## Introduction

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 saber-rattling, it is not inappropriate to refer to a reign of the phallus. Classical Athens was such a society.

The story of phallic rule at the root of Western civilization has been suppressed, as a result of the near-monopoly that men have held in the field of Classics, by neglect of rich pictorial evidence, by prudery and censorship, and by a misguided desire to protect an idealized image of Athens. As a Professor of Classics, I believe that an acknowledgment of the nature of this phallocracy will have the effect, not of disparaging the achievements of Athenian culture but rather of enriching our sense of them, adding yet another level to their meaning. In any case, the evidence cannot any longer be ignored.

Even to propose the concept of a phallocracy in ancient Greece may touch a sensitive nerve. In writing about Greek homosexuality Sir Kenneth Dover declared, "I know of no topic in Classical studies on which a scholar's normal ability to perceive differences and draw inferences is so easily impaired." As this introduction will make clear, Athenian male homosexuality was only one aspect of a larger syndrome which included men's way of relating to boys, wives, courtesans, prostitutes, and other sexual partners, and, in a larger sense, not only to people in Athens, but to other city-states.

First of all, what is "phallocracy"? Literally meaning "power of

the phallus," it is a cultural system symbolized by the image of the male reproductive organ in permanent erection, the phallus. It is marked by, but is far more particular than, the dominance of men over women in the public sphere. In historic times, at least, such dominance has been almost universal. Nor does phallocracy refer simply to the worship of the male organ, a practice considered bizarre by most Westerners but common in many parts of the world, especially in conjunction with worship of the female counterpart. Although cultures that revere sexuality are, like others, generally dominated by men, much of their art and rituals presents the phallus as a symbol of generativity and of union with, rather than dominance over, the female. Furthermore, phallocracy does not allude to male dominance solely within a private sphere of sexual activity. Instead, as used in this book, the concept denotes a successful claim by a male elite to general power, buttressed by a display of the phallus less as an organ of union or of mutual pleasure than as a kind of weapon: a spear or war club, and a scepter of sovereignty. In sexual terms, phallocracy takes such forms as rape, disregard of the sexual satisfaction of women, and access to the bodies of prostitutes who are literally enslaved or allowed no other means of support. In the political sphere, it spells imperialism and patriarchal behavior in civic affairs.

In speaking of "the display of the phallus," I am not referring, as Freudians do, to symbols that may remind us of the male organ, such as bananas, sticks, or Freud's own cigar. In Athens no such coding was necessary. As foreigners were astonished to see, Athenian men habitually displayed their genitals, and their city was studded with statues of gods with phalluses happily erect. The painted pottery of the Athenians, perhaps the most widespread of their arts, portrayed almost every imaginable form of sexual activity.

## Painted History

In describing Athenian phallocracy, I rely heavily on pictorial evidence. As a source for history, vase paintings and other figured monuments have the advantage of coming directly from their period, unlike literary texts, which have had to pass through centuries of copying, selection, and censorship to survive into our time. Yet until the very recent past, most studies of Greek sex relations and other aspects of social history have either ignored these artifacts or used them essentially as illustrations of views

derived from the written record.

Discovered during an era of sexual repression, "pornographic" Greek vase paintings were, in many cases, locked away in secret museum cabinets. When censorship was sufficiently liberalized, selections of the most sensational pictures were published in books apparently intended less for historians of sexuality or social customs than for devotees of erotica. Now it is time to study all the pictorial evidence for what it can teach us about the sexual politics of Classical Athens, and in particular about phallocracy.

Artifacts have to be studied with circumspection. As art historians have taught us, the interpretation of pictures raises subtle problems. Artists are affected by graphic traditions, the limitations of the techniques available to them, social conventions about what is permissible and interesting to depict, rivalry with other artists, requirements of composition, and other factors. To read a painting as if it were a snapshot would be as naïve as to regard a Greek tragedy as a slice of the life of its audience. Like a piece of writing, a painting can take such forms as fantasy, caricature, slander, or official propaganda. Pictorial conventions have a significance of their own, although it is not always easy to extract it. Why did artists favor certain subjects and treatments, neglecting others? Why do we have a fairly extensive pictorial record of the Athenians' crafts and trades, but not of their political activities, even though they were passionately devoted to these? Why is so much of the subject matter of vase painting mythological, even though it is often clearly intended to convey very concrete patriotic, political, or philosophical notions?

Often the basic meaning of a vase painting is clear and when it is not, we have techniques for concluding that one interpretation is more probable than another. A book intended for the general reader is not the place to explain the intricacies of "reading" pictures, but a comparison of my descriptions with the visual evidence reproduced in these pages will allow readers to intuit many of these procedures and to decide for themselves whether a given vase painting supports the argument in which it figures.

# An Obsessive Fear of Women

One way to grasp the essential nature of a culture is to look at its charter myths. In Athens, the legendary combat of Greek heroes and Amazons held first place in popularity. The legend of these

warrior women, who fight men and exclude them from their society, is the mythological archetype of the battle of the sexes and constitutes what Phyllis Chesler has called "The Universal Male Nightmare." From Classical antiquity in its entirety, over eight hundred portrayals of Amazons have survived. Nowhere else were they as numerous as in Athens; representations of Greek heroes stabbing and clubbing Amazons to death could be seen everywhere in painting, in sculpture and in pottery decoration. In Figure 1, a detail of a vase painting, a feisty female warrior identified as the Amazon queen, Hippolyte, aims her spear at the exposed genitals of a naked Greek man, probably Theseus, Athens' national hero. The Amazon on the left aims the blunt end of her spear at the abdomen of another Greek fighter. To a male viewer such scenes seem to say: women threaten our manhood, and need to be subjugated to prevent them from rebelling against us. On this vase, the outcome is in doubt. In most depictions of Greek warriors and Amazons, however, the women are shown being defeated and, often, being slain. Not infrequently, as in our cover illustration, the killer plunges his weapon into his opponent's breast near a nipple, as if to dramatize his assault on her femininity, even though he has to make an unnatural stabbing movement in order to do so

The motif of the rebellion of the Amazons was the most prominent expression of men's gynophobia, or fear of women. Many other myths—as well as drama, the law, and the practices of everyday life—document the same view of women, as caged tigers waiting for a chance to break out of their confinement and take revenge on the male world.

Regardless of how women would actually have behaved had they no longer been suppressed, this male fear existed as a social reality and formed part of the justification for phallocracy. As in the arguments for perpetual war to defend the integrity of the empire, Athenians apparently feared that any concession to women would lead to a collapse of the social order that men had built. Earlier, we distinguished phallocracy from worship of phallic images as organs of reproduction, and from the many patterns of male rule not symbolized by the phallus. Now we can add another element to the Athenian syndrome: a pervasive fear among men that, if they weakened the tenets of phallocracy, women might rise against them and in some sense destroy them.

The reign of the phallus comprised nearly every aspect of



1. Amazon aiming her spear at the genitals of a Greek warrior.

Athenian life. Once alert to its implications, we can see it reflected in architecture, city planning, medicine and law. In the public sphere of men, buildings were massive and surrounded by phallic pillars, whereas private dwellings, largely the domain of women, were boxlike, enclosed, and modest. In law, we can trace the origins of the syndrome back to Solon, a founder of Athens and a father of its democracy. In the early sixth century B.C. the great legislator not only overhauled the Athenian political system but also instituted many controls over sexual and family life. He originated the principle of the state-controlled and price-controlled brothel, and passed, or singled out for perpetuation, "Draconian" laws for safeguarding the chastity of citizen women, including the notorious statute that a father could sell his daughter into slavery if she lost her virginity before marriage. He also may have instituted the Women's Police (gynaikonomoi), not securely attested in Athens until the post-Classical age but probably much older. At any rate, enough domestic legislation goes back to Solon to consider him a codifier of the double standard of sexual morality.

#### Women and Slaves

One of the most revealing aspects of Athenian society was the similarity of the positions of women and slaves: a considerable number of references and symbols connect the two categories. The legal term for wife was damar, a word derived from a root meaning "to subdue" or "to tame." When the bride arrived at the groom's house, a basket of nuts was poured over her head for good luck, a treatment also extended to newly purchased slaves. This was called the katachysmata or "downpourings." Like a slave, a woman had virtually no protection under the law except insofar as she was the property of a man. She was, in fact, not a person under the law. The dominance of male over female was as complete during the period in question as that of master over slave. As a result, the lives of Athenian women have been nearly excluded from the record. The women of the age of eloquence were silenced, and deprived of the form of immortality that Greek men prized above all others: that of leaving a record of their achievements. With unintentional aptness a scholar entitled a recent study of the Periclean age Men of Athens (R. Warner, 1973).

But men sat uneasily on the victor's throne. For there was a vital difference between women and slaves in the minds of the men who owned them. Slaves and their agonies could be excluded from one's consciousness, like the sufferings of animals, but women are men's mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters, and the battle of the sexes had to be fought over again in the mind of every male Athenian. Nevertheless, the institution of slavery provides the key to the understanding of the sexual and moral stances of the Athenian Greeks to be described. Without a grasp of its implications, these attitudes would not be comprehensible by the modern mind.

Judged by the ideals of modern Western society, life in the ancient world in general was brutal. Slavery brought the gruesome implications of man's victories over his fellow men into every home. Even so, household and other urban slaves were a privileged elite. What went on in the mines, quarries, and treadmills (with which the masters of comedy constantly threaten their slaves) must largely be filled in from imagination. We have no references to those practices from the Greek age, but from the Roman Imperial period the author Apuleius has left us this description of a treadmill where slaves were punished:

Merciful gods, what wretched mannikins did I see there, their entire skin covered with bluish welts, their backs torn into bloody strips, barely covered with rags, some having only their genitals covered with a piece of cloth, all of them showing everything through their miserable tatters. Their foreheads were branded with letters, their heads halfshorn, their feet stuck in rings. They were hideously pale, the dank vapors of the stinking hole had consumed their eyelashes and diminished their sight. Like wrestlers, who are sprinkled with a fine powder as they fight their bouts, they were blanched with a layer of dirty-white flour. (Met. 9, 12)

Some Classicists argue that the ancient Athenians were mild masters to their slaves, thus echoing Aristotle, who wrote of the "customary gentleness of the Athenian people." Such evidence as we have, however, suggests that slavery was more unmitigated in Athens than in many other ancient societies. A telling detail of their customs was the use of an object called a "gulp preventer" (pausikape), a wooden collar closing the jaws, which was placed on slaves who handled food to keep them from eating it. The tortures of Tantalus were mirrored in everyday life.

A practice exclusive to Athens among Greek cities (with the possible exception of the Asian city of Miletus) was the routine torture of slaves in legal proceedings. A slave's testimony was admissible in court only if he gave it under torture, a provision that shows contempt for his character and disregard for his well-being. An owner could refuse to surrender his slaves to the opposition for questioning, but this would obviously cast a suspicion of guilt on him. If the slave was permanently injured during torture, the owner was entitled to damages. The state maintained a public torture chamber for legal purposes (basanisterion). The interrogations there were a form of popular entertainment: "Whenever someone turns over a slave for torture, a crowd of people gathers to hear what is said," Demosthenes reports. The Athenians were, in fact, inordinately proud of their practice of examination by torture, considering it, as one orator put it, "the justest and most democratic way" (Lycurg. 29).

Sexually, as in all other ways, slaves were at the mercy of their owners. In fact, we will see that slaves, whether owned by public and private brothels or by individuals, provided men's habitual sex outlets, a circumstance which in itself must have generated an equation of sex with domination. Those slaves who were also

women carried a double burden of oppression and were the most defenseless members of society.

### The Majesty of the Law

Criminals as well as slaves were treated harshly in Athens. Theft was punishable by death, and a common manner of execution seems to have been a form of crucifixion. Only favored convicts, like Socrates, were granted the more merciful death by poison. The place of execution was an open area outside of the city. Plato mentions a man who left Piraeus and in the "public place" saw the bodies of executed prisoners lying around (Rep. 4, 439e). The victim was stripped naked and fastened to an upright post with clamps, with a heavy iron collar around his neck. This method of execution is probably identical to that of "planking" (apotympanismos), mentioned in literature and dramatized in the figures of Prometheus and Andromeda, both of whom were shackled to rocks. Aristophanes makes sport of the practice by having his character Mnesilochos tied to a board for execution in his comedy Thesmophoriazusai. In 479 B.C. the Athenians did away with the Persian leader Artayctes by exposing him to the elements, tied to a post (Hdt. 7, 33). Pericles, who crushed an attempt at secession from the Delian League on the part of the inhabitants of Samos in 439, had a number of prisoners tied to stakes in the marketplace of Miletus. He left them there for ten days, after which he had them clubbed to death (Plut., Per. 28). Corpses of prisoners executed by "planking" have been found near Athens (Gernet; Flacelière).

As with the later forms of crucifixion, the publicity of the execution was clearly as intentional as the prolonged suffering of the victim. Indeed, the agonies of torture and death must have been familiar to every resident of Athens. In Aeschylus' Eumenides Apollo chases the Furies out of his temple, back to the ordinary places of torture and execution, where they belong and which evidently were not unknown to the audience:

> This house is no right place for such as you to Cling upon; but where, by judgment given, heads Are lopped and eyes gouged out, throats cut, and By the spoil of sex, the glory of young boys is Defeated, where mutilation lives, and stoning, And the long moan of tortured men spiked

Underneath the spine and stuck on pales. (185-190; trans. H. W. Smyth)

Whether or not a master could legally kill a slave at will is debated, but an owner could certainly inflict everything short of outright death on his property. The mere suspicion of a crime was sufficient cause for execution of a slave, as is revealed in Antiphon's speech Against the Stepmother: a slave prostitute, who had been an unwitting accessory to alleged murder, is routinely tortured and executed, apparently without any legal process.

### The Scholarly Response

In the face of evidence for these practices, what has been the response of Classics scholars? At best, they have habitually overlooked or interpreted away the evidence; and all too often they have openly endorsed or at least provided apologies for phallocracy. While one school of thought has been arguing that things were not as bad for women as they might appear, another school has been declaring that women deserved everything they got. Understandably a number of scholars have been drawn into Classics by sympathy for the patriarchal character of Greek life, or by a sense of kinship with Greek male homosexuality. Such scholars have consistently stressed, and endorsed, the phallocratic aspects of Athenian life, while ignoring the strains of feminism and anti-militarism that developed in opposition. Among the visceral misogynists should be counted Friedrich Nietzsche, who began his career as a classical philologist. In his essay "The Greek Woman," he finds it inevitable that an advanced and creative culture should reduce its women to the status of vegetables.

In the 1920s a German professor by the name of Paul Brandt wrote a two-volume social history of Greece, devoting the second volume to sex life. At the time, a work on this subject had to be published under a pseudonym, and Brandt chose that of Hans Licht, presumably to suggest that he was throwing light on an obscure matter. Under the title Sexual Life in Ancient Greece, the English translation of the second volume became a best-seller and went through many printings. It still constitutes the most thorough combing of Greek literary texts for allusions to sex, and the German edition also contains many photographs of artifacts, though without critical analysis. In Brandt's view, the Greeks "assigned to woman

as a whole the limits which nature had prescribed for them," and also pioneered and acted upon "the modern idea that there are two kinds of women, the mother and the courtesan" (18). Wives were "banished . . . to the seclusion of the woman's chamber" because of their inability to converse with the flair demanded by "highly cultivated Athenians . . . as their daily bread." Women failed as conversationalists because of "their entirely different psychological conditions and their completely different interests" (28).

In making this kind of circular argument, Brandt joined a great tradition extending back to the Athenian men themselves. One first deprives women of education and then excludes them from the political process for being uneducated. One bars them from athletics and then denigrates them for being physically underdeveloped. One teaches them to define their value solely in terms of sexual attractiveness to men, and then scorns them for primping constantly.

Another school of Classicists, rather than defending the Greeks for their polarization of the sexes, denies that it occurred. The groundwork for this view was laid by A. W. Gomme, otherwise a splendid scholar. Gomme argues that the appearance of rebellious and independent female characters in Greek drama proves that actual women enjoyed high status at the time the dramas were written. Many of the plays, however, are set in the distant pastthey are half-historical, half-mythological. Some of the heroines can better be regarded as projections of male fears than as realistic portrayals of ordinary women in the fifth century B.C. How would we respond to a critic who sought to describe women of the 1980s through a study of horror films, westerns, and experimental theater?

Apologists for the Athenians display wonderful ingenuity in defense of their idols. For example, L. J. Kuenen-Janssens argues that "women had considerable freedom of action," citing a statute according to which "neither child nor woman may accumulate [or possibly: transact for the value of | more than the price of one medimnus of barley" (Isae. 10, 10). Overlooking the fact that the statute cites a limitation rather than a right, this scholar conjures up a sphere of female capitalism, regardless of our lack of knowledge of even how much barley a medimnus was.

A third school of thought described Athenian women neither as respected and prosperous, nor as unpresentable, but as imperiled by men. Did husbands confine women to the house? Well, that was "protective solicitude," in the words of Donald Richter (7). After

all, the streets of Athens were "notoriously unsafe." Besides, there is no doubt in Richter's mind about the "sexual laxity" of Athenian women. "It was because Greek women were in fact so voluble that men reminded them so frequently that 'silence is a woman's glory.' " This view appears to combine the scorn of Brandt with the solicitude of Gomme.

In her brief, but rewarding section on Athenian women of the Classical age, Sarah Pomeroy comments on the dispute over their status, in which "some scholars hold that women were despised and kept in Oriental seclusion, while others contend that they were respected and enjoyed freedom comparable to that of most women through the centuries." She aptly observes that the dispute can in part be traced to the genres of evidence consulted. Scholars who treat the women in Classical tragedy as if they were modeled on contemporaries of the playwrights, uphold the position taken by Gomme. A contrary school prefers to rely upon orations, especially speeches from trials, which yield a more mundane, and far bleaker picture of the lives of women than does drama. Both schools of scholarship have largely failed to exploit the pictorial record, here used as a major resource: the panorama of ideals, myths, fantasies and, above all, scenes of daily life that appears on the tens of thousands of Greek vases, scattered in museums all over Europe and the United States. Over three hundred of these pictures are reproduced in this book.

The failure of historians to recognize the dark side of Attic culture has created an erroneous picture of the difference between the moral climate of Athens and that of her perennial antagonist, Sparta. This city-state is remembered in history as militaristic, aggressive and ruthless. In reality she allowed her women roles of some dignity and freedom, did not practice external military imperialism, and is entitled to the gratitude of the Western world for a sublime act of mercy: after defeating Athens, she spared the city and its population. Had Athens won the Peloponnesian War, Sparta probably would have been eradicated. For that matter of fact, the greater leniency of the Spartans, while largely ignored by scholarship. was recognized by the Athenians themselves. At all times, before, during and after the Peloponnesian War, prominent citizens of Athens, such as Aristophanes, Xenophon and Plato, "spartanized."

### Scope and Aim of This Study

As a Classicist I am committed to the study of Greece, but I hope that many readers will come to this book primarily through an interest in human sexuality, patterns of social dominance, and possibilities of reform, rather than from a background in ancient history. Those who feel that phallocracy remains a problem in modern, more subtle, forms, may wonder about the value of reaching all the way back to ancient Athens instead of confronting the pattern directly in our own society. However, just as a traveler learns about his or her own country through immersion in a foreign culture, so we can sharpen our sense of the present by contrast and comparison with a detailed case history from the past. Classical Athens is historically related to subsequent Western culture, and similar enough to illuminate it, but it is also alien enough to jolt our ordinary sense of reality.

A second reason for studying fifth-century Athens is that, compared with patriarchal industrial societies, its phallocracy, as yet not modified by serious challenges or concealed by prudery and guilt, was severe and crass. The reaction it triggered at the end of the century was correspondingly intense and produced the first antimilitaristic and feminist manifestations on record in the West. Thus, this short span of history provides us with extremes in the realms of the military and sexual ethics which still govern our societies. Classical Athens is a kind of concave mirror in which we can see our own foibles and institutions magnified and distorted.

Since I would like to make this book accessible to the general reader, I must ask my fellow Classicists to overlook explanations not intended for them, and to look instead at new evidence and new argumentation. Artifacts well known to historians of ancient art are reproduced side by side with unpublished vase paintings. Familiar quotations are intermingled with passages from Greek texts not previously cited in contexts of social history. Many readings of vases and literary passages in Greek are new, and my colleagues will recognize them as such.

I leave it to others to explore the thematic links between the phallocracy of Classical Athens and that of other times and places, including our own. Much remains to be done, and I hope that other scholars will address the origins of phallocracy as a distinctive social system, the detailed reinterpretation of Greek tragedy in this light, the links between sexual ethics and public affairs, and the revolts against and modifications of phallic rule (such as occurred after the defeat of Athens in 404 B.C.). For each of these topics this book offers some clues.

#### Outline

Until the end of the Periclean age, 430 B.C., a pronounced phallicism prevailed in classical Athens, which we will take to mean a combination of male supremacy and the cult of power and violence. Most of the following chapters will point to the phallic elements in a variety of aspects of Athenian life, and argue that the suppression of women, the military expansionism and the harshness in the conduct of civic affairs all sprang from a common aggressive impulse. They will also attempt to show that undercurrents of protest were always present in the city, and that these came to a head in the fateful year of 415 B.C. In that year the Athenians embarked on a rash, ill-planned military expedition against Sicily, which was to break the back of its wealth and power for all time. The event, however, took place over great opposition, which marked the beginning of an overt anti-phallic movement. The year 415, as it were, divided the classical Athenian age into two periods, one marked by extreme phallicism, and one of anti-militaristic reaction. This book begins and ends with the events of that year.

Chapter 1 tells the astonishing course of events of the year 415, and recalls the most puzzling mystery of all of Classical history which they posed, namely: Who was responsible for the scandal which was the Watergate of ancient Athens, the so-called "Mutilation [actually Castration] of the Herms"?

In Chapter 2 we explore the powerful myths that provided a warrant for male supremacy, most of them still popular today. In Chapter 3 we draw a contrast between phallic exposure and female invisibility on the Athenian scene.

The following eight chapters examine the kinds of relations that existed between men and their sexual partners. Thus, Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the status and experience of wives; Chapters 6 and 7 the world of prostitution, including that of the famous courtesans or hetaerai. In Chapter 8, the splitting of the female psyche between these two realms is clarified; and in Chapter 9 the sex appeal of female drudgery is shown. Apart from marriage and prostitution, men had another common way of relating to women: taking a concubine, which might combine the stability of marriage with the sexual primacy of prostitution. After examining concubinage in Chapter 10, we turn to the troubled subject of male homosexuality. Chapter 11 puts forth an original interpretation of Athenian homosexual practices.

In the third part of the book, we turn to a consideration of a cluster of rituals, dramas, and other manifestations which are aspects of, or responses to, phallicism. In Chapter 12 we look at rites and customs of sex role initiation; in Chapter 13, at stories and beliefs about what happens when, in foreign cultures, women are allowed to assert themselves; in Chapter 14 at Classical tragedy as an expression of male fear that domination might fail; and in Chapter 15, at the brilliant and varied forms through which women expressed their frustration at being dominated and sought momentary relief from it.

Finally, in Chapter 16 we return to the subject of the crucial year of 415 B.C., in which the extreme Athenian phallicism had its last spasm, and in which the latent opposition to it erupted in protest, too late to save Athens from disaster and its empire from collapse. It is here that a solution to the historical conundrum of the "Mutilation of the Herms" is proposed.

My focus is on Athenian life, and on the period of the greatest flowering of Attic culture, the Periclean age or *pentekontaetia* (Great Fifty Years) from 480 to 430 B.C. and its immediate aftermath. From this period date most of the vase paintings reproduced, and the greater part of the tragedies discussed. But evidence from other parts of the Classical world and from other periods had to be adduced, notably the Athenian courtroom speeches, a major source for the practical side of life in ancient Greece, which date mainly from the fourth century B.C.

I have identified, either in the text or in the notes, all citations from Greek and Latin literature by the abbreviations used in the Oxford Classical Dictionary, through which they can easily be traced. A few abbreviations are taken from Liddell-Scott-Jones' Dictionary of the Greek Language. In the bibliographies to the Introduction, the Chapters and the Epilogue I have listed all works referred to in the text, a few selected important titles, and the most recent work on the topic under discussion known to me, through

which the interested reader can find his way to older studies.

The artifacts reproduced are mainly Attic vase paintings; literature on these can be located in J. D. Beazley's Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters, Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters (Second Edition) and Paralipomena.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations of ancient and modern texts are my own.