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October 22, 2021

I have read and understood the relevant sections concerning plagiarism in the UCLA Student Code of Conduct handbook. This paper is my own work and has in no way violated UCLA's Code of Conduct.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

## Women in the Greek Symposium



The symposiums were parties held by Athenians around the time of Solon's reforms. While they are theorized to have been some form of aristocratic bonding in the face of political changes that threatened their power, they were, like most events in antiquity, male-dominated. However, I will be pulling from the kylix shown above to question the role of women in Greek symposiums and society as a whole.

The above image depicts artwork on the surface of a kylix, where a woman seems to be preparing to flick her kylix, a practice discussed in lecture as a game played at symposiums. This seems to imply that women would also possibly participate in the festivities of the symposium, a far cry from their traditional role as a provider of music and sex.

With the assumption that symposiums offered an environment in which aristocrats could enjoy the extent of their power, it seems strange to think that women would be allowed to revel in that power as well. However, we know for a fact that the Greeks held reverence for female figures to some degree, evident by the array of goddesses present in the Greek pantheon. In fact, these goddesses proved vital to the heroic tales of Homeric epic, which played an undeniable role

in shaping the Greeks' perception of power in the first place<sup>1</sup>. In addition, records show that the Athenians' contemporaries, the Spartans, elevated women to positions of authority to some extent. With the men off at battle, the women had to assume some responsibility on the homefront<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, with evidence from myth and reality in mind, we know that the idea of women in power was not completely foreign to the Greeks.

The symposiums also seemed to have been a place where participants established a sense of equality with one another. However, looking at Solon's reforms against women, they were clearly not viewed as equals. Perhaps another explanation of the kylix is that women held their own symposiums, where they could engage in similar activities. Logically, aristocratic women could have had the same motivations as men: creating a forum for discourse, entertainment, and bonding in the face of an uncertain future. In this scenario, it would seem that women would be acting out against the social norms that bound them, rejecting their role as vessels for male entertainment. If the symposiums were truly meant to promote a sense of equality, it is likely that the proposed female symposiums acted as a sort of refuge, where women could go to feel a sense of equality that was absent from Athenian society.

At the end of the day, this is just an image with no context. Factual evidence, such as the Athenians' noted disdain for the Spartans' liberal attitude towards women<sup>3</sup>, and their obvious exclusion from Athenian political institutions, makes it clear that women had nowhere near as much power as men. However, the origins of this kylix speak to some complexities of this societal relationship that are yet to be discovered.

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<sup>1</sup> McInerney 2018: 100.

<sup>2</sup> McInerney 2018: 141.

<sup>3</sup> McInerney 2018: 142.