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Archaeology and Gender Ideologies in Early Archaic Greece

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Introduction

In this paper, I argue that we can only hope to write proper histories of Greek gender ideologies in the archaic period if we find ways to ground our arguments in the archaeological record. The greatest achievement of feminist historians in the 1970s was to force the profession to take gender seriously as an organizing principle in human history. Feminist modern historians have followed up this initial success by returning to the archives, generating the data that allow them to refine and to answer their questions. But that has not been an option for ancient historians. The only part of the data base likely to expand significantly is the archaeological record.

Gender relations seem less rigid in Homer than in Hesiod or Semonides, and historians commonly argue that boundaries hardened during the early archaic period. As one recent survey puts it, "The Archaic Age was a critical period for women...it was within the developing framework of the *polis* that the laws and customs were established which were to determine the position of women for several centuries to come."[1] This model depends largely on drawing contrasts between Homer and later authors, and the source problems involved in this procedure are well known and acute.[2] Homer offers us one poet's vision of what the vanished heroic age ought to have been like; how does his picture compare to normative eighth-century ideas about gender relations? How much did such norms vary by location and class? How much does contrasting them with the radically different genres of lyric, elegiac, and iambic poetry tell us about changes through time? And where did Homer stand in the longer-term development of gender ideologies? Does he speak for a vanishing set of Dark Age attitudes, or for new ideas? Lacking a deeper historical context, we cannot make proper sense of the texts.

[1]Blundell 1995: 65.
[2]I set out my views on interpreting archaic poetry in Morris 1999: 157–85.

In this paper I suggest that archaeological data can provide such a context. I identify changes in the use of domestic space in the eighth century and suggest that the contrast between Homer and the later sources does indeed represent an important diachronic shift in gender ideologies in the central parts of Greece, around the shores of the Aegean Sea. Before 800 B.C.E., I suggest, attitudes toward gender were much more flexible than those which we see in archaic and classical literary sources; but, by 700, the outlines of the classical model were becoming visible.

The evidence currently available for archaic Greek houses is woefully inadequate, and my arguments here are necessarily tentative. Further, archaeologists of gender confront severe theoretical and methodological problems.[3] But, that said, the fact remains that the only way to put the literary evidence into a longer historical and a broader sociological context is by combining it with the material record. The specific arguments I offer here may not stand the test of time, but until historians begin formulating testable hypotheses we cannot expect archaeologists to seek out relevant data.

I begin by looking briefly at the evidence for household space in fifth- and fourth-century Athens and its relationships to gender ideologies; then, in section 2, I summarize some of the early archaic evidence. In the third section, I discuss my methods and assumptions before closing by drawing out some broader implications.

1. Classical Household Space

As is well known, Lysias (1.9–10) and Xenophon (*Oec.* 9.5) tell us that parts of fourth-century Athenian houses were set aside as women's quarters (the *gynaikon* or *gynaikonitis*), functionally associated with cooking, weaving, and storage. Contemporary legal speeches reinforce this. Lysias (3.23) and Demosthenes (37.45–46) speak of an inner, most private, part of the house, which outsiders should not enter unbidden. In a pathbreaking paper, Susan Walker divided the plans of several Greek houses into male and female quarters to illustrate these principles (Fig. 1). However, as Michael Jameson has shown, Walker's attempts to attribute gender to space have little support in the published evidence, except in the case of the men's dining room (*andron*). Jameson implied that archaeology might therefore make us question the weight

[3]See Gero and Conkey 1991; Gilchrist 1994; Meskell 1999.

that literary sources attach to gendered space, perhaps distinguishing between ideology and behavioral realities.[4]

Lisa Nevett has offered a more nuanced argument.[5] She suggests that space was "asymmetrically gendered" in classical Greek houses. Houses normally had several rooms around a courtyard, entered from the street through a narrow door. Nevett identifies public areas firmly conceived as male space, while the rest of the house was an appropriate area for women, but barred to outsiders. Space was not rigidly divided into male and female, as Walker assumed, but into male and non-male; and space could be conceived as having varying amounts of maleness, lying along a gender spectrum rather than falling into two distinct categories. There is no reason to suggest that women only used certain parts of the house. Rather, the symbolism of domestic space marked the rear of the house as female, secret, and internal, accessible only through male space. It cut the family as a whole off from the broader polis, accessible only through a narrow door guarded by the *kyrios*. As Lysias (1.4, 25, 36) and Demosthenes (18.132) make clear, crossing the threshold of the house without permission was an act of hubris, with all the associations that word carried. As in so many parts of the modern world, the symbolism of domestic space was a critical dimension of gender ideology in classical Athens. A true citizen was a man who ordered the space of his *oikos* in proper measure.[6]

2. Early Archaic Houses

But this attitude toward domestic space was hardly a new creation in fourth-century Athens. Hesiod already had similar ideas. He says in his description of winter that

> [Boreas] does not pierce the soft-skinned girl who stays
> Indoors at home with her mother, innocent
> Of golden Aphrodite's works. She bathes
> Her tender skin, anoints herself with oil,
> And going to an inner room at home,
> She takes a nap upon a winter's day,
> When, in his fireless house and dismal place
> The Boneless One is gnawing on his foot.[7]

[4]Walker 1983; Jameson 1990a, 1990b.
[5]Nevett 1994, 1995, 1999.
[6]Cf. Cohen 1991: 73–76.
[7]Hes. *Op.* 519–25, trans. Wender.

Like the classical authors, Hesiod links space and gender, femininity and the inner rooms.

But before about 750 B.C.E. this association between inner rooms and femininity was not available in central Greece.[8] By 1100 B.C.E., Mycenaean multi-room houses[9] had disappeared from central Greece. Instead we find single-room apsidal and oval houses. At Asine, Tiryns, Argos, and Eretria, and further west at Nichoria, most activities—eating, sleeping, cooking, storage, stalling animals—went on either in an undivided main room or in the open air.[10]

After 750, however, rectilinear houses replaced these simple structures on some sites. At first, these were also single-roomed, or else megaron houses with a main room and a small porch. There had been ninth-century experiments with such houses at Thorikos and Smyrna, and at Miletus one rectilinear house was built early enough to burn down around 750. But generally rectilinear houses are a late eighth- and seventh-century fashion. At Pithekoussai and Miletus we even see people remodeling oval houses by just building corners onto them (Fig.2).

By 700, the kind of courtyard houses that were normal in classical Greece were appearing. It was often a slow process, and at Miletus and Megara Hyblaea we see a gradual replacement of curvilinear houses across the seventh century. By 600, courtyard houses were normal everywhere. The best evidence comes from Zagora on Andros.[11]

Here we can identify one-room houses and megara built between 775 and 725. Some house-owners broke these into multi-room structures with functionally specific rooms after 725. For example, between 750 and 725, unit H24/25/32 was a simple megaron house (Fig. 3a). Sherds from the floors show that cooking, storage, eating, and drinking all went on in the one main room. By 725, though, the occupants had divided this room into three smaller rooms, H24, H25, H32. Judging from the finds, all three were used solely for storage.

[8]The evidence from Crete, western Greece, and Macedonia is different. I examine it, and explore the central Greek evidence in more detail, in Morris 1998: 16, 20–23, 27–29, 33–35, 40, 43, 46–47, 49, 55–56, 63–64.

[9]Hiesel 1990.

[10]Mazarakis Ainian 1997 and Lang 1995 provide excellent collections and discussions of the Dark Age archaic finds respectively, with full references for the scattered excavation reports on the sites I mention in the text. The internal space of the tenth-century building at Lefkandi Toumba (Popham *et al.* 1993) is divided in more complex ways, but is open to numerous interpretations. I offer my own views in Morris 1999: 218–38.

[11]Cambitoglou *et al.* 1971, 1988.

By 700, the south wall of the old porch was extended eight meters, and two new rooms, H40 and H41, built at its end (Fig. 3b). H40, with an unusually wide door, was probably an ante-room to H41, with a monumental stone hearth and many sherds from fine cups. The new house was reached from the courtyard now formed by the space between H32 and H40. Turning right, the visitor entered through the wide doorway into the public area of the house for feasting; turning left, into storerooms at the back. The house immediately to the south went through a similar transformation at just this time.

The rebuilding of Zagora between 725 and 700, and of most other Aegean communities over the next hundred years, constituted a revolution in domestic space. By the mid-seventh century, the experience of wandering through a Greek community—whether a little village like Koukounaries on Paros or a substantial town like Corinth—must already have been one of encountering high walls along the streets, pierced only by narrow doors letting on to secluded courtyards. Behind these walls, rooms were nestled in increasing levels of privacy. This was a total change from the open villages of the Dark Age. Within the space of a single lifetime, there had been a thoroughgoing transformation of what it meant to move through domestic space.

Attributing gender to excavated space is almost impossible, and I am not suggesting that men or women were restricted to particular parts of the house. Surely women often went into Zagora H40 and H41, and men into H24, H25, and H32. But I do want to suggest that the *ideas* about gendered space that we see in Hesiod and classical Athens began to take shape in the late eighth century. The courtyard houses we see at Zagora by 700 and Miletus by 600 cut the individual *oikos* off from other units. The *oikos* was accessible only through a narrow door, guarded by its male *kyrios*. Inside were his dependent women, children, relatives, and perhaps slaves, shielded from the world. The open, single-roomed houses of ninth-century Asine and early eighth-century Eretria did not work in this way.

3. Interpretation

In section 2, I did no more than sketch in the crudest of strokes the outlines of the transformation of domestic space under way in the late eighth century. Rather than pile up examples, I want to turn now to discuss some of the assumptions that underlie this use of archaeological data. The most obvious of these is the fact that people *can* develop complex spatial symbolism without

solid physical boundaries. The Brazilian Mehinaku are the best known case.[12] The appearance of archaeologically visible divisions does not *have* to mean anything of great significance; simply assuming that no boundaries mean fluid space and stone footings for walls mean structured space may be nothing more than the worst kind of positivism. Yet cross-cultural surveys do show regularly recurring correlations between rigid, hierarchical gender/age structures and firmly subdivided domestic space.[13] Comparative evidence can never prove a specific historical argument right or wrong, but it can show which way the burden of proof lies. In this case, we should *expect* these eighth-century changes in house forms to have been important.

Checklist approaches are of course open to many criticisms. Concrete ethnographic studies, like Henrietta Moore's of the symbolism of domestic space among the Kenyan Marakwet, or historical studies like Jane Adams' of farm houses in early twentieth-century Illinois,[14] always reveal more complexity. Meanings are open to debate, and individual actors simultaneously adapt the physical world to meet their desires and their desires to meet the constraints of the physical world. But certain recurrent themes recur in the mass of case studies, which suggests that there are three points we should bear in mind when looking at early archaic Greece.

First, houses are expensive. When unknown residents of seventh-century Miletus rebuilt the oval structure now known as Südschnitt House A with corners, or another family remodeled a house excavated on the Kalabaktepe hill around a courtyard, they must have had good reasons to do so. Some archaeologists would dismiss changes in dress or burial customs as mere "fashion," too frivolous or too psychologically embedded for serious analysis. But recent work on such "fashions" in house design in the modern world suggests that only a cultural trend of the utmost importance will drive people to do something as expensive as rebuilding their homes.[15]

Second, a house is an emotional repository. In most documented settings, few things count for more than the layout of the home. A major change in house design like that around 700 may have been no small thing, if only we can read the historically specific symbolic language of space. Iron Age houses have been analyzed less often than graves or sanctuaries, but I submit that the eighth-

[12]Gregor 1977.
[13]Kent 1990; Lawrence and Low 1990; Blanton 1994.
[14]Moore 1986; Adams 1993.
[15]Blier 1987; Blanton 1994: 79–113; Carsten and Hugh-Jones, eds., 1995.

century changes in house form were every bit as important as those better-known transformations in burial and the worship of the gods.[16]

Third, context. Without the kind of evidence ethnographers collect,[17] interpreting space is highly conjectural. But every case study shows that we can only interpret houses in the context of a broader symbolic system. In the late eighth century, we see that everything was in flux in central Greece. Recent studies of burial also point to hardening gender boundaries around 700, and I have argued that we can link together new forms of burial, worship, housing, art, writing, and travel as parts of the formation of and resistance to a new category of identity, the middling male citizen.[18] Male citizenship was as much about gender, cosmology, and ethnicity as about class and politics, and the huge overhaul of spatial categories between 750 and 650 was fundamental to it. The kinds of houses, sanctuaries, and cemeteries established by 650 remained normal in central Greece for the next millennium.

4. Conclusion

I suggest that the great change in central Greek house design in the late eighth and seventh century reveals hardening gender ideologies. Before 750, it is not easy to see how the relationships between space and gender taken for granted by authors from Hesiod to Demosthenes would have worked in a world of one-roomed houses in very open settlements; by 600, the inward-turned courtyard house with functionally specific rooms was normal everywhere. I cannot prove that this was directly linked to more rigid gender distinctions. Eleventh- through ninth-century Greeks *may* have interpreted their simple, open houses in much the same ways as archaic and classical Greeks did the subdivided space of their courtyard houses. But, putting together the poetry and the transformation of house forms and activity areas between 750 and 600, the most economical theory is that gender ideologies did change in this period, in a general shift toward "middling" values. This, I submit, was (a) the most important moment

[16]On burial, Morris 1987; Whitley 1991; on worship, Morgan 1990; de Polignac 1995.

[17]And even with it; the classic study of the meaning of domestic space, Bourdieu's interpretation of the Kabyle house (1970), is essentially unfalsifiable. As one biographer says, "it is not clear whether the symbolic edifice of binary oppositions exists in some sense in the culture and discourse of the Kabyle people, or whether it has simply been imposed by the anthopologist, who is thus its creator" (Jenkins 1992: 34–35).

[18]Houby-Nielsen 1992, 1995; Whitley, forthcoming; Morris 1999: 257–72; cf. Shanks 1999: 172–213.

in the evolution of gender ideologies in ancient Greece, and (b) part of a profound reorientation of every dimension of Greek society.

I close with a higher-level theoretical issue. My argument depends on what Anders Andrén calls the "method of correlation,"[19] looking for similarities between the structure of the material record and the verbal accounts that members of a past society gave of themselves. I have suggested, first of all, that the physical remains of classical Athenian houses and the writings of Athenian men about the gender implications of domestic space map onto each other closely, each helping to explain the other category of evidence. To borrow another of Andrén's terms, texts and artifacts provide "contemporary analogies" for each other.[20] I then showed that the kind of domestic space familiar in the fourth century began to appear around 700, and argued that the most plausible explanation of this phenomenon is that classical-type ideologies about gender also began to take shape around 700.

But Andrén rightly observes that this is not the only way to bring together words and things, and that historical archaeologists need to examine their own practices through both theoretical debates and detailed empirical studies. I want to suggest that the relative lack of institutional boundaries between ancient historians and classical archaeologists gives scholars of the ancient Mediterranean tremendous opportunities for working though just such high-level conceptual questions. Historical archaeologists of the early modern and modern west may have richer data sets, but in no other scholarly community do archaeologists and historians tend to know one another's source materials so well.[21] Ancient historians and classical archaeologists have grown used to being consumers of theories and methods developed for the study of other parts of the world: as the new millennium opens, we are about to become producers in our own right.

[19]Andrén 1998: 166.
[20]Andrén 1998: 156.
[21]E.g., Orser 1996; Johnson 1996; Tarlow 1999; Insoll 1999; see Morris 1999: 24–29.

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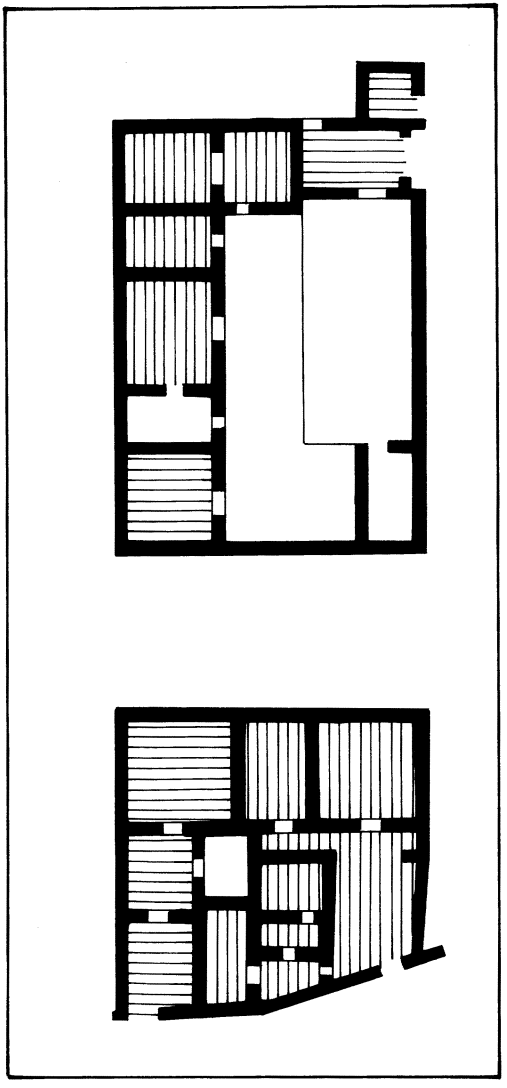

Fig. 1. Susan Walker's division of space in classical houses along gender lines. Top: The Dema House, Attica. Bottom: A house from the North Slope of the Areopagus, Athens. Vertical shading represents male space and horizontal shading female space.

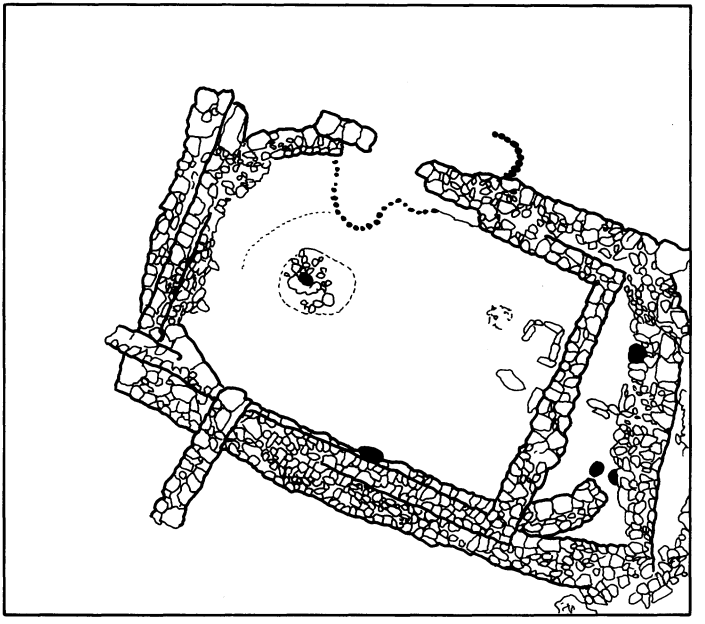

Fig. 2. Pithekoussai house, with oval and rectangular walls.

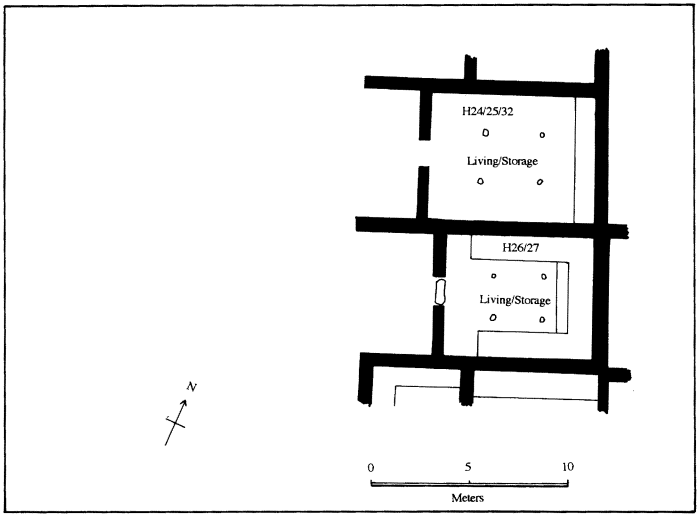

Fig. 3a. First phase at Zagora; house walls in black.

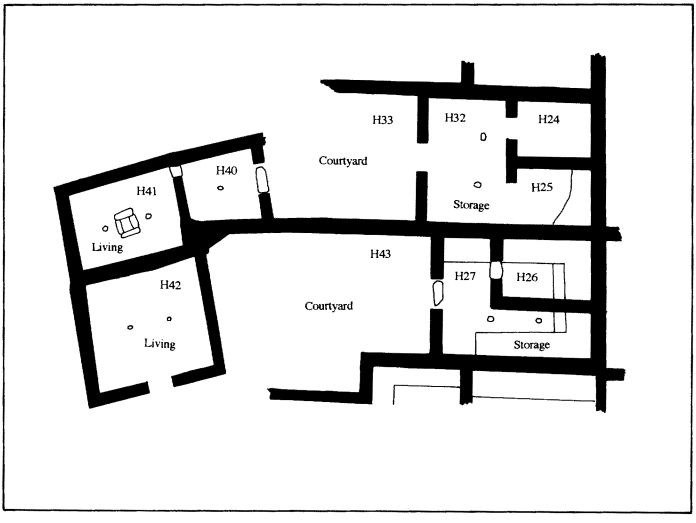

Fig. 3b. Second phase at Zagora; house walls in black.