheres of life (Hodkinson 2000, 214-35). These restrictions (involving uniformity of upbringing and of personal dress and military equipment, as well as limitations on food and feasting) were applied forcibly and extensively in the lives of Spartiate men. Spartiate women were often depicted by ancient writers as being exempt from these restrictions (e.g. Euripides, *Andromache* 147-53; Aristotle, *Politics* 1269b21-3). Recent research, however, has demonstrated the distortions inherent in such negative representations by male, non-Spartan writers, which have their origins in Athenocentric representations of the Spartan “Other” (Millender 1996, 215-86; 1999; Cartledge 1981). Despite the paucity of information about the lives of Spartiate women, there are signs of similar restrictions upon their deployment of private resources. Spartiate girls underwent a uniform public education

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<sup>10</sup> Schaps 1979, 52-8; Todd 1993, 207-10; Isaios 10.10.

which included simplicity of dress (Cartledge 1981, 91-2; Ducat 1988, 386-91; Pomeroy 2002, 3-32). Adult Spartiate women were not permitted to wear ornaments, to let their hair grow long, or to wear gold (Aristotelian *Polity of the Lakedaimonians*, ap. Herakleides Lembos 373.13, Dilts).<sup>11</sup> There were also restrictions on the use of private wealth in wedding and funerary ritual – both of them “rites of passage” in which women were closely involved (Foxhall and Stears 2000, 12-13). In contrast to the lavish expenditure and public display involved in contemporary Athenian weddings (Oakley and Sinos 1993), Spartiate wedding ritual was an austere secretive affair between bride and groom (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 15.3-4). Spartiate burial practices too were minimalist and uniform in character (Hodkinson 2000, 243-62), without scope for expenditure on grave goods or accoutrements for the body of the deceased and without funerary inscriptions, except for the simplest and most inexpensive monuments for “a man who died in battle and a woman from among the *hierai*” (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 27.2).<sup>12</sup>

#### Female expenditures: archaeological evidence

The above restrictions, although significant, did not remove all potential female uses of private resources. Our ability to uncover permissible areas of female expenditure, however, is limited by the fact that our male non-Spartan sources are primarily interested in the unusual and exotic aspects of the lives of Spartiate women at the expense of their normal everyday use of resources.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the sphere of normal activity in which we can make most progress in tracing women’s use of wealth is one in which the evidence is not literary but archaeological and epigraphic: namely, the sphere of dedications and votive offerings made at religious sanctuaries. Even here, however, as we shall see, there are problems of evidence which limit our capacity to recover female expenditure. For the present discussion, I shall focus primarily upon dedications of objects in bronze – a precious metal which survives in reasonable quantities and whose votive use indicates a not insignificant material commitment – at two major Spartiate religious sites: the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia and the sanctuaries (especially those of Athena) on the Spartan acropolis.<sup>13</sup>

In the period before 550 BC the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia provides indications of a considerable number of bronze dedications by women. The most common type is votive bronze jewelry, especially pins and brooches (*fibulae*). Temple inventories from sanctuaries elsewhere in Greece indicate that such jewelry dedications were frequently attached to items of personal clothing, which no longer survive. Clothing dedicated at Artemis Orthia was probably often quite expensive, to judge from the evidence of another contemporary votive, the miniature lead figurines, which depict model textiles with ornate designs and female figures wearing elaborate clothing (Foxhall and Stears 2000, 7-8). We are therefore dealing with offerings of some considerable value.<sup>14</sup> Such dedications were often made at moments of transition in the dedicant’s life: a phenomenon attested by two bronzes from the late seventh century (a pin-head and a die) inscribed with the name “Eleuthia(s),” a version of Eileithyia the goddess of childbirth, whose shrine lay close by the sanctuary.<sup>15</sup>

After 550 BC, however, there is a marked decline in finds of bronzes of all types at the sanctuary and after 500 BC the votive jewelry entirely disappears, as do jewelry motifs among the leads. The precise interpretation of this change, however, is a matter of debate. Some scholars have viewed it, along with a

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<sup>11</sup> This classical evidence diverges from the indications regarding the archaic period, especially the poet Alkman’s reference c.600 BC to imported Lydian headgear (*Partheneion* 1.67-8, Page).

<sup>12</sup> I.e. “holy” or “consecrated women.” For a defence of this MSS reading of the text against its frequent emendation to “a woman who died in childbirth,” Hodkinson 2000, 260-2.

<sup>13</sup> The following paragraphs present in condensed form my fuller discussion in Hodkinson 2000, 271-302, esp. 288-93. Note also the study of Kilian-Dirlmeier 1984, esp. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Early jewelry finds, especially from the Geometric and Lakonian I-II periods, also include items in gold and silver (Dawkins 1929).

<sup>15</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 3.17.1; cf. Kilian 1978; Pomeroy 2002, 111-12.

contemporaneous increase in hoplite lead figurines, as a sign of a reorientation of the sanctuary towards male concerns, following the creation of male public upbringing (cf. Kennell 1995, 136). However, even during the sixth century hoplite figurines are outnumbered by those depicting human women; and during the fifth and fourth centuries they decline in number, as do all the leads. Furthermore, the bronzes from the sanctuary after 550 BC show few signs of connection with the male upbringing. Indeed, the decline of bronze jewelry at Artemis Orthia is not a purely Spartan phenomenon, but forms part of a general decline of jewelry dedications throughout the Greek world. There is no reason to believe that this decline signifies the end of dedications of female clothing, since at sanctuaries elsewhere the evidence of temple inventories (a type of document not extant for Spartan sanctuaries) indicates that such clothing dedications continue down until the second century BC (Foxhall and Stears 2000, 4). However, since this clothing does not survive archaeologically, the termination of bronze jewelry dedications has the unfortunate effect of eliminating this proxy evidence for the deployment female resources at Artemis Orthia after 500 BC.

The finds from the Acropolis show marked contrasts to those at Artemis Orthia which reflect the closer connection of its sanctuaries to the official life of the polis. Bronze dedications are less common before 550 BC, but peak in the second half of the sixth century and continue strongly into the fifth. These votives are less linked to female life-transitions and more formal in character, with a preponderance of “converted” over “raw” offerings and a greater number of inscribed dedications.<sup>16</sup> Jewelry votives are few and confined to the later seventh century. Several of the dedications reflect areas of male activity, such as war and athletic competition. This initial impression of female exclusion, however, is by no means the whole picture. Several of the votives, especially the statuettes of Athena, could have been dedicated by either men or women. Moreover, out of four inscribed bronzes (all from the fifth century) which bear the names of their dedicants, three – a mirror and two bells – were dedicated by women. Female dedication of the bells is noteworthy because it raises the possibility that a considerable proportion of the large number of *uninscribed* bells dedicated at the sanctuary – more than 40 bronze examples and about 80 in terracotta – were also dedicated by women. If so, then the Acropolis finds would indicate that a number of Spartiate women in the fifth century were expending not insignificant sums on specially commissioned offerings at the central shrine of the polis.

#### Female intrusion into male spheres of expenditure

My discussion thus far have concentrated upon spheres in which the capacity to utilise private resources, or restrictions upon doing so, applied in a similar (if not identical) manner to both women and men. There is important evidence, however, regarding two spheres which for much of our period were the domain of men, but which came to witness the growing role of women. It is typical of the focus of our sources that both are spheres of elite expenditure rather than of everyday life.

The first sphere is that of equestrian competition.<sup>17</sup> Spartiate participation in chariot-racing contests at the Olympic Games first becomes evident in the 540s BC, but grew exponentially in the second half of the fifth century. In the years from 448 to 420 BC six different Spartiate owners between them won the four-horse chariot at seven out of eight Olympiads. Chariot racing was the most expensive of sporting activities, within the capacity of only the wealthiest persons; and the upsurge of Spartiate success was probably rooted in the increasing concentration of landed property into a few hands. Spartiate chariot-owners were prevented from celebrating their victories in Sparta itself, but they commissioned expensive victory monuments in the sanctuary at Olympia for the eyes of international visitors. Despite the restriction upon display at home, Olympic victories were a means of translating large-scale property ownership into socio-political power. An Olympic victory was regarded as a gift of the gods (e.g. Pindar, *Pythian* 5.122-3; 10.10); the victor as

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<sup>16</sup> A “raw” votive is an unmodified object of real, secular use which may often have been used for a considerable time before its dedication; a “converted” votive is an object produced for the specific purpose of dedication, a purposeful conversion of part of the dedicant’s wealth (Snodgrass 1989/90, 291).

<sup>17</sup> For a more detailed with full references, Hodkinson 2000, 303-33.

someone in their special favor, possessing an aura of invincibility, an ideal person for the leadership of state enterprises (cf. Kurke 1993, 136-7). Their Olympic victories catapulted certain chariot-owners into influential military or diplomatic positions. Thus chariot-racing became a sphere of competition among wealthy Spartiates, with the capacity to threaten traditional hierarchies, especially the established power of the kings, who (with one exception) stood aside from equestrian competition as an arena in which they had much potentially to lose in case of defeat.

It was through one king's reaction to the threat of Olympic success that women first broke into this exclusively male sphere of activity. In the 390s BC King Agesilaos II "persuaded his sister Kyniska to breed chariot horses, and showed by her victory that such a stud is a mark not of manliness but of wealth" (Xenophon, *Agesilaos* 9.6). Xenophon portrays Kyniska's success as resulting from her brother's initiative and as designed to undermine his rivals' use of chariot-racing by highlighting its association with femininity and with wealth. Even if Agesilaos did influence his sister, we should not underestimate Kyniska's own role, which was not restricted to fulfilling her brother's agenda. Kyniska celebrated her Olympic victories with two grandiose monuments. One was erected in the Altis, the heart of the Olympic sanctuary, contained bronze statues of Kyniska herself, her charioteer, her chariot and team of horses.<sup>18</sup> The other was a set of less than life-size bronze horses in the pronaos of the temple of Zeus made by the famous sculptor Apelleas of Megara.<sup>19</sup> Kyniska's victory monuments were extremely costly, about 3 talents at contemporary prices. Their grandeur, which exceeded that of any previous victory monument, was reinforced by the most boastful of epigrams:

Kings of Sparta are my father and brothers.  
Kyniska, conquering with a chariot of fleet-footed steeds,  
Set up this statue. And I declare myself the only woman  
In all Hellas to have gained this crown.<sup>20</sup>

The kudos of Olympic success now extended beyond the bounds of male Spartiates to a woman, whose victory celebrations broke new ground. Commemorations of Kyniska's victories also broke the mould in extending for the first time into Sparta itself, where a hero-shrine was erected to her (probably after her death) in the centre of the polis at the Platanistas (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 3.15.1). The placing of the shrine is significant, as Jean Ducat (1998, 168) has noted: close to the Dromos, where the young girls ran; close to the tomb of Alkman, the educator of young girls; above all, close to the sanctuary of Helen, model for the young female Spartiate. The polis hence held Kyniska up to young Spartiate girls as a model woman. Local commemoration of Kyniska's success seems, indeed, to have preceded her death. The find of a small Doric capital and abacus at the sanctuary of the Menelaion, inscribed with Kyniska's name, suggests that, unlike previous Olympic victors, she was permitted to celebrate her success in front of the citizen audience at home.<sup>21</sup> According to Pausanias (3.8.1), a number of other Greek women, especially from Sparta, subsequently emulated Kyniska by winning Olympic chariot-race victories. One of these Spartiate female victors, Euryleonis (winner of the Olympic two-horse chariot race in 368), went even further than Kyniska in being commemorated with a statue on the Acropolis, the traditional locus for celebrating male achievement (Pausanias 3.17.6). In his attempt to use his sister to oppose the challenge of chariot victories to the kingship, Agesilaos thus opened the door for wealthy women to enter this male world and breach the traditional restrictions on display imposed upon Spartiate men.<sup>22</sup>

The other predominantly male sphere which witnessed growing female deployment of wealth concerns relations of patronage and dependence.<sup>23</sup> Spartiate families established personal ties of dependence

<sup>18</sup> Pausanias 6.1.6; *Inscripfen von Olympia* 160; cf. Serwint 1987, 432-3.

<sup>19</sup> Pausanias 5.12.5; *Inscripfen von Olympia* 634; cf. Serwint 1987, 431-2.

<sup>20</sup> *Inscriptiones Graecae* v.1.1564a; *Palatine Anthology* 13.16; cf. Ebert 1972, no.33.

<sup>21</sup> *Inscriptiones Graecae* v.1.235; Woodward 1908/9, 86-7. Cf. also *IG* v.1.1567, a marble fragment bearing the name KYN... along with a reference to the shrine of Hyakinthos at Amyklai.

<sup>22</sup> For another account of Kyniska, Pomeroy 2002, 21-4.

<sup>23</sup> Cartledge 1987, 139-59; Hodkinson 2000, 335-68.

over non-citizen dependants attached to their households, especially their helot servants. Spartiate women were not completely excluded from such ties: for example, they controlled their own female servants. However, they were excluded from heterosexual relations with helots, in contrast to Spartiate men, whose sons by helot women were integrated into polis institutions (Xenophon, *Hellenika* 5.3.9) and were probably a source of prestige for their citizen fathers. Prominent Spartiates also maintained extensive relationships of guest-friendship (*xenia*) with leading men from other poleis. Operating in public and international contexts, such relationships were exclusively male. Finally, as economic differentiation developed within the citizen body, wealthy Spartiates increasingly established patronal relationships over poorer citizens. For most of our period such relationships were confined to men, especially as they often took place within the male-only institutions of the upbringing and common messes or involved relationships between public officials.

There is evidence, however, that by the mid-third century the wealthiest women had established themselves as patrons of Spartiate men. The evidence concerns two royal widows, Agesistrata and Archidamia, the mother and grandmother of King Agis IV, who are said to have been the richest persons in Sparta (Plutarch, *Agis* 4.1). Plutarch claims that Agesistrata possessed a multitude of male dependants, friends and debtors (*ibid.* 6.4). One indication of their patronal influence is that, when the two women threw their weight behind Agis' plans for reform, they summoned their male friends and exhorted them to join (*ibid.* 7.3). One important factor behind this influence is that by this period (the 240s BC) many of Sparta's classical civic institutions had fallen into disabeyance and the former citizen-body of "Peers" was now marked by huge socio-economic differentiation, thereby creating considerable opportunity for the deployment of female wealth.

### 3. Property, status and influence

What impact did their actual or potential ownership of property have upon the lives and status of individual Spartiate women? I shall consider both positive and negative impacts (controls over female marriage, influence within the household, and influence outside the household, including on public life), taking account, as far as the limited evidence permits, of variations in status and influence between women at different life-stages (unmarried; married; widowed) and from different socio-economic levels.<sup>24</sup>

#### Controls over female marriage

##### *First marriages*

The Spartan polis imposed penalties upon confirmed bachelors - or at least upon bachelors who neglected to sire children.<sup>25</sup> There is no evidence of a similar law applying to women, but the position of a spinster was regarded as a miserable condition, such as was visited on female dependants of men adjudged cowards (Xenophon, *Polity of the Lakedaimonians* 9.5). The nature of a woman's marriage was an important indicator of her and her family's status.

We saw earlier that the Spartiate inheritance system was one of "diverging devolution": property was passed down between the sexes, from a male owner to either a male or female heir or to a mixture of the two; and similarly in the case of a female owner. The anthropologist Jack Goody (1976) has noted a high degree of association between inheritance systems of diverging devolution and specific kinds of marriage practices, several of which are evident in Spartiate society (Hodkinson 1989, 90-3; 2000, 406-9). Most relevantly for our purposes, Goody notes a significant correlation between diverging devolution and a high degree of control over female marriage: when women are inheritors and transmitters of property, it is important for

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<sup>24</sup> Although the sources mention certain cases of men initiating divorces, they provide no evidence about the position of the women thus divorced. Similarly, they mention no cases of divorces initiated by women.

<sup>25</sup> References in Cartledge 1981, 95; to which add Xenophon, *Polity of the Lakedaimonians* 1.8, which implies that co-habitation was not necessary.

families that their daughters do not marry men of markedly inferior wealth. Strong formal control over female marriage is certainly evident in Sparta. Although matrimonial rites included a symbolic marriage by capture (Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 15.3-5), which was on one infamous occasion exploited by King Damaratos, who carried off the woman betrothed to his kinsman Leotychidas (Herodotus 6.65), it is clear from Herodotus' account of this episode that it was Leotychidas' method of acquiring a wife which was the norm and that marriages were usually arranged by betrothal.<sup>26</sup> The passages of Herodotus and Aristotle quoted above indicate that, for an unmarried heiress, the arrangement of the betrothal was in the hands of her father or (after his death) by the *klêronomos*, the father's male next-of-kin.

The public face of an arranged marriage organized by the male representative of the household does not of course tell the whole story and may obscure varying degrees of female initiative, influence, or at least consent. Nevertheless, it is clear that wealthy Spartiate families typically arranged the marriages of propertied daughters to gain maximum economic and socio-political advantage. One common tactic was the practice of endogamy. Owing to the paucity of detailed prosopographical evidence about Spartiate lineages, most information about specific endogamous marriages concerns women from the two royal houses, the Agiads and Eurypontids, whose activities most attracted the attention of ancient writers.<sup>27</sup> The marriages of Anaxandridas II to his sister's daughter (Herodotus 5.39), of Kleomenes I's daughter Gorgo to her step-uncle Leonidas (Herodotus 7.205), and of King Leotychidas' daughter Lampito to her nephew Archidamos II (Herodotus 6.71) are all examples of unions whose clear purpose was to consolidate the lineage's property holdings. When an endogamous marriage was not possible, the royal houses married their women to other prominent lineages, as in the case of the marriage of Agesilaos II's daughter Eupolia to a certain Chilon, probably a descendant of the famous ephor (Cartledge 1987, 147-9). Similarly, in the case of exogamous marriages of royal males, there were obvious advantages on both sides for such marriages to be contracted with daughters from the most prominent non-royal lineages, as in the case of Agesilaos II's own marriage to Kleora, daughter of Aristomenidas, a prominent Spartiate with foreign connections (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 3.9.3).

The passion with which royal males sought socio-economically desirable brides, and non-royal families to place their daughters within royal lineages, is illustrated by a set of interconnected episodes in the mid- to late sixth century BC. As noted above, the Agiad king Anaxandridas II contracted a marriage with his sister's daughter which served to re-unite at least part of the royal properties. When the marriage failed to produce an heir, Anaxandridas came under pressure to divorce his niece for another wife; but he refused to dissolve this union. Herodotus records that he was fond of his wife, but another factor against a divorce was surely the consequent loss of his wife's share of the lineage's property. Anaxandridas agreed to take another wife only when he was permitted to retain her as well – a most un-Spartan practice, according to Herodotus (5.39-40). His choice of a second spouse also showed sound socio-economic sense, since his new wife – whose lineage (“the daughter of Prinetas, son of Demarmenos”) Herodotus announces as if it were well-known – evidently came from one of the most distinguished, and no doubt wealthy, families in Sparta. The second wife produced a son, but then the first wife straightaway became pregnant; whereupon the kinsfolk of the second wife disputed its authenticity so fiercely that the ephors were obliged to attend the birth. The value this same kin group put upon achieving distinguished marriages for their womenfolk is further indicated by the fact that another granddaughter of Demarmenos, Perkalos, daughter of Chilon – note again the probable relationship to the famous ephor – was betrothed to Leotychidas, the leading member of the junior branch of the Eurypontid royal house (Herodotus 6.65). Perkalos was such an attractive match that (as we have seen)

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<sup>26</sup> Cartledge 1981, 99-100; MacDowell 1986, 77-82; Ducat 1998, 396. It is strange that Pomeroy (2002, 45) appears to give credence to the account of the Hellenistic writer, Hermippos of Smyrna (fr.87, *ap.* Athen. 555c), possibly influenced by the propaganda of the third-century revolution (Marasco 1978, 120), according to which nubile young men and women found their spouses by groping randomly in a darkened room, regarding it as “contradicting Herodotus.” Even Meillier (1984), who argues the case for the credibility of Hermippos' evidence, regards it as a pre-marital ritual of initiation, distinct from marriage proper.

<sup>27</sup> For more detailed exploration of the socio-economic rationale of the marriages mentioned below, Hodkinson 2000, 101-3; 410-13.

King Damaratos seized her before the marriage was consummated. In these episodes we see a leading Spartiate lineage attempting to further the status of its descendants by marrying its womenfolk into the two royal houses, and royal males seeking to obtain marriages to women of high socio-economic status. We also see the protection against divorce potentially afforded by a wife's property-holdings.

The marriages above were among the wealthiest Spartiates. Our limited evidence does not provide specific examples of marriages among ordinary citizen families, but there are generic indications that concerns of property-ownership were significant at all social levels. One indication is the practice of adelphic polyandry, attested by Polybius (12.6b.8), who says that it was a longstanding custom and quite usual for three, four or even more brothers to have one wife (cf. Perentidis 1997, 25-31). Adelphic polyandry is frequently associated cross-culturally with female property ownership (Leach 1955). The economic background to its practice in Sparta must often have been brothers, concerned about excessive division of their inheritance, pooling their resources to achieve a marriage with a woman of higher socio-economic standing. Another indication is the permissibility of marriage between uterine half-siblings (*homomêtrioi*, children of the same mother but different fathers).<sup>28</sup> This practice allowed a woman's sons and daughters by different partners to be exchanged in marriage, with the effect of concentrating their parents' properties.

To untangle the precise implications of these marriage maneuvers for female status is no easy task, especially given the male-oriented character of our sources. We gain no sense of the women's perspective from Herodotus' accounts of the marital maneuvers outlined above. The focus throughout is on the actions or reactions of the men: Anaxandridas, the kin of the second wife, Damaratos, and the disappointed Leotyichidas. We are not even given the names of Anaxandridas' two wives. Similarly, the sources' statements about polyandry and uterine half-sibling marriage are uninformative about female perspectives. We cannot determine the extent to which the women concerned were pawns in male economic and dynastic games or active exploiters of their property rights to obtain advantageous marriages.

It is clear, however, that women without significant property-holdings were considerably disadvantaged in the marriage stakes. The classic illustration is the daughters of the illustrious commander Lysander, who were deserted by their suitors when the poverty of their inheritance became known.<sup>29</sup> A similar message comes across in other sources. In Plutarch's account of the love story of Damokrita (*Moralia* 775c-e), her exiled husband's property was confiscated so that his two daughters would be disadvantaged by being deprived of dowries. According to an apophthegm in the *Lakainôn Apophthegmata* [*Sayings of Lakonian Women*] (anon no. 24 = Plutarch, *Moralia* 242b), "A poor girl, being asked what dowry she brought to the man who married her, replied, "The family *sôphrosynê*" [prudence, good sense]." The implication is that her material contribution to the marriage was deficient. Indeed, Aelian (*Varia Historia* 6.6) claims that men who married undowered women were relieved of all public duties: the implication is that this relief was compensation for foregoing the material advantage of a dowry.

Overall, therefore, their propertied condition was a major determinant of, and constraint upon, the marriages of Spartiate women. The one significant qualification is that control over the marriage of heiresses was less strong in Sparta than in certain other poleis. Herodotus' statement (quoted above) indicates that under certain circumstances the marriage of an heiress came under the jurisdiction of the kings, who allocated her to her appropriate male next-of-kin. It is important to note, however, that the royal jurisdiction applied only in the case of an unmarried orphaned heiress who had not been betrothed by her father (Hodkinson 2000, 95). An heiress already married or even merely betrothed (including, according to Aristotle, in her father's will) was permitted to retain her existing or intended spouse, instead of being at the disposal of the *klêronomos* as her next-of-kin. This is confirmed by the above case of Lysander's daughters: on their father's death the men to whom they were betrothed, far from being expected to give way to the next-of-kin, were fined when they abandoned the girls. Spartan practice here contrasts with the stricter laws

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<sup>28</sup> Philo, *On Special Laws* 3.4.22.

<sup>29</sup> *Apophthegmata Lakônika*, *Lysander* no.15, ap. Plutarch, *Moralia* 230a; Plutarch, *Lysander* 30.5; Aelian, *Varia Historia* 6.4; 10.5.

in both Athens and Gortyn, where the next-of-kin had the right to marry the heiress, unless she was married and already had a son (in Athens) or child of either sex (in Gortyn).<sup>30</sup> In Sparta, moreover, as Aristotle indicates, there was no obligation that the marriage even of an unmarried, unbetrothed heiress had to be with her next-of-kin; if he so chose, the *klêronomos* could give her in marriage to any man whatsoever.

### *Remarriage of widows*

We possess only limited prosopographical evidence regarding named Spartiate widows and what evidence there is relates exclusively to the upper classes. Even this limited evidence, however, provides some indication of the significance of the widow's property-holding, alongside the question of her age, in influencing her future marital status.

It seems that mature rich widows were often in a strong position to determine whether and whom they remarried. This point is illustrated, above all, by the cases of three women who played prominent roles in the third-century revolution. The first two cases are those of Archidamia and Agesistrata, respectively grandmother and mother of King Agis IV. The ages of these two women at the time of their husbands' deaths are unclear,<sup>31</sup> but when they emerge into the light of history in the late 240s, they appear as matrons beyond childbearing age who had never remarried and who possessed great influence as the richest people in Sparta (Plutarch, *Agis* 4.1). The third case is that of Kratesikleia, widow of King Leonidas II, who was almost certainly beyond her childbearing years on her husband's death c.235 BC.<sup>32</sup> Kratesikleia, we are told, had no wish to remarry, and she initially remained single; but about eight years later c.227 BC she chose to marry one of the most reputable and influential citizens, in order to enlist his support for the political plans of her son King Kleomenes III (Plutarch, *Kleomenes* 6.1). In the case of all these widows, their propertied status clearly did not require their remarriage and probably enhanced their relative independence.

For younger propertied widows the situation may often have been different. Take a case contemporary with those considered above: that of Agiatis, widow of King Agis IV. When her husband was executed in 241 BC, Agiatis was still a young woman, probably in her early 20s with a young child (Plutarch, *Kleomenes* 1.1). She was also heiress to her father's large estate. She was given no choice about her remarriage, since King Leonidas II (who came from the other royal house and had been behind her husband's execution) compelled her to marry his son Kleomenes. Agiatis' specific treatment by Leonidas was clearly exceptional and strongly influenced by the contingent revolutionary political circumstances of the era. Nevertheless, Plutarch's explanation of Leonidas' actions ("He did not want to give the woman to anyone else because Agiatis was an *epiklêros* of the large estate of her father, Gylippos") implies that, as an unmarried, unbetrothed heiress of child-bearing age, she was expected to remarry and fell legally under the king's jurisdiction. In forcing her to marry his own son, Leonidas was abusing his proper role, which should have been merely to adjudicate between claimants from among her kin; but it seems that Agiatis had no choice about whether or not to remarry.

The other case of a propertied widow of child-bearing age (our only case from the classical period) is that of Eupolia, second wife of King Archidamos II. Eupolia was in her late 30s at least when the king died c.427 BC.<sup>33</sup> The "horsey" connotations of her name and that of her father Melesippidas suggest that she came from a wealthy lineage.<sup>34</sup> Her marriage to King Archidamos is a classic example of a dynastic marriage.

<sup>30</sup> Harrison 1968-71, i.11-12 & Appendix I; Schaps 1979, 28; *Gortyn Code* 8.20-30. At Gortyn a childless heiress was allowed to avoid the obligation only if she ceded half the inheritance to her next-of-kin (7.52-8.7).

<sup>31</sup> On the fundamental problems regarding the identity of Archidamia's husband and her date of birth, McQueen 1990, 168-70. There is similar uncertainty regarding the dates of Agesistrata's birth and of the death of her husband, Eudamidas II, which could have been any time between c.260 and 244 BC (McQueen 1990, 170-4).

<sup>32</sup> She had a daughter Chilonis, who was already married with two young children in 241 BC (Plutarch, *Agis* 17.1; cf. 11.5).

<sup>33</sup> She bore another son, Teleutias, by her second marriage, who was probably born by 421 BC (he was surely at least age 30 when he held his first attested command in 391 BC). Eupolia's son by Archidamos, the future king Agesilaos II, was born c.444 BC (Cartledge 1987, 21). Spartiate women probably married around age 18-20 (Cartledge 1981, 94-5). Even if Eupolia married at the earliest possible age of 18 and gave birth to Agesilaos a year later, she will have been about 36 at Archidamos' death.

<sup>34</sup> Plutarch, *Agesilaos* 1.1. The names incorporate *polos* (foal) and *hippos* (horse).

Following Archidamos' death, however, Eupolia married an otherwise unknown Spartiate named Theodoros (*Palatine Anthology* 7.426): a marriage apparently down the economic scale, since her new relations were poor (Xenophon, *Agesilaos* 4.5; Plutarch, *Agesilaos* 4.1). This could be a case of a rich and eminent widow being able to flout normal expectations and marry her man of choice regardless of economic considerations, although there are suggestions in the sources that Eupolia was, on physical grounds, not the most eligible of spouses.<sup>35</sup> At all events, her son by her first marriage, Agesilaos, was so sensitive to his mother's impoverished connections that, when many years later he inherited both the kingship and substantial property-holdings from his half-brother King Agis II, he gave half this property to his mother's relations (Cartledge 1987, 115). Agesilaos' action reinforces our perception that Eupolia's remarriage was an unusual one (on whatever grounds) and that women were normally expected to marry within restricted socio-economic bounds. The episode also suggests that even an exceptional widow like Eupolia was expected to remarry, in view of her continued capacity for reproduction, and probably also her status as a significant owner of property.

#### Influence within the household

It is clear from the extent of women's property ownership and the careful controls over female marriage that a wife's property holdings made, and were regarded as making, a major contribution to the household wealth. To what extent did this give a woman influence within the household (*oikos*)?

The starting point for examining this question is the close association between wife and *oikos* within Spartiate society. For Plato, the *oikos* was the primary sphere in which Spartiate women operated, with their activities focused upon domestic care, management and child-raising (*Laws* 780e-781d, 806a). The two wives of King Anaxandridas each retained her own separate household rather than being merged into a single household (Herodotus 5.40). In itself, this association was not unusual within Greek poleis: evidence from contemporary Athens indicates that women frequently (though not always) took responsibility for the management of the household's affairs, not least at times when its menfolk were absent.<sup>36</sup> However, the authority of Spartiate women within their households was probably enhanced by a smaller than usual age difference between husband and wife and by the young husband's residence away from home in the barracks until age 30.<sup>37</sup>

This picture of close association between the Spartiate wife and her *oikos* was, however, overdrawn by some ancient writers, who claimed that Spartiate men were effectively excluded from domestic affairs (Plutarch, *Agis* 7.3). Similarly, some modern scholars (e.g. Kunstler 1987; Zweig 1993; Dettenhofer 1993; 1994) have portrayed Spartiate households as almost exclusively female-dominated domains within a largely sex-segregated society, in which the men's absence on military and public service left the women in charge at home. A more realistic assessment is that Sparta's foreign military campaigns varied in frequency and were mostly brief; and that, "although the Spartan male spent the majority of his time engaged in public activities, he must have taken an interest in the economic health of his *oikos*, on which his retention of citizenship, his status in the community, and the future of his descendants depended" (Millender 1999, 372; cf. Thommen 1999, 145). Male control over female marriage discussed above is testimony to this perspective. As was also noted earlier, the right to buy and sell and to enter the *agora* to acquire household necessities was an integral part of Spartiate citizenship. A similar image comes across in Plato's depiction of

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<sup>35</sup> According to a number of sources (Plutarch, *Agesilaos* 2.3, citing Theophrastos; *Moralia* 1d; Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* 13.566d), Archidamos was fined for marrying Eupolia, on the grounds that her short stature would produce not kings but kinglets. Her son, Agesilaos, was indeed short and also lame, although the sources disagree about whether this was congenital or the result of a childhood accident (Xenophon, *Hellenika* 3.3.3; Plutarch, *Agesilaos* 2.2; Nepos, *Agesilaos* 8.1). For divergent modern opinions, Cartledge 1987, 20; Krentz 1995, 178; Shipley 1997, 73-4, 88.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. the references and discussion in Schaps 1979, 15-16; Millender 1999, 372.

<sup>37</sup> As noted above (n.34), Spartiate women probably married around age 18-20, a few years later than in many other poleis.

Spartiate-style timocratic man, whose love of wealth is focused, above all, within his *oikos*.<sup>38</sup> We should therefore view the direction of the affairs of the *oikos* as a compound of female and male interests.

One illustration is the set of legitimate sexual relationships which scholars normally term “wife-sharing,” but which from the woman’s perspective might equally be called “man-doubling.”<sup>39</sup> According to our sole contemporary source, Xenophon (*Polity of the Lakedaimonians* 1.8-9),<sup>40</sup>

If a man did not want to cohabit with a woman, but nevertheless desired children of whom he could be proud, he [*sc.* the lawgiver Lykourgos] made it lawful for him, when he saw a woman of quality who had borne good children, to produce children by her with her husband’s consent. He [Lykourgos] gave his sanction to many similar arrangements: for the women want to gain possession of two households; and the men want to get for their sons brothers who are part of the kin and share in its power but claim no part of its property.

Xenophon describes the initiation of such relationships purely in terms of an arrangement between the men concerned. In contrast, certain modern scholars have tried to reinterpret the practice in terms of women’s sexual freedom and their desire to initiate liaisons outside marriage (e.g. Kunstler 1987, 99). Both perspectives are too extreme. Xenophon may provide an accurate description of the formal, public position; but it is unlikely that many such relationships were initiated without the woman’s consent. As Xenophon himself notes, women had a positive motive for actively undertaking a second relationship, which gave them charge of a second household. On the other hand, to prioritize female initiative and explain their involvement in terms of adulterous affairs is to ignore the realistic ancient concerns outlined in the passage, and especially its atmosphere of common endeavor by the two men and the woman to increase both their individual influence and that of the kin group without creating additional drains on household resources (cf. Ducat 1998, 396; Thommen 1999, 142). The collaborative role of wife-sharing/man-doubling within the long-term social and economic strategies of both households is demonstrated by its linkage with the practice of uterine half-sibling marriage, through which the woman’s sons and daughters by the two men could then intermarry, in order to concentrate the properties of the two households and solidify their alliance.

Within this context of both male and female involvement in the *oikos*, it is plausible to suggest that women’s contribution of property to the household gave them the capacity for varying degrees of influence. Cross-cultural studies have suggested that female control over household property is correlated with enhanced domestic authority.<sup>41</sup> Ancient Greek and Roman sources contain several indications regarding the pressure a rich wife could exert over her husband.<sup>42</sup> Comparative evidence from classical Athens, where women had fewer property rights than their Spartiate counterparts, indicates the significant initiative and influence in household affairs that could nevertheless be exercised by well-dowered women.<sup>43</sup> In Sparta, where all women inherited and owned some landed property, one would expect wives at all economic levels to be capable of exercising leverage within their households. This is precisely the role that Euripides in his *Andromache* gives to the wealthy Spartan princess Hermione: her possessions are said to secure her freedom of speech and she is able to lord her wealth over her husband (lines 147-53, 211, 940).

Certain aspects of Spartiate marriage practices probably also enhanced a woman’s economic influence. Within the wife-sharing/man-doubling arrangement her property holdings were important to both her households, since they would be shared by the children of both unions; the woman was the central focus uniting the two households, especially if her children by her different partners subsequently intermarried.

<sup>38</sup> Plato, *Republic* 548b; cf. Ducat 1998, 386.

<sup>39</sup> I adopt the term “man-doubling” from Sarah Pomeroy’s term “husband-doubling” (2002, 39-40), since the second partner’s relationship to the woman was not equivalent to that of her husband.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. also *Lakainôn Apophthegmata* [*Sayings of Lakonian Women*], *Anon* no.23 (= Plutarch, *Moralia* 242b); Polybius 12.6b.8; Plutarch, *Lykourgos* 15.7; *Comparison of Lykourgos and Numa* 3.3.

<sup>41</sup> Sacks 1974; Whyte 1978, 106-7; 145-7. Although Whyte criticises Sacks’ conclusions on the grounds of her limited sample of cultures, his own wider-ranging study produced similar, if somewhat weaker, positive correlations between these variables.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Plato, *Laws* 774c; Menander, *Plok.* fr. 333; Elder Cato, *Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta*<sup>4</sup> fr. 158.

<sup>43</sup> Schaps 1979, 76-7; Gould 1980, 49-50; Foxhall 1989.

Adelphic polyandry also gave certain women an extended household management role over the affairs of several men; the economic background to a polyandrous marriage must often have been that the woman was wealthier than each of her individual male partners. Within polyandrous marriages, in particular, but also within other households containing a majority of males, it may often have been the case that the menfolk were unable to sustain their contributions to the common messes (and hence their citizen status) without relying extensively upon produce from the landholdings of their wife or mother. This reliance would have occurred more frequently within poorer households, for whom the mess dues were a heavier proportional burden than for the rich; hence the capacity for female influence may have been especially strong within ordinary Spartiate families.

These last considerations suggest that female domestic influence may have grown over time, since the growing impoverishment of ordinary Spartiates from the fifth century onwards meant that a greater proportion of male citizens had difficulty meeting their mess dues, implying a more widespread reliance upon female resources. Growing impoverishment may also have increased the proportion of polyandrous marriages and wife-sharing/man-doubling arrangements, as a means of spreading a woman's fertility between more than one man, thereby limiting the number of heirs (cf. Polybius 12.6b.8). The incentives for such relationships may have intensified not only for poorer Spartiates, but also for richer citizens needing to consolidate their wealth in a period when property-ownership was becoming more important relative to civic performance as a determinant of status (cf. Hodkinson 1989, 95-7; 1993, 157-9). In addition, Sparta's declining citizen body will have meant that war casualties had a larger proportional impact upon the number of male citizens (Ducat 1983, 164). One consequence will have been a proportional increase in the number of widows, along with reduced opportunities for remarriage. The substantially freer rein which some propertied widows possess for independent economic and social action is a phenomenon evident in many societies.<sup>44</sup> Another consequence will have been increased inheritances for women. It is precisely in the later fourth century, when male citizen numbers were low, that Aristotle commented on the considerable number of sole heiresses and the large size of dowries, both of which would have followed from declining numbers of inheriting sons. The paucity of evidence makes it difficult to trace the precise impact of these changes upon women's position within the household. However, Plutarch's account of conditions before the third-century revolution refers to "the honor and influence which they [women] enjoyed on account of their wealth" (*Agis* 7.4). The household in which the young (and possibly fatherless) King Agis IV was reared was one apparently dominated by his mother and grandmother, rather than by a male guardian (*Agis* 4.1; cf. McQueen 1990, 171-2).

### Influence outside the household

To what extent did women's capacity for domestic influence, founded upon their ownership of property, extend to influence outside the household, upon the society at large? Here we need to distinguish two different (though sometimes overlapping) modes of influence: influence based upon domestic authority and exercised through the household; and influence exerted directly by women acting independently outside the household.

The first of these modes is notoriously difficult to analyze because female influence is usually hidden behind the external face of the household, which is normally represented by its male head. Without documents emanating from within the household, there is usually no way of knowing the extent to which a man conducting household business is implementing his own personal decisions or those hammered out in intra-household discussion involving its female members. It is also easy to ignore the broader societal significance of female domestic influence through "the assumption that the foundations of power in Greek society lie solely in the public sphere, and that domestic power is 'less important'" (Foxhall 1989, 22). Spartiate women could not hold political office or vote in the assembly. However, even on matters of public

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<sup>44</sup> E.g. for contemporary Athens, Todd 1993, 209-10; medieval and early modern England, Mate 1999, 37-8, 78-9; Erickson 1993, 156-222.

policy, many key decisions were taken not in open council or debate but through private negotiations which, although conducted between males, would have been potentially susceptible to household influence (cf. Cartledge 1987, 139-59; Hodkinson 2000, 335-68).

One ancient commentator who cannot be accused of underplaying the public impact of female domestic influence is Aristotle (*Politics* 1269b23-34). Having criticized the license given to women and their lives of luxury, he continues,

An inevitable result under such a constitution is that esteem is given to wealth, particularly if they do in fact come to be female-dominated; and this is a common state of affairs in military and warlike races,... for all such people seem to be in thrall to sexual relations, either with males or with females. That is why this state of affairs prevailed among the Lakonians, and in the days of their supremacy a great deal was managed by women. And yet what difference is there between the women ruling and the rulers being ruled by women? The result is the same.

Aristotle locates female influence within the context of esteem for wealth, although the characteristically compressed nature of his argumentation leaves a certain vagueness about the precise social mechanisms through which these factors are linked. The implication seems to be that women pressurize their menfolk to acquire wealth, and that female possession of wealth gives them a hold over their men and some control over public affairs, as the powers behind the ostensible rulers (Saunders 1995, 152).

The historical merits of Aristotle's arguments are difficult to evaluate. His perspective is clearly distorted by the influence of negative representations of Spartiate women by male, non-Spartan writers, which – as noted earlier – are rooted in Athenocentric representations of the Spartan “Other,” in this case through the portrayal of an “upside-down” world in which men are dominated by women. Nevertheless, his arguments show an appreciation of the relevance of household relationships to the wider society which is rare among classical commentators, who typically maintain an exclusive focus upon the public, male-orientated face of contemporary affairs. A case in point is King Agesilaos II's appointment of his brother-in-law Peisandros as admiral in 395 BC, a disastrous selection which led to the destruction of Sparta's naval empire. Xenophon (*Hellenika* 3.4.29) criticises the appointment, but leaves the reasons for it unexplained. It is left to Plutarch (*Agesilaos* 10.6) to explain that Peisandros was appointed to gratify his sister, Agesilaos' wife Kleora. Plutarch's explanation has, probably rightly, found favor with modern historians (e.g. Cartledge 1987, 146-7; Krentz 1995, 193), since it fits well with Agesilaos' interest in solidifying an alliance with Kleora's father and his Theban contacts and with other occasions on which he conducted his policies through family connections.<sup>45</sup>

The case above provides some hint of a historical reality behind Aristotle's hyperbolic comments. Just occasionally we get a similar indication from a classical source, as in a fragment from the fourth-century historian Theopompos reported by Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai* (609b):

Theopompos in Book 56 of the *Histories* [writes that] Xenopeitheia, the mother of Lysandridas, had been more beautiful than all the other women of the Peloponnese. The Lakedaimonians put her to death along with her sister Khryse, at the time when Lysandridas himself, the enemy of King Agesilaos, had been defeated in civil strife and when Agesilaos had procured his exile by the Lakedaimonians.

As Anton Powell notes, this is a case “of Spartiate women taken all too seriously as political influences in the early fourth century.” In this episode Lysandridas' mother and aunt were clearly implicated in his political activity, “too formidable to be left alive as a source of agitation” (Powell 1999, 409-10). The absence of reference to Lysandridas' father or any other male relative suggests a case of two mature widows exerting their personal influence in support of their male kin. Xenopeitheia and Khryse thus appear as forerunners of the better-attested cases of female support for younger male kin during the third century revolution. We have already noted the case of Agesistrata and Archidamia summoning their male friends and exhorting them to join King Agis IV's plans. Subsequently, when Agis commenced his plans for a redistribution of land by

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Xenophon, *Agesilaos* 11.13; Cartledge 1987, 139-59.

putting his personal landholdings into a common pool, his mother and grandmother did so too and were followed by their relatives and friends (Plutarch, *Agis* 9.3). Like Xenopeitheia and Khryse, they too were put to death the moment that Agis was out of the way (20.2-5). Similarly, Kratesikleia, the widowed mother of King Kleomenes III, “provided him with unstinting subsidies and shared his ambitions,” remarried to aid her son’s cause and then volunteered to go to Egypt as a hostage in exchange for King Ptolemy III’s financial help. She too ultimately met her death there in the aftermath of Kleomenes’ own death in a failed coup (Plutarch, *Kleomenes* 6.1; 22.3-7; 38).

The activities of these third-century women, although made in support of male kin, attest a significant degree of independent female influence, arising directly out of their wealth. As we have seen, Agesistrata and Archidamia are said to have been the richest persons in Sparta (Plutarch, *Agis* 4.1). Agesistrata had independently acquired a multitude of male dependants, friends and debtors, owing to which “she had great influence in the polis and took a large part in public affairs” (6.4). She and her mother played a significant role in the development of the revolutionaries’ schemes (6.1-7.3). Although the plan for the redistribution of property was originated by the young Agis and gained the support of certain of his peers, more mature and weighty backing was needed. The first step was the recruitment of Agis’ maternal uncle, Agesilaos; but this was just a step towards acquiring the backing of the ultimate patron: “As soon as Agis had won over Agesilaos, he straightaway sought with the aid of his uncle to persuade his mother, who was a sister of Agesilaos” (6.4). As Powell (1999, 394) has pointed out, the normal roles are reversed: “the male as intercessor approaches the powerful female.” In the event, Agesistrata and her mother Archidamia took some persuading, but were finally convinced by the combined arguments of the two men. They then took a patronal initiative, urging Agis on and using their influence to recruit their male friends and their wives.

As the revolutionary proposals became known, other Spartiate women came out in opposition to the proposals, partly because they would be stripped of their luxury, “but also because they saw that the honour and influence which they enjoyed in consequence of their wealth would be cut off” (7.4). Lacking, however, the power of Agesistrata and Archidamia, they appealed to the other king, Leonidas II. At this point the controversy moved into the exclusively male political arena of the Assembly and Council of Elders. Even in this period there were limitations beyond which independent female initiative could not go. However, one incident from a generation earlier indicates that Spartiate women, when united, could sometimes intervene in the male political sphere, at least regarding a matter which concerned them directly. During Pyrrhos’ invasion of Lakonia in 274 BC,

the Lakedaimonians at first wished to send their women to Crete, but the women opposed this, and Archidamia came into the Council of Elders with a sword in her hand and reproached the men on the women’s behalf for proposing that they should survive while Sparta itself perished (Plutarch, *Pyrrhos* 27.2).

The women had their way, though it is unclear whether they would have done so without the leadership of Archidamia, the daughter and sister of a king.

To what extent was direct female influence a new phenomenon in the third century or present already in the classical period? A major difficulty in answering this question is the limitations of the evidence. We know about the activities of certain third-century women through Plutarch’s *Lives*, and because his main source, Phylarchos, as a partisan of the revolution, had the motivation for describing internal Spartan affairs and a strong interest in stories involving women.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, most extant sources for earlier periods focus primarily upon Sparta’s external rather than internal affairs and upon the public male sphere. Even with these limitations of evidence, the activities of Kyniska and subsequent female Olympic chariot-race winners, along with the fragmentary information about the political involvement of Xenopeitheia and Khryse, provide some suggestion of a growing female external impact in the fourth century, even if it had not yet reached the extent subsequently achieved in the third.

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Gabba 1957; Africa 1961; and Powell 1999, 401-15, including the suggestion of a Spartan source.

As we move back to the later sixth and fifth centuries, the evidence for independent female influence declines still further, despite the fact that in Herodotus we have a source by no means uninterested in female action and very interested in Sparta's internal politics and society. Yet women appear largely as pawns in his references to the marital wheelings-and-dealings discussed above; and only one historical Spartiate woman appears briefly as an independent actor: Gorgo, only child of King Kleomenes I and wife of Leonidas I. That Herodotus met her in person in her later life is suggested by the personal nature of one of his stories: as an 8 or 9 year-old girl, she was present at a private meeting involving her father, and successfully warned her father not to be corrupted by attempts at bribery (Herodotus 5.51). But this episode does not say anything significant about female influence; and, as an heiress, Gorgo was conventionally married in her teens to her male next-of-kin, her step-uncle Leonidas (Herodotus 7.205).<sup>47</sup> Herodotus records another episode involving Gorgo after her marriage (7.239). The exiled king Damaratos had sent a secret message to the Spartans by writing it on the wood of which the tablet was made, hidden under the normal writing surface, the covering layer of wax. On receiving the blank tablet, the Spartans could make nothing of it until Gorgo worked out the secret and advised them how to find the message. The episode shows that a king's wife was privy to such a matter of state and could proffer independent advice; but, if that was the best tale that Gorgo could tell Herodotus about her public role, it hardly indicates the kind of female influence evident in later centuries.

#### **4. Female property, status and the crisis of Sparta**

Over the course of this essay we have seen that their ownership of property had varying and changing effects upon the position of different women in diverse contexts of Spartiate life. We have noted variations in women's abilities to make use of their material resources, variations in their control over their marital lives, and variations in intra- and extra-household influence. There were also variations in female capacities between each of these different spheres, illustrating a central point made in the cross-cultural study of Martin King Whyte (1978) - and before him by Robert Lowie (1920, 187) - that female status is not a unitary phenomenon but typically varies in different areas of life. As Whyte has also observed, a high degree of female control over property may have positive benefits for women's status in certain aspects of life but have little or no impact in others (1978, 145-7). Even an Agesistrata was married conventionally to her nearest kinsman. In addition, women's capacity to control and deploy property is itself a variable affected by other factors and developments, and therefore subject to change. During the 300 years or so of Spartan history covered in this paper women's legal property rights appear to have remained the same; but, as we have seen, their capacities to utilise their property did change and develop, with certain important consequences. In this final section I want to explore briefly the broader societal context for these changes and developments, incorporating a variable explicitly omitted from Whyte's study: socio-economic differences.<sup>48</sup>

We saw earlier that the close association between Spartiate women and their households probably entailed a fair degree of influence over its affairs. As far as the Spartan polis were concerned, this influence was not in itself problematic. Recent work has rightly noted the important role played by women in the stable functioning of Spartan society (e.g. Redfield 1977/78; Ducat 1998). In particular, women had a direct interest in their menfolk's observance of the established norms of behavior within the communal institutions of Spartiate society. The public performance of its males affected the prestige of the household, including the status of its female members, and its capacity to contract socially and materially advantageous marriages for its children. During Sparta's heyday there was, consequently, a broad identity of purpose between civic

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<sup>47</sup> Gorgo will have about 17 or 18 when Kleomenes died in 491 BC; Herodotus' statement that Leonidas' marriage to Gorgo was one reason why he gained the throne implies that they were already married at Kleomenes' death.

<sup>48</sup> One of the self-acknowledged limitations of Whyte's cross-cultural method is that for each of the societies covered in his study the social practices recorded represent "the customs of the largest part of the indicated cultural group, which usually means the commoners rather than the elites or despised minorities" (1978, 18).

interests and the concerns of propertied women for the well-being and success of their households. Household and community, moreover, were linked in particular ways within the lives of Spartiate women. The essence of Sparta's classical organization had been the establishment of a common way of life which minimized the daily impact of differences of birth and wealth. This common way of life was applied most thoroughly to Spartiate men. But the women too had their own communal upbringing (Pomeroy 2002, 3-32); and the key purpose of that upbringing was to prepare them for their adult roles which, although largely conducted in the context of their households, revolved around the essential civic function of bearing and rearing children. Those non-Spartan writers who viewed Sparta's distinctive marriage practices in terms of female sexual license misinterpreted this essential civic function as an escape from civic control. On the contrary, in their household roles as mothers and as enforcers of the Spartiate code, women made essential contributions to the biological and social reproduction of the citizen population and to the civic solidarity of the Spartiate polis.

As noted earlier, however, during the course of the classical and early hellenistic periods the Spartan polis underwent an ongoing social crisis which revolved around growing differences in wealth. Spartiate society became increasingly plutocratic in character, as the rich gained an increasing monopoly over both economic resources and socio-political power (Hodkinson 2000, 399-445). As the impoverishment of ordinary Spartiate households intensified, many lost their citizen status. The final consequence was the greatly reduced and sharply stratified citizen body of the mid-third century, comprising a mere 700 male citizens, of whom only about 100 possessed significant landed resources (Plutarch, *Agis* 5.4). In view of their significant contribution to Spartiate society, it is inconceivable that Spartiate women played no part in the development of this crisis, especially given the observable increase in female influence. We must, however, beware of the tendency, evident in certain historical explanations of the greater prominence of women in Greek cities in the hellenistic and Roman periods, to view the increasing centrality of female activity in a rather narrow fashion: in terms primarily of civic decadence, regression and decline.<sup>49</sup> This is a failing of several of the ancient sources, for whom female prominence and wealth entail the dominance of softness and luxury, in contrast to the discipline of Sparta's civic institutions (e.g. Aristotle, *Politics* 1269b12-39; Plutarch, *Agis* 4.1). The connections between Sparta's civic crisis and the increasing participation of women in activities and spheres that were formerly exclusively male need to be viewed in broader socio-political context.

Limits of space forbid a full analysis of the increasing socio-economic differentiation which underlay the Sparta's civic crisis.<sup>50</sup> Although it had various structural causes, it also involved the direct agency of wealthier households, who actively engaged in a variety of activities aimed at differentiating themselves from ordinary Spartiate households or at accumulating property at their expense (cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1307a34-6). Both male and female members of wealthy households were implicated in these activities. Many of them were conducted publicly by the male household head. However, adult female members of the household must often have been involved, in varying degrees, in shaping household decisions (such as about marriage alliances) or in their subsequent implementation (for example, in the storage of illegal gold and silver currency after its temporary prohibition in 404 BC). Some activities, such as the wife-sharing/man-doubling arrangements, required women's active participation. Others related directly to property owned by women as well as men: for example, the deliberate underpayment of taxes (*eisphorai*) on landholdings (Aristotle, *Politics* 1271b10-17). Finally, there were the spheres of activity, such as chariot racing and personal patronage, which were originally male preserves but in which women became increasingly involved.

The background to this female involvement was the increasing separation between rich and poor households and, with it, the growing significance of wealth relative to civic achievement as a determinant of status. Such a plutocratic environment diminished both the ties binding rich Spartiate males to their poorer "Peers" and the barriers separating them from their wealthy female counterparts. (Diminished, not

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. van Bremen 1996 for a critique of such interpretations.

<sup>50</sup> For more complete discussion, Hodkinson 2000, 399-440.

extinguished: certain aspects of Spartiate life still divided along gender lines, especially politics and warfare.) By using their wealth in formerly male spheres, wealthy females could now begin to access new forms of personal status. In addition, the reduced value of male civic achievement for household status weakened the former identity of purpose between the interests of the polis and those of wealthy women.

Amidst these changes, however, some women – indeed, most women – lost out: namely, the female members of the majority of ordinary Spartiate households. The plutocratic environment of fourth and third century Sparta diminished the ties between wealthy and poorer Spartiate women. The latter may, as suggested above, have gained some increased measure of domestic influence; but this was surely outweighed by the impoverishment of their households, which led at best to a vastly decreased social significance and at worst to their exclusion from full Spartiate status. Ordinary Spartiate women also suffered from the collapse of Sparta's civic institutions. The abandonment of the male public upbringing by the mid-third century at the latest (Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 42; Kennell 1995, 11-14) must have entailed the parallel abandonment of its female counterpart, which had previously leveled the upbringing of women from diverse backgrounds and had emphasized, as we have seen, the essential contribution of all women to the community's biological and social reproduction. The aim of the revolutionary proposals of King Agis IV in the 240s was to reverse many of the changes outlined above: to level out wealth through a redistribution of land and a cancellation of debts, and to re-establish the primacy of citizen bonds through a restoration of the austere discipline and common way of life. Most women of wealth lobbied strongly against the reforms, persuading King Leonidas to take up their cause. Spartiate men too had their say: the poor through the Assembly, the rich through the Council of Elders. The one element of the Spartiate population conspicuous by its absence from the historical accounts, unable to air its separate voice, was the bulk of ordinary Spartiate women.

The contribution of women to the crisis of Spartiate society was, therefore, not an independent phenomenon: neither a case of female dominance over the ostensible male rulers, as Aristotle asserted, nor of feminine luxury undermining male austerity, as Plutarch implies. It was rather a product of the changing roles of a minority of the female Spartiate population, women from wealthy households, rooted in fundamental changes which affected the overall socio-economic character of Spartiate society.

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