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Ancient Greek Peasants: Myth and Reality from a Gender Perspective

Starożytni greccy chłopci: mit i rzeczywistość z perspektywy płci

ABSTRACT

In this article, I will explore the idyllic conceptions of peasantry in the Ancient Greek world. From the Homeric poems and Hesiod's Opera, ancient Greeks considered land tenure the most honorable way to have property. This symbolic creation was present in the minds of the Greeks and was part of children's education. Land tenure was the basis of political participation and the recruitment of soldiers in historic times. Manual workers, even specialized ones, merchants, and long-distance traders were considered inferior to land owners. It was believed that those who had land to lose would defend the country better. However, ancient Greece was also a patriarchal society. In their system, only men could have land, inherit it as first sons, and mature into adulthood. Women were seen as dependent, eternal minors who were expected to marry once adolescent and produce as many children as possible. This ideal sex-role division did not correspond with reality but was used to explain Greek political problems throughout its history. I will use historical events such as the archaic colonization process or the Spartan crisis of the fourth

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century B. C. to analyse how ancient sources either blamed women for political problems or disregarded them altogether.

Key words: Ancient Greece, Gender Studies, Peasantry, Women work, Homeric poems, Hesiod, sex-division

STRESZCZENIE

W niniejszym artykule omówię idylliczne wyobrażenia o chłopstwie w starożytnej Grecji. Na podstawie poematów Homera i dzieła Hezjoda można stwierdzić, że starożytni Grecy uważali posiadanie ziemi za najbardziej honorowy sposób posiadania majątku. Ta symboliczna koncepcja była obecna w umysłach Greków i stanowiła część edukacji dzieci. Posiadanie ziemi było podstawą udziału w życiu politycznym i rekrutacji żołnierzy w czasach historycznych. Pracownicy fizyczni, nawet wyspecjalizowani, kupcy i handlarze dalekosiężni byli uważani za gorszych od właścicieli ziemskich. Wierzano, że ci, którzy mają ziemię do stracenia, będą lepiej bronić kraju. Jednak starożytni Grecy byli również społeczeństwem patriarchalnym. W ich systemie tylko mężczyźni mogli posiadać ziemię, dziedziczyć ją jako pierworodni synowie i stać się pełnoprawnymi dorosłymi. Kobiety były zależne, wiecznie niepełnoletnie, od których oczekiwano, że wyjdą za mąż w wieku nastoletnim i urodzą jak najwięcej dzieci. Ten idealny podział ról płciowych nie odpowiadał rzeczywistości, ale był wykorzystywany do wyjaśnienia problemów politycznych Grecji w całej jej historii. Wykorzystam wydarzenia historyczne, takie jak archaiczny proces kolonizacji lub kryzys spartański w IV w. p.n.e., aby przeanalizować, w jaki sposób starożytne źródła obwiniały kobiety za problemy polityczne lub całkowicie je pomijały.

Słowa kluczowe: starożytna Grecja, gender studies, chłopstwo, praca kobiet, eposy homeryckie, Hezjod, podział płciowy

INTRODUCTION: A RURAL WORLD

When discussing ancient Greek topics in popular culture, certain ideas consistently emerge: democracy, philosophy, city-state, etc. Greek civilization appears to be intimately connected to our collective consciousness. There is a prevailing political tendency to view European citizens as inheritors of the ancient Greeks¹. However, they were a pre-industrial society closely attached to the land. They experienced mobility and survival problems. Thus, their daily problems were far away from us, who live in a modern society, in which the majority of the population are not peasants. This paradox creates a reality distortion in which ancient Greeks seem to be, at the same time, very close and very far away from our minds. Finally, ancient Greeks believed that women were inferior by nature. Family relationships and social roles were unequal between men and women. Ancient Greece was also a fertile ground for misogynist conceptions. This article will focus on those related to land tenure.

¹ H. González Vaquerizo, *La Grecia que Duele. Poesía de la Crisis*, Madrid 2024.

It is a fact that Ancient Greek societies were mostly rural. Daily life in the polis, in which democracy or oligarchy took place, depended on the countryside. Every single day, all products, such as wheat, wine, or vegetables, must arrive at the agora market to supply citizens with food. Traders or artisans must be fed daily in the local market. Those products came from the surrounding area of the polis. In conclusion, the ancient Greeks were more peasants than anything else. As G.M. Foster pointed out, 'peasant' is a term based on an economy that can have several implications².

The Ancient Greeks lived in a pre-industrial world with low land productivity. For every trader or politician, ten peasants needed to be in the country to produce enough surplus. Peasant sold their surplus in the agora and bought artisan products. Some agora markets regulated the prices, such as Athens³, where they were written down in stone inscriptions. The discovery of this data has enabled scholars to calculate the prices. In a drought or war situation, the community, after a few months, suffered famine and illness. This situation happened in some well-known historical moments, such as during the Peloponnesian War, in the 5th century B.C.

Ancient Greeks were conscious of the importance of taking care of the countryside. It helped to define the origin of men, establish groups of vote, create richness with exports of surplus, and to control women. They dismissed salaried work. A person who sold their work could also sell their political convictions⁴. One of the biggest differences between men and women were that the female half of the population could not inherit the land, with only a few exceptions, and had difficulties living far away from the land in which they were born. This reality established a culture of segregation, which idealized a rural world. Women were considered part of the polis society, but they did not defend themselves in a war situation and did not take part in the communal decisions. This sex division can explain several stereotypes in Greek society that persisted through centuries.

² G.M. Foster, *Interpersonal Relations in Peasant Society*, "Human Organization" 1960, 19, 4, pp. 174–178.

³ W.T. Loomis, *Wages, welfare costs, and inflation in classical Athens*, Ann Arbor 1998.

⁴ E.M. Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave. The Foundations of Athenian Democracy*, London–New York 1988, p. 15.

RESEARCH AND RESULTS

Property and land

In the first centuries of Greek history, before the Phoenician alphabet adaptation to the Greek alphabet, Greeks promoted their cultural ideas through oral history. These were a series of myths, organized in cycles, transmitted orally in communal parties by rhapsodes and *aoidoi*. In the eighth century, a poet, whom we call Homer, compiled two of those stories. Nevertheless, the majority of them were lost, but not completely forgotten. Cross-references and isolated fragments permit scholars to have an idea about the wealth of heroes based on ideal aristocratic values. C.M. Bowra defined Homer as a mythographer, able to compile several stories with coherence⁵. I pose that, not by chance, there is a clear idea inside those poems of a connection between aristocratic behaviour and land tenure. All Homeric heroes are rich in land and all of them fight for their honour, not to have more territory. Homer established that property was related directly to land tenure. Being an owner of a farm was the most honorable form of property. Money and jewellery could provide commerce, a less noble form of richness. The figure of the Phoenicians reflected this idea⁶. Merchants were dangerous for the epic heroes returning home. They tried to cheat them because they were focused on rapine products and commercial benefits⁷. The main stereotype is the greedy Phoenicians, permanent, not occasional traders, who used force to acquire wealth, traded in non-necessities, were deceitful, and searched for

⁵ C.M. Bowra, *Homero*, Madrid 2022.

⁶ Od. 13.270–278; ‘Now when I had slain him with the sharp bronze, I went straightway to a ship, and made prayer to the lordly Phoenicians, giving them booty to satisfy their hearts. I bade them take me aboard and land me at Pylos, [275] or at goodly Elis, where the Epeans hold sway. Yet verily the force of the wind thrust them away from thence, sore against their will, nor did they purpose to play me false; but driven wandering from thence we came hither by night’. Od. 15.425–430 ‘Thither came Phoenicians, men famed for their ships, greedy knaves, bringing countless trinkets in their black ship. Now there was in my father’s house a Phoenician woman, comely and tall, and skilled in glorious handiwork. Her the wily Phoenicians beguiled. [420] First, as she was washing clothes, one of them lay with her in love by the hollow ship; for this beguiles the minds of women, even though one be upright. Then he asked her who she was, and whence she came, and she straightway shewed him the high-roofed home of my father, and said: [425] ‘Out of Sidon, rich in bronze, I declare that I come, and I am the daughter of Arybas, to whom wealth flowed in streams. But Taphian pirates seized me, as I was coming from the fields, and brought me hither, and sold me to the house of yonder man, and he paid for me a goodly price’.

⁷ G.C. Zecchin de Fasano, *Egipto, Fenicia, Creta: Tres Espacios clave para el Discurso Etnográfico*, “Hélade” 2019, 5, 1, pp. 115–130.

profit⁸. The trader's ideals were far away from Homeric aristocratic heroes who searched to preserve their memory in future generations with their glorious deeds. Thus, every job that implied selling their time or effort was considered degrading. The *Odyssey* established that nothing was more humiliating than having no property and being forced to work for another person:

‘So I spoke, and he straightway made answer and said: ‘Nay, seek not to speak soothingly to me of death, glorious Odysseus. I should choose, so I might live on earth, to serve as the hireling of another, of some portionless man whose livelihood was but small, rather than to be lord over all the dead that have perished. But come, tell me tidings of my son, that lordly youth, whether or not he followed to the war to be a leader’⁹.

This passage explains perfectly the importance of being a landowner. Work was close to slavery because it removed liberty from the individual. It follows the misconception that only a man with all his subsistence necessities secured could spend time and effort to maintain his ideas in leading the politics of a society. Being rich meant having time to care about those loftier aspects of life.

In the Homeric poems, being rich and famous was related to being an aristocratic warrior. Such a man could leave his family to fight for a promise and maintain his status of an excellent person. Homeric kings were military leaders who could go to war with myriads of dependent soldiers just to keep a promise. All of the leaders came from rich and aristocratic families. All had a vast farmland and a group of dependent people to cultivate it. They were landowners with no problems of subsistence and always had somebody to wait for them at home. They went to war to support each other and according to aristocratic ideals and principles of *xenia*.

Nevertheless, even though all had their army, they did not pay their soldiers, because they did not have money to do it. Their search for swag consisted of luxurious and singular objects made of silver and gold. The common soldiers wanted the riches to spend them. In contrast, aristocrats did not sell or trade, but treasured those objects at home as the proof

⁸ M. Peacock, *Rehabilitating Homer's Phoenicians. On Some Ancient and Modern Prejudices against Trade*, "Ancient Society" 2011, 41, pp. 1–29.

⁹ All the translations of the *Odyssey* come from the Loeb Classical library edition of 1995 by George E. Dimock and A. T. Murray. Homer, *Odyssey*, vol. 1, books 1–12, transl. A.T. Murray, rev. G.E. Dimock, 2nd edition, Cambridge MA–London 1995 (*Loeb Classical Library*, 104) [hereinafter: Hom. Od.] 11.489–491.

of their bravery and to be given as eventual gifts at an occasion of visiting aristocratic peers. That is called Homeric *xenia* protected by the gods. The relationship that Homeric heroes established between them was a ceremony of performance. After both of the men presented themselves and their origins, they shared a meal based on animal sacrifice. This implies a great effort and ostentation of wealth. The meals also needed the god's approval. They promised each other future support and this promise affected future generations¹⁰. To commemorate this, they exchanged a precious object, which could be a gold or silver weapon like a sword or a shield although it could also include other objects¹¹ made of previous metals. These gifts were kept at home, in a visible place to show them to future visitors. The person who received the better object is in debt with the other part.

This *xenia* ceremony was completely opposed to commerce principles because the objects did not move from one place to another, profit provided disadvantage, and the final purpose was to establish bonds of solidarity. Those *do* pacts were behind the Trojan War. A *xenia* pact between Helen's suitors promised Menelaus to support him in case of Helen's abduction. The so-called *Eoiai* catalogue by the pseudo-Hesiod, in a fragmentary state, compiles this myth¹².

Thus, Homeric heroes are rich in luxurious objects that they could use only to strengthen their bonds of solidarity. On the other hand, they received daily support from their land, in which they grew the grapes they converted into wine and raised the animals they sacrificed to the gods at their daily banquets. So, hospitality is related to food and wine consumption that is offered for granted to hosts¹³.

In conclusion, aristocrats, rich by nature, needed to know their land as proof of their status. In theory, they were peasants; in reality, they lived far away from their land. There is one passage that explains this concept: it is related to the various scenes of Odysseus' recognition by their relatives. Odysseus spent twenty years trying to return home. It was a long

¹⁰ A. Iriarte Goñi, *La institución de la Xenía: pactos y acogidas en la antigua Grecia*, "Gerión" 2007, pp. 197–206

¹¹ M.I. Finley, *El Mundo de Odiseo*, México 1961; G. Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City*, Cambridge–London–New York–New Rochelle–Melbourne–Sydney 1987.

¹² J. Carruesco García, *Helena i l'objecte Preciós*, in: *Utopies i Rebel·lió: Liz Russell, una Vida Acadèmica*, eds. J. Zaragoza Gras, E. Hutingford Antigas, Tarragona 2020 (*Atenea*, 19), pp. 69–82; E. Duce Pastor, *Helena antes de Troya: Recuperando: El Prototipo de la Mujer Raptada (y Peligrosa) en el Mito Griego*, "Chronica Mundi" 2022, 15, pp. 7–31.

¹³ J. Garzón Díaz, *Vino y Banquete desde Homero a Anacreonte*, "Helmantica: Revista de Filología Clásica y Hebrea" 1979, 91, pp. 63–96.

war of ten years and another ten of twists and turns on the Aegean Ocean. When he arrived home, the suitors, local aristocrats, were pressing his wife to get married again. He had to take revenge on them because they consumed his storage with continuous banquets, abusing his absent hospitality. This is the *Odyssey*'s end that everybody knows. However, the return of the hero was more complex. He was recognized before by his dog Argos, his son Telemachus, and his wife Penelope¹⁴. All of them, except the dog, used tricks to measure Odysseus and by doing so they provided scholars with precious information about the ideals and proper behaviour commonly assumed and expected. I am interested in the last trial of recognition, the visit of Odysseus to his old father Laertes, who was still alive.

Old people received respect due to their experience. Laertes could barely recognize Odysseus. Nevertheless, the hero used an infallible strategy to elicit his father's recognition: to speak about the family land and describe the kinds of trees that produce offspring.

'And come, I will tell thee also the trees in the well-ordered garden which once thou gavest me, and I, who was but a child, was following thee through the garden, and asking thee for this and that. It was through these very trees that we passed, and thou didst name them, and tell me of each one. [340] Pear-trees thirteen thou gavest me, and ten apple-trees, and forty fig-trees. And rows of vines too didst thou promise to give me, even as I say, fifty of them, which ripened severally at different times—and upon them are clusters of all sorts'¹⁵.

This passage shows that even an aristocrat needed to know the kinds of trees and their properties. Odysseus, as a good aristocrat, was educated in recognizing trees and used them as a way to prove the family richness. Odysseus did not speak about the *xenia* relationships or about rich objects treasured in the palace. Those objects were used for outside performances. Knowing the land, tree by tree, proved him to be the real Odysseus.

At this point, it is clear that Homeric poems created the first idealization of the peasant, but a peculiar version of that concept. All peasants were of aristocratic origins, rich and prosperous. They are happy, live in abundance, and act as hosts to foreigners according to their god's laws¹⁶.

¹⁴ E.K. Anhalt, *A Matter of Perspective: Penelope and the Nightingale in 'Odyssey' 19.512–534*, "The Classical Journal" 2002, 97, 2, pp. 145–159.

¹⁵ Hom, *Od.* 24.336–344.

¹⁶ R.A. Santiago Álvarez, *La polaridad "huésped"/"extranjero" en los Poemas Homéricos*, in: *Contacto de poblaciones y extranjería en el mundo griego antiguo. Estudio de fuentes*, eds. R.A. Santiago Álvarez, M. Oller Guzmán, Barcelona 2013 (*Faventia, Supplementa* 2), pp. 29–45

Secondly, in Homeric poems, a man with no land is useless. The idea of the Homeric family was a man married to an aristocratic woman and surrounded by children and grandchildren, all of them living in the same palace, called *megaron*, banqueting all day with the products of the area. This house was in the middle of the properties, at the top of a hill, controlling the territory. All Homeric aristocrats were rich, had thousands of animals to be sacrificed to the gods, and had happy and faithful slaves. There were no bad times, famine, or drought. Abundance is the general view of this mythic period in which men were the rulers of a prosperous household. However, what happened with Homeric women? Those wives and daughters who spent years alone while their men were fighting?

In Homeric poems, women were in charge of the household and organized the products and the visitors. All Homeric women stayed at home during the Trojan War, apparently keeping the household interests. Some of them were unfaithful, like Clytemnestra who took a lover¹⁷. Others, like Penelope, proved to be fair and loyal¹⁸. They always produced noble and proud heirs, that were always kept, even if they came from informal relationships¹⁹. Nothing made scholars think that women were unsuitable for managing land. They could own land, such as Penelope. Homeric women had dignity and modelled the ideal behaviour. They have their concept of *xenia* relationship, that happened in the distance. Instead of exchanging weapons, they exchanged luxurious female objects, just as embroidered clothing made by themselves. They never saw one another but sent those objects to extend their relationships between women²⁰. Nothing led scholars to think that Homeric women were inferior to Homeric men. They had their social position related to land tenure.

Nevertheless, men removed women from land tenure and considered them part of their property in the following periods. Women lost their importance and respect that were present in the Homeric poems. The idea

¹⁷ C. Dukelsky, *Clytemnestra, Esposa Violenta, Mujer con Poder. Una Interpretación de su Iconografía en la Cerámica Griega*, in: *La pólis sexuada: normas, disturbios y transgresiones del género en la Grecia Antigua*, eds. E. Rodríguez Cidre, E.J. Buis, Buenos Aires 2011, pp. 84–113.

¹⁸ N. Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope, from Character to Poetics*, Princeton NJ 1994.

¹⁹ One of the best examples of this practice is the double wedding that Telemachus attended in Sparta (Od. 4.1–26). Hermione, the legitimate daughter of Menelaus and Helen got married at the same time as a male bastard of Menelaus did, providing evidence that illegitimate sons were kept in the household and received honors.

²⁰ E. Duce Pastor, *El Comercio Noble Homérico en la Odisea y su Vertiente Femenina, "Antes-tería"* 2013, 2, pp. 51–65.

of a land property similar to a farmstead persisted: a house, storerooms, and the land²¹. Animals, tools, and women were included.

Something happened during the Dark Ages, the period that corresponds to the Iron Age. Greek culture passed through difficult times due to the crisis of 1200 B.C. When writing reappeared, the reality of the countryside was different. It is considerably poorer and humble and under the system of patriarchal family. This new situation changed gender roles as well.

However, that image of a different reality, repeated in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, created an idealization of the peasant and the landowner that is constant in all ancient Greek history²². As Homeric poems were a school of behaviour to ancient Greeks, the connection between land and wealth was one of the cultural essences of ancient Greek civilization. This construct implied an effort to develop a model of a man who behaved according to aristocratic values. One of the main goals of Greek civilization throughout its history was to use that model to educate citizens on those values²³.

Finally, Homeric heroes were imitated as models of *paideia*²⁴. Greek education of the elites, and also of the non-elites, was based on the Homeric hero's behaviour. The politician, the ruler, and the land tenor inspired themselves in Achilles, Hector, and Agamemnon and imitated them. Greek education resided in literature, transmitted orally. Homeric women were also used as models and counter models of behaviour throughout Greek History, creating literary topoi²⁵. Finally, there were Homeric imitations in all Greek History, for example in the funerary rite²⁶. Those are examples of how strongly did those ideas crystallize in Greek History.

²¹ Demosthenes, 43 in *Against Macartatus*, about the heritage of Hagnias, Demosthenes explored in the full speech the problems of heritage when a kurios died without direct heirs and no testament. Different relatives tried to exposed their rights in successive judgments.

²² H. Forbes, *The Ethnoarchaeological Approach to Ancient Greek Agriculture, Olive Cultivation as a Case Study*, in: *Agriculture in Ancient Greece, Proceedings of the Seventh International Symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens, 16–17 May 1990*, ed. B. Wells, Stockholm 1992, pp. 87–104.

²³ M. Santos Gómez, *El modelo aristocrático de la paideia antigua. La persistencia del areté heroica*, "ReiDoCrea" 2017, 6, p. 344.

²⁴ W. Jaeger, *Paideia. Los Ideales de la Cultura Griega*, Mexico 2001.

²⁵ E. Duce Pastor, *Reinterpretando el Mito: Helena de Troya la Obra de Eurípides*, Madrid 2012; eadem, *Mujer Virtuosa, Mujer Malvada. El Prototipo de la Mujer Griega en la Atenas del Siglo V a través de Helena y Andrómaca de Eurípides*, in: *I Congreso de Museos, Xénero e Arte. Actas do Congreso. Lugo 11, 12 e 13 Outubro de 2013*, Lugo 2015, pp. 55–60.

²⁶ C. Bérard, *L'héroon à la Porte de l'ouest*, Bern 1970, p. 22.

Life and connections in the country side

Even if Homeric poems are a fundamental source in this topic, they reflected an ideal world that did not correspond to any real period of Greek history, even if Greek authors considered them a reflection of past times²⁷. The first author who depicted a historical moment of the peasantry in Greek History was Hesiod, an epic author of the eighth century who lived in Boeotia. Hesiod was a humble peasant whose brother received the family heritage. Even if scholars have idealized Hesiod's vision of his family and vital circumstances²⁸, it continues to be valid in the following terms. Some decades ago, Hesiod was considered a chaotic peasant who presented his concerns chaotically. Nevertheless, it has been proven to be more complex²⁹. Hesiod gave voice to the reality of the peasant who had a piece of land to survive. He rejects other forms of production such as commerce and sea merchants because it promoted richness in the aristocracy. Thanks to his two works, *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, it is possible to reconstruct the daily life of a Greek peasant during Archaism. One of the main points about Hesiod's *Opera* is the audience. Society has changed. Hesiod recited his poems in public aristocratic banquets. Poets recited Homeric poems because the world of the eighth–seventh century B.C. is strongly influenced by Homeric ideals³⁰. However, they also included this kind of compositions that spoke about a different reality³¹. As G. Arrighetti suggests, the Greek society has changed³². Dark times promoted contention and saving and Hesiod reflected this small economy based on the land and the neighbourhood.

In the Greek historic Archaism, only the first son inherited the land. This system ensured that the land was not divided into pieces too small to guarantee subsistence. However, there was a tendency to land concentration in a few hands that later caused problems in the community³³.

²⁷ K.A. Raaflaub, *Homeric Society*, in: *A New Companion to Homer*, eds. I. Morris, B. Powell, Leiden 1997, pp. 624–625.

²⁸ A. Burford, *Land and labor in the Greek world*, Baltimore 1993, p. 84.

²⁹ M.L. West, *Hesiod, Works and Days*, Oxford 1978, pp. 41–59.

³⁰ J.P. Crielaard, *Past or Present? Epic Poetry, Aristocratic Self-Representation and the Concept of Time in the Eighth and seventh Centuries BC*, in: *Omero Tremila Anni dopo. Atti del Congresso. Genova, 6–8 Luglio 2000*, eds. F. Montanari, P. Ascheri, Roma 2002 (*Edizioni di storia e letteratura*, 210), pp. 239–295.

³¹ J.L. Ready, *Homer, Hesiod and the Epic Tradition*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Archaic Greece*, ed. H.A. Shapiro, Cambridge 2007, p. 132.

³² G. Arrighetti, *Poeti, Eruditi, e Biografi. Momenti della Riflessione dei Greci sulla Letteratura*, Pise 1987 (*Biblioteca di Studi Antichi*, 52), p. 41.

³³ D. Ascheri, *Distribuzioni di Terre dell'antica Grecia*, Torino 1966, pp. 61–72.

Even if this is a theoretical situation, land problems in the Greek history seem to elucidate that the first son does not always inherit. Hesiod seems angry with his situation, so maybe he expected a division of the inheritance. He had no other possibilities for subsistence and wrote a long epic poem about the life in the countryside. He seems prepared to be a peasant. The starting point of view of his *Opera* differed from Homeric poems. Noble behaviour and success in the war times are left behind and the rhythms of the season cycle are the basis of human life. Hesiod could have had some personal experience in cultivating the land. However, as in the Homeric poems, there is always doubt. What is the difference between literary sources that promoted a peasant life and reality? This question, posed by J.E. Skydsgaard some decades ago, is still under discussion³⁴.

Hesiod's *Opera* is full of advice about the proper times to sow, gather, and so on. As the land was linked to the family, the basic surviving unit, searching for a good wife was vital. There is a proper time to get married, related to the land and the life-cycle.

'Bring home a wife to your house when you are of the right age, while you are not far short of thirty years nor much above; this is the right age for marriage. Let your wife have been grown up four years, and marry her in the fifth. Marry a maiden, so that you can teach her careful ways, and especially marry one who lives near you, but look well about you and see that your marriage will not be a joke to your neighbours. For a man wins nothing better than a good wife, and, again, nothing worse than a bad one, a greedy soul who roasts her man without fire, strong though he may be, and brings him to a raw old age³⁵.

Hesiod established that men should marry once achieved maturity (at around 30 years old), and after having inherited the land. The reason for this proper time is related to the idea of adulthood. Male Greeks became full adults when they had land to manage. So, this is the moment

³⁴ J.E. Skydsgaard, *Agriculture in ancient Greece. On the nature of the sources and the problems of their interpretation*, in: *Agriculture in Ancient Greece, Proceedings of the Seventh International Symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens, 16–17 May 1990*, ed. B. Wells, Stockholm 1992, p. 9.

³⁵ All translations are from the Loeb editor in 2006 in charge of Glenn W. Most. Hesiod, *Theogony*, in: Hesiod, *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia*, ed. and transl. G.W. Most, Cambridge MA 2007 (Loeb Classical Library, 57) [hereinafter: Hes. Theog.]; idem, *Works and Days*, in: Hesiod, *Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia* [hereinafter: Hes. WD] 695–707.

for having a wife and offspring³⁶. Besides, they wanted to become *kyrios*, head of the household, when they received their inheritance. Greek men controlled the house, the animals, the land, and the unmarried relatives (sisters, widows, and old people). They received social prestige and had to represent all of them in any conflict. In conclusion, all those ideas created models of behaviour. There was a common pattern in Mediterranean societies that included maintaining male children for more years than female offspring because they were considered more productive and derived in marriages with strong age differences³⁷.

I have presented a stereotype of a mature groom. In contrast, brides were much younger. The ideal age was around 14 years, just after the first menstruation. The main reason for this unbalanced marriage in age and experience was related to fertile years. Women needed to give birth to as many sons as possible because the majority of children did not survive. A woman could have seven or eight births during her fertile life and see only two of them survive until adulthood. The first year of child's life had especially low prognosis of survival, thus, Greek couples expected to see that the majority of their offspring would not have survived childhood. This is why a man needed a young and strong wife able to survive births and provide a male heir. In general terms, ancient Greeks preferred boys to girls; the girls were considered weaker for work and left the family when they got married.

Hesiod insisted on another set of criteria considered in choosing a wife – she must be young, live in the area, and have a good reputation. Women socialized on the outside, especially in local parties and religious rituals. Their social reputation depended on their attitudes and family origins³⁸. When their families wanted to marry them off, the community valued them and established bonds depending on their “quality”. This idea implied that peasants not only need food support, but also social connections; these connections are related to their wives, chosen from families in the same area. Askra, Hesiod's village, looks like a place where coexistence was built on several basic social rules³⁹.

³⁶ E. Duce Pastor, *Matrimonio legítimo, poder familiar: el matrimonio en la Grecia Arcaica*, in: *Formas, manifestaciones y estructuras del poder político en el mundo antiguo*, eds. A.J. Domínguez Monedero et al., Madrid 2017, pp. 287–302.

³⁷ T.W. Gallant, *Los Hogares Antiguos y su Ciclo de Vida*, in: *El Mundo Rural en la Grecia Antigua*, ed. J. Gallego, Madrid 2003, p. 103.

³⁸ E. Friedl, *The position of women: Appearance and reality*, “Anthropological Quarterly” 1967, 40, 3, p. 100.

³⁹ A.T. Edwards, *Hesiod's Askra*, Oakland CA 2004, p. 11.

Greek society was rooted in family bonds, especially during this early archaic period, when states did not exist and the communities organized themselves. However, one, or maybe two, aristocratic families were in charge of providing justice and solving conflicts. But Hesiod was not interested in that elite. When rights or voting did not exist, family was the only support a man could have. Hesiod represented the non-aristocratic life, an image of peasants who suffered from bad harvests and needed support from the community. The old *xenia* relationships, which included people from other regions, are not interesting anymore in a more practical society⁴⁰. Support and hospitality between neighbours were more important to sustain the community. This support could be interpreted as a new form of *xenia* because it is also protected by the laws, concretely Zeus⁴¹, but did not affect foreigners, because only the closest community provided support.

To organize those communities which support each other, the family was the basic unit. Greek families were patriarchal and had a *kyrios* as the head of the family. This male member should be the oldest one, the owner of the land, and use the property, which included younger men, women, animals, and crops, for his benefit. The *kyrios* must defend the household members in case of aggression or vulnerability but could use their life in his interest. A good *kyrios* wanted to marry his daughters of good fame to neighbours because they could enlarge the family and provide necessary support. The good balance for a family lied in having around 6–7 members to provide surplus enough to survive with an average land⁴².

So, Greek men used marriage to strengthen their ties with other families. They created bonds for the future support during famine periods. That is the main reason that Greek women lived in the same area and Greeks promoted selective endogamy⁴³. In ancient Greece, fame was an important factor to consider. In the 60s, Dodds defined this culture as a shame-based system⁴⁴. This means that at the ancient times the com-

⁴⁰ A. Piñol Villanueva, *Hesíodo: de una hospitalidad heroica a una hospitalidad pragmática*, in: *Contacto de poblaciones y extranjería en el mundo griego antiguo. Estudio de fuentes*, eds. R.A. Santiago Álvarez, M. Oller Guzmán, Barcelona 2013 (*Faventia, Supplementa* 2), p. 48.

⁴¹ A. Saavedra Sanhueza, *Entre Póthos Y Philótēs. La Preponderancia De La Afectividad En El “Amor” Conyugal En Homero Y Plutarco*, “*Historia 396*” 2022, 12, 2, pp. 221–248.

⁴² E. Will, *Aux Origines Du Régime Foncier Grec. Homère, Hésiode et l’arrièreplan*, “*Revue des Études Anciennes*” 1957, 59, 1–2, pp. 47–49.

⁴³ A.M. Abou-Zeid, *Migrant labour and social structure in Kharga Oasis*, in: *Mediterranean Countrymen. Essays in the Social Anthropology in the Mediterranean*, ed. J. Pitt-Rivers, Paris 1963, p. 44.

⁴⁴ E.R. Dodds, *Los Griegos y lo Irracional*, Madrid 1997.

munity's opinions defined the individual member and his social status. Greek individuals would be held in high regards due to their fairness and nobility, even if their actions strayed off this path in private. With women, the same concept applied. Women should maintain purity and innocence, ready to get married after being educated at home. Maidens were called *parthenoi*, a concept that indicated purity and sexuality. A *parthenos* was able to have sex and have children, so, she was dangerous to the men of the family, who should marry her off as soon as possible. The *parthenos* was known by their neighbours and her public stance helped her (or not) to get married.

From Hesiod, it is possible to trace back an concept of marrying women from the nearest area and having support in agricultural tasks. In case of potential issues, war, or famine, they cooperate. So, neighbours were vital to the community's survival⁴⁵ and foreigners were viewed with suspicion. Hesiod presented all the possible conjugal problems of a peasant in Antiquity⁴⁶. This idea contrasts with the one from the Homeric times when princesses came from far away to set marriages. That fact established a difference with aristocratic families that persisted in Greek history⁴⁷. In the Homeric poems and in real Greek history, women could move to get married and establish political bonds. In contrast, peasant women married people of the same area.

Hesiod promoted a stereotyped ideal of quiet and harmonic life in the countryside. Fair men wanted a peaceful wife and a piece of land big enough to survive without luxuries. However, what is the place of women in this stereotype? They must be chosen carefully, and the majority of them were disappointing, not like the honorable Homeric women.

How to choose a good wife

Greek men could avoid marriage until a concrete moment in their life. When they became full adults, in case of further resistance, they met with community pressure⁴⁸. Besides, they had time enough to choose

⁴⁵ A.E. Hanson, *The Medical's Writer Woman*, in: *Before Sexuality. The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, eds. D.M. Halperin, J.J. Winkler, F.I. Zeitlin, Princeton 1990, pp. 309–338.

⁴⁶ M.B. Arthur, *Early Greece. The Origins of the Western Attitude toward Women*, in: *Women in the Ancient World, the Arethusa Papers*, eds. J. Peradotto, J.P. Sullivan, Albany NY 1984 (SUNY series in Classical Studies), p. 22.

⁴⁷ O. Patterson, *Freedom*, vol. 1, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*, New York 1991, p. 62.

⁴⁸ J. Dubisch, 'Foreign Chickens' and Other Outsiders: Gender and Community in Greece, "American Ethnologist" 1993, 20, p. 277.

with care. Hesiod was clear about the importance of what to avoid when searching for a good wife. He disregarded values such as love and sexual desire. Thus, a good man buys his wife with a dowry. At this point, it is remarkable to focus on one aspect: the importance of good exchange in a marriage. Dowry is the amount of money or goods given by the groom or the father of the bride. This quantity of the riches, controlled by the husband, guarantees the wife's status.

This method, used during antiquity, exists nowadays in some modern cultures. It is specific to arranged marriages⁴⁹. In this kind of marriage, love and sexual desire are secondary, and the groom searches for a passive wife. That is the metaphor implied in this passage that turns a different way. Hesiod recommended buying women.

‘First of all, get a house, and a woman and an ox for the plough—a slave woman and not a wife, to follow the oxen as well—and make everything ready at home, so that you may not have to ask of another, and he refuse you, and so, because you are in lack, the season pass by and your work come to nothing’⁵⁰.

He did not mean that a man should buy a slave and make her become a wife. That could be a legitimate problem with the children born from this union. He meant to pay the father instead of kidnapping a woman. A good wife behaves like an ox, following the leader because she follows her father's desires. Kidnap, adjunction, and great dowries were part of Homeric times. Once again, this stands in an opposition to the theoretical ideals embodied in such acts as the abduction of Helen of Troy or the dowry of Penelope.

This attitude is linked to a permanent message in all Hesiod's books. In contrast with the Homeric times, life was hard. The peasant selects the optimal moments to till the soil, weighing factors. The wife must be great. While the husband is away, she stays home and cares for the household. The family must stay united and maintain good relationships during the times of constant struggle. Even so, Hesiod considered finding a good woman almost impossible. As he mentions, ‘[D]o not let a flaunting woman coax and cozen and deceive you: she is after your barn. The man who trusts womankind trusts deceivers’⁵¹.

⁴⁹ J.D. Gómez-Quintero, M.C. Alagón, L. Cosculluela Pros, *Entre la Obediencia y la Rebelión: Los Matrimonios Concertados de Mujeres de Origen Senegambiano en España*, “Alternativas. Cuadernos de Trabajo Social” 2023, 30, 1, pp. 152–179.

⁵⁰ Hes. WD. 405–409.

⁵¹ Hes. WD. 373–375.

The ancient Greeks thought women had a natural urge to binge eat and drink pure wine like barbarians. In contrast, men contented themselves and drank wine mixed with water so as not to get drunk. So, men should control and dominate women as women search barns, following their animal nature.

I would like to stress the pair of words πυγοστόλος ἐξαπατάτω translated as flaunting woman coax. For Greeks, the most erotic part of a woman was her coax, as statutes prove⁵². A good husband was not looking for attractiveness or sex appeal. Instead, he sought contentment and purity. In contrast with Homeric women, female attractiveness was considered a problem, not a virtue. Hesiod insinuated that a husband in love was weak because he would lose his authority in front of his wife. R. Flacelière pointed out that Hesiod was misogynistic compared to the stance presented in the Homeric poems⁵³. These poems depicted women in a dignified and respectful way. Others, like R. Hunter⁵⁴, analyzed the anxiety in his opera. They said that Hesiod worried about everything. Hesiod's work mirrors financial struggles of his time. When a Greek man was poor, he lived harassed for his debts⁵⁵. This situation could end in losing their rights, called *atimia*. Peasant debts that ended in slavery were common. This lasted for decades in Greek history⁵⁶. The dismissal of women's good attitudes was presented in other passages⁵⁷, which were comparing women to animals. H. Lloyd-Jones makes this link⁵⁸. He connects the animalization of women with other lyric poets, such as Semonides of Amorgos and the Iambus about women he wrote (fr. 7). The reality is that peasant women worked every day, not only maintaining the land but also home, where they took care of storing, cleaning, and manufacturing products. Even if old sources do not show this, this is what stands behind Hesiod's ideas⁵⁹. That is the main reason

⁵² C. Sánchez Fernández, *Arte y Erotismo en el Mundo Clásico*, Madrid 2005, p. 33.

⁵³ R. Flacelière, *Le Féminisme dans l'ancienne Athènes*, "Comptes Rendus Des Séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres" 1971, 115, 4, p. 698.

⁵⁴ R. Hunter, *Hesiodic Voices, Studies in the Ancient Reception of Hesiod's Works and Days*, Cambridge 2014, p. 166.

⁵⁵ S.B. Pomeroy, *Diosas, Rameras, Esposas y Esclavas. Mujeres en la Antigüedad Clásica*, Madrid 1987, p. 64.

⁵⁶ M. Valdés Guía, *Thetes y Hectémoros en la Atenas Presoloniana*, "ATHENAEUM Studi Periodici di Letteratura e Storia dell'Antichità" 2014, p. 15.

⁵⁷ Hes. Theog. 594–602.

⁵⁸ H. Lloyd-Jones, *Females of the Species. Semonides on Women*, Park Ridge NJ 1975, pp. 18–19.

⁵⁹ L.S. Sussman, *Workers and Drones: Labor, Idleness and Gender Definition in Hesiod's Beehive*, in: *Women in the Ancient World, the Arethusa Papers*, eds. J. Peradotto, J.P. Sullivan,

for why a woman who wants to eat every day is a problem. She is also the guardian of the surplus⁶⁰. Good peasants must predict price changes. They must also store products⁶¹. So, good relationships and confidence were more important to sexual desire.

With this affirmation, I do not want to express that sex was not important⁶². Marriage was a way to celebrate fertility and to include humans in nature. People revered and safeguarded the domestic fire. It held conjugal harmony. But, it's a symbol of the trust between spouses. Conjugal love was desirable, but not based on passion⁶³. The ancient Greeks thought some feelings were dangerous. These feelings clouded the human senses. Passion was between those feelings.

I don't want to dismiss the importance of gender inequality or women's worth in Hesiod's Opera. This view of relations between men and women was not Hesiod's idea. It was grounded in the then education. Overall, ancient Greece based the sex division on inequality. Women were inferior but necessary for procreation as a man without heirs loses his name and identity. Due to this, they treated women with suspicion. This idea about women was part of men's education throughout Greek history. Epic poets' work was repeated and copied for centuries. It spread the misogyny that was part of Greek education⁶⁴.

This idea persisted in ancient times. It was based on the premises from Homeric poems and Hesiod's opera. Land ownership was the way to measure wealth and the major reason to be proud. Thus, only men could inherit land, which was the basis of political participation. There could be some idealization. But it seems clear that Greeks thought men were land owners and citizens. In contrast, women were expelled from land property. Women were needed for procreation. If not, the land was divided into pieces, as Hesiod pointed out⁶⁵. However, women were part of the land. They were attached to it. When they became alone, they were

Albany NY 1984 (*SUNY series in Classical Studies*), pp. 82–83.

⁶⁰ D. Lyons, *Dangerous Gifts: Ideologies of Marriage and Exchange in Ancient Greece*, "Classical Antiquity" 2003, 22, p. 99.

⁶¹ I. Morris, *Hard Surfaces*, in: *Money, Labour and Land, Approaches to the Economies of Ancient Greece*, eds. P. Cartledge, E.E. Cohen, L. Foxhall, London 2002, p. 42.

⁶² Some details support this idea. For example, Hesiodic recommends not letting genitals be dirty with semen. He says to avoid this in front of the house fire. Op. 733–734).

⁶³ A. Iriarte Goñi, *Feminidades y Convivencia Política en la Antigua Grecia*, Madrid 2020, p. 32–33.

⁶⁴ I. Pérez Miranda, *Mito, Género y Paideia. Reflexiones desde la Historia Antigua*, "Foro de Educación" 2009, 11, pp. 241–247.

⁶⁵ Hes. Theog. 603–614.

extremely problematic. Women were always considered inferior by nature and it affected their social status.

In the second part, I will discuss examples. They show how this structure defined gender roles and the evolution of Greek history. Land can explain key moments in ancient Greek history. It also shows gender inequality.

Lack of land vs lack of women

One of the most well-known periods of Greek history is the colonization process. From ancient Greece and its islands, Greeks sailed the Mediterranean Sea. They arrived at faraway places, such as the Iberian Peninsula. This process was constant from Mycenaean to Hellenistic times. However, it was vital in ancient times. This was due to problems after synoecism⁶⁶.

In this process, the possession of land was an important factor. It separated men from women. Women went to work the land⁶⁷. The main reason for founding new cities was the lack of land in the motherland. This lack was called 'stenochoria'. This happened during a process that affected Greek families. The population increased during the times of prosperity. With fruitful harvests, more people survived until adulthood. Greek agriculture was based on cereal, olives, and grapes. Wine production was also part of it. But it was also complemented by other products such as legumes. Those complements, apart from being consumed as food, help to regenerate the soil⁶⁸. However, famines were common and there was a perception of a lack of land. From one side, aristocrats owned the majority of land and did not want to lose their large properties. From the other side, medium and small peasants needed more space to survive. So, due to tradition and productivity, land division was a problem⁶⁹. When the *kyrios* died, all the land was passed on to the firstborn, who searched for a wife. Even considering all the previous points about childhood mortality rates, second sons were in a tough spot. They had other options, such as mercenaries or becoming merchants, however, these

⁶⁶ A.J. Domínguez Monedero, *Las Colonizaciones en el Mediterráneo Antiguo*, Madrid 2022.

⁶⁷ M.D. Mirón Pérez, *Tiempo de Mujeres, Tiempo de Hombres: Género, Ocio y Trabajo en la Grecia Antigua*, "Arenal, Revista de Historia de Las Mujeres" 2001, 8, p. 21.

⁶⁸ A. Sarpaki, *The Palaeoethnobotanical Approach. The Mediterranean Triad or is it a Quartet?*, in: *Agriculture in Ancient Greece, Proceedings of the Seventh International Symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens, 16–17 May 1990*, ed. B. Wells, Stockholm 1992, pp. 72–73.

⁶⁹ P. Garnsey, *Cities, Peasants and Food in Classical Antiquity. Essays in Social and Economic History*, Cambridge 2004, p. 210.

options could be problematic for the city. So, going to a new place was an opportunity for men to survive and become part of a new society. The metropolis could more or less force them to go, but, in any case, they were living in a discomfort with no clear future. In fact, before and during the colonization process some decided to run away forever and become mercenaries in the Near East. The Lydian Empire's Egyptians were eager to pay Greek soldiers⁷⁰. However, military life was not for everyone. It is clear now that the lack of land and opportunities for men explains the colonization process. Those men were single because they could not achieve a position in their homeland and they have an uncertain future.

Gender differences in Greek society created a bias. Women could not leave the land. Maidens were educated until geezerhood to get married to someone in the area. Fathers waited for years to marry off their daughters to gain a useful economic or social connection. In conclusion, making them live away was useless⁷¹. So, maidens stayed in the motherland while colonists left to find a colony.

In conclusion, Greek colonists were all men who needed a piece of land and a wife. To produce offspring, they must have been married to local women as soon as they established themselves in a new place. So, the Greek colonization process caused hybridization. Interculturality was the only solution to survive. Colonists needed a group of women who would give birth to another generation. They also needed connections with the locals to sustain a new place.

The local population was necessary, especially for the local authorities. They would sometimes negotiate with locals for a piece of land for a group of women to get married, like in Massalia⁷². Other times, they

⁷⁰ A. Clavero Sánchez, *La otra Cara de la Moneda.: El Dinero en el Reino de Lidia*, "Contribuciones a La Economía" 2018, 16, 4; M. Durán Vadell, *El Mercernariado en la Antigua Grecia*, "Militaria: Revista de Cultura Militar" 1998, 12, pp. 94–95.

⁷¹ A.J. Domínguez Monedero, *Consideraciones acerca del Papel de la Mujer en las Colonias Griegas del Mediterráneo Occidental*, in: *La Mujer en el Mundo Antiguo. Actas de las Quintas Jornadas de Investigación Interdisciplinaria*, ed. E. Gorrido González, Madrid 1986, pp. 143–152; E. Duce Pastor, *Mixed Identities in the First Generations of Archaic Greek Colonies: The Female Contribution*, in: *People on the Move across the Greek World*, eds. C. Mauro, D. Chapinal-Heras, M. Valdés Guía, Sevilla 2022 (*Estudios Helénicos*, 4), pp. 187–209.

⁷² Ath. 13, 36. 'The Phocæans in Ionia, having consulted the oracle, founded Marseilles. And Euxenus the Phocæan was connected by ties of hospitality with Nanus; this was the name of the king of that country. This Nanus was celebrating the marriage feast of his daughter, and invited Euxenus, who happened to be in the neighborhood, to the feast. And the marriage was to be conducted in this manner: After the supper was over the damsel was to come in, and to give a goblet full of wine properly mixed to whichever of the suitors who were present she chose; and to whomsoever she gave it, he was to be the bridegroom.

would kidnap a group of women, like in Miletus⁷³. All colonizations were rooted in an unending desire for land. This was true not only for the ancient Greeks. For example, it was true in the founding of Carthage⁷⁴. The first new *poleis* kept this pattern. They seized the land with novel crops, establishing fresh settlements. The remains are found to be established with a mix of local and Greek materials⁷⁵.

In any case, it is remarkable that the Greeks depended on the land. When the land was scarce, they moved through the Mediterranean Sea. Rural workers seeking land ownership made up the majority of colonists. As landowners, they could participate in the politics of the city.

In this process, Greek women were excluded because they could not inherit. This idea leads to the final point. It is the link between land and politics in Greek society, which includes men only.

Land and political participation: a man privilege

After synoecism, the union of city-states during the eighth century, the political systems had different ways to participate. It is not a surprise that land tenure was the basis of this participation. But there were problems and political crises. The system evolved, but the factor of land ownership was always present. Even if there was a divide between the land

And the damsel coming in, whether it was by chance or whether it was for any other reason, gives the goblet to Euxenus. And the name of the maiden was Petta. And when the cup had been given in this way, and her father (thinking that she had been directed by the Deity in her giving of it) had consented that Euxenus should have her, he took her for his wife, and cohabited with her, changing her name to Aristoxena. And the family which is descended from that damsel remains in Marseilles to this day, and is known as the Protiadæ; for Protis was the name of the son of Euxenus and Aristoxena’.

⁷³ Hdto. 1, 146, 2. ‘married Carian women whose parents they had put to death. For this slaughter, these women made a custom and bound themselves by oath (and enjoined it on their daughters) that no one would sit at table with her husband or call him by his name, because the men had married them after slaying their fathers and husbands and sons. This happened at Miletus’.

⁷⁴ Justin, *Epitome*, 18.6 ‘Elissa, having purchased as much land as could be encompassed by a bull’s hide, cut the hide into very thin strips and thus surrounded a large space, where she built a citadel which she called Byrsa. Many young men from neighboring regions, attracted by the fame of the new city, came there. Fearing that without wives the colony would have no posterity, Elissa ordered about eighty maidens to be seized from the surrounding peoples and brought to Carthage, so that the young men might marry them and the city might have descendants’.

⁷⁵ A.J. Domínguez Monedero, *La Colonización Griega en Sicilia. Griegos, Indígenas y Púnicos en la Sicilia Arcaica: Interacción y Aculturación*, Oxford 1989.

and the city in ancient Greece, they were strongly connected⁷⁶. These origins determined the ability of men to participate in the political life. In Athens, the *demoi* division reflected familial origins in Attica⁷⁷.

The land occupation was diverse. Some families owned detached houses. Others lived in groups of about three cottages. Some lived in small fortified villages. The most well-known case is Attica land⁷⁸. It looks clear that the land supported the city if we extrapolate. Male citizens traveled several times a year. They did so for festivals and harvest parties. This was true not only for crop production but also for the general population, who socialized in the city and thus developed a common identity. But, men were always dominant. Besides, there were social differences between those citizens. A humble peasant did not have the same rights as a large owner⁷⁹. The differences in ownership inspired social divisions.

In a patriarchal society, only men could have access to citizenship. Greeks thought that only landowners had to be civic soldiers and citizens. Still, peasants had to have land. They had to also be able to pay for their military gear⁸⁰. Famine, drought, and constant issues in ancient societies were political problems too⁸¹. Significant losses of peasant property also weakened the army. At times, such as during the rule of Solon of Athens, to save the *polis*, the land debts were cancelled⁸². This solution maintained the civic body, though the archaeological remains are not clear enough to make a judgement about the efficiency of this undertaking. Landowners regained possession of confiscated territory, according to S. Forsdyke's

⁷⁶ J. Gallego, *Campeños en la Ciudad, Bases Agrarias de la Polis Griega y la Infantería Hoplítica*, Buenos Aires 2005, p. 15.

⁷⁷ R. Osborne, *Demos: The discovery of Classical Attika*, Cambridge–London–New York–New Rochelle–Melbourne–Sydney 1985.

⁷⁸ H. Lohmann, *Agriculture and Country Life in Classical Attica*, in: *Agriculture in Ancient Greece, Proceedings of the Seventh International Symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens, 16–17 May 1990*, ed. B. Wells, Stockholm 1992, pp. 29–60.

⁷⁹ J. Gallego, *La Polis Griega. Orígenes, Estructura, Enfoques*, Buenos Aires 2017, pp. 30–31.

⁸⁰ Arist. *Athen. Pol.* 4, 2. 'Citizenship had already been bestowed on those who provided themselves with arms; and these elected as the Nine Archons and the Treasurers, 2 who were owners of an unencumbered estate worth not less than 10 minae'.

⁸¹ J.M. Camp, *A Drought in the Late Eight Century B.C.*, "Hesperia" 1979, 48, pp. 397–411; C.G. Starr, *The Economic and Social Growth of Early Greece 800–500 B.C.*, New York 1977, pp. 41–42.

⁸² N.G.L. Hammond, *The Seisachtheia and the Nomothesia of Solon*, "The Journal of Hellenic Studies" 1940, 60, pp. 71–83.

research⁸³. Solon also banned selling male citizens into slavery. He aimed to put an end to this process⁸⁴.

There was a connection between war and politics. While mercenaries and foreigners were dangerous due to their questionable loyalty, land-owners with property to maintain would fight for the city to protect his family. That is why war campaigns lasted around 40 days during the summer – peasants had to leave their crops and return after their end⁸⁵. Women took the land. If war lasted too long, some feared that women would gain too much power. This happened in Sparta in the 4th century. There, King Agis IV tried to restore old values by changing women's wealth⁸⁶. The overrated Spartan crisis of Agis was blamed on women's ambition, while in reality it was caused by long wars, the death of old customs, and oliganthropia⁸⁷ – population crisis leading to a lower number of soldiers.

The next point I would like to stress is the relationship between land and the center. Even if it remains unclear if a land owner lived in the countryside or the city⁸⁸, land ownership was the basis of political participation. So, the city must be seen as a link between the *asty* (city center) and the *Chora* (the territory). Owners may have had a house in the middle of their land, which was used only for purposes of storing crops and materials. They visited it frequently but lived in the city to engage in public

⁸³ See S. Forsdyke, *Land, Labor and Economy in Solonian Athens: Breaking the Impasse between Archeology and History*, in: *Solon of Athens New Historical and Philological Approaches*, eds. J.H. Blok, A. Lardinois, Leiden 2006, pp. 334–350.

⁸⁴ M. Faraguna, *Hektemoroi, Isomoirai, Seisachtheia: Recherche Recenti Sulle Riforme Economiche Di Solone*, "Dike" 2012, 15, pp. 171–192.

⁸⁵ R. Osborne, *Classic Landscape with Figures. The Ancient Greek City and its Countryside*, London 1987.

⁸⁶ Plut. Agis 3.1. 'When once the love of silver and gold had crept into the city, closely followed by greed and parsimony in the acquisition of wealth and by luxury, effeminacy, and extravagance in the use and enjoyment of it, Sparta fell away from most of her noble traits, and continued in a low estate that was unworthy of her down to the times when Agis and Leonidas were kings'. Plut. Agis. 7.1. 'but Agesilaüs tried to show her that the king's project would be feasible and its accomplishment advantageous, and the king himself besought his mother to contribute her wealth for the advancement of his ambition and glory'. P. Cartledge, *The Economy (Economies) of Ancient Greece*, in: *The Ancient Economy*, eds. W. Scheidel, S. von Reden, Edinburgh 2002, p. 15.

⁸⁷ D. Asheri, *Sulla Legge di Epitadeo*, "Athenaeum. Studi Di Letteratura e Storia Dell'Antichità" 1961, 39, p. 45.

⁸⁸ R. Osborne, 'Is it a farm?' *The definition of agricultural sites and settlements in ancient Greece*, in: *Agriculture in Ancient Greece, Proceedings of the Seventh International Symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens, 16–17 May 1990*, ed. B. Wells, Stockholm 1992, pp. 21–25.

life. In the farmland, the population was a mix of dependents, who were partly slaves, farm workers, and small owners. However, some free but dependent workers had to control them. Depending on the *poleis*, this proportion could change⁸⁹. In Attica, small landowners existed but these were the big owners who held most of the land. They rented small pieces of land to dependent populations. This created a more complex system⁹⁰. Ancient sources enable scholars to see this connection. For example, in *Defence for the murder of Eratosthenes*, the orator Lysias exposed this topic. He wrote a speech for the peasant Euphiletus, where after the introduction, Euphiletus presented his life as a countryman and defined himself through being married at middle age and controlling his wife.

‘When I, Athenians, decided to marry, and brought a wife into my house, for some time I was disposed neither to vex her nor to leave her too free to do just as she pleased; I kept a watch on her as far as possible, with such observation of her as was reasonable. But when a child was born to me, thence-forward I began to trust her, and placed all my affairs in her hands, presuming that we were now in perfect intimacy⁹¹’.

Besides, this speech delineates a clear connection between peasants and citizen businesses. Even if he was a peasant and did not live in the center of Athens, his wife was seduced in a civic ritual – while she was at the Thesmophoria festivals, the seducer saw her and started to make sexual proposals⁹². This allows to note that religious festivals included peasants like the rest of the citizens. The speech alluded also to other notions. It promoted the idea of the Athenian countryside and its people. For example, when the peasant Euphiletus planned to find his wife, he searched for neighbours to play the role of witnesses. He then went to the local tavern which, we can infer, had people going and returning from the city to the land during the night hours. Euphiletus with his witnesses bought torches⁹³. So, people were constantly moving

⁸⁹ M.H. Jameson, *Agricultural Labor in Ancient Greece*, in: *Agriculture in Ancient Greece, Proceedings of the Seventh International Symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens*, 16–17 May 1990, ed. B. Wells, Stockholm 1992, pp. 139–140.

⁹⁰ L. Foxhall, *The Control of the Attic Landscape*, in: *Agriculture in Ancient Greece, Proceedings of the Seventh International Symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens*, 16–17 May 1990, ed. B. Wells, Stockholm 1992, pp. 155–156.

⁹¹ English translation by W.R.M. Lamb, M.A. for Harvard University Press in 1930. Lysias, transl. W.R.M. Lamb, Cambridge MA–London 1930 (*Loeb Classical Library*, 244) [hereinafter: Lys.] 1.6.

⁹² *Ibidem*, 1.20.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, 1.24.

from one place to another. Products, such as a torch, were necessary to support Athenian peasants every day. However, the continuous movement between different locations was reserved to the male population, who had the right to move for different reasons.

In contrast, women were, at least symbolically, removed from the public space, and instead, were attached to the land. Even in Classical Athens, men could not pronounce their names in public. At least, we detect that women who came from a citizenship family were invisible in official spaces and were mentioned as “the daughter of” or “the wife of”⁹⁴. This custom affected daily life. It influenced marriage proposals and court accusations⁹⁵. It is my suggestion that they excluded women due to the female inability to inherit the land. They could do so only in some cases, such as in *epiklerai*⁹⁶. They were not considered full citizens. As land was the basis for political rights, women were always secondary. They received a role in civic life as they took care of some religious festivals and were educators of future citizens⁹⁷, however, this did not change the fact that they were always considered to be in a secondary position. They could travel between the land to the city but only for religious festivals or to sell their products. Mobility was more acceptable for men; women needed to have a legitimate excuse⁹⁸.

Land dependency

Even the history of big cities like Athens was shaped by decisions related to land. As Thucydides⁹⁹ said about Athens, one of the biggest *poleis*, the Athenian people lived in the countryside. This reality resulted

⁹⁴ D. Schaps, *The Woman Least Mentioned: Etiquette and Women's Names*, “The Classical Quarterly” 1977, 27, 2, pp. 323–330.

⁹⁵ E. Duce Pastor, *Don't Call Me by My Name: Respect and Invisibility in Women's Names in Athens*, in: *Name and Identity: Selected studies on ancient anthroponymy through the Mediterranean*, eds. C. de la Escosura Balbás, A. Kurilič, G.E. Rallo, Oxford 2024 (*BAR International Series*, 3161), pp. 21–30.

⁹⁶ J.E. Karnezis, *The Epikleros (Heiress): A Contribution to the Interpretation of the Attic Orators and to the Study of the Private Life of Classical Athens*, Athens 1972.

⁹⁷ N. Loraux, *Nacido de la Tierra, Mito y Política en Atenas*, Buenos Aires 2007.

⁹⁸ D. Cohen, *Law, Violence and Community in Classical Athens*, Cambridge 1995 (*Key Themes in Ancient History*).

⁹⁹ Thucydides 2.16 ‘The Athenians thus long lived scattered over Attica in independent townships. Even after the centralization of Theseus, old habit still prevailed; and from the early times down to the present war most Athenians still lived in the country with their families and households, and were consequently not at all inclined to move now, especially as they had only just restored their establishments after the Median invasion. Deep was their trouble and discontent at abandoning their houses and the hereditary temples

in a close relationship between political implications and gender divisions. Women were not own landers and were not full citizens. So, women were excluded from public life. Let's develop this idea with an example.

During the archaic period, Athens decided to invest in monopolies, for which they chose wine and olive oil. Their production required a great effort from the peasants. They used the same techniques but tried to produce more to export. The wine market was stable at its high prices¹⁰⁰. On the other hand, Athenians still needed basic products for their subsistence, and this supply was supplied by the import of wheat from the Black Sea¹⁰¹, further leading to the Athenian expansion, rivalries, and the Peloponnesian War.

This vulnerability in the food supply caused the Athens to be too weak to survive a siege, which underlied the Spartan strategy during the Archidamian phase of the Peloponnesian War. An illness expressed in Athens and as a consequence, it started to lose the war. During those difficult times, some citizen women had to perform various tasks, for example, as wet nurses or sellers¹⁰².

I have used Athens as an example. It shows how important it is to understand the image of the peasantry in Greek civilization. The countryside is key to politics, family, and the evolution of war in Greek history¹⁰³. It is equally vital in all phases of Greek history. When scholars picture Ancient Greek peasants, they see them through the prism of their lands and gender roles. Ancient Greek populations needed the same thing: a piece of land for food and a wife to produce heirs. In the case any of the requirements were unmet, disasters that ensued were continuous. I have a main point to explain. Greek populations had a connection to land production. Peasants were the system's heart. This idealization of the peasantry stemmed from a division of gender roles, which caused women to be always placed in the inferior position. Ancient Greek peasants proclaimed rights and debts, but these were solely men who did so. This explained why women were invisible in ancient sources.

of the ancient constitution, and at having to change their habits of life and to bid farewell to what each regarded as his native city'.

¹⁰⁰ V.D. Hanson, *Practical Aspects of Grape-Growing and the Ideology of Greek Viticulture*, in: *Agriculture in Ancient Greece, Proceedings of the Seventh International Symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens, 16–17 May 1990*, ed. B. Wells, Stockholm 1992, pp. 161–166.

¹⁰¹ P. Garnsey, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹⁰² I.J. Cisneros Abellán, *Dentro y Fuera de Casa. Las Trabajadoras en la Atenas de los Siglos V y IV a. de C.*, Uviéu 2022 (Colección Deméter).

¹⁰³ E. Mackil, *Propiedad, deuda y revolución en la Grecia Antigua*, in: *Capital, deuda y desigualdad, distribuciones de la riqueza en el mundo antiguo*, eds. M. Campagno, J. Gallego, C.G. García Mac Gaw, Buenos Aires 2017, pp. 27–54.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I defined the idealization of peasantry in Ancient Greek History. I explained how it influenced the Greek family and politics. Based on the Homeric poems, we can conclude that the Ancient Greeks followed a code of behavior, which lasted until some well-known events in ancient Greek history happened. These events involved land ownership and its problems and affected further political issues. Which is important to state, women participation in them was reduced significantly. In the following periods, Hesiod laid out the foundation of a system that continued.

For ancient Greeks, the land was the basis of their culture. Being rich was deemed honorable; enrichment was enough of a reason to travel across the Mediterranean. It was the base for their participation in the political life. It was also the vulnerability that led to losses in wars. No matter what, land ownership was reserved solely to the Greek men. Women could not inherit and were under the guardianship of a man of her family. Men's desires caused the subjugation of women, who were bound to their received gender role related to family care and the production of children. When women got too much land, as in Sparta in the 4th century, their political power was being reduced.

In this scheme, women were always inferior. They were dependent on their fathers and husbands. They lived in the same area all their lives and did not join the colonization process. They did not vote and were invisible in the sources. Women were always minors, part of a household, who lived to serve its interests. Still, all sources show them as part of the workforce. They care for the products in the store and work the farmlands.

Land tenure, as seen from a patriarchal point of view, shaped the lives of ancient Greeks. It allowed scholars to explain how vital it was for an ancient society to organize life around land. In this system, men had to have some land property to gain standing in politics and civic life. Employers dismissed artisans and dependent workers because they did not own land. Thus, if there is a lack of land, the Greeks should occupy other territories. A fully fledged Greek adult was a land owner. As a contrast, women received their proper status entering motherhood.

In conclusion, a contradiction emerged – women should be removed from the land property, but at the same time be kept inherently linked to it as part of the household. This system kept them dependent, subordinate to their fathers and husbands. Women emerged occasionally in the ancient sources, lacking distinct identities, which is why the Greek sources spoke mostly about men – soldiers and politicians who conquered

the Mediterranean area. In general terms, the men's world is an unequal world that is explained in terms of land tenure.

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NOTA O AUTORZE

Elena Duce Pastor – dr, adiunkt w Universidad Autónoma de Madrid oraz członek grupy badawczej "Hélade". Jej praca koncentruje się na powiązaniach między płcią i statusem w starożytnych źródłach greckich. Zajmuje się kwestiami małżeństwa, dziedzictwa i międzykulturowości w okresie archaicznym i klasycznym.

