INTRODUCTION

Approaching Women in Prehistory and History

In this introduction, the scene is set for the 'lives' that form the body of this book. The first thing to consider is the presence – or absence of women. This absence takes several forms: absence from the world, absence from society or parts of it, absence from culture and absence from history. The discussion then moves to misogyny and patriarchy, which in a real sense lie behind the issue of missing women but which also must be considered in theoretical terms, and matriarchy, which forms part of the story of how women came back into history and one way in which parts of human 'history' has been conceived of. The chapter then gives a brief review of attempts to put women back into ancient history and archaeology. Finally, the methods and scope of the book are described, along with the questions it addresses.

MISSING WOMEN

In 1992, Amartya Sen published a disturbing editorial in the *BMJ: British Medical Journal* in which he argued that the world was missing about 100 million women, in particular from parts of Asia and north Africa.[1] He pointed out that while more boys tend to be born around the world, girls are hardier and, given the same care, more survive. The difference in numbers must result from cultural and social factors. As Sen noted, these factors include the pervasive influence of traditional male-focused cultures, neglect of the health and nutrition of baby and infant girls, and, increasingly, sex selective abortion. Exposure

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and infanticide are also still practiced in some parts of the world. Eleven years later, Sen revisited the subject in another article and rather than progress found instead that little had changed.[2] Indeed, the situation may be getting worse; in India and China, amongst other countries, the increasing availability of cheap sonography is enabling more couples to determine the sex of a fetus before birth, with the result that those of the 'wrong' sex, often females, can be aborted.[3]

Although doing ancient demography is difficult, it is probably also the case that the ancient world of Greco-Roman culture – which forms the backbone of this book – was missing women too.[4] It has long been recognised that exposure was practiced in ancient Greece and Rome, although the reasons for exposure, how common it was, and its possible effects on the make-up of the general population have been hotly debated.[5] In his *Theaetaetus*, a dialogue on knowledge, Plato has Socrates – the midwife of ideas – make the following comment about how a new idea should be received, using the birth of a child as a metaphor:

> Here at last, then, after our somewhat painful labor, is the child we have brought to birth, whatever sort of creature it may be. His birth should be followed by the ceremony of carrying him round the hearth; we must look at our offspring from every angle to make sure we are not taken in by a lifeless phantom not worth the rearing. Or do you think an infant of yours must be reared in any case and not exposed? Will you bear to see him put to the proof, and not be in a passion if your first born should be taken away?[6]

As a metaphor, it relies on exposure being common-enough practice to be made sense of. The incidental suggestion here is that newborns would be assessed as a matter of course and that some infants could be considered 'not worth rearing'.

Deformity, sickliness, or weakness could be reasons for the exposure of a baby rather than its acceptance into the family.[7] One Roman-era Greek medical writer, Soranus, noted eight points to consider in judging the worthiness of a baby for rearing:

> 1) the mother should be healthy 2) the baby should be full-term 3) it should cry with vigor 4) it should be 'perfect' in all its parts 5) its 'ducts' must be free of obstruction 6) the natural functions of every member should be neither sluggish nor weak 7) the joints must bend and stretch 8) it should have the right size and shape and be properly sensitive to stimulus.[8]

Other reasons for exposing newborns could include illegitimacy, poverty – and sex. In ancient Sparta, male babies judged weak by magistrates would be tossed into a pit, but female babies were raised.[9]

Neither Plato nor Soranus were discussing girls in particular, but the view has been widespread among modern scholars, at least since the early twentieth

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century, that female babies were more likely to have been exposed than males.[10] La Rue Van Hook made this point about the Greeks in 1920.[11] Reasons he noted for exposing female babies included that girls were less desired as children: a girl would need to be provided with a dowry and girls could not perform military duties to defend their city. Some ancient comments support the economic argument. A comic writer from third-century BC Greece, Posidippus, penned the line, intended to be humorous to his audience, 'one rears a son even if one be poor, but exposes a daughter even if one be rich'.[12] The sentiment is also found in a first century BC papyrus from Egypt too in which a mercenary called Ilarion gave instructions to his wife to raise a male child but expose a female one.[13] Mark Golden estimates that perhaps 10 per cent of Athenian female babies were exposed.[14]

Not all infants that were exposed died or were intended to be killed directly – the choice of where to leave a new baby and whether to leave any items with it would affect its chances either way. One surviving novel from Roman times by Longus, called *Daphnis and Chloe*, has the two main characters, a boy and a girl, found as exposed babies at the start.[15] The boy, Daphnis, was found first, by a goatherd called Lamon, though Lamon was initially tempted just to take the few items left with the infant. He felt ashamed and took the baby as well. Two years later, the shepherd Dryas found the baby girl and he and his wife adopted her, bringing her up with love and affection. This is a work of fiction, but the details have to be plausible for the story to work.

A true story recounted by Roger Bagnall tells of a less happy fate for a real foundling.[16] In AD 362 a contract was drawn up in the village of Kellis, in Upper Egypt, agreeing on the sale of an unnamed girl for two solidi, a fairly low price for a slave but enough to feed a family for a year, so a not inconsiderable sum. The sellers were a married couple, Tatoup and her husband Psais, and the buyer one Tithoes, a carpenter; quite ordinary Egyptians of the period. The contract records that the girl was a foundling, an infant that had been exposed and found and nurtured by Tatoup. We do not know why the girl was sold – was this the plan all along, to raise the girl as an investment, was it opportunistic, or was it an act forced on the couple by their situation? Letters between Pliny the Younger, as governor of Bithynia, discuss individuals born free but exposed and brought up as slaves, which posed a legal problem; the fate of the Egyptian girl was not unique.[17]

Bennett argued in 1923 that there was little evidence for exposure of infants during the Roman republic or early empire, in contrast to the situation among the Greeks.[18] However, this has been strongly rejected by later scholars including Peter Brunt, who conducted a major study of Roman demographics.[19] Harris follows this view and suggests that 'the exposure of infants, very often but by no means always resulting in death, was widespread in many parts

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of the Roman Empire'.[20] Similarly, it is also accepted that across the Roman world baby girls may have been exposed more often than boys, as a result of a general preference for male children.

Proving that more female babies were exposed than male babies in antiquity is difficult, but such a pattern would not be unexpected and has been found in many 'traditional' societies across time and space, even into the present as Sen noted. L. S. Vishwanath has written of 'endemic female foeticide and infanticide' in parts of modern India.[21] Whether the exposure of baby girls was ever significant enough to have a demographic impact on the sex ratio of a particular population in antiquity, be it that of Athens or the entire Roman world, is unclear. We might reasonably expect differences according to urban or rural locations and to social location, as is noted by Vishwanath for India. However, it is much less controversial to assert that the practice of exposing less-valued female infants would have reinforced their lower value and have impacted social attitudes about women more widely.

Women do not go missing only because of exposure or direct killing, they also disappear due to neglect based on social and familial sex-preferences. Nowadays, 'neglect' is defined as 'circumstances when a child's basic needs or rights are not adequately met resulting in harm or jeopardy to the child's health, development, or safety' and is 'a major world health and social problem'.[22] Neglect can include a child receiving less care generally, an inadequate diet, or 'precocious assumption of adult roles and their exposure to threatening circumstances that jeopardize their healthy development'.[23] One example of how girls can suffer unequal treatment from 2021 is illustrative. Following the recent withdrawal of western troops from Afghanistan, and the increasing fragility of the Afghan economy, some parents began selling their children.[24] In one case, a baby girl was sold for $500 to provide food for the family's sons. The buyer apparently wanted the girl for his son as a wife. Why sell the girl to feed the boys? Girls can be a saleable commodity and boys take priority for parental care.

There is evidence for systematic neglect of girls in antiquity. For example, Xenophon tells us that in Athens and elsewhere in Greece women were fed less well than men.[25] This contrasted with the exceptional treatment of Spartan girls, who were better fed and physically fit through exercise. As young brides, of twelve and upwards into the teens, girls of the classical world could expect to fall pregnant multiple times to their much older husbands, which took a toll on their bodies and risked their lives in giving birth. Lauren Caldwell, who has written about Roman girlhood, quotes a passage from Plutarch, who contrasts practices in Sparta and Rome and the reasons behind them:

> Also, matters concerning the giving of girls in marriage agree with their educational system as well. Lycurgus [of Sparta] gave them in marriage

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> when they were ripe and eager, in order that intercourse, now that nature was demanding it, might be the beginning of goodwill and affection, instead of the hatred and fear of those girls forced unnaturally, and also in order that their bodies might have the strength to endure pregnancy and childbirth . . .. But the Roman gave girls in marriage when they were twelve years old or even younger. In this way especially both body and character would be pure and chaste for the husband when he married her.[26]

Caldwell also notes a Roman epitaph for an eighteen-year-old woman called Herennia Cervilla, which may be somewhat typical. Written in the first person, but presumably in her husband's words, it says:

> To the shades below. I, Herennia Cervilla, daughter of Lucius, wife, lived for eighteen years and thirty days. With three children left behind, I ended life in pain. My dear husband, while living, set this up as a memorial to me.[27]

We do not know how her age at marriage, possibly fifteen or younger, nor how many pregnancies she had in total, but she left three living children and may ultimately have died in childbirth or due to complications.

Greek and Roman medical writers – mostlyl men, of course – did make recommendations about the bringing up of girls, including about their diet and exercise, in order to make them more ready for pregnancy and childbearing. For example, they usually recommended marriage in the later teens rather than before.[28] This 'medical' guidance for how to treat women tells us about how men wanted women to be – healthy for the purposes of marriage and reproduction with men, not necessarily for the benefit of women in and of themselves. Women across ancient societies were valued primarily for their role in reproduction.

It seems likely then, that the ancient world was missing women. And although it is dangerous to generalise from the millennium of the classical world to the Mediterranean as a whole across the swath of time and different cultures covered by this book, the Roman pattern might be indicative of traditions that existed for a reasonable period of Mediterranean history, as Roger Bagnall suggested.[29]

It should be said that none of this denies the strength of love possible in families with daughters – the relationship of Cicero to his daughter Tullia, for example, is well known.[30] Nor does it deny the value placed – by men and women – on women in the roles that society granted them. Both women and men could take pride in adhering to and fulfilling societal norms and the expectations of others, however we may judge these roles in hindsight.

Cicero's love for his Tullia, and for his wife Terentia, seems to have been reciprocated, but the sources we have are Cicero's letters, though his wife and

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daughter did write to him too. This position, where most of our historical sources were written by elite males, also results in missing women. As Sarah Pomeroy pointed out in the introduction to her classic book *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (1975; 1995):

> The literary testimony presents grave problems to the social historian. Women pervade nearly every genre of classical literature, yet often the bias of the author distorts the information. Aside from some scraps of lyric poetry, the extant formal literature of classical antiquity was all written by men. In addition, misogyny taints much ancient literature.[31]

Not only are women in a sense missing from ancient literature, they can also be found absent from modern histories. As recently as 2010, historian Susan Lee Johnson could still accuse scholars of ignoring both women's history and gender issues.[32] One recent book, which tells the story of ancient Greece in fifty lives, one of the inspirations for this book, includes only two lives of women, a poet and a courtesan.[33] Things are better than they were but not as good as they could – and should be. There is still work to do in 'putting women back in', in a variety of ways.

MISOGYNY AND PATRIARCHY

Women are missing because of cultural preferences and biases towards boys and men in traditional societies, as Sen pointed out. This may equate to a widespread and persistent level of misogyny – 'hatred of women'. Ancient Greek misogyny is well known – in particular through the infamous poem on women of Semonides of Amorgos. In his poem he casts women as the greatest evil made by Zeus. He lists different kinds of 'bad' women and their characteristics, made from different animals – a pig, a fox, a dog, an ass, a cat, a horse, a monkey. The pig-woman is fat and lives in filth, the fox-women is a contrary know-all, the dog-woman a busybody and a gossip – 'a man cannot check her with threats, no, not if in anger he dash her teeth out with a stone, nor yet though he speak gently with her'.[34] The bee-woman is the only 'good' woman – or good wife. She loves and takes care of her husband rather than spending time gossiping about sex with other women. Whether the poem is intended as humorous or serious, and whether or not it represents Semonides' own views, it gives us an insight into how some men at least could think about women in antiquity and what they thought amusing.

Misogyny is not a straightforward or blanket concept. It is not simply a case of men hating women and 'keeping them down'. As Kate Manne points out in her book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, 'misogynists can love their mothers – not to mention their sisters, daughters, wives, girlfriends, and secretaries. They need not hate women universally, or even very generally'.[35]

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We can remember Cicero and Tullia here. She suggests that male misogynists 'tend to hate women who are outspoken, among other things' and this chimes in with the sentiments expressed by Semonides about women who 'gossip' or are somehow disagreeable to men and not considerate enough to their needs. But both men and women can judge women on the basis of how much they conform to 'patriarchal norms and values'.[36]

Misogyny can be embedded and internalised even by women within a culture; as well as personal feelings or attitudes, it can comprise 'social practices and institutions'.[37] An example of this might be the tradition of female genital mutilation, which many women in the cultures where it is practiced believe is important to have performed on their own daughters and in which women themselves have often performed the cutting.[38] It might seem obvious to an outsider that the practice is harmful to girls and women – and plainly misogynistic and immoral – but that does not stop some women within those cultures approving of it, valuing it – and carrying it out. This internalisation of misogyny and its elevation to a 'norm' can help us understand the perpetuation of patriarchal cultures.

Manne wrote of patriarchal norms and values and most of the cultures in this book have been and can be considered patriarchal – political power was usually a male-dominated or almost exclusively male domain.[39] But some are less convinced by the utility of the term and traditional concept of patriarchy. Carol Meyers makes several excellent points in her discussion of the term as it relates to ancient Israel.[40] For example, if the basic unit of ancient societies was the household, and much household power in the ancient Mediterranean rested with senior women, then the concept of patriarchy clearly becomes problematic, an oversimplification and distortion of the societies in action. Political power as constructed by men was not the only power in a society. She also points out that, in organisations made up of females, they 'had their own hierarchies, independent of those in the general social systems'. Inequalities in society were based on a range of factors, economic or legal status, age, and not just sex or gender; relations between all people in society were under constant negotiation. Based on these critiques, we could ask: Who has more status, power and agency – a wealthy Roman matron of a noble family or a male slave working in a mine?

Certainly, Meyer's points must be accepted, but dispensing entirely with the notion of patriarchy may not be helpful. Pavla Miller argues that 'patriarchy . . . has been a powerful organising concept with which social order has been understood, maintained, enforced, contested, adjudicated and dreamt about for over two millenia of western history'.[41] The female/male opposition may be only one intersection with which we can describe and examine an ancient society, but it is a major one, often dictating much, if not all, about an individual's life and opportunities. Misogyny and patriarchy are contexts that

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overshadowed and directly impacted on the lives of the women of the ancient Mediterranean.

Ancient Athens, for example, has been seen as an uber-masculine culture. Classicist Eva Keuls has even termed it a 'phallocracy', writing that

> in the case of a society dominated by men who sequester their wives and daughters, denigrate the female role in reproduction, erect monuments to the male genitalia, have sex with the sons of their peers, sponsor public whorehouses, create a mythology of rape, and engage in rampant sabre-rattling, it is not inappropriate to refer to a reign of the phallus.[42]

There was a variety of thought amongst ancient philosophers and the elite about the role and capacities of women. Plato, unusually, believed women could perform equally to men intellectually, and in his utopia could have equal rights, whereas Aristotle saw women as ruled by emotion and less spirited than men.[43] For Aristotle, women had to be ruled.[44] Later, the influential Stoics have been seen as positive about women's abilities – their capacity for virtue, for example – although they did not call for any gender equality and instead restricted women to the domestic sphere.[45]

In Greece, Spartan women perhaps had the greatest freedom and societal respect, making them odd amongst their neighbours, but how much of the stories told by other Greeks and Romans about the Spartans is true and how much a 'Spartan myth'? The same might be said for Etruscan women, often imagined as more 'free and equal' than women in many other ancient societies. In Hellenistic times, there were many famous and powerful queens – but even though 'a queen may rule in a patriarchal society' and 'enjoy the highest status,' Pomeroy writes, 'her position does not empower her female subjects'.[46]

The Roman paterfamilias is another well-known example of ancient patriarchy in action – the absolute power over a family held by its eldest male. Access to political office at Rome was also restricted to men. Never was there a female consul or an empress who ruled in her own right, no matter how powerful or historically important some individual women like Augustus' wife Livia, or in later times Galla Placidia or Theodora were. Apart from the 'rebel' empress Zenobia of Palmyra, it was only in Byzantine times that a few empresses manage to gain greater power – women like Sophia, Zoe, and another Theodora.[47] Rome was, then, a patriarchy.[48]

The overarching patriarchy of classical antiquity seems by and large uncontroversial, but this book looks further back in time too. In pharaonic Egypt, the 'gulf between the sexes' may not have been as pronounced as in the classical world, but pharaohs and officials were usually male.[49] There are a few exceptions and two of them are discussed in this book: Merneith and Hatshepsut. The societies of the Bronze Age Levant and Mesopotamia were patriarchal, with families headed by men; and the Late Bronze Age Hittite kingdom too

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was 'strongly patriarchal'.[50] Again, in both, there were women of power and status. Minoan Crete and Mycenaean Greece in the Middle to Late Bronze Age have been contrasted as matriarchal, feminine and pacifistic and patriarchal, masculine and aggressive respectively.[51] This very subjective and quite dubious way of characterising the Minoan and Mycenaean societies has rightly fallen by the wayside – though archaeologists do not deny that, judging by the frequency and style of their representation, women may have played an important and potentially powerful and public role in Bronze Age Crete. The Argaric society of Bronze Age Iberia has been seen, like Mycenaean culture, as a male-dominated warrior society – though some archaeologists now dispute this characterisation.[52]

Modern western society has not escaped charges of misogyny or the label of patriarchy either, despite legal equality between the sexes.[53] Caroline Criado Perez's book *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* paints a convincing picture of a society based on accepting men as the norm, the basic point of reference, with women as awkward, different, and other.[54] In part, this stems from the weight of history. Pomeroy, for example, argued that 'the rationalized confinement of women to the domestic sphere, as well as the systematization of anti-female thought by poets and philosophers, are two of the most devastating creations in the classical legacy'.[55] Ancient women may have been missing from, less visible, and less free in their own societies and then been ignored by a male-dominated modern academia and continued patriarchy – a double blow.

MATRIARCHY AND THE GODDESS

In the patriarchal world of nineteenth-century Europe, anthropology and the experience of other cultures around the world demonstrated that the family and sex-based gender roles were a matter of culture rather than nature and that the patriarchy that had been taken for granted was only one possible outcome.[56] In the grand pattern of human history, the ultimate outcome of development from promiscuous savagery – the monogamous Victorian marriage within a patriarchal society in which men dominated the public world – had to be explained.

In 1861, the same year as John Stuart Mill published *The Subjection of Women*, another book appeared, written by Johann Jakob Bachofen, a Swiss lawyer and student of antiquity. This was his *Das Mutterecht* – in full in translation: *Mother Right: A Study of the Religious and Juridical Nature of Gynecocracy in the Ancient World*. Bachofen read Greek myths with the understanding that they preserved truths about earlier times, the more so because they were collective stories, and this, amongst other personal and intellectual factors, led to his focus on women and the feminine. Bachofen presented a story of human social evolution and

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progress in five stages that flip back and forth between female and male power. These are: hetaerism, Demetrian matriarchy, the Dionysian age, Amazonism, and the Apollonian age.[57]

In the beginning, humans lived in groups led by strong men, 'tyrants', where children were 'sowed at random' and no one knew who their father was. Although men were dominant, power was inherited from the mother. In the next stage, Demetrian matriarchy, through their 'Amazonism', women asserted their rights to marriage and to choice of husband, transforming society into a true matriarchy in which women ruled – a gynecocracy. In his evolutionary scheme, this period was necessary for the education of men and the channelling of their powers into something constructive. Men responded in kind, bringing in the masculine and phallic age of Dionysus; men came to dominate women in marriage and lost the respect of women. The age of Amazonism saw women rebel, setting up real societies like the Amazons of Greek myth. Eller calls it 'basically matriarchy out of hand, women gone wild'; Bachofen wrote of 'man-hating, man-killing, war-like virgins' who at the same time wanted to submit to the phallic males.[58] Finally, in the Apollonian age, women realise their purpose lies in 'love and fertility and not man-hating belligerence'. Equality is achieved, oddly, through the acknowledgement of male spiritual superiority – men are the sun that lights the moon.

Although patriarchy won out with 'the permanent and complete defeat of the maternal principle' and 'the decisive conquest of women', Bachofen also believed that motherhood and female rule were central to the development of the refined human sensibilities that resulted in civilisation.[59] Cynthia Eller quotes him as follows:

> The relationship through which humanity first attains to civilization, that which serves as the starting point for the development of every virtue, the formation of each nobler aspect of existence is the model of motherhood which comes into being as the divine principle of love and unity, of peace amidst a life full of violence. By nurturing the fruit of her womb, woman learns earlier than man how to extend her loving care beyond the limits of her own self and to protect and support another creature's existence. All social progress, all devotion, all ministration to the living and respect for the dead emanates from her.[60]

Bachofen, with his confused situating of women in a grand human story, may have been more a romantic than any kind of feminist, one with a nostalgia for a world he perceived through his study and reflection. His work did not make any significant impact in itself – indeed, there was criticism of its intuitive 'methodology' – but many of its ideas have been echoed in some form by others who believe in an ancient matriarchy.[61] Other better known scholars of the period, however, such as John McLennan and Lewis Henry Morgan did

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take up the idea of ancient matriarchy and so a 'female' stage became built into various versions of the human story – a stage where the feminine was defeated and relegated to history by the victory of the male principle.

Somewhat earlier, another feminine-focused theory had appeared: the notion of a supreme Mother Goddess. During the Romantic movement of the early 1800s, the classical goddesses that had remained cultural symbols became more associated with nature, giving rise to the idea of 'mother nature', according to Ronald Hutton.[62] In 1849, Eduard Gerhard proposed that classical Greek goddesses originated from a single prehistoric goddess in his book *ober Metroen und Gotter-Mutter*. As other older pre-classical cultures were discovered in the Near East, goddesses seemed to take on ever greater importance and more scholars adopted Gerhard's basic idea. This provided a context for the rise in matriarchal or 'feminine' thinking.

In the late nineteenth century, anthropologist and mythologist James Frazer, author of *The Golden Bough* (1890), developed his theory that Mother Goddess worship in the Aegean and Europe derived from the Neolithic period, from pre-Indo-European times.[63] This worship was truly ancient. Jane Ellen Harrison soon 'posited the previous existence of a peaceful and intensely creative woman-centred civilization, in which humans, living in harmony with nature and their own emotions, worshipped a single female deity'.[64] Her goddess had three aspects, including the Maiden and the Mother; male gods were either consorts or sons. This ancient era of peace was shattered by the invasion of northerners who brought with them violent and warlike patriarchy.

Arthur Evans, who excavated the Bronze Age site of Knossos on Crete from 1899 also developed a belief in a strong 'feminine' character to the island's culture – owing much to Frazer and Harrison, who was a fellow member of the British School at Athens.[65] Evans' elegant and peaceful Minoans venerated a Great Goddess; young women and priestesses were frequently shown on gold rings and in fresco paintings involved in acts of worship. Goddesses themselves would appear to the women in scenes of epiphany, sometimes floating down from on high. His interpretations of Minoan society in the early twentieth century have been so influential that they continue to shape public perceptions of Bronze Age Crete: our sophisticated and feminist 'Minoans' are very much his invention.[66]

Elsewhere in the Near East, archaeologists excavating a number of sites, including Tell Arpachiyah, Chagar Bazan, and Domuztepe recognised the features of a common Neolithic culture, which they named the Halaf tradition, or just Halaf.[67] Halaf dates between roughly 6000 to 5000 BC. Figurines belonging to this tradition were identified early on as representing the Mother Goddess, for example, by Max Mallowan and John Cruikshank Rose, who excavated at Arpachiyah in 1933: 'in all of them, prominence is given to certain

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features which these figures were obviously intended to emphasize particularly the breasts, slender waist and pronounced navel, and steatopygous rump'.[68] The Halaf locals 'were a people worshipping the "mother-goddess"'.[69] Ancient figurines and statuettes dating back to the Palaeolithic began to be seen as representing the Mother Goddess, now the chief deity of prehistory.

In the 1950s, under the influence of Carl Jung's idea of an archetypal Great Mother, a number of other archaeological works appeared, all supporting the Mother Goddess theory: Erich Neumann's *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (1955), Crawford's *The Eye Goddess* (1959), and James' *The Cult of the Mother Goddess* (1959). The Jungian Neumann argued that the 'unshapely figures of the Great Mother' were the model symbols of fertility.[70] The Great Mother herself had been a constant 'inward image at work in the human psyche' and stood for 'the archetypal unity and multiplicity of the feminine nature' and even now 'determines the psychic history of modern man and of modern woman'.[71] Goddess worship was ancient and universal, a natural part of the human psyche.

Also extremely influential in the 1950s was Robert Graves' retelling, or perhaps better his reimagining, of the Greek myths. As Sibylle Ihm points out, Graves, influenced by Frazer and Bachofen, had the central idea that 'all myths deal with a universal female figure'.[72] He thought that invading Greeks from the north had brought with them to the Aegean the more masculine Indo-European culture, melding with and overlying the feminine Goddess-worshipping matriarchal pre-Greek cultures – much like Harrison. Whilst steeped in the classics, Graves' work is more 'Graves' mythology' than straight Greek myth, 'he mixes fact and conjecture in such a convincing and barely detectable way that anyone unfamiliar with the subject has to believe that all his conjectures *are* facts'.[73] That his work did not find much scholarly praise did not at all affect its popularity and impact; unsurprisingly, several of his works, Ihm notes, remain important in goddess, spiritual and feminist circles.

Greek prehistory seemed to many to supply an apparently clear picture of the transformation from matriarchy to patriarchy, with the eclipsing of the feminine and peaceful society of the Bronze Age Minoans and pre-Greeks by the masculine and warlike Indo-European Mycenaeans. This view was given especial prominence by Jacquetta Hawkes in her wonderfully illustrated 1968 book *Dawn of the Gods*. Hawkes, who was influenced by Neumann and others, thought it appropriate and natural to characterise societies along gender lines. For example, the Minoan palace at Knossos, she suggested, 'can be said to express a feminine spirit', with 'domesticity, privacy, lightness of touch and domestic amenities . . . set among gardens and flower beds' and with decoration and frescoes that enhanced 'the feminine quality implicit in the building'.[74] Mycenae's Lion Gate, on the other hand, 'expresses something enduring in the Mycenaean tradition: its aggressive masculinity and ingrained

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militarism'.[75] Contemporary scholars would strongly question this approach, not least for its essentialist notions of gender, but it gives a flavour of the norms of the period in which it was written.

Hawkes argued that the people of Neolithic west Asia and Europe had such a distinctive and coherent a tradition 'that it must imply a common religious belief', which flowed from east to west, with the spread of agriculture.[76] The Goddess dominated from the Neolithic through the Bronze Age and, though demoted, survived as part of later Mediterranean culture in the form of goddesses such as Cybele, Artemis, and Aphrodite – something James Mellaart had also suggested in his 1967 book about the Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük, which he had discovered in 1958, and reiterated in the 1980s.[77]

Along with Hawkes and Mellaart, the most well-known scholar in the story of the Goddess is Marija Gimbutas (1921–1994), a Lithuanian-born archaeologist and specialist in European prehistory, who worked in the 1950s at Harvard's Peabody Museum, then at Stanford, and from 1963 at the University of California, Los Angeles. Gimbutas' influential ideas about the Goddess and 'Old Europe' – pre-Indo-European Europe from the Palaeolithic to around 3500 BC – appear to have developed, and increased in intensity over several decades, from her 1974 *Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe*, republished in 1982 as the *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*, to *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe* of 1999 and the posthumous *The Living Goddesses* (edited and supplemented by Miriam Robbins Dexter, 1999).[78] For Gimbutas, Old Europe was a peaceful world infused with a feminine force, which was manifested in the widespread worship of a Goddess, portrayed in the many female figurines and in the matrilineal social system she envisioned. This world was ended, though not all at once and not completely, by the spread of the warlike Indo-Europeans, represented archaeologically by the Kurgan culture: 'the gentle agriculturalists . . . were easy prey to the warlike Kurgan horsemen who swarmed down upon them'.[79]

Firmly based on her extensive knowledge of the archaeological evidence, especially figurines and architecture, Gimbutas' interpretations of the evidence have been taken up as authoritative 'facts' about the nature of society and religion in European and west Asian prehistory, especially by some Goddess pilgrims and feminists; 'it is no accident that Gimbutas' books are shelved with feminist literature in bookshops around the world'.[80]

Amongst the evidence she interpreted as indicating the widespread worship of 'goddesses, or a goddess, in many forms' are figurines and other 'art' and architecture from Çatalhöyük and the temples of prehistoric Malta.[81] A 2016 article in the *Times of Malta* ruminates on the island's temples, the origins and presence of the Goddess – and the draw of Malta to ancient and modern pilgrims:

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> Undoubtedly Malta was the foremost strong promoter of female power, reverence and mystique, as evidenced in the iconic Tarxien Temples, where the colossal seven-foot (2.13m) figure reputed to be an obese Mother Goddess, the greatest and biggest of them all . . . towered over all religious symbols at Tarxien . . .. In this religious milieu the Mother Goddess of Fertility reigned supreme.[82]

The idea of an ancient matriarchy is an old and persistent one, but one that finds very few supporters within archaeology. Lin Foxhall has termed it a 'dead end' of feminist scholarship.[83]

Out of patriarchy have come the interlinked ideas of a long stage of history – prehistory – in which a great Mother Goddess was worshipped and where women ruled in matriarchal societies, only to be overthrown. Although these earlier contributions are no longer how we 'do' history or archaeology – making sweeping generalisations about the feminine or masculine 'nature' of societies or fitting these notions into impressionistic evolutionary schemes – these stories remain part of our mental templates of the past. They are still influential and have been part of the story of putting women back into history.

PUTTING WOMEN BACK: WOMEN IN HISTORY, ANCIENT HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

The study of women in antiquity is not new and stories about some 'notable' female figures were never lost. Many lists of notable women appeared from antiquity to the Renaissance.[84] Stories of biblical and classical women remained in circulation and formed the subject matter of late medieval and early Renaissance authors such as Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Christine de Pizan. None of these authors, however, were interested in objective history as opposed to the use of historical figures to express their own opinions on the virtues of women and provide examples for contemporaries – as well as showing off their own erudition. Histories of cities and other books published often contained chapters on women too, figures of note locally.[85]

Jane Stevenson suggests the flurry of lists appearing in the later Renaissance and early modern period reflects a societal concern with increasing numbers of educated women. She notes that these lists would provide educated women with a heritage and history of their own. In her chapter on 'learned women', Stevenson describes how in early modern Europe there were many more classically educated women, women who could read and write Latin and knew their literature, than is often thought. This is a pattern noted by Isobel Hurst for Victorian women too.[86] The educational situation for women differed depending on their location in society and the wishes of their families – and their own desires. However, women's social status and position did not depend on education in the way that men's did, so education was inevitably male-focused.

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As we have seen already, women and matriarchy took their place in anthropology and connected to classical studies through myth, ancient history, and archaeology. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a reader interested in women of the ancient world could consult the articles of James Donaldson of St Andrews University, which were published together as a book in 1907 entitled *Woman: Her Position and Influence in Ancient Greece and Rome, and Among the Early Christians*. Donaldson was well aware of the male bias of the ancient sources, written by men for men, and he noted that women were either subject to 'wild abuse' or 'praised to the skies' and that we should be cautious about uncritically believing anything we read.[87] His treatment is generally sensitive. Mitchell Carroll's *Greek Women*, also from 1907, was less even-handed: he suggested that 'extremism is a chief feminine characteristic' – women were either 'utterly pure and holy' or 'utterly vile'.[88] In 1914, a female scholar, Mary Sturgeon, published *Women of the Classics*, in which she focused on 'the heroines of Homer, of Attic tragedy, and of the *Aeneid* of Virgil'.[89] An alternative approach was taken by Helen McLees, who focused on epigraphy in her *A Study of Women in Attic Inscriptions*. In contrast to the grim view of the life of Athenian women given by Donaldson, she observes that 'the inscriptions, on the other hand, show that in practice there was much to render the lot of Athenian women comparatively happy'.[90] This conclusion would certainly be disputed by some – but all generalisations can be questioned and women's lives considered individually.

The American classicist Grace Harriet Macurdy (1866–1946) pioneered the study of the Macedonian queens of the Hellenistic period and 'woman-power', publishing her landmark *Hellenistic Queens. A Study of Woman- Power in Macedonia, Seleucid Syria and Ptolemaic Egypt* in 1932. Up until that point, Barbara McManus states, 'no classical scholar, male or female, had ever attempted to recover and document the lives of individual Greek women whose names are part of recorded history'.[91] Macurdy did not attempt to heroise her subjects, but she did credit them with real agency and power based on their own personalities and circumstances; these women were as political and as opportunistic as their male relatives. In 1925, Macurdy had become the first woman to give a public lecture in classics at King's College London.[92] Later in the century, more books on ancient women followed: Charles Seltman's *Women in Antiquity* from 1956 and J. P. V. Dacre Balsdon's *Roman Women: Their History and Habits* (1962), for example. The subsequent sixty years has only seen more works appear.

The first wave of feminism saw the situation of women in society change across the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and a second wave of feminism reached a peak in the late 1960s.[93] This had a significant impact on the study of women in history. The new and feminism-informed study of women in antiquity emerged in the early 1970s and has grown from there,

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being taken up in classics and archaeology. A collection of papers published in the journal *Arethusa* in 1973 was one important landmark. It included articles on attitudes to women, women in literature, philosophy and art, sexual behaviour, and rape. Sarah Pomeroy provided a bibliography of earlier work on women in antiquity.[94] Then, in 1975, Sarah Pomeroy's classic *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* came out. The book, with its classical-world focus, utilised textual and archaeological evidence, surveying women of all classes from goddesses, the Bronze Age and Homeric epics, through to the early Roman Empire, but it especially focused on real women rather than figures from mythology. Lin Foxhall points out that *Goddesses* represented what 'a major step forward Pomeroy and other second-wave feminist scholars made in terms of the sophistication of their historical methodologies and theoretical frameworks'.[95]

A few years later, in 1991, Pomeroy published an informal survey of forty-five ancient history, classics, and archaeology journals, finding that twenty-two had no articles connected to the study of women (the journal, *Helios*, however, had an issue devoted entirely to Roman women).[96] By this time, she could conclude that 'the study of women has, indeed, become part, albeit a very small part, of the mainstream of Classical Studies'. In the same year, her edited volume *Women's History and Ancient History* added further contributions to the growing field.[97] By 2000, Marilyn Katz was able to review eighteen recent contributions that had appeared in the space of only three years, noting that a further ten or twelve books could easily be added to her list.[98]

In archaeology, a pioneering paper of 1984 by Margaret Conkey and Janet Spector questioned current modes of archaeology and asserted that it unwittingly perpetuated a gender ideology based on contemporary assumptions.[99] One way in which this was manifest was in the notion that ancient women were 'invisible'. The problem with the notion, they wrote, is that assumptions are made about the gendered division of labour and then women and material culture; women's 'soft' material culture is seen as less visible – less durable because of its materials. A recent exploration of 'Visible men and elusive women' on summer farms in pre-industrial Sweden challenges these still active ideas, demonstrating that 'both women and men worked in both soft and hard materials, and both women and men are invisible and visible' and that 'ideals and norms, and everyday life, respectively, are different matters'.[100]

Conkey and Spector's paper did not signal an immediate change but did set the tone. In 1991, Roberta Gilchrist noted, in a paper in *Antiquity*, that 'archaeology has not been eager to address the issues, or indeed the existence of women's archaeology'.[101] In the same year, Alison Wylie also expressed surprise at why archaeology seemed to be lagging behind 'the vibrant traditions of research on women and gender now well established in most other social scientific fields'.[102] Wylie's paper appeared in a new volume edited by Joan

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Gero and Conkey; their wide-ranging *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*.[103] This book has five sections looking at the archaeology of gender, space and gender relations, material aspects of gender production, gender and food systems, and images of gender. Chapters range from deep prehistory to Sumeria and the Aztecs. The volume represents a take-off point for the study of women and gender in archaeology. In 1998, a reader in gender archaeology was published that included key papers going back to Conkey and Spector.[104] In a 2003 review, Conkey argued that feminism had 'absolutely' changed archaeology.[105] In 2009 Gilchrist's chapter, 'The Archaeology of Sex and Gender', was included in a major collection of essays in *The Oxford Handbook of Archaeology*.[106]

Now it would be an immense task to review all of the contributions to the study of women in the ancient world: books, journal articles, and web articles. But in the twenty-first century, the study of women and gender in archaeology and ancient history has flourished. Since 2010, notable contributions that are standard reference works include Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon's *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World* (2012), Diane Bolger's *A Companion to Gender Prehistory* (2013), and Stephanie Lynn Budin and Jean MacIntosh Turfa's seventy-four-chapter *Women in Antiquity: Real Women across the Ancient World* (2016), which are excellent and wide-ranging edited volumes that contribute a great deal to the field.[107] There are also dedicated sets, including the four-volume *Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History* and Bloomsbury's six-volume series *A Cultural History of Women*.[108] And there are the excellent and ever-growing Oxford University Press series 'Women in Antiquity', with eighteen volumes now, and Routledge's titles in the 'Women of the Ancient World' series.

These take the exploration of women and gender far beyond the classical worlds of Greece and Rome back into Early Bronze Age Mesopotamia, the Late Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean, and beyond. Budin and Turfa's *Women in Antiquity* sets out quite programmatically to be a book about '*real* women – their bodies, names, occupations, interests, sex lives, religious functions, and legal capacities' rather than women constructed by men in myth or literature.[109] It has been a great influence on this present book.

Women are not just subjects of study; they have played an important role in Mediterranean archaeology since the early twentieth century. The British School at Athens accepted female students, though at first they could not take part in excavations.[110] In 1911, this changed, and three women joined the excavation of Phylakopi on Melos. One of these, Hilda Lorimer, went on to publish the important book *Homer and the Monuments* (1950), in which she undertook a detailed comparison of material culture revealed by archaeology and Homer's epics.[111] Reviewers of the time regarded the volume as 'excellent' and a new standard work.[112] The American archaeologist Harriet Boyd

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Hawes (1871–1945) had already been excavating in Crete with Edith Hall (1877–1943). She is remembered for her discovery and excavation of the ancient Minoan town of Gournia in 1901 and its publication in 1905. Archaeology was just a part of her very eventful life full of humanitarian and political interests and other activities beyond archaeology.[113]

The English archaeologist Dorothy Garrod (1892–1968) also worked extensively in the Mediterranean. In 1925, the year of Macurdy's King's College lecture, she found a Neanderthal skull in the Devil's Tower cave in Gibraltar in 1925. In the eastern Mediterranean, she uncovered evidence for the Natufian culture and undertook important work at Mount Carmel, work she published with Dorothea Bate (1878–1951) in 1937.[114] In 1939, she became the first female Oxbridge professor – the Disney Chair of Archaeology at Cambridge; this despite the fact that Cambridge did not start awarding degrees to women until 1948. Bate, from Carmarthen, was possibly the first female scientist employed by the Natural History Museum in London in 1898; she was a pioneering archaeozoologist.

Also in 1925, Gisela Richter (1882–1972) became the curator of Greek and Roman art at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art; she was the Met's, and possibly the United States' first female curator.[115] Richter, from London, was appointed as an assistant in 1905 to catalogue a collection of Greek vases but stayed and worked her way up. In 1917, she became a US citizen. She published many books on Greek art in her long career, including her popular *A Handbook of Greek Art* from 1959, which sixty years later is still an excellent and enjoyable introduction with its 500 illustrations. In 1944, she received an award for achievement from the American Association of University Women; in 1952, an honorary doctorate from Oxford; and in 1968, the Archaeological Institute of America's Gold Medal Award for Distinguished Archaeological Achievement. Women such as these proved beyond any doubt to society that women could, when allowed to, make significant contributions to fields such as archaeology, ancient history, art history, and classics.

Nowadays, around half of archaeologists are women.[116] However, even in a climate of increased job equality and access to education, the bullying and sexual harassment of women has been described as an 'epidemic' in archaeology.[117] High-profile female classicists like Mary Beard and Bettany Hughes have, as well as bringing good history to millions of viewers, listeners, and readers, have suffered from appalling sexism and misogyny via social media.[118]

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This book is intended as a contribution to women's history, Mediterranean history, and human history; its specific aim is to put thirty 'real' women, of different backgrounds but all from around the Mediterranean, back into

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history, to present their lives and critically consider the evidence from which these can be reconstructed. Not all of these women have been 'missing' – some, like Olympias and Cleopatra Selene, are famous, or at least well known to archaeologists and ancient historians. Some, however, are known only from human remains, objects or images, or a combination of these. The women of this book are seen as individuals and not treated as heroines or villains, as good or bad women, or as exemplars of feminine virtue or moral rectitude; there are no goddesses or women from myths.

The approach taken in this book combines analysis of archaeological evidence, including bodies, objects and sites, epigraphy, iconography and textual evidence of various types, including texts from ancient histories to poetry; in this it is no different to many other books on the topic. Methodologically, I find the need to maintain a divide between archaeologists and ancient historians unnecessary and artificial, as will many others. For example, as a student of the Late Bronze Age Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean, the Greek Linear B inscribed tablets are an important textual source alongside the archaeological evidence of settlements, tombs, bodies, images, and objects. A consideration of these allows us to situate some women quite precisely in time and space. The Hittite and Egyptian texts of this period are also seen in combination with the material remains, allowing these cultures and their histories to be peopled by named individuals and interpreted in light of historical events. In her exploration of Sumerian women, Susan Pollock uses literary and economic texts, burials, and iconography to tell us about women and gender in different ways.[119] Alison Glazebrook and others have revealed much about classical prostitution through both texts and archaeology.[120] In other words, I work with what we have and aim to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

Women certainly appear in texts of various kinds, from labels and seals, economic texts to literary ones, including histories; literary texts especially were composed by men and may tell us about their images of women and their roles and status. Comparison of a male-authored literary text on the ideals of womanhood might contrast sharply with the reality of a woman's economic power revealed by a seal ring or public status indicated by a statue and inscription. In some cases, women authored texts of their own, but generally these were high-status women and they were largely exceptions to the rule. A great loss are the memoirs of Agrippina the Younger, great granddaughter of Augustus, wife of the emperor Claudius, and mother of Nero. No doubt there are many other texts lost that we have no idea about. But we do, perhaps surprisingly, have some texts written by named women from the Early and Late Bronze Ages. As so often in history, poorer women are often the least visible and their own voices the most difficult to hear, though it is sometimes possible. Texts and images must always be read sensitively and with concern

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for their contexts. Archaeology can sometimes help rectify the biases of texts by the direct study of human remains and also the spaces in which people lived and the objects that they used or had around them in life and death, though the dead too were manipulated by the living into their final rest.

The aim of this book is to locate and where possible name specific women from the Mediterranean area, and to offer a brief 'biography' of them in their historical context; thirty 'lives' are presented in chronological order from the Palaeolithic to the early days of the Byzantine Empire of Justinian and Theodora. Sometimes when we can locate a woman, we cannot know her name. In the many anonymous burials, archaeologists have given names or references to the bodies. Nameless women should not be forgotten or left out of the story, instead their physical remains and the nature and circumstances of their interment should be examined and elaborated. Even when we do have names, we may know little else about the specific individual concerned, so it is necessary to supplement the story by reference to 'women' more generally in a given time and place and to the anthropological, cultural and historical situation more widely.

Some might argue that a book that juggles 'historical' with 'prehistoric' women and the different kinds of sources that pertain to each will be uneven, disjointed or not specific enough to a particular field of study. That is as it may be, and no book will ever please all readers. The Mediterranean binds this book together, as does the focus on real women, not a specific type of evidence or a single defined archaeological culture, civilisation, or period. The aim again is to be inclusive, rather than exclusive, and this means transcending the boundaries of culture-specific archaeological and historical disciplines. Others too have approached wider Mediterranean history across significant chunks of time and space with the sea itself as the link in the chain, most notably in recent times David Abulafia and Cyprian Broodbank; it is no bad thing.[121]

This book takes a chronological approach in five parts: Part I: The Deep Past, Part II: The Bronze Age, Part III: The Iron Age, Part IV: The Hellenistic Worlds, and Part V: The Age of Empire. This scheme is chosen only for its convenience and there are biases implicit in it – a focus on Greece and Rome and the classical heritage is a product of the author's background and the impact of these cultures in later times, as well as the presence of particular kinds of evidence. But it is also true that there was a trend towards greater interconnection and integration in the Mediterranean region over time that culminated in a politically unified Mediterranean in Roman times. A brief historical introduction is given to set each part in context. The bias is tempered by the inclusion of women from non-classical cultures: Palaeolithic and Iron Age France, Neolithic Anatolia and Malta, ancient Mesopotamia from the Bronze Age to the Persians, early Iberia, Hittite Anatolia, the Levant, as well as

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pharaonic Egypt, for example. For classical times, I have tried to include women from a a range of locations, not just Athens and Rome. I hope to have achieved a fair enough balance across time and space. This book is not a history or description of women in these cultures generally, but a book of lives of specific women who lived in them.

Along the way, I hope to provide some insight into questions about how archaeologists and historians go about gathering, evaluating, and interpreting evidence for the lives of ancient women. This includes the use of techniques from bioarchaeology, and the study of skeletal, dental and organic remains, to the study of graffiti or literary histories. How can we go from a skeleton or a name to a whole human story? What can funerary contexts, the treatment of a body, the way it was laid to rest, and the goods it had with it tell us about the woman whose burial we are examining? How much should we believe the stories about women written in historical texts?

The women presented in this book had very different life experiences, even though most lived in patriarchal societies. The lives will, I hope, reveal something of the different backgrounds, ambitions, and activities of these women and their trajectories through life, their troubles, and triumphs. A woman of Palaeolithic France clearly had a very different life to a Bronze Age priestess from Greece or the empress Theodora, but I hope we would agree that all women of the past are worthy of research and remembrance.

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