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**"Woman between the Tyrant and the Polis: the Role of Women in
Tyrannical Regimes"**

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Woman between the Tyrant and the Polis: the Role of Women in Tyrannical Regimes

Where there is a tyrant, there is a woman. This sentence might broadly summarize the relationship between tyrants and women since the ancient texts present these two figures of Greek history as recurrently and inextricably linked to one another, starting with the account Herodotus gives us of the first tyranny¹. On a first reading of those texts, the woman could be categorized either as a helper in instigating the tyranny or as the victim of the tyrant and his *hubris*². Used by ancient authors to show the pride and violence of this new kind of political leader, she is a way for the authors to denounce tyranny as a perverted way of governing the city. But a more careful reading shows that the role of women in the political life of the tyrant cannot be reduced to those aspects. Her presence itself at different stages of the story of these tyrants demonstrates that she had an actual and particular role to play. She is more than a way to seize power or to use violence to subdue the city: she is a messenger, a mediator between the tyrant and the *polis*.

The Archaic tyrant was born out of the turmoil of the Archaic Greek *polis*. He was a new type of leader, an aristocrat who used the political unrest known within the city to seize power. At first not necessarily negatively connoted, the portrayal of this Archaic tyrant changed over time with the appearance of certain particular *topoi*³ including, among others, the accumulation of wealth⁴, absolute power and unlimited sexual freedom⁵, therefore making women inseparable from the tyrant. The tyrant is then seen as an enemy of the city. Following his desires, he does what he wants⁶, as does Pandora following her “appetites”⁷, without consideration for the *polis* or the gods⁸. Herodotus presents the following description of the tyrant through Otanes’ speech, while Darius and six other lords are discussing the best way of governing:

“And yet an absolute ruler⁹ ought to be free of envy, having all good things; but he becomes the opposite of this towards his citizens; he envies the best who thrive and live, and is pleased by the worst of his fellows; and he is the best confidant of slander. Of all men he is the most inconsistent; for if you admire him modestly he is angry that you do not give him excessive attention, but if one

¹ Herodotus I, 11. Tyranny is a political phenomenon, which appeared in Anatolia (Gyges in Lydia) and was first mentioned by Archilochus, a poet from the island of Paros (seventh century B.C.): “Je ne me soucie pas de Gygès et de ses trésors. L’envie n’a jamais habité mon cœur et je n’ai point de colère contre l’ordre établi des dieux. Je ne souhaite pas l’altière puissance d’un tyran. Tout cela est bien loin de mes yeux.”, Fragment 15 (Bounard, 1958), commentary by Casevitz 1991, 209.

² The notion of *hubris* covers a violent action inflicted on others, and could be the demonstration of a will to dishonour the victim. For the tyrant, it also encompasses any behaviour contrary to the laws of the gods and the city (Fischer 1992, 1 and 137).

³ On the tyrannical *topoi*, see Anderson G., “Before Tyranny were Tyrants: Rethinking a Chapter of Early Greek History”, *Classical Antiquity* (2005), vol. 24, n.2, pp.173-222.

⁴ E.g. Polycrates, Plato, *Meno*, 90 a.

⁵ McGlew, 1993, 26. Periander, tyrant of Corinth, having intercourse with his dead wife is probably the most striking example (Herodotus, V, 92, η, 3), thus raising the question of reality and myth.

⁶ Connor 1977, 102.

⁷ Zeitlin 1996, 56.

⁸ McGlew, 1993, 27

⁹ On the use of *basileus* and *turannos* in Herodotus, see Levy E., “Basileus et turannos chez Hérodote”, *Ktema*, 18, 1993, pp.7-18.

gives him excessive attention he is angry because one is a flatter. But I have yet worse to say of him than that; he upsets the ancestral ways and rapes women and kills indiscriminately¹⁰.”

A century later, Aristotle continues to follow a similar pattern, and reinforces the portrayal of the tyrant as being an egotistical man, willing to do anything to satisfy his desires, with tyranny as the negative side of monarchy¹¹:

“But there is a third kind of tyranny which is thought to be tyranny in the fullest degree, being the counterpart of universal kingship; to this sort of tyranny must necessarily belong a monarchy that exercises irresponsible rule over subjects all of the same or of a higher class with a view to its own private interest and not in the interest of the persons ruled. Hence it is held against the will of the subjects, since no free man willingly endures such rule¹².”

“But there is no such thing as natural fitness for tyranny, nor for any other of the forms of government that are divergences, for these come about against nature¹³.”

The tyrant is then at the margins of the *polis*¹⁴, personifying “un régime exceptionnel et fait d’exceptions¹⁵”, master of his virtues as well as his vices¹⁶, remedy and reason behind the troubles known by the *polis*¹⁷.

The female figure is not exempt from *topoi* either. The first woman, Pandora, was created by Zeus (with the assistance of Hephaestus, Athena, Aphrodite, and Hermes) to punish Prometheus for his help to men, therefore becoming a plague to them¹⁸:

¹⁰ Herodotus (A.D.Godley, 1920), III, 80. V.J. Gray (“Herodotus and Images of Tyranny”, *A J Ph.*, vol. 117, 1996, pp. 361-389) adds details to this portrayal of the tyrant, using Herodotus’ portrayal of the Cypselids: “He equates his will or fancy with the law (V, 92, η 1), exhibits rapacious greed and unchecked aggression (V, 92, ε 2, η 1), fears for his own life and is jealous of the others (V, 92, ζ 2), commits atrocities (III, 49, 2) and other outrages (III, 48, 2), forces his will on women (III, 48, 2; V, 92, η 1 et 3), confuses sex and politics (III, 48, 2), executes without trial (III, 50, 1; V, 92, η 1, ε 2, ζ 1), inhibits speech and thoughts (III, 52, 6), bases his rule on his own and his subject’s fear (III, 52, 2; V, 92, ε 2), and his power depends on one man (III, 53, 4).”

¹¹ See Jacqueline de Romilly, “Le classement des constitutions d’Hérodote à Aristote”, *REG*, tome LXXII, 1959, pp.81-99.

¹² Aristotle (H. Rackham, 1944), *Politics*, 1295a, X, 3-4.

¹³ Aristotle (H. Rackham, 1944), *Politics*, 1287b, XVII, 1.

¹⁴ With the exception of Pittacos, called “aisymnetes” by the ancients, who seems to have governed Mytilene from 590 to 580 B.C. and left power once peace was restored within the city. Aristotle, *Politics*, III, 1258a, 8 and 9; Mossé, 1969, 14.

¹⁵ Schmitt-Pantel, 1979.

¹⁶ McGlew, 1993, 28.

¹⁷ A distinction is nevertheless necessary between what are called the “good” and the “bad” tyrants. Cleisthenes of Sicyon or Peisistratus of Athens had a reputation as “good” tyrants, i.e. tyrants who did not use their power arbitrarily and who, somehow, respected the harmony of the city – Herodotus (A.D.Godley, 1920), I, 59 “and Peisistratus ruled the Athenians, disturbing in no way the order of the offices nor changing the laws, but governing the city according to its established constitution and ordering all things fairly and well.” The negative side of the tyrannical figure seems to have appeared with the second or third generation after those “good” tyrants (Periander at Corinth and Hippias at Athens).

¹⁸ The stereotyped vision of the role and place of women can be found in certain female characters of Athenian tragedies such as in Sophocles’ *Antigone*. There, Ismene responds to her sister Antigone concerning Creon’s order forbidding the burial of their brother: “[...] weak women, think of that, not framed by nature to contend with men. Remember this too that the stronger rule; we must obey his orders, these or worse.” (Sophocles (F.Storr, 1924), *Antigone*, v.61-64). The function of a woman and her place within the house was also presented by Heracles’ daughter, Macaria, in Euripides’ (Arthur S.Way, 1950) *Heraclidae*, v.476-77: “[...] Since for a woman silence and discretion be fairest, and still tarrying in the home.”

“For from her is the race of women and female kind: of her is the deadly race and tribe of women¹⁹,”
“Forthwith he made an evil thing for men²⁰”.

The destiny of the Greek woman seemed then sealed. A woman was a person one had to be careful with, constrained to the limits of the house and under the constant surveillance of men, or at least as it is presented in the most stereotypical ancient texts. Unfortunately, many modern historians continued to carry on this stereotypical vision in limiting the portrayal of women to her most famous examples, such as the very wise wife of Ischomachus in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*²¹. Viewing woman as being an eternal minor led historians to relegate her with inferiors, slaves and foreigners as if women were at the margins of their society and city, therefore overlooking the actual symbolic importance they had. From a historiographical viewpoint, a change occurred in the seventies and the apparition of a new will to write a history of women. This desire to understand their role within their societies brought a new development to the study of Greek women²² (integrated within the notion of gender²³) and drew a more nuanced image of her, highlighting the symbolic place held by the female community within the Greek society²⁴. From this symbolic viewpoint, the most important notion brought up by these studies is the duality of the Greek woman as represented in the story of Pandora. Even if she has an inferior status, she possesses an intrinsic power which makes man unable to totally dominate her. She can steal from him, seduce him, impoverish him, i.e. control him²⁵. She then symbolizes the frustration of men who, like the tyrant, would like to control and master everything.

This intrinsic power of hers, or this duality, is the key to a true understanding of the place Greek women held in their society and especially within the tyrannical regime. In order to grasp it properly, the behaviours of tyrants towards women (of their family, their predecessors or of the city), as well as the city’s attitude towards the tyrants’ female relatives should be analyzed in turn. In doing so, we may be able to understand the place, symbolic or real, that women had in the setting up of the regime, exercising power and overthrowing of tyranny²⁶.

I. The Woman at the Source of the Tyrannical Power: the Marriage

Even if tyranny can be seen at first as a new type of government, tyrants came from the traditional aristocracy and used old/traditional types of behaviour to their benefit: the tyrant

¹⁹ Hesiod (Hugh G. Evelyn-White, 1914), *Theogony*, v.590-591.

²⁰ Hesiod (Hugh G. Evelyn-White, 1914), *Theogony*, v.570.

²¹ Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, VII, 5-6; 9-11; 30; 35-37.

²² Schmitt-Pantel 2002, 604-605.

²³ Schmitt-Pantel 2002, 608.

²⁴ The ancient texts should not be analyzed too literally and without caution. These texts were written by male authors mainly for a male audience, i.e. they are representative of the contemporary prejudiced image used to depict Greek women. They do not represent a fixed image of historical reality as it may have been, but inform us of the place of women in the Greek psyche, as well as of the purposes of the use made of the female figures.

²⁵ Zeitlin 1996, 71 and Hesiod, *Work and Days*, v. 374.

²⁶ Since I will analyze a representation, an image of the Greek woman, and not a legal function within the city, in this study I will generally use the singular (woman) and not the plural (women).

is a new political man with old habits²⁷. Being an aristocrat, his first way to obtain allies and support was through marriage, which led women to play important roles when a tyrant both seized and lost power. According to Herodotus, the first tyranny was caused by a woman, the wife of the Lydian king Candaules. Wanting revenge after Candaules wronged her (by not respecting her status as a legitimate wife), she encouraged Gyges to kill her husband and to take her and the power. Through his choice, Gyges²⁸ was literally and symbolically replacing Candaules²⁹.

“For the present she made no sign and kept quiet. But as soon as it was day, she prepared those of her household whom she saw were most faithful to her, and called Gyges. He, supposing that she knew nothing of what had been done, answered the summons; for he was used to attending the queen whenever she summoned him. When Gyges came, the lady addressed him thus: ‘Now, Gyges, you have two ways before you; decide which you will follow. You must either kill Candaules and take me and the throne of Lydia for your own, or be killed yourself now without more ado; that will prevent you from obeying all Candaules’ commands in the future and seeing what you should not see. One of you must die: either he, the contriver of this plot, or you, who have outraged all custom by looking on me uncovered.’ Gyges stood awhile astonished at this; presently, he begged her not to compel him to such a choice. But when he could not deter her, and saw that dire necessity was truly upon him either to kill his master or himself be killed by others, he chose his own life³⁰.”

In this narrative, the woman is represented as having an intrinsic part of the political power, being herself a way to access it. She cannot use this power directly, but she can transmit it and legitimize its seizing. Generally speaking, taking the wife of his predecessor was an attempt for the new leader to legitimize his new position at the reins of the city. As Louis Gernet wrote: “on sait que, suivant une conception fortement ancrée dans la légende, c’est un complément ou un titre à la succession que d’épouser la femme de son prédécesseur³¹”. This particular narrative is representative of the duality of woman, i.e. the notions of change and continuity that she represents. The woman of this story, who stays anonymous³², defends the respect for traditions and asks for retaliation when they are transgressed³³. In this, she is an element of continuity, reminding men of what should or should not be done. She is also the permanent element in this political succession, transmitting power from one man to the other. At the same time, she is a vehicle of change : it is because of, or through, the action done to her that the political change occurs.

During the Archaic period, aristocrats formed alliances with similarly positioned elites (from their own *polis* and other cities) through marriage³⁴. The tyrant, since he was an aristocrat, used this tool of marriage to obtain support when seizing power, to create³⁵, strengthen, or re-

²⁷ According to Gernet, the tyrant, from the beginning, applies to himself old aristocratic patterns from Homeric times, connecting himself to the traditions of kings and heroes (1982, p. 236).

²⁸ For the vocabulary used to describe Gyges’ power, see Lévy E., p. 12.

²⁹ Another version of the story of Gyges is given by Plato in *Republic*, II, 359 D-360 B.

³⁰ Herodotus (A. D. Godley 1920) I, 11

³¹ Gernet 1982, p. 244.

³² She is called Tudo by Nicolaus of Damascus (*FGrHist* 90 F47). A speech supposedly given by her in a tragedy retracing their story can be found in P.Oxy. XXIII, 2382.

³³ On revenge in Herodotus, see Jacqueline de Romilly, « La vengeance comme explication historique dans l’œuvre d’Hérodote », *REG*, 1971, 84.

³⁴ Balot even argued that these aristocrats formed a kind of panhellenic elite class (2006, p. 36-37).

³⁵ As the example of the marriage of Agariste, daughter of the tyrant Cleisthenes of Sicyon, shows (Herodotus, VI, 126-130 and Alexander 1959).

establish relationships with other powerful families, and even to establish a “tyrannical network”³⁶. Matrimonial alliances were for the tyrant a way to attach to his person the necessary support for staying in power that he could not necessarily find within his own city. Since his power was born from the conflicts of the *polis*, he needed to create a network more important and more centred on himself in order to secure his position in power.

The connection woman/marriage/ transmission/political power is one very commonly found and will be studied here only in a selection of pertinent examples starting with Peisistratus, tyrant of Athens between 561 and 527 B.C.

This policy of alliances³⁷ led Peisistratus to marry three times in order to seize or re seize power. At first married to an Athenian woman³⁸, mother of his sons Hippias and Hipparchus, he later married the daughter of Megacles, leader of the opposition, in order to gain Megacles’ support for his return to power in Athens:

“Then Megacles, harassed by factional strife, sent a message to Peisistratus offering him his daughter to marry and the sovereign power besides. When this offer was accepted by Peisistratus, who agreed on these terms with Megacles, they devised a plan to bring Peisistratus back [...]”³⁹.

Herodotus described later the failure of this alliance due to Peisistratus’ obstinate refusal to father children with Megacles’ daughter:

“Having won back his sovereignty in the manner which I have shown, Peisistratus married Megacles’ daughter according to his agreement with Megacles. But as he had already young sons⁴⁰, and the Alcmeonid family were said to be under a curse⁴¹, he had no wish that his newly wed wife should bear him children, and therefore had wrongful intercourse with her. At first the woman hid the matter: presently she told her mother (whether being asked or not, I know not) and the mother told the husband. Megacles was very angry that Peisistratus should do him dishonour [...]”⁴².

This refusal of a child, and therefore of the long term existence of the alliance⁴³, signified Peisistratus’ rejection of membership in the Alcmeonid family and, in the long run, of their access to power. Faced with Peisistratus’ refusal, Megacles withdrew his support and Peisistratus had to leave Athens again, the duration of his power being linked to the duration of his marriage⁴⁴. In this story, the daughter of Megacles, whose name is not mentioned, is the element of communication used between her father and husband. She is not active in the process, but her presence is what signifies the occurring political change.

³⁶ Gernet 1982, 237. E.g. Periander who married Melissa, daughter of the tyrant Procles of Epidauros (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, XIII, 589 F).

³⁷ Vérihac & Vial, 1998, 51.

³⁸ Scholars remain unsure of her name. According to the scholiast of Aristophanes’ *Knights* (449), she was called Myrrhine and nicknamed Bursine after a joke made by Cleon. For Thucydides, Myrrhine was the name of Hippias’ wife.

³⁹ Herodotus (A. D. Godley 1920), I, 59-60 and Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.*, XIV-XV.

⁴⁰ Those legitimate sons were Hippias and Hipparchus. As mentioned by McGlew (1993, 177), Peisistratus probably did not want to increase the number of potential heirs.

⁴¹ Herodotus refers here to the tentative seizing of power by Cylon, son-in-law of Theagenes, tyrant of Megara (Herodotus, V 71 ; Thucydides, I, 126 ; Plutarch, *Solon*, XII, 1).

⁴² Herodotus (A. D. Godley 1920), I, 61. See also Plutarch, *On the Malignity of Herodotus*, 16.

⁴³ The purpose of marriage being the procreation of legitimate children, cf. Vérihac & Vial 1998, 270 and 276.

⁴⁴ According to Gernet (1982, 247), “Mégacès fit des propositions solennelles comme quoi Pisistrate épouserait sa fille *epi ti tyrannidi* “pour la tyrannie””.

Additionally, Peisistratus had formed another alliance through an Argive woman, daughter of Gorgilos, Timonassa⁴⁵, previously married to Archinos of Ambracia from the Cypselid family⁴⁶. In this union, Peisistratus fathered Iophon and Hegesistratus who was in charge of leading the Argive troops to Pallenis in order to support their father's second return from exile⁴⁷. Since in Athens these two sons were not recognized as being Peisistratus' heirs (Herodotus calls them *nothoi*, bastards), it can be assumed that the purpose of this Argive alliance was clearly to ensure protection and assistance outside the city.

This political use of marriage persisted in the Peisistratid family since Hippias, looking for support, followed his father's strategy in marrying his daughter to the son of the tyrant of Lampsacus after the murder of his brother Hipparchus at the Panathenaea in 514 B.C.⁴⁸:

“After this the tyranny became harsher for the Athenians, and Hippias, being now in greater apprehension, not only put to death many of the citizens, but also began to look abroad, to see if in any quarter he might find any door of safety open to him in case of a revolution. At any rate after this he gave his own daughter Archedice in marriage to Aeantides son of Hippocles, tyrant of Lampsacus – an Athenian to a Lampsacene! – perceiving that this family had great influence with King Darius. And there is at Lampsacus a monument of her bearing this inscription: ;This dust covers Archedice daughter of Hippias, who was foremost in Hellas among the men of his time: her father and husband, her brothers and children were tyrants, yet was not her mind lifted up to vain glory.”⁴⁹

The second series of examples concerns the Sicilian tyrants. Although tyranny appeared in Sicily at the end of the sixth century B.C. and the beginning of the fifth century B.C., it really developed on the island when it started to disappear elsewhere in Greece. In Sicily, tyranny became a “military monarchy” based on civic contingents and indigenous mercenaries⁵⁰. The leaders of these Sicilian cities, even if independent from one another, were looking for external support which they found in a tight matrimonial policy with one another's families. These marriages helped them to retain and strengthen their power, as well as ensuring the necessary protection against the threat posed by Carthage. For instance, we can observe the weaving of this matrimonial web with the marriage of Gelon with Damarete⁵¹, daughter of the tyrant of Agrigentum, Theron (488-472 B.C.)⁵². This alliance was strengthened by the marriage of Theron to Gelon's niece, daughter of Polyzalos⁵³. Gelon's death (478 B.C.) did not end this alliance since his brother simultaneously took his wife, Damarete, and his power over to Gela. Hieron, who then took power over Syracuse (after being tyrant of Gela), was himself married to one of Theron's nieces.

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.*, XVII, 4.

⁴⁶ Andrewes 1982, 400.

⁴⁷ Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.*, XVII, 3. The fact that Hegesistratus can lead the troops means that he was at least 20 years old. Then, Peisistratus made him tyrant of Sigeum (Herodotus, V, 94).

⁴⁸ If we are to believe Herodotus, this connection of women with political power/tyranny persisted in the Greek psyche since according to him: “this was he [Megabates] whose daughter (if indeed the tale be true) Pausanias the Lacedaemonian, son of Cleombrotus, at a later day betrothed to himself, being ambitious of the sovereignty of Hellas” Herodotus (A.D. Godley 1963) V, 32.

⁴⁹ Thucydides (C. Forster Smith 1966), VI, 59, 3.

⁵⁰ Ruzé & Amouretti 2003, 205.

⁵¹ Damarete is known for her “diplomatic” intervention in the conflict between Syracuse and Carthage, and Carthage would have thanked her for her action. A coin was made in her honour (Diodorus, XI, 26). There, the tyrant uses a woman to communicate with another city and not “intra muros”.

⁵² Timaeus, *FGrHist* 93 B.

⁵³ Timaeus, *FGrHist* 93 A.

Due to the personal aspect of tyranny, these alliances were more an object of agreement between two men than between two cities, with the wife again the link between two generations of rulers. The duality of woman makes her the vector of change (her new husband is the new leader) as well as the stable element of the *polis* and to some extent of the regime itself and its continuity (a link between the successors). It is through marriage that the tyrant can make his first statement toward the inside (the *polis*) and the outside (his potential allies) worlds.

Dionysius I, tyrant of Syracuse from 405 to 367 B.C., followed the same political pattern and went further in marrying two women after the death of his first wife, the daughter of Hermocrates. Looking for a bride, he asked the city of Rhegium to offer him one of its girls:

“For since his wife, the daughter of Hermocrates, had been slain at the time the cavalry revolted, he was eager to beget children, in the belief that the loyalty of his offspring would be the strongest safeguard of his tyrannical power. Nevertheless, when an assembly of the people was held in Rhegium to consider Dionysius' proposal, after much discussion the Rhegians voted not to accept the marriage connection. Now that Dionysius had failed of this design, he dispatched his ambassadors for the same purpose to the people of the Locrians. When they voted to approve the marriage connection, Dionysius sued for the hand of Doris, the daughter of Xenetus, who at that time was their most esteemed citizen⁵⁴.”

In refusing the marriage⁵⁵, Rhegium was thereby refusing alliance and allegiance to the tyrant, leading him to make the same offer to Rhegium's enemy, Locrium⁵⁶. Once Locrium agreed, the tyrant married two women at the same time, one from Syracuse, the city base of his power, Aristomache, and one from Locrium, Doris of Locrium⁵⁷. The ceremony was lavish, and the whole city participated, with the public aspect being part of the marriage's validity⁵⁸:

“After Dionysius had taken in marriage both maidens at the same time, he gave a series of public dinners for the soldiers and the larger part of the citizens⁵⁹.”

With this double wedding the tyrant was showing the city his particular status. Transgressing the taboo of polygamy, he was putting himself at the level of gods and heroes⁶⁰, portraying himself as symbolically above, or at least apart from, the rest of the community. Furthermore, this statement helped him create the distance necessary to justify his seizure, maintenance and exercise of power: being “above”, he was more fit to rule⁶¹. From a political viewpoint, these two marriages also highlight the inherent problem of tyrannical power: “born” in the city, the tyrant still needs outside support only ensured through personal relations, cemented by marriages and children. Through Aristomache, he kept the link with the city of Syracuse, the base of his power, and on the other hand, through Doris, he was letting a non-Syracusan enter his *genos*, hence ensuring their support. Dionysius went so far as marrying his children

⁵⁴ Diodorus Siculus (C. H. Oldfather 1989) XIV, 44, 5-6.

⁵⁵ On Rhegium's refusal, see also Plutarch, *Timoleon*, 6; Diodorus Siculus, XIV, 107, 3.

⁵⁶ See also Thucydides, IV, 24, 2.

⁵⁷ Aelian, XIII, 10.

⁵⁸ Cf Vatin 1970, 147 for the necessity of the public aspect in the validity of marriage.

⁵⁹ Diodorus Siculus (C. H. Oldfather 1989) XIV, 45,1.

⁶⁰ Supposedly Dionysius consummated both marriages the same night. But since Dionysius seems to have focused on him many of the tyrannical *topoi*, an analysis of the portrait made of him should not be too literal.

⁶¹ This could be related to the episode of Peisistratus and Pnyx.

within his own *genos*⁶², thus refusing to see power move into other hands, and therefore expressing his authority over the city.

Tyrants also used marriages to control the entire civic body of the *polis*. In order to strengthen their power over the city and its population, some tyrants forced women, wives of citizens, to marry men of their choosing, usually men of inferior status⁶³. The women of the city were then an instrument used by the tyrant to tighten his control over the *polis* and its identity⁶⁴. Both Aristodemus, tyrant of Cumae, 505-504 B.C., and Dionysius of Syracuse reconstituted the civic body of *poleis* under their control to their own advantage, assuring the fidelity of the new constituted civic body to themselves. Aristodemus allegedly used marriage as a tool to thank the slaves who supported him when he seized power⁶⁵ and Dionysius apparently behaved in the same way to ensure his power and authority over rebellious cities⁶⁶. In recreating a part of the civic body, Aristodemus and Dionysius were in fact ensuring the fidelity of this group to their person, rather than to the city itself, since the newly acquired privileges could have been terminated once the rule of the tyrant was overthrown.

This practice was not by nature tyrannical since it also occurred in ordinary cities⁶⁷, when the number of citizens was dangerously decreasing, mainly for military causes (as in the cases of Argos⁶⁸ and Chalcedon⁶⁹). Here, slaves or *perioikoi* were used, as a last resort, to counterbalance the small number of full citizens and therefore ensure the survival of the city⁷⁰ (often resulting in further conflicts⁷¹). In the case of the tyrants, the use of this type of

⁶² He married Dionysius the Younger to his daughter Sophrosyne and his daughter Arete to her uncle Thearidas, then, when he died, to Dion, brother of the tyrant's mother. The third daughter of Dionysius, Dikaiosyne, was married to her uncle Leptines. Cf. Vernant 1972 on Dionysius' *hubris*.

⁶³ See Asheri 1977.

⁶⁴ From Aristodemus of Cumae to Nabis of Sparta, different tyrants used forced marriages (Athenaeus, 509 B and Polybius, XVI, 13, 1-2).

⁶⁵ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, VII, 3-4.

⁶⁶ Dionysius used forced marriages on two occasions. At first in Syracuse after the rebellion of the Hippeis in 405 B.C. (Diodorus, XIV, 7, 4-5 and XIV, 66, 5) and secondly concerning a city he had conquered (Aeneas Tacticus, *Polioretica*, XL, 2-3).

⁶⁷ This practice was well known. Philip V of Macedonia tried to rally to himself the slaves of besieged Chios. He promised them freedom and marriage to the wives of the citizens if they helped him (Plutarch, *Bravery of Women*, 245 B-C). This episode dates probably from 201 B.C. According to Plutarch, the slaves stayed faithful to their masters and helped the women of Chios to defend the city until the departure of the assailants.

⁶⁸ Herodotus, VI, 83; Plutarch, *Bravery of Women*, 245 F; Pausanias, I, 20, 8 and 9.

⁶⁹ Plutarch, *Greek Questions*, 49 or 302 F.

⁷⁰ For Argos, according to Plutarch, the new husbands were *perioikoi* ("tôn perioikôn") and according to Herodotus *douloi*. For Chalcedon, they were freed slaves and metics ("apeleutheroi kai metoikoi"). In these two cities, the new husbands did not have the same political rights and were expelled from the city by the sons of the first husbands. Following the same pattern, the democratic city could, when there were too few citizens, give citizenship to illegitimate children or children born from only one citizen parent (cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1278 a and the commentary of Vêrilhac & Vial 1998, 48).

⁷¹ Sparta encountered the same problem during the war against Messenia (Strabo, VI, 3, 3; Diodorus Siculus, VIII, 21 and Athenaeus VI, 271, C-D). In certain cases, the children fathered in those unions left their city to found a colony. Many texts agree on this point, leading to a new question on the stereotypes concerning the foundations of colonies.

marriages was perverted since its goal, as presented in the texts, was the survival of the tyrant's power, not of the city itself⁷².

The identity of the so-called inferiors varies from one city to another⁷³, but they were all presented as being normally excluded from citizenship, highlighting the hubristic side of the tyrant's action in including them for his sole benefit. In modifying the identity of the civic body, the tyrant does more than just create a new class of citizens that would support his power, he perverts the core identity of the city and its moral strength in giving citizenship to those who do not politically belong to the *polis* (slaves, mercenaries, foreigners), and turns upside down its traditional social order – the slaves become masters.

Through these marriages, the new citizen became a “complete” citizen. Being connected to the masters' wives and replacing them gave the new husbands all the privileges reserved for full citizens. Marriage is a necessary step in the justification of this new status, with the tyrant leading the men of the city to do what he was already doing for himself: taking the wife, the power, and the position as the head of the house of the former leader and thereby affirming his own position in the succession⁷⁴.

In the examples mentioned above, the woman represents the local aristocracy and the powers linked to it: as mistress of the *oikos*, she is the guardian of the house, titles and properties. She is an element of continuity of the *oikos* and so of the city. Therefore, in order to be able to act on the city and its identity, the tyrant uses women as intermediaries.

II. The Woman, Messenger of the Tyrant

Through his actions towards women (as a group or as individuals), the tyrant could deliver a message on his position within the city, his opinions or intentions.

When Peisistratus, tyrant of Athens, tried to regain power after his agreement with Megacles, he used the following strategy:

“Then Megacles, harassed by factional strife, sent a message to Peisistratus offering him his daughter to marry and the sovereign power besides. When this offer was accepted by Peisistratus, who agreed on these terms with Megacles, they devised a plan to bring Peisistratus back which, to my mind, was so exceptionally foolish that it is strange (since from old times the Hellenic stock has always been distinguished from foreign by its greater cleverness and its freedom from silly foolishness) that these men should devise such a plan to deceive Athenians, said to be the subtlest of the Greeks. There was in the Paeonian deme a woman called Phya, three fingers short of six feet, four inches in height, and otherwise, too, well-formed. This woman they equipped in full armor and put in a chariot, giving her all the paraphernalia to make the most impressive spectacle, and so drove into the city; heralds ran before them, and when they came into town proclaimed as they were instructed: ‘Athenians, give a hearty welcome to Peisistratus, whom Athena herself honors above all men and is bringing back to her own acropolis.’ So the heralds went about proclaiming this; and immediately the report spread in the

⁷² These marriages were also connected to the *topos* of the redistribution of lands, a political measure usually attributed to tyrants, which leads one to question the actual reality of these marriages.

⁷³ The women mentioned are said to be *tôn despotôn gunaikes kai thugateres*, “wives and daughters of the masters.”

⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the texts present these women as never being totally submissive. Even if they had to submit to these unions, they raised their children in a spirit of revenge and reconquest.

demes that Athena was bringing Peisistratus back, and the townsfolk, believing that the woman was the goddess herself, worshipped this human creature and welcomed Peisistratus⁷⁵.”

“In the twelfth year after this Megacles, being harried by party faction, made overtures again to Peisistratus, and on terms of receiving his daughter in marriage brought him back, in an old-fashioned and extremely simple manner. Having first spread a rumor that Athena was bringing Peisistratus back, he found a tall and beautiful woman, according to Herodotus a member of the Paeanian deme, but according to some accounts a Thracian flower-girl from Collytus named Phye, dressed her up to look like the goddess, and brought her to the city with him, and Peisistratus drove in a chariot with the woman standing at his side, while the people in the city marvelled and received them with acts of reverence⁷⁶.”

Through this “mise en scène” the tyrant was pretending to have been symbolically chosen by the goddess to rule the city⁷⁷. In being led by the goddess from the outside of the city to the Acropolis, Peisistratus was saying to the Athenians that the goddess was putting him above the factions fighting against one another for political power⁷⁸. He was signifying that he did not depend on any political party, but relied directly on the city’s divinity who herself led him back to the city⁷⁹. Hence his only legitimacy was the one of the *demos*, represented by the city divinity⁸⁰. Then, in marrying Phye to his son Hipparchus, Peisistratus was connecting himself to the goddess on a private, family level, thus symbolically consummating his relationship with the goddess.

In another anecdote, Peisistratus indirectly used his own daughter as an intermediary. She would have been kissed “à la volée⁸¹” by an Athenian in love with her⁸². In the face of such an insulting act, the family of the tyrant pushed him to take revenge. But the tyrant refused and showed mercy to the man responsible for the insult⁸³. Through this episode, the tyrant is presented as showing the city his mercy and moderation, in contrast to the excessiveness usually attributed to tyrants⁸⁴. He puts himself above passions and conflicts, and is then able to judge them fairly⁸⁵.

⁷⁵ Herodotus (A. D. Godley 1920), I, 60.

⁷⁶ Aristotle (H. Rackham, 1952), *Ath. Pol.*, XIV, 4.

⁷⁷ According to W.R. Connor (1987), the Greeks had a cultural tradition that during religious processions, young people could represent gods and goddesses. These youths could be members of the aristocracy, then rewarded for evergetism, or priestesses of the cult (Shapiro 1989, 14).

⁷⁸ Hoffmann 1992, 226.

⁷⁹ According to Valerius Maximus (*Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, V, 1, 2, ext.2) and Polyaeus (I, 21), the young woman, not Peisistratus, was holding the reins of the chariot; his position would have shown that he was under the orders of the goddess.

⁸⁰ Hoffmann 1992, 228.

⁸¹ According to Polyaeus (V, 14) and Diodorus Siculus (IX, 37, 1), the episode took place during a procession where the girl held a basket (probably the Panathenaea where the girl was *canephoros*).

⁸² According to Polyaeus, the man abducted the girl. Pursued by Hippias and brought back in front of Peisistratus, the tyrant, amazed by such courage, authorized the wedding to take place (V, 14).

⁸³ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, V, 1, ext.1.

⁸⁴ This episode is also related by Diodorus Siculus (IX, 37, 1) and Plutarch, *Sayings of Kings and Commanders*, Peisistratus, 3.

⁸⁵ In another version of this episode, it is his wife, and not his daughter, who is the victim, with the young man in love replaced by party-goers: “Some revelers fell in with his wife, and did and said a good many ribald things. The next day when they besought Peisistratus with many tears, he said, ‘As for you, do you try to conduct yourselves in a seemly manner hereafter, but as for my wife, she did not go out at all yesterday.’” (Plutarch (F.C. Babbitt, 1968), *Sayings of Kings and Commanders*, Peisistratus, 4). It could be argued that these anecdotes concern Peisistratus in particular because they participate to the positive tradition linked to him.

In both examples, the attitude of the tyrant towards women helps in the construction of a positive image of the ruler. But there are also examples of the opposite. Following the murder of his wife Melissa⁸⁶, Periander, tyrant of Corinth from 627 to 585 B.C., commanded the women of Corinth to burn their clothes in her honor:

“In a single day he stripped all the women of Corinth naked, because of his own wife Melissa. Periander had sent messengers to the Oracle of the Dead on the river Acheron in Thesprotia to enquire concerning a deposit that a friend had left, but Melissa, in an apparition, said that she would tell him nothing, nor reveal where the deposit lay, for she was cold and naked. The garments, she said, with which Periander had buried with her had never been burnt, and were of no use to her. Then, as evidence for her husband that she spoke the truth, she added that Periander had put his loaves into a cold oven. When this message was brought back to Periander (for he had had intercourse with the dead body of Melissa and knew her token for true), immediately after the message he made a proclamation that all the Corinthian women should come out into the temple of Hera. They then came out as to a festival, wearing their most beautiful garments, and Periander set his guards there and stripped them all alike, ladies and serving-women, and heaped all the clothes in a pit, where, as he prayed to Melissa, he burnt them. When he had done this and sent a second message, the ghost of Melissa told him where the deposit of the friend had been laid⁸⁷.”

The clothes were burnt in a hole in front of the Heraion outside the city⁸⁸. This sanctuary had a necromantic tradition and Hera, a divinity with pronounced chthonian aspects at Corinth, received holocaust-like sacrifices. The women’s acquiescence⁸⁹ may relate to a tradition of a female procession toward the sanctuary, as the jewels, *kalathoi*, and small pottery pieces representing women found at the Heraion of Perachora show⁹⁰. Regarding the tyrant, the reasons behind Periander’s action, apart from bold *hubris*⁹¹, could be due to his remorse⁹²,

This kind of story concerns the female relatives of the tyrant rather than his male relatives. The reason lies probably in the fact that the female relatives are under the protection or guardianship of the tyrant, who is their *kurios*, whereas a male relative, who does not need a *kurios*, can revenge himself.

⁸⁶ Diogenes Laertius, I, 94. As Nicole Loraux (Loraux 2003, 15) notices, the death of Melissa recalls the death of the sister-wife of Cambyses, king of the Persians (Herodotus, III, 32). Both rulers apparently killed their wives in an excess of rage; the deaths were attributed to ill fate (*sumphorē*). According to E. Will (Will 1955), a series of misfortunes would have followed Melissa’s murder, leading, in the long term, to the fall of the Cypselids’ dynasty. It is true that because of this death, Lycophron, son of Periander, refused to assume his position in the succession at Corinth. He joined his maternal grandfather, Procles, at Epidaurus where Procles was tyrant, and then ruled over Coreyra.

⁸⁷ Herodotus (A. D. Godley 1920) V, 92. In Diogenes Laertius (R.D.Hicks 1925) I, 96, Periander stole the jewels of the Corinthian women to pay off an offering he promised to make if he was victorious at the chariot race of Olympia: “Ephorus records his vow that, if he won the victory at Olympia in the chariot-race, he would set up a golden statue. When the victory was won, being in sore straits for gold, he despoiled the women of all the ornaments which he had seen them wearing at some local festival. He was thus enabled to send the votive offering.”

⁸⁸ Will 1955, 83-84.

⁸⁹ Since Hera had a protective function over the world of women and fertility, the women of Corinth were probably not surprised by the tyrant’s demand (Novaro-Lefèvre 2000, 59).

⁹⁰ Novaro-Lefèvre 2000, 60.

⁹¹ The character of Periander is very controversial. He was seen as a friend of the arts and poets, one of the seven wise men of Greece, as well as a violent tyrant, advised in this behaviour by the tyrant of Miletus: “Whatever act of slaughter or banishment Cypselus had left undone, that Periander brought to accomplishment.” (Herodotus (A. D. Godley 1920), V, 92, η).

his lust to find the money, or could be connected to the sumptuary laws generally attributed to tyrants. During the Archaic period, tyrants and *aisumnetai* are presented as having taken different measures to fight any conspicuous manifestation of wealth or idleness from wealthy aristocratic families⁹³ in order to reduce the most flagrant expressions of the social imbalance already causing troubles within the *polis*. These laws may also have been used by the tyrant to forbid the other citizens to show their own wealth, i.e., their potential superiority over him (prior to this episode, Periander would have already forbidden men to meet on the agora and enjoined them to avoid idleness⁹⁴). This act may also be the expression of the tyrant's desire to offend this proud aristocracy from whom he has confiscated power. As Nicole Loraux wrote, "les tyrans sont généralement censés se plaire à désarmer [les hommes de la cité, sans doute les aristocrates]", the female clothes corresponding there to the male weapons: "en dénudant les femmes de Corinthe, Périandre a donc, au moins symboliquement, désarmé leurs maris⁹⁵". In taking the women's clothes (if this anecdote is exact, we can argue that they were probably not stripped naked, but deprived of any element of their finery or ornaments), Periander was doing to the Corinthian women the equivalent of what he did to their husbands. He was attacking the expression of their identity (clothes, jewelry) and their function within the city (with the cult of Hera), as mistresses of the *oikos*. In making them undress with their servants, he was blurring the city's social lines, showing his *hubris* in neither respecting the laws, nor the traditions⁹⁶, using the women as a way to affirm his power over the citizens⁹⁷.

In the examples studied, women, both as the tyrant's relatives and as members of the city, are used as intermediaries, messengers. The tyrant uses them to communicate with the civic group as a whole or to make the strength of his power known to the city, demonstrating then the women's involvement in the life of their *polis* and the recognition of their belonging to their community.

III. The Woman Defends the City

As the examples previously studied show, the woman can symbolize different aspects of the life of the city. The center of familial life, she can represent her family and its attributes. In her maternal role, she can be associated with the city's physical and symbolic existence. As a character of Greek tragedies or historical stories, she can represent Greek values and the respect for traditions, resisting and denouncing the tyrant and his tyrannical way of governing the *polis*. Through all these connections between her and the city, she is led to play the

⁹² According to Diogenes Laertius (R.D.Hicks 1925) I, 100, Periander wrote to Procles about the death of Melissa: "For long ago I made expiation to you for your daughter by burning on her pyre the apparel of all the women of Corinth."

⁹³ Loraux 2003, 10-11.

⁹⁴ Nicolaus of Damascus, *FGrHist*, 90 F 58.

⁹⁵ Loraux 2003, 13.

⁹⁶ Fischer 1992, 1: "Hybris is essentially the serious assault on the honour of another, which is likely to cause shame and lead to anger and attempts to revenge....the typical motive for such infliction of dishonours is the pleasure of expressing a sense of superiority."

⁹⁷ Dionysius the Younger behaved similarly at Locrium (after he was expelled from Syracuse, he seized power in this city in 356 B.C.) There, he took the jewels and treasures of the women and citizens (Justin, XXI, 3), as did his father Dionysius the Elder (Aristotle, *Economics*, II, 20 a).

mediator between the city and the tyrant, where she is a representative of the city and its aspirations.

Aristodemus, previously mentioned, took Xenocrite, the daughter of an exiled man, probably an aristocrat, by force to become his concubine:

“However, he was singularly enamoured of Xenocrite, whom he kept, the daughter of an exiled father, without restoring her father to his country or winning his consent⁹⁸, but believing that somehow the girl was contented to be with him, inasmuch as she was envied and deemed happy by the citizens. But all this did not make any great impression on her. She was distressed at being partner to a union in which there had been no giving in marriage nor plighting of troth, and she longed for her country’s freedom no less than did those who were the object of the despot’s hatred⁹⁹.”

Through this forced concubinage, the tyrant was devaluating Xenocrite since her social status was changed from the daughter of a citizen to the mere concubine of the tyrant. Therefore, when citizens plotting to kill the tyrant asked for her help, she agreed. With her support, they entered the palace and killed Aristodemus, freeing the city. According to Plutarch, the idea of plotting against the tyrant was the result of the comments of two women¹⁰⁰: the first comment made by Xenocrite and the second made by an anonymous woman from Cumae regarding the virility of its men¹⁰¹. This woman was afraid of seeing Aristodemus because, according to her, “among all the people of Cumae Aristodemus [was] the only man¹⁰²”. After the fall of Aristodemus, the whole city admitted the importance of Xenocrite’s action and nominated her priestess of Demeter, thinking this honor would please the goddess. By putting her in charge of the priesthood of Demeter Thesmophoros, a cult exclusively for legitimate wives, the citizens of Cumae atoned for the tyrant’s violence to Xenocrite when he took her as a concubine rather than a legitimate wife. Xenocrite herself was seeking this more “honorable” position, as her demand for the tyrant’s body shows. In accomplishing the funeral rituals, she was putting herself in the position of spouse and not concubine. But in helping the city instead of protecting the tyrant, she chose the city over her new “family” group. Because of her attitude towards the citizens and their own recognition of her suffering, Xenocrite¹⁰³ can be seen then as a representative of the city, its values and its continuity. This kind of anecdote is of course to be read with caution since Plutarch’s purpose with these narratives was to show that women were capable of the same *arete*, or virtue, as men¹⁰⁴. But even with this precaution in mind, we can still observe that a female figure, anonymous or known, is at the center of the radical change occurring in the *polis*. It is in reminding the men

⁹⁸ In not respecting the traditions, the tyrant is acting hubristically.

⁹⁹ Plutarch (F.C Babbitt, 1931) *Bravery of Women*, 262 A.

¹⁰⁰ Plutarch (F.C Babbitt, 1931) *Bravery of Women*, 262 C: “Thus the city of Cumae was made free by the bravery of two women, the one who put into their minds the thought and impulse for the deed, and the other who co-operated with them to bring about its conclusion.” Dionysius of Halicarnassus recounts another version of Aristodemus’ fall in which he does not mention Xenocrite (VII, 11).

¹⁰¹ This could be connected to the information given to us by Dionysios of Halicarnassus concerning Aristodemus’ attempt to “feminize” the sons of the killed aristocrats (VII, 9, 1-5), having been known to be effeminate himself (VII, 2, 4-5).

¹⁰² Plutarch (F.C Babbitt, 1931) *Bravery of Women*, 262 B.

¹⁰³ Thebe, wife of the tyrant Alexander of Pheres (369-358 B.C.), also betrayed her tyrannical companion for the good of the city (Xenophon, *Hellenica*, VI (4), 35-36).

¹⁰⁴ See the stories of the female relatives of Agis IV and Cleomenes III of Sparta (Plutarch, *Life of Agis* and *Life of Cleomenes*; cf. Powell 1999).

of the core “identity” values of their community (norms of marriages, virility) that they trigger them to act.

A second striking example of female courage against the tyrant’s violence is that of a woman living in Athens, Leaena. Leaena was a courtesan, perhaps of servile condition, living in Athens under the rule of the tyrant brothers Hippias and Hipparchus, sons of Peisistratus. She was close to Harmodius and Aristogeiton, the “tyrannicides”. After the murder of Hipparchus during the procession of the Panathenaia festival in 514 B.C., Leaena was arrested and tortured by Hippias¹⁰⁵ :

“When, therefore, the conspirators failed and were put to death, she was questioned and commanded to reveal those who still escaped detection; but she would not do so and continued steadfast, proving that those men had experienced a passion not unworthy of themselves in loving a woman like her. And the Athenians caused a bronze lioness without a tongue to be made and set it up in the gates of the Acropolis, representing by the spirited courage of the animal Leaena’s invincible character, and by its tonguelessness her power of silence in keeping a holy secret¹⁰⁶.”

We know through Thucydides that the tyrant’s murder was not motivated by a political desire to free the city, but had originated in a love quarrel¹⁰⁷. But as time passed, this action became a “myth”, and the idea of a political plot developed¹⁰⁸, even though the Athenians knew that the fall of the tyranny was due to Spartan intervention and not themselves¹⁰⁹. A cult was organized for Harmodios and Aristogeiton and supervised by the city, and a statue in their honor erected in the agora¹¹⁰. According to J.F.McGlew, Harmodios and Aristogeiton became civic heroes and any link with them recalled their exploit¹¹¹. The fact that the Athenians also erected a statue in Leaena’s honor¹¹² shows the desire to integrate her into the telling of the story of their liberation.

Regarding the portrait drawn of Leaena, the ancient authors agree on her courage and silence while being tortured by the tyrant, highlighting then even more the *hubris* and cowardice of the torturer and showing the reversal of the “traditional” roles : a strong-willed woman facing a man controlled by his passions and fear. This use of torture on opponents seems to have been a first during the rule of the Peisistratid family, and was not mentioned prior the murder¹¹³. The torture of a woman symbolizes this crucial time when the tyrant descended to violence, as the way of ruling the city changed through this action against her. A woman is

¹⁰⁵ Though she was tortured, Leaena never revealed her supposed accomplices; however, Aristogeiton did (Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.*, XIX, 4). The story of her suffering became more and more detailed and gruesome: Pliny, VIII, 87; Tertullian, *Apology*, L, 8.

Hippias did not necessarily disrespect the laws in torturing her since a courtesan could be of servile condition.

¹⁰⁶ Plutarch, (W.C.Helmbold 1939) *Concerning Talkativeness*, VIII, 505 E-F.

¹⁰⁷ Thucydides, VI, 53, 3-59, 4. On the insult made to Harmodios’ sister: Aristotle, *Politics*, V, 10, 1311 a 35.

¹⁰⁸ McGlew 1993, 152. Popular songs appeared during the fifth century B.C. proclaiming the tyrannicides’ success and comparing Harmodios and Aristogeiton to Achilles and Diomedes.

¹⁰⁹ Thucydides, VI, 53, 3.

¹¹⁰ The statues were removed by Xerxes and brought back by Alexander (McGlew 1993, 153).

¹¹¹ McGlew 1993, 153. The law of Demophantos was voted in 401 B.C. on the possibility of civil rebellion in the case of tyranny (McGlew 1993, 187; Andocides, I, 96-98).

¹¹² Pliny, XXXIV, 72.

¹¹³ Peisistratus seized power three times, but was apparently never violent when he governed the city. Cf. Thucydides, VI, 54, 5-55, 3. According to Aristotle, Peisistratus governed Athens respecting its laws (Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.*, XIV, 3).

then at the turning point of the city's story, marking the rupture between two worlds, two times¹¹⁴.

Since drama is a mirror of its society, tragic plays are another source of the symbolic place held by women in the city's relationship with the tyrant. In Euripides' *Phoenician Maidens*¹¹⁵, Jocasta can be perceived as the spokesperson for the city. She tries to assume the role of mediator between her two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, both fighting over the kingship of Thebes. Asked by Polynices to intervene to solve the conflict between him and his brother¹¹⁶, she sides with the city against her son¹¹⁷ once Eteocles reveals his lust for tyrannical power¹¹⁸. In so doing, Jocasta symbolizes then the city facing a tyrannical will.

The function of mediator given to the mother within the family is here extended to mediator within the whole city¹¹⁹. But her maternal status is not the sole reason explaining Polynices' demand for help¹²⁰. Jocasta, being the wife of Laius and Oedipus, is a link between the different kings and the successive generations. It could be argued that Jocasta transmitted the kingship to Oedipus¹²¹ when he wedded her (his exploit in defeating the Sphinx not being enough). She is therefore the element of stability within the troubled history of the city. Because of this position, she is justified in reminding her son of the duties of a good ruler and in doing so transcends her maternal role to symbolize traditions and balance against tyrannical *hubris*. In fact, Jocasta's intervention is actually ineffective and does not help the city, but it does symbolize for the audience the limited possibilities at the disposal of the city to fight against the tyrant. Here the city can only count on the help of a mother.

Often in works about Greek tyrants, the private sphere joins the public one. In the *Phoenician Maidens*, Jocasta attacks the tyrant for his misuses of personal power¹²², as does Antigone in Sophocles' eponymous play *Antigone*. When Antigone opposes Creon, she reveals the tyrannical side of a power presented at first as being legitimate and at the service of the city. In accomplishing the burial rituals for her brother, she affirms her place as a woman within her family and the city. Creon's decree forbidding Polynices' burial, as well as his behavior in front of Antigone, makes his transformation into a tyrant clear to the Thebans and the audience. Creon becomes then excessive, arrogant, and unable to withstand any disobedience,

¹¹⁴ Leana does not represent Athenian women since she is not one of them. Being a courtesan, she was separated from the Athenian women and probably, due to her work, was more in contact with the male sphere. This connection would explain why the tyrant himself is not presented as doubting the fact that she was aware of the plot.

¹¹⁵ The play was performed in Athens between 412 and 408 B.C.

¹¹⁶ Euripides, *The Phoenician Maidens*, v.435-437.

¹¹⁷ Euripides, *The Phoenician Maidens*, v.559-567.

¹¹⁸ Euripides, *The Phoenician Maidens*, v.519-525.

¹¹⁹ Cf. the chorus (A.S. Way, 1950), *The Phoenician Maidens*, v.443-445: "Lo, unto parley Eteocles comes. Mother Jocasta, thine the task to speak words whereby thou shalt set thy sons at one." This role of mediator could also be connected to Arete's position in Homer's *Odyssey* (VII, 53-77).

¹²⁰ There is also the example of the daughter of Periander, tyrant of Corinth. She was sent to talk to her brother Lycophron, in the name of their father, after the male emissary failed. Herodotus (A.D. Godley 1921) makes her say: "and many that by zeal for their mother's cause have lost their father's possessions. [Tyranny] is a thing hard to hold; many covet it, and our father is now old and past his prime; give not what is your estate to others." (III, 53). Here again, a woman is the last hope of return to reason. See Gernet 1982, 241 and Loraux 2003 on Lycophron's attitude.

¹²¹ Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, v. 258-260.

¹²² Lanza 1997, 75.

as his power takes a personal dimension¹²³. Here again a woman stands before the tyrant when he is ready to fall into the trap of *hubris*. She reminds him that he belongs to the world of men and to the city, a city which recognizes itself in her action (as presented in Haemon¹²⁴'s speech¹²⁵).

The conflict between Creon and Antigone goes past the private sphere: in fighting for her family and her rights, Antigone transcends her female condition to symbolize the important perennial values to respect, i.e. the gods and family.

As Pauline Schmitt-Pantel wrote, "les femmes [...] interviennent dans les moments de crises aiguës où l'existence même de la cité est remise en question"¹²⁶. In a critical situation, a woman can face a tyrant and symbolize, at that very moment, the city, as well as tradition and moderation in opposition to tyrannical *hubris*. Violence done to her by the tyrant is the clear sign of the tyrant's passage into *hubris* and of a new situation within the city. This political change (the concomitant lack of respect for traditions and hubristic attitude) leads the tyrant to be despised and triggers the resistance of the female victim, as well as that of the city¹²⁷. But the fact that a woman is the last bulwark protecting the city signifies also how powerless the *polis* is in face of the tyrannical phenomenon.

IV. The Fall of the Tyrannical Regime: Woman as Victim of her Ties to Tyrannical Families

Since women were seen as representing the continuity of their family unit and of all the attributes connected to it, including political power, they were one of the first victims of the tyrant's downfall¹²⁸, becoming then the intermediaries of the expression of the *demos*' will¹²⁹. In assaulting the tyrant's female relatives, the city was cutting off the possibility of the perennity of the regime, i.e. its change from a tyranny into a monarchy. With these horrible outrages, the citizens were repaying the tyrant: violence responded to violence.

For instance, when her son fell from power, the mother of Phalaris of Agrigentum, 570-555 B.C., was burnt in the brazen bull made by him to torture his opponents¹³⁰. This extreme act may have proceeded from the citizens' desire to seek revenge upon and destroy a tyrant

¹²³ Lanza 1997, 162.

¹²⁴ Since Haemon himself is neither married, nor associated with the power, he can be presented as joining the group of the maidens, i.e. Antigone, without detracting from his status.

¹²⁵ Sophocles, *Antigone*, v. 692-699.

¹²⁶ Schmitt-Pantel 2002 p. 610-611.

¹²⁷ Women could physically defend the city, as they did during certain sieges: Pausanias, VIII, 5, 9 on Tegea; Thucydides, II, 4, 2 on Plataea; Thucydides, III, 74, 1 on Corcyra; Plutarch, *Pyrrhos*, XXVII, 5 to 10 on Sparta; Pausanias, II, 20, 8 to 10 and Plutarch, *Bravery of Women*, 245 D-E on Argos and Telesilla. In these episodes, women symbolize again the last protection of the city.

¹²⁸ As the example of the relatives of Ortyges, one of the tyrants of Erythrae shows in Hippias of Erythrae, *FGrHist* 421 F 1.

¹²⁹ They were probably also attacked because of their own physical weakness since it is easier to assault a woman than a man, especially if his guards protect him.

¹³⁰ Heraclides Ponticus, *De Rebus Publicis*, FHG 37. On Phalaris' brazen bull, see Diodorus Siculus, XIII, 90; Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, I, 95; Pliny, XXXIV, 89; Polybius, XII, 25; Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, I, 651-652; Ovid, *Tristia*, III, 11, 39-54; Orosius, I, 20, 1-4.

described in our sources as ultimately violent and cruel¹³¹. Because Phalaris' mother was burned alive¹³², the fire is here a symbol of destruction and not of transition as it was in the traditional practice of funerary cremation¹³³. In this case, the body was destroyed without the performance of any funerary ritual, thus signifying her exclusion from the city¹³⁴, even from the human community itself¹³⁵. The dispersion of the ashes may also express a desire to avoid polluting the earth of the city.

For the Greeks, the mother was a clear metaphor for the city¹³⁶. For a man with political stature, the figure of the mother could be associated with the city, homeland, and, furthermore, power¹³⁷. In many stories about tyrants, it seems as if the relationships between the tyrant and his mother foreshadowed the one he had with the *polis*. For instance, as Herodotus tells us, Labda of Corinth, from the aristocratic ruling family of the Bacchiads, was forced due to her deformity (she had a limp) to marry a man outside her *genos*, a Lapith. From this union, the tyrant Cypselos was born, a new "unorthodox" man from an "unorthodox" marriage¹³⁸. Geneviève Hoffmann underlines the fact that Labda's limp could be associated with the uncertain beginnings of the tyrannical regime¹³⁹. Since Labda was a member of the ruling family, descendants of the founder of the dynasty, Bacchis, her son Cypselos could associate himself with the origin of the power. In doing so, he was overriding the Bacchiads' pretensions to rule, legitimizing his own seizing of power as a descendant of Bacchis. This connection found more justification in the fact that Bacchis himself was known to have a limp. In rejecting Labda because of this deformity, the Bacchiads were symbolically rejecting Bacchis, leaving an opportunity to her son to legitimize his "coup". Furthermore, as Diogenes Laertius described in the case of Crateia and her son Periander, tyrant of Corinth and son of Cypselos, the mother's behaviour towards her son could trigger his *hubris* and announce his future attitude toward the city:

"Aristippus in the first book of his work *On the Luxury of the Ancients* accuses him [Periander] of incest with his own mother Crateia, and adds that, when the facts came to light, he vented his annoyance in indiscriminate severity¹⁴⁰."

¹³¹ See Cicero (*De Divinatione*, I, 46) quoting Heraclides Ponticus on the dream made by Phalaris' mother announcing the violence of her son.

¹³² Because the victims are alive at the time of their punishment, this cremation does not recall incineration practice as occurred in the Homeric world (*Iliad*, XXIII, v.250-257; XXIV, v.789-803) or in plays (Aeschylus, *Choephoroe*, v.680-687; Sophocles, *Electra*, v.50-60 and v.1113-1120; Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, v.1192-1202; Euripides, *Orestes*, v.39-45 and v.403; Euripides, *Hecuba*, v.894-897; Euripides, *Suppliants*, v.936 and 948-49).

¹³³ Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, 110.

¹³⁴ Sepulchres were denied to enemies and traitors of the city: Thucydides, I, 126, 3-12 and Plutarch, *Solon*, XII, 4 on the Cylonids' murderers.

¹³⁵ See Vernant 2007, p.74-75. As Parker (1983, 16) mentions concerning the Alcmeonids: "They were tried and exiled, and the very bones of the dead members were expelled."

¹³⁶ See two epitaphs presenting this metaphor: Dioegenes Laertius about Pittacos and Lesbos (R.D.Hicks 1925, I, 79) "Here holy Lesbos, with a mother's woe, bewails her Pittacus whom death laid low;" and Periander with Corinth (R.D.Hicks 1925, I, 97): "In mother earth here Periander lies, the prince of sea-girt Corinth rich and wise."

¹³⁷ Artemidorus, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, I, 79.

¹³⁸ An oracle predicted that the birth of this child would carry decisive consequences for Corinth (Herodotus, V, 92). The Bacchiads, afraid, decided to kill the baby who was finally saved due to his mother's courage and stratagem (Herodotus, V, 92 and Pausanias, V, 17, 4).

¹³⁹ Hoffmann 1992, 214-215.

¹⁴⁰ Diogenes Laertius (R.D.Hicks 1925) I, 96.

Louis Gernet argued that the mother symbolises the earth¹⁴¹, thus the city, meaning, as Marie Delcourt¹⁴² has demonstrated, that the sexual possession of the mother would be an expression of seizing power over a city or a territory. Jean-Pierre Vernant went further in making a comparison between Periander and Oedipus¹⁴³. For him, the mother symbolises sovereignty (especially in the case of Crateia's name) over a city of which the tyrant takes possession as his own¹⁴⁴. The abnormal relationships of Periander with the city would then be a reflection of the abnormal relationship Crateia had with her son¹⁴⁵.

This association mother/city is also shown in Hippias'¹⁴⁶ dream recounted by Herodotus:

“The previous night Hippias had a dream in which he slept with his mother. He supposed from the dream that he would return from exile to Athens, recover his rule, and end his days an old man in his own country. Thus he reckoned from the dream¹⁴⁷.”

Hippias saw himself in his father's place at the side of his mother and within the city¹⁴⁸. This dream is not a manifestation of the tyrant's abnormal sexuality¹⁴⁹, but rather expresses his desire to return home, a desire more significant for the archaic tyrant “born” out of the turmoil of his own city.

The murder and denial of burial is recounted for different female relatives of the tyrant as in the extreme case of the relatives of Dionysius II :

“In narrating stories concerning the luxury of Dionysius the Younger, tyrant of Sicily, Satyrus the Peripatetic in his *Lives*¹⁵⁰ says that rooms in his palace with a capacity of thirty couches were filled by the banqueters. In the same strain Clearchus, in the fourth book of his *Lives*, writes as follows¹⁵¹ ‘Dionysius, the son of Dionysius, proved to be the evil genius of all Sicily; once he went over to the city of the Locrians, which was the town of his own origin (for Doris, his mother, was a Locrian by birth), and strewing the largest hall in the city with tufted thyme and roses, he summoned one after the other the young girls of the Locrians; then naked among naked girls he omitted no indecency as he rolled with them upon the pavement. Not long afterward, therefore, the outraged fathers got his wife and children into their own power, and standing them up in the street they indulged their lust upon them with brutal violence. And when they had sated themselves with outrage, they thrust needles under their finger-nails and killed them. They then chopped up the bones of the dead victims in mortars; the rest of the bodies they divided up as meat-portions and pronounced a curse on whosoever refused to taste them; the reason why they ground up their flesh,

¹⁴¹ Louis Gernet 1982, 242.

¹⁴² Marie Delcourt, *Œdipe ou la légende du conquérant*, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et de Lettres de l'Université de Liège, fasc. CIV, 1994.

¹⁴³ See especially Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, v. 332.

¹⁴⁴ Jean-Pierre Vernant 1988, 71.

¹⁴⁵ According to Plutarch (*The Dinner of the Seven Wise Men*, 2), Crateia's love for her son led her to have incestuous relationships with him. Torn by remorse, she then killed herself.

¹⁴⁶ Hippias had been driven out of Athens by a coalition of Athenian aristocrats and Spartans (510 B.C.).

¹⁴⁷ Herodotus (Godley, 1920) VI, 107.

¹⁴⁸ According to Jean-Pierre Vernant, the proscription of incest or sexual unions in direct familial lines (parents/children/grandchildren) in Greece was due to the fact that parents represented a kind of alter ego, a double of oneself. Love was supposed to be directed toward someone different from oneself in order to assure the exchange vital to the balance of the city (Vernant 1972, 89, as well as Aristotle, *Politics*, III, 1280 b on the balance of the city).

¹⁴⁹ As suggested by Holt 1998, 226.

¹⁵⁰ F.H.G., III, 160.

¹⁵¹ F.H.G., II, 307.

in view of the unholy curse, was that the food might be entirely consumed as they ate their bread; what was left over they sunk in the sea.¹⁵²”

The dispersion of the ashes, dust of the bones was perpetrated in a desire of annihilation of the bodies and perhaps of any memory of tyranny. The total destruction of the bodies and bones could then be connected to an expiatory ritual performed in order to make sure that the dead would not come back asking for revenge. The sharing of the meat-portions and the threat accompanying it may be understood as a will to spread the guilt and responsibility of this action to all the citizens, therefore making it somehow disappear.

The fact that the dead parent is not buried but left without sepulchre, shows that the parent is treated as a traitor or enemy of the city¹⁵³. The female relative bears, as the tyrant does, the burden of the blame. The behaviour of these citizens may also suggest that the tyrannical regime itself was perceived as a stain, a sort of pollution that the city needed to wash out through sacrifice. A “polluted” person or city, since pollution was seen as being potentially contagious, needed to perform certain rituals to be cleansed¹⁵⁴. Through this sacrifice, similar to a purification ritual because blood is shed, the city could transform itself and pass from one state to another, from tyranny to freedom¹⁵⁵. As R. Parker wrote, “the notion of purifying the city by the expulsion of some disruptive elements (*ekkathairo*) is one that is quite commonly found¹⁵⁶”. The rejection of a group of female relatives could then be considered a purifying ritual, with the group itself the scapegoat. And as with certain mythological scapegoats, death could have been seen as a necessary element for the safety of the city.

The fact that the tyrant himself was not necessarily a victim of this violence¹⁵⁷, but that it focused on women, shows that a new step in the life and history of the *polis* corresponded to these violent acts committed against women.

The violence perpetrated against the relatives – women and children – of the tyrant sought to stop the tyrant’s family from continuing their rule. If the tyrant had neither wife nor children left, no one could claim to be his successor or pursue his political legacy. These murders and assaults not only ended the tyrannical regimes, they also were warnings for any person tempted by tyranny. Plus, these crimes could have helped the city to exorcise itself of tyranny¹⁵⁸, the torturer citizens putting themselves at the place of the tyrant¹⁵⁹. The tyranny

¹⁵² Athenaeus, XII, 541 e (C.B. Gulick, 1933). See also Aelian, IX, 8 and VI, 12 ; Plutarch, *Timoleon*, XIII, 10 and *Political Precepts*, 28; Strabo, *Geography*, VI, 1, 8. Garland 1985, 45-47 on the pollution caused by dead bodies.

¹⁵³ In Euripides’ *Hecuba* (v. 795-797), the body of Polydorus is cast overboard as well, but without having been previously reduced to ashes.

¹⁵⁴ In Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* Thebes needs to find and expel the murderer of Laios in order to be cleansed and cured of its plague.

¹⁵⁵ Parker 1983, 211: “The elimination of evils of various kinds, and by various means, seems to be seen in this period as a ‘purification’, without it necessarily being felt that they had been caused by a pollution.”

¹⁵⁶ Parker 1983, 263.

¹⁵⁷ During the rebellion of the Hippeis in 405 B.C., the plotters, not being able to attack the tyrant directly, decided to assault Dionysius the Elder’s wife instead (Diodorus, XIII, 112, 3 ; Plutarch, *Dion*, III, 1-2).

¹⁵⁸ These violent acts were somehow so common that the wife of the tyrant Aristotemus of Elis preferred to kill herself when the regime of her husband fell rather than become a victim of the people’s violence (Plutarch *Bravery of Women*, 253 C-E).

¹⁵⁹ But sometimes the city differentiated between the tyrant and his female relatives, as the case of Theste, sister of Dionysius I, shows (Plutarch, *Dion*, XXI, 9).

died symbolically along with women, the crazed rage of the populace replacing the *hubris* of the tyrant.

Conclusion

The woman has a strong presence in the symbolic relations that exist between city and tyrant. She appears to be an element of the city's stability, illustrating its past and future. This characteristic reflects the duality of woman, her ambivalence. Because she represents the unchangeable element of the city, any act against her shows the transition from one state to another in the city's life. In this duality, she follows Pandora whose presence consummated the rupture between the world of men and the world of gods¹⁶⁰.

The city has a familial dimension in which women are important. The unit of reference is not the *oikos*, but the city itself, conceived of as a big "family" in which woman is an essential element representing the city or the tyrant. In both cases, she is the representative of her family or her familial milieu and acts as a reference. She symbolizes respect for Greek traditions and a moderate government. She reminds her fellow Greeks of the attitude to maintain for the good of the community, and she does not hesitate to act to defend it. But the fact that she, as a woman, is the last protection of the city shows how powerless the city is against tyranny.

Greek women did not have political rights as we understand them nowadays, but were nonetheless a very important element of political life and its narratives¹⁶¹. The frequent appearance of the female presence in these stories is the sign that it was essential for the coherence of the narrative, as if, for a male author and his male audience, a political change could not be symbolically complete without the presence of a woman to give it body. One can then raise questions about the reasons for this use of the female figure. The answer probably lies in the fact that a woman cannot directly use any of what she transmits. Since she has no authority over power (or properties), she acts only as a "neutral" link between two men. In her lies power itself (or citizenship or properties), its corruption linked to its male use. Because she stands outside the male sphere without enjoying the concomitant privileges or rights, she can transcend her condition as a woman to symbolize the prerogatives that her male counterparts covet. Her status outside of the political competition gives her preeminence over men, who are too politically tainted, and enables her to symbolize values, traditions or the *polis* itself.

The woman is a mediator, an instrument of transition. As Pauline Schmitt-Pantel wrote, the relationships between men and women "font partie de la description du mode de vie de l'homme politique et de son identité. [...] le féminin est utilisé pour dévaloriser des conduites, en particulier quand entre en jeu la définition de l'homme en tant que citoyen, en tant qu'être politique¹⁶²". Her role and position within her family and city were therefore crucial to its

¹⁶⁰ Zeitlin 1996, 62.

¹⁶¹ Even if the historicity of some of these anecdotes may be called into question, it does change the symbolic importance of Greek women within these narratives.

¹⁶² Schmitt-Pantel, p.219.

existence, continuity and identity, and the tyrant, because tyranny was by essence unstable, seemed to have understood woman's ambiguous role and its potentiality within the *polis*.

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