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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE ECONOMY OF THE FEMALE LYRIC VOICE

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Abstract
Although the evidence is limited, examples of professional female poets who composed public songs for their communities, commissioned by wealthy families and women patrons, suggest that female performance activated the same economic dynamics as the work of male poets in relation to their patrons. Thus, women contributed to the economic life of their communities through their poetic voices, and were able to express their views on social, political and economic matters.

A place within the society

In an influential volume published a decade ago, Leslie Kurke examined the economic dynamics embedded in epinician poetry, highlighting the relationship between poets and patrons and the aristocratic ideology shaping the choral lyric poetry of the archaic and late archaic periods.[1] Concepts such as 'traffic in praise', *megaloprepeia*, gift exchange, and the search for *habrosyne* are now integral to understanding the aristocratic ideology and the world of lyric poetry, reflecting a society striving to maintain its privileges in the face of a rising popular class. Kurke's insights remain relevant and could be newly applied to the study of female poetic voices, a field that has largely been neglected in discussions about its economic implications.

Contemporary historical research is increasingly focusing on the economic impact women had on ancient cities, examining their activities within the household and

[1] Kurke (1991 [2013²]).

their contributions to family and community wealth.[2] Women's lives were predominantly centred on the domestic and sacred spheres. Indeed, in the ancient world, the home was not only a place of 'consumption' but also of 'production'. Woven products, which were the work of female hands (both mistress and slaves), served the needs of the household, but the surplus could be sold outside.[3] Good housewives, such as the one described in Xenophon's *Economicus*, administered resources and directly controlled the productivity of agricultural work, implementing improvements to increase income.[4] Furthermore, women contributed to the family patrimony with their dowry, an indispensable element of every marriage transaction, although, at least in Athens, women could not dispose of it independently, and it passed from the father's hands to those of the husband.[5]

In addition, women played an important role in organising and carrying out religious festivals and ceremonies:[6] priestesses and prophetesses constituted authorities of the utmost respect within cities, whereas ordinary women played a crucial role in the carrying out of religious festivals through weaving, food preparation and ritual organisation.[7] Women also performed in female choruses during festivals, which entailed the dual role of singer and dancer under the direction of a *chorodidaskalos*, who could be either male or female. Some women composed and performed their own songs, either solo (in the case of monodic poetry) or by directing a choir (predominantly female).[8]

As I will now try to explore, these public occasions represented an important arena for women to raise their voices and express thoughts and concerns with economic repercussions, thereby influencing the economic and social decisions of their communities. In fact, the economic impact of women on society extended beyond their domestic and sacred activities, because these occasions provided opportunities for women to raise their voices in musical and lyric form,[9] expressing their opinions on policies and custom, including marriage, which had significant economic implications for households and communities.

[2]The most influential works, which opened the path to new ways of considering women's economic contributions to households and communities, are Foxhall (1989); Pomeroy (1994) 41–67; Cox (1998); Harris (2014).

[3]Foxhall (1989); Bernard (2003) 117–40; Harris (2014); Berg (2016). Lyons (2003) 102–8 underlines that women's contribution to household's economy was limited to weaving, whose products were less precious than others (e.g. metals) that were normally associated with men's artisanal world. See also Battezzato (2024) 217–23.

[4]See Pomeroy (1994) 41–67.

[5]See Schaps (1979); Foxhall (1989); Cox (1998), 68–77; Cobetto Chiggia (2014).

[6]Regarding women as ritual agents and as contributors to the economy of sanctuaries, see Dillon (2002), Goff (2004), Cole (2004); the collected essays in Parca-Tzanetou (2007) and Dillon, Edinow, Maurizio (2017) (particularly Dillon 2017).

[7]See Goff (2004), who explores the 'political role' of women's participation in the city's religious rituals, highlighting how the sacred sphere constitutes the best context in which their agency at different social levels could be expressed, also from a political point of view, thus constituting a sort of female counterpart to male agency within the *polis*. See also Blok (2001), Dillon, Edinow, Maurizio (2017).

[8]On the social role of female choruses, see Calame (1977 [2001^2]), Stehle (1997), Lardinois 2011. For women's voices in public contexts, see McClure (1999), Lardinois and McClure (2001), Nobili (forthcoming).

[9]Regarding song and lyric as typical expressive modes of the female voice, see Stehle (1997) 71–118; Lardinois (2001); Nobili (2023) 17–21.

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The female voice in the world of *habrosyne*

Women's poetry, composed or practised by women, can intersect with the economic dynamics of cities, addressing collective issues and decisions. A prominent example is the poetry of Sappho, whose intended audience – public or private – is still debated.[10] André Lardinois, in a recent contribution, presented Sappho as a 'citizen' deeply integrated into the political dynamics of her town, freely expressing her views on political and social matters, including war.[11] Some of her poems also reflect the economic dynamics typical of archaic societies, similar to those found in the works of her male contemporaries, attesting to her firm integration into her community.

In the crucial years between the end of the seventh and the sixth century BC, the Greek economy entered a new phase marked by the expansion of maritime trades and of commercial routes with overseas countries, particularly Anatolia and Northern Africa. Lesbos was strategically positioned as a 'gateway' to the East for ships traversing the Mediterranean, making it a prime port for merchants and sailors travelling to and from Asia Minor. This position allowed the islanders to interact with people from across the Mediterranean, significantly broadening their commercial horizons,[12] and this diverse network has an interesting reflection on Sappho's poetry and on the 'intertextual geographies' she constructs, to use Barbara Graziosi's words.[13] According to the Suda, Sappho's companions came from neighbouring regions and Ionia, with Anactoria from Miletus, Gongyla from Colophon and Eunìca from Salamis (Cyprus).[14] Egypt was also a known destination: Alcaeus may have been exiled there,[15] and Herodotus (2.178) confirms that the Mytilenians helped to build the Hellenion at Naucratis, a large temple for all Greeks established in the Nile delta to facilitate trade with Egypt and Africa.

At this time, the figure of the aristocrat-merchant emerged, representing members of the aristocracy who exported surplus agricultural produce rather than consuming it locally. This trade, especially with the East, brought back monetary wealth, precious metals and luxury goods previously rare in Greece, helping these aristocrats maintain a lifestyle of opulence unattainable for the rest of the population.[16] The monetary dimension of this system of exchanges is often disguised, in the aristocratic logic of archaic poets, as an appreciation for precious objects, symbols of elegance and distinction, and for gift-exchange dynamics reminiscent of Homeric society.[17] However, the commercial aspect is undeniably present, especially in the social reality of an island like Lesbos, which was highly engaged in overseas trade.

[10]The public and social dimension of Sappho's poetry has gained major – although not conclusive – strength in the last several years. See Calame (1977 [2001^2]) 210–14; Parker (1993), (2005); Stehle (1997); Lardinois (1996), (2022); Ferrari (2007); Nagy (2007), (2016); Bierl (2003), (2018).

[11]Lardinois (2023).

[12]See Mazzarino (1943); Aloni (1983); Spencer (1995); Tausend (2006); Caciagli (2011) 261–7; Thomas (2021).

[13]Graziosi (2024).

[14]Sud. Σ 107 s.v. Σαπφώ. See Cavallini (2006).

[15]Str. 1.2.30.25.

[16]See Tandy (2004); Raaflaub (2004) 210–11 and (2016); Zanetto (2022).

[17]See Kurke (1991 [2013^2]) 206–22.

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The wine of Lesbos was a prized commodity, and Sappho's family probably owned vineyards in the area of Eressos, where she was from.[18] Anecdotal tradition states that Sappho's elder brother, Charaxos, travelled to Egypt to trade wine and fell in love with the renowned courtesan Rhodopis (or Doricha, Sappho's derogatory nickname for her[19]). Charaxos reportedly squandered his considerable wealth on her and remained in Egypt for an extended period. Sappho, however, rebuked her brother for this association and, in her songs, expressed public disapproval of his conduct, which she felt undermined his duties as head of the family and the honour of the *oikos*.[20]

Sappho's fragment 5 Voigt-Neri takes the form of a prayer, albeit a peculiar one, to the Nereids (with a final invocation to Aphrodite). She asks for her brother's salvation and the restoration of her family's honour, which has been tarnished by his actions. The most lacunose parts of the text (ll. 10–15) probably alluded to the punishments suffered by Sappho and her family within the community due to Charaxos' behaviour and possibly the resulting economic hardship. This underscores the social pressure exerted by the community to stigmatise such behaviour and the dishonour Sappho endured (see τίμας, l. 10) as a consequence, reflecting the familial logic whereby all members of the *genos* suffer the consequences of the actions of the individual.[21]

In another poem from the Charaxos cycle, the economic implications of the *affaire* are even more apparent. The so-called 'Brothers' poem' (fr. 10 Neri)[22] features a dialogue between the 'poetic I' – possibly Sappho herself – and an anonymous interlocutor, in which the poetess expresses hopes that the latter will order her to go to the temple of Hera to pray for the merchant's safe return.[23]

ἀλλ' ἄϊ θρύλησθα Χάραξον ἔλθην
ναῒ σὺν πλήᾳ· τὰ μέν, οἴομαι, Ζεῦς
οἶδε σύμπαντές τε θέοι· σὲ δ'οὐ χρῆ
τα̃τα νόησθαι,
ἀλλὰ καὶ πέμπην ἔμε καὶ κέλεσθαι

[18]Gal. 10, 832; Suda σ 107A *s.v.* Σαπφώ. See Möller (2000) 203–14. Several amphoras manufactured in Lesbos have been found in shipwrecks in the Mediterranean as well as in Sicily, Etruria, the Black Sea and Egypt (mainly Naucratis), attesting to the wide commercial trade of Lesbian wine. Besides wine, several agricultural products, fabrics and metals were exported. Lesbian merchants returned home from their journeys with papyrus, wheat, spices and precious objects, which were scarce in Greece.

[19]The term derives from δω̃ρον and alludes to the greed of the courtesan, aligning with a common *topos* associated with *hetairai*. See Nobili (2016a).

[20]The anecdotic tradition is reported by Hdt. 2.135; Ath. 13.596b–c; Str. 17.33; Posidipp. 122 A.–B.; Ov. *Her.* 15.63–70, 117–20. See Biffi (1997), Lidov (2002).

[21]See Aloni (1983) 28–9 and (1997) LXX–LXXIII; Caciagli (2011) 258–61.

[22]The ode comes from P. Sapph. Obbink, of dubious provenance; nonetheless, at the moment there are no safe grounds to argue that the poem is spurious, and it may be included among Sappho's poems. See the *Retraction Notice* of the editors in Bierl and Lardinois (2016) and Sampson and Uhlig (2019).

[23]Various hypotheses have been advanced to clarify who this unknown interlocutor is: probably the mother (cf. Mueller 2016; Kurke 2016), but possibly also the nurse (Bettenworth 2014, Sironi 2015) or a male member of the family (the father or another brother: cf. Lardinois 2016, 182–4; Stehle 2016; Caciagli 2016). For similar Homeric prayers in which an authoritative member of the family – usually a man – orders a woman to pray to the gods for her own salvation or that of the family, see Nobili (2023) 23–40.

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πόλλα λίσσεσθαι βασίλ̣ηαν Ἥραν
ἐξίκεσθαι τυίδε σάαν ἄγοντα
νᾶα Χάραξον,
κἄμμ' ἐπεύρην ἀρτέμ̣εας·

You keep on saying that Charaxos must come
with his ship full. Zeus knows this,
I believe, as do all the gods.
Don't think about that,
but send me, yes command me
to keep praying to Queen Hera
that Charaxos return here
guiding his ship safely
and find us secure.[24]

The dialogue presents two opposing perspectives. While the other person is concerned about the economic implications of Charaxos' absence (νᾶϊ σὺν πλήᾳ at l. 6), as he squandered the household's capital, leaving his relatives in financial distress, Sappho affirms that the most important thing is for Charaxos to return safely.[25] His return will finally ensure the family's honour (and finances), which has been severely tarnished by his actions. In these two poems, it emerges that Sappho, although worried about the economic implications of her brother's actions, seems to disguise purely mercantile logic, driven by profit, with a set of aristocratic values centred on honour and family, thus adhering to the anti-monetary ideology that characterises the mentality of archaic aristocratic poets.[26]

These events, although seemingly autobiographical, are more likely of communal interest and reflect the dynamics, fears and ambitions of a mercantile society in a phase of expansion, which were also repurposed in other contexts, as evidenced by the rich anecdotal tradition surrounding Charaxos.[27] They illustrate how even poetry composed by a woman – often for religious occasions in which the entire citizenry participated – was intended to convey ideals and conceptions with significant social value. Sappho's poetry comments on, critiques, or applauds the political choices of her contemporaries, entering into economic debates that fuelled public discourse: maritime trade is necessary for the household's survival and the lack of this income (either due to reiterate absence or to irresponsible squandering) may deprive the family of its honour. Alcaeus, in fr. 117b V., similarly condemns the dangers of squandering vast amounts of money and assets on courtesans and prostitutes, thus confirming that this topic was central to public debate in archaic Lesbos.[28]

[24] Sapph. fr. 10.5–13 Neri. Transl. by Lardinois-Rayor, as for Sapph. fr. 98a-b.
[25] See Lardinois (2023) 17–20.
[26] See above, n. 17.
[27] The subject 'we' at l.7 of fr. 5 V. suggests a public occasion for this ode: see Lasserre (1989) 190–3; Ferrari (2007) 147–50, who underlines the emphasis on φίλοι at l. 6. Regarding the non-autobiographical instances of Sappho's poetry, see Lardinois (2016), Stehle (2016), Bierl (2016).
[28] See Nobili (2016a) 10–12.

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Another issue that weighs on Sappho and prompts her to voice her opinion publicly is the trading relationship with Lydia and the eastern world. This trade allowed aristocratic Lesbian families to acquire luxurious objects of Eastern origin, marking their wealth and setting them apart from ordinary citizens. Sappho, in particular, exhibits a passion for *habrosyne*, an orientally inspired luxury lifestyle that began to spread among Ionian cities and then into Greece in the seventh century BC. This lifestyle signified an aristocratic refinement, based on the display of wealth through imported exotic goods, fine fabrics and precious pottery inaccessible to ordinary people.[29]

As Robin Osborne observed, 'luxury is gendered' and has been associated with the female domain since its earliest attestations, such as Semonides' portrayal (fr. 7.57–70 W^2) of the costly and lavish wife (the mare-woman), who washes herself three times a day and indulges in perfumes, hairstyles and floral adornments.[30] Sappho (and others like her) takes pride in belonging to a social class that can afford such luxuries and expresses her support for the economic policies that enable trade with the East, making the import of these goods possible. In fr. 58d.2–4 Neri, Sappho openly declares her love of luxury (ἀβροσύνα), associating it with the love (ἔρως) of the sun, splendour (τὸ λάμπρον) and beauty (τὸ κάλον).

> ⌞ἔγω δὲ φίλημμ' ἀβροσύναν,⌟ [ἴστε δὲ] τοῦτο, καί μοι
> τὸ λά⌞μπρον ἔρος ἀελίω, καὶ τὸ κάτλον λέ⌞λογχε.
>
> Yet I love the finer things, [you must know] this and the love
> of the sun has granted me brilliance and beauty.

These two verses, which in *P.Oxy.* 1787 constitute the conclusion of fr. 58c N., the *Old Age Poem*, are also quoted in a passage by Clearchus of Soli,[31] who emphasises the necessary association between elegance (ἁβρότης) and virtue (ἀρετή), a concept that Sappho also highlights in fr. 148 Voigt -Neri ('Wealth without virtue is not a harmless companion'), thus exalting the importance of aristocratic education and behaviour. *Habrosyne*, in fact, appears in this fragment as a typically aristocratic concept, as it is associated with immaterial elements such as sunlight and beauty. However, it also conveys an allusion to a broader sphere of values, in which the display of elegance becomes a privilege reserved for the few. This is the same passion for *habrosyne* that, in fr. 3 D.K., Xenophanes attributes to his fellow Colophonians, who are said to have adopted a luxurious lifestyle from their Lydian neighbours.

The Lydians indeed played an important role in the affairs of Lesbos, being its most influential and powerful neighbour, with whom the island could not help but relate. As a primary commercial partner, Lydia was a source of raw materials and luxury goods vital to the island's economy. It is plausible that the rulers of Lydia influenced the internal political dynamics of Mytilene, as implied in Alcaeus' fr. 69 V., where he mentions receiving a large reward for serving as a mercenary in the Lydian army, thus securing favour with this great power in a (later failed) coup against Pittacus.

[29]See Mazzarino (1943), Lombardo (1983), Kurke (1992).

[30]Osborne (2021) 10. See previously Lombardo (1983) 1086–7.

[31]Ath. XV 687 a–c = Clearch. fr. 41 Wehrli. On their relation to the *Old Age Poem,* see, among others, Lardinois (2009); Neri (2021) 673–7.

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The display of an aristocratic lifestyle, marked by its exclusivity and inaccessibility to the general population, was expressed through the acquisition of coveted luxury goods, often of Eastern origin and imported, as they were otherwise unobtainable in the local market. Alcaeus boasts of owning a helmet adorned with a feather from Caria (fr. 338 V.), a prized possession that might have been procured by his brother, a mercenary in the service of the king of Babylon.[32] His brother returned from the East with a luxurious weapon – a sword of ivory and gold – which the poet mentions with admiration (fr. 350 V.).

Sappho also speaks of a 'bewitching robe' (fr. 22b Voigt-Neri), the κατάγωγις, probably a long tunic with a purple hem. When worn by a girl who incites desire (πόθος), this robe stirs emotions in the admirer and delights the poetess. In fr. 39 Voigt-Neri, Sappho describes a person adorned with elegant and ornate (ποίκιλος) sandals from Lydia, while in fr. 101 Voigt-Neri, in a poem dedicated to Aphrodite and transcribed by Athenaeus (9.410e), she speaks of perfumed purple drapes from Phocaea in Ionia. These drapes, intended to be used as headscarves, are presented as a precious gift for the goddess.[33]

The oriental provenance of these fabrics makes them valuable and highly sought-after objects, as attested in fr. 98a–b Voigt-Neri, where Sappho laments that, under the rule of 'the Mytilenean' – probably Pittacus –, it has become impossible to acquire luxury items of oriental origin, such as the headband from Sardis that her daughter Kleis so desired, as it was fashionable among her peers.[34] Although Sappho tries to dissuade her, reminding her that in her own youth girls wore simple purple ribbons in their hair, oriental fashion now seems to have taken over, with ornate Lydian headdresses spreading across the cities of Ionia, captivating the vanity of noble girls.

a
..].θος ἀ γάρ με γέννᾳ[
.].ας ἐπ' ἀλικίας μεγ[
κ]όσμον αἴ τις ἔχη φόβα.[
π̣ορφύρ̣ωι κατελιξαμε[ν
ἔμμεναι μάλα τοῦτο .[
ἄλλα ξανθοτέρα<ι>ς ἔχη[
σ̣α<ὶ>ς κόμα<ι>ς δάιδος προ.[
σ]τεφάνοισιν ἐπαρτια[
ἀνθέων ἐριθαλέων· [
μ]ιτράναν δ' ἀρτίως κλ[
π̣οικίλαν ἀπὺ Σαρδίω[ν
…].αονιασπολεις [

b
σοὶ δ' ἔγω Κλέι ποικίλαν [
οὐκ ἔχω πόθεν ἔσσεται [
μιτράν<αν>· ἀλλὰ τὼι Μυτιληνάωι [

[32] Str. 13.3.2.
[33] On the functions of objects in Sappho's poetry, see Mueller (2023) 59–88; Battezzato (2024) 236–48.
[34] See Mazzarino (1943) 51–2; Ferrari (2007) 13–26; Neri (2012) and (2021) 741–51.

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(a) … My mother [once said that]
in her youth, when someone wrapped
her hair round with a purple hairband
it was the finest decoration by far.
But for the girl with hair
more golden than a blazing torch,
far better for her to wear garlands
of blooming flowers.
Yet now an embroidered hairband
from Sardis
… cities …
(b) But for you, Kleïs, I have no embroidered
hairband – where will it come from?
The Mytilenean …

The *mitra* is ποικίλα, embroidered but also scintillating and colourful, to denote the admiration it generates and its belonging to the realm of *habrosyne*, such as the sandals in fr. 39 Voigt-Neri.[35] Kleis is also associated with luxurious garments of oriental origin (specifically from Phrygia) in fr. 92 Voigt-Neri, where purple and saffron-coloured peplos, cloaks and crowns are mentioned. These luxury garments become symbols of feminine elegance, and even the *mitra* of Sardis (a finely embroidered hairband) stands in contrast to the warrior's *mitra* (made of metal), which is part of the armour of the Homeric warrior.[36]

Beyond the aesthetic appeal these fragments convey, their political and economic implications, as well as Sappho's intent to actively insert herself in a pressing debate in her community, are clear. These fragments highlight the aristocratic passion for luxury objects of oriental origin, which became status symbols for young aristocrats eager to embrace fashionable trends. However, the import of such goods became challenging during periods of austerity and autarky, when Pittacus appears to have imposed restrictions on trade and sumptuary laws.[37] Sappho's own family, affected by the exile of the Kleanaktidai and possibly by personal financial difficulties, faced economic instability, which rendered these luxury expenditures prohibitive.[38] As Battezzato observes, Sappho's inability to provide her daughter with a precious object is here compensated by the transmission of *kleos*, poetic fame, which – starting from Sappho's mother (named Kleis, according to various testimonies) – is passed down matrilineally to the young Kleis.[39]

The passion for *habrosyne* and the desire for luxury objects and garments among aristocratic families is a hallmark of female songs, particularly in *partheneia*, the choral

[35]See Lather (2021) 132–41.

[36]See Hom. *Il.* 4.134–8, 187; Mueller (2023) 72–4.

[37]Theophrastus (fr. 97 Wimmer) affirms that Pittacus regulated the consumption of wine and the display of wealth at funerals. See Mazzarino (1943); Aloni (1983); Ferrari (2007) 13–26; Caciagli (2011) 303–7; Graziosi (2024) 97–9. Dale (2023) 55 n. 20 raises doubts about Mazzarino's reconstruction of Pittacus' policy; see also Page (1955) 102–3.

[38]Sappho herself was forced into exile in Sicily (*FrGrHist* 239 A 36 = Sapph. test. T 251 Neri). See Page (1955) 224–6.

[39]Battezzato (2024) 236–48.

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songs performed by young girls (with a male director).[40] For instance, in Alcman's *Great Partheneion* (fr. 3 Calame), the elaborate display of the girls' allure in front of a Spartan audience is closely tied to the admiration for the sophistication of their clothing and jewellery.

ἦ οὐχ ὁρῆις; ὁ μὲν **κέλης**
Ἐνετικός· ἀ δὲ χαίτα
τᾶς ἐμᾶς ἀνεψιᾶς
Ἀγησιχόρας ἐπανθεῖ
χρυσὸς [ῶ]τ ἀκήρατος·
τό τ' ἀργύριον πρόσωπον,
διαφάδαν τί τοι λέγω;
Ἀγησιχόρα μὲν αὔτα·
ἀ δὲ δευτέρα πεδ' Ἀγιδὼ τὸ ϝεῖδος
ἵππος Ἰβηνῶι Κολαξαῖος δραμήται·
ταὶ πελήδες γὰρ ἅμιν
Ὀρθρίαι φᾶρος φεροίσαις
νύκτα δι' ἀμβροσίαν ἄτᾳ Σήριον
ἄστρον ἀϝηρομέναι μάχονται.
οὔτε γάρ τι **πορφύρας**
τόσσος κόρος ὥστ' ἀμύναι,
οὔτε ποικίλος δράκων
παγχρύσιος, οὐδὲ μίτρα
Λυδία, νεᾳνίδων
ἰανογ[λ]ε̣φάρων ἄγαλμα,
οὐδὲ ταὶ Ναννῶς κόμαι …

Why, don't you see? The **racehorse** is Venetic; but the hair of my cousin Hagesicora has the bloom of undefiled **gold**, and her **silver face** – why do I tell you openly? This is Hagesichora here; and the second in beauty after Agido will run like a **Colaxaean horse** against an **Ibenian**; for the Pleiads, as we carry a plough to Orthria, rise through the ambrosial night like the star Syrius and fight against us. For abundance of **purple** is not sufficient for protection, nor **decorate snake of gold, no, nor Lydian headband, pride of dark-eyed girls**, nor the hair of Nanno …[41]

The two leaders, Agesichora and Agidò, are compared to foreign-bred racehorses, embodying an elitist athleticism reserved for the wealthiest.[42] The passage also highlights purple robes, intricately carved gold jewellery (the snake, which is ποικίλος) and a luxurious Lydian mitre – similar to those mentioned by Sappho[43] – underscoring the aristocracy's openness to Eastern trade, which flourished during the seventh

[40]See also Swift (2016) for the visual references, also to luxury objects, embedded into *partheneia*. For clothing imagery in the *partheneia*, see Coward (2016).
[41]Transl. D. A. Campbell.
[42]See Hodkinson (1999), Nobili (2013a).
[43]The Lydian headband recurs in Pindar's *Nemean* 8.14–15 as a metaphor for the song itself.

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century. This openness occurred before the autarchic policies that Sparta established in the sixth century BC onwards, which led the city toward increasing cultural and economic isolation.[44] At this earlier time, however, Sparta was particularly receptive to external contacts, both economic and cultural, with foreign countries and the East, as demonstrated by the presence of figures like Alcman, who may have hailed from Sardis, and other notable poets such as Terpander and Arion, who came from Lesbos. Alcman's choral piece reflects this, as the girls in his chorus express admiration for these cultural and political ties.[45]

Similarly, in *PMG* 655, Corinna describes the performance of a chorus of Tanagran girls, whom she guides into the remembrance of mythical deeds performed by their local heroes:

ἐπί με Τερψιχόρα [καλῆ
καλὰ ϝεροῖ' ἀϊσομ[έναν
Ταναγρίδεσσι λε[υκοπέπλυς
μέγα δ' ἐμῆς γέγ[αθε πόλις
λιγουροκω[τί]λυ[ς ἐνοπῆς.

Terpsichore exhorts me
to sing beautiful stories
for the women of Tanagra with white peplos.
And the city greatly rejoices
for my limpidly seductive voice.

Here, too, Corinna begins by addressing the 'women of Tanagra with white peplos', making an explicit reference to their elegance. This refinement probably reflected the ambitions of the local aristocracy, as attested by the famous Tanagra terracotta figurines found in Hellenistic tombs. These figurines, depicting elegantly attired women, suggest a well-established Boeotian tradition of sophistication dating back to earlier periods.[46]

The female voice, therefore, both when expressing itself directly and when embodying, as in the case of Alcman, the thoughts of a male author, aspires to take a clear stance even on economic matters, advocating an aristocratic perspective that does not differ significantly from the male viewpoint of authors such as Pindar.

[44]Regarding luxury objects in other poems by Alcman, see Finglass (2021), and on contemporary luxury female dedications in Spartan sanctuaries, see Gallou (2021).

[45]On the passion for *habrosyne*, which characterised Spartan's aristocracy during the archaic age in contrast to Sparta's alleged austerity, and its connection with women, see the collected essays in Hodkinson and Gallou (2021), and, in particular, Osborne (2021), Finglass (2021), Gallou (2021), Paradiso and Roy (2021). Millender (2021) explores the transformation of archaic *habrosyne* into *tryphé*, as an excessive search for eastern luxuries, which characterises Spartan women in fifth- and fourth-century Athenian sources.

[46]See Beck (2020) 103–4; Spinedi (forthcoming).

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The economy of marriage

The works of Calame and Stehle have persuasively demonstrated the significance of marriage as a backdrop for many female choral performances in public. In the *partheneia* of Sappho, Alcman, or Pindar, the *fil rouge* that guides the words of the girls is always the nuptial subtext, with subtle dynamics of seduction underlying the performances. These public displays offer an opportunity for girls of marriageable age to present themselves to the male audience, among whom they may find potential husbands. The community, in turn, watches with approval as these courtships develop and new marital unions are formed.[47] Thus, even poems intended for different occasions often serve as a means to reinforce the value system underpinning aristocratic marriage.

However, in the Greek world, marriage was primarily an economic transaction.[48] The dowry (or nuptial gifts mentioned in the epics) was a central element of the agreement between the bride's father and the prospective husband. Instances where marriage occurred without a dowry were exceedingly rare, if not unheard of. Marriage was part of the same ideological framework that upheld the aristocratic mindset, and lyric poetry played a role in perpetuating this institution, even in its economic aspects.

The epinician ode further affirms these values, although its focus is more masculine, rooted in concepts such as *kleos*, athleticism and *megaloprepeia* exercised by victorious aristocrats over their communities.[49] As Leslie Kurke has persuasively argued, the language of gift exchange and bride-price also permeates the epinician ode, using marriage as a metaphor for the athlete's victory, thereby achieving glory and wealth, as is most evident in Pindar's *Pythian* 9, which displays the economic implications of prosperous mythical and human marriages.[50]

The same image of marriage is detectable in Sappho's songs, reflecting the ideology of *habrosyne* she expresses elsewhere. Sappho was well known for her *epithalamia*, songs composed for illustrious weddings, and it is notable that she not only supports the institution of marriage but also acknowledges the economic exchanges that accompany it, as her male contemporaries. Sappho's fr. 44 Voigt-Neri is sometimes considered a true *epithalamium*, as it recounts the grand and joyous marriage between Hector and Andromache. This depiction could have served as a model for a couple, and the ode may have functioned as a *hymenaios*, performed during wedding ceremonies.[51] The fragment immortalises the moment of the *agogé*, when Hector arrives in Troy, leading Andromache from her home town on a richly decorated chariot.[52] The

[47] See Calame (1977 [2001^2]); Stehle (1997) 71–107. See also Lonsdale (1993) 193–205; Ingalls (2000); Swift (2016).

[48] See Foxhall (1989); Cox (1998); Lyons (2003), 102–5; Cobetto Chiggia (2014); Berg (2016).

[49] Kurke (1991 [2013^2]) 141–222.

[50] Ibid. 95–118.

[51] Cf. Rösler (1975) 275–85; Aloni – Negri (1983); Aloni (1997) lxi–lxv; Neri (2021) 635–44. The length of the fragment cannot be stated definitively, as noted by De Kreij (2020), in contrast to Sampson (2016). Although the hymeneal nature of the ode is disputed (see e.g. Page 1955: 71–4), the exemplary nature of the wedding couple is evident, as exemplified also by Graziosi (2024) 99–102.

[52] Spelman (2017) argues that Sappho's representation may have been inspired by the famous entrance into Troy of Paris and Helen, as recounted by the *Cypria.*

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performance of this song probably took place in a similar context, blending myth and reality, a common practice in lyric poetry.

τάς τ' ἄλλας Ἀσίας .[.]δε.αν κλέος ἄφθιτον·
Ἔκτωρ καὶ συνέταιρ[ο]ι ἄγοισ' ἐλικώπιδα
Θήβας ἐξ ἰέρας Πλακίας τ' ἀπ̣[ἀΐ]ν<ν>άω
ἄβραν Ἀνδρομάχαν ἐνὶ ναῦσιν ἐπ' ἄλμυρον
πόντον· **πόλλα δ' [ἐλί]γματα χρύσια κἄμματα**
πορφύρ[α] καταΰτ[με]να, ποίκιλ' ἀθύρματα,
ἀργύρᾳ τ' ἀνάρι̣θ̣μα ̣ποτή̣ρι̣α̣ κἀλέφαις.

… and of the rest of Asia immortal glory:
Hector and companions lead
from sacred Thebes and perennial Placia,
graceful Andromache, bright-eyed, on ships
on the salty sea; **many bracelets of gold and garments**
of light purple, variegated ornaments,
and innumerable cups of silver and ivory.

Hector and Andromache are depicted as an ideal couple, and it is no coincidence that Andromache is celebrated for the wealth of the ornaments she brings with her as soon as she arrives in Troy: 'many bracelets of gold and robes of light purple, variegated ornaments (ποίκιλ' ἀθύρματα), and innumerable cups of silver and ivory'. The expression ποίκιλ' ἀθύρματα recalls once again the realm of *habrosyne*, with the visual allusion to an oriental luxury that gives pleasure to those who display it, that we already noticed in Sappho's frr. 39 and 98 Voigt-Neri. The Trojans welcome the new princess with similar extravagance, and the festive atmosphere includes precious objects (craters and cups) and oriental perfumes (myrrh, cassia and frankincense), while the songs of girls, women and men further enrich the scene.

Such precious objects – jewellery, luxury garments, gold, silver vessels – were typically part of a wealthy girl's dowry, which she had some freedom to manage. These objects were also common in funeral trousseaus and dedications by women.[53] Τὰ χρυσία καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια (the gold and the garments) was the technical term for the dowry objects, later known as *paraphernalia*, which the bride wore on her wedding day, as confirmed by wedding iconography. Visual representations of weddings often highlight the extravagance of the brides' appearance and the richness of the ceremony, signalling both the wealth of her family and the prestige of her future husband.[54] In *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, for instance, the chorus of girls dreams of returning to Greece, where they will celebrate a luxurious wedding (1143–52), where luxury clothes and hairstyles are key components.

Lyric depictions of marriage typically emphasise such luxurious displays. Sappho, in representing Andromache as the ideal bride, underscores the importance of the bride's dowry: the richer the dowry, the more splendid and fortunate the matrimonial union, no matter how ephemeral it may be, by virtue of the tragic fate that the

[53] See Lyons (2016), Gondek (2016).
[54] See Oakley-Sinos (1993) 16–21, 43–7; Gondek (2016).

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couple will face. By celebrating the wealth of Andromache's dowry, fit for a princess, Sappho highlights the success of a marriage grounded in an equal division of wealth between the bride and the Trojan prince, which leads to *homophrosyne*, the mutual understanding considered essential for an ideal relationship between husband and wife.[55]

However, the ostentatious display of the bride's *paraphernalia* also takes on significance in the context of the economic shifts occurring during the transition from aristocratic oligarchies to the era of tyrannies and democracies. By the sixth century, wedding ceremonies were subject to reforms aimed at curbing the aristocracy's public displays of power – economic as well as political, as the downsizing of funerals also attests. Solon, for instance, enacted laws to limit the amount of ornaments and jewellery brides could wear on their wedding day.[56] While it is unclear if similar attempts were made in Lesbos, Pittacus' autocratic policies and his effort to limit aristocratic *habrosyne* – as alluded to in fr. 94 Voigt-Neri – have been compared to Solon's similar sumptuary reforms in Athens.[57]

Sappho's voice thus rises to reaffirm the value of aristocratic marriage and the display of wealth that accompanies it, in opposition to emerging populist reforms that sought to diminish the power of elite families and promote a more equal integration of the aristocracy within the broader community of the *polis*.

The choice of a mythical subject for ode/poem 44 suggests that it was composed for a public occasion, probably a wedding, attended by both men and women. It is therefore not surprising that it adheres to the officially shared matrimonial model, which is also found in male poetry, such as that of Pindar. The case is different for poems intended for a more private audience, which instead cast a more ambiguous and distinctly feminine light on marriage, insisting on the separation of the bride from her mother and group of friends, seemingly in contrast with the model imposed by society.[58]

Therefore, from the survey conducted so far, it emerges that the voice of female poets – at least in poems composed for public occasions, the voice of female choruses directed by male authors and, to a certain degree, that of contemporary male poets essentially share the same value system, reflecting an aristocratic society founded on the display of wealth as a status symbol and a criterion of social distinction. A different case may be that of poems composed by female poets (Sappho) for more intimate occasions, perhaps intended for an exclusively female audience, which communicate feminine instances in opposition to a well-rooted male poetic tradition.

The public arena offered women (both as authors and performers) the opportunity to raise their voice in order to exert their own influence on the social and economic dynamics within various communities. Female voices thus promoted a series of values

[55] On the opposite side, see Corinna's opposition to unions not equally based on a correct gift-exchange and *homophrosyne*, as the secret abduction of Asopus' daughter by the gods (*PMG* 654 col. ii–iv).

[56] Plut. *Sol.* 20.4: 'In all other marriages, he banned dowries, prescribing that the bride could take with her three garments, household stuff of little value and nothing else.' See Wagner-Hasel (2013), Tsakiropoulou-Summers (2018).

[57] See Mazzarino (1943) 44.

[58] See e.g. fr. 104a Voigt-Neri, which laments the separation of the bride from her mother, or fr. 94 Voigt-Neri, on the sorrowful separation of a girl (perhaps a newly married bride) from her group of friends. See Lardinois (2001) 85–6.

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upheld by the male poets of the time, as if it were in the interest of the entire 'corporation of poets' to maintain a system of values rooted in aristocratic society and in exchanges, including economic ones, that it generated.

Women and patronage

From this perspective, one might ask whether, beyond their influence in activating or approving certain social dynamics, a distinct circle of female-driven economic transactions could have emerged behind performances in which women were the protagonists. It is reasonable to imagine that poets such as Sappho or Corinna, who composed cultic songs for the entire citizenry, such as the *epithalamia*, or in the case of Sappho, poems probably addressed to a more intimate circle of women, received some form of compensation for their work. For example, Corinna composed odes for city festivals across various localities in Boeotia, as did her contemporary Pindar. It is conceivable that they both competed for commissions from the same patrons or cities.[59] Consider the cult of the Charites at Orchomenus, celebrated both by Pindar in *Olympian* 14 and by Corinna in a fragment mentioning the river Cephysus, which is traceable to that locality (*PMG* 692 fr. 2), or the cult of Apollo at Tanagra, evoked both by Pindar in fr. 286 M. and by Corinna in *PMG* 655, where she exhorts the girls of Tanagra to join her in singing a song for the town. Both poets exhibited continuous connections to Thebes and its most important festivals, reflecting a close relationship with the local aristocracy.[60]

While the remunerative aspect for professional poets such as Pindar or Simonides is fairly well known, and it is clear that the 'mercenary muse' Pindar criticises in the poet of Ceos was a common practice in choral lyric poetry,[61] the economic relationship between patrons and female poets remains more uncertain. We may wonder whether Corinna, who was commissioned to write poems for communal religious festivals just like Pindar, and who displayed wisdom and technical mastery (including metrical innovations attributed to her) on a par with her rival (if not even better, following a certain anecdotal tradition that saw her as superior to him[62]), was compensated for her work to the same extent as her male adversary.

Poets such as Arion, Ibycus, Pindar and Simonides were known to have amassed great wealth: Isocrates (*Antid.* 166) states that Pindar was paid 10,000 drachmas by the Athenians for a single encomium, and the scholia report that Pindar asked the family of Pytheas from Aegina half a talent (3000 drachms) to compose a small-scale epinician, in a context where one drachma per day was the standard income for a workman.[63] However, remuneration did not always take the form of monetary fees. Although financial transactions gained more prominence in the sixth century BC,[64] other forms of

[59]On the anecdote concerning Pindar's and Corinna competition and their struggle to secure commissions for themselves from rich aristocratic families, see Nobili (forthcoming).

[60]See Spinedi (forthcoming).

[61]Regarding the economic transactions implied by the poet–patron relationship, see Svenbro (1976) 173–86; Gentili (1984 [1995^3]) 212–36; Kurke (1991 [2013^2]); Bremer (1991); Carey (2007) 202–6; Cairns (2011); Stewart (2016); Rawles (2018) 133–225.

[62]See Plut. *De glor. Ath.* 4.347f–348a; Ael. *VH.* 13.25; Paus. 9.22.3.

[63]See Bremer (1991) 48–54.

[64]See Kurke (1999).

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compensation were possible for aristocratic poets, as demonstrated in Sappho's case.[65] Hesiod (*Op.* 654–9), for instance, states that after competing in Aulis at the funerary games for Amphidamas, he was rewarded with a tripod, which he dedicated to the Muses. Simonides was said to have received gifts from Hieron, but he sold them,[66] while Pindar was given part of the offerings pilgrims dedicated to Apollo in Delphi.[67] High-value gifts, as well as elite hospitality and maintenance at tyrants' courts, where poets enjoyed the status of friends (*philoi*) rather than ordinary salariats, were part of the rewards for professional poets.[68] Moreover, in epinician odes, any monetary transactions between poets and patrons were often disguised as gift exchanges between peers[69] or framed within the language of erotic or pederastic relationships between *eromenos* and *erastes*.[70]

Sappho provides more specific evidence in this regard. In fr. 32 Voigt-Neri, she declares that the Muses, by gifting her with their work, made her τιμία (honoured), a term that carries an economic connotation, as it implies a honour deriving from the ἔργα (works, jobs) of the Muses.

αἴ με τιμίαν ἐπόησαν ἔργα
τὰ σφὰ δοῖσαι

[The Muses] granted me honour
by the gift of their works.

The economic connotation is reinforced by Aelius Aristides (*Or.* 28.51), who states that Sappho boasted before other women considered fortunate, claiming that the Muses had made her 'rich and envied' (ὀλβίαν τε καὶ ζελωτήν);[71] and she also reflects on the limits and unpredictability of richness in the few lines preserved by a papyrus commentary on her work, where she says that 'the gods assign wealth (whom they want)'.[72]

It is plausible that the poetess is referring to material wealth derived from her poetic art, granted by the Muses. If she indeed maintained a form of 'discipleship

[65]The aristocracy of Sappho's family is clearly evident in the anecdotal and biographic tradition (see Suda *s.v.* Σαπφώ, σ 107 A = Sapp. test. 253 Neri). Nonetheless, as Charaxos' story shows, the household's incomes deriving from land property were supported by other forms of revenue, such as trading.

[66]Ath. 14.656 d–e.

[67]Paus. 10.24.5; Plut. *De sera* 13.

[68]See Gzella (1971); Pelliccia (2009) 241–7; Bowie (2012). Hornblower (2007) 297–302 suggests the pleasure of the hospitality Pindar enjoyed in Aegina as a reason for the high number of epinician odes dedicated to Aeginetan victors.

[69]See Kurke (1991).

[70]See Nicholson (2000).

[71]Gentili (1984 [1995^3]) 218; Ferrari (2007) 50–1. See also Solon, who in fr. 13 W^2 at l.3 asks for fortune from the gods (ὄλβον μοι πρὸς θεῶν μακάρων δότε), and at l.7 specifically wealth (χρήματα δ' ἰμείρω μὲν ἔχειν); like Sappho's family, Solon gained at least part of his wealth through trading (Plut. *Sol.* 2.1).

[72]*P.Oxy.* 2506, fr. 48c (= Sapph. fr. 168D 5b Neri). See Treu (1966) 15–20; Neri (2021) 849.

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relationship' with younger girls, such relationships probably had an economic dimension as well.[73] Thus, while some women composed poetry and received remuneration within the established patronage dynamics of the times, we may argue that there were also women who enjoyed financial autonomy and may have exercised patronage.

In the sacred sphere, numerous testimonies attest to women offering rich dedications to deities. These dedications involved not only precious items the women could access more freely (e.g. garments they made, jewellery and parts of their dowry) but also considerable sums of money drawn from family finances, often with the consent of their husbands, for commissioning statues and other votive gifts.

Votive dedications confirm the consistent presence of women at sacred sites. It has been estimated that about one-tenth of all private dedications from the eighth to the fifth century BC were made by women.[74] A notable example is the colossal dedication by Nicandra of Naxos to the goddess Artemis in the sanctuary of Delos around 650 BC, which bears an inscription with Nicandra's name and her prestigious family lineage (*CEG* I 403). This is a woman from an aristocratic family, who offered this important gift to the goddess Artemis, perhaps in gratitude for her recent marriage. While it is unclear whether Nicandra personally commissioned the costly statue or if a male member paid for it, what is certain is that women assiduously frequented the sanctuary at Delos, as confirmed by numerous sources.

The Delian festival, largely focused on Apollo but which also prominently included the veneration of Artemis, in archaic times attracted men and women from across the region. Naxos, located a short distance from Delos, held political sway over the sanctuary in the Archaic period, and the island was responsible for several monumental constructions, such as the Terrace of the Lions and the Naxian *oikos*.[75] Girls' choruses were a valued part of the festivities in honour of the twins, as mentioned in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (vv. 146–64). Nicandra's dedication thus fits into this rich cultural landscape, where Naxos held sway over the sanctuary, and its female citizens (as well as the men) actively participated in the island's festivals, seeking visibility and prominence before the people who assembled from every region of Ionia.

Other, more modest but equally meaningful, female votive dedications reveal the roles women played within their families. Everyday objects they used in domestic life, such as mirrors found in Brauron or on the Athenian Acropolis and offered as gifts to Athena, attest to this. These objects – buckles, distaffs and tools used for weaving – are found throughout Greece. Examples include the sanctuary of Hera at Perachora and various sanctuaries where especially precious, finely ornamented textiles were dedicated, such as Brauron and Tanagra.[76] Statues were frequently adorned with richly decorated peplums and robes, produced and offered by female hands.[77] Through such offerings, ritual agency intertwined with women's artistic and manual skills. When a dedication was accompanied by a prayer, their poetic expertise was also on display.

[73]Although the idea of Sappho 'schoolmistress' is now outdated (see Stehle 1997; Parker 1993 and 2005), some initiatory functions within the dynamics of *chorodidaskalia* are still attractive (see Bierl 2003 and 2018).

[74]Lazzarini (1976) 169. See also Day (2016).

[75]Constantakopoulou (2007) 42–6.

[76]See Dillon (2002) 13–14.

[77]Regarding the dedication of fabrics, see Brøns (2017a) and (2017b) in sanctuaries across Greece; and Gallou (2021) for the Spartan evidence.

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Furthermore, there are numerous examples of high-quality vases, inscribed with the names of their owners, wealthy women who could afford to purchase and 'customise' precious artifacts.[78]

These everyday objects illustrate women's authority within their households, including their ability to manage possessions such as household furnishings or items from their dowries. Women would sometimes relinquish these things to offer them to a deity, usually female, in gratitude or supplication. Especially interesting are the dedications found on the Acropolis in Athens, where women offered Athena a tithe (*dekate*). Some of these dedications came from women earning their own incomes, for instance, a washerwoman, reflecting the financial independence some women had in managing the income derived from their labour.[79]

Since there is evidence of women who enjoyed a certain economic independence, allowing them to offer votive dedications to the gods, we cannot rule out the possibility that there were others who commissioned celebratory poems from prominent professional poets and poetesses, despite the lack of explicit testimonies to support this. The male-dominated world of the epinician odes, with its complex relationships between poet, patron and audience, excluded women from the commissioning process.[80] Although these odes highlight rich family networks, mentioning patrons alongside numerous professional or private ties, they conspicuously avoid mentioning contemporary women, even wives, mothers, or sisters, underscoring their absence from this patron–poet relationship.

A different scenario emerges in the case of cultic songs for religious occasions, where women may have played a leading role: although these testimonies do not confirm the existence of specific patronage dynamics between female patrons and poets, they do highlight the leading role that some women could exert within the family, including in commissioning choral songs.

The marriage subtext that permeates Alcman's *partheneia*, which features young women of marriageable age as protagonists, probably involved their mothers – wealthy women of the local aristocracy. In Sparta, women's resourcefulness, including their economic power, was highly valued, as was their participation in poetic and musical activities.[81] One of these women may have commissioned a unique encomium by Bacchylides (20A M.),[82] which recounts the Spartan myth of Marpessa, whose stern father forbade her marriage.[83] Bacchylides' poem is structured around a reference to contemporary figures (ll. 4–12), compared with Marpessa and her father in the mythic section (ll. 13–56).

[78]See Steinhart (2003).

[79]See the dedications by Smikythe (the washerwoman, IG i^3 794; Raubitschek 380), Empedia (IG i^3 767; Raubitschek 25), Mikythe (IG i^3 857; Raubitschek 298), or Melesos (IG i^3 540). See Dillon (2002) 14–19.

[80]See Ahlert (1942), Kyriakou (1994) on mythic female figures in Pindar's epinician odes.

[81]Spartan women could inherit their parents' properties and administer them: see Hodkinson (1989) and (2004); Pomeroy (2002), 76–86; on the musical education of Spartan girls, see Calame (1977) [2001^2] 214–31; Pomeroy (2002) 3–27; Ducat (2006) 223–77.

[82]As regards this fragment belonging to the book of encomia, see Nobili (2013b), 39–44; D'Alessio (2016). Snell (1952) speculated that it might be a kind of 'inverted encomium', an ode of blame against a contemporary character, a strict father who refuses to marry off his only daughter.

[83]For the Spartan setting of this ode, see Di Marzio (2006), Nobili (2013b).

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– – –⏑⏑–⏑– κ]αθημένη
– – –]υ̣ο̣[–]π̣[⏑–⏓–⏑]μας
——] καὶ ὑπέρ[μορ’ ἄχθε]τ̣αι πατρί,
ἰ̣κ̣[ε]τ̣εύει δὲ κα[– –]
χ[θ]ονίας τάλαι[ν’ Ἀρὰς] ὀ̣-
ξ[ύ]τ̣ερόν νιν τελ[έσαι]
γῆρας καὶ κατάρατ[ον –⏓–⏑–]ι̣
μούνην ἔνδον ἔχω[ν ⏑–
λε]υκαὶ δ’ ἐν [κ]εφαλ[ῇ ⏑–⏑– τ]ρίχες.

She, sitting (at home?)… and is exceedingly angry with her father, and (in her affliction?) she makes supplication to the nether-world Curses, poor wretch, that he completes a bitter and accursed old age for keeping his daughter alone indoors and (preventing her from marrying), although the hair (will turn) white on her head.[84]

The ode emphasises the character of this brave girl who, in response to her father’s cruelty, curses him and manages to escape the destiny he had chosen for her; her attitude is not isolated in myth, and the *Catalogue of women* includes examples such as Tyro, who frequently reproached her father Salmonaeus for his impiety; Mestra, who managed to escape unwanted marriages; and Atalanta, who avoided marriage by defeating her suitors in running races.[85] The central role played by this girl in the song may be an indication of the prominence of a female figure in the patronage relationship with Bacchylides.

Sparta also provided convivial settings where women played leading roles.[86] A passage from Athenaeus, inspired by the work of the Spartan historian Sosibius, attests to the existence of encomia sung by female choirs at women’s banquets, where praises were lavished on the most beautiful girls, and breast-shaped sweets called κριβάναι were served.[87] An encomium like Bacchylides’ fr. 20A M. might fit in such a setting, where the praise of girls of marriageable age was highly valued, as confirmed by the *partheneia*.[88]

Furthermore, Sparta in the fourth century was home to a remarkable woman whose extraordinary qualities and charisma anticipated those of Hellenistic queens: Cynisca, sister of King Agesilaos. She was the first and only woman to win the chariot race at Olympia twice, using the wealth inherited from her father, Archidamos, to breed

[84]Transl. by Campbell.
[85]See Hes. frr. 30, 43a, 75, 76 M.W. See Ormand (2014).
[86]On Spartan conviviality, see Nafissi (1991) 173–226; Quattrocelli (2002) and (2008).
[87]Ath. 14, 646a = Sosib. *FGrHist* 595 F 6. Other encomia for illustrious Spartan women are mentioned by Plut. *Lyc.* 26, 6–8. Female banquets in Sparta may also be evidenced by iconography: a sixth-century Laconian cup from the sanctuary of Hera at Samos shows women reclining at the symposium with men, thus providing visual evidence of Spartan women’s presence at banquets (Samos K 1203; see Pipili (1987) 72–3, figs. 104, 104a). Some Athenian vase paintings (Herm. 664 = ARV^2 16,15; Munich, Antikenmus. 2421 = ARV^2 23,7) depict female-only symposia, with naked women drinking wine, possibly an Athenian parodic representation of Spartan women’s banquets. See Neils (2012) 161–3.
[88]See Nobili (2013b).

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racehorses.[89] She was also a patron of the arts, commissioning the Megarian sculptor Apelles to create two monuments depicting her victory, which were displayed at Olympia.[90] An epigram inscribed on her Olympic monument (*CEG* 820 = 33 Ebert), which she probably commissioned herself, celebrates her unprecedented achievement as the first woman in Greece to receive the Olympic crown.[91]

Σπάρτας μὲν ⌞βασιλῆες ἐμοὶ⌟ | πατέρες καὶ ἀδελφοί,
ἅρ⌞μασι δ' ὠκυπόδων ἵππων⌟ | νικῶσα Κυνίσκα
εἰκόνα τάνδ' ἔστ᾽ ἀσε, μόν⌞αν⌟ | δ' ἐμέ φαμι γυναικῶν
Ἑλλάδος ἐκ πάσας τό⌞ν⌟|δε λαβεῖν στέφανον.

Ἀπελλέας Καλλικλέος ἐπόησε.

My fathers and brothers are kings of Sparta.
Cinisca, having won with the chariot of swift-footed horses,
erected this statue. I declare that I am the only one
among the women of Greece to have received this crown.
Apelles, son of Callicles, made this statue.

As Pausanias notes (3.8.2), in a city with few poetic celebrations for sporting victories like Sparta,[92] Cynisca's commissioning of a poetic epigram stands out for its originality and the assertiveness with which she celebrated her achievements. Cynisca demonstrates that Spartan women, with financial autonomy, could achieve prominence by competing in equestrian contests and commissioning art and poetry.

If Spartan women could play significant roles in commissioning, they could do so elsewhere as well. Pindar's *partheneion* 94b, a cultic song composed for a girls' chorus at the Theban Daphnephorica, was commissioned by a local family, whom the poet praises alongside the god, showing an unusual female participation in song and dance.[93] Both male and female members of the family are named: Pagondas, his father Aeoladas, his son Agasicles[94] (the *daphnephoros*), Pagondas' wife Andesistrota (the *chorodidaskalos*, entrusted with the task of instructing the chorus) and their daughter Damena (the *choregos*), who, like the Spartan Astymelousa, stood out among her peers.

[89]On Cynisca, see Pomeroy (2002) 21–3; Kyle (2003); Perry (2004) 57–66; Hodkinson (2004) 111–12. Xenophon (*Ages.* 9.6) and Plutarch (*Ages.* 20) state that her brother Agesilaos persuaded her to compete in the horse races to demonstrate that, if a women could excel in this sport, victories were due to wealth rather than virtue. However, Cynisca's agency must be reevaluated due to the great economic independence Spartan women had. See Paradiso (2015); Paradiso and Roy (2021) and Carrara (2023).

[90]Paus. 6.1.6 and 6.12.5.

[91]The literary quality of the verses must be attributed to an expert poet. See Nobili (2013a) 76–8 and (2016b) 174–7.

[92]On Spartan epinician odes, see Nobili (2013b).

[93]Regarding this ode, see Lehnus (1984); Stehle (1997), 93–7; Kurke (2007); Di Marzio (2018); Presutti (2023).

[94]On the historic identity of Pagondas and Aeoladas, see Hornblower and Morgan (2007) 35–9.

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πολ]λὰ μὲν [τ]ὰ πάροιθ̣[⏑–×–⏑–
ḍ̣αιδάλλοισ’ ἔπεσιν, τὰ δ’ α̣[×–⏑–
Ζεὺς οἶδ’, ἐμὲ δὲ πρέπει
παρθενήϊα μὲν φρονεῖν
γλώσσᾳ τε λέγεσθαι·
ἀνδρὸς δ’ οὔτε γυναικός, ὧν θάλεσσιν ἔγ-
κειμαι, χρή μ[ε] λ̣α̣θεῖν ἀοιδὰν πρόσφορον.
πιστὰ δ’ Ἀγασικλέει
μάρτυς ἦλυθον ἐς χορόν
ἐσλοῖς τε γονεῦσιν
ἀμφὶ προξενίαισι·
[…]
Δαμαίνας π̣α[. .]ρ . . […]ῳ νῦν μοι ποδὶ
στείχων ἀγέ̣ο· [τ]ι̣ὶν γὰ̣ρ ε̣[ὔ]φρων ἕ̣ψεται
πρώτα θυγάτηρ [ὁ]δοῦ
δάφνας εὐπετάλου σχε̣δ[ό]ν
βαίνοισα πεδίλοις,
Ἀνδαισιστρότα ἃν ἐπά-
σκησε μήδε̣σ̣[ι.].[.].[.]ρ̣ο̣[]

Many are the former things …
as I adorn them in verses, while the others…
Zeus knows, but it is proper for me
to think maidenly thoughts
and to say them with my tongue.
Neither for man nor woman, to whose offspring
I am devoted, must I forget a fitting song.
As a faithful witness for Agasicles
I have come to the dance
and for the noble parents
because of their hospitality:
[…]
(Father?) of Damena, stepping forth now
with a … foot, lead the way for me, since the first
to follow you on the way will be your kindly daughter,
who beside the branch of leafy bay
walks on sandals,
whom Andesistrota trained
in skill …[95]

Both parents are here praised for their hospitality, and both appear as commissioners of the ode (in fact, it was necessary that the *daphnephoros* had both of them alive). Andesistrota is noted for teaching Agesicles' sister Damona how to dance and to perform the sacred steps, emphasising the significant role both women played in

[95]Transl. by Race.

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the ceremony. The young Damona, in line with the hegemonic role her family seems to play in Thebes and in this ritual, was the *choregos*, while her mother was the *chorodidaskalos*, highlighting the important function of female members of the family in both ritual and social terms.

We see here the involvement of the entire family in commissioning and executing a poem that was performed during one of the city's most important festivities, placing all members of the family in the spotlight. The women, like the men, played an active role in the success of the performance, leading Pindar, who typically refrained from praising women in his odes, to include their names among the most distinguished members of the Aeolads' household.[96]

It is therefore unsurprising that in societies in which women frequently participated in choruses – whether as *choregai* or *chorodidaskaloi* – poetesses such as Corinna and Myrtis could emerge, strengthening the connection between performers and authors, as was also evident in Lesbos.[97] Moreover, the shared occasions, modes of composition and content exhibited by both Boeotia, the homeland of Pindar and Corinna, and Lesbos, where Sappho and Alcaeus flourished, suggest that the patronage relationships between female poets and patrons were similar in these regions. In places where women had greater freedom to manage their finances, intellectual professions like poetry could thrive. This stands in stark contrast to cities like Athens, which frowned upon such economic autonomy, severely limiting women's participation in poetry, both as authors and performers.

Conclusions

The multifaced geography of female song highlights various regions where girls and women actively participated in choral performances – both as performers or as authors – providing them with opportunities to raise their voices in public, before wide and diverse audiences. These performances allowed women to comment on or express opinions about a range of topics, including the economic choices and politics of their communities.

The most significant realm for these women was *habrosyne*, a concept closely tied to aristocratic life and particularly to the female sphere. Women used their influence to ensure the continued flow of luxury goods from the Eastern world, which symbolised their social standing. From Alcman's Sparta to Corinna' Boeotia to Sappho's Lesbos, *habrosyne* represented a status symbol for aristocratic women and poets, who often struggled to preserve it, sometimes in opposition to the current political trends.

[96] See Demand (1982) 98–103.

[97] Regarding the Boeotian cultural background, which ensured girls received a quality education that enabled them to read, write and appreciate poetry, see also *CEG* I 446, a graffito on a kantharos of the second half of the fifth century BC, found in Thespiae, which preserves a dedication of a man to his wife. It is a metrical text, which may indicate that the woman would have appreciated such a gift, as she might have been able to identify the rhythmic structure. A stele from Thespiae (Athens, Nat. Arch. Mus. 817) depicts a young woman seated on a chest, with a scroll rolled up on top of it, indicating that she is in a moment of pause from reading, and a pyxis by the Painter of the Dancing Pan, dating to the second half of the fifth century BC, portrays a woman preparing to perform a poetry recital, while one of her companions holds an open scroll containing an hexametric fragment that probably constituted the beginning of a poem evoking a dance performance by the inhabitants of Iasus. See Avronidaki (2008) 14–19; Caroli (2022) 132–7.

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Another key economic concern for women was the institution of aristocratic marriage, marked by the display of wealth through marriage gifts and dowries. This, too, was part of the world of *habrosyne* and directly involved women, as marriage was not only the most important event in their life but also their most significant contribution to the household's finances.

Finally, although the evidence is limited, it seems reasonable to suggest that female performances activated the same economic dynamics as the work of male poets in relation to their patrons. We find examples of professional female poets who composed public songs for their communities, commissioned by wealthy families, and of women patrons, who supported the arts and poetry by dedicating costly statues and epigrams in sanctuaries and perhaps also commissioning odes from renowned poets.

Thus, women contributed to the economic life of their communities through their poetic voices. While silence and domestic life characterised the lives of most women, especially in Athens, other regions afforded women the opportunity to perform in public cultic contexts, which served as important platforms for expressing their views on social, political and economic matters.

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