

Motherhood and Citizenship in the Classical *Polis*

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ABSTRACT:

The issue of female citizenship in the Greek world has traditionally been addressed by either denying women's status as *politis* or by attributing their sharing in the *polis* exclusively in connection with cultic practices and priestly roles. Can other perspectives be introduced in this regard? Evidence associating women with property in various contexts of the Greek world challenges the assumption of their exclusion from citizenship. The figure of the woman–mother–citizen should not be understood as merely a conduit for the transmission of rights to her children, nor does it designate female citizens solely as mothers of citizens: maternal status leads to a wider recognition of rights, and prerogatives that women not only transmitted but also possessed.

KEYWORDS: motherhood; female citizenship; property; *politis*.

1. Women as mothers and citizens: property, inheritance and cult

The issue of women's citizenship is notoriously controversial: it is often ignored or only admitted from the functional perspective of the generation of legitimate citizens. Josine Blok's recent work has revived the issue by emphasising the role of religion as the basis for sharing in the *polis* (Blok 2017); the religious connotations of women's citizenship have been identified, among others, by Geneviève Hoffmann (1999) and Nicholas Jones (1999), and, particularly in relation to priestesses, by Robert Parker (1996) Joan Breton Connelly (2007), and Blok herself with Stephen Lambert (2009). Edward Cohen suggests that the word *politis* ("citizeness"), shows that Athenian women were permitted and expected, as *politides*, to "share in" significant aspects and activities related to the *polis*, which were no less relevant than men's political activities (Cohen 2000, 31–48). As asserted by Violaine Sébillotte Cuchet (2016), the notion of women's citizenship within the context of the *politides* is indeed valid. The hesitancy among scholars to embrace the concept of female citizenship is not rooted in ancient

linguistic and institutional practices, but rather, it is more attributable to contemporary ideological influences. Cohen and Sébillotte Cuchet both recognise women's participation in the *polis* from a perspective that is primarily, if not essentially, linked to religion, as is also the case with Blok. A significant body of research has identified the participation of women in religious and cultic activities as a means of defining citizenship for women: Parker (1996, 80) described it as “a kind of ‘cultic citizenship’”. As Giangiulio (2017, 41) has recently highlighted, the Cretan *polis* of Axos offers a compelling case study. It is here that we encounter the earliest known reference to *astai*, a term used to denote female civic identity. This reference appears in an inscription recording participation of the *astai* in sacred rituals associated with the military sphere, which was exclusively occupied by males.¹ Although the recognition of women as participants in the *polis* was primarily rooted in a religious context, it is frequently accompanied by a call for a re-examination of the concept of citizenship itself, along with its practices and implications.² In the field of scholarship, three distinct approaches have been identified concerning female citizenship in ancient Greece. The first perspective posits the absence of any formal recognition of female citizenship in ancient Greece (Loraux 1990). The second viewpoint asserts that women were considered citizens solely in their capacity as mothers of male citizens (Brulé 2003 among others). The third approach suggests that women participated in the life of the *polis*, albeit indirectly, through their involvement in sacred events and cults.

In Athens, there is no doubt that *astai* mothers played a pivotal role in ensuring the fulfilment of the civic obligation of citizenship, after Pericles' decree of 451/0 excluded those not born ἐξ ἀμφοῖν ἀστοῖν from participation in citizenship (μὴ μετέχειν τῆς πόλεως).³ Notwithstanding their formal recognition as citizens, women's participation in citizenship was primarily, if not exclusively, confined to their role as mothers of male citizens. This perspective has been recently reiterated by Christopher Joyce (2023b, 350-1): “Women were citizens of Athens in the important legal sense that it was necessary to have an Athenian mother for a free adult male to be citizen”, adding that “when the theoretical categories of ‘citizenship’ and ‘social participation’ are confused in scholarship, there looms a danger that an accurate description of the contribution of

1 IC II V 5 and 6, cf. Perlman 2010.

2 According to Sourvinou-Inwood (1995, 116), the core of female citizens' identities was access to the priesthood and eligibility for religious offices. On the distinction between *astai* and *politides*, which I will not discuss here, different points of view in Cohen 2000, 49-78; Patterson 1986 and 2021; Joyce 2023 (b), 349-51.

3 Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 26.4: μὴ μετέχειν τῆς πόλεως, ὃς ἂν μὴ ἐξ ἀμφοῖν ἀστοῖν ᾖ γεγονώς. Cf. Plut. *Per.* 37. 3; Ael. *VH* 6. 10; 13. 24; Suda *s.v.* δημοποῖήτοι. See Patterson 1981 and 2005; Blok 2009b; Rhodes 1981, 331-35.

Athenian women to the history of Athens comes under threat”.⁴ Conversely, Barbara Schipani’s contribution to the same volume proposes that the domains of activity available to or designated for women were distinct and divergent from those allocated to men (Schipani, Ferraioli 2023, 198-201). This conceptualisation of areas of agency would not diminish women’s participation in the city as wives and mothers, within the *oikos* and while performing collective functions of primary importance, particularly religious ones. Their political function should be recognised in their service to their community. Active membership within the *oikos* was, according to Cohen (2000, 38, 45-46), the premise and the condition for the attribution of citizenship to both male and female members of the community: “Both men and women derived their right and their reality of participation in the *polis* not from personal attributes, but from their familial positions within the ‘household’”.

I will not be pursuing the “religious path”, which has already been explored with relevant arguments that, however, do not seem truly conclusive to me, when it comes to analysing forms and developments of the institutionalisation of citizenship. I think it is important to bear in mind that, for historical research, institutionalisation is a point of arrival, behind which we must seek to reconstruct the trajectories that culminated in its establishment as a process. This concept has been elucidated by Michele Faraguna (2024) and, to quote Catherine Neveu (2023), it is essential “to search not the meaning but the making of the meaning”.

In contemplating the relationship between motherhood and citizenship, it would be worthwhile to challenge the idea that Greek women participated in citizenship solely as mothers of citizens. The present study seeks to investigate the extent to which motherhood granted greater recognition to Greek women within the *polis*. My hypothesis is that motherhood completed their *timē* and gave them authority in various areas of domestic and public life, including, of course, sacred activities and offices, as well as social, economic and legal matters. While Aurélie Damet (2015) has made important observations on this subject, further exploration is possible. The selection of topics will be constrained, necessitating a focus on two primary issues concerning the institutionalisation of citizenship for female members of the *polis*:

4 Joyce claims that such a distinction will help for a higher respect and a better understanding of ancient sources; his core argument seems to be that the *politis* should not be considered a citizeness because of the lack of political participation or power; Blok (2018, 79) had argued that limited or no access to public office was the normal condition for most of citizens in archaic but still in classical era: “participation in political office, therefore, was not the defining feature of citizenship in ancient Greece”. While rethinking citizenship in archaic Greece, Giangiulio (2018, 46) could convincingly state that: “women were part of the people who made up the political community, even though they did not possess political rights”. So, the question remains open: what makes a woman a citizeness? Political rights and participation or access to ritual and cults, legal rights and guarantees, patrimonial recognition?

- a. The relationship between women and property in defining female citizens;
- b. The evidence for female citizenship and the meaning of being πολίτις, as a specific way of sharing in the *polis*, not limited to mere reproduction of male citizens.

2. Outside of Athens

It has been hypothesised that the constraints on the attribution of rights and civic acknowledgement to women were more evident in Athens than in other regions, particularly during the Classical period and within the democratic city, and that these constraints were less pronounced, if not absent, outside Attica. The primary cases have all been thoroughly delineated; for a comprehensive overview, consult Rocca (2012), Gallo (2017), who characterises the condition of Athenian women as an “anomaly” within the Greek context, and Ferraioli in Schipani, Ferraioli (2023).

2.1. Women and property

In the world of the *poleis*, the best-known case is that of Gortyn, the Code of Gortyna being the oldest known documentary evidence. Although many specific issues are still debated (Gagarin 2008 and 2012; Maffi 1997 and 2012a; Guizzi 2018: 118–22, 129–38), it seems evident that the Code bestows upon women considerable rights and privileges concerning dowries, marriage gifts, and inheritance (heiresses received half the amount of properties than their brothers), and it stipulates properties owned and controlled by mothers (*IC IV 72*, col. IV, ll. 26–27: τὰν ματέρα τὸν ᾧ αὐτὰς κρεμάτων; l. 44: τὰ ματρῶνα). Moreover, it establishes a sophisticated array of regulations for the status of the *patroiochos*, who appears to have more options in the matter of marriage and control over properties than the Athenian *epikleros*. The Code stipulates that there are properties (κρέματα) that belong to women. Gagarin (2008 and 2012) postulates that women could control and manage their properties without the intervention of a tutor (in Attic terminology, a *kyrios*), in great if not total autonomy (see the discussion of Gagarin’s positions in Maffi 2012) and provides mothers with a certain degree of independence concerning property. Enhanced autonomy for women in conjunction with particular legal or patrimonial delineations and functions does not necessarily imply emancipation. Instead, it signifies a more precise delineation of the roles assigned to women within the confines of those *poleis*, unveiling the status of women as constituents of the community, encompassing both domestic and civic domains. This, in turn, contributes to the conceptualisation of female citizenship.

In Sparta, Aristotle (*Pol.* 1270a 23–25) states that women controlled two-fifths of the *klaroi*, as *epikleroi* or through dowries, suggesting that they had direct control of both inheritance and dowry, which Hodkinson interprets, I think

rightly, as an anticipation of the female part of inheritance, as in the Gortyn Code (Hodkinson 2000, 65-186; 2004, 103-106; see also Bresson 2016). Female influence within Spartan *oikoi* has been identified as a factor in the stabilisation of the internal structure of the *polis* (Redfield 1977/8; Ducat 1998): property rights and practices made it possible, and so the domestic, private, or social regulations had, also, a public and political implication. Sharing in the *oikos*, with the concomitant legal attribution of property rights, constituted a significant means of involving women in the Spartan *polis* and safeguarding the patrimonial assets of the *oikos* over time. Wealthy and influential Spartan women from around 240 BCE are remembered by Plutarch, *Agis* 7. 4, witnessing a progressive growth of female capacity for wealth accumulation (Hodkinson 2004, 121, 126-29, with important considerations regarding the ideological framework for the link between female power and the decline of late classical and Hellenistic Sparta: “[t]he connections between Sparta’s civic crisis and the increasing participation of women in activities and spheres that were formerly exclusively male need to be viewed in a broader socio-political context”). The depiction of Spartan women as the sole progenitors capable of producing “true men” serves to portray them as unwaveringly supportive of the social structure of their society. This representation offers a compelling insight into the manner in which the concept of a “liberated” Spartan woman was a fundamental component in the construction of the Spartan mirage (Cartledge 1981). In fact, these two aspects are complementary: they indicate the basis for recognising women’s civic role as mothers, and the main consequence of this recognition, namely the right to play an active role in material assets of the *oikos*’ estate: “in their household roles as mothers and as enforcers of the Spartiate code, women made essential contributions to the biological and social reproduction of the citizen population and to the civic solidarity of the Spartiate *polis*” (Hodkinson 2004, 127).

Significant evidence of women’s agency comes from central, western and northern Greece. In Macedonia, women appear in formal real estate sales deeds without the involvement of a *kyrios*, at Olynthos, around the mid-fourth century (Hatzopoulos 1988, 19-23 = *SEG* 38.670), and at Amphipolis (Hatzopoulos 1991, 24-29, no. III = *SEG* 41.557). During the early Hellenistic period (third-second century BCE), women in Corcyra were involved in significant economic transactions, which they carried out independently, with one case of a woman acting as a witness (Antonetti 2010, 325; Velissaropoulos-Karakostas *et al.* 2003, 136-137; Grandinetti 2011; Rocca 2012, 249-250). The manumissions attested in Macedonia, Thessaly, western Locris and Phocis all feature female manumitters who granted freedom to slaves directly and apparently freely. Despite the variety of contexts, the absence of the *kyrios*’s role and women’s legal capacity to operate autonomously on their family group’s property are common features (Rocca 2012, 251-61 offers a very detailed list of manumitting and manumitted women).

Further instances of women selling properties (primarily, but not exclusively, houses) without the involvement of a *kyrios* have been documented from Hellenistic Sicily. These have recently been collated and annotated by Donatella Erdas (2025b, 68-70), who has also addressed other evidence from Tenos and Amorgos.⁵ In all these cases, women act without any legal restriction or supervision, as if they had their own *kyrieia*.

2.2. Granting citizenship to women

By the end of the fifth century, or possibly as early as the beginning of the fourth century, the children of Thasian women residing in the colony of Neapolis had formally recognised as full citizens, thereby legitimising their lineage (*IG* XII 8, 264, 7-11):

ἔδοξεν τῷ δήμῳ· τὰ μὲν ἄλλα καθ[άπερ τῇ βολῇ· εὐξασθαι δὲ τῷ Ἡρακλεῖ
κα]/ι τοῖς ἄλλοις θεοῖς πᾶσιν· ἀγαθ[ῇ] τύχῃ δέ, ὅποσοι μὲν Νεοπολιτέων ἐκ
Θα]/σίῳ γυναικῶν εἰσιν, τότος Θα[σίος εἶναι καὶ μετεῖναι αὐτοῖς καὶ παισὶ]/
(10) πάντων ὅσωμπερ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλ[οις] Θα[σί]οις μέτεστιν, καὶ ὅταν ἐς τὸ αὐτὸ
ἦω]/σιν τοῖς ἄλλοις Θασίοις, ὀρκῶ[σαι] αὐτ[ὸς] κατὰ τὸν νόμον·

The assembly of citizens has decided; decision identical for the remaining (affairs) with the decisions of the Council; pray to Herakles and to all the other gods; Good fortune, the inhabitants of Neapolis, who descend from Thasian women, will be considered Thasians and they can participate, themselves and their children, in everything that Thasians take part in; and when they reach the same age as the other Thasians, they shall swear an oath (of allegiance) according to the law ... [transl. Arnaoutoglou]

Two inscriptions from Dodona concerning the naturalisation of two women are dated around 370 BCE.⁶ In the first one (*SEG* 15.384, ll. 1-6 = Cabanes, Hatzopoulos 2020, I.I.2; 30) citizenship is granted to a woman named Philista:

Ἀγαθαὶ τύχαι, βασι/λεύοντος Νεοπολέμου/ τοῦ Ἀλκέτα, Φιλίσται τῇ Ἀντι/
μάχου γυναικὶ ἐξ Ἀρρώνου/ (5) ἐδόθη πολιτεία, αὐτῇ/ καὶ ἐκγόνοις κτλ

5 Sicilian sale deeds in Game 2008, no. 81 = Del Monaco 2025, no. 173 (Camarina 2nd Century BCE, seller Dikaigoros widow of Antallos); Game 2008, no. 86 (Morgantina, third Century BCE); as Erdas (2025b, 69) observes: “It is noteworthy [...] that ownership and power to sell reside in these cases in the same female person”. A sale from Tenos (*IG* XII 5, 872.20 = Game 2008, no. 45) is documented as a transaction between two women, in which they are listed as the respective seller and buyer of a plot of land, accompanied by a *kyrios*. Amorgos (*IG* XII 5, 55, late fourth/early third century BCE) offers a potential illustration of joint ownership between a husband and wife (Stavrianopoulou 2006, 99-104; Erdas 2025b, 70 and n. 25).

6 These inscriptions have been studied by Cabanes (2010) and Elisabeth Meyer (2012, 2013), among others, and form the basis of Schipani and Ferraioli’s paper (2023); see now Cabanes, Hatzopoulos 2020, 214-17.

With good fortune. Neoptolemos, (son) of Alketas, was king. Citizenship was given to Philista, the wife of Antimachos, from Arrhonos, to her and (her) descendants... [transl. Harvey]

The second inscription (*SEG* 15.384, ll. 20-24 = Cabanes, Hatzopoulos 2020, I.I. 2 31) granted citizenship to the offspring of Philtō (this is the prevailing interpretation of γενεά):

(20) Ἀγαθῶι τύχαι, βασι/λεύοντος Νεοπτολέμου/ τοῦ Ἀλκέτα, τῇ Φιλτοῦς
γενεῇ ἐξ Ἀρ/ρόνου ἐδόθη πολιτεία, αὐτῶι/ καὶ ἐκγόνοις κτλ

With good fortune. Neoptolemos, (son) of Alketas, was king. Citizenship was given to the offspring of Philtō, from Arrhonos, to her and (her) descendants... [transl. Harvey]

In both cases, citizenship is extended to the women's descendants. The significance of filiation is evident in this context, as evidenced by the analogous case of Thasos. Moreover, Cabanes has proposed that citizenship must entail the recognition of property rights for the women concerned, in addition to legitimising the line of descent (see Meyer 2012 and 2013). The correlation between *politeia*, filiation and property appears to be pivotal, though the validity of categorising property as a concession associated with the “private” domain, as Cabanes did, to differentiate the citizenship of Epirote women from the political citizenship of men, might be called into question. It seems evident to me that the issue of property rights and their recognition assumes a political dimension, serving as a crucial element in the conceptualisation of *politeia* (see Faraguna 2024).

As indicated by the references to magistrates in the two texts (*prostatas*, *grammateus* and *damiourgoi*), it appears that the era of concessions coincided with the organisation of the Molossians in Epirus (although Meyer considers these magistrates to be of a religious nature, connected to the organisation of the sanctuary of Dodona).⁷ Remarkably, these processes of institutionalisation are intertwined with the establishment of legitimate members of the civic body, as well as the status of mothers, property regimes and their possible extension to women and their descendants, in forms and definitions that vary according to context.

⁷ Meyer intends the inscription as a later rewriting of Neoptolemos' decrees, to be dated around 250 BCE, and suggest that the *damiourgoi* should be considered as a board of officials connected with amphictyonic Council for Dodona rather than magistrates of the Molossian *koinon*: “One common type of *damiourgoi* elsewhere in the early Greek world was a member of a board of officials with oversight, sometimes judicial, of religious matters and sanctuary practices: and this fits Dodona very well”; see the discussion in Cabanes, Hatzopoulos 2020, 216.

A few years later, during the synoecism of Orchomenos and Euaimon, the children and wives of mixed marriages were naturalised (*IG* V 2, 343, ll. 34-37, ca. 360-350 BCE, cf. Hannik 1976):

ὅτις ξέν[αν] / (35) γεγάμηκε, τὸς παῖδας [κ]/[α]ὶ τὰς γυναῖκας Ἐ[ρ]χομινίας
ἦναι

For those who have married a foreigner, let the children and wives be Orchomenians. [transl. Hannik]

In the third century BCE, the Epirote *koinon* granted citizenship to a woman named Kallisto, as evidenced by an inscription from Thermos (*IG* IX 1², 1-8), which introduces *isomoiria* with respect to other Aetolians:

ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ. / [Α]ἰτωλῶν τὸ κοινὸν/ Καλλιστῷ Ἀρισταίχμῳ[υ] / [θυ]γατέρα
Ἀλκιοῦ αὐτῇ[ν] / [καὶ] ἐγγόνους ἐπόησεν / [π]ολλῆτιν καὶ Αἰτωλίδα πᾶ[ντ]/[ω]ν
ἰσόμοιρον ὅσων καὶ οἱ [λοι]/πρὸς Αἰτωλοί.

Good fortune. The koinon of the Aetolians gives citizenship to Kallisto daughter of Aristachmos of Aleia, to her and (her) descendants, and they can take the same part in everything as the other Aetolians.

Cabanes interprets this as the full right to administer one's own property and comments that such a condition would have been unimaginable in Athens.

Although the picture I presented here is extremely concise, it suggests that the connection between women and citizenship was not consistent throughout the Greek world. It seems to have developed into a growing visibility of women between the late classical period and early Hellenistic era. At the same time, there was scope for full acknowledgement of female citizenship, which was typically extended to their descendants. This acknowledgement was frequently accompanied by property rights.

3. Athenian women and citizenship: an exceptional context?

What constitutes being a *politis*? What prerogatives does it confer? I will return to Athens in trying to answer these questions. In a recent article, Gallo (2017) uses comparisons with Greek society to present Athens as an exception with regard to the treatment of women and the restrictions placed on them. However, a rather paradoxical situation arises: while Athens was supposedly the city least open to recognising women's roles in civic spaces, it used two specific feminine terms to refer to female citizens: *politis* and *astē*.

Although rare, these terms do exist, attesting to the fact that the classical Athenians gave female citizenship a specific semantic form. To quote Sébillotte Cuchet (2016, 207): “The reluctance [...] to use the term “female citizen” to translate terms that clearly exist in Greek should probably be understood in light of contemporary representations of citizenship and politics”. This seems to me a wise warning to bear in mind. I also agree with the author’s assertion that the issue of women citizens has a much stronger “gender” connotation for modern cultural and ideological perspectives than it did for the Greeks. The issue of female citizenship largely concerns questions of social and class belonging, as well as defining the forms of possible gender distinctions in the *polis*, as argued by Steven Hodkinson (2004) for Sparta and Schipani, Ferraioli (2023).

I see three elements at play here:

- a. Legitimate filiation: women as mothers of citizens and heirs within the household.
- b. Access to religious and cult activities.
- c. Legal capacity in relation to property.

For women citizens, the qualifying condition in all three cases is being mothers and passing on both citizenship and property to their sons and daughters. However, I must admit that I am quite unsatisfied with the portrayal of women as part of the community only as mere transmitter of civic, political and juridic rights they do not share, and, in the last part of this paper, I will try to discuss a few points on this issue.

a. Perhaps there would be no need to dwell on legitimate filiation. It would suffice to recall the question with which the archons’ *dokimasia* opens, according to Aristotle’s *Athēnaion politeia* (55.3): “Who is your father? Who is your mother?”⁸ The well-known case of the naturalisation of the Plataeans seems to emphasise the status of the mother, not only for its symbolic significance (on the symbolic confinement of mothers, see Bourdieu 2002 [1998], 25-49), but also for the political relevance regarding citizenship. While Canevaro (2013, 196-208) has demonstrated that the decree preserved in the speech *Against Neaera* is a forgery,⁹ I am interested in the fact that Apollodorus asserts that citizenship is only perfected through children born to naturalised Plataeans and Athenian women, ἄσται καὶ ἐγγυηταί ([Dem.] 59.106):

8 Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 55.3: τίς σοι πατήρ καὶ πόθεν τῶν δῆμων, καὶ τίς πατρός πατήρ, καὶ τίς μήτηρ, καὶ τίς μητρός πατήρ καὶ πόθεν τῶν δῆμων. Rhodes (1991, 617) explains from an institutional point of view the mention of the maternal grandfathers: “the proof that a woman was a *politis* was that their father was registered as a citizen”. Rhodes also noted that the formula of the *dokimasia* seems to date back to the archaic *polis*, where the knowledge of members of the community must have been more obvious, and “the examination [...] a matter of formal confirmation rather than genuine enquiry”. The distance between the civic role of mothers and the very elusive way to certify their identity and family status in Athens is a challenging question; see Ferrucci 2021 and 2025.

9 [Dem.] 59.104.

ἔπειτα καὶ τὸν νόμον διωρίσατο ἐν τῷ ψηφίσματι πρὸς αὐτοὺς εὐθέως ὑπὲρ τε τῆς πόλεως καὶ τῶν θεῶν, καὶ μὴ ἐξεῖναι αὐτῶν μηδενὶ τῶν ἐννέα ἀρχόντων λαχεῖν μηδὲ ἱερωσύνης μηδεμιάς, τοῖς δ' ἐκ τούτων, ἂν ὧσιν ἐξ ἀστῆς γυναικὸς καὶ ἐγγυητῆς κατὰ τὸν νόμον.

And furthermore, he defined at once in the decree the rule applying to the Plataeans in the interest of the city and of the gods, declaring that it should not be permitted to any of them to be drawn by lot for the office of the nine archons or for any priesthood, but that their descendants might be so drawn, if they were born from mothers who were of Attic birth and were betrothed according to the law. [transl. N.W. DeWitt]

Isocrates made the role of Athenian mothers in completing the attribution of citizenship to the Plataeans explicit in the *Plataicus* with a formulation that appears highly inclusive of Athenian women, when the Plataean speaker refers to “your female citizenesses” (Isoc. 14.51):

Καὶ γὰρ οὐδ' ἀλλότριοι τυγχάνομεν ὑμῖν ὄντες, ἀλλὰ ταῖς μὲν εὐνοίαις ἅπαντες οἰκεῖοι, τῇ δὲ συγγενείᾳ τὸ πλῆθος ἡμῶν· διὰ γὰρ τὰς ἐπιγαμίας τὰς δοθείσας ἐκ πολιτίδων ὑμετέρων γεγόναμεν· ὥστ' οὐχ οἷόν θ' ὑμῖν ἀμελήσαι περὶ ὧν ἐληλύθαμεν δεησόμενοι.

For indeed we are not aliens to you; on the contrary, all of us are akin to you in our loyalty and most of us in blood also; for by the right of intermarriage granted to us we are born of mothers who were of your city. You cannot, therefore, be indifferent to the pleas we have come to make. [transl. Van Hook]

b. The share of religious offices and celebrations by Athenian women is well known and has been often considered the foundation for female citizenship (Blok 2017). I will recall only the *Thesmophoria*, reserved for citizen women, designed as *eugeneis* (Ar. *Thesm.* 330),¹⁰ or *gametai* (Isae. 3.80; 8.19);¹¹ during the celebrations two women were elected as ἀρχοῦσαι, in charge of νομιζόμενα including donations of food and goods for sacred banquets.¹² Selection of women allowed to take part at the *thesmophoria* was considered as a sign of sharing in the political community (the deme and the *polis*) as a result of membership in the *oikos* (Burkert 1977, 240-43). Motherhood was a privileged condition adding authority and prestige for adult women involved in religious contexts (Ferrucci 2025). A relevant comparison comes from Malkin's analysis of colonial context, where, since the foundation, “women played a major role in establishing and maintaining religious *nomima* that depended on women's participation”, both

10 For the meaning of *eugeneis* see Dover 1974, 50-51, 93ff.; Austin, Olson 2004, xlvii n. 31, 160.

11 Cf. Detienne 1979, 183-86, 195-97 and n. 3; Loraux 1990, 212-19; Parker 1996.

12 IG II² 1184; 1213; cf. Humphreys 2004, 180; supervision of the sacred ceremony is expressed as ἀρχεῖν εἰς Θεσμοφῶρῖα.

in the private sphere of the *oikos* and in public rituals; *nomima* included cults and religious rituals, requiring a specific female knowledge. Malkin concludes: “[h]ave there been no transmission of knowledge among Greek mothers and daughters, those cities that we call Greek colonies would have lost the ‘Greek’ element within one generation” (Malkin 2021, 55, 63).

The motif of a mother’s identity being a prerequisite for Athenian citizenship is evident in many passages of forensic speeches, often in reference to the law reintroduced and reformulated during the archonship of Eukleides, and recalled in court in relation to inheritance and citizenship rights.¹³ The connection between these rights seems evident, referring to their common origin in the recognition of affiliation with the *oikos*, as the place where the relationships of the domestic community’s members (freemen-slaves, men-women and father-children, according to the Aristotelian classification in the first book of *Politics*) and their property rights are defined.

The theme of *politides* raises the question of women’s legal capacity in relation to the property of the *oikos*. In the case of the speech eight of Isaeus, the issue of citizenship is closely and explicitly linked to that of inheritance (“For if you judges are misled into the belief that our mother was not an Athenian citizen, neither are we citizens”),¹⁴ but, due to the legal nature of the case, it is subordinate to it.

c. Michele Faraguna (2024) has clearly demonstrated the connection between property and citizenship, within the process of institutionalisation of the *polis*. This process begins with the need to formalise property regimes and rights. For both titles (citizenship and property, particularly succession), mother-citizens are indispensable for transmission. But does this transmission role really exclude them from participation? Let us briefly consider this.

In terms of legal capacity, the law cited in Isaeus (10.10) is often considered decisive in affirming the drastic limitation imposed on Athenian women’s capacity to engage in significant economic transactions:

Παιδὸς γὰρ οὐκ ἔξεστι διαθήκην γενέσθαι· ὁ γὰρ νόμος διαρρήδην κωλύει παῖδι μὴ ἐξεῖναι συμβάλλειν μηδὲ γυναικὶ πέρα μεδίμνου κριθῶν.

For a minor is not allowed to make a will; for the law expressly forbids any child—or woman—to contract for the disposal of more than a bushel of barley. [transl. Forster]

Wyse (1904, 659-69) and Gernet (1957, 58) expressed doubts regarding the wording of the law, the relevance of women’s presence in it, and the role of the

13 Isae. 8.43; Dem. 57.30.

14 Isae. 8.43: Ἐὰν γὰρ ἐξαπατηθῇτε ὑμεῖς πεισθέντες ὥς ἡ μήτηρ ἡμῶν οὐκ ἦν πολίτις, οὐδ’ ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν.

kyrios. Empirical evidence and actual behaviour suggest that the law was not applied as summarised in Isaeus' passage, as exemplified, for instance, by the case of the Polyeuctos widow (Dem. 41.11, 20-20). Gernet proposed that guardians (*kyrioi*) should be understood as exercising their function by authorisation rather than representation, thereby making the woman's actions legally effective without acting or negotiating on her behalf (*praestare auctoritatem*). More recently, Virginia Hunter (1989, 1994) and Lin Foxhall (1989, 1996) have raised no less radical doubts about the extent of male *kyrieia* in Athens. They have collected a wide range of situations in which women demonstrate significant agency in managing economic and financial matters, although the legal framework of the references has not always been analysed in sufficient detail. Conversely, Harris demonstrated, based on a careful re-reading of *Horos* 114A and of Polyeukos' wife case, that the scope of action of female citizens was broader than is generally accepted. He concluded that these examples "should cause us to rethink any assumptions we might make about the position of women on the basis of the evidence drawn from the Athenian laws" (Harris 1992, 320). These studies began to recognise the active role of women within the *oikos*, usually in light of a discrepancy between legal provisions and practice. For example, the widow of Polyeuctos grants a loan of two thousand drachmas and keeps *grammata* containing provisions on the division of property, which her daughters seem to accept without objection.

Other female figures with agency emerge from Athenian forensic speeches, including: Cleoboule, the mother of Demosthenes; Diodotos' wife, who is given a heartfelt defence of her children by Lysias (32.12-17); Archippe, the wife of Pasion and then Phormio, and the mother of Apollodoros. These women are all mothers and are mentioned because of their relationship with their children and their involvement in managing the *oikos* estate, from different angles (Cleoboule defends it from Aphobos, Diodotos's wife from her father Diogeiton, and Archippe from her son from her first marriage).

What capacity were these mothers acting in? I will mention two examples only. In his speech *On the Succession of Aristarchus*, immediately after mentioning the above-referenced law, Isaeus illustrates the methods of transmitting inherited property by the *epikleros* to his children. As Foxhall noted, there is no doubt that the procedure required men at both ends: the *de cuius* on one side and his grandchildren on the other. However, Isaeus speaks of these men in unexpected terms: he explains that his opponents have illegitimately acquired "the property of their mother" (τὰ τῆς μητρὸς χρήματα)¹⁵ and adds that the man who

15 Isae 10.11-12: ἐξ ὧν αὐτοὶ λέγουσιν ἔτι φανερώτερον ὑμῖν γενήσεται τοῦτο, ὅτι παρανόμως καὶ ἀσελγῶς ἔχουσι τὰ τῆς μητρὸς χρήματα. (12) (...) Θαυμαστὸν γὰρ ἂν εἴη, εἰ τὴν ἐμὴν μητέρα ἔχοντι Ἀπολλοδώρῳ ἢ Ἀριστομένει οὐκ ἂν οἷόν τε ἦν τῶν ἐκείνης κυρίῳ γενέσθαι, κατὰ τὸν νόμον ὃς οὐκ ἔῃ τῶν τῆς ἐπικλήρου κύριον εἶναι, ἀλλ' ἢ τοὺς παῖδας ἐπὶ δίετες ἡβήσαντας [κρατεῖν τῶν χρημάτων], ἀλλ' ἑτέρῳ αὐτὴν ἐκδόντι ἐξέσται

marries the *epiklēros* does not become *kyrios* of her property because the law prevents it. The pseudo-Demosthenic *Against Macartatus* affirms that the offspring of the *epiklēros* has full property rights (*kratein tōn chrēmātōn*) but is obliged to maintain the mother (saying nothing about the father); Isaeus's speech 8 adds that who marries an *epiklēros* becomes *kyrios* of the woman, not of the properties.¹⁶ The last statement may help understanding why some women, while acting with a *kyrios*, may be represented as legally entitled to own properties and dispose of them, as in the sale deeds we saw before. Expressions such as τὰ ἐκείνης, τὰ τῆς ἐπικλήρου and τὰ ταύτης χρήματα refer to assets bestowed to women, using the formula of ownership. The presence of the *kyrios* does not cancel this female link to properties.

When the children of an *epiklēros* reach the appropriate age, they will be responsible for κρατεῖν τῶν χρημάτων. *Kratein* indicates full ownership because it is definitive; the formula *echein kai kratein* is used in various mortgage *horoi* and in the herald's annual proclamation, which reassures the people that the archon will respect property rights (*Ath. Pol.* 56.2). The father and children of the *epiklēros* benefit from this ownership: during the transfer of assets between the death of the former and the coming of age of the latter, the women, as mother, has ownership of them. No one can be *kyrios* of the estate, the most they can do is manage it in her stead. The many references to the oppression suffered by the husbands of *epiklēroi* in the new comedy seem to suggest that women could claim control over these assets and exercise power, at least over their husbands.

The story of Archippe also raises questions about women's ability to manage assets. In his first speech *Against Stephanus*, Apollodorus accuses Phormio of seizing his mother's considerable assets through Pasion's will, which he

εἰς τὰ ταύτης χρήματα ὕδν εἰσποιῆσαι. Δεινὰ μέντ' ἂν γίγνοιτο. "From their own assertions it will become still more evident to you that they are illegally and impudently detaining my mother's property. 12. (...) Seeing that neither Apollodorus nor Aristomenes, if either of them had married my mother, could possibly have had the disposal of her property—in accordance with the law which does not allow anyone to have the disposal of the property of an heiress except her sons, who obtain possession of it on reaching the second year after puberty—it would be strange if Aristarchus is going to be allowed, after giving her in marriage to another, to introduce a son to inherit her fortune". [transl. Forster]

- 16 [Dem.] 46.20: Καὶ ἐὰν ἐξ ἐπικλήρου τις γένηται καὶ ἅμα ἡβήσῃ ἐπὶ δῖετες, κρατεῖν τῶν χρημάτων, τὸν δὲ σίτον μετρεῖν τῇ μητρὶ. "If one be born the son of an heiress, two years after he has reached the age of manhood he shall assume control of the estate, and he shall make due provision for his mother's maintenance". [transl. Murray]; Isae. 8.31: συνοικῆσαι μὲν ἂν τῇ γυναικὶ κύριος ᾖν, τῶν δὲ χρημάτων οὐκ ἂν, ἀλλ' οἱ γενόμενοι παῖδες ἐκ τούτου καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνης, ὅποτε ἐπὶ δῖετες ἡβήσαν· οὕτω γὰρ οἱ νόμοι κελεύουσιν. "He would have the right to claim the daughter in marriage, but he could not claim the estate, which would go to the children born of their marriage when they had completed two years after puberty; for this is what the laws ordain". [transl. Forster]

considers to be false.¹⁷ Murray translates χωρὶς ὧν οὔσης τῆς μητρὸς κυρίας with “inasmuch as they were in the custody of my mother”, whereas Gernet’s rendition seems to me more accurate: “tout le bien qui appartenait à ma mère”. The Greek text actually reads: “of which my mother was *kyria* (ὧν ὄσης τῆς μητρὸς κυρίας)”. Is this emphasis intended to highlight Phormio’s dishonesty? Even outside the dispute with his stepfather, in the speech *Against Polykles*, Apollodorus recalls that Archippe only ceased to be *kyria* of his possessions in the last days of her life.¹⁸ The orator also attributes a donation of an equal sum of money to the woman for her four children (two from each marriage), which came from her estate (τὰ μητρῶα).¹⁹

And, at the end, I will conclude on the word μητρῶα/ματρῶα. It is a well-known term, which “allude a un insieme di beni appartenenti a una donna sposata” as is defined by Maffi (2012b, 91) in a recent revisitation of a documentation including a very fragmentary inscription from Phaistos (T8), the Code of Gortyna (*ex. gr.*: IC IV 72, col. IV 23-29: τον πατερα τον/ τεκνον και τον κρεματον κ/αρτερον εμεν ταδ δαισιος/ και ταν ματερα τον φον αυ/τας κρεματον. Ας κα δοοντι,/ με επανανκον εμεν δατε/θθαι), and the inscription from Tegea from 324/3 BCE. I will not discuss here the highly controversial question of how much of these assets women actually had at their disposal. However, it is clear that there were two distinct categories of property within the *oikos*, designated through the father and mother respectively. Women’s property, ranging from dowries to inheritance, in the case of the *epiklēroi*, and sometimes even other inherited assets, such as those Pasion left to Archippe, never became part of the husband’s estate, at least in the wealthiest *oikoi*. It is likely that, in poorer *oikoi* where mothers supported themselves through work,

17 [Dem.] 45.74: ἀλλ’ αὐτὸς μὲν οὐκ ὤκνησε τὴν δέσποιναν γῆμαι καὶ ἡ τὰ καταχύσματ’ αὐτοῦ κατέχευε τόθ’ ἡνίκ’ ἐονήθη, ταύτῃ συνοικεῖν, οὐδὲ προῖκα πέντε τάλανθ’ αὐτῷ γράψαι, χωρὶς ὧν οὔσης τῆς μητρὸς κυρίας οὗτος ἐγκρατὴς γέγονεν πολλῶν χρημάτων κτλ. “But for himself he has not scrupled to marry his mistress, and he dwells as husband with her who scattered the sweatmeats over him when he was bought as a slave, nor to write a clause giving himself a marriage portion of five talents in addition to the large sums of which he became master, inasmuch as they were in the custody of my mother”. [transl. Murray]

18 [Dem.] 50.60: ἑκταῖος γὰρ ἦκων ἐτύγχανον, καὶ ἐκείνη ἰδοῦσά με καὶ προσειποῦσα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀφῆκεν, οὐκέτι τῶν ὄντων κυρία οὔσα ὥστε δοῦναι ὅσα ἐβούλετό μοι. πολλάκις δὲ πρότερον μετεπέμπετό με, ἀφικέσθαι δεομένη αὐτόν, εἰ μὴ τῇ τριῇρει οἶόν τε εἴη. “I had been but six days at home, when, after she had seen and greeted me, she breathed her last, being no longer mistress of her property, so as to give me I as much as she wished. She had often sent for me before this, begging me to come to her by myself if I could not come in my ship”. [transl. Murray]

19 Dem. 36.32: ὅτε γὰρ τὰ μητρῶα πρὸς μέρος ἡξίους νέμεσθαι, ὄντων παίδων ἐκ τῆς γυναικὸς Φορμίῳνι τουτῷ, τόθ’ ὠμολόγεις κυρίως δόντος τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ σοῦ κατὰ τοὺς νόμους αὐτὴν γεγαμῆσθαι. “For when you claimed the right to distribute your mother’s estate share by share, and she had left children by the defendant, Phormio, you then acknowledged that your father had given her with full right, and that she had been married in accordance with the laws”. [transl. Murray]

there was little distinction between the property of the father and that of the mother. There is a significant difference between the widow of Polyuktos, who manages her own property and appears to have access to that left by her husband, and Nicarete, the widow of Thoucritos, who works in the marketplace to support herself and her family. In the former case, her husband's death amplifies her agency, while in the latter, it forces her to focus entirely on finding a way to survive.

The reflections I have shared with you today on female citizenship converge at the *matrōia*: the formal/institutional plane of the *polis* establishes the condition of *politis*, substantiated by functions and activities concerning the *oikos*, such as procreation and property. As Meillassoux said, the *oikos* has two purposes: to produce and to reproduce. A female citizen is defined by her role as a mother, as well as by her ownership of assets that are specifically hers, and her involvement in the circulation and redistribution of assets within the domestic group. In some cases, she finds herself managing (or protecting) the entire *oikos* structure, far from limiting herself to merely passing it on. These two traits define female citizenship: being a mother and participating in the definition of the patrimonial structure of the *oikos*, a condition which, it seems, applies also to Athenian women.

