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# “Πολυάνωρ γυνή” (“Wife of many husbands”):

## Ancient Greek polyandry as reflected in the mythic/epic tradition

Olga Zolotnikova

The purpose of this article<sup>1</sup> is to inquire into ancient Greek polyandrous relations as they are traced in the mythic and epic traditions. The term “polyandry” will be used in three ways. Firstly, as a form of marriage, in which a wife is simultaneously shared by two or more husbands. Secondly, as socially approved sexual behavior in which a woman can legally have more than one male partner, before as well as during her marriage. Thirdly, as the socially recognized serial re-marriages of a woman.

It should be acknowledged that to this point the study of the ancient Greek polyandry is mainly focused on the situation attested in Sparta during the Classical period. However, it may be argued that the ancient Greeks practiced polyandrous relations much earlier, as far back as prehistoric times and in forms different from those described by ancient authors in relation to Classical Sparta. Moreover it will be shown that even during the Classical period the Spartans were not alone among the Greeks and other culturally related societies in their practice of polyandry. Thus, it is the contention of this paper that ancient Greek polyandry should be approached more broadly. It should be read as part of a specific, but universal phenomenon determined by certain conditions which inevitably emerge in the development of institutions of kinship and marriage.

### Polyandry in ancient Sparta

The case of Spartan polyandry has long been discussed and has been variously interpreted. Ancient authors from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC mentioned the following forms:

1. *Wife-sharing/wife-borrowing (among non-relatives)*: according to ancient historians, Lykurgus “... freed men from the empty and womanish pas-

sion of jealous possession, by making it honorable for them... to share [their wives] with other worthy men in the begetting of children... An elderly man with a young wife, if he looked with favor and esteem on some fair and noble young man, might introduce him to her, and adopt her offspring by such a noble father as his own... A man who admired some woman for the fine children that she bore her husband and the modesty of her behavior as a wife, might enjoy her favors if her husband would consent, thus... begetting for himself noble sons” (Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 15.6–8, the same in Xen. *Lac.* 1.8–9). Also, “when a man had begotten enough children, it was honorable and quite usual for him to give his wife to one of his friends” (Polyb. 12.6b.8).

2. *Fraternal polyandry*: “...among the Lacedaemonians it was a hereditary custom and quite usual for three or four men to have one wife or even more if they were brothers, the offspring being the common property of all... ” (Polyb. 12.6b.8).
3. The use of the so-called “*substitute or additional husband*” practiced by Spartan women. According to Nicolaus Damascenus, “the Lacedaemonians... encourage their women to get pregnant by the most well-shaped (or beautiful) citizens and foreigners as well... ” (Nic. Dam. *FGI* 90 F 103z 6).<sup>2</sup> (Translation by the author)

<sup>1</sup> I want to express my acknowledgement to Dr. A. Corso for discussing with me the draft of this paper, to J. Jensen for the editorial help in preparing this paper for publication. A special warm thanks to Allison Surtees, PhD candidate at John Hopkins University, for correcting the English text.

<sup>2</sup> Note an observation by S. Hodkinson 1989, 111: “*there were circumstances in which she [a Spartan woman] could legitimately take on an additional partner*”.

4. *Relatively free sexual behavior of married women*  
(Plut. *Mor.* 242 “*Sayings of Spartan Women. Other Spartan Women to Fame Unknown*” 23).

The common circumstance underlying all these cases is that they occurred in a society fully controlled by men, or in the patriarchal social context: the forms 1/ and 2/ were a result of men’s will or initiative, and the forms 3/ and 4/, although attributed to women’s initiative or will, were approved by men.

According to the dominant view, Spartan polyandry should be interpreted as a practice intended to limit a woman’s fertility and thus avoid the distribution of the family property among numerous heirs (that she could bear her husband).<sup>3</sup> The survival of primitive family institutions of a tribal type, such as group marriage, has also been recognized in that practice.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the forms 3/ and especially 4/ appear to have been a product of the relative independence of women within Spartan society, supported, on the one hand, by their extraordinary economical rights,<sup>5</sup> and, on the other, by their permanent presence in a warlike state, where the men as professional warriors were absent for long periods of time.<sup>6</sup> In reference to this last observation, it should be emphasized that the conditions allowing the exceptional role of Spartan women do not completely correspond with the character of the classical patriarchal society.

## Polyandry attested among various peoples

Outside Sparta, similar cases of polyandry have been attested in many other societies of different social levels, both ancient and modern. For instance, in ancient times, the cases of *wife-sharing*, sometimes mixed with the *fraternal polyandry*, were reported to occur among Northern European tribes (Britons,<sup>7</sup> Caledonians,<sup>8</sup> Libyrni<sup>9</sup>), Etruscans,<sup>10</sup> Scythians,<sup>11</sup> Indians,<sup>12</sup> Lybians and some other Arabian peoples.<sup>13</sup> The memory of fraternal polyandry practiced in the past among the ancient Slavs may be traced in Russian folklore.<sup>14</sup> Fraternal polyandry is still practiced among some of the Tibetans and Himalayans with the intention of controlling population growth.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Hodkinson 1989, 90, 106. In antiquity, this view was expressed by Xen. *Lac.* 1.

<sup>4</sup> Lurie 1993, 223–4, n. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Hodkinson 1989, 82; also Arist. *Pol.* 2.6.11.

<sup>6</sup> Note Arist. *Pol.* 2.6.8: “... during these [expeditions] the men were indeed obliged to leave their wives in sole control at home, and for this reason paid them greater difference... and gave them the title Mistress /Δέσποινα/”; also Pomeroy 2002, 92–3.

<sup>7</sup> Caes. *B Gall.* 5.14 (about Britons): “...Groups of ten or twelve men have wives (“uxores”) together in common, and particularly brothers along with brothers, and fathers with sons; but the children born of the unions are reckoned to belong to the particular house to which the maiden (“virgo”) was first conducted.” Also Pembroke 1967, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Dio Cass. 77.12.2 (about Caledonians): “...They dwell in tents, naked and unshod, possess their women in common and in common rear all the offspring.” Also Pembroke 1967, 14, note 52.

<sup>9</sup> “The Libyrni have women in common and raise children together until they reach five years of age...” (Nic. Dam. *FGrH* 90 F 103d), Pembroke 1967, 7.

<sup>10</sup> “... (it is said that) Etruscan women are held in common... and (that) Etruscans raise all their children even if it is not known who is the father of whom” (Theopomp. *FGrH* 115 F 204).

<sup>11</sup> Nic. Dam. *FGrH* 90 F 104 /Joann. Stob./: “The Galactofagoi, a Scythian people,.. have in common their possessions and women so that the eldest men are considered the fathers [of the children]...” (the translation is by the author).

<sup>12</sup> One of the classical cases of fraternal polyandry in general is described in the *Mahabharata*: Arjuna, one of the five brothers Pandava, shared with them his wife Draupadi; each brother was to be Draupadi’s husband exclusively for one year to ensure the link between the father and the child she was supposed to bear to him; after the end of the term, she became the wife of another brother, again for one year (*Mahabharata* 1.189, 18.4.9; Grinzer 1994). For polyandry in ancient India see especially Singh 1978.

<sup>13</sup> For example, according to Herodotos (4.180), among the Auses of Libya, “the intercourse of men and women is promiscuous”; within the third month after the birth of a child, “the men assemble, and the child is adjudged to be that man’s, to whom it is most like.” Strabon (16.4.25) described the system of polyandry among the inhabitants of Arabia Felix; also Pembroke 1967, 12–3.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., in the tale about a princess (“tzarevna”), who for a long time lived in the same house, remote in forest, with seven heroes (“bogatiri”), brothers to each other; it was used by A. Pushkin in his poem “*The legend about a beautiful princess and the seven heroes*” (“Skazka o prekrasnoi zarevne i o semi bogatiriah”).

<sup>15</sup> According to anthropologists, *fraternal polyandry* occurs more frequently than all the other known forms of polyandry. Even in modern time, it has actually been attested in *Nepal*, *Sri Lanka*, in some areas of *India* (in Himalayan areas of *Zanskar*

Cases of free sexual behavior permitted to married and unmarried women in ancient societies controlled by men are particularly well-known among the Lokrian Greeks in Italy,<sup>16</sup> but also in Etruria,<sup>17</sup> Lydia,<sup>18</sup> Macedonia,<sup>19</sup> and Thrace.<sup>20</sup>

The above evidence suggests that polyandry as attested in ancient Sparta and other patriarchal societies was a universal response to certain similar social situations. It should be pointed out that, in historical terms, societies in which polyandry was/is practiced despite their patriarchal nature may be classified as either archaized (Sparta, Lokri, Etruria, India), underdeveloped (Macedonia, Thrace, Lydia, modern Tibet and Himalayas) or still primitive (tribes).

## Cases of polyandry traced in the Greek mythic/epic traditions

The Greek mythic and epic traditions contain many patterns, which, if taken literally, indicate that the ancient Greeks *were aware of* (or remembered) some other earlier forms of polyandrous relations, which were no longer practiced in historic times.

1. *Promiscuous sexual relations* characterized in the Classical Greek tradition as *koinogamia* and believed to have been practiced in Athens before Kekrops: “At Athens Kekrops first yoked one woman to one man. Before then mating was at random and promiscuous... Before him no one knew the father because there were so many of them” (Ath. 13.555d); “Kekrops legislated that *women, who before mated like beasts*, be given in marriage to one man” (Ioannis Antiochenus, frg. 13, *FHG* 4.547). According to ancient authors, who were men, the promiscuity “of the old days” was caused by “women’s intemperance” and their “inordinate passion” (note Aesch. *Cho.* 598–601). This type of human sexual behavior resembles animal-like behavior caused by uncontrollable biological instincts and may thus be connected with the most barbarous stages of social evolution. In terms of sociobiology, this behavior might be compared with the mating system, as attested in nature, by which one female can simultaneously or consequently couple with many males.<sup>21</sup> Special attention

should be given to the remarks about the matrilineal character of the Athenian society while it was koinogamous and the active social, even political, role of women in it, which were supposedly terminated by the reforms of Kekrops: “...women... no longer could cast a vote, no new-born child would take the mother’s name, and no one should call the women Athenian” (Varro in August. *De civ. D.* 18.9).<sup>22</sup>

Typologically, we may associate this kind of sexual behavior with the barbarous behavioral patterns echoed in a number of myths, in which *a female abducts or keeps a male by force in order to have sexual relations with him*.<sup>23</sup> The following cases may be taken as characteristic examples. Eos abducted a number of heroes: Kephalos (Ov. *Met.* 7.700–710, Eur. *Hipp.* 453–6), Orion (Hom. *Od.* 5.121), Kleitos (Hom. *Od.* 15.250), and Tithonos (*Hymn. Hom. Ven.* 218). Aphrodite abducted Phaethon (Hes. *Theog.* 987–91). According to Herodotos (4.110–116), the Amazons used to select and keep by force

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populated by a Mongolian race, *Rawain* and *Jaunpur* populated by ethnic stock mixed of Mongoloids and Indo-Aryans, in *Nymba* and *Pahari* in Northern India, in *Ladakh* and *Toda* in Southern India), in the *Yunnan region of China* populated by the Mosuo people, in some *Subsaharan African* and *indigenous American* communities (Surui of northwestern Brazil), see: Goldstein 1971, Parmar 1975, Goldstein 1976, Beall & Goldstein 1981, Goldstein 1987, Levine 1989, Schuler 1987, Raha & Coomar 1987, Bhatt 1992. Also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polyandry>, <http://www.webindia123.com/uttar/people3.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Polyb. 12.6b.9–10: “...the Lokrians... returning home singly and at rare intervals *allowed their wives to become more familiar with their slaves than with their original husbands*, and *allowed their maidens still greater latitude*...”

<sup>17</sup> Bonfante 1973, 91–101. The position and behavior of women in the Etruscan society are also examined in Bonfante 1986.

<sup>18</sup> According to Herodotos (1.93–94), Lydian girls “give themselves up to prostitution before marriage...”

<sup>19</sup> “The Macedonians think it is fine for girls to have lovers and sleep with them before they are married...” (*Dissoi Logoi*, 2.12 in DK 2.405–16), Pembroke 1967, 17.

<sup>20</sup> “... They [Thracians] take no care of their *maidens, allowing them to have intercourse with what men they will*” (Hdt. 5.6).

<sup>21</sup> “Polyandry”, <http://www.answers.com/topic/polyandry>.

<sup>22</sup> The translation is from Tyrrell 1984, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Nagy 1990, 242.

young men for sexual purposes. Kalypso and Kirke both kept Odysseus for a lengthy period of time (e.g. Kalypso for 7 years, Hom. *Od.* 7.259), as what might be called a “sexual prisoner”.<sup>24</sup> Omphale, the Lydian queen, daughter of Tantalos and widow of Tmolos, kept Herakles for one year as her slave and had a sexual relationship with him (Soph. *Trach.* 248–54, Ov. *Her.* 9.103).

2. *Absolute sexual freedom for unmarried women before their marriage.* This may be recalled in the expressive words of Nausikaa referring to cases when a maiden “in despite of her own father and mother, while they still live, consort with men before the day of public marriage” (Hom. *Od.* 6.287–8). Sexual behavior of this sort may be compared with that attested in historic times among the Lokrians (Polyb. 12.6b.10), Lydians (Hdt. 1.93–4), Thracians (Hdt. 5.6), and Macedonians (*Dissoi Logoi* 2.12). It is noteworthy that Greek society as described in myths and epic did not view potential consequences of an unmarried woman’s free sexual behavior, such as pregnancy and childbirth, as obstacles for her later official marriage. A pregnant woman or a woman with a child born out of wedlock could be married to a man who was not the child’s father (note the cases mentioned by Pindaros in *Ol.* 9.57–66, and *Pyth.* 3.9–27).<sup>25</sup> As for an illegitimate child, there seems to have been two possibilities: he could either be taken with his mother into her new family (just as Boukolion was recognized as the elder son of Laomedon, but born secretly by his mother, perhaps from an unknown father, Hom. *Il.* 6.23–24; a similar story was told about Menesthios, Hom. *Il.* 16.174–8) or kept by his mother’s parents (just as Eudoros, son of Polymele from an alleged secret union with Hermes, was raised by his grandfather, as his mother immediately after his birth was officially taken as a spouse by Ehek-leos, Hom. *Il.* 16.179–92).
3. *Relatively free sexual behavior of married women* openly practiced for their amusement and sexual satisfaction, and usually excused by frequent and lengthy male absence from the household (note Aesch. *Cho.* 920: “This is a cruel thing... for women to be deprived of a husband”). This

practice may be recognized in many situations described in the mythic/epic tradition as adultery, which was nonetheless not considered grounds for official divorce. The most characteristic case is the behavior of Klytaemestra who in the long absence of Agamemnon openly cohabited with her lover, Aegisthos (Hom. *Od.* 1.35–6, Aesch. *Cho.* 133–134). Another famous instance is the story of Kephalos’ wife Prokris, who had the lover Pteleon. Upon discovery by her husband, she fled to the king Minos, with whom she also shared her bed, but finally returned to Kephalos (Apollod. 3.15.1, Ov. *Met.* 6.681–2). In the historic period, as it has been shown above, this type of female sexual behavior survived among the Lokrians (Polyb. 12.6b.9–10), Spartans (Plut. *Mor.* 242 “*Sayings of Spartan Women. Other Spartan Women to Fame Unknown*” 23), and especially Etruscans, who even allowed their women the right to raise all their children regardless the father’s identity.<sup>26</sup>

4. *Legitimate sexual relations practiced by a married woman with a man or men other than her husband* with the intention to beget offspring, without terminating her marriage. This could be a result of and excused by the husband’s impotency or sickness as well as by the couple’s childlessness or the absence of a male offspring, all thought to be husband’s fault. The conviction that a certain other, “better” (healthier), man could

<sup>24</sup> Hom. *Od.* 1.14–5: “... Kalypso, ... beautiful goddess, keeps [Odysseus] prisoner in her hollow caves, yearning that he should be her husband...”; Hom. *Od.* 5.13–5: “...he lies in an island suffering grievous pain, in the halls of the nymph Kalypso, who keeps him perforce...”; Hom. *Od.* 5.154–7: “By night indeed he [Odysseus] would sleep by her side perforce in the hollow caves, unwilling beside the willing nymph, but by day he would sit on the rocks and the sands, racking his heart with tears and groans and griefs...”. Hom. *Od.* 9.31–2: “...In the same way [as Kalypso] Kirke held me back in her halls... yearning that I should be her husband...”

<sup>25</sup> E.g., an unmarried daughter of Opous became pregnant by Zeus, who after that wedded her to Lokros; the child received his grandfather’s name (Pind. *Ol.* 9.57–66). The Thessalian princess Koronis secretly cohabited with Apollo; having become pregnant by the god, she married the Arkadian Ischys without her father’s permission (Pind. *Pyth.* 3.9–27).

<sup>26</sup> Bonfante 1973, 91–101.

produce better offspring, fertilizing a woman with his “better (healthier) seed”, would also contribute to a deliberate attempt by a married woman to become pregnant by him. It appears that the society represented in myths did not forbid a married woman to raise her child even if it was not sired by her husband. This pattern may be traced in many major and minor mythical/epic stories about married mortal women or heroines, who had intercourse with a god and after that bore beautiful children, whom they raised with their husbands, for example: Leda–Tyndareus/Zeus > Helen and Polideukos (Apollod. 3.10.7), Alkmene–Amphitryon/Zeus > Herakles (Hom. *Od.* 11.266–8, Pind. *Pyth.* 9.84–6), Hekube–Priamos/Apollo > Troilos (Apollod. 3.12.5), Tyro–Kretheus/Poseidon > Pelies and Neleus (Hom. *Od.* 11.235–59), Iphemeideia–Aloeus/Poseidon > Ephialtes and Otos (Hom. *Od.* 11.305–7). Survival of this tradition may be recognized in the above mentioned Spartan official trend encouraging women to become pregnant by the most handsome and strongest men, Spartan citizens and foreigners alike, in order to bear good children (Nic. Dam. *FGrH* 90 F 103z 6).

5. *Possible practice of something like “husband-borrowing”, which, on the basis of the case considered above, might be considered a sort of institutionalized temporary exchange of husbands among women for the purpose of producing better offspring (diametrically opposed to the Spartan practice of “wife-borrowing” described in Xen. Lac. 1.8–9, Plut. Vit. Lyc. 15.6–8). Such tradition may have been echoed, for example, in the mythological image of Zeus, the official “husband of Hera” (Hom. Il. 7.411, 10.329, 16.88, Hom. Od. 8.465) and “the best of men and gods” (Hom. Il. 19.95–6), who fertilizes countless females.*

6. *The right of a married woman or an obligation imposed on her by her social/kin group to change her husband, which seems to have occurred in the following forms:*

- the woman’s right to trade her husband for a more beloved man, as in the famous case of Helen, Menelaos and Paris, and in that of Kly-

taemestra, “who has changed her husband taking Aegisthos” (Aesch. *Cho.* 133–4);

- the woman’s right/obligation to change her husband for either a *stronger* or a *younger* man as well as for a *more handsome* one. The first and the second conditions (related to man’s strength and age) may be recognized in the fairly known practice of putting a husband to periodic tests of his physical abilities in various competitions, in which he had to participate with other, usually younger, men. This practice was presumably meant to ensure that a woman’s given consort is the *strongest, fastest, most vigorous, most able* of men; that is, the winner of the competition. Should he fail, the husband was replaced by his victorious opponent. Remnants of this ancient custom are particularly clear in the myth of the two husbands of Epikaste, Laios and Oedipus, the older of which was killed in a symbolic battle by the younger (Hom. *Od.* 11.271–80). Another example is the story of the thirteen chariot races organized in Elis by Oenomaos between himself and the suitors of Hippodamia, his daughter and by some accounts also a consort (Apollod. *Epit.* 2.4–5). The same idea seems to underlie the legendary competition between Odysseus and the suitors of Penelope, in which the competitors were required to string Odysseus’ great bow and shoot an arrow through the twelve axes (Hom. *Od.* 21.73–7, 410–22). The custom of replacing a weaker husband with a stronger one was undoubtedly known in Greece’s neighbor Italy. There it survived until historic times as a form of religious behavior attested, for example, in the cult of Artemis at Nemi. In that sacred grove, a human “consort” of the goddess, having held his position for a certain period of time, had to face a new candidate for his position in mortal combat.<sup>27</sup> The third condition, that of a man’s appearance, seems to have been echoed during historic times in the male beauty contests, which were normally associated with the worship of various female divinities.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Frazer 1922, 1, 8–10.

<sup>28</sup> Zolotnikova (forthcoming).

7. *An obligation (?) of a widow to remarry, but choosing her new husband herself.* This situation is most clearly reflected in the case of Penelope, who was compelled to remarry by common opinion, given Odysseus' long absence and uncertain fate (Hom. *Od.* 2.113–4, 195–7, 204–5, 223). It should also be noted that Helen, following the death of Paris, was required to marry one of his brothers, of whom she chose Deiphobos, as long as she remained in Troy (Apollod. *Epit.* 5.9).

Having classified these various cases of polyandry according to the reasons behind their implementation, we may now divide them into three main groups:

1. those resulting from biological consideration (women's sexual needs); these recognize either woman's simple sexual satisfaction or satisfaction of woman's sexual desire for someone in particular (this situation applies to both married and unmarried women),
2. those concerned with reproduction (for married women),
3. those associated with the needs of the woman's kin group, which might oblige her or give her the right to trade an old or ill husband for a younger or stronger/ healthier one (in the case of married women) or to marry again (if woman was a widow). The purpose here is to provide a woman with the most capable husband, who would take the best care of her social/kin group's interests.

One common feature, however, unites all the forms and the cases of polyandry listed above: it is the woman's will or initiative (direct or indirect), which may be understood if considered in terms of the *women's socially recognized right to behave in that way.*

## The “mother's right society”: theoretical definition

It should be acknowledged that a society, which gives women the right of either absolute or relative sexual freedom, is one in which the position

of women is sufficiently independent to that of men. In anthropological terms, it is a so-called “matriarchal society”, but it might also be a patriarchal society with sufficient survival of the so-called “matriarchal system”. In connecting the type of polyandry practiced on the basis of a woman's initiative with the “matriarchal” social order, we need to define the nature and the historical context of the society, which might be called “matriarchal”. Turning briefly to the theoretical aspect of the problem, we must clarify the meaning of the terms “matriarchal society” and “matriarchal social order”.

Societies conventionally called “matriarchal” should be more correctly termed “mother's right societies” or “maternal societies”. Their nature is defined by the fact that they are composed of or may even be identified with the *maternal kin group(s)* formed on the basis of the blood-kinship relationships traced through the mother. The characteristic features of a *maternal kin group* are the following:

1. as a rule, it is a large kin group—compact tribe, gens or extended family of three or more generations – organized according to the principles of matrilineality and matrilocality, which imply the definition of origin through the mother and not the father, and that the children belong to the mother's, not to the father's kin group (lineage);
2. due to a generally low level economy, the kin group appears to be a *collective owner* of the occupied territory or a *collective user* of the land portion;
3. the females (mothers, daughters, and wives) form its permanent component, while the males (husbands, fathers, and sons) are temporary member, coming from or moving to another kin group for marriage;
4. for men, the access to a group, to any position within it, and to its possessions is possible only through women – through their mothers and sisters, by birth and kinship, or through their wives, by marriage (the so-called *uxorilocal marriage*);
5. kinship through the mother is more significant than kinship through the father and is consid-



ered sacred; it is protected ideologically—by religious beliefs, hereditary customs, and sacred laws. This makes the bonds between a wife and a husband, as well as those between children and their father, less important than the bonds between sisters and brothers and those between children and their mother; furthermore, the bonds between sisters and brothers are even more important than those between mother and her children;

6. a/. the leadership or exercise of authority within the group, despite the position of women, belongs to the oldest living male – the husband of the oldest woman (grandfather) or the eldest brother of the eldest sister (maternal uncle), b/. the responsibility for control over the group's property falls to the person in authority, that is the oldest male in the group, c/. in certain cases, such as a lengthy absence or death of the male leader of a group, his wife or sister may be placed in charge of the group and its property;
7. women as the group's permanent component are more closely connected with its hereditary religious customs and cults; as a result, they dominate its religious activities and perform the main priestly functions.<sup>29</sup>

In order to define the actual place of the practice of the mother's right in history, we should, first of all, trace the origins of mother's right itself back to the conditions of primitive (barbarian) civilization and non-regulated sexual relations (*koinogamy*, group marriage, polyandry mixed with polygamy), when only a child's mother could be known with certainty. At this stage, the mother's right society can exist in its most pure form, as a primitive barbarous tribe, and is defined by scholars as *the early maternal society*.<sup>30</sup> The *late maternal society*, since it depends on large maternal kin groups, may appear in the form of an autonomous community consisting of exogamous maternal gens/gentes or extended maternal families, and even as an early state with clear hierarchical structure topped by one powerful leader.<sup>31</sup> However, as social and economic structures develop, the maternal society acquires more and more features of the paternal system, and in its late forms may variously be mixed with the emerging father's

right institutions.<sup>32</sup> The “mother's right” and the “father's right” systems may even co-exist within the same social group for quite a long period.<sup>33</sup> The end of the maternal social order is determined by the establishment of the *individual (nuclear) family*, which comprises a husband (the biologically stronger member), a wife (the biologically weaker member) and their children, and is economically based on its individual, relatively compact, property part. In terms of social systems, this condition usually corresponds with the formation of a complex centralized state/warlike monarchy, although a variety of intermediate situations and long survivals of the matrilineal/matrilocal institutions and traditions are also normal.

Thus, *theoretically*, the maternal society may exist in the conditions, which occur between the barbarous stage and the emergence of the individual (nuclear) family. The actual state or states of kinship system of societies in that period of their evolution may be identified only approximately because of lack of literary evidence. However, scholars make such attempts, mainly on the basis of reminiscence

<sup>29</sup> The clearest example of the “maternal society” may be seen in the famous caste of the *Nayars* (Kerala region in Southern India), which existed until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were organized according to the matrilineal property-groups composed of three generations: *brothers* and *sisters* together with the *children of the sisters* and the *children of the sisters' daughters*. Each matrilineal property-group also appeared as a collective owner of land: “the members owned or leased property in common, lived in one house, and were under the legal guardianship of the eldest male... of the group”. *The access to the common property of the group and all rights were acquired through the mother*. The children and the property remained in the mother's lineage. Brothers had their wives from the other groups without having access to the property of their wives and without having special links with their children. Thus, the *permanent elements of a matrilineal property-group* were: sisters (> wives of men from other groups), brothers (> husbands of women from other groups), children and grandchildren of sisters; the *temporary elements of a group* were husbands of sisters and those of sisters' daughters, who were coming from other groups (Gough 1959, 24–5).

<sup>30</sup> Khazanov 1970, 139.

<sup>31</sup> For an attempted typology of early societies, which is yet not fully accepted among scholars, see Renfrew & Bahn 2001, 175–7.

<sup>32</sup> Khazanov 1970, 139.

<sup>33</sup> Khazanov 1970, 139.

traced in later folk-lore and mythic traditions, evidence of language, and some fossilized forms preserved in the attested kin/family institutions. There are also certain archaeological indications, which may show the maternal character of a society. Among such indications are:<sup>34</sup> 1. the patterns of settlements and dwellings as well as the structure of cemeteries, which point to the occupation of territory by large kin groups/extended families;<sup>35</sup> 2. burials within or near dwellings (so-called “domestic burials”) suggesting deep dependence of a given society on kin relationships. These two features are generally associated with the societies passing through early developmental stages, where elements of the maternal system are very likely to occur; 3. burials of children together with women (presumably their mothers), and not with men (their fathers), which may be a sign of the matrilineal character of the practiced kin relationships; 4. apparent wealth of female burials in comparison with burials of males, signifying not only the respected position of women within a given society, but also their more advantageous property rights in comparison with those of men<sup>36</sup> – a kin/social group characterized by such a condition would most probably have been matrilocal; 5. in the case of mixed group burials, the central position of women’s graves in relation to those of men; 6. the presence in female burials of the objects indicating the association of women with priestly functions, which may be taken as evidence of women’s more close connection with the kin cults and, hence, of the matrilocal character of a given kin/social group.

## Traces of the “mother’s right society” among the prehistoric Greeks

With respect to the Greek society in particular, we must not ignore certain references in the mythic/epic traditions, which imply the practice of the mother’s right among prehistoric Greeks. The *existence of the mother’s right family in the prehistoric Aegean* has been sufficiently shown in a number of scrupulous studies<sup>37</sup> and does not require detailed con-

sideration here. The following features provide the clearest argument for the maternal system phase in Greek prehistory. The promiscuity, which, according to tradition, was practiced in pre-Kekropian Athens and resulted in uncertain paternity,<sup>38</sup> seems to correspond with the conditions characteristic of a barbarous maternal tribe familiar only with matrilineality and matrilocality. The memory of the primary organization of society according to the matrilineal/matrilocal kin groups, tribes and families, in which the females form the constant and privileged element accepting males as minor partners and on the temporal basis, is represented in various mythic patterns, such as the Amazonian tribe,<sup>39</sup> the closely tied mother and daughter–Demeter and Kore,<sup>40</sup> as well

<sup>34</sup> According to Khazanov 1970, 141–5.

<sup>35</sup> It has been argued that in early societies, large houses are usually associated with matrilocal extended families, Ehrenberg 1989, 94.

<sup>36</sup> Ehrenberg 1989, 168–71.

<sup>37</sup> Briffault 1927, Bachofen 1948, Thomson 1949, Pembroke 1965, Pembroke 1967, Pomeroy 1973, 129–35, Thomas 1973, Lekatsas 1977, Cantarella 1987, 11–23, Manheim 1992, Wagner-Hasel 1992.

<sup>38</sup> Ath. 13.555d, Joannis Antiochenus, frg.13, *FHG* 4, 547.

<sup>39</sup> Note the description of the Amazonian tribe by Strabon (11.5.1): “The Amazons... spend the rest of their time off to themselves, performing their several individual tasks, such as ploughing, planting, pasturing cattle, and particularly in training horses, though the bravest engage mostly in hunting on horseback and practice warlike exercise; ... they have two special months in the spring in which they go up into the neighboring mountain which separates them and the Gargarians. The Gargarians also, in accordance with an ancient custom, go up thither to offer sacrifice with the Amazons and also to have intercourse with them for the sake of begetting children (“συνεσόμενοι ταῖς γυναιξὶ τεκνοποιίας χάριν”), doing this in secrecy and darkness, any Gargarian at random with any Amazon; and after making them pregnant they send them away; and the females that are born are retained by the Amazons themselves, but the males are taken to the Gargarians to be brought up; and each Gargarian to whom a child is brought adopts the child as his own, regarding the child as his son because of his uncertainty...”. For the Amazons as a matrilineal group see also Tyrell 1984, 23–39, Blok 1995, 185.

A similar idea seems to underlie the myth about the “Lemnian crime”, according to which the women of Lemnos once killed all the male population of the island and then massively married with the Argonauts, see Apollod. 1.9.17, Ap. Rhod. 1.618; also Martin 1987, 81.

<sup>40</sup> Secure prehistoric origins of this pattern are seen in Late Bronze Age group representations of two females (e.g., the ivory group of two seated females and a boy, from the North

as the families comprising only sisters (like Graiai, Gorgones, and Erynies). An echo of the former maternal kinship system may be recognized in the common mythical practice of sending away newborn and even grown sons (e.g., Oedipus, Ionas, Paris, Orestes), while keeping daughters in the family (e.g., Klytaemestra sent away Orestes and kept Electra with her). The fact that the prehistoric Greek family maintained the matrilineal and matrilocal character for quite a long period may be inferred from a series of earlier customs, which were still remembered in the late prehistoric/early historic times, when the myths and epics began to be recorded. Such customs include: naming children after their mother and not after their father (like Letoides, Niobides, Danaides, Molionides, Fillyrides, Maias, and others);<sup>41</sup> considering kinship through the mother more significant than any other kin relationship (especially reflected in the myth about Althea and Meleagros, Hom. *Il.* 9.565–72); viewing marriage as the acceptance of a husband into the family/house of his wife<sup>42</sup> and calling a husband after his wife (e.g. “πόσις Ῥέας”/“husband of Rhea”, Pind. *Ol.* 2.77; “πόσις Ἀμφιτρίτας”/“husband of Amphitrite”, Pind. *Ol.* 6.104; “πόσις Ἥρας”/“husband of Hera”, Hom. *Il.* 7.411, 10.329, 16.88, Hom. *Od.* 8.465; “Ἑλένης πόσις”/“husband of Helen”, Hom. *Il.* 7.355, 8.82); giving family authority in certain cases to the mother’s or wife’s brother and not to the father’s or husband’s closest relative (the *avunculate*);<sup>43</sup> transmitting power and property through a daughter to a son-in-law and not to a natural son (e.g. Tyndareus > Helen + Menelaos, Tyndareus > Klytaemestra + Agamemnon, Oenomaos > Hippodamia + Pelops). The most remarkable circumstance is, however, that the position of priority of the *mothers* over the *fathers* in former Greek society appears not only to have been recognized, but also supported by and legitimized in the *unwritten sacred laws*. The Greeks in the Classical period still remembered them as the “old laws” protected by the Erynies, the wrathful chthonic demons (Aesch. *Eum.* 778).

Although the existence of the maternal society among the prehistoric Greeks, in one or another form, is undeniable, uncertainty still remains concerning the chronology of the “mother’s right” period in Greek history and the possibility of confirm-

ing the conclusions drawn from the myths and epics with some other evidence.

The patriarchal society based on the *father’s right* family is securely attested among the Greeks from the Mycenaean period by the use of the father’s name in designating familial origin in the Linear B tablets<sup>44</sup> and in the epic verses, which date to the prehistoric period.<sup>45</sup> The Greek mother’s right society may, therefore, have existed in a period prior to the beginning of the Mycenaean period, or Late Helladic IIIB.

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Slope of the Acropolis of Mycenae, now in the Athens National Museum, see Mylonas 1983, 119, fig. 90); the worship of the two goddesses in association with each other was highly widespread during the historic time.

<sup>41</sup> “Letoides” (e.g., *Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 158, 261; Pind. *Pyth.* 1.12–3, *Nem.* 9.53), “son of Leto” (*Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 176, 189), “Leto’s children” (Pind. *Pyth.* 4.3), “young sprouts of Leto” (Pind. *Nem.* 6.37), “daughter of Leto” (Pind. *Ol.* 3.26), “son of Danaë” (Pind. *Pyth.* 12.17), “child of Danaë” (Pind. *Pyth.* 10.45), “son of Maia” (*Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 73, 88), “Maia’s child” (Aesch. *Cho.* 812), “Cheiron, son of Phillyrida” (Pind. *Pyth.* 3.1, *Pyth.* 9.30). Many other names are also worth of attention, e.g. “child of Aphrodite” (Pind. *Ol.* 7.14), “Harmonia, the daughter of Aphrodite” (Hes. *Theog.* 975), “Iphimedeia’s children” (Pind. *Pyth.* 4.89), “child of Leda” (Pind. *Nem.* 10.66), “offspring of Leda” (Aesch. *Ag.* 914), “child of Rhea” (Pind. *Nem.* 11.1), “Tityos, son of broad Gaia” (Hom. *Od.* 11.576), “sons of Endais /daughter of Cheiron/” (Pind. *Nem.* 5.11), “offspring of Thetis” (Pind. *Ol.* 9.76), “child of Alkmene /Herakles/” (Aesch. *Ag.* 1040), “son of lovely-haired Tyro” (Pind. *Pyth.* 4.136); more evidence has been presented by Lekatsas 1977, 13–4. Note also an ancient tradition, according to which children in Athens before Kekrops took the mother’s name, Varro in Aug. *De civ. D.* 18.9, Tyrrell 1984, 29.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Hom. *Od.* 4.569: “You [Menelaos] have Helen to wife and are in the eyes [of the others] the son-in-law of Zeus”.

<sup>43</sup> Note, for instance, the case of Kreon, who claimed the throne of Thebes every time his sister Epikaste, wife of Laios and subsequently of Oedipus, became a widow; he finally got it after his sister’s death (Paus. 9.26.3–4).

<sup>44</sup> E.g. in PY An 29.4 (“the son of Kusamenos”), PY Sn 01.7 (“the son of Perimedes”), PY Sn 01. 15 (“the son of Etewoklewes”), Ventris & Chadwick 1973, 176–8.

<sup>45</sup> E.g. Zeus’ epithets *Kronides* (Hom. *Il.* 1.498) and *Kronion* (Hom. *Il.* 5.753–754), “the son of Kronos”, the invention of which may be connected with the Late Mycenaean–Post-Mycenaean (Aeolic) phases of Greek epic, see Zolotnikova 2003, 31–2; also *Atrides*, *Oilides*, *Laertiades*, and other patronymic designations, which are derived from the Mycenaean context.

On the other hand, the memory of koinogamy in pre-Kekropian Athens might recall the situation associated with the indigenous population of Attica and, thus, may *tenuously* be related to the time before the arrival of the first Greeks at the end of the Early Bronze Age.<sup>46</sup> As for the early Greeks, the name of the common supreme Indo-European deity  $\star t^{\prime}yeus-p^hHt^her$  preserved in the name of the Greek major god  $\text{Ζεύς πατήρ}$ <sup>47</sup> indicates that the Indo-European tribes, including the Greek ones, had already developed the *concept of fatherhood* by the time of their separation at the very end of the Neolithic period.<sup>48</sup> However, the *knowledge of the father* does not necessarily contradict the maternal system, especially that in its late form, and may just signify the established practice of regulated relations between the two sexes. Moreover, certain features apparently pointing to earlier use of the mother's right among, aside from the Greeks, such disparate Indo-European peoples as the Romans,<sup>49</sup> the Germans,<sup>50</sup> the Sarmatians,<sup>51</sup> the Scythians,<sup>52</sup> the Hittites,<sup>53</sup> and the Lycians,<sup>54</sup> allow the argument that the common Indo-European (or Proto-Indo-European) kinship system was still maternal at the time of the breakup of the Indo-European unity, in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. This conclusion, in combination with the analyzed references in the Greek myths and epics, suggests that the first Greeks, who arrived in Greece at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, although they had already passed the stage of barbarous koinogamous maternal tribe, still followed the maternal kinship system, which determined the correspondent character of their society for quite a long period. Thus, given the evidence of myths/epics, linguistics, and Linear B tablets, the maternal system in Greece may be placed somewhere between the Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age and the beginning of the Mycenaean time.

Can we deduce any material evidence for the maternal system in Greece from the available archaeological records? Archaeologists are usually very careful in defining the kinship system on the basis of the archaeological remains.<sup>55</sup> The whole picture of the Greeks' kinship structure in the early prehistoric (illiterate) times may, as far as possible, be established only after systematic and comparative

study of the available material evidence of the forms and character of kin institutions at each individual site. Certain local differences must be expected due to the variety of cultural and ethnic traditions as well as the different levels of social-economic evolution reached at each given place. It is, however, impossible to accomplish such a work in this paper, where only the following general observations may be presented. Thus, it appears that the prehistoric population of Greece used to be organized in communities consisting of large kin groups/extended families during the Early Bronze Age–early Middle Bronze Age.<sup>56</sup> The organization according to kinship-based groups and the significance of the blood-kin ties (especially traced in the “domestic burials”) seem to have been maintained to a certain

<sup>46</sup> The so-called “Greek entry into Greece” is now dated from the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC to c. 1900 BC; see the recent discussion of this problem in Gamkrelidze & Ivanov 1995, 1, 794–804, also Caskey 1960, 287, 301.

<sup>47</sup> Gamkrelidze & Ivanov 1995, 1, 196, 680, 692–700.

<sup>48</sup> According to Gamkrelidze & Ivanov 1995, 1, 791, the beginning of separation of the Indo-European communities should be dated to the late 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC.

<sup>49</sup> For survival of maternal society in Rome in the form of the *avuncular system* see the commentary by M. Hutton to Tacitus, *Germany* 20, in Tacitus, *Dialogus. Agricola. Germania*. The Loeb Classical Library, 1925, 349 (Appendix 7). The evidence for the prior transmission of Latin kingship through the female line see in Frazer 1922, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Note Tac. *Germ.* 20 (the avuncular system among the Germans): “...Sisters' children mean as much to their uncle as to their father: some tribes regard this blood-tie as even closer and more sacred than that between son and father”.

<sup>51</sup> Khazanov 1970.

<sup>52</sup> Khazanov 1970, 141.

<sup>53</sup> Khazanov 1970, 139.

<sup>54</sup> Hdt. 1.173: “[the Lycians] take their names not from their fathers but from their mother...If a woman of full rights marries a slave, her children are deemed pure-born”; Nic. Dam. *FGrH* 90 F 103 K: “The Lycians honour women more than men, take their second name from the mother side, and leave their property to their daughters, not their sons...” (the translation is from Pembroke 1967, 20); also Pembroke 1965, Khazanov 1970, 139.

<sup>55</sup> Renfrew 1972, 362–3, 403.

<sup>56</sup> For example, Renfrew 1972, 366–7, Andreev 1989, 56, 61, Dakouri-Hild 2001, 110–2, 116, Georgousopoulou 2004, 209–10, Peperaki 2004, 217, Walter 2004, 74, Kofa 2005, 357.

degree until the late Middle Bronze Age–early Late Bronze Age.<sup>57</sup>

The identification of the position of women in the Early–Middle Bronze Age Greek communities in general may, perhaps, be based on the following principle: the more primitive the character of the society as identified on the basis of the archaeological records, the more probable the survival of the maternal system within it.

For the most studied and most significant of the relevant patterns, we may refer to the Grave Circles B and A in Mycenae, dated to 1620/1610–1540/1530 BC (MH III–LH I) and 1580–1500 BC (late MH III–LH I) respectively.<sup>58</sup> In terms of kinship system, both seem to represent large families over three or four generations,<sup>59</sup> each family possibly dwelt in one large common house (“pre-palace”) and collectively possessed the territories belonging to it. Burial material, precisely the richness of the female graves,<sup>60</sup> provides evidence of the significant status of women and their privileged property rights in those kin groups. There are certain indications of the matriliney of both families (such as joined burials of women and children in the Grave O and in the Shaft Grave III, as well as a common grave for adult brother and sister, the Grave Γ, which contained the buried Γ55 and Γ58, both over their mid-thirties).<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, it has been observed that among all the buried in both the Grave Circles, there were about thirty to thirty-five males, the majority of whom died at around thirty-six years of age, and approximately eleven females.<sup>62</sup> This suggests that the women from the dynasties of the Mycenaean Grave Circles may have been married at least twice (some of the buried males may have been their sons or brothers), and that the *men came into the women’s families through marriage*. This conclusion may be supported by the fact that the attempted reconstruction of the facial characteristics of seven men buried in the Grave Circle B seems to have indicated that those men were unrelated.<sup>63</sup> All these features suggest the matrilocal/uxorilocal character of both the families. Moreover, women of the Grave Circle A family appear to have exercised the supreme priestly functions.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, it seems possible to define the families of the Mycenaean Grave Circles as maternal. How-

ever, certain traces of patriliney (burials of children with men) and the emergence of smaller kin groups (subfamilies) within those large families have also been noticed<sup>65</sup> and actually reveal a tendency toward the formation of the individual paternal family.

As the material from some other closely examined prehistoric Greek sites indicates, towards the end of the MH–beginning of the LH period the kin-based units gradually transform into socially organized units.<sup>66</sup> At the beginning of LH III B Greek society appears to consist of individual father’s right families.

<sup>57</sup> For example, Valmin 1938, 232–3, Koumouzelis 1980, 194, Dakouri-Hild 2001, 110–3.

<sup>58</sup> Mylonas 1973, 425.

<sup>59</sup> Musgrave, Neave & Prag 1995, 111.

<sup>60</sup> Karo 1930, 176–82. Ehrenberg 1989, 168–71, emphasizing the “difference between women’s and men’s graves” in the Mycenaean Grave Circles as well as that observed in other European archaeological cultures of the Bronze Age–Early Iron Age, speaks generally about “a very important social role” of women and even about “extremely high status” of some of them in that period.

<sup>61</sup> Mylonas 1983, 40, Mylonas 1973, 188–9, Musgrave, Neave & Prag 1995, 119–22, 128.

<sup>62</sup> Mylonas 1973, 379–84, Mylonas 1983, 3. The practice of “ritual replacement if not actual killing” of the ruling kings in a ceremonial combat, which would be held “after a certain cycle of years”, has been suggested (Mylonas 1973, 391–2). It is tempting to support this presumption with an ancient custom known in different forms to challenge the queens’ husbands in the periodic competition with younger men; it was supposed to test the king’s fitness to rule: if he overcame his opponents, he continued to be the king; otherwise he was replaced by somebody stronger than he (*see above*).

<sup>63</sup> Musgrave, Neave & Prag 1995, 130.

<sup>64</sup> Remains of silver scepters ornamented with gold and topped with crystal balls were found in the female Grave III, Schliemann 1878, 200–1, nus.309–10.

<sup>65</sup> Burials of children with men have been identified in the Grave Circle B: in the Grave I (Mylonas 1973, 112), Grave Δ 2 (Mylonas 1973, 145–6), and Grave N (Mylonas 1973, 160–3). The subfamilies’ graves appear to have been the Grave Γ (burials of possibly 3 males and one female, Mylonas 1973, 43–51), the Grave Δ (burials of an adult male, possibly of one female, and of one more uncertain person, Mylonas 1973, 80–2), the Grave N (burials of two men of about 45 and 28 years old and one child, Mylonas 1973, 160–3), all in the Grave Circle B, and the Grave IV in the Grave Circle A (containing the burials of three males and two females, Wace 1949, 60–1).

<sup>66</sup> Dakouri-Hild 2001, 116–7.

Thus, in light of all the above evidence, we might now place the period of the mother's right society in Greece more precisely between the Late Neolithic and the late Middle Helladic/early Late Helladic periods.

## Survivals of the “mother's right society” among the Greeks in the historic time

The transition from maternal to paternal system was most probably lengthy and not always definitive. For instance, mythic/epic material supports the argument for a very powerful and even independent position of women in the Mycenaean royal families (we may note, for example, Klytaemestra, Arete, and Penelope). In addition, certain references in the Linear B documents suggest the rights of Mycenaean women to own the land and to hold property of private persons and villages by lease.<sup>67</sup> In the 6<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, in the Dorian Cretan polis of Gortyna, free women appear to have had some political rights, as they were counted together with men in the tribe membership.<sup>68</sup> There is evidence for the autonomy and even social power of elite women in Spartan society<sup>69</sup> as well as for a prominent role played by royal women in the central political institutions of ancient Macedonia.<sup>70</sup> This unusual, but real situation<sup>71</sup> recalls the memory of active social-political behavior of women in pre-Kekropian Athens (see above, Varro in Aug. *De civ. D.18.9*). Some mother's right features in the matters of property and marriage have been attested in the historic period among the Dorians<sup>72</sup> and the Arcadians.<sup>73</sup> Remarkably, an Athenian inscription of c. 367/6 BC mentions two women, possibly widows, as land-owners,<sup>74</sup> despite the strict Athenian custom of refusing a woman any control over real estate, which she could have inherited following the death of her father, brother(s) or husband. A more in-depth study of the mother's right survivals in the Greek society of the historic period would form another important subject for separate research.

It is important to note that the identified in the

Greek mythic/epic tradition forms of polyandry practiced on the basis of woman's will/initiative have certain ethnographic and historical analogies in various, mostly primitive, societies, which seem to have followed the maternal order.<sup>75</sup> This should overrule any possible doubts about the reality of

<sup>67</sup> Ventris & Chadwick 1973, 270 (Uf 1031), 241–3 (En 02.18), 243–4 (En 74.4, 18, 22, 24), 244–5 (En 659.5), 246 (Eo 211.3, 5), 247 (Eo 224.6, 7, 8, Eo 276.3, 5, 7), 248 (Eo 160.2, 4), 248–9 (Eo 444.4). Some women were mentioned as holders of more than one plot (like ?Smila in En 03.4 and En 74.4, Korinsia in En 74.18, 24 and Eo 160.4, and Aiwaia in Eo 160.2 and En 74.22); this circumstance, perhaps, indicates their wealthy economic position.

<sup>68</sup> Willetts 1967, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Pomeroy 2002, 92–3.

<sup>70</sup> Carney 2000.

<sup>71</sup> For the normal position of women in Classical Greek states as that “outside society” see Lacey 1968, 125–76, Schaps 1979, 89–98, Gould 1980, 46, also Just 1989, Sealey 1990, Patterson 1998, Johnstone 2003.

<sup>72</sup> For the wives' property rights in Sparta see Hodkinson 1989, 82. For the women's property rights in Gortyna see Willetts 1967, 44, VI, 9–10 (“τὰ τὰς γυναικός”), 42, IV, 44, and 49, XI, 44–5 (“τὰ ματρῶια”), 44, VI, 12 (“τὰ τὰς ματρῶς”), 44, VI, 34, 45 (“τὸν ματρώιον”). The Law of Gortyna clearly distinguishes the portions of wives and mothers from the property of husbands and fathers, and protects the women's private possessions from any mishandling by men (Willetts 1967, 44, VI, 9–12). Women of Gortyna also appear to have had the right of independent disposal of their property portion (Willetts 1967, XI, 44–5). For a form of the matrilineal marriage in Gortyna in the 6<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, see Pembroke 1967, 19, Willetts 1967, 44–5 (VI, 56–VII, 2).

<sup>73</sup> For maternal inheritances in Tegea in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC see *SIG* 306, 4–9, 48–57 (“τὰ ματρῶια”); also Cartledge 1981, 97.

<sup>74</sup> Rhodes & Osborne 2003, 177 (nu. 36, lines 67–9: “...the lands of the wife of Charmylus, the neighbor of which is the land of the wife of Alypetus...”).

<sup>75</sup> E.g. Herodotos (4.176), wrote about a tradition among the *Gindanes* of Libya, “where every woman wears many leathern anklets, because (so it is said) *she puts on an anklet for every man with whom she has had intercourse; and she who wears most is reputed the best, because she has been loved by most men*”.

Until recently, polyandry by woman's will was practiced among the Nayar people, in Southern India, who, as it has been shown, were organized according to the maternal system (see above, note 29): a girl of a certain age was married to one “official”, or ritual, husband, who was supposed to leave her after four days of the ritual marriage; after that, a girl was visited by a number of men outside of her group, the “visiting husbands”, *according to her wish*. When a woman became pregnant, it was essential for the men, who visited her, to acknowledge probable paternity (Gough 1959, 25–6, also Pembroke

Greek polyandry, which could be practiced on the basis of woman's will, although it is traced only in the myths and epics.

## Conclusion

Summarizing the evidence considered above, it may be concluded that polyandry as a specific, socially recognized form of marriage and sexual relations may appear in two main variations: that practiced on the basis of woman's will/initiative and that practiced on the basis of man's will or with man's permission. In anthropological terms, the former is mainly associated with the maternal, or mother's right, society, while the latter should be placed within the patriarchal social context. However, in general, polyandry should be seen as a survival of the barbarous mating system, and in any of the variations is attested in societies of relatively low evolutionary level.

The forms of ancient Greek polyandry based on woman's will/initiative are mainly known from the mythic/epic traditions; they were the product of the maternal society, the existence of which in Greece may be roughly dated to the period between the Late Neolithic and the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. The forms of polyandry which occurred among the Greeks during the historic period, primarily but not exclusively in ancient Sparta, were in most cases a result of men's will and belonged a patriarchal context.

Comparing the two variations of polyandry in their relation to ancient Greek society, it may be observed that the "mother's right" system, which seems to have prevailed before the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, provided women with sufficient freedom in their sexual behavior and with the pos-

sibility to follow their biological needs and personal feelings, both before and after their marriage. It also gave married women the right to avail themselves of men other than their husbands for reproductive purposes. On the other hand, it could oblige a married woman to trade her husband with another and a widow to remarry for the sake of the woman's kin group. The establishment of the patriarchal system based on the individual family, however, gave men substantial power over the female component of the society. Fathers, husbands, and brothers obtained the right to control and to arrange the social and private behavior of women (daughters, wives, and sisters). This included the possibility of forcing them to have sexual relations with more than one man or to be shared by a number of men. The reasons of polyandry resulting from the man's will were mainly economic, hereditary, and reproductive.

Both variations have been attested outside of ancient Greece, in ancient and modern times.

It is necessary to emphasize that polyandry was neither a regular form of marriage nor the prevailing type of sexual relations, but rather an exceptional situation both in patriarchal and matriarchal contexts. It was, however, historically conditioned and produced by certain biological, social and economical factors.

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1967, 15: "a woman may have a number of recognized lovers, as well as one ritual husband, but none of these has any rights over her children..."). As a matter of fact, that situation may be characterized as a group marriage of a girl with a number of men outside of her group, who were chosen, except for her ritual husband, and had sexual access to her with her consent.

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