

HOW THE ASPIS LOCKED CITIZEN-SOLDIERS IN AND OTHERS OUT. AN ESSAY¹

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Summary: This essay builds on two papers by Mogens Herman Hansen (2008; 2010), which both used mechanisms of exclusion, particularly regarding women and foreigners, to illuminate the nature of civic belonging in the *polis*. Expanding this approach, the essay asks why the Greeks, and especially, it seems, the Athenians, developed unusually formalised practices of inclusion and exclusion. The author's interest arises from a comparison between modern Denmark and Switzerland, where women obtained enfranchisement fifty years apart. For the author, this gap shows that the ideal of the citizen-soldier tends to exclude the political participation of other groups.² Hansen himself used the Swiss *Landsgemeinden* as the only historical parallel to Athenian democracy,³ but he did not address their exclusionary nature. I will examine how solidarity and citizenship were constructed through boundary-making, analysing the symbolic, material, and institutional mechanisms by which Athenian civic identity was created and maintained.

- 1 I was fortunate to receive teaching and professional guidance from Hansen from the moment I began to study at the then *Institut for Græsk og Latin* (later *Saxo-Instituttet*) in September 1992 until June 2018. For me, as for so many others, he was far more than an inspiring teacher and distinguished scholar: his combination of intellectual rigour, generosity, and humour has remained a constant guide until today. This article is offered as a modest token of gratitude for a presence that endures beyond his passing. I am grateful to the editors of this volume in Mogens' honour and to the reviewers for their numerous suggestions and improvements.
- 2 Women's suffrage was introduced in Denmark in 1908 for municipal and in 1915 for parliamentary elections. In Switzerland, female federal suffrage came only in 1971, and the last *Landsgemeinde* canton to allow women to enter the open-air assembly, Appenzell Innerrhoden, did so as late as 1991, and only because the Swiss Federal Supreme Court had ruled that denying them the vote was unconstitutional.
- 3 Hansen 1991: 10.

Introduction

Mogens Herman Hansen was one of the foremost scholars of Athenian institutions and Greek constitutions. Although his primary interest lay in political rather than social history, he approached questions of civic identity with the same encyclopaedic command and Aristotelian concern for definition that characterised his work on institutions. In 2008, he gave a paper entitled 'The Position of Women in the *Polis*, with Particular Reference to Classical Athens' at an interdisciplinary symposium organised by Phrontisterium, the Classical students' association at the Saxo Institute, and published it shortly thereafter in *AIGIS*.⁴ The article is important for Hansen's use of the issue of women to probe a more fundamental problem: what it meant, in institutional and conceptual terms, to belong to the *polis*. His paper closed with a paradoxical question of broader theoretical scope, to which he ventured only a tentative and preliminary answer:

'Already the ancient Greeks' had a negative and patronizing view of women and their place in the state – a view that has dominated our culture right up to the present day. As a whole, women were disenfranchised and excluded from politics until the beginning of the 20th century. But there is one curious exception: queens. At the same time as it was claimed that women lacked understanding of the state and society and could not be trusted with power and influence, powerful queens were accepted as rulers across Europe: Margaret I of Denmark; Isabella of Aragon; Catherine de' Medici; Elizabeth I of England; Christina of Sweden; Maria Theresa of Austria and Catherine II of Russia, to name but a few. There has never been any doubt that all these queens were skilled and highly competent rulers. I have always been struck by the jarring contradiction between the belief that politics cannot be entrusted to women, and the respect accorded to these queens and their political acumen. We also encounter such queens in antiquity – but not in archaic or classical Greece. I can mention Olympias of Epirus, mother of Alexander the Great; Artemisia of Halicarnassus, who ruled Karia after the death of Mausolos and Kleopatra of Egypt. All of

4 Hansen 2008. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

these queens belong to the periphery and to the Hellenistic period, not to classical Greece. Why not? Perhaps because the *poleis* were republics, not monarchies – with the exception of Sparta. Without kingdoms, no queens.

Hansen thus highlighted a paradox: in archaic and classical Greece, women were excluded from politics and from political office on the assumption that they lacked full rational deliberative capacity. Yet history, both ancient and modern, offers numerous examples of respected and competent female rulers. Hansen's explanation was simple: republics without kings had no thrones for queens to occupy. In a footnote, he remarked that, so far as he knew, this question had never been properly addressed, and that it would make an excellent topic for a PhD thesis.⁵ Eighteen years later, the paradox remains largely unexamined. While I do not attempt to provide a full answer here, some progress may be made through an analysis of the exclusion of women together with that of metics and non-Greeks. This comparative perspective guides the discussion that follows, adopting a structural approach that focuses on oppositional logics: noble/commoner, male/female, citizen/metic, Greek/barbarian, through which the Greeks articulated political belonging.⁶

Hansen himself approached a closely related problem in a separate paper, 'Greeks and Barbarians', likewise first presented at a Phrontisterium symposium.⁷ The essay dovetails with 'The Position of Women in the *Polis*' in treating exclusion as constitutive of Greek identity. Hansen argued that the opposition between Greek and non-Greek was gradually sharpened over time: Homer never uses the word *barbaroi*, which seems to appear only when the Greeks began to define themselves more sharply in opposition to the Persians. The decisive ethnic criterion was linguistic: speaking Greek meant being a Hellene, while speaking any other language marked one as *barbaros*, a speaker of sounds unintelligible to Greek

5 Hansen 2008: 10 n. 10.

6 Weiberg 2024: 31 *et passim* cautions against the uncritical use of binary classifications as sociological models. In the present discussion, however, I employ such categories only as heuristic devices, and only inasmuch as they reflect the logic of Greek civic language and institutional practice, which frequently articulate themselves through sharply drawn oppositions; cf. e.g. Cartledge 1998: 57 and 2009: 4-5.

7 Hansen 2010.

ears. The Persian Wars of 490 and 480-479 BC intensified this division, crystallising the literary *topos* of 'the barbarian', which was ideological rather than descriptive. This sharp contrast found its most systematic expression a century and a half later in Aristotle's political anthropology, where the opposition between Greeks and barbarians is no longer merely cultural or historical but embedded in a normative theory of political capacity and natural hierarchy.⁸

Hansen's two papers point toward a broader analytical possibility which he himself did not fully pursue: if exclusion structured Greek identity externally, in the opposition between Greek and barbarian, it may also have structured civic identity internally, within the *polis*, in the differentiation between male and female, citizen and non-citizen. Rather than treating women as a special case, this essay therefore considers women, metics, and non-Greeks together as analytically parallel forms of exclusion. The question is not whether these groups participated in social, economic or religious life, the first two of them demonstrably did, but how the *polis* drew and enforced the line that separated full political subjects from those who remained structurally outside. Exclusion seems to emerge as a constitutive mechanism through which civic solidarity and political identity were produced and maintained.

Needless to say, Hansen was not the first to notice the marginalisation of women, non-citizens, and non-Greeks, both in social practice and in civic representation. From the mid-1970s onwards, Greek women became the subject of systematic analysis. Sarah B. Pomeroy's *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (1975) marked a decisive turning point, after which feminist and gender-historical scholarship examined the position of Greek women in general, and Athenian women – and later men – in particular. Around the same time, the position of the foreigners emerged as a distinct field of enquiry. In *The Ideology of the Athenian Metic* (1977), David Whitehead demonstrated that, although the Athenians depended heavily on their resident foreigners for labour, trade, and military service, they nonetheless excluded them from civic membership through special taxes, legal disabilities, and ritual restrictions. Thus, metic status was a structurally indispensable yet politically marginal condition within the democratic *polis*.

8 Hansen 2010: 7-9 with n. 19, with reference to Arist. *Pol.* 1327b16-28a16.

Parallel developments occurred in the study of Greek representations of non-Greeks. In *Orientalism* (1978) Edward W. Said traced modern Western constructions of the 'Orient' back to classical antiquity, arguing that cultural representation operates as a form of power by generating stylised and hierarchical images of the 'other'. Greek depictions of Persians were later disseminated through canonical school texts in the educational traditions of modern imperial Europe and North America, becoming part of the Western self-definition. Translating this theoretical model devised outside the field of Classics, Edith Hall in *Inventing the Barbarian* (1989) showed that the literary and iconographic figure of the barbarian in ancient Greece was indeed not an objective depiction of the Persians, but rather a rhetorical construct of Greek identity. This line of enquiry was further developed by Jonathan M. Hall in *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (2002), which shifted the emphasis from the exclusion of the 'other' to the contingent processes of Greek self-image, demonstrating how language, descent, and cult served as fluid criteria for belonging, sharpened in the crucible years after the Persian Wars.

These topics did not emerge in a vacuum but became thinkable as research problems only once analogous issues had become socially and politically salient in the present. As the Italian intellectual and politician Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) famously observed, "ogni vera storia è storia contemporanea."⁹ Scholarly inquiry inevitably reflects the preoccupations of its own age and cannot meaningfully anticipate debates that don't exist in the wider society. An illustration of this dynamic is the fact that Athenian democracy itself only emerged as a major research field, owing in no small part to the work of Hansen, in the context of the student and worker mobilisations of May 1968 in Paris, which challenged inherited hierarchies of authority, knowledge, and legitimacy within European universities and societies.

Since around 1990, studies of Attic oratory, Greek inscriptions, curse tablets and legal papyri have increasingly shown women appearing as independent actors and decision-makers in economic and household

9 Croce 1920: 4 for the citation in Italian. By this he meant that, ideally, history is not about the past itself, but about the past as it is understood and made meaningful in the present.

contexts, both within the *oikos*, at the market and even in the courts.¹⁰ Moreover, women played central and publicly visible roles in religious life, participating in festivals, rituals, and cult offices integral to the civic calendar.¹¹ The traditional image of the secluded Athenian women, strongly promoted in Greek philosophical writing and normative elite discourse, is now widely recognised as an idealised marker of status and respectability rather than a description of social reality across all levels of society.

A comparable revision has taken place in the study of metics. Recent scholarship has qualified the earlier picture of marginalisation by drawing attention to the social and religious contexts in which metics could and actually did participate in civic life, even while remaining excluded from citizenship. Sara Wijma, for example, has examined the involvement of metics in state cults and public rituals, highlighting forms of integration that have hitherto largely been overlooked.¹² Overall, the evidence points to a persistent tension between social participation and formal political exclusion. Women and metics were deeply embedded in economic, religious, and neighbourhood life, yet remained institutionally excluded from the political community. This disjunction was structural rather than accidental; it was rooted in the way the *polis* defined political membership. The key issue, therefore, concerns the mechanisms through which a community maintained sharp symbolic and institutional distinctions amid the dense social integration of daily life. To approach this problem, we must shift attention from social practice to civic self-definition: from what people did to the classificatory and normative frameworks, above all legislation and literature, through which political belonging was constructed and enforced.

10 See, e.g. Foxhall 1989 and 1996, both masterful reviews of select examples from Classical Greek literature illustrating Athenian women's active roles within household and society, despite their relative invisibility in formal legal and political documentation. *Politides*, the feminine form of *politai* (citizens), possessed legal status (1996: 139), could appear in court (1996: 140), could legally own land (1996: 141), and often triggered disputes that ultimately reached the courts (1996: 141). They were not entirely excluded from the world of law but engaged with it continuously, acting knowingly and effectively through male intermediaries (1996: 154).

11 See, e.g. Cartledge 2016: 137.

12 Wijma 2014.

Civic Classification and the Logic of Exclusion in Classical Athens

One way to approach this logic is through normative statements that show particularly clearly how Athenians conceptualised gender, household and political reproduction. A notably clear formulation appears in Apollodoros' speech *Against Neaira* (Ps.-Dem. 59.122), where the ordinary meaning of 'living with a woman' is explained in strictly civic terms:

τὸ γὰρ συνοικεῖν τοῦτ' ἔστιν, ὃς ἂν παιδοποιῇται καὶ εἰσάγῃ εἰς τε τοὺς φράτερας καὶ δημότας τοὺς υἱεῖς, καὶ τὰς θυγατέρας ἐκδιδῶ ὡς αὐτοῦ οὔσας τοῖς ἀνδράσιν. τὰς μὲν γὰρ ἐταίρας ἡδονῆς ἔνεκ' ἔχομεν, τὰς δὲ παλλακὰς τῆς καθ' ἡμέραν θεραπείας τοῦ σώματος, τὰς δὲ γυναῖκας τοῦ παιδοποιεῖσθαι γνησίως καὶ τῶν ἔνδον φύλακα πιστὴν ἔχειν.

'Living with a woman' means, after all, that a man has children with her and introduces his sons to the members of his phratry and deme, and he gives his daughters away to be married, presenting them as his own. We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure, concubines for meeting our bodily needs day-by-day, but wives for having legitimate children and to be trustworthy guardians of our household.

Translation (slightly modified) by V. Bers (2003)

This frequently quoted passage is instructive in several respects. It portrays the Athenian citizen father as the sole intermediary between biological and civic reproduction, emphasising that he alone has the power to transform his offspring into political members through acts of registration and recognition. It also assigns different civic trajectories to his sons and daughters, thereby embedding gender hierarchy directly in the mechanisms of political continuity. Furthermore, it categorises women as belonging to three functional groups, each defined solely by the services they provide to male citizens.¹³ The passage reveals a classification

13 The passage also reveals, almost inadvertently, the extent of the agency and responsibility attributed to citizen women. As 'trustworthy guardians of the household', wives appear not merely as bearers of legitimate children but as active stewards of the *oikos* on which the *polis* depended. Their management of household resources,

scheme through which the civic order itself appears to have been conceived and stabilised, at least ideally, rather than merely expressing misogynistic attitudes. A further question is why this logic of differentiation seems to have been so central to Greek civic self-definition. In other words, why were the Greeks – and especially the Athenians – so invested in maintaining clear distinctions between political insiders and outsiders? To address this, we must move beyond individual cases and consider broader structural patterns, briefly venturing into the realm of Greek political symbolism.

Zeus' Daughter and Mythologies of Exclusion

If exclusion lay at the heart of Greek civic identity, the myth of Athena's birth offers a revealing illustration. Although Hesiod is conventionally dated to around 700–650 BC, his works were probably first committed to writing under the Peisistratids (546–510 BC).¹⁴ The form in which the myth survives therefore reflects a long process of oral transmission and continual reworking. Hesiod's version of Athena's birth is as follows: (*Theog.* 886–900):

Zeus as king of the gods made Metis his first wife,
the wisest among gods and mortal men.
But when she was about to give birth to the pale-eyed goddess
Athena, he tricked her deceitfully with cunning words
deceived her mind and put her away in his belly
on the advice of Earth and starry Heaven.
They advised him in this way so that no other of the gods,
the eternal fathers, should have the royal station instead of Zeus.
For from Metis it was destined that clever children should be born:
First a pale-eyed daughter, Tritogeneia,
with courage and sound counsel equal to her father's,
and then a son she was to bear, king of

protection of its integrity, and role in ensuring the orderly transmission of status formed an indispensable, if often unacknowledged, component of civic life.

14 Skaife Jensen 2011: 295.

gods and men, one proud of heart.

But Zeus put her away in his belly first,

so that the goddess could advise him of what was good or bad

Translation M.L. West (1988)

The scene depicted is familiar from literary and visual traditions, above all vase-paintings showing Athena springing fully armed from Zeus' head. Yet our familiarity with the topic risks obscuring its strangeness: a goddess conceived in her mother's womb, developing within her father and emerging fully grown from his skull (*Theog.* 924). This represents a cultural construction that calls for explanation. We must therefore ask what social logic could generate such a story, and what function it served in the form in which it has come down to us. Why, in Hesiod's version, is the swallowing of Metis made so central?

In the *Iliad* (5.875), Zeus is simply said to have 'born' Athena. During the first half of the sixth century, Stesichoros (*PMG* fr. 233) is reported to have introduced Hephaistos' intervention at Athena's birth, while in the early fifth, Pindar (*Ol.* 7.35-37) provides the earliest preserved literary mention of Hephaistos splitting Zeus' head open with a bronze axe.¹⁵ In some accounts, Eileithyia, the goddess of childbirth, is present to assist Zeus. These scattered elements – the swallowing of Metis, Hephaistos' blow, the presence of divine midwives, the armed epiphany, only gradually coalesced into the canonical narrative handed down to us by later mythographers, such as Apollodoros (1.3.2).

Athena's Birth: Comparative, Structuralist and Gendered Readings.

Over the past half-century, the myth of Athena's birth has been analysed through comparative and gender-political lenses. Walter Burkert traced its Near-East parallels, especially in the Hittite *Kumarbi* cycle, while emphasising the distinctly Greek transformation of this material, i.e. the

15 *Schol. ad Apollon. Rhod.* 4.1310 (Wendel) attributes the intervention of Hephaistos to Stesichoros, perhaps simply because Stesichoros was the earliest source to mention this motif that the scholiast knew.

bond between Zeus and Athena and the erasure of Metis as Athena's mother.¹⁶ Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant interpreted Metis as a form of feminine power appropriated and contained by Zeus.¹⁷ Nicole Loraux then read Athena's birth as a symbolic charter for the exclusion of women from the civic community of the *polis*,¹⁸ a claim later reinforced by Jean-Bertrand Bonnard's notion of the 'Zeus complex', in which male paternity asserts an exclusive claim to creativity.¹⁹

If we follow Loraux and Bonnard, the myth of Athena's birth acquires a political dimension, in which female generativity was seen as underwriting male civic authority. Athena emerges as a paradoxical figure, female in form and nature, but structurally detached from womanhood and maternity, and more aligned with paternal authority. Aristophanes is already attuned to this cultural tension. In *The Birds*, he mocks the idea of a 'well-ordered city' governed by an armed goddess while a man sits at the loom (826-31),²⁰ playfully inverting the alignment between martial authority and male identity. Athena's unnatural birth made her available as a potent political symbol: female in form, yet one in which maternity is effectively excluded in favour of patrilineal continuity.²¹ For classical Athenians, this myth may have legitimised their community imagined as self-generated and grounded in patrilineal continuity.

16 Burkert 1985: 142-43. Rutherford 2018: 12-13 notes striking parallels between Hesiod's *Theogony* and 'The Song of Coming Forth' from Hittite mythology.

17 Detienne & Vernant 1974: 29, 169-77.

18 Loraux 1981: 25-47.

19 Bonnard 2004: 25-64.

20 Aristophanes' *Birds* (826-31): "And just how can the *polis* remain well disciplined, where a god born a woman stands there wearing a full armour, while Kleisthenes plies a spindle?" Transl. Henderson 1999. See Hurwit 1999: 239, for a commentary.

21 For the special relationship between the Athenians and Athena, see Hurwit 1999: 10-11.

The Iconographic Evidence

a. Pithos with relief, 700-675 BC. Archaeological Museum of Tenos. *LIMC* "Athena" no. 360. Sources: *LIMC* (text); *Wikimedia*, s.v. "Tenos" (photograph). © Wikimedia Commons.

b. Shield band, 630-600 BC. Museum of Olympia. Inv. B1911. *LIMC* "Athena" no. 361. Source: *LIMC* (text and drawing). © Cornelsen Verlag. Reproduction authorized by the publisher.

c. Shield band, 600-550 BC. Museum of Olympia. Inv. B1975. *LIMC* 362. Source: *LIMC* (text and drawing). © Cornelsen Verlag. Reproduction authorized by the publisher.



Fig. 1

The earliest representation of Athena's birth appears on the Tenos pithos (Fig. 1a), ca. 700-675 BC: Zeus seated, flanked by figures perhaps identifiable as Hephaistos and Eileithyia, with a winged Athena emerging from his head. The Tenos pithos offers both the earliest 'birth from the head' motif in Greece and the only known instance in which a newborn winged Athena is depicted.²² This feature may reflect Oriental influence, since

²² A winged Athena figures on the west frieze of the Treasury of the Siphnians in Delphi, ca. 530 BC; cf. Pedley 2012: 163, and as Athena Nike on gold staters coined by Agathocles of Syracuse (317-289 BC); cf. de Lisle 2017: 11 and 19.

wings are a common attribute in the iconography of Near Eastern divinities. Without proving Near Eastern origin for the myth, it aligns well with the Eastern comparanda.

After a gap of several decades, the motif reappears in iconography around 630-600 BC (figs. 1b-1c), now unmistakably Greek and martial.²³ Athena is armed, wingless and integrated into hoplite visual culture: helmet, spear, aegis and shield. Roughly half of all early depictions (fifteen of some thirty) are from bronze reliefs on shield bands dedicated to Zeus at Olympia.²⁴ The concentration of shield-band suggests a Peloponnesian origin for the armed-birth motif, even though it later becomes quintessentially Athenian.²⁵ By the late sixth and early fifth centuries, Athenian workshops and civic projects (e.g. coins, Acropolis dedications) anchor Athena's birth firmly within Athenian political iconography.²⁶

23 Cf. Gdańsk Decorated Armour Database (dad.ug.edu.pl/database/) nos. SB24 and SB17. *DAD* does not provide bibliographical references, but see Biers 1990: 185 and Johnson 2004: 197 for short commentaries on B1975.

24 *LIMC* inventories twenty representations of Athena's birth (*LIMC* 343-62), the majority deriving from Attic vases, except notably a Corinthian *pinax* from 550-500 BC and a fresco from Elis (6th cent.). None of these post-date 460 BC. The strong preponderance of Attic material should be treated with caution, since both production and survival of Greek vases are skewed towards Athenian examples. Numerical over-representation is therefore not decisive, even if the overall concentration remains suggestive when considered alongside the broader visual and civic context. *LIMC* no. 359 is a lost, undated and unlocated fresco. *DAD* (cf. n. 22) inventories fifteen 'birth of Athena' on shield bands alone, distributing them chronologically as follows: 636-600 BC (4), 600-575 BC (3), 575-550 BC (3), 550-525 BC (3), 525-550 BC (2).

25 Kunze 1950: 77-82; Brommer 1961: 66.

26 Hurwit 1999: 29-34, 112-13, 177-79. Johnson 2004: 249-56, on the Athenian appropriation and civic monumentalisation of the myth.



a. Tetradrachm of the “owl” type c. 510–500 BC.

Obverse: Head of Athena right wearing Attic helmet with raised crest, beaded necklace and earring

Reverse (not shown): Incuse field: owl standing right, head facing. Legend AΘE. Upper left: olive spray.

Wikimedia commons.



b. “Mourning Athena.” Relief from the Acropolis. Parian marble, c. 470 BC. H.: 0.48 m. Acropolis Museum, Athens. Inv. no. 695.

Plaster cast. Private collection. © Bjørn Paarmann.

Fig. 2

Athena had long been Athens’ patron goddess, but her political visibility increased sharply in the decades around the turn of the sixth century. Under the Peisistratids, civic coinage favoured aristocratic and agonistic imagery in form of horses, chariots and wheels. Around 510–500 BC, however, with the establishment of democracy (508/7),²⁷ Athenian silver coinage adopted the head of Athena and the owl as civic types (Fig. 2a), marking the first sustained effort to present the goddess as the visual emblem of the citizen body. This is indicated by the legend of the tetradrachm (fig. 2a): (νόμισμα τῶν) Ἀθη(ναίων), i.e. “coin of the Athenians.”

27 As Cartledge 2009: 62, rightly stresses, Kleisthenes’ reforms did not amount to a fully-fledged democracy; even so, they constituted a significant advance toward the development of democratic institutions. For evidence of collective decision-making in the early period, see Cartledge 2009: 61–62; cf. also Cartledge 2016: 74.

A generation later, this new focus found monumental expression. Around 470 BC, after the Persian destruction of the Acropolis, the uninscribed relief known as the *Mourning Athena* (Fig. 2b) was erected.²⁸ The goddess, identifiable by helmet and spear, leans toward a stele to the right.²⁹ Whether mourning or reflective – *la Athéna pensive/die sinnende Athena* – the figure distils civic identity into a female divine body, a *polias* par excellence.³⁰ The relief thus exemplifies the Athenians' progressive anchoring of political self-definition in the figure of their patron goddess. At the same time, it exposes a deeper ideological tension: a female deity embodies a civic order from which mortal women were institutionally excluded, and in which reproductive and marital functions associated with femininity were symbolically detached from the sphere of political representation.

Bonnard's observation that motherless divinities occupy an ambivalent sexual register is especially apt here. Athena's gendered ambiguity made it possible to imagine the Athenian *polis* as self-generated and symbolically closed, while retaining a female divine figure at its centre.³¹ The convergence between this mythic configuration and the emerging visual language of hoplite citizenship – both grounded in disciplined, male solidarity – offers a productive bridge from symbolic exclusion to the institutional and military structures that formalised it.

28 Pedley 2012 for discussion p. 238 and photo p. 239, fig. 7.46.

29 The rectangle has been interpreted as a monument bearing the names of the war dead; *pace* Bloedow 1999: 30. Casualty lists begin to appear around 500 BC, so such an interpretation is chronologically possible. However, the stele cannot have carried a decree, since profane inscriptions are unattested before the late 430s.

30 Hurwit 2004: 150.

31 Bonnard 2004: 67 n. 218.

The Hoplite Phalanx: A Technical and Social Transformation of the Archaic Society

A decisive military innovation in Archaic Greece was the double-gripped *aspis*, first attested c. 700 BC.³² By transferring most of the weight to the forearm through a bronze band (*porpax*) and stabilising the shield with a handgrip near the rim (*antilabe*), the new design enabled warriors to carry and hold steady a substantially larger shield than before. By approximately 675 BC, this shield had spread across the Greek world together with helmet, cuirass, greaves, spear and sword. Greeks now fought in close order: each man's *aspis* protected the exposed right flank of his comrade to the left, locking the men into an interdependent formation. The shield's dimensions and weight, together with the discipline required to maintain position, suppressed individual display in favour of the steadiness of the whole phalanx.

It is often argued that the hoplite phalanx operated within largely unspoken conventions and was not ideally suited to Greece's varied terrain. Awareness of these limitations is already attested in Herodotos (7.9), who has the Persian commander Mardonios criticise the Greeks for choosing open and level ground agreed upon in advance, rather than exploiting stratagem or terrain. In this portrayal, likely reflecting ideas familiar to Herodotos' contemporaries, hoplite warfare does indeed appear formalised. Some scholars have therefore interpreted the rise and diffusion of the phalanx as driven more by ideology than by efficiency.³³ Yet despite its apparent limitations, the phalanx was the most effective infantry system available, and its conventions no more restrictive than those governing early modern line infantry. Moreover, Greek battle descriptions mention numerous instances of surprise attack, deception, tactical op-

32 Cartledge 2013: 77. For a description of the *aspis*, its development and advantages, cf. Schwartz 2009: 32-38. For the idea that the shield constituted the centre piece of hoplite warfare, see Schwartz 2009: 13.

33 Cartledge 2013: 78-79 with n. 19 argues that civic ideology, rather than efficiency alone, may have contributed to the large-scale adoption of the hoplite phalanx. Pace Schwartz 2009: 156 and 230, who emphasises the phalanx's operational efficiency, pointing to the remarkable duration of its use, in his view 750-338 BC.

portunism, and skilful use of terrain – facts that challenge the romanticised model of ritualised set-piece duel.³⁴ Within its operative limits, the phalanx proved highly effective, and its diffusion is best explained by military performance rather than by civic ideology. However, once the phalanx became embedded in the political culture of the *poleis*, it proved resistant to change. Citizen-soldiers, bound by ritual expectations and an ethos of continuity, seem to have been reluctant to reconsider inherited forms of fighting. Thus, while civic ideology did not cause the emergence and diffusion of the phalanx, it probably contributed to the ossification of the system once established. Major tactical reforms – lengthening the spear into the *sarissa*, reducing shield size, integrating cavalry and light troops, and instituting year-round drill – arose instead under Philip II and Alexander, whose combined-arms innovations far surpassed the Classical hoplite model.

The widespread adoption of hoplite warfare acted as a catalyst for broader social and political reorganisation. Earlier scholarship conceptualised this development as a ‘hoplite revolution’, though modern critics have complicated this picture.³⁵ Even so, the emergence of a sizeable body of men capable of equipping themselves, training together, and maintaining disciplined close-order combat constituted a functional ‘middling stratum’, distinguished both from poorer citizens whose participation in the hoplite phalanx was possible but intermittent and from elites who still defined themselves through mounted warfare. To be clear, Greek society was already governed by men before the phalanx; the formation did not create male dominance. It intensified and formalised it by grounding civic identity in a disciplined, exclusively male formation whose effectiveness depended on mutual bodily interdependence. Although women had always remained outside the political sphere, the consolidation of hoplite warfare sharpened their marginalisation by linking political capacity directly to embodied military function. The

34 Schwartz 2009: 178, 181, 201.

35 Pritchard 2007: 337–38 rightly rejects the older determinist claim that hoplite warfare inevitably produced democracy, arguing that the link between military practice and political change was far more complex. Hall 2014, in the sub-chapter ‘A hoplite revolution?’ (165–73), outlines the historiographical debate and discusses arguments for and against it.

phalanx thus operated not merely as a tactical system but as a gendered institution: it structured collective identity through the physical solidarity of armed men and reinforced the exclusion of those unable to participate in its discipline. Yet while scholarship has long examined the military and political implications of the phalanx, it has paid comparatively little attention to the exclusionary mechanisms that this homosocial organisation introduced. The *polis* became, in effect, a men's club: solidaristic internally but sharply demarcated externally.³⁶ This dynamic of solidarity-through-exclusion forms the core of the analysis that follows.

Aristocratic Openness vs Hoplite Exclusion

Hesiod gives voice to this exclusionary logic in the form of myth. In both *Theogony* and *Works and Days* women appear as secondary and dangerous. The Golden Age had been woman-free; then came Pandora, crafted by Hephaistos and sent by Zeus as a "beautiful evil" (*Op.* 80-81). Wives are likened to drones, consuming men's labour while producing nothing (*Op.* 702-705). The female principle is presented chiefly as an unavoidable conduit of reproduction, with little place in creation or civic order. In this light, the swallowing of Metis and the motherless birth of Athena are not simply mythic curiosities but reveal a cultural logic that restricts women's participation in emerging civic structures. Rather than reflecting an aristocratic warrior ethos, the Hesiodic corpus articulates a social imaginary closer to that of the hoplite farmers: disciplined labour, self-sufficiency and sharply drawn boundaries. Those excluded from the col-

36 On the gendered and ideological dominance of hoplite norms in democratic Athens, see Cartledge 1998: 61-63. Cartledge demonstrates the persistence of hoplite masculinity across drama, oratory and visual culture even after the rise of the importance of naval power, and Athenian rowers, following the battle of Salamis (61-63). For a discussion of the status and ideology of women in democratic Athens, see e.g. Pritchard 2011 (2015), who offers a synthetic social-historical survey of women's roles within the *polis*. My concern here, however, is less with ideological *representation*, whether of hoplite values or of gender, than with the ways in which hoplite-defined criteria for political participation structured collective identity through mechanisms of exclusion.

lective practices that structured male solidarity naturally appear marginal and suspect, lacking the embodied *habitus* through which civic belonging was constituted. This produces an ideological landscape in which exclusion appears not as a political act but as a moral and cosmological necessity.

Homer's epics seem to preserve a different register. Penelope's wisdom (*Od.* 16.409), Andromache's grief (*Il.* 24.723-29), and Helen's bitter clarity (*Il.* 24.761-75) reveal forms of female intelligence integrated into the narrative world. Homer knows of Zeus giving birth to Athena (*Il.* 5.875-80; 8.32) but omits the swallowing of Metis, and the epics, composed for aristocratic audiences, retain an openness that allows for limited but meaningful female agency. Hesiod's farmer-poetry, by contrast, presents women merely as burdens or threats. The contrast between Homer and Hesiod therefore concerns not only gender but the broader imagination of social boundaries. Homer's aristocratic world is permeable and translocal, at least for aristocrats, while Hesiod's world is defensive, labour-bound and normatively closed. Greek literature itself recognised that identity was defined at its margins. The encounter between Diomedes and Glaukos (*Hom. Il.* 6.155-70), where hereditary guest-friendship overrides battle-hostility, exemplifies how aristocratic ties could blur the line between insider and outsider. Herodotos preserves similar moments: Kleisthenes' Panhellenic marriage contest for Agariste (6.125-26) and Kroisos' reception of Solon (1.30-70) reveal a 'transnational' aristocratic orientation that contrasts with the Hesiodic vision.³⁷ Aristocratic identity operates through recognition, mobility and reputation rather than through fixed boundaries of descent or locality.

This logic seems universal. The sociologist Georg Simmel observed in the book chapter 'Exkurs über den Adel' that aristocrats recognise one

37 The Spartan king Demaratos, deposed ca. 491 BC, took refuge at the Persian court and advised Xerxes during the invasion of Greece (*Hdt.* 6.67). Themistocles, ostracised in 471, entered Persian service under Artaxerxes I as dynast of Magnesia (*Thuc.* 1.137-38). Alcibiades moved to Sparta and ended as a guest the Persian satrap Tissaphernes after his condemnation in 415 (*Thuc.* 8.82). By contrast, the mass audience addressed by Old Comedy presupposes a more ethnocentric horizon. Aristophanes exploits foreignness as comic stigma, caricaturing barbarians through accent, gesture and physical difference (e.g. *Acharnians*, *Birds*, *Thesmophoriazusae*). This suggests that popular civic culture consolidated identity more through symbolic exclusion.

another across ethnic and geographic boundaries because status is portable, embodied, and reinforced through shared practices of education, etiquette, and marriage.³⁸ Such cosmopolitanism is accompanied by another form of exclusivity: aristocrats recognise only their peers and relegate commoners to a separate category.³⁹ An Alcmeonid from Athens may well have felt closer to a Bacchiad horse-breeder from Corinth than to a farmer of his own deme. What emerges is not the absence of boundaries, but that the location of the boundary depends on one's social position. Ordinary Athenians probably encountered foreigners more often as permanent metics than as aristocratic guests at symposia. Simmel's concept of the *stranger* captures this structural position: both near and far, embedded in the community but marked by categorical difference.⁴⁰ The metic occupies precisely such an ambivalent role: indispensable to the economy and even to defence, but excluded from citizenship. A comparable logic applies to women. Intimate within the household yet absent from the assembly, they were 'internal strangers': the closest of insiders who were nevertheless excluded from the civic core. The rise of the hoplite phalanx reinforced this position by tying political belonging to embodied military competence, an attribute inaccessible to women by definition.

Modern anthropology and sociology refine what the Greeks had already intuited. The Norwegian social anthropologist Fredrik Barth argued that collective identity rests not on shared cultural content but on the maintenance of boundaries between 'us' and 'them'.⁴¹ Pierre Bourdieu, by contrast, located civic identity in 'habitus', i.e. the embodied dispositions through which solidarity and tacit recognition take shape.⁴²

38 1908a. Simmel anticipates what Bourdieu would 60 years later theorise as *habitus*: embodied dispositions and cultural codes that make recognition within an elite almost instantaneous.

39 Simmel 1908a: 547-48.

40 Simmel 1908b: 509 and 512.

41 Barth 1969: 15.

42 Bourdieu 1977: 72. Cf. also Bourdieu 1990: 52. Harari 2008 (in the chapter 'Flesh-witnessing: Those who weren't there cannot understand', 231-40) notes that soldiers repeatedly claim that only those who have endured war's bodily and sensory hardships can truly understand it, implicitly forming a community defined by shared experience.

Rather than choosing between the two concepts, both are needed: Barth clarifies boundary-making, while Bourdieu explains why boundaries endure. The hoplite phalanx offers a concrete illustration. Interlocked shields, drilled bodies, each man's safety linked to that of the next. Solidarity becomes a physical fact. To stand one's ground in the phalanx was to enact citizenship.

Neither Barth nor Bourdieu addressed gender, yet Greek women – and, in a different way, metics – occupied the position of *internal strangers*: situated within the *polis* but denied full participation. The rise of the phalanx estranged not only non-citizens and non-Greeks, but also women, central to reproduction and cult yet increasingly sidelined in political life. If the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* can be read as contributions to an aristocratic debate over authority – whether power should rest with a king or be negotiated among elite peers – then *Works and Days* intervenes in a parallel and contemporary debate over the proper ordering of the emerging community, including the place of women within it. In this sense, Hesiod's poem can be read as a normative programme for a hoplite-inflected society, defining labour, hierarchy and gender.

From Draco to Aristotle: The Institutionalisation of Exclusion in Athens

The solidarity forged in the hoplite phalanx appears to have been progressively stabilised through law and institutions. When democracy was introduced at Athens in 508/7 BC, Kleisthenes's reform placed the demes at the centre of the new political order. The deme served both as a unit of local identity and as the administrative hinge of the new democracy. Access to the assembly, the courts, the magistracies and military service depended on deme enrolment, for it was through the demes that the Athenian youth entered the citizen body, as noted above ([Dem.] 59.122).⁴³ Military success reinforced this institutional consolidation. The political weight of the hoplite class was confirmed by Marathon in 490 BC, while the decisive naval victory at Salamis in 480 BC strength-

43 Cartledge 2009: 61.

ened the leverage of the *thetes* and enabled further democratic radicalisation associated with the reforms of Ephialtes in 462/1. Political participation thus expanded within the male citizen body, both socially and numerically. This expansion, however, never extended to women or metics, who remained structurally within the *polis* yet excluded from political life. This was not a loss of rights they had once possessed: neither group had ever been politically included. But once exclusion was embedded in democratic institutions, later extension of political rights became effectively impossible. The very architecture of the Athenian democracy deepened equality among citizen men while simultaneously hardening the exclusion of those outside it. From Draco's homicide legislation (c. 620) to Perikles' citizenship law (451/50), Athenian reforms increasingly defined citizenship by descent and tightened the exclusion of women and metics, even as democratic equality intensified within the citizen body.⁴⁴

Perikles' citizen law, which required that both parents be Athenian, made citizenship a strictly hereditary status. For metics, it eliminated remaining avenues of integration and confirmed their position as a permanent non-citizen population. For women, the effects were different but equally significant: they acquired a sharper symbolic role as guarantors of legitimate descent, while their marriages and reproductive lives came under tighter public scrutiny. The law heightened their civic significance without granting them civic power. By tying a child's citizenship to that of the mother, the law intensified concerns over legitimacy and purity of descent and reinforced expectations of female seclusion and male guardianship, narrowing the social space to citizen women. Athenian women thus became indispensable to the reproduction of the citizen body while remaining excluded from its political definition.

Crucially, descent alone did not activate citizenship: the institutions that made civic status operative – introduction into the *phratry* and, above all, enrolment in the *deme* – were reserved for men. As Apollodoros notes ([*Dem.*] 59.122), fathers presented their sons to these bodies, while placing their daughters under the guardianship of their future

44 It has already been noticed that in democratic societies such as Athens, where male citizens had the greatest political rights, women were completely excluded from political participation; see, e.g., Jameson 2004: 281–82.

husbands. Excluded from deme enrolment, women lacked the civic standing from which political rights emerged, making political participation institutionally impossible.

The paradox identified by Hansen is therefore structural. The institutional rationalisation that expanded democratic participation also hardened the mechanisms of exclusion: as political rights stabilised within the male citizen body, the criteria of belonging became increasingly rigid. Once citizenship rested on descent and male-controlled civic activation, women could no longer appear as potential political subjects. The very success of Athenian democracy among men sharpened the line excluding women.

Aristotle then converts this institutional reality into political theory. In the *Politics*, women's exclusion from deliberative authority becomes an aspect of natural order: the male is attributed full deliberative capacity, while the female is assigned a subordinate, non-authoritative share in reason. What democratic institutions had fixed in practice – the alignment of political agency with male citizenship activated through deme membership – Aristotle presents as anthropological and teleological necessity. Structural exclusion thus becomes cognitive necessity, and the administrative closure of the citizen body is retrospectively legitimated as the natural form of the *polis*.

Since the nineteenth century, scholarship has often equated the Athenian *polis* with its male citizen body and democratic institutions. This emphasis, grounded in the *polis*'s own legal and philosophical self-description, tended to marginalise women, slaves, children, and metics as functional or symbolic actors rather than political subjects. The *polis* thus appears primarily as the domain of the *polites*. This is not merely a modern distortion but a consequence of Athenian institutions successfully defining political reality on their own terms. The question is therefore not whether women belonged to the *polis*, but in what sense and according to whose criteria.

Were Athenian Women Citizens?

Hansen formulated the problem succinctly: Athenian women lived in the *polis* but were not full members of it. Following Aristotle, he distinguished between the *polis* as a community of households (*oikiai*), where women were indispensable (*Pol.* 1), and the *polis* as a political community of *politai*, from which they were excluded (*Pol.* 3). Women were *astai* but not *politides*: they could neither deliberate nor hold office, they were necessary for the reproduction of the civic body yet absent from its formal definition of citizenship. More recently Josine Blok has nuanced this picture by showing that citizenship language was not confined to political participation. In everyday usage *polites* could apply to women as well as men, and inscriptions attest women acting publicly as priestesses, dedicants, and guarantors of descent.⁴⁵ Women were also embedded in economic production, property transmission and ritual exchange.⁴⁶ Cult was not peripheral, but constitutive of civic identity. In this wider political-religious sense, women could function as civic actors, even while remaining excluded from formal political power. The Panathenaia makes this visible: women wove and presented the new peplos to Athena Polias at the very festival where the city staged its collective identity. This ritual underscored that the city's bond with its goddess depended on female labour, even as political authority remained strictly male.⁴⁷

Yet philosophical codification moved decisively in the opposite direction. Aristotle defined the *polites* as one who shares in magistracies and judgments (*Pol.* 1275b18-20) and denied women full deliberative capacity. This was not a neutral description, but rather a normative contraction of the civic category that erased women from political theory altogether. Its influence proved long-lasting: transmitted through cathedral schools, universities, and later mass education, Aristotle's definition helped naturalise women's exclusion from political and intellectual authority.

45 Blok 2017: 148-53.

46 Cartledge 2009: 41-42; 2016: 133-39.

47 Blok 2017: 183-84.

A cautious structural contrast may nevertheless be suggested. Hesiod and Aristotle, each in their own register, codify exclusion: Hesiod mythically, through Pandora and the effacement of Metis; Aristotle philosophically, through the definition of citizenship and deliberative capacity. Homer and Plato, by contrast, leave conceptual space – however narrow – for female intelligence and agency at the periphery of male political life. Western tradition, however, overwhelmingly canonised the exclusionary strand.

At this point – precisely where cultural representation becomes a structuring device – we may observe a parallel development inside the *polis* itself. Just as the Persians were stereotyped as luxurious or effeminate in Greek literature, so too did the figure of the irrational, secluded, or threatening woman seem to have become a recurrent civic *topos*. These symbolic types helped stabilise boundaries both outwardly (Greek/barbarian) and inwardly (male/female), reinforcing political exclusion through culturally encoded images rather than description. The power of these *topoi* endured well beyond antiquity: once Aristotle's reduction of women's deliberative capacity entered the philosophical canon, it was reproduced through medieval, early-modern and modern educational systems across Europe and the Americas. As public schooling expanded from the eighteenth century onward, Aristotle's civic anthropology became a normative template for associating rational authority with men. This institutionalised bias contributed directly to the modern 'Matilda Effect', i.e. the systematic downplaying or misattribution of women's intellectual labour, and to the persistent reluctance of awarding bodies, including the Nobel committees, to recognise women's scientific achievements on equal terms.

Sparta

Although the Spartans embodied the phalanx more conspicuously than any other Greek community, they did not follow the trajectory attested in other *poleis* by which hoplite warfare weakened aristocratic prerogatives and broadened civic participation. Instead, Sparta retained an archaic monarchical framework. Kingship took the form of a hereditary

dual kingship embedded within a rigid oligarchic order. This constitution, retrospectively attributed to Lykourgos, seems to have been stabilised earlier than in other Greek *poleis*.⁴⁸ The ideal equality of the *homoioi* was therefore not the egalitarianism of middling farmers, but a disciplined inward-facing aristocratic solidarity grounded in lineage, austerity and collective military identity.⁴⁹

Within this order, women acquired a – for the Greek world – striking economic prominence, particularly in landholding and property transmission. This was a structural consequence of a militarised society in which adult male citizens were persistently absent for training or campaigning. Following the conquest of Messenia (seventh century BC), the Spartan men were unable to supervise the helot-worked estates that sustained their military specialisation. Female rights of inheritance, bequest and ownership therefore ensured the continuity and functioning of these estates across generations. By the fourth century BC, women are reported to have controlled forty percent of Spartan land, a reflection of the material logic of this order rather than evidence of political inclusion.⁵⁰

Aristotle's critique of Spartan women (*Pol.* 1269b-1270a) therefore misreads the system. Spartan women's economic centrality compensated for the structural absence of their husbands, while political authority remained firmly monopolised by the *homoioi*. It was not female agency but the rigidities of an archaic militarised oligarchy that weakened Sparta: the concentration of land in ever fewer hands, the demographic contraction of the citizen body (*oliganthropia*), the chronic reliance on helot labour and the inflexibility of the *gerousia*. The Spartan case thus confirms rather than qualifies the general argument: even where hoplite organisation did not generate democracy, the political community remained structured around male military capacity. Spartan women's economic agency arose only as a secondary effect of disrupted male property control, not as a pathway to political participation. Sparta thereby makes visible the distinction – later more fully institutionalised at Athens – between economic participation and political inclusion.

48 Cartledge 2009: 43.

49 Tridimas 2025.

50 Fleck & Hanssen 2005: 221.

Sparta marks one end of a broader structural spectrum. At the opposite end stands Athens, where hoplite and naval service underpinned an increasingly participatory democracy. Yet both systems rested on the same foundational principle: political belonging was defined through the capacity to bear arms. Switzerland offers a modern analogue closer to the Athenian end of the spectrum. Like Athens, some Swiss rural republics developed participatory institutions, *Landsgemeinden*, civic deliberation, extensive local autonomy, and, like Athens, they coupled these democratic practices with a remarkably persistent exclusion of women. This juxtaposition illustrates a for modern people counter-intuitive, but structural logic: the more democratic the militia polity, the sharper the boundary it draws around the politically active, armed male body. In other words, wider participation among men does not soften exclusion; it intensifies it. Where political equality rests on military capacity, the expansion of male political rights seems to correlate with the entrenchment of female political exclusion.

A structurally comparable configuration therefore reappears, under very different historical conditions, in the smallholder republics of early-modern and modern Switzerland. Here, too, political equality was organised within a community of armed male citizens, while women—despite longstanding traditions of local autonomy, communal decision-making, and sophisticated forms of popular self-government—were excluded from enfranchisement well into the late twentieth century. The parallel between Swiss city-states and Greek *poleis* stems from structural similarities. In both contexts, militia citizenship generated strong internal solidarity among those who bore arms, while simultaneously hardening the boundary of political belonging against those who did not. The contrast with dynastic or aristocratic regimes is instructive. Monarchies and noble lineages could transmit authority through women precisely because political legitimacy there was genealogical and did not depend on collective military performance. By contrast, the *poleis* and the *Landsgemeinde* cantons grounded civic identity in embodied capacity to defend the community. Their political subject was the armed male citizen, and the cohesion of the community was inseparable from that figure. The result is the same structural pattern visible in Athens: the more a political system

embraced participatory self-government among men, the more its exclusion of women was entrenched.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that Greek political equality rested not on the expansion of inclusion but on actively producing boundaries. The hoplite phalanx formed more than a tactical formation: it generated a social *habitus*, in Bourdieu's sense, characterised by embodied solidarity among those capable of bearing arms. The *aspis* locked men into a common front and, in the same movement, pressed women, metics and non-Greeks outward. Athens radicalised this structure by embedding it into civic institutions – deme enrolment, descent rules, and male-controlled mechanisms of civic activation – thereby deepening equality within the male citizen body while simultaneously hardening the exclusion of those outside it. Exclusion became a structural effect of the *polis*'s mode of reproduction.

The comparative cases of Sparta and the Swiss *Landsgemeinde* cantons confirm the underlying pattern. In both, political community centred on the armed male citizen: equality among those who bore arms coexisted with the permanent exclusion of those who did not. Despite their differences—Spartan oligarchic discipline on one side, Swiss smallholder republicanism on the other—both systems reveal how militia-based citizenship generates internal solidarity by sharpening the boundary of political belonging. The Swiss case, in particular, underscores the dynamic already visible in Athens: the more democratic the polity among armed men, the more persistent the exclusion of women became. The recurrence of this configuration across such divergent contexts demonstrates that the Greek case was not an isolated cultural peculiarity but an instance of a broader institutional logic linking military capacity, male civic equality and the structural exclusion of the unarmed.

Hansen may not have endorsed every step of this argument, but he would have recognised its method: the close analysis of institutions, the comparative reach beyond the *polis*, and the insistence that political categories must be understood in their operational context. In this sense,

the title of this essay is meant both literally and metaphorically. The hoplite shields locked citizens in – and, in the same act, locked others out. Recognising this double motion clarifies both the paradox of the ancient polis and the surprising durability of boundary-making logics within modern republican ideals.

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