

## Women's Economic Participation in Ancient Greece: A Re-examination Through Property Records

Much scholarship on the status of Athenian women emphasizes legal and social limitations: lack of education, childbearing responsibilities, confinement within the *γυναικεῖον*, and lack of physical and political freedoms (Lacey 1968; Pomeroy 1975). Other scholarship suggests that women's rights in Athens were covert and/or implicit (Sealey 1990; Just 1991; Foxhall 1989). Records of female property ownership in Athens further complicate our understanding of women's legal status because, on the one hand, they provide evidence that some women did participate in economic transactions beyond social and legal norms; but on the other hand, the extant evidence is not definitive proof of widespread practices and cultural expectations. Examining *ὄροι* and orations reveals that Attic women engaged in legal property transactions. Nevertheless, one must ask: how much can really be extrapolated about Attic women's rights from these singular cases?

In this paper, I will argue that the epigraphical evidence both highlights Attic women's participation and their limitations in economic activities and necessitates a further examination of women's legal status. My paper considers the following complications of the epigraphical evidence. First, there is no evidence that the *ὄροι* themselves were, in fact, composed by women, only that women were named, e.g. Fine 28 (Finley 114) where the woman Demo was named as *πληρώτρια*, the collector of the loan, but a third party, De[xithe]us, pledged security (Harris 2006). This invites the question: who, then, composed these documents? I will argue that these inscriptions were most likely composed by a woman's *κύριος* on her behalf due to the woman's inability to seek redress in court, giving insight into the limitations of women's participation. Second, extrapolating cultural or legal norms from the *ὄροι* is further complicated by the fact that

there are often noteworthy anomalies in the formulae used and in the subject of the text where women are named. Harris 2006 notes several anomalies in Fine 28 that prompt further analysis: the use of real and personal security pledge, the formula indicating the suretor for the loan, and the use of the feminine *πληρώτρια* (i.e., the one who collects and disperses the loan). In this essay, I expand upon the observations of Harris 2006 and combine those observations with evidence extrapolated from the following orations: Demosthenes 41, Demosthenes 59, Isaeus 3, and Isaeus 10. As I will show, it is possible that women's economic roles may have extended far beyond the traditional limits of the *γυναικεῖον* and the legal limits of status. Perhaps an expanded notion of the legal and economic status of Athenian women may yield some notion of a proto or nascent "female independence" in the Greek world.

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