

Diane Touliatos-Miles (ed.)

# HER ART:

Greek Women in the Arts  
from Antiquity to Modernity



PETER LANG

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## **Tekhnides: Women Artists in Ancient Greece**\*

John G. Younger

Most of what little we know about women in ancient Greece concerns women in Athens.<sup>1</sup> In spite of our limited knowledge, however, we can identify several aspects of women participating in the arts.<sup>2</sup> All women made textiles and all women played some kind of musical instrument. Women with money (of all statuses) commissioned sculpture and architecture, so did priestesses. Since foreign resident (*metic*), slave, and sometimes citizen men worked in the crafts, we can imagine at least *metic* and slave women doing so as well. And finally, literate women included the wives and daughters of citizens and at least the high priced prostitute (the *hetaira*), and some *metic* women too, many of whom were also *hetairas*.

\* I am grateful to Michael Cosmopoulos for the invitation to present this paper at the conference "Her Art" and to Diane Touliatos who also participated and then volunteered to edit this volume. Translations of Greek texts are my own.

1 It is commonly accepted that Athenian society (and most of Greek society, with occasional exceptions) was severely sex segregated and patriarchal. Women had no legal rights, were perpetual minors, were silenced, and their thoughts and activities were denigrated. For a general treatment of this situation, see Eva C. Keuls, *Reign of the Phallos* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Perikles' Funeral Oration (given in the winter, 431 B.C.; Thucydides 2.45.2) summarizes this attitude: "the greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men." Also see, David M. Schaps, "The Woman Least Mentioned: Etiquette and Women's Names," *Classical Quarterly* 27, (1997): 323-330.

2 For a general treatment, see Sarah B. Pomeroy, "Tekhnikai & Mousikai Women," *American Journal of Ancient History* 2 (1977): 51-68.

### Textiles<sup>3</sup>

All women made textiles; from the wool and flax they made the yarn, then worked on the loom to make the cloth, and then cut, sewed, hemmed, and embroidered or brocaded the decorative details to make the finished piece.<sup>4</sup> They made all textiles—clothing, coverings, tapestries, scarves, saddle blankets—any and everything made of cloth. While finished textiles have rarely survived,<sup>5</sup> sculpture [Fig. 2: 1 – “Demeter’s Chiton,” Sculpted by Damophon of Messene] and vase paintings preserve for us their range and sometimes their lavish decoration.<sup>6</sup>

As several myths demonstrate, textiles constitute a kind of language, a transmitted language from mother to daughter of texture, patterns, and cut, and a social language of status and culture.<sup>7</sup> While proper male status in sculpture and

3 Elizabeth J.W. Barber has written three basic studies: *Prehistoric Textiles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), “The Peplos of Athena,” in *Goddess and Polis: The Panathenaic Festival in Ancient Athens*, edited by Jennifer Neils, 103-117 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), and *Women’s Work: The First 20,000 Years* (London: W.W. Norton), Maria Schoenhammer, “Women and Textiles in Home,” in *American and Co., 1994 Philological Association 125th Annual Meeting, 1993, Abstracts*, ( Worcester: American Philological Association, 1993: 16) links women, their narratives, and sister: American Philological Association, 1993: 16) links women, their narratives, and perhaps even their feminine genealogy to textiles: “the primary significance and value of a cloth, which is based on its artistic quality, goes back to the woman who designed and created it. It is beyond the control of men.”

4 See a black-figure *lekythos* by the Amasis Painter (Keuls, 1986 [supra n. 1]: fig. 93; Neils, 1992 [supra n. 3]: figs. 66a & b) and a red-figure squat *lekythos* in the manner of the Eretria Painter (H. Alan Shapiro, *Art, Myth, and Culture: Greek Vases from Southern Collections*, New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1981, no. 50).

5 Barber, 1991 (supra n. 3) has several illustrations of surviving ancient textiles.

6 For vases depicting weaving on the loom see the black-figure *lekythos* by the Amasis Painter (mentioned above); for weaving narrow bands of richly decorated cloth (e. g., fillets, shawls, hems) on hand looms, see a red-figure *kalathos* (Keuls, 1986 [supra n. 1]: fig. 100a); for the richness of designs, see the cloth still on the loom on a red-figure *skyphos* by the Penelope Painter (Keuls, 1986 [supra n. 1]: appendix fig. 223; Neils, 1992 [supra n. 3]: fig. 63), and richly robbed female figures like Demeter on a red-figure *skyphos* by Makron (Neils, 1992 [supra n. 3]: fig. 73; Barber, 1991 [supra n. 3]: fig. 16.2), and a statue of Athena painted on a red-figure *kylix* by Onesimos (Martin Robertson, *Art and Vase Painting in Classical Athens* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992]: fig. 33) and another one sculpted (Neils, 1992 [supra n. 3]: fig. 74); compare Despoina’s shawl sculpted by Damophon (Andrew Stewart, *Greek Sculpture: An Exploration* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990], 94-96, 792; a detailed description and analysis). A chariot race was once painted as woven into the sleeve of the female sculpture known as Euthydikos’s Kore (Gisela M.A. Richter, *Korai*, London: Phaidon, 1968, fig. on p. 100). Janet D. Spector, “What This Awl Means: Towards a Feminist Archaeology,” in *Women and Prehistory*, edited by Margaret Conkey and Joan Gero, 389-406, esp. pp. 395ff. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991). Like tattoo and scarification patterns in equatorial Africa,

painting is conveyed by his nudity (his exposed genitals becoming his identity card),<sup>8</sup> the clothed woman in art has her body hidden by her text, a text which every other woman would be able to read by following the textile, its weight, weave, ornamentation, finishing, even press-folds.<sup>9</sup> And the patterned details told stories, too, sometimes literally like that of Procræ who weaves the story of her rape into her tapestry.

Fig. 2: 1 – “Demeter’s Chiton” (detail), Sculpted by Damophon of Messene (ca. 150 B.C.E.), Temple to Despoina, Lykasura (photo author)



Indonesia, Polynesia, and Central America, classical textile patterns must have conveyed similar kinds of information about ethnicity, kinship relations, belief, gender roles, and class (Barber, 1991 [supra n. 3], 283-98, esp. 293 - 98; W.D. Hamby, *The History of Tattooing and Its Significance* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927), passim and esp. pp. 171-242).

8 Contrast Robin Osborne, “Men Without Clothes: Heroic Nakedness and Greek Art,” *Gender and History* 9 (1997): 504-528.

9 Press folds are those quasi-permanent folds attesting to a garment’s careful folding and storage when not in use; they have not been much studied but are faithfully copied in Greek sculpture as if to attest to the woman’s care of her textiles. Brunilde Ridgeway states that they apparently begin in the second quarter of the fourth century B.C. (*Fourth Century Styles in Greek Sculpture* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997], 170), but they can be observed as early as in the figure of Aphrodite on the Parthenon’s east frieze (thus, ca. 440; cf. Thebes Mus. BE 63, a Roman copy of a fifth century statue of Artemis), and they continue to be depicted in Roman sculpture (e.g., Mytilene New Museum no. 7101, a statue of Livia, and statues of women in the Herakleion Mus. garden).

The state also sponsored official textile-making. Select women in several cities were appointed to create magnificent robes for their patron deities. Every four years in Athens, for example, beginning in October, some twelve women and two girl assistants wove the gown (*peplos*) that was given to the cult statue of Athena Polias on her birthday (mid-August); this was a huge textile, dyed saffron yellow, and embroidered with scenes from mythology.<sup>10</sup> At Elis, the "Sixteen Women" wove Hera's peplos in a special building in the agora (Pausanias 5.6.2-6); and at Sparta, women wove the robe for Apollo at Amyklai in the "Tunic House" (Pausanias 3.16.2).

From many sources we hear of women dedicating their textiles to their gods. Agapenor's daughter, Laodiké, sent a robe to Athena Alea at Tegea with a woven dedication giving her name and birthplace (Pausanias 8.5.3); women wove their names into textiles which they dedicated to Artemis at Brauron.<sup>11</sup> And temple inventories, like those for the Parthenon, list dedicated textiles (along with everything else people dedicated) and the names of the women dedicants and what towns they came from.<sup>12</sup>

### Music<sup>13</sup>

Fig. 2: 2 – "Hydria in the Polygnotos Group" (photo author)



In many ancient depictions, mostly vase paintings, we see women making music. Some of these women are prostitutes entertaining their clients, but many others are simply women at home playing for themselves or their women friends. For instance, a mid-fifth century B.C.E. red-figure hydria in the Polygnotos Group [Fig. 2: 2 – "Hydria in the Polygnotos Group"] depicts a seated Sappho (labeled "Sappos") reciting poetry while Nike (the victory goddess) crowns her and her two women friends listen, one of whom holds a lyre.<sup>14</sup>

While there was a wide range of musical instruments, some were appropriate for women to play (sometimes exclusively) and others not at all. We see women playing the common tortoise shell lyre (*cheleis lyra*), which was also appropriate for school boys and men in casual settings, but only women played the harp (*triganon*) and two special lyres, one with a long soundboard (*sambuke*) and another with a long frame for the strings (*barbiton*). Men and women, especially women prostitutes, played the *aulos*, a set of two reeds played simultaneously; the sound was thought to be exciting and sexually provoking (they are commonly played at animal sacrifices and at men's sex parties). The one instrument we never see women play (but see below) is the concert *kithara*, an elaborate lyre that men played, especially at musical contests, dressed up, interestingly enough, in a long robe that was otherwise appropriate only for women.<sup>15</sup>

Women, only or mostly, also played percussion instruments, especially the castanet-like *krotala* for parties (men's and women's)<sup>16</sup> and, in religious ceremonies, both the large tambourine (*tympanon* [without the metal disks]) in celebrations of Cybele and the rattle (*sistrum*) in celebrations of Isis.

Aside from women musicians, there were women composers (some of these, like Sappho and Nossis, will also be mentioned below). An odd literary source states that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were actually written by a woman, Phantasia of Memphis (in Egypt), and that Homer appropriated her work upon his visit there (Ptolemaios Chennos in *Phot. Bibl.* 151 a37 ff.).

But we also know of real women composers.<sup>17</sup> For instance, Megalostрата of Sparta, sixth century B.C.E., was a famous singer of songs, and probably composed them.<sup>18</sup> Praxilla of Sikyon, fifth century, was well known for her bawdy

14 Athens National Museum 1260 (*JRV*<sup>2</sup> 1060. 145). The scroll reads "Gods! Winged words, I begin, airy words but pleasant" (John M. Edmonds, "Sappho's Book as Depicted on an Attic Vase," *Classical Quarterly* 16, 1922, 1-14).

15 Orpheus is called effeminate (*malhalkizesthai*) because he was a kitharode. (Plato, *Symposium*, 179d).

16 One woman was expert enough to be depicted on her tombstone playing the krotala, (Christoph W. Clairmont, *Classical Attic Tombstones* [Klitchberg: Akanthus, 1993] no. NMA 1896).

17 For brief mentions of women authors, including composers, see M. L. West, *Die griechische Dichterin: Bild und Rolle* Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1996.

18 Denys L. Page, ed., *Poetae Melici Graeci* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) no. 59(b).

10 Barber, 1992 (supra n. 3).

11 Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 1458 - 67; *Inscriptiones Graecae* II<sup>2</sup>, 1514 - 29.

12 Diane Harris, *Treasure of the Parthenon and Erechtheion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

13 See M. L. West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

drinking songs,<sup>19</sup> and her Athenian contemporary Charixena was known for her old-fashioned melodies. In the third century, we hear of Glaukê of Chios, a famous singer who accompanied herself on the kithara; she certainly composed the music, perhaps the lyrics too, and may well be one of the few women kithara players, if not the only one.<sup>20</sup>

Several women composers wrote hymns to the gods of various cities, and they received honors (and pay) for their work. Alkinoê, perhaps of Ephesus, was commissioned to write hymns to Zeus(?), Poseidon and Amphitritê for the city of Thronion in Lokris Epiknemedia; two inscriptions (*Inscriptiones Graecae* IX(1) 309 and XII(5) 812, both late third century) relate how pleased the citizens were with her efforts. Even more so, Aristodama of Smyrna (alive in 218/7 B.C.E.), daughter of Amyntas, was another itinerant poet and composer who composed hymns for the cities of Lamia in Thessaly and for Chaleia in Boeotia; Chaleia was so pleased that it set up several honorary inscriptions. The one that was set up in the sanctuary of Delphi records how she was given a laurel crown, paid money, granted a share in the sacrifice of goats, and given land, a home free of tax, and asylum for ever (for her family too).<sup>21</sup>

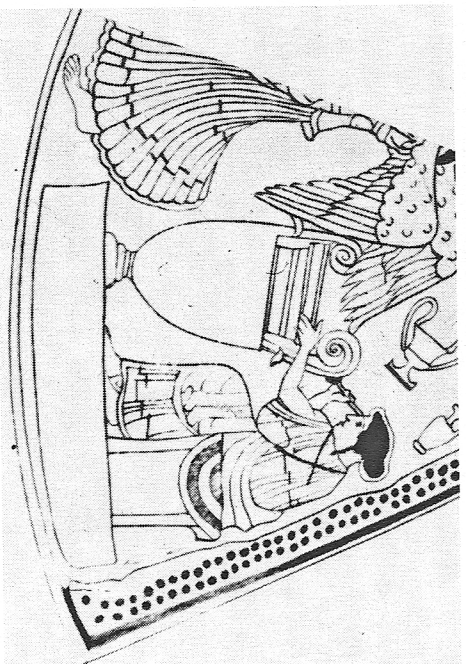


Fig. 2: 3 – “Hydria by the Leningrad Painter” (drawing author’s)

## Pottery

There is only one piece of direct evidence for women making pottery in ancient Athens: a water jar by the Leningrad Painter<sup>22</sup> depicts a vase workshop (pottery or metal plate). In the center, the goddess Athena carries a victory wreath to a youth working on a special drinking cup; he is flanked by two other youths working on pots while they are crowned by winged Nikes. At the right edge, however, a woman, perhaps young, with her hair up in a bun, sits on a platform working on a large volute crater [Fig. 2: 3 – “Hydria in the Polygnotos Group”]; she is, in a literal sense, the overseer of the workshop.

Though there is no other representation of women working on vessels in ancient Greece, many studies have documented the production of pots by women in many cultures, and it is extremely likely that women had a long history of making pottery in Greece.<sup>23</sup> If so, it would seem logical that women would be making the pottery they mostly used, cooking vessels, the water jars, and other women’s vessels; men would be making the pottery used in trade.

Candidates for vessels made by women for women’s use include the “Nikosthenic” pyxis<sup>24</sup> and the alabastron. The Nikosthenic pyxis, a special type of round box with lid, was made to hold jewelry; the scenes on these boxes often depict women. The alabastron is a small, elongated, penis-shaped container for oil, presumably scented oil. While some alabastra depict neutral scenes with women,<sup>25</sup> others refer to sex, rape, and sensuality.<sup>26</sup>

Alabastra that are depicted being used on other vases often refer to sex: women hold one in one hand and a dildo in the other,<sup>27</sup> and they hold them while

22 Marjorie S. Venn, “The Caput Hydria and Working Women in Classical Athens,” *Classical World* 81 (1988): 265–72, argues that “women vase workers in Athens were a perfectly normal sight.”

23 This subject has been explored by several authors; see, for instance, the studies by Elster, Nordquist, and Papadopoulos in *Techné*, edited by Robert Lafinieur and Philip Betancourt (*Aegaeum* 16, Liège: Université de Liège, 1997); Cathy Lynne Cosin, “Exploring the Relationship between Gender and Craft,” *Gender and Archaeology*, edited by Rita P. Wright, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996): 111–140; and Kristina Berggren, “Why Embroider Pottery?” *Journal of Prehistoric Religion* 7 (1993): 8–25.

24 Claire Lyons informs me that many pyxides do seem to have been made for women.

25 E.g., an alabastron in Baltimore (Keuls, 1986 [supra n. 1]: fig. 235) and an alabastron by the Persephone Painter (Joseph V. Noble, *The Techniques of Painted Attic Pottery*, London: Faber and Faber, 1966, fig. 156).

26 The rape of Oreithyia by Boreas on an Etruscan alabastron in Oxford, Mississippi (Shapiro, 1981 [supra n. 4]: no. 7).

27 Martin F. Kinmer, *Greek Erotica on Attic Red-Figure Vases*. (London: Duckworth, 1993): 87. The author mentions a kylix by Epiktetos.

19 Aristophanes, *Ekklesiastuzsa*. 943; Kratinos fragment 153 in *Poetae Comici Graeci*, edited by Rudolf Kassel and Colin Austin (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1983-); Theopompos 51 also in Kassel-Austin; and *Eymologicon Magnum*, 367. 21.

20 Mentioned in an epigram by Hedylos: Athenaeus, 176a.

21 *Inscriptiones Graecae* IX (2) 62; *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*<sup>3</sup>, edited by W. Dittenberger, 532; *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* II, 263.

bargaining with men holding coin bags, presumably to purchase their sexual favors.<sup>28</sup> It is likely, therefore, that alabastra held the special oil used for lubrication during sex,<sup>29</sup> but they are not just associated with autosexual or heterosexual activity; in many instances one woman holds the vessel out to another.

Vases (and other containers) were used as metaphors for women, and there has been much discussion of this theme of "woman as vessel";<sup>30</sup> it has been noted that such containers refer to women in their ability to bear children.<sup>31</sup>

### Sculpture<sup>32</sup>

No woman is ever named as a sculptor, but the concept certainly existed since two vases depict a goddess sculpting: a Nike sculpting a trophy and an Athena sculpting a clay horse.<sup>33</sup>

Since many women dedicated sculptures,<sup>34</sup> surely they commissioned some of these, thereby having a hand in what the product looked like. I regard it quite likely, for instance, that the women's association (*thiasos*), the "Sixteen Women of Elis" who conducted the Heraia games,<sup>35</sup> would have had a say in what their

28 E.g., on a *kalpis* by the Kleophrades Painter (John Boardman, *Athenian Red-Figure Vases. The Archaic Period* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1975] fig. 136).

29 Kentis, 1986 (supra n. 1): 120; Kilmer, 1993 (supra n. 27): 27 and 87.

30 François Lissarrague, "Women, Boxes, Containers: Some Signs and Metaphors," ed. Ellen D. Reeder, *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece* (Baltimore and Princeton: The Walters Art Gallery and Princeton University Press, 1955): 91-101; E. D. Reeder, "Containers and Textiles as Metaphors for Women," *Ibid.*, 195-295.

31 In myth, several women who transgress social taboos (e.g., having children out of wedlock) are shut up in a chest (usually with their children) and cast adrift at sea (e.g., Danaë, Aegë). Once, a man is so treated in the context of a social reversal: when the women of Lemnos kill their husbands, their leader (and eventual queen) princess Hysipylë secures her father King Thoas in a chest and floats him out to sea to land on Chios.

32 For a recent general book on Greek sculpture, see Stewart, 1990 (supra n. 6).

33 A red-figure pelike, the namepiece of the Trophy Painter (*Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* 18, [1920]: 23); and a red-figure chous, the namepiece of the Group of Berlin 2415 (Neils, 1992 [supra n. 3]: fig. 9).

34 I know of no previous attempt to list women dedicators of sculpture and give here only a small sample from my own notes. Pausanias mentions several, some by real women (e.g., a statue dedicated by Nikippë, daughter of Paseas, to Aphrodite Symmachia at Mantinea Pausanias 8.9.6.), and some by mythological women (e.g., wooden statues dedicated at Cape Malea by the Amazons of Themadon in south Russia, Pausanias 3.25.3.). Hedytë dedicated a statue to Artemis at Brauron (Petros G. Themelis, *Brauron, Guide to the Site and Museum*, Athens: Apollo Editions, 1972, figure on p. 33).

35 The Heraia Games consisted of footraces held for women at Olympia in honor of Hera; reorganized in the 580s, the race took place every four years in the Olympic Stadium but the course was shortened by 100 feet. It is likely that the women's games took place at roughly the same time as the men's (perhaps just before) so entire families could go to

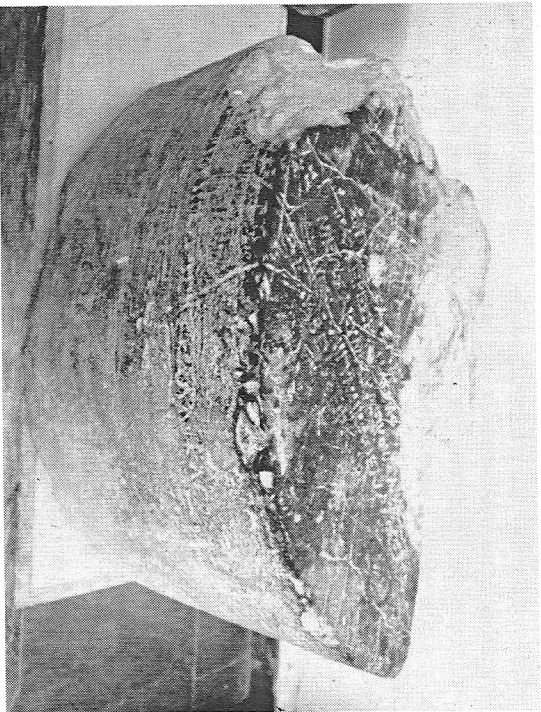
statue group at Olympia looked like. It was (and still is) a noteworthy commission of the fourth century B.C.E.; it consists of two large, semi-circular bases placed in front of the east front of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. Though the group is not mentioned by Pausanias, the two bases probably held eight bronze statues per base of the "Sixteen Women." It is unlikely that these particular statues were portraits of the actual sixteen women at the time of the dedication, but rather were ideal portraits of the mythical first Sixteen Women of Elis who initiated the games, consisting of Hippodameia, the daughter of Oinomaos and wife of Pelops, and her countrywomen. Actual portraits of the Sixteen Women, however, were set up in early Roman imperial times in the front porch of the Temple of Hera,<sup>36</sup> three Flavian statue bases (late first century C.E.) are still there, with inscriptions that name them (Antonina Kleodikê, Klaudia Alkinoua, and Numisia Teisis) and list the honors paid them by the Council of Olympia and the City of Elis "for their virtue and concern," that is, for their benefactions. Earlier actual statues, belonging to the Julio-Claudian period (late first century B.C.E. to early first century C.E.), have also been found in the area and probably also depict some of the Sixteen Women at that time; these portray women draped in the so-called Herculanensis poses signifying their propriety. Since their sculptors signed these statues (Aulos Sextios Eraton of Athens, Eros, and Eleusinius), they should be considered works of significance.

I also think that the four women who won Olympic victories and therefore were allowed to set up portraits of themselves in the sacred area (the Altis) would also have had a say in what their statues looked like. These would be the four women horse-breeders whose chariot teams won chariot races at the Olympic games. Like today, the winners of horse races were the owners, not the jockeys, or, in this case, the charioteers. Little is known about three of these victors; one is anonymous, though Pausanias records that her statue consisted of herself in the chariot with her female charioteer (6.4.10). Another was a certain Belistichê from Macedonia whose group showed her and her pair of foals (Pausanias 5.8.11). A third was the unnamed daughter of Euryon of Sparta who also won the Olympic chariot race with her two horses; her statue, however, was set up in Sparta itself near the famous temple of Athena Chalkothêkê on the acropolis (Pausanias 3.17.6).

both. The *thiasos* (association), "Sixteen Women of Elis," oversaw the games and wove the peplos for Hera. The winners received a bull for sacrifice, a feast, an olive wreath, and the permission to dedicate their painted portraits (more below under painting). Pausanias 5.16.2-3, 6.20.7; Thomas F. Scanlon, *Eros and Greek Athletics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): ch. 4; Nancy Serwint, "Female Athletic Costume at the Heraia," *American Journal of Archaeology* 97 (1993): 403-422.

36 Ernst Curtius and Friedrich Adler, *Olympia. Die Ergebnisse der von dem deutschen Reich veranstalteten Ausgrabungen* (Berlin: A. Ascher and Co., 1892-1897), especially volumes III, 253-254, pls. LXII.6, and LXIII.4 & 5 (Julio-Claudian statues) and V nos. 429, 435, and 438 (Flavian bases).

Fig. 2: 4 – "Statue base for portrait of Kyniska, Olympia" (photo author)



The fourth was the famous Kyniska of Sparta, daughter of King Archidamos (Pausanias 3.8.1, 15.1; 5.12.5; 6.1.6). In the early fourth century she was the first woman to raise horses and the first woman to win with a team at Olympia. She had two statues of herself set up at Olympia, both by the famous sculptor Apelles. One was a bronze group of her horses, under life-sized and placed just inside the front porch of the Temple to Zeus at Olympia on a white marble base (it is still there). Her own portrait, however, was placed by itself on a circular statue base of dark Eleusinian limestone; it survives in the Olympia Museum (L160, dating 390-380 B.C.E.) [Fig. 2: 4 – "Statue Base for Portrait of Kyniska"] with Apelles' signature and part of its famous epigram preserved. Note the triumphant change in the rhythm in the last line when she boasts of her achievement:<sup>37</sup>

My fathers and brothers are kings of Sparta,  
But I won, Kyniska, with a chariot of swift horses,  
And I set up this statue, the only woman,  
I say, of all Greece, I took the crown.

37 The original Greek has three lines of dactylic hexameter and a last line of pentameter. I have tried to indicate this shift in rhythm and emphasis by rendering the first three lines in iambic tetrameter and the last line in trochaic.

## Architecture

We also have no direct evidence for women as architects, but there is evidence for their commissioning architecture and thereby probably having some say in layout and design. First, the concept is not unknown; after the Macedonians destroyed Thebes (335 B.C.E.), the hetaira Phrynê said she would pay for rebuilding the fortifications if they could be inscribed: "Alexander knocked it down, but Phrynê got it back up" (Atheneaus 13.591b).

Artemisia, queen of Caria, commissioned the monumental tomb for her husband Mausolos at Halikarnassos (died 454 B.C.E.); she was following a tradition in Lycia and Caria of women as patrons of tomb building.<sup>38</sup> On the Athens Acropolis in the Augustan period (after 27 B.C.E.) a small rotunda was erected for the cult and statues of Roma and Augustus; this building was co-sponsored by "Pammenes son of Xenon of Marathon," priest of the cult, and "Megistê, daughter of Asklepiades of Halai," priestess of Athena Polias (the main cult of Athena on the Acropolis).<sup>39</sup> The Ionic style of the Rotunda closely imitates that of Athena Polias's temple, the Erechtheion, perhaps reflecting a decision by the priestess Megistê herself (it is usually assumed that Pammenes provided the funding). And the textile merchant, Eunnachia, priestess of Isis, paid for an exhibition hall at Pompeii that uses the Augustan imperial motive of animals among plants in the marble frame of the main door, certainly indicating her high status and perhaps implying her direct involvement in the design of the building.<sup>40</sup>

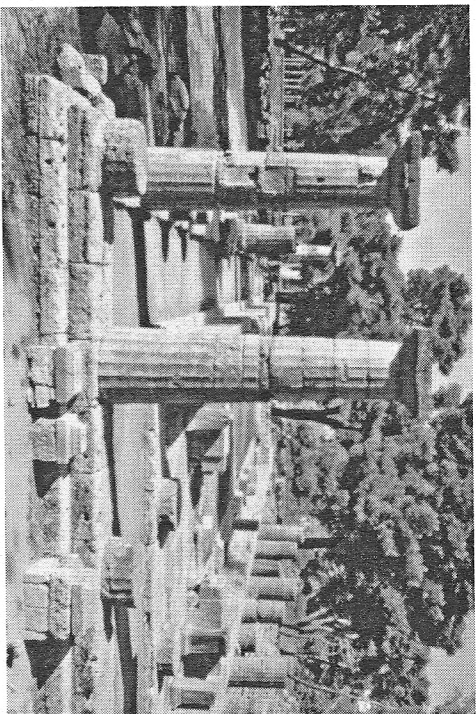
38 I am grateful to Sarah Cornack for introducing me to these late Classical and Hellenistic women-patrons.

39 John Travlos, *Pictorial Gazetteer of Ancient Athens* (New York: Praeger, 1971): 494-495.

40 L. R. Richardson Jr., *Pompeii: An Architectural History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988): 194 - 198. Although her name suggests she is Greek, the inscription over the side door is in Latin; it declares that Eunnachia paid for the building herself.



Fig. 2: 5 – “Niches for women’s portraits, column of the Temple to Hera, Olympia” (photo author)



## Painting

We have much evidence for women painters, especially as portrait painters in both the Greek and Roman periods. The winners of the Heraia Games were permitted to dedicate their painted portraits—these probably went in the niches that still survive in the columns of the temple to Hera [Fig. 2: 5 – “Niches for Women’s Portraits”].<sup>41</sup> Since the niches are small, roughly 20 by 30 centimeters, we can imagine the portraits to be just of heads painted on boards. The early Hellenistic poet Nossis, describes several of these in her four-line epigrams (probably funerary) and attests to their faithfulness to the sitter (*Greek Anthology* 6.353 & 354, 9.605). Here’s one:

This plaque presents the portrait of Thanateté; it well portrays  
her proud demeanor, beauty and gentle gaze.  
To look on you the guardian of the house would wag her tail  
thinking to see its mistress home and hale.  
(*Greek Anthology* 9.605)

The encyclopediast Pliny the Elder (died 79 C.E.) lists several Greek women painters (book 35, chapters 35 & 40), all apparently late Hellenistic: “Timareté,

41 Joan V. O’Brien, *The Transformation of Hera: A Study of Ritual, Hero, and the Goddess in the Iliad* (Boston: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993): ch. 6 and appendix.

the daughter of Mikon the Younger, painted a Diana at Ephesos, one of the very oldest panel-paintings known. Irené, daughter and pupil of the artist Kratinos, painted a girl (now at Eleusis), a Kalypso, an Aged Man, the juggler Theodoros, and Alkisthenés the dancer. Aristareté, daughter and pupil of Nearkhos, painted an Asclepius. Iala of Kyzikos (who always remained single) painted at Rome in the late Republic, both with the brush and with the engraving tool upon ivory, her subjects being female portraits mostly. At Naples, there is a large picture by her, the portrait of an Old Woman; and there is a self-portrait done with the aid of a mirror. There was no painter superior to her for technique, and her artistic skill was so superior that her works sold at much higher prices than those of the most celebrated portrait-painters of her day. One Olympias painted also, but nothing is known of her, except that she had Autouboulos for a pupil.”<sup>42</sup>

Two paintings from Campania, Naples Museum 9017 and 9018, the latter from Pompeii (House of the Surgeon 6.1.110) [Fig. 2: 6 – “Wall Painting from Pompeii”], show women painting portraits.<sup>43</sup>

Fig. 2: 6 – “Wall painting from Pompeii, House of the Surgeon” (photo author)



42 I have revised the standard Loeb translation (Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia*, 10 volumes, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942 - 1963) here of 35.40 and have included with it some explanatory remarks from 35.35.

43 Wolfgang Helbig, *Wandgemälde der vom Vesuv verschütteten Städte Campaniens* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1868): nos. 1443 & 1444, respectively.

## Literature & Philosophy

Much has been written on women as authors,<sup>44</sup> and to avoid repetition, I limit my discussion here to a few observations not usually covered by philologists. First, I would include, as women authors, those who wrote hymns (like Aristodama) and also such women whose voices come through loud and clear in the epigrams associated with them (like Kyniska).

Of women writers, Sappho has received the most attention (cf. Fig. 2: 2);<sup>45</sup> she expresses her love and desire for women and has an impressive and unusual, even arresting, writing style. Nossis, whom I mentioned above, calls herself a second Sappho and has one remarkable poem that could allude to the vagina as a flower:

"Nothing is sweeter than love; success is second place—  
I'll even spit honey from my mouth."

Thus says Nossis. She whom Aphrodité has not favored  
doesn't know what kind of flowers those roses are.

*Greek Anthology* 5.170

Praxilla of Sikyon (early fifth century) was derided in antiquity for her silliness; three lines of a long poem on the death of Adonis (Aphrodité's lover) were often cited as proof of her trivial talent. Having gone to the Underworld, Adonis is asked what he most misses in life, and he answers:

I miss most the light of the sun,  
second the bright stars and face of the moon,  
and then good cucumbers, apples, and pears.

*Zenobius, Proverbs* 4.2

44 Collections and translations of the fragments of Greek and Roman women writers can be found in the following recent works: Josephine Balmer, *Classical Women Poets* (Melsham: Bloodaxe Books, 1996); Diane Raynor, *Sappho's Lyre. Archaic Lyric and Women Poets of Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); and Jane M. Snyder, *The Woman and the Lyre. Women Writers in Classical Greece and Rome* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989). Little, however, has been written on the few women who were also philosophers. These would include Diotima of Mantinea, who Socrates says was influential on his thinking (Plato, *Symposium* 201d-204c). Pericles's mistress, Aspasia of Miletos, was well known for her rhetorical skills: she conversed with Socrates (Cicero, *De Inventione* 31.51), taught rhetoric, and wrote a funeral oration and dialogues on love (Plato, *Menexenos* 236b scholia 235e). Included amongst the Platonic circle were the women Axiothea of Phloesia and Lasthenia of Mantinea.

45 For a brief account and bibliography, see my discussion of her in my book, *Sex in the Ancient World A-Z* (New York & London: Routledge, 2004): 207-211.

It was the inclusion of cucumbers (*siktious*) that brought the ridicule, but if we are charitable, then we should read "siktious" as a pun on the name of her native city, Sikyon, and thus a clever allusion to home.

Another poet who has not received much attention is Corinna of Tanagra in Boeotia (traditionally, early fifth century, but her poems sound later).<sup>46</sup> She was said to have won a prize over Pindar, she wrote in the Aeolic dialect, and she was the subject of some portraits, both painted (at Pompeii, along with her teacher Myrtis and her rival Pindar)<sup>47</sup> and sculpted (Argos Museum 8). Along with a couple of long fragments of epic poems on local heroes (including Orion), come two poems (attested only in a late prose epitome) that are addressed to young girls: the two poems resemble Grimm fairy tales. One, the Shuttle Maidens, warns of what might happen to young girls who prefer to stay at their loom weaving rather than go to the local all-women's festival in honor of Dionysos (the god visits those two girls and "inspires" them to commit suicide); the other, the Daughters of Minyas, praises the civic loyalty of young girls by honoring two who sacrificed themselves when their city was faced with a plague.

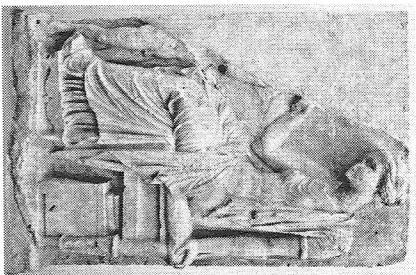
Finally, there is a tombstone from Thespieae, near Tanagra [Fig. 2: 7 — "Tombstone of Woman Author"], that depicts a woman writer; it is dated to the end of the fourth century. She sits on a backless chair gesturing to her small son. Below her chair is a basket-shaped box on which rest a couple of scrolls, books.<sup>48</sup> If this is not the tombstone of Corinna it commemorates another Boeotian woman author whose name we do not yet have the privilege of knowing.

46 John M. Edmonds, *Lyra Graeca* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1927), III: 6-39; John G. Younger, "Korinna's 'Shuttle Maidens' and 'Daughters of Minyas': proptreptic Myths for good Boeotian girls," <http://www.apaclassics.org/AnnualMeeting/03mtg/abstracts/younger.html>.

47 Pompeii houses 14.5.25, 6.14.38 and 43 (Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli, *Pompei: Pitture e mosaici*; Rome: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 1990-2003).

48 S. Karouzou, *National Archaeological Museum. Collection of Sculpture: A Catalogue* (Athens: General Direction of Antiquities and Restoration, 1968): 107, NMA 817.

Fig. 2-7 – "Tombstone of Woman Author, from Thespieae, Boeotia" (photo author)



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## Penelope's Perspective: How Greek Women Poets Translate the Classics

Gail Holst-Warhaft

To understand Greek women writers one has to read first the men, and to understand the men, one has to read the Classics. Modern Greek poetry and prose from Solomos to Cavafy to Elytis is a reactive literature, much of it a reaction to the burden of the classical past. In some sense what nineteenth- and twentieth-century poets were doing is translating the poetry of Antiquity into a new idiom -- writing, like Kazantzakis, a sequel to the revered literature of the past. Nationalism and a desire to establish a continuous tradition with the past may have inspired some of these writers, but others wrote against the past: half resenting the burden of the classical like Seferis ("I awoke with this marble head in my hands and I don't know where to lay it down") and half determined to undermine the prestige of the hallowed texts by ironic or irreverent new readings.

With the exception of Cavafy, the great figures of twentieth-century Greek poetry -- Solomos, Sikelianos, Elytis, Kazantzakis, Seferis, Ritsos, Varnalis -- were all living in a new nation at a time of violence, privation and forced emigration. The Homeric poems and tragedy were irresistible models, as was the Bible, an equally hallowed text on which they drew heavily. For these poets, the classical became a painful metaphor for the modern: "Wherever I travel," as Seferis said, "Greece wounds me."<sup>1</sup> And Elytis, in his magestic "Axion Esti" says "Ti glossa mou edossan elimiki/ to spiti ftohiko sits amoundies tou Omirou"<sup>2</sup> (The language they gave me: Greek/ the house on Homer's shores: poor). Kimon Friar, the great translator of modern Greek poetry, made the claim that

"The Western world has made Greek myth part of its culture, but only the Greek himself, of whatever time, may use it with validity, not as the trappings of an outmoded religion, but as symbols still alive in the memory and emotions of the people."<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not one agrees with him, it is true that the writers who speak a language that is closely related to ancient Greek and who live in a landscape where almost every toponym has a connection to Antiquity feel the presence of this tradition in a particular and immediate way.

For women poets, the task of creating a new language of poetry was still more difficult. Like their male counterparts, they were burdened by a classical

1 "In the manner of George Seferis," *Piimata, 1986-1996* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1999): 99.  
 2 Odysseas Elytis, *Axion Esti* (Athens: Ikaros, 1959): 28.  
 3 Kimon Friar, ed., *Modern Greek Poetry* (Athens: Efsathiadis, 1982): 25.