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RESPONSE TO DAVID COHEN

It is difficult to offer a response full of fireworks to a paper with which one agrees wholeheartedly, so I hope this will do justice to David Cohen's stimulating analysis of women in Athenian public life. Cohen has opened up important issues in two areas which have significant implications not only for the study of gender in ancient Athens, but also for our overall understanding of civic life: 1) the representation of citizenship in public life and 2) civic religion as a significant, gendered public arena.

1. Citizenship and representation.

It is good to see that we can finally move beyond the question of whether or not women were citizens, to conclude that women could not have been anything other than citizens (Patterson 1981; 1986). This is not to deny that citizenship meant something different for women than for men, as it also must have meant something different for rich men than for poor men. Cohen has demonstrated the importance of representing yourself as a 'citizen' in terms of lifestyle and everyday behaviour: the way you look and act, the things that you do (including your occupation) and even the things that you wear. A citizen, male or female, was in effect somebody who 'looks like' (and is seen to act like) a citizen. Again, appropriate representations and ideal behaviours vis a vis citizenship were clearly different for men than for women. Because of this, even more than for men, one could say that conversely, a female citizen was also some one not seen to act like a non-citizen.

One of the most interesting implications of Cohen's argument concerns the role of written laws regarding citizen status. The fourth-century Athenian laws concerning who was and who was not a citizen appear clear cut, as least as presented by Aristotle's *Ath. Pol.* 42. But, as Cohen has pointed out, the evidence of the private law court speeches tells a somewhat different story. Men and women with pretensions were vulnerable to others who might try to represent them as non-citizens if a lapse in morals or behaviour allowed an opening – Timarchos (Aesch. 1) is a case in point. However, Timarchos also demonstrates another aspect of this phenomenon: how you behaved was not a civic issue until an opponent challenged it by bringing it into the civic arena, usually via the courts. So, if your mother sold ribbons in the agora, even though this was not desirable behaviour, it did not necessarily infringe the ideal lifestyle of a citizen, unless somebody pointed it out in public. Since ideally at least, most women lived less visible lives than men and could not usually represent themselves directly in public, civic contexts, it was

easier to represent them maliciously as non-citizens. I suspect that this is the point (or one of the points) at which women were most disadvantaged by their exclusion from politics and law.

The case of Neaira and Phano ([Dem]. 59) demonstrates this clearly. Naturally, we can never know ‘the truth’ of any of these cases, and this certainly is a peculiar case. However, I am quite persuaded by Cohen’s reading of [Dem.] 59, particularly his arguments about Phano’s marriages. Both the story of her dowry from Epanetus and the assertion that Theogenes did not know whom he was marrying sound highly implausible. The possibility that both women were, in fact, citizens is not generally considered and Cohen’s argument suggests that this is a real possibility.

2. Civic religion as a significant public arena

Cohen has argued that ‘religion was perhaps not central to men’s civic existence, but it was to women’s’. I am sure that this is true, but perhaps it would be useful to complicate matters a little bit. It might be fairer to say that religious activity had a different kind of centrality for men than for women. Nor were the kinds of public arenas in which women might appear necessarily limited to religion. Another one which occurs to me is the public funeral – a highly political event – carefully described by Thucydides (2.46) as including women as participants via the funeral speech he attributes to Pericles. Presumably the very reason that women are mentioned at all at the end of the speech was because the keening of mourning women was a normal feature of this and other funerary rituals.

Certainly I agree that religion should not be considered as some kind of marginal, or less important, civic activity. However, what is critical is that religious activities rarely involved the level and degree of political choice associated with men’s public and civic activities, from which women were excluded. Individuals, households, and families could and did deliberately undertake religious duties and activities in highly political ways, as Cohen points out. And, women, perhaps mostly exceptional women, were central to such political activity. It is interesting to note the large sums administered by some of these women in their capacity as priestesses. How did they circumvent the ‘one medimnos of barley’ law (Isaeus 10.10)? Was it simply ignored? Or, were all transactions carried out through a guardian (kyrios)?

However, civic religion could serve as a focus of inequality as well as of equality. Cohen rightly points out that in Athens more religious festivals excluded men than women. However, although Athenian citizens held pride of place and undertook the key roles, many festivals also included, and indeed encouraged the participation of, metics and xenoï (we know almost nothing about the participation of slaves). Most key roles in religious festivals (with some democratic exceptions), and certainly most of the main official cult posts, must have been undertaken by men and women from the upper ranks of Athenian society. Similarly, in practice, certain elements of political participation, e.g. proposing decrees in the assembly,

were largely undertaken by a limited group of the well-educated elite, not by the ordinary citizens. In actuality, there must have been as few public women in the religious arena as there were public men in the law courts or the assembly. The performance of most religious events must have presented two contradictory, but interwoven, themes: the first is the political equality of citizens and their superiority over 'others'; the second (exemplified by that most uncomfortable sounding chariot ride of Meidias and his wife to Eleusis) is the economic inequality within the citizen body.

I have been interested for some while by the paradox of Athenian dress. During the second half of fifth century, men began to 'dress down' in Athens. They stopped wearing golden grasshoppers in their hair, and instead of wearing luxurious chitons, they donned plain tunics. A.G. Geddes (1987: 325-30) in an important article on men's clothing has convincingly argued that this represents the adoption of 'the democratic look' by elite men. It was no longer politically correct to dress too lavishly; that was the sign of the effeminate or the barbarian. However, at the same time, women were beginning to 'dress up'. The plain peplos was dropped entirely, and women were wrapped in ever more flowing fabric, clinging chitons, and elaborately trimmed robes and other finery. It is interesting that although Athens, like other Greek cities, had a long history of sumptuary legislation, I know of none from this period which attempted to address this phenomenon. Plainly, 'the democratic look' did not apply to women. Cohen's observations about civic religious activity as a platform for performing prestige, the kinds of occasions on which women might be expected to wear their finest clothes, may offer a partial resolution of this paradox.

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