

# **Women Across the Ages:**

## **Society, Family and Health**

*Edited by*  
**Elif Charlotte NELSON**

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## WOMEN ACROSS THE AGES: SOCIETY, FAMILY AND HEALTH

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## Preface

This volume, *Women Across the Ages: Society, Family and Health*, arises from a shared scholarly interest in enriching our understanding of the past by exploring dimensions of history that have received less attention. While political and institutional narratives have long provided one foundation for historical study, this work engages with the vital, often private, realms of women's experiences—including family, reproduction, and health. Structured both chronologically and thematically, the volume traces a path from myth to law, from ritual to medicine, and from domestic life to political participation. It illuminates the many ways women have historically expressed agency, less often through open resistance and more commonly through adaptation, negotiation, and endurance within the frameworks of their time. Born of a collaboration that believes a fuller historical synthesis is possible when women's voices and experiences are included, this volume seeks to intend as a contribution to gender history and as a resource for all scholars exploring the complex social and intellectual dynamics of human history.

*Elif Charlotte NELSON*

*Editor*



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# Chapter One

## Introduction

Elif Charlotte NELSON\*

The historical narrative has long been illuminated by the chronicle of public life, with its focus on the actions and institutions of men. Alongside these stories, however, exist the equally vital, yet less explored, realms of the family, the household, and the intimate experiences of health and childbirth. *Women Across the Ages: Society, Family and Health* emerges from a shared curiosity to bring these dimensions into the light, presenting a rich and multifaceted exploration of women's lives as central, dynamic forces in history. This volume, drawing on the expertise of historians specializing in diverse eras and regions, from ancient Greece to the late Ottoman Empire, invites us to see women's resilience, labour, and nuanced agency not as footnotes, but as fundamental threads in the intricate tapestry of our shared past.

The book is designed to guide the reader on a chronological and thematic journey, beginning in the foundational worlds of classical antiquity and moving through to the modern era. It consistently focuses on the deeply human interplay between gender, familial institutions, and well-being, allowing us to listen for the echoes of women's experiences through the centuries.

Our journey commences in the emotionally charged world of Homer's *Iliad*, with Sinem Aydoğan Demir's analysis of "*The Position of Women in the Family*." This chapter examines how epic poetry encodes profound societal truths. Demir meticulously illuminates the roles of iconic figures like Helen, Andromache, and Hecabe, revealing that while these women are often cast as objects of exchange in a patriarchal, warrior-centric society, they are

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also portrayed with profound emotional depth. Their strength resonates in their articulation of grief, their attempts at persuasion, and their unwavering devotion to their families, establishing a powerful literary paradigm of a woman's value being intimately tied to the *oikos*, or household.

Building on this foundation, Mert Hasılcıoğlu provides a socio-legal analysis in "Women and the Oikos in Classical Athens: Gender, Labour, and Legal Constraints." This chapter moves from the world of myth to the stark realities of Athenian democracy, revealing the poignant paradox of women's central yet legally invisible role. Hasılcıoğlu details how the *oikos* was the fundamental unit of the city-state, sustained almost entirely by women's labour—from weaving and childcare to managing enslaved individuals and producing goods. Yet, this indispensable economic contribution was systematically obscured by the *kyrios* system, which denied women legal personhood. The chapter beautifully illustrates that women's confinement to the domestic sphere was not a natural condition, but an ideological and legal construct essential to the functioning of the Athenian state.

Hasılcıoğlu's second contribution, "Birth and Ritual in Classical Athens," then delves into one of the most critical and dangerous aspects of women's lives. This chapter shifts the focus to the female body and the pivotal life event of childbirth, framing it as a deeply religious and social passage. It explores how women navigated the mortal dangers of labour through powerful rituals, invoking goddesses like Artemis and relying on the expertise of midwives and female networks. The postnatal rituals of Amphidromia are revealed not merely as family celebrations, but as formal mechanisms for integrating a new life into the *oikos* and the polis, while simultaneously weaving gendered expectations into a child's identity from its first breath.

Crossing into the Roman world, Sinem Aydoğan Demir and Okan Demir examine the "Education of Roman Women According to Ancient Literature." This chapter explores the compelling tension between a patriarchal society's ideal of the virtuous, domestically oriented *matrona* and the reality of educated women who acquired intellectual and professional skills. The authors show that while traditional education aimed to inculcate feminine virtues, some elite women, like Cornelia, became

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renowned for their learning, while lower-class women gained practical literacy through professions like medicine. The chapter highlights thoughtful advocates like Musonius Rufus, who argued for women's philosophical education, revealing gentle undercurrents of intellectual aspiration that subtly challenged rigid norms.

The scope then expands to the medieval crossroads of Anatolia and the Caucasus with Zehra Güneş's "A Journey Across Dynasties: Georgian Princess Tamara from the Bagrationi Lineage to the Anatolian Seljuks." This chapter offers a poignant narrative of elite women as both instruments and agents of political diplomacy. The life of Gurju Khatun, a Georgian princess married into the Seljuk court, is a moving story of a woman navigating treacherous waters of dynastic politics, religious difference, and personal tragedy. Her story demonstrates that even women of the highest status were subject to the patriarchal strategies of their families, yet they could also wield significant influence and exhibit remarkable resilience within the interstices of power.

Güneş's subsequent chapter, "A Family Crisis in the Ilkhanids: The Case of Baghdad Khatun," continues this exploration, examining the dramatic rise and fall of a noblewoman whose political ambitions in a medieval Islamic court ultimately led to her execution, illustrating the extreme risks that could accompany female political power.

The focus then shifts to the bustling streets of the Ottoman Empire. Okan Büyüktapu's study of "The Legal and Social Worlds of Ottoman Women in 16th Century Istanbul Court Records" provides a granular, archival-based view of women's lives. Moving beyond prescriptive texts, this chapter reveals Ottoman women as active, savvy litigants who used the Islamic court system to assert their rights regarding property, marriage, and divorce. It powerfully challenges stereotypes of passive, secluded women, showcasing instead their legal agency and pragmatic navigation of the judicial system to protect their own interests.

The volume then turns to early modern Europe, where Kadir Çelik examines female scientific authors and their contributions to practical knowledge. The chapters, "A Woman Fighting Against Plague and Poisons: Signora Isabella Cortese among i Professori de' Secreti" and "Teaching Women Chemistry: Marie Meurdrac on Hair Care in Seventeenth-Century European Scientific Literature," explore how women engaged with science

by authoring practical manuals on medicine and chemistry. These chapters illuminate how women positioned themselves as intellectual and professional figures, finding creative ways to participate in print culture and challenging their conventional depiction as marginal actors within patriarchal frameworks.

Cihan Özgün's chapter, "Findings on the Female Body and Sexuality in European Society from the Early Modern Period to the 19th Century," then traces the evolving—and often oppressive—scientific and medical discourses that sought to define and control the female body, providing critical context for understanding the historical regulation of women's most intimate experiences.

The final chapters bring our narrative into the 19th and early 20th centuries. Yasin Özdemir's "Childhood in the Ottoman Empire: Aspects of Everyday Life in the 19th Century" and Olcay Pullukçuoğlu Yapucu's "Women from Rumelia to Anatolia" examine the social history of family, migration, and daily life during a period of immense imperial transformation. The volume concludes with Murat Kaya's "The Long Wait: Ayşe Aliye Köksal and the First Female Parliamentary Representative from Eskişehir," a fitting end that bridges the historical struggles detailed throughout the book with the hard-won achievement of formal political representation in the modern Turkish Republic.

A central theme woven throughout this study is its nuanced and heartfelt redefinition of female agency. The collective work of our contributors moves beyond a simplistic binary, revealing women's strength as a consistent thread of resilience manifested in various forms: the emotional fortitude of Homeric heroines, the legal savvy of Ottoman women in court, the economic resourcefulness of Athenian women, the intellectual contributions of female scientists, and the political endurance of figures like Gurju Khatun and Ayşe Aliye Köksal. It shows that agency could be found in the quiet arts of negotiation, the creativity of adaptation, and the profound power of survival within constraining systems, not just in overt resistance.

This sophisticated and humanizing perspective is complemented by the volume's practical utility as a foundational scholarly resource. It synthesizes a vast amount of specialized research into a coherent and engaging narrative, making it an invaluable teaching tool and a catalyst for

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future research. By illuminating the intricate and powerful dimensions of women's lives woven through history, *Women Across the Ages* not only recovers lost voices but also fundamentally enriches our understanding of the human past.

Ultimately, by offering both a fresh interpretive lens and a comprehensive historical synthesis, this volume seeks to create a lasting and meaningful intellectual legacy. It is a privilege to bring together the contributions of these distinguished scholars, and it is our heartfelt hope that this collection will serve as a source of insight and inspiration for future research and for generations of scholars to come.



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## Chapter Two

# The Position of Women in the Family in Homer's *Iliad*

Sinem AYDOĞAN DEMİR\*

### I. Introduction

The social status and roles of ancient Greek women are not directly documented. However, starting from Homer's epics and evaluating ancient Greek literary works in this context, it is understood that women's social experiences were different from those of men. In ancient Greek society, the image of women, which began with the ideal female types presented in Homer's epics and those positioned in opposition to them, and solidified in collective memory with Hesiod's Pandora<sup>1</sup>, continued in different forms in later periods.<sup>2</sup> When the image of women in these works, created in line with the ideologies of male authors, is evaluated together with the laws of the period, it becomes evident that gender roles in Ancient Greece were shaped according to men's political concerns. In this context, in Ancient Greece, where the *oikos*<sup>3</sup> emerged as the most important social unit, the *polis* transformed into an organized administrative structure with all its

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<sup>1</sup> Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 570–615; Hesiod, *Opera et Dies*, 45–105.

<sup>2</sup> Mehmet Ali Kaya and Kevser Taşdöner, 'İlkçağda Kadın: Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği Bakımından Hellenistik Çağ Öncesi İlkçağ Tarihine Genel Bakış', *Türkbilim* 4/21 (2017): 12ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Oikos*, the term refers to the most important unit of the post-Mycenaean period. It encompasses not only the family or household but also all individuals living with the family, the land they inhabit and work on, as well as their movable and immovable properties. See also Sultan Deniz Küçüker, 'Arkhaik Öncesi Grek Devlet Yapısını Şekillendiren Politik Gruplar', *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 32, 54 (2013): 108ff.

elements, and ultimately democracy was established in many *poleis* based on the equality of citizens, examining the status of women within the *oikos* as the smallest unit of society holds great importance.<sup>4</sup> This is because men's political concerns confined women's social roles solely within the *oikos*, based on the production of future citizens.

The Homeric epics shaped the public and political sphere as exclusively the domain of Greek men, while women were directed toward the domestic environment. The idea that the ancient Greek woman always belonged to the *oikos* —the domestic and private sphere— became the dominant narrative about women in post-Dark Age Greek society. From the time of the Homeric epics, the ideal woman in the ancient Greek imagination was one who did not occupy a role in the public domain, except in exceptional cases, and who devoted herself to her roles within the household. These societal roles deemed suitable for women were closely tied to the evolving political structure of Greece after the Dark Age. The transformation process that introduced new laws and customs in line with the developing structure of the *polis* reduced women's visibility in society.

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<sup>4</sup> Data on Ancient Greek history is typically obtained from Athens and Sparta. On the other hand, the social and political evolution of most Greek *poleis* exhibits characteristics similar to that of Athens. However, the political structures of Sparta and Athens are quite different from each other. This difference, as it influences societal conditions, also creates nuances in gender roles. The disparity between the two city-states regarding women's education serves as a good example of this. Despite the differences in the understanding of education during women's childhood and youth, the purpose these different attitudes serve remains the same. In Sparta, the education provided to women until they were married was aimed at preparing them to give birth to future soldier-citizens of the state. In Athens, on the other hand, women were only educated in domestic matters, preparing them for marriage and raising future citizens of Athens. While the content of women's education appears different, ultimately, both models point to a specific lifestyle designed for women. In both cases, women exist to fulfil roles assigned to them by men, primarily giving birth and dealing with related duties. The difference in educational approaches only results in a relatively freer Spartan woman compared to the Athenian woman, who was forced to live a more secluded life. Of course, this situation cannot be evaluated as a natural role distribution stemming from biological differences between genders. Instead, it is more appropriate to focus on the perception of women in Ancient Greece, as reflected in literary works. This way, the reasons behind women being excluded from the public sphere dominated by men and confined solely to domestic spaces can be better understood.

Accordingly, a woman's life, under male supervision from birth, was directed along the line of marriage. The hierarchy among women was also shaped along this trajectory. The life of a married woman was confined to activities like weaving —one of the oldest tasks attributed to her gender— far from public matters and with minimal interaction outside the *oikos*. The women depicted in Homer's epics represent all the traditional duties associated with ancient Greek women.<sup>5</sup> Thus, with the Homeric epics written down at the end of the Dark Age, models that would define the societal roles of ancient Greek women were introduced to society. For this reason, examining Homer's epics, which provide examples intertwined with mythology regarding women's roles within the family, serves as a good starting point for understanding this topic.

Homer's epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, bear influences from the gender system encountered in the Greek mythological tradition.<sup>6</sup> However, the epics differ from each other in terms of the roles they assign to women in their plots. The *Iliad* begins with the narrative of a conflict arising because of a woman and then focuses on the devastation that war brings to communities and families. On the Trojan side, Hector, Andromache, and Astyanax represent a family that will be completely destroyed by the war, while also symbolizing families that will be torn apart by the Trojan War. On the other hand, the *Odyssey* presents the triad of husband, wife and son, who face the threat of disintegration due to the war.<sup>7</sup> On the Achaean side, Odysseus, Penelope<sup>8</sup>, and Telemachus are representatives of a family unit

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<sup>5</sup> Marilyn B. Arthur, 'Early Greece: The Origins of The Western Attitude Toward Women', *Arethusa* 6/1 (Spring 1973): 13.

<sup>6</sup> Homer has been attributed with certain attitudes that favour men over women. Moses I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), 138 ff. On the other hand, there are authors who believe that a more cautious approach should be taken regarding Homer's negative attitude toward women. Steven Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', *Acta Classica* 22 (1979): 24, n. 34.

<sup>7</sup> Nancy Felson and Laura Slatkin, 'Gender and Homeric Epic'. In *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 91–92.

<sup>8</sup> For Penelope depictions in Ancient Greek and Roman literature, see Serap Kalaycıoğulları, 'Klasik Dönem Yunan ve Roma Yazınında Penelope: Homeros'tan Ovidius'a Penelope Betimi ve Heroides', *Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 7/2 (2016): 95–111. For representations of women in Homer's *Odyssey*, see also Beth

that will reunite in Ithaca after overcoming the obstacles they faced for years. In this sense, both epics provide significant insights into the family structure of the society in which they were created and the position of women within this structure. This study will focus on the position of women within the family structure presented in the *Iliad*.

## II. Women and Family in the *Iliad*

The *Iliad* is the narrative of a war that emerges from male rivalry over women. The war is presented within the context of a series of events related to the possession of women, involving both enemy and allied men.<sup>9</sup> A woman is shown as the cause of the war that serves as the subject of the epic.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, at the beginning of the epic, the reason for the dispute between the two men is also the sharing of a female captive.<sup>11</sup> In this portrayal, women in the *Iliad* are objects to be fought over or exchanged. They have no say in whose hands they will end up.<sup>12</sup> They lack the freedom to determine their own futures. However, this does not mean that all women in the epic are in the status of slaves. There are also free women who stand out in the position of wives. Nevertheless, the existence of women as objects for men is established in the very first book of the epic.<sup>13</sup> In this regard, according to Felson and Slatkin, marriage in the epic can be seen as the peaceful exchange of women between men. In this case, war becomes its violent counterpart.<sup>14</sup> In this war, what appears to be protected and defended is marriage as an institution that ensures patriarchy based on the possession of women. While the war in the epic serves as a defence of

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Cohen (Ed.), *The Distaff Side: Representing the Female in Homer's Odyssey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, according to Farron, Homer tried to overcome the inadequacy of presenting female characters in the war setting of the *Iliad* by fully utilizing the scenes in Troy. Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 15.

<sup>10</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, II.160–165, 175–180.

<sup>11</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, I.170–185.

<sup>12</sup> Agamemnon plans to offer one of his daughters to Achilles in order to draw him into the war. It is once again shown here that women do not have freedom in choosing their spouses. Homer, *Iliad*, IX.140–160.

<sup>13</sup> Hanna Roisman, 'Helen in the *Iliad*; Causa Belli and Victim of War: From Silent Weaver to Public Speaker', *American Journal of Philology* 127, 1 (Spring 2006): 2.

<sup>14</sup> Felson and Slatkin, 'Gender and Homeric Epic', 95.

marriage and the broader aristocratic arrangements it supports, it also has the characteristic of destroying households and families. In this respect, the heroes of the epic dedicate themselves both to social values and institutions and to an activity that destroys them at the same time.<sup>15</sup>

In that case, the patriarchal marriage system in the *Iliad* is generally dominated by the ownership of women. So, what is the family structure that emerges within this system, and what is the position of women within this structure? To understand this, it is necessary to take a closer look at the lives of mortal women mentioned in the narrative of the epic. Helen, Andromache, Hecabe, Briseis, and Chryseis are the ones whose names are mentioned more frequently in situations involving men compared to their female counterparts. Other women, such as Laothoe<sup>16</sup>, Kastianeira<sup>17</sup>, Kassandra<sup>18</sup>, Theano<sup>19</sup>, or Astyanax's nurse, are less visible. Therefore, the scenes in which Helen, Andromache, Hecabe, Briseis, and Chryseis are prominent are more suitable for drawing conclusions about the condition of women. For this reason, the family structure in the *Iliad* and the position of women within this structure will be evaluated in the context of these five characters who stand out compared to the others.

In the epic, the position of prominent female characters within the family is depicted in a way that reflects the male-dominated societal structure of the time. They are generally dependent on men and confined to the household. It is possible for a man to live with multiple women.<sup>20</sup> These women are often portrayed through their roles as wives and mothers. Within this framework, they are individuals with limited rights, responsible for household chores and caring for their children.<sup>21</sup> The roles assigned to women naturally also define the domains where men and women can be

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<sup>15</sup> Felson and Slatkin, 'Gender and Homeric Epic', 96.

<sup>16</sup> One of Priam's wives is also the mother of Lykaon and Polydoros. Homer, *Iliad*, XXII.45–50.

<sup>17</sup> One of Priam's wives is the mother of Gorgythion. Homer, *Iliad*, VIII.300–305.

<sup>18</sup> She is the daughter of Priam. Homer, *Iliad*, XIII.365.

<sup>19</sup> She is the priestess of Goddess Athena in Troy. She appears in the scene where women pray to the goddess. Homer, *Iliad*, VI.295–305.

<sup>20</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, I.105–115; VI.241–245; IX.450; XXI.85–90.

<sup>21</sup> Hector also says that his wife Andromache feeds the horses. Homer, *Iliad*, VIII.185–190.

influential.<sup>22</sup> Women are predominantly within the household, while men occupy the spaces of battle. Although this can be observed throughout the epic, it is particularly evident in one specific scene. The scene depicts the Trojan women waiting for Hector to return from the battlefield. They are anxiously seeking news from the men who determine their fate on the battlefield. When Hector reaches the tower at Troy's western gates, they gather around him to hear news about their husbands and sons,<sup>23</sup> as their futures are entirely dependent on the men in their lives. War, as a process that leads to the loss of men, leaves women unprotected. The fall of Troy as a result of the war will lead many of these women to become war captives in the hands of the Achaeans.<sup>24</sup> To prevent this outcome, Hector asks only one thing of the women:<sup>25</sup> to pray to the goddess Athena.<sup>26</sup> The epic does not offer women any other means of intervening in their futures. Therefore, this scene is significant in showing that all women, regardless of class, are dependent on men in determining their futures and have limited areas of activity outside the home.

This scene, which clearly demonstrates women's dependence on men in family life and their orientation towards the domestic sphere, is also significant in showing that they played a prominent role in services related to goddesses. It is understood that women, in their roles as wives, mothers, or other capacities, undertook not only essential domestic duties for the continuity of the family but also such religious responsibilities. These duties, after all, were among the traditional roles of women throughout Ancient Greek history.<sup>27</sup> Most importantly, these tasks constituted an exception that allowed Ancient Greek women to participate in the public sphere. Therefore, Hector directing women to pray to the goddess also points to a limited action they could perform in public. The scene where Hector, upon not finding his wife at home, asks the servants where she is

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<sup>22</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.490–495.

<sup>23</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.236–240.

<sup>24</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.455–465.

<sup>25</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.240, 270–276.

<sup>26</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.85–95, 240, 310.

<sup>27</sup> Arthur, 'Early Greece', 13.

also confirms that a woman could leave the house for reasons such as visiting relatives or fulfilling a religious duty.<sup>28</sup>

The female characters in the *Iliad* are positioned within the domestic sphere, and rather than directly engaging in actions outside the home, they are figures affected by the outcomes of men's actions, providing the emotional framework for these effects. However, certain scenes in the epic reveal some women who, at least symbolically, possess a degree of power, though this is quite limited. Helen, who is central to the epic's subject, is an example of this.<sup>29</sup> Her connection with the goddess Aphrodite, her status as a queen, and her beauty that brings calamity<sup>30</sup> serve as metaphorical instruments to convey her symbolic power. However, this power emerges not outside the male-dominated world but as part of or a result of it. Thus, even her connection to divine powers does not enable her to transcend the societal limitations imposed on women.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Helen is portrayed as the cause of the war between the Trojans and the Achaeans.<sup>32</sup> The claim of ownership over a woman, as seen in Helen's abduction in the *Iliad*<sup>33</sup>,

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<sup>28</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.375–380.

<sup>29</sup> Helen is portrayed as the cause of the war in the second book of the *Iliad*. Homer, *Iliad*, II.160–165, 175–180. In the third book of the *Iliad*, she is at the centre of the main theme of the epic. Homer, *Iliad*, III.70–75, 90–95, 255, 280–285, 455–460. For depictions of Helen in Ancient Greek literature, see Didem Demiralp, 'İlkçağ Anadolu Efsanelerinin 'En Güzel'i: Troyalı Helena', *Gazi Akademik Bakış* 4/7 (2010): 201–213.

<sup>30</sup> Throughout the *Iliad*, Helen is depicted as possessing remarkable beauty, which is regarded as the primary catalyst for the Trojan War. Homer often conveys her beauty through the reactions of other characters. For instance, the elderly Trojans, observing her from the tower at the western gates, note that her beauty is so potent it has the potential to bring about destruction. Homer, *Iliad*, III.150–160.

<sup>31</sup> Even the connection to mythology does not enable it to surpass these limitations. According to Farron, in Helen's relationship with Aphrodite, the goddess disregards Helen's desires, similar to how the men in her life have treated her. Consequently, Aphrodite effectively objectifies Helen in this context. Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 20.

<sup>32</sup> See the true causes of the war Mehmet Ali Kaya, 'Troya ve Troya Savaşı: Efsane ve Tarih', *Akademik-Der* 1 (2017): 5 ff.; Mehmet Ali Kaya, *Ege ve Eski Yunan Tarihi-I: Tarih Öncesi Çağlardan Klasik Çağa Kadar* (İstanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2016), 97–98.

<sup>33</sup> There are implications in the second and third books of the *Iliad* that Helen was subjected to rape. Homer, *Iliad*, II.350–355, 585–590; III.444–445. However, there is a conflict between what Helen states about her own situation and what others



underscores the objectified value of women.<sup>34</sup> However, Helen, abducted by the Trojan Paris, is a married woman. This situation necessitated her husband's fight to reclaim his ownership.<sup>35</sup> This claim was not confined to just two men. In the Trojan War, which began when Helen's husband, Menelaus, the king of Sparta, enlisted the help of his brother Agamemnon to retake his wife, the king of Mycenae, Helen became an object that incited warriors to fight.<sup>36</sup>

Helen herself is a woman who strives to transcend all the meanings imposed on her by men. She stands out from many other women in the narrative as a speaking subject in the example of the *Iliad*.<sup>37</sup> Essentially, in the war setting of Homer's *Iliad*, the situation of all women is quite similar. Helen is a woman who has held prominent roles as a wife in the palaces of both Sparta and Troy. Owing to her upper-class status, she is characterized in the *Iliad* by her eloquence and perceptiveness in the use of language.<sup>38</sup> The subtlety she exhibits in her family conversations is noteworthy. She speaks respectfully and politely with her relatives, such as Priam, the king of Troy and father of Paris, and Hector, Paris's brother and a prominent figure in Troy. For instance, before the duel between Paris and Menelaus,

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inform her, along with the reasons for the presence of allusions to rape in the epic see Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 16 and n. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VII. 350, 355–365.

<sup>35</sup> As the conflict persists, it will be necessary for Paris to engage in a direct confrontation with Menelaus in order to determine possession of Helen. Homer, *Iliad*, III.65–75, 85–95, 250–255, 281–285.

<sup>36</sup> The Achaeans are engaged in conflict with the Trojans concerning Helen see Homer, *Iliad*, II.160–165, 175–180.

<sup>37</sup> Felson and Slatkin, 'Gender and Homeric Epic', 96–97.

<sup>38</sup> Pantelia contends that Helen possesses a unique understanding of life that other women in Homer's epics do not share. She attributes Helen's strength to her intelligence and her ability to perceive the deeper significance of events. Helen is depicted as a character who comprehends the importance of historical knowledge and acknowledges the need to preserve contemporary happenings for future generations. Maria C. Pantelia, 'Spinning and Weaving: Ideas of Domestic Order in Homer', *The American Journal of Philology* 114, 4 (Winter 1993): 499. Hanna Roisman contends that Helen's freedom is restricted. She primarily navigates these limitations by articulating her perceptions, feelings, and thoughts. In this regard, Roisman asserts that the sole clear progression in the epic lies in the evolution of Helen's self-expression. Roisman, 'Helen in the *Iliad*', 33–34.

Priam called Helen to his side and asked her to identify the Achaean commanders. Here, Helen openly expressed her shame and regret while maintaining a respectful tone toward Priam.<sup>39</sup> Her conversations with Hector also reflect this same tone. In a confrontation where Hector calls Paris to the battlefield, Helen expresses her admiration and gratitude towards him openly.<sup>40</sup> While she criticized Paris for his lack of bravery in battle, she also expressed her admiration for Hector, highlighting her respect for him. Despite her critical observations, Helen maintained a respectful tone, illustrating her courage in articulating the truth while preserving a sense of balance. Following Hector's death, she remarked that she had consistently treated him with kindness, underscoring the positive nature of their relationship and her emotional intelligence in fostering it.<sup>41</sup>

The examples demonstrate that Helen usually maintained a diplomatic demeanour in her relationships with family members. However, this approach failed in influencing the actions of the men in her family. For example, during her conversations with Hector, she offered him a chair to sit on; however, Hector firmly rejected the offer, asserting that sitting down was meaningless while the Trojans were engaged in battle. He made it clear that he would not heed her words.<sup>42</sup>

Despite having freedom of expression, Helen is in the position of an object among the warring men, primarily her husband Menelaus and Paris.<sup>43</sup> So much so that she does not have the right to make choices that would determine either her own life or the course of the war in order to escape the war environment caused by her.<sup>44</sup> In this sense, while she was a tool in the process that started the war, she made no contribution to preventing what would happen afterward. This is because her emotions and

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<sup>39</sup> For the conversation between Helen and Priamos see Homer, *Iliad*, III.160–245.

<sup>40</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.343–360.

<sup>41</sup> F. J. Groten Jr., 'Homer's Helen', *Greece & Rome* 15, 1 (Apr. 1968): 38.

<sup>42</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.350–365. See also George J. Ryan, 'Helen in Homer', *The Classical Journal* 61, 3 (Dec. 1965): 116.

<sup>43</sup> Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 16.

<sup>44</sup> Farron posits that by depicting the diminished significance of the emotions of Helen and other female characters in relation to their male counterparts, Homer effectively highlights the plight of women and their limited capacity to influence events, including the trajectory of their own lives. Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 15.

feelings hold no importance among the warring men.<sup>45</sup> Aside from influencing Paris to fight, her feelings about the war or her own future are irrelevant.<sup>46</sup> The primary concern for the men is the possession of her, which they believe can only be attained through warfare. Her inability to participate in this process underscores her status as an object in the eyes of men.

The male-dominated world ignores Helen's thoughts on war, while she depicts the war in a passive position through her weaving.<sup>47</sup> This situation underscores her inability to engage actively in roles traditionally associated with men. Even when the outcome of the matter directly affects her, she remains a mere observer of the proceedings.<sup>48</sup> This scene illustrates one of the fundamental roles assigned to women in Ancient Greece. While men pursued heroism on the battlefield, women were expected to focus on domestic responsibilities, particularly weaving, rather than involving themselves in men's affairs. This was considered the appropriate role for them. In later periods, weaving continued to be recognized as the primary occupation for women in Ancient Greece. Both Helen's weaving scenes and those depicting other women in Homer's epics reinforce the overall portrayal of women's domestic life, as presented by later writers.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For instance, Helen is portrayed observing the confrontation between Paris and Menelaus. Homer, *Iliad*, III.130–165. According to Farron, this scene shows that Homer cares about the psychological state of women. However, her feelings do not matter to the men who determine her future. Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 17.

<sup>46</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.335–340. However, Helen's ideas about Paris' fighting change very quickly, perhaps because she is aware with her rational side that her ineffectiveness over men, or perhaps because of her irrational side under the influence of Aphrodite. See Homer, *Iliad*, III.425–436. See also Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 20–21.

<sup>47</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, III.125–128. See also another scene where she is weaving Homer, *Iliad*, VI.320–325.

<sup>48</sup> Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 15–16. See also Ann L. T. Bergrens, 'Language and the Female in Early Greek Thought', *Arethusa* 16, 1/2 (1983): 79.

<sup>49</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.285–290, XXII.440.

In contrast, Helen, as a character in the scenes in which she participates, articulately conveys her deep sense of regret.<sup>50</sup> She might feel this way either because she has acted against ancient Greek norms or due to her inability to influence the male-dominated society around her. Despite feeling deep regret and shame for the unfolding events, her situation remains unchanged. This is largely because decisions related to matters beyond the domestic sphere are reserved for men. Even if a woman has a strong desire to protect her family, she lacks the right to intervene in events outside the home. Consequently, all she can do is observe and endure the resulting consequences.<sup>51</sup> In the scenes depicting her actions, particularly when she observes the consequences of the war, her sense of regret is consistently apparent.<sup>52</sup> It is essential to acknowledge that Helen's profound feelings of regret following her infidelity to her husband, the king of Sparta, are a natural emotional response. A woman who undermines the sanctity of marriage is likely to experience significant remorse as a consequence of her actions.<sup>53</sup> Upon learning that Menelaus and Paris are set to engage in a one-on-one combat, Helen experiences a profound emotional response, shedding tears as she reflects on her sense of longing for her homeland, as well as for her husband and family.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, she is uncertain about whether her brothers are alive or not.<sup>55</sup> Helen's relationship with Paris fills her with profound regret for being separated from her daughter and relatives, and for witnessing families torn apart by the war she set in motion. Furthermore, her decision, which led to these

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<sup>50</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, III.170–180, VI.344–360, XXIV.762–775. For a study of Helen's statements in her self-blame, see Margaret Graver, 'Dog-Helen and Homeric Insult', *Classical Antiquity* 14, 1 (April 1995): 41–61.

<sup>51</sup> Helen's condition is linked to her status as an object among men. For more information, see Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 16 ff.

<sup>52</sup> For a detailed study of Helen's self-blame, see Ruby Blondell, '“Bitch that I Am”: Self-Blame and Self-Assertion in the *Iliad*', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 140, 1 (Spring 2010): 1–32.

<sup>53</sup> Helen states that she has received harsh criticism from others for her actions. Homer, *Iliad*, III.240–245.

<sup>54</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, III.140–144.

<sup>55</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, III.235–245.

painful outcomes, is ascribed to the influence of the goddess Aphrodite.<sup>56</sup> Regardless of her reasons for being there, Helen feels immense regret. Her choice harmed her loyalty to her husband, forcing her to endure the consequences.

In the *Iliad*, Helen is portrayed as more than just a symbol of beauty; she is a complex character who embodies themes of war, guilt, fate, and the intricacies of human nature. While Homer praises her beauty, he also explores her internal struggles, regrets, and her role in society. Helen's persistent self-blame in the *Iliad* reflects the societal moral burdens placed on married women with children. In ancient Greek society, particularly in Athens, women's primary role was to bear legitimate children and uphold the honour of the household. A woman's chastity was seen as synonymous with the family's honour. When a woman's chastity was questioned, it became not just a personal issue but a matter of family and societal concern. Therefore, Helen's decision to leave her husband and daughter for Troy was viewed as a violation of family honour, a transgression believed to have sparked an entire war. Ultimately, this situation had widespread repercussions, demonstrating that a woman's actions could have significant societal consequences, impacting many families.

Helen serves as a representation of a complex perspective on wifehood and motherhood, set against the context of a war that emphasizes the theme of possession over women. Her predicament in Troy is significantly influenced by her conflicting loyalties to her family in Sparta as well as the regret she experiences. As a result, Helen's roles as a mother and wife are markedly more intricate than those of other female characters within the epic, who are typically portrayed in more conventional and straightforward manners. Although the main themes of wifehood and motherhood also pertain to these other characters, their depictions lack the depth and complexity that characterize Helen's narrative. In this context,

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<sup>56</sup> Demiralp, 'İlkçağ Anadolu Efsanelerinin 'En Güzel'i', 207. The passages that suggest Helen's position in Troy was not voluntary indicate that she may have been sacrificed. According to Farron, her ambivalent attitude—acting under the influence of Aphrodite and feeling ashamed of the chaos she has caused—can be understood through her relationship with Aphrodite. Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 17 ff.

Andromache<sup>57</sup>, depicted as the epitome of a perfect wife, emerges as another significant female character alongside Helen. She is the wife of Hector, the Trojan prince, and the mother of their young son, Astyanax. In line with the gender roles of her era, Andromache embodies the qualities of an exemplary spouse, characterized by her deep love and unwavering devotion to Hector. Together, they represent a relationship where both partners share a profound emotional bond.<sup>58</sup> This suggests that harmony between spouses within the family is idealized.<sup>59</sup> The war, rooted in the fragmentation of Helen's family, ultimately culminates in Hector's demise. Consequently, this conflict also leads to the destruction of Andromache's family. In this context, Andromache serves as a representation of the plight faced by women in marriages disrupted by war, as depicted in the *Iliad*.

Homer depicts Andromache with significant emotional complexity, particularly in her dual roles as a wife and mother. This complexity is most distinctly illustrated in the scene where she bids farewell to Hector.<sup>60</sup> As she sends him off to the battlefield, her words are imbued with deep love and unwavering devotion, coupled with an acute fear for his safety. In a bid to persuade him to remain within the protective citadel of the city<sup>61</sup>, Andromache expresses her profound concern for both him and their son, Astyanax, whom she holds in her arms.<sup>62</sup> She articulates her anxiety regarding her son's upbringing in the absence of his father, recognizing that Hector's potential death would leave their child vulnerable on both physical and social fronts.<sup>63</sup> Andromache is aware that the father figure plays a critical role in ensuring a child's social acceptance, which underscores the societal constraints faced by women and the limited capacity of mothers to protect their children.<sup>64</sup> Her maternal instincts, along with her desire to safeguard her son, are accentuated. This scenario

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<sup>57</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.370–375.

<sup>58</sup> For the differences in the relationships of Andromache and Hector compared to those of Helen and Paris, see Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 25–26.

<sup>59</sup> Felson and Slatkin, 'Gender and Homeric Epic', 92.

<sup>60</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI. 405–495.

<sup>61</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI. 431–440.

<sup>62</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI. 400.

<sup>63</sup> This realization becomes clearer when she realizes that Hector is dead. Homer, *Iliad*, XXII.475–515.

<sup>64</sup> Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 25.

also underscores the prevailing ideals of womanhood during that era, where motherhood and the management of the household were viewed as fundamental characteristics of the ideal woman.

The scenes featuring Andromache reveal how the lives of women in the *Iliad* are profoundly influenced by the fates of their families, especially through their relationships with their husbands. This is particularly evident in Andromache's expressions, as her emotional bonds are intrinsically tied to Hector<sup>65</sup>. For her, Hector encompasses the roles of father, mother, brother, and friend; he is her everything.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, Andromache is acutely aware of the implications for herself and their child should Hector fall in battle, which compels her to voice her concerns in an effort to protect him. Her plea highlights the devastating impact that the loss of a husband can have on a family. Andromache does not want Hector to go to battle because his death would symbolize the end of her own existence.<sup>67</sup> Yet, her appeal transcends mere emotion—she also argues that it would be more advantageous for him to help defend the fortress rather than engage in direct combat.<sup>68</sup> Her ability to articulate a military strategy is notable, reflecting that she is not only concerned for her own and Hector's safety but is also contemplating the future of Troy.

In the *Iliad*, Andromache is depicted as a deeply emotional, perceptive, and realistic character in her roles as both a wife and a mother. Her profound love for Hector and her instinct to protect their son emerge as some of the most powerful emotions in the epic. However, her desire to safeguard her family is not reciprocated by Hector.<sup>69</sup> The narrative makes clear that a man's success and heroic fame in battle are valued far more highly than a woman's concerns.<sup>70</sup> The dialogues between Andromache and

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<sup>65</sup> Felson and Slatkin, 'Gender and Homeric Epic', 98.

<sup>66</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.410–431.

<sup>67</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.410–415.

<sup>68</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.430–440.

<sup>69</sup> However, he is aware of how war harms women and children. Kathy L. Gaca, 'Reinterpreting the Homeric Simile of 'Iliad' 16.7–11: The Girl and Her Mother in Ancient Greek Warfare', *The American Journal of Philology* 129, 2 (Summer 2008): 149. Christian Werner, 'Wives, Widows and Children: War Victims in Iliad Book II', *L'Antiquité Classique* 77 (2008): 13.

<sup>70</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.440–445, 475–480.

Hector illuminate the societal roles and expectations for men and women. Hector's response to Andromache's fears exemplifies this division: he insists that a woman's responsibilities lie in managing the household and attending to her servants, while war is solely the domain of men.<sup>71</sup> This theme is further emphasized by the scene in which Hector is killed in battle, with Andromache portrayed as completely unaware of his fate, engaged in weaving at home and preparing bathwater for her husband's return<sup>72</sup>. This imagery reinforces the rigid division of roles and highlights a woman's place within the domestic sphere. Thus, even though Hector's death will dramatically impact her future, it is deemed inappropriate for Andromache to occupy her mind with matters of war.<sup>73</sup>

After Hector's death, Andromache endures profound pain from the loss of her husband, a fate she had foreseen. For a married woman, losing the person to whom she is completely devoted results in considerable upheaval in her life. She is also acutely aware of what it means for her son to grow up without a father. This awareness is evident in her reaction when she sees Hector's lifeless body being dragged by Achilles.<sup>74</sup> When Hector's body is later returned by Priam, Andromache's grief is depicted once more. In this moment, her lament poignantly reflects the struggles of women.<sup>75</sup> Through the emotionally charged moments crafted by Homer, Andromache emerges as a powerful voice for women's sorrow, bringing their suffering into the public sphere.<sup>76</sup> This portrayal underscores the significant roles assigned to women in the literary context of that era, possibly reflecting

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<sup>71</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.490–495. In Hector's response, the prevalence of scenes of weaving in the Homeric epics is indicative of the traditional roles of women. Jane McIntosh Snyder, 'The Web of Song: Weaving Imagery in Homer and the Lyric Poets', *The Classical Journal* 76, 3 (Feb.–Mar.1981): 193.

<sup>72</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXII.440–445.

<sup>73</sup> Farron suggests that Homer highlights the intensity of women's emotions to illustrate that men often disregard those feelings. In this context, it is expected that women's proposals for war, like their other interactions with men, are not taken seriously. Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 22 ff.

<sup>74</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXII.475–515.

<sup>75</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXIV.725–745.

<sup>76</sup> This is the only type of public speaking that is recognized as open to women. Maria C. Pantelia, 'Helen and the Last Song for Hector', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974–2014) 132, 1/2 (Autumn 2002): 26.



their own circumstances.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, Andromache is one of the true victims of war.<sup>78</sup> She had foreseen the devastating consequences for herself and her son if her husband died in battle; yet, she could not intervene in the unfolding events or determine her own fate. She bears the cost of a war waged by men. Through her character, Homer exposes the destructiveness of war and the tragedies faced by women. Andromache's lament powerfully conveys that Hector's death signifies not only the destruction of the city but also the enslavement of its women and children.<sup>79</sup> Ultimately, the story of Andromache and Hector's family is significant not only for illustrating the distinctions between male and female roles throughout the epic's narrative but also for reflecting the parent-child relationships within the family.<sup>80</sup>

In the epic, Hecabe is portrayed as the wife of Priam, the king of Troy, and the mother of Hector, Paris, and several other children. She stands as a symbolically significant female figure, akin to Helen and Andromache. Hecabe is primarily characterized as a wife, mother, and queen, which is crucial for understanding the roles assigned to women in the *Iliad*. As the esteemed wife of Priam, she also serves as queen of Troy. This role is often represented through her silence, which is intricately linked to her duties as a wife. Throughout the *Iliad*, Hecabe is not depicted as someone who directly influences Priam's decisions; rather, she offers emotional support.

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<sup>77</sup> In Andromache's lament, her profound grief for Hector transforms into an expression of her own suffering. Marilyn B. Skinner, 'Briseis, the Trojan Women, and Erinna', *The Classical World* 75, 5 (May-Jun. 1982): 266. Homer highlights that the women who are meant to be given to Achilles and Briseis weep when they see Patroclus's dead body, but their tears are not genuinely for him. Their sorrow stems from their own situation. Homer, *Iliad*, XIX.300–305.

<sup>78</sup> Rebecca Muich, 'Focalization and Embedded Speech in Andromache's Iliadic Laments', *Illinois Classical Studies* 35–36 (2010–2011): 21. At the same time, her character represents the suffering of all women affected by the war. Charles Segal, 'Andromache's Anagnorisis: Formulaic Artistry in Iliad 22.437–476', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 75 (1971): 55.

<sup>79</sup> Casey Dué, 'Learning Lessons from the Trojan War: Briseis and the Theme of Force', *College Literature* 34, 2: Reading Homer in the 21st Century (Spring 2007): 234.

<sup>80</sup> Felson and Slatkin argue that in the case of Hector and Andromache, the destruction of their family is central to the poem, and its powerful impact carries over into the *Odyssey*. Felson and Slatkin, 'Gender and Homeric Epic', 99–100.

Her protective instincts come to the forefront when Priam sets out to retrieve Hector's body from Achilles' tent.<sup>81</sup> In this moment, she is shown not only as a queen but also as a concerned wife trying to keep the family intact. Yet, Priam remains indifferent to her efforts.

Hecabe, especially in her role as Hector's mother, embodies profound emotional strength. Throughout the ongoing war, her dialogues with Hector reveal her genuine attempts to care for him.<sup>82</sup> However, it becomes increasingly clear that she cannot change his mind.<sup>83</sup> As she seeks to dissuade Hector from confronting Achilles, she portrays the dual nature of a loving yet desperate mother.<sup>84</sup> In this critical moment, Hecabe's maternal instinct drives her to protect her son from the threat of death. She represents the essence of maternal love and the instinct to shield loved ones from the brutal realities of war. For her, war signifies not only the destruction of a nation but also the heartbreak endured by mothers. Nevertheless, Hector places his honour and heroic duty above his mother's love, just as he does with his wife's emotions.<sup>85</sup> This scenario further illustrates how women's feelings often go unnoticed in a male-centric world.

Hecabe assumes the role of the grieving mother following Hector's death. In the epic, women often find themselves relegated to the role of mourners, lamenting their losses. In her initial lament, Hecabe reflects on her misfortune, emphasizing her son's role as a protector of the Trojans and his esteemed place among them.<sup>86</sup> Her sorrow when Hector's body is brought back to Troy is particularly poignant.<sup>87</sup> In this moment, her words reveal both her profound inner anguish and her acceptance of her son's heroic yet tragic fate. This highlights the helplessness that women experience in the face of decisions made by men within the family. With Hector's demise, Hecabe's future grows increasingly grim. The loss of an important figure who not only safeguarded her lineage but also protected

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<sup>81</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXIV.200–215.

<sup>82</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.250–265.

<sup>83</sup> Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 26.

<sup>84</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXII.80–90.

<sup>85</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.440–445, XXII.90–130.

<sup>86</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXII.430–435.

<sup>87</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XXIV.748–760.

the city leaves her vulnerable. As reiterated earlier, a woman deprived of a man's protection is often left to confront a future filled with suffering. The emotional pleas of women attempting to avert this fate were frequently disregarded by men. Ultimately, Hecabe's personal sorrow serves as a symbolic portent of Troy's impending downfall.

The *Iliad* features a number of notable female characters, including Helen, Andromache, and Hecaba, who are prominent in their roles as wives. Additionally, the poem portrays female characters who have been captured by war, offering a poignant perspective on the impact of conflict on women. Among these women is Briseis, who, like Helen and Andromache, is granted a voice in the epic.<sup>88</sup> She distinguishes herself from other captive female characters by articulating her emotions at pivotal moments.<sup>89</sup> However, despite her capacity for emotional expression, Briseis remains a minor character in comparison to others. Nevertheless, she plays a vital narrative role, particularly in the exploration of themes such as familial loss and love. Homer portrays Briseis not merely as a spoil of war, but as a woman who has endured profound suffering—a wife mourning the loss of her husband. This depiction enhances her symbolic significance in relation to family.

Briseis is initially characterized as a prize awarded to Achilles.<sup>90</sup> In the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon regarding her possession, Briseis' emotions remain largely disregarded, as they hold little significance for the male figures involved.<sup>91</sup> However, her background is deeply tragic; she endured the loss of her family and husband at the hands of Achilles and subsequently became a war captive.<sup>92</sup> This narrative transforms her from a mere object into a powerful symbol of the devastation inflicted by war. Briseis's sorrow during Patroclus's funeral, as she contemplates her own personal losses, adds depth and complexity to her character.<sup>93</sup> This lamentation underscores important dimensions of women's experiences in

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<sup>88</sup> Felson and Slatkin, 'Gender and Homeric Epic', 96–97.

<sup>89</sup> Rukiye Öztürk and Ayşe Yakut, 'Romalı Duygusal Bir Aşk *Elegeia*'sı *Puella*'sı Olarak Homeros'un Tutsak Kadın Kahramanı Briseis', *Archivum Anatolicum* 17/2 (2023): 376.

<sup>90</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, I.180–185, IX.105–115, 130–135, 270–275, 335–345.

<sup>91</sup> Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 29–30.

<sup>92</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XIX.290–295.

<sup>93</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XIX.285–300.

wartime. A woman who loses her husband and family becomes exposed and vulnerable, often relegated to the status of a war captive. This situation emphasizes how Patroclus served as a vital source of emotional support and security for her. The death of Patroclus, however, dismantles her temporary family structure yet again. In essence, Briseis exemplifies a woman's resilience in the face of adversity, as she strives to maintain her will to live and her desire for connection, all while grappling with the profound longing for family. In this context, the presence of a spouse and family emerges as crucial to a woman's ability to persevere. Like many female characters depicted in the *Iliad*, Briseis bears the heavy burden of war. However, her narrative is particularly poignant, illustrating the experience of a woman who is forcibly separated from her family, only to forge new bonds that are ultimately threatened by further loss. Briseis' story serves to illuminate the ways in which war imposes suffering upon women by severing familial ties and how the relationships formed in an effort to survive are perpetually at risk amid conflict. Despite these challenges, her resilience allows her to remain one of the most significant and impactful female figures in the *Iliad*.

The final female character to be examined is Chryseis, a young woman awarded to Agamemnon as a spoil of war at the outset of the *Iliad*. Her father serves as a priest of Apollo. When he arrives to reclaim his daughter, Agamemnon humiliates him and sends him away<sup>94</sup>, provoking Apollo to unleash a plague upon the Achaeans.<sup>95</sup> When the return of Chryseis becomes inevitable, Agamemnon seeks to compensate by seizing Achilles' prize, Briseis, which initiates the significant conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles.<sup>96</sup>

Agamemnon's remarks regarding Chryseis clearly reflect his view of her as an object.<sup>97</sup> While he professes to love her, this affection resembles a desire for possession rather than a true emotional bond. This perspective illustrates the ancient Greek understanding of women, who were frequently regarded as property associated with a family's honour, assessed not by emotional connections but by a sense of ownership. Agamemnon's

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<sup>94</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, I.25–35.

<sup>95</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, I.45–54, 95–100.

<sup>96</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, I.175–185.

<sup>97</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, I.105–120.

statements are part of a narrative that highlights the male-centred family structure of the time, wherein women could be seen as spoils of war. Like inanimate loot, they were subject to distribution and exchange. Family relationships could evolve into a system of male ownership over women. Even a respectable wife, such as Agamemnon's spouse Clytemnestra, is placed below the status of war trophies. This situation underscores how marriage functioned to bind women to men and diminish their autonomy. Women were viewed as embodiments of men's honour and property, and even married women could lose value, revealing a family structure designed to protect men's rights of ownership.

Chryseis, in contrast to the other four prominent women in the *Iliad*, does not openly share her emotions; however, she enhances our understanding of women's roles within marriage and family throughout the epic. Agamemnon's reluctance to part with Chryseis, along with his preference for her over Clytemnestra, emphasizes the precarious nature of marital and familial bonds. This juxtaposition raises important questions about infidelity and the complex relationship between concubines and wives.<sup>98</sup>

### III. Conclusion

The *Iliad* is an epic that both reflects and dramatizes the role of women in ancient Greek families. While female characters may appear symbolically strong in certain instances, their actual power within the family is limited. A closer examination of five female representations in Homer's *Iliad* reveals that these women occupy various positions in their familial relationships and in their interactions with the men who influence their lives. However, this diversity should not be interpreted as Homer having different approaches toward them; rather, his perspective on each female character—regardless of their differing family dynamics or the impact of war—is largely consistent. Whether they are mothers, wives, or concubines, Homer highlights the profound emotions that women possess, yet emphasizes the low regard with which these emotions are held by

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<sup>98</sup> Felson and Slatkin, 'Gender and Homeric Epic', 94. For a similar example, see Homer, *Iliad*, IX.450.

men.<sup>99</sup> None of these women possess the right to influence the decisions made by the men in their lives. Even those endowed with foresight and the ability to predict outcomes are often overlooked in a male-dominated society. Helen, often seen as the catalyst for the unfolding events, illustrates this point well; she lacks the power to alter the course of outcomes, functioning primarily as a catalyst within the narrative. Her actions are heavily influenced by the goddess Aphrodite<sup>100</sup>, demonstrating that even divine support cannot grant her agency in a patriarchal world. Moreover, her sense of regret regarding her choices does not prevent the tragic events that lead to the downfall of families.

Helen's limited influence over decisions concerning her family's future is mirrored in the portrayals of Andromache and Hecabe. Unlike Helen, who embodies a complex and often indecisive role as a wife, these two female characters are depicted as more firmly connected to their husbands. Their intense emotional bonds are also evident in their roles as mothers, driven by a powerful instinct to protect their families and children. Despite their passionate expressions of emotion, however, they are frequently dismissed and not taken seriously. These women, deeply aware of their own tragedies, are compelled to stay uninvolved in the public affairs dominated by men, highlighting their constrained positions within the family, particularly in the context of war. The sense of helplessness faced by these married and free women parallels the experiences of those who have become the spoils of war.

In the *Iliad*, women's portrayals, represented by characters such as Helen, Andromache, Hecabe, Briseis, and Chryseis, are predominantly confined to the domestic sphere, shaped by societal expectations of family structure. Their responsibilities revolve around household tasks and the preservation of family continuity as mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, or slaves to heroic men. Decision-making regarding the future of the family is firmly in the hands of men. While the male characters engage with public matters, women's experiences are largely shaped by domestic issues, the grief of loss, and their struggles to cope with such losses. This

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<sup>99</sup> Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 15.

<sup>100</sup> For different comments about this, see Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 18 and n. 14.

representation highlights the subordinate status of women in relation to men. Additionally, the recurring emphasis on their need for protection by men implies that they are Incapable of existing Independently.<sup>101</sup> Despite these limitations, women's deep emotions about their fractured families—lost siblings, children, and husbands—infuse the narrative with significant human depth. However, as Farron notes, their roles primarily serve to enhance the overall appeal of the story.<sup>102</sup>

Finally, it is crucial to recognize that the depiction of women within the household in the *Iliad*—despite being a narrative that draws from various periods between the 13th and 8th centuries BC—holds significance due to its resemblance to the portrayal of women in the *oikos* of later Ancient Greek society. In this context, the *Iliad* serves as an early literary source that provides valuable insights into the social roles prevalent in Ancient Greece.

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<sup>101</sup> Frederick G. Naerebout, 'Male-Female Relationships in the Homeric Epics', in *Sexual Asymmetry Studies In Ancient Society*, ed. Josine Blok and Peter Mason (Amsterdam, 1987), 124.

<sup>102</sup> Farron, 'The Portrayal of Women in the *Iliad*', 30–31.

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## Chapter Three

# Women and the *Oikos* in Classical Athens: Gender, Labour, and Legal Constraints

Mert HASILCIOĞLU\*

### I. Introduction

In ancient Greek society, the social status of women was not defined through the notion of individual civic identity, but rather through their functions related to the continuation of lineage, the preservation of property, and the sustainability of household order. This functional definition led to the exclusion of women from the public sphere, their physical confinement to the domestic space, and their ideological containment within the framework of the *oikos* (household). Lawgivers and intellectuals reduced women to values such as loyalty, fertility, and modesty, thereby excluding them from the *polis* (city-state), the domain of citizenship. Although women were deprived of political representation and civic rights in this system, they were nonetheless positioned as central agents in the processes of production, care, and transmission that ensured the continuity of the *oikos*. However, this position was rendered invisible and considered secondary due to the restriction of their activities to the household and their placement under legal guardianship. The labour of women within the domestic sphere was not only associated with biological reproduction but was also closely linked to the maintenance of cultural continuity.

This chapter aims to examine the position of women within the family structure in Classical Athens, along with the ideological, legal, and

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economic foundations that underpinned this position. The social order shaped around the concept of the *oikos* will be analysed in a multilayered manner, focusing on women's everyday practices, their roles in production processes, and their relationship to property. In addition, it will explore how the exclusion of women from the public sphere was legitimized both intellectually and culturally through the regulatory frameworks of lawmakers as well as the representations offered by philosophers and tragedians. In doing so, this section seeks to reveal the invisible labour of Athenian women, their limited autonomy, and their simultaneously pivotal yet subordinate role within the interconnected dynamics of family and state.

## **II. Household and the Social Position of Women**

In Athenian society, the family structure was regarded not merely as a network of kinship ties but also as the fundamental unit of social organization. As Aristotle notes in his work *Politics*, the *oikos* functioned as the smallest structural unit of the *polis*, the centre of political organization, and this structure was founded upon hierarchical relationships.<sup>1</sup> The primary responsibilities of the *oikos* included raising male children to become citizens who would fulfil military service, participate in political life, and meet tax obligations; preparing female children to ensure lineage continuity and manage the household economy; safeguarding the inheritance of property within the family; and maintaining a self-sufficient economic system through domestic production. In return, the *polis* was tasked with protecting the family from external threats and providing legal frameworks that guaranteed the continuity of property.<sup>2</sup> In this way, a symbiotic relationship was established between family and state, structured around reciprocal obligations and designed to ensure demographic continuity, military mobilization, and social stability.

This relationship between the *oikos* and the *polis* was legitimized not only through social practices but also through the legal codes and cultural norms of the time. One of the earliest ideological formulations of this framework can be found in the laws of Solon, the Athenian lawgiver. As

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Politica*, 1252a–1253b.

<sup>2</sup> Sue Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece* (Harvard University Press, 1995), 66.

recounted by Plutarch, Solon's regulations concerning women were marked by internal contradictions yet consistently prioritized male interests.<sup>3</sup> For example, while the law permitted the killing of an adulterous male, a man who raped a free woman was merely subjected to a monetary fine, revealing a conception of justice fundamentally shaped by gender.<sup>4</sup> If the woman's consent was given, the penalty could be reduced even further, and in some cases, the loss of virginity was treated as a form of property damage, making it legally permissible for a daughter to be "sold" by her family. This legal logic illustrates how female virginity was not simply an individual trait but was reified as a value belonging to the family and, by extension, to the broader community.

The legislation of Solon, who had institutionalized the regulation of prostitution by placing sex workers under state control and establishing what is considered the first state-sanctioned brothel in the Greek world,<sup>5</sup> drew a clear distinction between women who openly offered themselves to fulfil male sexual needs (*pornai* and *hetairai*) and those who were "protected" for the purposes of marriage and legitimate procreation.<sup>6</sup> This legal and social division suggests that virginity was regarded as essential for women destined to assume the role of mother, as the internal stability of the *oikos* and the legitimacy of offspring depended on the preservation of a woman's sexual exclusivity. Through this framework, the female body became subject to regulation at both moral and economic levels.

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<sup>3</sup> Plutarch, *Solon*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> At the core of this distinction lies the perception of rape as merely a physical violation, whereas adultery was seen as damaging the woman's emotional loyalty to her husband and threatening the legitimacy of the lineage, see Ruby Blondell et al., eds., *Women on the Edge: Four Plays by Euripides* (London: Routledge, 1999), 52. On the other hand, sexual assaults against enslaved women were typically not regarded as violations of individual rights, but rather assessed in terms of the harm inflicted upon the slave's owner. As a result, punitive measures likely varied depending on the victim's legal status and the extent to which the assault disrupted the order of the *oikos*.

<sup>5</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, XIII.596d; Mehmet Ali Kaya and Kevser Taşdöner, 'İlkçağda Kadın: Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği Bakımından Hellenistik Çağ Öncesi İlkçağ Tarihine Genel Bakış', *Türkbilim* 4, no. 21 (2017): 14.

<sup>6</sup> Nuran Şahin, *Antik Dönemde Anadolu'da Kadın* (Ege Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2013), 33–41; Mehmet Ali Kaya, *İlkçağ Tarihi ve Uygarlığı* (İstanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2021), 289.

Expectations of chastity and modesty served not only familial interests but also the broader goal of maintaining civic order. Thus, women's sexuality was inscribed within a normative system designed to uphold the cohesion and continuity of the *polis*, effectively subordinating female autonomy to the ideological imperatives of state and household.

The restriction of women's social position in Classical Athens was reinforced not only by legal frameworks but also by the ideas, discourses, and literary works of the period's intellectuals. A majority of authoritative thinkers in the Classical Greek world articulated views that normalized and legitimized the exclusion of women from the public sphere.<sup>7</sup> This marginalization was often justified through appeals to divine will, natural order, or biological difference, presenting gender inequality as a fixed and inescapable component of the cosmic and social structure.<sup>8</sup> For instance, Xenophon argued that women were created for domestic responsibilities, while men were suited for engagement with the outside world and public affairs.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, he grounded the division of labour between genders in what he claimed to be divine design. Such perspectives found increasing expression in 5th-century Athens, where women were progressively confined to the home and systematically denied access to education. As a result, Athenian men, bored with the intellectually unengaged lives of secluded wives, increasingly sought companionship and intellectual stimulation from *hetairai* (educated courtesans) who were permitted to

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<sup>7</sup> On the justification of gender difference in ancient Greek philosophy through a system of binary oppositions, see Sabina Lovibond, 'An Ancient Theory of Gender: Plato and the Pythagorean Table', in *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night*, ed. Léonie J. Archer, Susan Fischler, and Maria Wyke (London, 1994), 88–101. On the naturalization of the female body and gender difference in ancient medicine, see Helen King, 'Producing Woman: Hippocratic Gynaecology', in *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night*, ed. Léonie J. Archer, Susan Fischler, and Maria Wyke (London, 1994), 102–14.

<sup>8</sup> Kaya and Taşdöner, 'İlkçağda Kadın', 13–15.

<sup>9</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, VII.22–25. According to him, the god created women for domestic affairs and men for external ones; therefore, women were endowed with greater compassion toward children and greater fear to safeguard household provisions, while men were given more courage to confront external threats. Arguing that women possess limited physical endurance and are thus naturally confined to the household, Xenophon claims that women are, by nature, more inclined toward protection, obedience, and withdrawal.

operate beyond the rigid boundaries imposed on citizen women.<sup>10</sup> Aristotle regarded men and women as inherently different beings, each endowed with distinct natural functions. He conceptualized man as the one who rules and woman as the one who is ruled, embedding gender hierarchy within the fabric of nature itself.<sup>11</sup> In his account of reproduction, he portrayed the woman as a passive contributor to the creation of a child, while the man provided the active generative principle. However, Aristotle also acknowledged that women possessed superior qualities in areas such as memory, child-rearing, and certain forms of learning.<sup>12</sup> Tragedians echoed these conceptions in literary form.<sup>13</sup> Sophocles famously asserted that “silence is the grace of woman,” thus confining women’s place in public discourse to muteness and passivity.<sup>14</sup> Euripides, by contrast, portrayed female characters as complex figures capable of inciting violence, deception, and social disruption, revealing anxieties about women’s latent power within a patriarchal order.<sup>15</sup> Aeschylus advanced this logic further by denying women any biological role in the creation of a child, reducing them to mere vessels for male seed.<sup>16</sup> Collectively, these views constructed a cultural imaginary that not only reinforced the ideological subordination of women but also mythologized their exclusion as natural and necessary.

In Homeric epics, aristocratic women, while subordinated to male authority, are occasionally depicted as figures to whom men turn for advice on political or familial matters. These women are portrayed as not being strictly secluded; within certain boundaries, they could appear in public settings, be present during gatherings involving male guests, and even take part (albeit symbolically) in matters of social importance such as war.<sup>17</sup> This

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<sup>10</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, III.11; Marilyn Katz, ‘Ideology and “The Status of Women” in Ancient Greece’, *History and Theory* 31, no. 4 (1992): 73.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Politica*, 1254b; Şahin, *Antik Dönemde Anadolu’da Kadın*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 2.1.732a3–10; *Politica*, 1337a.

<sup>13</sup> Kaya and Taşdöner, ‘İlkçağda Kadın’, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Sophocles, *Ajax*, 293.

<sup>15</sup> Blondell et al., *Women on the Edge*, 80–82.

<sup>16</sup> Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 658–661.

<sup>17</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, VI.264, VII.24, VIII.100; *Odyssey*, XXI.350–353; Mehmet Ali Kaya, *Ege ve Eski Yunan Tarihi – I* (İstanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2023), 193–96; Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (Schocken, 1995), 20–23, 25–30; Blondell et al., *Women on the Edge*, 49.

relative freedom, however, became significantly curtailed in 6th-century Athens with the democratic reforms. Athenian democracy, considered the most influential model of democratic governance in the ancient world, was based on the sovereignty of the *demos*, referring exclusively to male citizens. Women, along with children, slaves, and foreigners, were excluded from this political framework.<sup>18</sup> In this respect, Athens presents a striking example of a “democracy without women,” a system in which representation was defined through the male body and voice, and in which women’s political presence was structurally excluded.<sup>19</sup> What had once been a degree of aristocratic openness was replaced by a civic structure that confined women to the domestic sphere and reinforced their legal and ideological marginalization. It should be noted, however, that since women had no political rights prior to the reforms of Solon or Cleisthenes, these measures did not alter their status in this regard.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, men were selected for high public offices based on their military contributions, as citizenship during this period was directly defined through the obligation to serve in war, which played a central role in shaping the social order.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, the democratization process institutionalized not only new forms of political participation but also a gender ideology in which the roles deemed appropriate for men and women became increasingly distinct and rigid. As aristocratic family-based power was replaced by a citizenship-based political structure, women’s influence was pushed back into the domestic sphere, and their public visibility progressively diminished. One early example of this transformation can be seen in Solon’s legislation restricting the elaborate funeral rites organized by aristocratic families and the behaviour of professional female mourners.<sup>22</sup> As the divide between *polis* and *oikos* became more sharply defined in democratic Athens, men were directed toward military and political domains, while women were confined

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<sup>18</sup> Kaya, *Ege ve Eski Yunan Tarihi – I*, 387.

<sup>19</sup> Kaya and Taşdöner, ‘İlkçağda Kadın’, 16.

<sup>20</sup> On the democratization process in Athens, see Kaya, *Ege ve Eski Yunan Tarihi – I*, 397ff; Thomas N. Mitchell, *Democracy’s Beginning: The Athenian Story* (Yale University Press, 2015), 25–38.

<sup>21</sup> Kaya, *Ege ve Eski Yunan Tarihi – I*, 401.

<sup>22</sup> Cicero, *De legibus*, 2.59; Plutarch, *Solon*, 21.5–7; Josine H. Blok, ‘Solon’s Funerary Laws: Questions of Authenticity and Function’, in *Solon of Athens*, ed. Josine H. Blok and André Lardinois (Brill, 2006), 197–99.

to the household, increasingly associated with values such as obedience, silence, and modesty.

Far from denoting simply a nuclear family, the concept of *oikos* encompassed a more expansive and multi-dimensional structure. It included not only the immediate kin but also extended relatives residing under the same roof, enslaved individuals, productive tools, property, and the physical spaces in which economic activities were conducted.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, the *oikos* functioned both as an economic unit where material production took place and as a social institution in which roles, values, and lineage continuity were maintained. The legal and cultural identity of individuals was largely constructed through their affiliation with a particular *oikos*, which defined their social status, obligations, and entitlements within the community. This structural formation rested on an organized division of labour along the axes of age, gender, and social status. Male members of a household, particularly the one holding the position of *kyrios* (the legal guardian and patriarch) bore responsibility for managing the external relations of *oikos* and for representing it in the civic realm. Women, by contrast, were assigned to the domestic sphere, which delineated their scope of action and shaped their societal roles. Their expected duties included spinning wool, weaving textiles, organizing the daily functioning of the household, overseeing enslaved labourers, and administering the provision of basic domestic needs.<sup>24</sup> The everyday responsibilities of women, ranging from household maintenance and childrearing to elder care and the facilitation of domestic religious observances, formed the backbone of household sustainability. Although these activities were rarely acknowledged in public discourse or official

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<sup>23</sup> J. Roy, ““Polis” and “Oikos” in Classical Athens’, *Greece & Rome* 46, no. 1 (1999): 1–18.

<sup>24</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 9.14–15; Aristotle, *Politica*, 1252b 10–12, 1323a; Laura K. McClure, *Women in Classical Antiquity: From Birth to Death* (John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 38–39. Ancient literary texts that contain detailed depictions of women’s social roles should be interpreted not as direct documentation of historical realities, but rather as fictional narratives reflecting cultural norms, anxieties, or idealizations; see Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 94–97; Lisa C. Nevett, *House and Society in the Ancient Greek World* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 14.



records, they were nonetheless indispensable to the inner workings and continued viability of the *oikos*.

In Athenian society, the education of children was not overseen by the state as it was in Sparta, but was instead directly controlled by the family, specifically by the *oikos* and the male head of the household, the *kyrios*.<sup>25</sup> From an early age, children within the *oikos* were socialized into roles that were clearly delineated along gender lines. Boys were educated and prepared for the civic responsibilities they were expected to assume as adult male citizens, including participation in political life and the management of familial property. Girls, by contrast, were guided from a young age toward mastering domestic skills, internalizing the roles of wife and mother, and learning the ritual practices they would later be expected to uphold and transmit.<sup>26</sup> This process functioned not only as a form of practical upbringing but also as a mechanism of social reproduction, through which children learned their designated place within the household and internalized the normative expectations of their society.

At the core of the hierarchical structure underpinning the *oikos* stood the system of male guardianship known as the *kyrios* system. The term *kyrios*, derived from a Greek adjective meaning “one who has authority” or “one who exercises control,” evolved into a legal designation denoting a man who served as the legal guardian of a woman.<sup>27</sup> Within this framework, a woman’s life was, from birth onward, placed under the legal and practical supervision of a male figure, whether her father, brother, husband, or adult son.<sup>28</sup> Under this patriarchal legal regime, women were effectively denied autonomous legal identity. They could not own property independently, enter into commercial agreements, or represent themselves as plaintiffs or defendants in legal proceedings. Any formal transaction or legal act

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<sup>25</sup> Kaya, *Ege ve Eski Yunan Tarihi – I*, 374–79.

<sup>26</sup> Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 131–33; McClure, *Women in Classical Antiquity*, 39–42.

<sup>27</sup> Naomi T. Campa, ‘Kurios, Kuria and the Status of Athenian Women’, *Classical Journal* 114, no. 3 (2018): 258–62.

<sup>28</sup> Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, 66–67, 114; Bella Vivante, ‘Women in Ancient Greece’, in *Women’s Roles in Ancient Civilizations: A Reference Guide*, ed. Bella Vivante (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), 241.

involving a woman required either the explicit consent or the direct involvement of her *kyrios* in order to be deemed valid.<sup>29</sup>

The *kyrios* system, prevalent not only in Athens but across many Greek city-states, functioned as both a legal construct that denied women recognition as individual legal persons and as an ideological apparatus that curtailed their engagement with the broader social sphere.<sup>30</sup> Even in Athens, a city-state often celebrated for its democratic institutions, women were not granted citizenship rights, not even in a nominal or symbolic capacity.<sup>31</sup> Within this framework, a woman's existence in the civic realm was mediated exclusively through her male relatives. Her participation in the continuity of the family line and her contributions to household production were construed as her primary justifications for societal inclusion. Consequently, a woman's social standing was determined not on the basis of her individuality but through her membership in, and subordination to, a familial structure.<sup>32</sup> This reality is mirrored in the documentary practices of the time: in both literary texts and legal documents, women were typically not referred to by their own names but rather identified in relation to their *kyrios*, thereby reinforcing their derivative status within the written cultural record.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, this system was not universally applied in an

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<sup>29</sup> David M. Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 4–8, 17–18, 40, 54; Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, 117–18.

<sup>30</sup> Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, 114, 119; Campa, 'Kurios, Kuria and the Status of Athenian Women', 262.

<sup>31</sup> David M. Pritchard, 'The Position of Attic Women in Democratic Athens', *Greece & Rome* 61, no. 2 (2014): 174–93.

<sup>32</sup> Athenian society constructed female public identity in such a way that it was closed to both praise and blame. In the Homeric era, women could attain *kleos* (fame, renown) by acting in accordance with gendered expectations, but under Athenian democracy, a woman's respectability was measured by the absence of her name in public discourse. According to Thucydides (2.45), Pericles, after glorifying the men who died in war, addressed the women by stating, "... greatest will be hers who is least talked of among the men whether for good or for bad", thus equating female *kleos* with silence. This reveals a societal model in which the woman was not considered an autonomous individual but was defined solely through her affiliation with a male figure, see Blondell et al., *Women on the Edge*, 50–51.

<sup>33</sup> Demosthenes, 27.4–5, 46–50; Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women*, 53–54. In Demosthenes' speeches, it is implied that the names of "respectable" women

absolute or immutable manner. In certain legal speeches and court records, one encounters instances where women appear to exercise a degree of control over movable or immovable property, often acquired through inheritance or outside the confines of formal marriage arrangements.<sup>34</sup> In these cases, women occasionally assert limited rights of ownership, though such situations were generally exceptions to the norm. Rather than representing legally codified entitlements, these moments of autonomy typically arose out of practical necessity or as a result of the negligence or absence of appropriate male guardians.<sup>35</sup> Such forms of restricted agency could be observed, for instance, when the guardianship system failed to function effectively, or when a woman, by virtue of old age or widowhood, emerged as the *de facto* head of her household in the absence of a dominant male figure.

The practical embodiment of the *kyrios* system within the household was most vividly expressed through the institution of the *epikleros*. This legal designation applied to a daughter whose father had died without leaving a male heir and who thus stood to inherit the family estate. However, rather than conferring full ownership, the role of the *epikleros* was primarily that of a conduit: she was required (often by legal compulsion) to marry her closest male relative, thereby ensuring that the property remained within the paternal lineage.<sup>36</sup> In this framework, the woman was not the proprietor of the inheritance but rather its vessel, a temporary

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should not appear in public documents, a reflection of prevailing social norms that sought to limit women's visibility in the public sphere. Women mentioned by their own names instead of their *kyrios*' were most likely *hetairai* or *metoikoi*, see John Gould, 'Law, Custom and Myth: Aspects of the Social Position of Women in Classical Athens', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 100 (January 1980): 45–46; Jakub Filonik, 'Athenian Impiety Trials: A Reappraisal', *Dike – Journal of the History of Greek and Hellenistic Law* 16 (2013): 69.

<sup>34</sup> Isaeus 6.30, 10.23; Demosthenes, 27.46–47; Campa, 'Kurios, Kuria and the Status of Athenian Women', 263–65.

<sup>35</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 3.11.4; Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women*, 4; Lin Foxhall, 'Household, Gender and Property in Classical Athens', *The Classical Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (January 1989): 33–34.

<sup>36</sup> Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, 117–18; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 60–62; Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women*, 25–30; Cynthia B. Patterson, *The Family in Greek History* (Harvard University Press, 2001), 92–103.

custodian through whom the estate could be transmitted to a future male descendant. This intermediary role sharply curtailed a woman's rights not only in law but also in practice, reinforcing the idea that her proximity to property did not equate to actual authority over it. A comparable situation applied to unmarried women who remained in their father's house and were referred to as *patroiokoi*.<sup>37</sup> Despite their intimate association with the family estate, these women held no administrative power over its use or disposition. Marriage, rather than liberating such women from this legal dependency, merely transferred their subordination to another *kyrios*, their husband.

In Athenian society, marriage was not conceptualized primarily as a private union between two individuals, but rather as a foundational institutional mechanism serving multiple public and familial objectives.<sup>38</sup> Its primary functions included ensuring the continuation of the *oikos*, safeguarding and enhancing property holdings, maintaining social status, and reinforcing political alliances. Women, within this framework, were positioned less as autonomous agents and more as instrumental figures, facilitators in the transmission of lineage and property across generations. Although often cast in a passive role, women were nonetheless pivotal to the structural continuity of the household and its assets. Marital arrangements were rarely based on personal choice; instead, they were typically orchestrated by the parents (most commonly the father) of the prospective bride and groom. Both parties were expected to comply with these arrangements, which prioritized the collective interests of the family over the preferences of the individuals involved.<sup>39</sup> Particularly among elite families, strategic marriages such as first-cousin or avunculate (uncle-niece) unions were not only common but also encouraged. These arrangements aimed to prevent the fragmentation of familial estates, consolidate wealth within narrow kinship lines, and forge or reinforce intra-familial political networks. Marriage, therefore, functioned as a tool

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<sup>37</sup> Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women*, 44–47; Patterson, *The Family in Greek History*, 92–96; Ayşe Gül Akalın, 'Eskiçağda Grek Kadının Toplumsal Yaşantısı', *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 22, no. 33 (1 May 2003): 28–29.

<sup>38</sup> Cox, *Household Interests*, 188.

<sup>39</sup> McClure, *Women in Classical Antiquity*, 38; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 62–63.

of economic strategy and social engineering, one in which women played a central yet heavily regulated and symbolically objectified role.<sup>40</sup>

In Athens, it was considered essential not only for the preservation of lineage but also for the maintenance of a “pure” citizen body that a man’s wife possess full citizen status. Marriages to non-citizen women were viewed unfavourably by lawmakers, as they posed a risk to the integrity of both property transmission and civic identity. This stance reflects the dominance of an exclusionary, blood-based conception of citizenship in Athens.<sup>41</sup> Although in earlier periods prominent citizens such as Miltiades and Megacles had married foreign women and their children were recognized as citizens,<sup>42</sup> such practices became increasingly problematic as Athenian society moved toward a more democratized political structure. The case of Themistocles, whose mother was from Cardia and who faced exclusion from civic institutions such as the *gymnasion*, illustrates this shift. Moreover, Athenian comedians of the time often targeted politicians like Themistocles by slandering their mothers as either of barbarian origin or as prostitutes. These attacks reveal the strength of public sentiment regarding the importance of maternal lineage in defining legitimate citizenship.<sup>43</sup> Finally, in 451/450 BCE, a law introduced by Pericles abolished the right to citizenship for children whose mother and father were not both Athenian, thereby discouraging marriages between Athenian men and *metoikos* (resident alien) women and legally narrowing the boundaries of citizenship.<sup>44</sup> However, during periods of war, when the male population

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<sup>40</sup> Wesley E. Thompson, ‘The Marriage of First Cousins in Athenian Society’, *Phoenix* 21, no. 4 (1967): 273–82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1086216>; Robert J. Littman, ‘Kinship in Athens’, *Ancient Society* 10 (1979): 21–22.

<sup>41</sup> Rebecca Futo Kennedy, *Immigrant Women in Athens: Gender, Ethnicity, and Citizenship in the Classical City* (Routledge, 2014), 6.

<sup>42</sup> Herodotus, 6.39; Plutarch, *Cimon*, 4.1; Brian M. Lavelle, ‘Koisyra and Megakles, the Son of Hippokrates’, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 30, no. 4 (1989): 503–13; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 66–67.

<sup>43</sup> Plutarch, *Themistocles*, 1.1–2; Nepos, *Themistocles*, 1; Mehmet Ali Kaya, *Ege ve Eski Yunan Tarihi - II* (İstanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2022), 163; Peter Bicknell, ‘Themistokles’ Father and Mother’, *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 31, no. 2 (1982): 161–73.

<sup>44</sup> Plutarch, *Pericles*, 37.2–5; Aristotle, *Athenaion Politeia*, 26.4; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 65–68.

declined, this law was temporarily relaxed. Men were allowed to marry two women simultaneously, and children born to foreign mothers were once again granted citizenship. According to Diogenes Laertius, during this time it became legally permissible for a man to have children with two women, provided at least one of them was Athenian.<sup>45</sup> Prominent figures such as Callias, Socrates, and Euripides are reported to have engaged in bigamy, indicating that this temporary measure was also socially accepted to a degree. Nevertheless, despite these moments of flexibility, a lasting attitude of exclusion and suspicion toward women of non-citizen or foreign origin (whether from other Greek city-states or so-called barbarian populations) remained embedded in the Athenian social consciousness.

In Athenian society, girls were typically married off shortly after reaching puberty, with the average age of marriage around fourteen.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, men generally postponed marriage until their thirties, by which time they had achieved a degree of economic stability, completed their military obligations, and acquired the means to establish and support a household. This pronounced age disparity between spouses was not merely the result of demographic pragmatism or functional necessity; it also reflected a deeper socio-cultural logic aimed at controlling female sexuality and maximizing reproductive potential at an early stage. The expectation that girls enter marriage as virgins was a powerful normative imperative, closely tied to ideals of familial honour and paternal authority. Female chastity was not only a moral ideal but also a prerequisite for securing the legitimacy of offspring and the purity of patrilineal descent. Conversely, the social acceptance of delayed marriage for men aligned with prevailing gender norms that associated masculinity with public service, delayed domesticity, and broader freedom of movement. Additionally, this dynamic was reinforced by the relative scarcity of citizen women eligible for marriage, which made the early marital seclusion of girls both a social and reproductive strategy within the highly regulated structure of the *oikos*.

Through the institution of the *epikleros*, Athenian law imposed a legal obligation on heiress daughters to marry their closest male relative in cases

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<sup>45</sup> Diogenes Laertius, 2.26.

<sup>46</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 7.5–10; Plato, *Leges*, 785b; Aristotle, *Politica*, 1335a; Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, 7.1.3; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 64.

where a family lacked a male heir.<sup>47</sup> This regulation was designed to prevent the transfer of family property to an external *oikos* and to ensure the retention of assets within the paternal lineage. Although Plutarch derided the practice as absurd and irrational, he nonetheless acknowledged that the underlying logic of the law was not merely about maintaining genealogical continuity, but also about preserving the economic integrity and sustainability of the household unit. The system was structured to guarantee that property would not pass directly to a woman, but instead through her to a male descendant (typically her son) thus returning ownership to a male lineage. Even in cases where the *epikleros* was already married, the law could compel her to dissolve the existing union in order to marry the designated male relative.<sup>48</sup> This underscores the extent to which women's marital and reproductive autonomy was subordinated to the imperatives of inheritance preservation and patriarchal succession. The *epikleros* served not as a beneficiary in her own right, but as a legal conduit through which property could be securely redirected along patrilineal lines.

Although the dowry (*proix*) represented the woman's economic contribution to the marriage, it was not under her control.<sup>49</sup> Legally retained by the woman's natal family, the dowry was managed by the husband throughout the marriage, functioning primarily as a form of capital transfer between households and symbolizing the alliance of two *oikoi*.<sup>50</sup> Its reclamation, only permitted under specific circumstances such as divorce or widowhood, was not an expression of female property rights but a contractual obligation preserving inter-household ties.<sup>51</sup> The dowry served multiple regulatory functions. During marriage, it provided minimal material security for the woman and discouraged marital dissolution by imposing a potential financial loss on the husband. Upon dissolution, its

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<sup>47</sup> Plutarch, *Solon*, 20; Isaeus, 10.12; Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, 117–18; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 60–62; Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women*, 25–30; Patterson, *The Family in Greek History*, 92–103.

<sup>48</sup> Isaeus, 3.64.

<sup>49</sup> Gerhard Thür, 'Proix', in *Brill's New Pauly, Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Schneider Helmuth (Boston: Brill, 2007), 949–950.

<sup>50</sup> Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women*, 23–24, 61–70, 75–76.

<sup>51</sup> Isaeus, 3.35–36; Demosthenes, 59.52; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 63; Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, 115–16.

return offered the woman a measure of post-marital leverage, enabling her to remarry with economic resources and alleviating her natal family of renewed financial responsibility.<sup>52</sup> In all cases, the dowry reinforced the woman's role not as an autonomous economic actor, but as a conduit of familial wealth within a patriarchal system aimed at preserving property, lineage, and social stability.

In Athens, divorce was recognized as a legitimate means of restructuring the *oikos*, particularly when the continuity or functionality of the household was perceived to be at risk. Men enjoyed broad and unilateral rights in this regard; if a husband wished to dissolve the marriage, it was sufficient for him to expel his wife from the household, without the need for formal legal proceedings or official justification.<sup>53</sup> Although it was legally permissible for women to initiate divorce, the process was significantly more complex and constrained.<sup>54</sup> A woman seeking to end her marriage was required to submit a formal petition to the city's *archon* (magistrate), and this procedure was typically mediated by a male guardian, such as her father, brother, or adult son. During this application, the woman was required to submit a written account stating her reasons for leaving; notably, the husband's infidelity was not considered sufficient grounds for divorce, as male sexual freedom was culturally sanctioned, whereas physical abuse or mistreatment of the wife constituted valid justification.<sup>55</sup> The limits of female autonomy in such matters are vividly illustrated in historical anecdotes.<sup>56</sup> For example, when Hipparete attempted to divorce her husband Alcibiades by personally presenting her case to the *archon*, she was forcibly taken back by her husband before completing the process. Similarly, in the case of Onetor's sister, who wished to remain in her marriage, her brother nonetheless petitioned for divorce on her behalf, highlighting how women's legal capacity to act independently in marital matters was severely circumscribed.

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<sup>52</sup> Alick Robin Walsham Harrison, *The Law of Athens: Family and Property* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 52–60.

<sup>53</sup> Demosthenes, 59.51; Lysias, 14.1.28; Harrison, 39–42.

<sup>54</sup> Andocides, 4.14; Plutarch, *Alcibiades*, 8; Harrison, 42–44.

<sup>55</sup> Şahin, *Antik Dönemde Anadolu'da Kadın*, 75.

<sup>56</sup> Plutarch, *Alcibiades*, 8.2; Demosthenes, 30.1; Harrison, 40–41.



At the bottom of the household hierarchy were enslaved individuals, whose labour sustained the productive and service-oriented functions of the *oikos*.<sup>57</sup> Although they lived in close physical proximity to the family, often sharing domestic space with free members of the household, slaves were regarded as entirely separate in both legal status and social standing. Both female and male slaves were employed in a range of tasks, from household chores to activities conducted in the surrounding environment, and they played essential roles in ensuring the smooth operation and maintenance of the domestic order. Among these, certain enslaved women occupied a unique yet precarious position as *pallakai*, a legally recognized but subordinate form of concubinal wifehood.<sup>58</sup> Unlike legitimate wives (*gametai*), *pallakai* were typically purchased or self-surrendered women<sup>59</sup> whose legal status remained that of a slave, even as they became integral to the domestic and reproductive operations of the household. They could bear children for their *kyrios*, manage household affairs, and fulfil both sexual and managerial roles within the *oikos*. Despite being perceived emotionally or functionally as spouses, they could be sold, disciplined, ransomed at will, or even subjected to judicial torture (*basanos*). They didn't have legal protection for themselves or their children, who were classified as *nothoi*, meaning illegitimate and ineligible for inheritance. The example of *pallakai* shows that even those who were denied legal rights could hold essential roles within the household. Their situation reveals a deeper contradiction in Athenian society: the domestic system relied heavily on the labour and presence of women who had no formal status or protection. This suggests that legal exclusion did not mean social insignificance, but rather

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<sup>57</sup> Cheryl Anne Cox, *Household Interests: Property, Marriage Strategies, and Family Dynamics in Ancient Athens* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 190–94; Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*, 140–41; McClure, *Women in Classical Antiquity*, 38.

<sup>58</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, XIII.572a; Lysias, 1.31; Isaeus, 6.47; Demosthenes, 43.51; Morris Silver, *Slave-Wives, Single Women and 'Bastards' in the Ancient Greek World: Law and Economics Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2018), 1–11, 71–76; Şahin, *Antik Dönemde Anadolu'da Kadın*, 68–69.

<sup>59</sup> On the social and economic pressures that led some unmarried women to become *pallakai* or prostitutes, see Mark Golden, 'Demography and the Exposure of Girls at Athens', *Phoenix* 35, no. 4 (1981): 325. Golden notes that remaining unmarried was viewed as a personal and familial misfortune, and demographic constraints meant that up to one in five Athenian girls may not have married at the conventional age.

that the system depended on invisible and unacknowledged forms of contribution, especially by enslaved women.

### III. Women's Labour in Domestic Production

In ancient Greek society, particularly in Classical Athens, women's economic contributions were largely rendered invisible in legal records and official discourses. Nevertheless, in everyday practice, especially within the framework of the household economy and subsistence production, women exercised a critical and often indispensable role. The legal structure of the time systematically excluded women from key economic rights: they were not permitted to own property independently, enter into binding commercial agreements, or make financial decisions in their own name. These capacities were reserved exclusively for their *kyrios*, the male guardian who acted as their legal proxy in all matters of economic significance.<sup>60</sup> Even in cases where a woman possessed assets, she lacked the legal authority to manage or dispose of them without male supervision. This principle extended even to families with no surviving male heirs, where daughters were not permitted to inherit property outright. Instead, under the legal mechanism of the *epikleros*, such women were required to marry a close male relative to ensure that the estate remained within the patrilineal family structure. Thus, the law not only denied women direct access to property and economic agency but also transformed their bodies and marital status into tools for the preservation of male-cantered inheritance lines.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the numerous legal constraints imposed upon them, women in Classical Athens made substantial contributions to both rural and urban economies through the productive labour they carried out within the *oikos*. Tasks such as textile production, food preparation, dairy processing, childcare, and elder care were not confined to fulfilling domestic needs alone; they were frequently organized in a way that allowed for surplus goods to enter the local economy, either through barter or direct sale, thus

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<sup>60</sup> Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women*, 23–24, 61–70, 75–76.

<sup>61</sup> Schaps, 23, 26, 33–34; M. Ertan Yıldız, 'Eski Yunanca Yazıtlar Işığında Anadolu'da Kadının Konumu', *Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli Üniversitesi SBE Dergisi* 11, no. 3 (30 September 2021): 89–90. Also see above, note 47.

supplementing the household's income.<sup>62</sup> Archaeological evidence, including 6th-century BCE Greek vases, vividly illustrates the prevalence of these activities. Scenes depicting women spinning wool and weaving at upright looms confirm that these tasks were integral to daily life and were widely practiced.<sup>63</sup> The home, therefore, was not merely a site of residence for women but also served as a primary locus of economic production. Literary sources reinforce this picture, with numerous references to domestic textile work and the presence of looms in women's quarters.<sup>64</sup> Textiles woven at home were used not only for clothing members of the household but also as commodities circulated through local markets. Furthermore, some of these fabrics took on symbolic and ceremonial value, being dedicated to deities during religious festivals or fashioned into garments worn in public rituals. Thus, domestic labour was embedded in broader social, religious, and economic systems, revealing the extent to which women's work underpinned both the material and symbolic fabric of Athenian society.<sup>65</sup>

Within the household-centred structure of ancient Greek production systems, women occupied essential and highly specialized roles. The sustainability of the *oikos* was deeply dependent on domestic productive activities, most of which were carried out by women. Their primary responsibilities encompassed a wide array of textile and food-related tasks, including spinning wool, weaving fabric, baking bread, processing milk, and producing cheese and wine.<sup>66</sup> The spatial organization of Greek homes was directly shaped by the economic activities. Central to the organization

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<sup>62</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.7.9–10; McClure, *Women in Classical Antiquity*, 42–43.

<sup>63</sup> Louise Clark, 'Notes on Small Textile Frames Pictured on Greek Vases', *American Journal of Archaeology* 87, no. 1 (January 1983): 55–56; McClure, *Women in Classical Antiquity*, fig. 3.2.

<sup>64</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 6.490; Homer, *Odyssey*, 15.515, 21.350; Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, 773; Euripides, *Bacchae*, 504; Euripides, *Ion*, 740; Plato, *Lysis*, 208d; Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 10.10.

<sup>65</sup> Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 95; Akalın, 'Eskiçağda Grek Kadının Toplumsal Yaşantısı', 41.

<sup>66</sup> Bread: Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 18.28.1; Thucydides, 2.78. Milk and Cheese: Homer, *Iliad*, XI.635; Philostratus, *Vitae sophistarum*, 2.1.5. Textile: Homer, *Iliad*, 6.490; *Odyssey*, 15.515, 21.350; Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, 773; Euripides, *Bacchae*, 504; Euripides, *Ion*, 740; Plato, *Lysis*, 208d; Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 10.10.



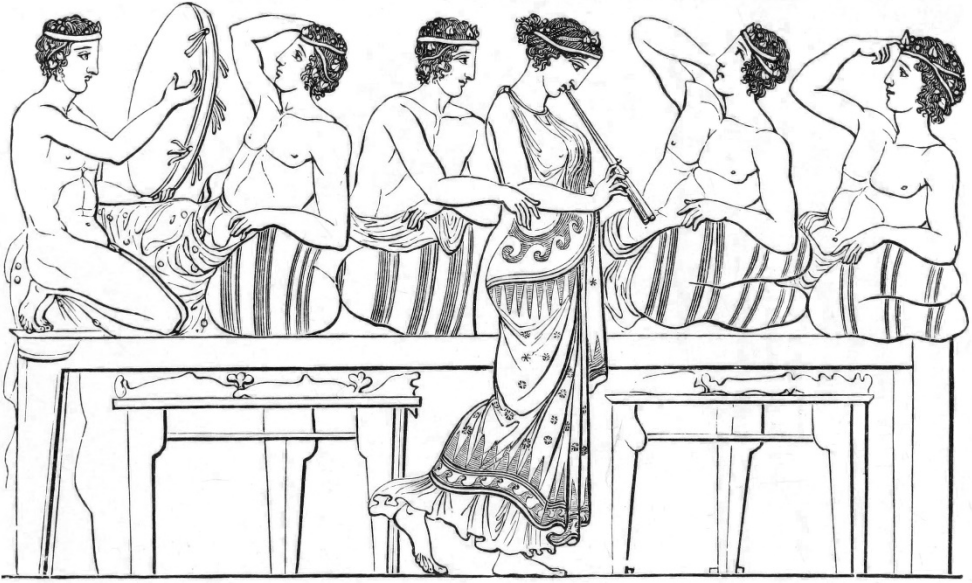
**Figure 1** – Women’s domestic labour in a Classical Athenian household.<sup>67</sup> Illustration by John Pentland Mahaffy (1890), depicting women engaged in spinning, weaving, laundry, and childcare, reflecting the central role of female labour in the *oikos*.

was the *gynaecium* (*gynaikeia* or *gynaikonitis*), a designated section of the house reserved for women.<sup>68</sup> These quarters functioned not only as physical workspaces for the tasks of domestic production but also as social environments where intergenerational knowledge was transmitted. In the female-exclusive spaces, largely inaccessible to men, the rhythms of labour were interwoven with informal systems of mentorship, collaboration, and skill-based education.

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<sup>67</sup> John Pentland Mahaffy, *Ordinary Greek Dress*, illustration, 1890, held in the public domain via Wikimedia Commons.

<sup>68</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 9.3–5; Lysias, 1.9; McClure, *Women in Classical Antiquity*, 39–42; Carla M. Antonaccio, ‘Architecture and Behavior: Building Gender into Greek Houses’, *The Classical World* 93, no. 5 (2000): 522–25.



**Figure 2** – Symposium scene with hired female entertainers.<sup>69</sup> Illustration after an ancient Greek vase painting, showing four reclining male symposiasts attended by a female flute-player (*auletris*). The *andron* was a room specifically designed for male use during formal dining and drinking gatherings. Women were generally not permitted to enter, and their presence was considered socially inappropriate unless they were hired as entertainers or sexual companions.<sup>70</sup>

Weaving stood out as one of the most prominent domains of female labour in both the everyday life and the religious-cultural representations of ancient Greek society. The processes of spinning wool into yarn and transforming into woven textiles were not only central components of a young girl's domestic education but also constituted one of the few arenas in which women's labour was publicly acknowledged and ritualistically valued. Textile production was deeply embedded in civic and sacred life. Notably, during the Panathenaea, a major religious celebration held in honour of the goddess Athena, women collectively wove a special *peplos*, a

<sup>69</sup> Wilhelm Adolf Becker, *Charicles: Illustrations of the Private Life of the Ancient Greeks*, trans. Frederick Metcalfe (London: Longmans, Green, 1889), 345.

<sup>70</sup> Lysias, 3.6; Demosthenes, 47.53; Antonaccio, 'Architecture and Behavior', 522, note 23; Defne Yılmazcan, 'Antik Yunan'da Oikos ve Kadın', *Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi Karatekin Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 8, no. 2 (1 October 2020): 279–80.

handwoven ceremonial garment, to be offered to the deity.<sup>71</sup> The *peplos* dedication ritual thus served as one of the rare instances where women's productive labour achieved formal recognition in public ceremonies, revealing their vital, though often overlooked, participation in the cultural and spiritual fabric of the *polis*.

Women's economic roles in ancient Greece extended well beyond the confines of the domestic sphere and were also evident in rural labour, animal husbandry, and market activity. Particularly among the lower classes and enslaved populations, women often served as visible and indispensable sources of labour in agricultural fields, in tending livestock, and in selling goods at local markets. In contrast, upper-class women generally did not participate directly in these forms of manual labour; instead, their involvement was primarily supervisory, managing household production and overseeing childrearing, often through the labour of slaves or servants.<sup>72</sup> Though largely unacknowledged in legal texts, these contributions were essential to household subsistence and the functioning of the broader economy. While a woman's actions remained under the legal authority of her *kyrios*, the practical management of the *oikos*' economic affairs often fell to her. In this sense, women wielded significant informal power as domestic economic administrators, even if their roles were not formally recognized within the civic or legal frameworks.<sup>73</sup> Toward the Hellenistic period, this pattern of invisibility began to shift modestly.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 76; McClure, *Women in Classical Antiquity*, 51–52; Akalın, 'Eskiçağda Grek Kadının Toplumsal Yaşantısı', 41.

<sup>72</sup> Akalın, 'Eskiçağda Grek Kadının Toplumsal Yaşantısı', 32–33.

<sup>73</sup> Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women*, 14–15.

<sup>74</sup> The modest increase in the visibility of Athenian women toward the Hellenistic period can be attributed to several overlapping developments. First, the repeal of restrictive laws introduced by figures such as Demetrius of Phalerum—including the oversight of women's behaviour, dress, and domestic gatherings by the *gynaikonomoi*—alleviated certain legal pressures. Second, the rise of philosophical schools like Stoicism and Epicureanism, which acknowledged the rational capacity of women and advocated for their education, contributed to shifting social attitudes. Third, educational opportunities, particularly in music and literacy, became more accessible to elite girls, fostering greater intellectual and social agency. Finally, accounts such as that of Agnodice, who disguised herself as a man to study medicine and ultimately helped overturn prohibitions on women practicing medicine, reflect a symbolic challenge to gendered professional boundaries. See Attia Ibrik Momen

Inscriptions from the era reveal that some urban and affluent women not only owned property but also made financial donations and contributed to public institutions.<sup>75</sup> Records of temple dedications, including offerings of gold and silver objects, suggest that women could act as economic agents in religious as well as civic contexts. These indicate an emerging visibility of women's economic identities in written sources, challenging the assumption that their roles were entirely confined to private life and signalling a slow evolution in the representation of female agency.

In rural areas of ancient Greece, women's participation in agriculture was shaped by the gendered and class-based organization of society. In a system where men typically undertook outward-facing roles or civic duties,<sup>76</sup> women's labour was central to the operations of small-scale agricultural units. Tasks such as sowing seeds, weeding, harvesting, threshing, and tending livestock were commonly carried out by women. Except for the most physically demanding tasks (such as ploughing with oxen), most agricultural work was routinely performed by both free and enslaved women. In major cities like Athens, slaves were sold at low prices, making it possible for most households to afford at least one.<sup>77</sup> However, in rural areas, where small landowning families could not compete with large estate owners or afford enslaved labour, men often relied on the labour of their wives and children to fulfil the roles typically assigned to slaves.<sup>78</sup> While the most gruelling work, like ploughing, was often assigned to

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Al-Hassi, 'The Social Status of Greek Women in the Hellenistic Era (Athens as an Example)', *International Journal of Humanities and Educational Research* 6, no. 2 (1 April 2024): 302–13.

<sup>75</sup> Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women*, 71–72; Akalın, 'Eskiçağda Grek Kadının Toplumsal Yaşantısı', 35–37.

<sup>76</sup> Aristotle, *Politica*, III.1277b. For an elderly man, withdrawing from public affairs into the domestic sphere associated with women or retreating to the countryside was considered a profound humiliation, see Plutarch, *Moralia*, 784a.

<sup>77</sup> Kaya, *Ege ve Eski Yunan Tarihi - I*, 389, note 41; M. C. Howatson, ed., 'Slavery', in *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1 January 2011), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199548545.001.0001/acref-9780199548545-e-2761>.

<sup>78</sup> Aristotle, *Politica*, VI.1323a; Plato (*Leges*, 805 D–E) presents so-called "barbarian" societies—where women participate in agricultural labour—as a negative contrast, thereby idealizing a more orderly and hierarchical social structure in which women are confined to domestic roles.

enslaved women, elderly or impoverished women frequently undertook tasks such as gathering leftover crops after harvest.<sup>79</sup> Class status was one of the most significant determinants of a woman's role in agricultural labour. Upper-class women typically did not participate directly in manual production but might supervise agricultural activities or manage household outputs. In contrast, women of lower socio-economic status (whether free or enslaved) were engaged directly in physically demanding fieldwork. In times of crisis, such as during wars or in the aftermath of societal collapse, the demand for labour increased. Under such extraordinary circumstances, even poor but free women could improve their material conditions by filling the labour vacuum, temporarily stepping into roles that granted them modest but tangible economic advancement.<sup>80</sup>

The existence of specialized terms in ancient Greek for female agricultural labourers underscores the visibility and definability of women's roles in rural production. Lexical designations such as *poastria* (female weed-clearer), *theristria* (female harvester), and *kalamitris* (female gleaner or corn ear gatherer) reveal not only the frequency with which women engaged in these tasks but also the cultural familiarity with their occupational identities.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the playwright Aristophanes, in one of his now-lost comedies titled *Poastriae* ("female herb collectors"), appears to have taken this category of female labourers as a central theme. The mere existence of such a title suggests that these women occupied a socially recognizable position, not only in economic terms, but also within the cultural imagination. Their representation in the comedic tradition implies that they were sufficiently prominent in everyday life to be thematized on

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<sup>79</sup> Walter Scheidel, 'The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome: Rural Labour and Women's Life in the Ancient World (I)', *Greece & Rome* 42, no. 2 (October 1995): 210–11, 213.

<sup>80</sup> Demosthenes, 57.45; Christine Schnurr-Redford, *Frauen Im Klassischen Athen: Sozialer Raum Und Reale Bewegungsfreiheit* (Berlin, Boston: Akademie Verlag, 1995), 216–17.

<sup>81</sup> Hesiod, *Opera et Dies*, 602; Pollux, *Onomasticon*, 1.222; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 784a; Aristophanes, fr. 829; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, XIV.619a; Walter Scheidel, 'The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome: Rural Labour and Women's Life in the Ancient World (II)', *Greece & Rome* 43, no. 1 (1996): 1–3; Schnurr-Redford, *Frauen Im Klassischen Athen*, 216.



stage, further affirming their role as both economic actors and socially visible figures in the landscape of Classical Greece.

Women's involvement in animal husbandry in ancient Greece was primarily concentrated in tasks such as milking, preparing feed, and caring for small livestock such as sheep and goats. These responsibilities were typically performed within the relative safety of the household's farmstead or enclosed areas, reflecting the gendered division of labour that designated less physically demanding and less hazardous duties to women. More arduous tasks, such as herding large animals across open terrain and guarding flocks against external threats, were generally assigned to men or young enslaved males. These activities required not only physical strength but also the capacity to defend livestock against theft or predators, often necessitating the carrying of weapons. By contrast, women tended to remain within the domestic perimeter, where they provided essential care and management for animals in stable environments.<sup>82</sup> Ancient sources also reveal darker aspects of gender and power dynamics within pastoral life. In some accounts, single male shepherds, whose basic needs were met by their employers, were assigned enslaved women to prevent them from engaging in sexual acts with animals or with free women.<sup>83</sup> Such practices expose the instrumentalization of enslaved women's bodies and the extent to which they were subjected to both labour exploitation and sexual control within the rural economy. This disturbing arrangement not only underscores the sexual vulnerability of enslaved women but also reflects the broader mechanisms of domination that permeated gender, class, and labour hierarchies in ancient Greek society.

Although women's activities outside the *oikos* were commonly viewed as improper, various sources reveal their involvement in urban labour and informal service work beyond the domestic and agricultural sphere. In practice, women's work frequently extended beyond the confines of the *oikos*, particularly among the lower classes and rural populations, where

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<sup>82</sup> Herondas, 8.6; Philostratus, *Vitae sophistarum*, 2.1.5; Scheidel, 'The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome (II)', 3–5. See also Kathryn Gutzwiller, 'The Herdsman in Greek Thought', in *Brill's Companion to Greek and Latin Pastoral*, ed. Marco Fantuzzi and Theodore D. Papanghelis (Brill, 2006), 1–23.

<sup>83</sup> Phaedrus, *Fabulae Aesopiae*, 3.3.17; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 14.9c–d; Scheidel, 'The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome (II)', 5.

poverty compelled many to take on menial tasks and engage in small-scale trade. Women exploited their domestic skills in profitable ways: textile-related activities such as wool-working, dyeing, weaving, and garment production were common, as were the preparation and sale of foodstuffs like bread, porridge, vegetables, garlic, figs, sesame, salt, and honey.<sup>84</sup> Other trades, such as laundry work, garland and ribbon-making, and even the production and sale of perfumes, also originated from domestic expertise. Midwifery was regarded as a respectable profession for women, exemplified by Socrates' mother Phainarete, while Euripides' mother was famously associated with selling herbs and produce.<sup>85</sup> In many cases, women managed both the production and the sale of goods, as exemplified by Euxitheos' testimony that he and his mother were actively engaged in the ribbon trade.<sup>86</sup> Legal restrictions, such as the limit on contractual transactions exceeding the value of a *medimnos* of barley, curtailed large-scale female commerce, but were likely circumvented in everyday practice.<sup>87</sup> For elite or urban women, public appearance in the *agora* conflicted with social ideals of modesty and respectability, prompting their economic activities to be mediated through male relatives or kept hidden. Nonetheless, in periods of crisis, such as the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, even women from higher-status households could be drawn into income-generating labour, as illustrated by the case of Aristarchus' female relatives operating a domestic textile workshop.<sup>88</sup> Ultimately, the interplay between household production and market

<sup>84</sup> Pollux, *Onomasticon*, 10.18; Aristophanes, *Acharnenses* 478; Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 457, 562; Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, VII.38–40; IG, I<sup>3</sup> 546, II<sup>2</sup> 1672, 70–71; Schnurr-Redford, *Frauen Im Klassischen Athen*, 219; Roger Brock, 'The Labour of Women in Classical Athens', *The Classical Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1994): 338–39, notes 15–21; Edward M. Harris, 'Wife, Household, and Marketplace: The Role of Women in the Economy of Classical Athens', in *Donne Che Contano Nella Storia Greca*, ed. Umberto Bultrighini and Elisabetta Dimauro (Casa editrice Carabba, 2014), 199–201; Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women*, 61–63; Akalın, 'Eskiçağ'da Grek Kadının Toplumsal Yaşantısı', 34, note 161.

<sup>85</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 149a–50b; Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae*, 387; Brock, 339–40; Şahin, *Antik Dönemde Anadolu'da Kadın*, 205; Yılmazcan, 'Antik Yunan'da Oikos ve Kadın', 281.

<sup>86</sup> Demosthenes, 57.31, 35; Brock, 'The Labour of Women', n. 26.

<sup>87</sup> Brock, 341; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 73.

<sup>88</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.7; Brock, 'The Labour of Women', 338.

exchange reveals the indispensable yet often marginalized role of women in sustaining the ancient Greek economy. Despite the dominant ideology of seclusion, women navigated and occupied shared commercial spaces, interacting with male traders and customers alike, thus challenging the gendered spatial boundaries.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The roles and status of women within the family structure in Classical Athens were fundamentally shaped by and embedded within a deeply entrenched patriarchal order. This system, operating through explicit legal constraints and pervasive ideological constructs, systematically denied women autonomy and consistently subordinated their identities to male authority, epitomized by the institution of the *kyrios*. While women indeed fulfilled essential functions that maintained familial stability and indirectly supported the socio-economic structure, these roles should not be misconstrued as indicators of genuine agency or empowerment. Rather, they were carefully delineated tasks assigned by and reinforcing the patriarchal norms that aimed to preserve male dominance and socio-economic continuity.

The limited economic visibility women occasionally achieved, exemplified by selling domestically produced goods like textiles or foodstuffs in local markets, did not equate to true economic independence. Instead, such activities underscored their secondary and supportive positions within male-controlled economic frameworks. Women's involvement in the marketplace was not a reflection of autonomy but rather an extension of their role as subsidiary contributors to a household economy dominated by male interests and authority.

Acknowledging the fundamentally restrictive nature of women's societal roles in Classical Athens thus provides a more historically grounded understanding of their lived realities. This perspective critically reveals the structural mechanisms deliberately enacted to perpetuate patriarchal dominance, highlighting how women's contributions (although essential) were strategically confined within parameters that actively prevented meaningful empowerment, autonomy, and civic participation.

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## Chapter Four

# Birth and Ritual in Classical Athens

Mert HASILCIOĞLU\*

### I. Introduction

In the ancient Greek world, childbirth was seen as more than a biological event—it was understood as a sacred and symbolic passage deeply rooted in religious belief and social custom. For women, it represented a moment of profound physical, emotional, and societal significance. In Athens, childbirth was surrounded by a range of ritual actions and communal practices designed to protect both mother and child, to seek divine favour, and to manage the risks associated with birth. Deities such as Artemis and Eileithyia played a central role in this process, as their powers were invoked not only to assist in labour but also to prevent misfortune and ensure a safe outcome. These religious dimensions continued beyond the act of giving birth, influencing how the newborn was introduced into the household and, eventually, accepted into the civic community. Ceremonies such as the Amphidromia and naming rites marked this transition, linking the personal experience of childbirth to the wider social and religious world of the Athenian *polis*.

This chapter explores the biological and social dimensions of childbirth, focusing on the practices associated with birth. It examines how Athenian women interpreted the physical and emotional challenges of childbirth through religious and ritual acts, the roles played by midwives and other female attendants during labour, and the postnatal rituals of evaluation and formal acceptance.

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## II. Religion and Childbirth

Faced with the life-threatening and physically demanding experience of childbirth, women in ancient Greece first turned to goddesses in search of divine assistance. The understanding of childbirth as not only a biological event but also a sacred moment of transition led to the association of certain deities—above all Artemis—with midwifery functions and protective roles. Artemis held a central place in both mythological narratives and ritual practices as a powerful goddess who aided women through the various stages of labour. The many epithets attributed to her reveal the significance of her presence during childbirth: Lokhia and Lokheia refer to her as the attendant and overseer at the moment of birth, while titles such as Eulokhos and Okylokheia (“she who brings swift delivery”), Mogostokos (“she who eases labor pains”), Soodina (“she who delivers from suffering”), and Lysizonos (“she who helps those giving birth”) emphasize the protective and facilitating powers expected of her during this perilous process.<sup>1</sup> Artemis’s divine role as a helper during childbirth was also legitimized through myth, particularly in her support of her mother Leto during the birth of Apollo. Ancient sources frequently emphasize this aspect of Artemis, portraying her as a deity who could ease labour pains or ensure a swift and safe delivery.<sup>2</sup> To express gratitude and seek favour, women offered her gifts such as garments, belts, sandals, and locks of hair. In the cult of Artemis Brauronia, worshipped in Brauron in Attica, the finest clothing of women who had died in childbirth was dedicated to the goddess. Similarly, in the postnatal offerings known as Pausotokeia, women who had survived childbirth presented garments to Artemis, underlining her protective presence and assistance during the process.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Güler Çelgin, *Eski Yunan Dininde ve Mitolojisinde Artemis* (Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 1986), 18; Nuran Şahin, *Antik Dönemde Anadolu’da Kadın* (Ege Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2013), 88; Susan Guettel Cole, ‘Domesticating Artemis’, in *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*, ed. Sue Blundell and Margaret Williamson (Routledge, 2005), 30 and note 13

<sup>2</sup> Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 161–169; Menander, *Georgos*, 112; Susan Guettel Cole, *Landscapes, Gender, and Ritual Space: The Ancient Greek Experience* (University of California Press, 2004), 121, 210–12.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Athenaion Politeia*, 54.7; Euripides, *Iphigenia Taurica*, 1446–1466; Şahin, *Antik Dönemde Anadolu’da Kadın*, 88 and note 64; Jennifer Larson, *Ancient Greek Cults*:



**Figure 1** – Votive Relief from Brauron. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

Artemis was believed to possess the power to avert the tragic outcomes of childbirth, making her a divine authority who required regular supplication. From an early age, girls were expected to appease the goddess through dance and ritual, and before their first menstruation (menarche), they participated in symbolic ceremonies at Brauron by assuming the role of a “bear” (*arkteuein*).<sup>4</sup> These practices reflected Artemis’s complex nature—both protective and easily provoked—and the need to calm her potentially wrathful presence. If neglected, such rites were thought to provoke the goddess’s anger during childbirth.<sup>5</sup> As a result, these rituals were understood as symbolic acts of protection, performed at key transitional moments in a woman’s life to secure Artemis’s favour and avert danger.

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*A Guide* (Routledge, 2007), 107–8; Stephanie Lynn Budin, *Artemis* (Routledge, 2015), 103–6; Cole, *Landscapes, Gender, and Ritual Space*, 212.

<sup>4</sup> Libanius, 5.29; Budin, *Artemis*, 77–80; Cole, *Landscapes, Gender, and Ritual Space*, 210–11; Larson, *Ancient Greek Cults*, 108; Çelgin, *Eski Yunan Dininde ve Mitolojisinde Artemis*, 16–17.

<sup>5</sup> Pausanias, 6.19.3; Cole, ‘Domesticating Artemis’, 26–28; Budin, *Artemis*, 86–87, 115–42.

Within this religious context, Eileithyia emerged as another central goddess invoked by Athenian women during childbirth. Her name is etymologically linked to the Greek verb *eleuthein*, meaning “to come” or “to come to aid,” which is echoed in the cries of labouring women who called out “elthe, elthe” (“come, come”) in urgent appeal for her presence.<sup>6</sup> Eileithyia was believed to be the one whose arrival made childbirth possible, making her one of the first divine figures to be called upon at the onset of labour.<sup>7</sup> In mythological narratives, she is portrayed as the chief midwife among the gods—for instance, Leto’s prolonged labour, lasting nine days before the birth of Apollo and Artemis, was attributed to Eileithyia’s initial refusal to assist.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the birth of Heracles was delayed due to Eileithyia’s jealous interference, revealing that she was not only a helper but also a goddess capable of withholding aid and inflicting divine punishment. In this sense, Eileithyia embodied the sacred dimension of the uncertainty and danger surrounding childbirth. Although often mentioned alongside Hera and Artemis, she did not possess a fully independent persona, yet remained a vital figure who had to be invoked and appeased to ensure a successful delivery.<sup>9</sup>

In ancient Greece, water played a vital role in rituals associated with childbirth and fertility. The sanctuaries of Artemis and other deities were often located in natural settings, especially near rivers and springs, reflecting their divine power to protect and regulate both the natural world

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<sup>6</sup> Christos Iavazzo et al., ‘Eileithyia: The Goddess of Labour’, *Maedica* 17, no. 1 (2022): 253. According to another interpretation, the name Eileithyia is derived from the combination of the verbs *eileo*, meaning “to push,” and *thyō*, meaning “to be driven mad by pain.” This etymology reflects the goddess’s role in addressing both the physical intensity and the emotional turmoil of childbirth, see Robert Stephen Paul Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, with Lucien van Beek (Brill, 2010), 1:383–384.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Garland, *Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks*, 2nd ed. (Greenwood Press, 2009), 89; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Harvard University Press, 1985), 170.

<sup>8</sup> Pausanias, 1.18.5; Kate Campbell Hurd-Mead, *A History of Women in Medicine: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century* (Haddam Press, 1938), 29–30; Leyla Aydemir, ‘Eski Yunan ve Roma Dünyasında Şifacı Tanrıçalar ve Şifacı Kadınlar Arasındaki İlişki’, *Anatolian Research*, no. 22 (January 2020): 64.

<sup>9</sup> Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 171.

and the human life cycle.<sup>10</sup> In this context, water from sacred sources was regarded not merely as a means of physical cleansing, but as an instrument of religious purification and ritual transition. Archaeological excavations at the sanctuary of Brauron have uncovered numerous water-carrying vessels (*hydriai*) and figurines of women bearing water (*hydrophoroi*), indicating a direct association between water and the goddess's functions.<sup>11</sup> In these sanctuaries associated with Artemis's roles as guardian of fertility, childbirth, and children, water-related rituals formed the basis of purification and transitional practices linked to pre-marital preparation, postnatal cleansing, and early child-rearing. Pregnant women collected water from specific sacred springs to be used in ritual baths following childbirth, seeking both physical and spiritual purification. These same sources were also visited during pregnancy to promote a healthy gestation and an easier delivery. However, any action that might contaminate the water—such as bathing, washing clothes, or discarding waste—was strictly prohibited and met with severe penalties.<sup>12</sup> The process of a child's growth was viewed as a vulnerable phase that required divine protection, and for this reason, children were entrusted to deities known as *kourotrophoi*. Goddesses such as Artemis, Demeter, Hekate, Hestia, Leto, and Gaia were believed to watch over children from birth through adolescence, assuming protective roles throughout their development.<sup>13</sup> Closely associated with water, these deities were symbolically linked to springs and flowing rivers, which represented fertility and nourishment. Consequently, parents offered votives to these divine figures, maintaining the sacred bond that began at birth through ongoing ritual observances.

The sanctuaries of deities associated with childbirth and child development were typically located in elevated, hard-to-reach areas near water sources. Women seeking a healthy delivery (or their family members) would visit these sacred sites to offer votives and draw upon the purifying properties of the water believed to bring spiritual and physical cleansing. However, since childbirth (like death) was thought to produce significant

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<sup>10</sup> Cole, *Landscapes, Gender, and Ritual Space*, 193–94; Budin, *Artemis*, 56–57.

<sup>11</sup> Cole, *Landscapes, Gender, and Ritual Space*, 45, 193 and note 104.

<sup>12</sup> Cole, *Landscapes, Gender, and Ritual Space*, 35 and note 20.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Life: From Conception to Old Age* (Cornell University Press, 1993), 111–13.

ritual pollution (*miasma*), giving birth within these sanctuaries was strictly forbidden.<sup>14</sup> As women were not permitted to deliver under the protection of these divine spaces—and with no institutional equivalent to hospitals in ancient Greece—childbirth generally took place at home. Although ancient sources do not provide explicit information about where childbirth occurred within the household, scholars generally agree that it most likely took place in the *gynaikeion*—the section of the house reserved for women.<sup>15</sup> This room, being the most private and restricted to female members of the household, would have offered both physical seclusion and symbolic protection during labour. It also served a practical function, as it helped contain the ritual pollution (*miasma*) believed to accompany childbirth, preventing its spread to other areas of the home.<sup>16</sup>

### III. Childbirth in Practice

Women who oversaw childbirth in ancient Athens were typically experienced figures who relied on practical, empirical knowledge passed down through generations.<sup>17</sup> Births took place exclusively in the presence of women; children, men, and even women who had not yet given birth were usually excluded from this intimate event. Scenes in Aristophanes' plays where female characters withdraw from public life under the pretext of childbirth clearly illustrate that childbirth was understood as a private ritual space from which men were barred.<sup>18</sup> The central figure in this secluded setting was the *maia*, or midwife. Although midwifery was considered a modest occupation, it commanded high respect due to its vital function. Plato notes that midwives were generally older women who had passed childbearing age, some of whom possessed well-established ritual knowledge, familiarity with medicinal herbs, and even prophetic skills.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> IG, II<sup>2</sup> 1035.10–11; SEG, 36.121; Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 741–757; Cole, *Landscapes, Gender, and Ritual Space*, 105 and note 76; Garland, *Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks*, 213–14.

<sup>15</sup> Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 61.

<sup>16</sup> Şahin, *Antik Dönemde Anadolu'da Kadın*, 88.

<sup>17</sup> François P. Retief and Louise Cilliers, 'The Healing Hand: The Role of Women in Ancient Medicine', *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 7 (2005): 177.

<sup>18</sup> Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae*, II.526–34; *Thesmophoriazusae*, II.507–9; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 61–62.

<sup>19</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 149b–c; Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine* (Routledge, 2004), 101.

Although most of these women were unfamiliar with written culture, Soranus, in his description of more advanced midwives, identified certain ideal qualities: literacy, knowledge of dietetics and surgical techniques, long and gentle fingers, and even a rational attitude free from superstition.<sup>20</sup> In addition to the midwife who took primary responsibility for the delivery, there were other female figures—rarely mentioned in the Hippocratic corpus<sup>21</sup>—such as the *omphaletomos* (the one who cut the umbilical cord), the *akestrides* (a healing assistant during labour), and the *iatreousa* (female healer).<sup>22</sup> These women possessed hands-on expertise and practical knowledge, and they were typically involved in high-risk deliveries or in providing care during the postnatal period. Although male physicians (*iatroi*) are frequently recorded as having attended childbirth, they were likely summoned only in cases of complications or when postnatal health issues arose.<sup>23</sup> Alongside professional attendants, the birthing process also involved female relatives, neighbours, and friends—women who had personal experience with fertility and childbirth. It was commonly stated that, in addition to the midwife, at least three or four other women should be present during labour. Their responsibilities included calming the mother's fears, offering both physical and emotional support, and invoking the birth goddesses with hymns under the guidance of the midwife.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Soranus, *Gynaecia*, 1.3–4; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 62–63; Vivian Nutton, 'Healers in the Medical Market Place: Towards a Social History of Graeco-Roman Medicine', in *Medicine in Society: Historical Essays*, ed. Andrew Wear (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 54.

<sup>21</sup> The reason why male physicians who authored the Hippocratic texts rarely mentioned these women may have been their intention to present themselves as the sole authoritative figures in matters of childbirth, see Helen King, 'Medical Texts as a Source for Women's History', in *The Greek World*, ed. Anton Powell (Routledge, 2002), 209.

<sup>22</sup> *On the Diseases of Women*, 1.46, 1.68; *On Fleshes*, 19; Helen King, 'Using the Past: Nursing and the Medical Profession in Ancient Greece', in *Anthropology and Nursing*, ed. Pat Holden and Jenny Littlewood (Routledge, 2015), 21; Leyla Aydemir, 'Eskiçağ Dünyasında Kadın Şifacılar' (PhD diss., İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2020), 194–97.

<sup>23</sup> King, 'Using the Past', 21; Nutton, 'Healers in the Medical Market Place', 25. Cf. Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 101.

<sup>24</sup> Soranus, *Gynaecia*, 2.5; *On the Excision of the Foetus*, 4; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 64.

Despite the many prayers offered to goddesses and the ritual efforts to ensure protection, childbirth in the ancient Greek world remained an extremely risky and dangerous experience for women. The primary causes of this danger included inadequate hygiene conditions and the fact that many women became pregnant before reaching full biological maturity, often while still in adolescence. Miscarriages were common, and maternal mortality during labour occurred with alarming frequency. A poignant expression of this danger appears in Euripides' tragedy *Medea* (247–251), where the protagonist declares, “I would rather stand three times in the front line of battle than give birth once”—a powerful testament to how women perceived the ordeal of childbirth.<sup>25</sup> Although various contraceptive methods are mentioned—such as herbal mixtures, solutions prepared with vinegar and water, or woolen pads soaked in honey—their effectiveness was limited and unreliable. However, certain plants used in ancient medicine—particularly pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*), rue (*Ruta graveolens*), and ferula—were found to have genuine abortifacient or contraceptive properties.<sup>26</sup> The active compounds in these plants, such as pulegone in pennyroyal, have been shown through modern experimentation to induce uterine contractions or inhibit embryonic development. Nevertheless, when consumed in high doses, these substances could cause severe side effects, including liver failure, neurotoxicity, and internal bleeding. Moreover, since the potency of herbal ingredients varied depending on their geographical origin, determining an appropriate and safe dosage was extremely difficult. As a result, these natural methods of birth control carried both the risk of ineffectiveness and the potential for fatal outcomes. Within such uncertainty, women were rarely afforded safe intervals between pregnancies, and the physical and psychological toll of childbirth remained a recurring and exhausting trial throughout their lives.

Due to the inherently dangerous nature of childbirth in ancient Greece, various methods and practices were developed to manage the

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<sup>25</sup> Garland, *Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks*, 77.

<sup>26</sup> Sarah E. Nelson, ‘Persephone’s Seeds: Abortifacients and Contraceptives in Ancient Greek Medicine and Their Recent Scientific Appraisal’, *Pharmacy in History* 51, no. 2 (2009): 57–69.

process. Hippocratic texts describe normal labour as beginning when the foetus, positioned head-down, initiates the tearing of the uterine membranes through its own movements—emphasizing that the onset of birth was not triggered by external intervention but by the agency of the foetus itself.<sup>27</sup> As labour approached, softening agents such as oils and warm water were applied to moisten the uterus and birth canal, easing the passage of the child.<sup>28</sup> In addition, herbal substances were frequently used in ancient medicine to reduce labour pains or to accelerate the delivery process. In cases where labour was delayed, midwives attempted to stimulate childbirth by administering a warm mixture composed of honey, aromatic wine, turpentine, and olive oil. This concoction was believed to soften the birth canal and encourage uterine contractions, thereby facilitating the onset of labour. Another substance commonly used for its muscle-relaxing properties was dittany (*Dictamnus*), which served a dual purpose: it was employed medicinally to ease childbirth and also offered ritually to the goddess Eileithyia as a plea for divine assistance.<sup>29</sup> However, alongside such herbal treatments, some highly invasive and risky techniques were also practiced. In particularly difficult deliveries, pregnant women might be forcefully shaken—held by their arms and legs and jolted up and down—in an attempt to reposition the foetus and prompt its descent, a method that vividly illustrates the physical extremity to which birth management could be taken in the absence of modern medical knowledge.<sup>30</sup> Under normal circumstances, childbirth typically took place on a birthing chair, a special seat designed to allow gravity to assist in the delivery process. Labouring women were kept in a resting position until the cervix was fully dilated, at which point they were quickly positioned on the chair to complete the final stage of labour through active pushing.<sup>31</sup> Midwives came prepared with a set of essential tools, including warm water, oil, sponges, swaddling clothes, and a knife or scissors to cut the

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<sup>27</sup> *On the Nature of the Child*, 30; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 69.

<sup>28</sup> *On Superfoetation*, 4; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 69.

<sup>29</sup> Şahin, *Antik Dönemde Anadolu'da Kadın*, 88.

<sup>30</sup> *On the Excision of the Foetus*, 4; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 71.

<sup>31</sup> *On Superfoetation*, 8; Şahin, *Antik Dönemde Anadolu'da Kadın*, 89. For the other methods of giving birth, see *Hymnus Homericus ad Apollinem*, 117f; Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 27.2; Soranus, *Gynaecia*, 2.4.3, 5.2, cited in Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 72.



umbilical cord.<sup>32</sup> According to Soranus, assistants working alongside the midwife would apply gentle pressure to the mother's abdomen to help guide the baby through the birth canal. Proper breathing was considered crucial during this process; rather than screaming, women were instructed to hold their breath and exhale in controlled moans to conserve energy and reduce strain. Once the baby was delivered, the umbilical cord was carefully severed—often not with iron, which was believed to bring bad luck, but with a shard of glass or pottery, reflecting the symbolic and superstitious dimensions of birth practices in antiquity.<sup>33</sup>

Immediately after birth, the first assessment of whether the newborn would be raised was often left to the discretion of the midwife who had overseen the delivery. Before bathing or swaddling the infant,<sup>34</sup> the midwife conducted basic physiological examinations to determine the child's viability. Based on her observations, she could advise the family on whether the infant should be nurtured or abandoned.<sup>35</sup> If the decision was made not to raise the child, it was again the midwife's responsibility to remove the infant from the household and arrange for its discreet disposal.<sup>36</sup> In Athens, the act of birth did not automatically confer acceptance into the family or the broader community. The newborn's formal inclusion in the *oikos* (household) depended on the approval of the *kyrios*—the male head of the household—and the completion of specific ritual procedures, without which the child held no recognized legal or social status. Until this process of formal acceptance was completed, the infant was considered to exist only in a biological sense, lacking any legal or civic recognition. The decision as to whether the child would be raised or not was made entirely within the private domain of the household, without involvement from public or legal authorities. In this context, *expositus*—the exposure or abandonment of a newborn—functioned as a widely practiced method of postnatal selection

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<sup>32</sup> Soranus, *Gynaecia*, 2.2–2.3.1; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 70.

<sup>33</sup> Soranus, *Gynaecia*, 2.11.1; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 74.

<sup>34</sup> Véronique Dasen, 'Childbirth and Infancy in Greek and Roman Antiquity', in *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2010), 297–303; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 81–83.

<sup>35</sup> Soranus, *Gynaecia*, 2.2–6; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 64.

<sup>36</sup> Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 64. Also see Plato, *Theaetetus*, 151c; Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae*, II.340, 407 and 502–18.

in the ancient world.<sup>37</sup> Once a family determined that a child was unwanted, it was typically handed over to a midwife or a household slave, who would then leave the infant at a remote location outside the settlement. A more common variation of this practice involved abandoning the child at a frequently travelled crossroads or near a sanctuary, where there was hope that a passerby or temple attendant might feel compassion and take the child in. This form of abandonment relied entirely on chance and the goodwill of strangers. In either case—whether abandoned in isolation or left near a populated area—the infant faced extremely low chances of survival. Hunger, exposure to the cold, animal attacks, or human exploitation posed immediate and severe threats, leaving the child’s fate entirely to chance.<sup>38</sup> In some instances, abandoned children were taken in by third parties, not out of benevolence, but for exploitative purposes such as enslavement, forced begging, or sexual abuse.<sup>39</sup> The decision to raise or abandon a newborn was shaped by a combination of physical, economic, and social factors, any one of which could prove decisive. These included physical deformities, financial hardship, the number of existing children in the family, whether the mother was married, the presence or absence of the father, the mother’s social status, the gender of the child,<sup>40</sup> or the fact that the child was considered illegitimate. Enslaved women, in particular, might

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<sup>37</sup> For the most well-known example, see Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, § 723–6. Judith Evans Grubbs, ‘Infant Exposure and Infanticide’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Evans Grubbs and Tim Parkin (Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> Maria A. Liston and Susan I. Rotroff, ‘Babies in the Well: Archaeological Evidence for Newborn Disposal in Hellenistic Greece’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World*, ed. Judith Evans Grubbs and Tim Parkin (Oxford University Press, 2013), 74–77; Grubbs, ‘Infant Exposure and Infanticide’, 85–92; Erman Gören, ‘Klasik Atina’da Ad(landırman)ın Ritüel Bağlamı: Amphidromia’, in *Eskiçağ Yazıları 6*, Akron, ed. A. Vedat Çelgin and N. Eda Akyürek Şahin, VIII (Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 2014), 21–22, note 7; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 85–86.

<sup>39</sup> Seneca, *Controversiae*, 10.4; Pseudo-Demosthenes, 59.18; Grubbs, ‘Infant Exposure and Infanticide’, 94–95.

<sup>40</sup> Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 87. See Mark Golden, ‘Demography and the Exposure of Girls at Athens’, *Phoenix* 35, no. 4 (1981): 316–31, who argues that Athenians refused to raise at least 10% of newborn girls, suggesting that this practice constituted a gender-based systematic strategy driven by concerns such as the risk of remaining unmarried, economic burden, and broader social imbalance.

abandon their children either under the orders of their masters or in an attempt to spare them a life of servitude similar to their own.<sup>41</sup> In most cases, the decision was not made by the father—who was typically absent during childbirth—but by the mother or the midwife present at the time.<sup>42</sup> Within this context, *expositus* was not merely a choice about biological survival; it was a form of social selection shaped by class status, gender norms, and economic constraints. In Athenian society, the experience of childhood began only for those who had passed this initial threshold of acceptance.

#### IV. Postnatal Rituals and Social Acceptance

In Athens, childbirth was not merely a biological event but a legal and ritualized moment marking the beginning of an individual's construction as a social being. During this process, the newborn's gender was announced not only within the household but also in the public sphere. An olive wreath was hung on the door for a male child, while a hank of wool signified the birth of a girl.<sup>43</sup> The olive branch, sacred to Athena, symbolized religious belonging, political continuity—through its association with the enduring nature of the polis—and well-being, thereby representing ideals of citizenship and civic integration for male infants.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, wool, associated with Penelope in Homeric tradition, evoked femininity, domestic productivity, and fidelity, making it an apt symbol for female children. Placed at the entrance of the home immediately after birth, these two symbols served as the first ideological markers that integrated the newborn

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<sup>41</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 9.5; Dio Chrysostomus, *Orationes*, 15.8; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 89.

<sup>42</sup> Dio Chrysostomus, *Orationes*, 15.8.

<sup>43</sup> Hesychius, s.v. στέφανον ἐχφέρειν; Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 20; Claudia Englhofer, 'Birth', in Brill's *New Pauly, Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Schneider Helmuth (Brill, 2007), 2:667; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 75.

<sup>44</sup> Aristides, *Orationes*, 2.11; Plutarch, *Quaestiones convivales*, 723f; Gören, 'Klasik Atina'da Ad(landırma)', 29–30; Marcel Détienne, 'L'olivier: Un Mythe Politico-Religieux', *Année 178*, no. 1 (1970): 5–23. Garland (*The Greek Way of Life*, 75) interprets the olive branch as a symbol of male athletic excellence, likely evoking the victory wreaths awarded to Olympic champions and thus associating the newborn boy with future physical strength and competitive virtue.

not only into a biological reality but into a gendered social and cultural order.

Amphidromia was a ritual of acceptance and purification held at least five days after birth,<sup>45</sup> during which a newborn was formally introduced into the household (*oikos*) and given a name.<sup>46</sup> In ancient Athens, childbirth was regarded as a source of ritual pollution, meaning that the woman who had given birth was believed to contaminate not only the house but also anyone who entered it. As a result, all participants in the event were required to undergo purification.<sup>47</sup> Guests, who had learned the newborn's sex from the

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<sup>45</sup> Ancient sources provide conflicting information regarding the day on which the Amphidromia was held: the *Suda* and Plato mention the fifth day, Hesychius refers to the seventh day (*Hebdome*), while Euripides (*Aegeus*, fr. 2) and Aristophanes (*Aves*, 494) indicate the tenth day (*Dekate*). Richard Hamilton reconciles these discrepancies by suggesting that the ceremony had a multi-phase structure extending over several days, see Richard Hamilton, 'Sources for the Athenian Amphidromia', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 25, no. 3 (1984): 250; Athina Papachrysostomou, *Ephippus: Introduction, Translation, Commentary* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021), 54–55. The duration of the Amphidromia may have varied depending on the family's social status; poorer families likely completed all ritual steps within a single day, while wealthier families may have extended the process over several days, see Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 20. Jean Rudhardt suggests that the Amphidromia held on the fifth day has often been conflated with the name-giving ceremonies on the seventh or tenth day, although in fact these rituals served distinct functions, see Jean Rudhardt, 'La Reconnaissance de La Paternité Sa Nature et Sa Portée Dans La Société Athénienne: Sur Un Discours de Démosthène', *Museum Helveticum* 19, no. 1 (1962): 58.

<sup>46</sup> Hesychius, s.v. ἀμφιδρόμια; Harpocration, s.v. ἀμφιδρόμια; *Suda*, s.v. ἀμφιδρόμια; Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 757; Pausanias Atticista, α 101; Ephippus, fr. 3; Pollux, 2.8; Plato, *Theaetetus*, 160e; Leonard Schmitz, 'Amphidromia', in *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, 3rd ed., ed. William Smith et al. (John Murray, 1890), 1:105–6; Hamilton, 'Sources for the Athenian Amphidromia'; Gören, 'Klasik Atina'da Ad(landırma)', 20–24; Papachrysostomou, *Ephippus*, 54–55.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Stengel, 'Amphidromia', in *Paulys Realencyclopädie Der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. Gerog Wissowa, I,2 (J.B. Metzler, 1894), 1901–2; Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 96–98; Cole, *Landscapes, Gender, and Ritual Space*, 105–8. Due to the ritual impurity caused by childbirth, the midwife was considered ritually restricted and was not permitted to assist in other households until purification had taken place. This restriction could last until the Amphidromia ceremony, and in some cases, it might have extended up to the fortieth day, see Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 64.

symbolic decoration placed on the door, would bring gifts of seafood such as cuttlefish or multi-limbed octopuses—creatures associated in Greek thought with *metis*, or cunning intelligence and strategic skill. These offerings held symbolic significance (*opteria*), while also serving as part of the communal feast that marked the occasion.<sup>48</sup> At the beginning of the ceremony, the infant was likely carried—probably by women, or in some cases perhaps only by the father—in a circular motion around the *hestia* (the household hearth),<sup>49</sup> which held sacred significance as the spiritual centre of the home.<sup>50</sup> Alternatively, the ritual may have involved circling around the baby rather than with the baby. This act, from which the ceremony derives its name (*Amphidromia*, meaning “around-running”), symbolized the newborn’s presentation to the household gods and to the family members. Given the uncertainty of the first days after birth and the high rates of infant mortality,<sup>51</sup> *Amphidromia* marked not only the child’s biological arrival but also their social birth—the first formal acknowledgment of the individual’s integration into the family, the divine order, and the future civic body.

In this context, the second stage following *Amphidromia* was a *thysia*, or sacrificial ceremony, typically performed on the tenth day after birth. Although ancient sources sometimes conflated this ritual with *Amphidromia*, it was in fact a distinct rite aimed at eliminating the religious pollution (*miasma*).<sup>52</sup> To emphasize the purity of the ritual space, aromatic substances and incense (*thumiateria*) were burned, filling the area with

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<sup>48</sup> Athenaeus, 9.370d; Gören, ‘Klasik Atina’da Ad(landırma)’, 22–23, notes 8, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Barbara Tsakirgis, ‘Fire and Smoke: Hearths, Braziers and Chimneys in the Greek House’, *British School at Athens Studies* 15 (2007): 230.

<sup>50</sup> Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 93–96; Christian Laes, ‘Infants Between Biological and Social Birth in Antiquity: A Phenomenon of the “Longue Durée”’, *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 63, no. 3 (2014): 366–69. The conflicting accounts found in ancient sources regarding the performance of the *Amphidromia* suggest that the ceremony may have been practiced in varying forms across different regions. Furthermore, the fact that most of these sources date from later periods implies that the ritual likely underwent changes in both form and function over time.

<sup>51</sup> Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, 7.12.2.

<sup>52</sup> Şahin, *Antik Dönemde Anadolu’da Kadın*, 92–94.

pleasing scents intended to attract divine favour and sanctify the setting.<sup>53</sup> The ceremony was attended not only by the child's immediate family but also by priests, civic officials, and close acquaintances from the father's side. All participants were expected to be ritually pure. The type of animal offered as sacrifice varied depending on the family's social rank and economic capacity, reflecting both their devotion and their status within the community.<sup>54</sup> During the sacrifice, the animal's head was lifted toward the sky, its blood was poured onto the altar, and the portions designated for the gods were burned in offering. In this way, the ritual was marked by the presence of blood, fire, and fragrant smoke rising toward the divine. The remaining meat was then evenly distributed among the participants in a communal feast, which served as a symbolic affirmation of unity with both the gods and the social community.<sup>55</sup> In addition to sharing the meal, attendees presented the newborn with various gifts and protective charms, expressing their blessings and good wishes for the child's future.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the ceremony not only reinforced the spiritual purification following physical birth, but also affirmed the child's enduring place within the family and the broader social fabric.

The naming of the child typically took place on the tenth day after birth, known as the *Dekate*.<sup>57</sup> At this stage, the child was legally acknowledged by the father as a member of the family and acquired an individual identity.<sup>58</sup> In ancient Greece, names functioned not only as personal identifiers but also as symbolic expressions of the society's

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<sup>53</sup> Véronique Mehl, 'Parfums de fêtes. Usage de parfums et sacrifices sanglants', in *Le Sacrifice Antique: Vestiges, Procédures Et Stratégies*, ed. Pierre Brulé, Histoire (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008).

<sup>54</sup> Gunnel Ekroth, 'Meat in Ancient Greece: Sacrificial, Sacred or Secular?', *Food and History* 5, no. 1 (2007): 256.

<sup>55</sup> Şahin, *Antik Dönemde Anadolu'da Kadın*, 93; Ekroth, 'Meat in Ancient Greece', 249–52.

<sup>56</sup> Şahin, *Antik Dönemde Anadolu'da Kadın*, 94.

<sup>57</sup> Demosthenes, 39.22, 40.28; Isaeus, 3.30; Rudhardt, 'La Reconnaissance de La Paternité', 56–62.

<sup>58</sup> David Noy, 'Neaera's Daughter: A Case of Athenian Identity Theft?', *The Classical Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (2009): 407–8; Mehmet Ali Kaya, *Ege ve Eski Yunan Tarihi – I* (Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2023), 312.

ideological structure and gender norms.<sup>59</sup> Girls' names were often formed as feminine versions of male names (e.g., *Hegesistratos* and *Hegesistrate*), yet elements commonly associated with masculine virtues—such as *-alke* (courage), *-kratos* (strength), or *-sthenos* (power), which evoked military excellence—were rarely found in female names, as they were seen as incompatible with normative ideals of femininity. Instead, the names of women—who were largely excluded from the public sphere—often reflected elements of social and domestic life. Terms such as *agora* (marketplace) and *dike* (justice) appeared more frequently in female names than overtly political references like *demos* or *polis*. For instance, the name *Timagora*, given to the daughter of Timodemos, reflects this tendency. Female names also commonly emphasized qualities such as physical attractiveness, gentleness, and moral virtue. A name like *Eukoline* (“well-behaved” or “of good character”) expressed this ideal. In some cases, women were named after abstract values and virtues, with names such as *Euphrosyne* (joy), *Philia* (friendship), or *Eirene* (peace) directly embodying moral and emotional ideals.

Although Athenians typically had only one personal name, individuals were distinguished from others with the same name through various naming conventions that functioned in place of modern surnames. These included the use of patronymics—identifying a person by their father's name—or demotics, which indicated the deme (local district) to which one belonged, thereby signalling both familial lineage and civic affiliation.<sup>60</sup> For women, identification was usually made through association with a male household authority—typically the father, brother, husband, or son.<sup>61</sup> Over

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<sup>59</sup> Sarah C. Humphreys, *Kinship in Ancient Athens: An Anthropological Analysis* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 263–91; José Luis García-Ramón, ‘Personal Names’, in *Brill's New Pauly, Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Schneider Helmuth, vol. 10 (Brill, 2007).

<sup>60</sup> Aristotle, *Athenaion Politeia*, 21.4; T. F. Winters, ‘Kleisthenes and Athenian Nomenclature’, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 113 (1993): 162–65; Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 21–22; Humphreys, *Kinship in Ancient Athens*, 265.

<sup>61</sup> Examples such as *Kleistrate Nikeratou* (“Kleistrate, daughter of Nikératos”), *Axiothea Sokleous gyne* (“Axiothea, wife of Sokles”), and *Lysimache Telemachou meter* (“Lysimakhe, mother of Telemakhos”) illustrate this naming pattern, see C. Morel, ‘Nomen’, in *Le Dictionnaire Des Antiquités Grecques et Romaines* (Hachette, 1873), 91;

time, personal names could be expanded to reflect changes in a person's life circumstances or replaced altogether with a *pseudonymos* (substitute name) or a *hypokorisma* (affectionate nickname), often expressing familiarity or emotional intimacy.<sup>62</sup> These forms of naming were sometimes affectionate terms given in childhood, while in other cases they evolved later as descriptive labels reflecting an individual's personality, appearance, or way of life.<sup>63</sup> Names such as *Phile* ("beloved"), *Plangon* ("doll"), and *Khoirine* ("little pig") illustrate the use of diminutives and pet names derived from animals or flowers.<sup>64</sup> Some women were also known by grammatically neutral diminutive forms ending in *-ion*, such as *Boidion* or *Pamphilion*, which softened the tone of the name and conveyed familiarity or endearment.<sup>65</sup>

Although the father held primary authority in naming a child, the process was often open to negotiation within the family. A scene from Aristophanes' comedy *Nubes* features a debate between parents over the choice of a name, suggesting that mothers could also have a say in the decision.<sup>66</sup> The motivations behind name selection varied widely. Some names reflected religious devotion—for example, *Aphrodisia* or *Kybele*—while others conveyed political leanings or aesthetic preferences.<sup>67</sup> Themistocles, for instance, named his daughters *Sybaris*, *Italia*, and *Asia*, choices that conveyed the family's cosmopolitan interests and engagement with the wider world through geographical associations.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, artisans often chose names for their children that symbolized their own profession, using naming as a means of transmitting occupational identity

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Christina Katsikadeli, 'Personal Names', in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics*, ed. Georgios K. Giannakis (Brill, 2014), 3:56.

<sup>62</sup> Humphreys, *Kinship in Ancient Athens*, 267–69; Katsikadeli, 'Personal Names', 57; García-Ramón, 'Personal Names', 835–36.

<sup>63</sup> Morel, 'Nomen', 89.

<sup>64</sup> Humphreys, *Kinship in Ancient Athens*, 267, note 17.

<sup>65</sup> Morel, 'Nomen', 91.

<sup>66</sup> Aristophanes, *Nubes*, 60–74. Blaise Nagy, 'The Naming of Athenian Girls: A Case in Point', *The Classical Journal* 74, no. 4 (1979): 362.

<sup>67</sup> Humphreys, *Kinship in Ancient Athens*, 265–66; García-Ramón, 'Personal Names', 835–36; Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 22–23.

<sup>68</sup> Plutarch, *Themistocles*, 32.2; Nagy, 'The Naming of Athenian Girls', 362–63; García-Ramón, 'Personal Names', 835–36.



across generations. A sculptor might name his son *Daidalos*, while a carpenter might choose *Kheirisophos*—names that signalled both lineage and skill. Within families, it was also common to follow naming cycles, especially for male children, by preserving the name of the paternal grandfather.<sup>69</sup> Girls, too, were sometimes named after their paternal grandmothers, though such instances are less well-documented. This disparity is largely due to the fact that Athenian women's names were rarely spoken or recorded in public during their lifetimes, which contributed to their relative invisibility in formal historical records.<sup>70</sup>

Overall, naming practices in Athens reflect the subordinate status of women in society and the dominance of a patriarchal ideology. Although one might expect women—being more closely confined to the domestic sphere—to bear names that emphasize familial connections more strongly, in practice the opposite was often true.<sup>71</sup> Men's names, owing to their visibility in the public realm, frequently preserved the names of well-known male ancestors, thereby reinforcing lineage and civic identity. In contrast, women's names, shaped by their exclusion from public life, less frequently conveyed explicit familial ties and did so in more indirect ways. Women's names were most often derived from their father's lineage or defined through their relationships with male family members. In some cases, their names amounted to little more than informal nicknames lacking structural or social significance. As such, the meanings and uses of female names should be understood as linguistic and cultural practices that reflect women's exclusion from public discourse and their confinement to familial roles. This naming pattern serves as yet another symbolic marker

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<sup>69</sup> Humphreys, *Kinship in Ancient Athens*, 271.

<sup>70</sup> Women from respectable families were generally not referred to by their personal names in public settings; instead, they were identified through their male guardians—typically their father, husband, brother, or son. However, in inscriptions, their names were usually recorded alongside those of these male relatives. Demosthenes, 27.4–5, 46–50; John Gould, 'Law, Custom and Myth: Aspects of the Social Position of Women in Classical Athens', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 100 (January 1980): 45–46. Also see note 33 in the other chapter by Hasılcıoğlu in this volume.

<sup>71</sup> Humphreys, *Kinship in Ancient Athens*, 287.

of how Athenian women were restricted to the private sphere and rendered socially invisible in terms of identity and status.<sup>72</sup>

In Athens, various rituals marked a child's integration into society and the process of becoming a citizen. One such ritual was the *meion*, performed as part of the Apatouria festival.<sup>73</sup> This ceremony marked the child's first formal introduction into the public sphere and involved a sacrificial offering within the father's phratry (kinship group) to celebrate the birth.<sup>74</sup> The term *meion*, meaning "lesser" or "secondary," is often interpreted in relation to the *koureion*, a larger sacrificial rite performed for boys during adolescence, suggesting that the *meion* may have been primarily reserved for male children.<sup>75</sup> However, while it was not entirely impossible for a *meion* to be offered for girls, such practices were not consistently observed across different phratries.<sup>76</sup> During the ceremony, male relatives from the father's phratry, as well as maternal kin and family friends, would partake in the sacrificial meal, symbolizing communal recognition of the child's birth. Although *phratries* held the authority to reject the registration of illegitimate children, ancient sources record at least one case in which a child initially denied by the father was eventually accepted after being presented by the mother's relatives.<sup>77</sup> This example highlights both the social and legal dimensions of phratry admission.<sup>78</sup> It is highly probable that girls did not participate directly in the *meion* ritual and

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<sup>72</sup> See the other chapter by Hasılciöğlu in this volume.

<sup>73</sup> Aysen Sina, 'Eskiçağda Atina'da Şenlikler', *Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 2, no. 1 (2015): 46, 1.

<sup>74</sup> Harpocraton, s.v. μέων; Golden, *Children and Childhood*, 23. On phratries, see Stephen D. Lambert, *The Phratries of Attica* (University of Michigan Press, 1998); Kaya, *Ege ve Eski Yunan Tarihi - I*, 229–36.

<sup>75</sup> Aristophanes, *Ranae*, 798; Humphreys, *Kinship in Ancient Athens*, 298.

<sup>76</sup> Isaeus, 3.73; Plato, *Leges*, 785a–b; Humphreys, *Kinship in Ancient Athens*, 582, note 49.

<sup>77</sup> Andocides, 1.126–127; Humphreys, *Kinship in Ancient Athens*, 299.

<sup>78</sup> Whether girls were formally registered in a phratry remains a matter of scholarly debate. For discussions on this issue, see Isaeus, 3.73, 75, 76, 79; Aristophanes, *Acharnenses*, 146; Mark Golden, "'Donatus' and Athenian Phratries", *The Classical Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1985): 9–13; Susan Guettel Cole, 'The Social Function of Rituals of Maturation: The Koureion and the Arkteia', *Zeitschrift Für Papyrologie Und Epigraphik* 55 (1984): 237.

may not have even been present at the ceremony.<sup>79</sup> More broadly, rites of passage for girls entering adulthood were limited in comparison to those for boys, since Athenian society primarily defined girls' roles in terms of marriage and reproduction as a means of ensuring familial continuity. Offerings to Artemis and symbolic acts such as the "bear dance" (*arkteia*) performed at Brauron functioned as preparatory rituals for these future roles. However, such practices were often privileges reserved for girls from elite families and did not represent a universal experience for all Athenian females.<sup>80</sup>

## V. Conclusion

In ancient Athenian society, childbirth was perceived not merely as a biological process but as a pivotal moment deeply embedded in religious and social dimensions. Throughout its various stages, divine intervention—particularly from goddesses such as Artemis and Eileithyia—was considered indispensable, and specific rituals were performed to secure their favour. Water played a central role in this context, not only as a means of physical cleansing but also as a symbol of ritual purification, attaining sacred significance through its use in ceremonies held at sanctified sites. Nevertheless, despite these ritual and divine measures, childbirth remained a process fraught with serious physical and social risks. The experience and judgment of midwives were of critical importance for ensuring both the safety of the mother and the viability of the newborn. The secluded setting of the birth, typically the *gynaikeion*, and the collective presence of supportive women highlight the gendered structure of Athenian society and reflect the broader dynamics of female solidarity and marginalization within that cultural framework.

Postnatal rituals in ancient Athens signified not only the infant's incorporation into the family but also their integration into the ideological and social fabric of the city. Ceremonies such as naming and the

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<sup>79</sup> A comparable case is observed in the *gamelia* ritual, held during the same festival, where the groom offers a sacrifice to the members of his phratry; notably, the bride is absent from the ceremony. See Isaeus, 3.79, 6.64; Demosthenes, 57.43; Cole, 'The Social Function', 236.

<sup>80</sup> Humphreys, *Kinship in Ancient Athens*, 299–301; Cole, 'The Social Function', 238–44.

Amphidromia marked the child's formal acceptance and laid the foundation for eventual civic identity. In particular, naming practices for girls and their exclusion from public ritual spaces served as symbolic reflections of the limited and indirect roles assigned to women in Athenian society. In this respect, childbirth and its accompanying rituals should be understood not merely as the beginning of an individual life, but as potent symbolic moments in which the ideological values, social hierarchies, and gendered divisions of the Athenian polis were reaffirmed and reproduced.

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## Chapter Five

# Education of Roman Women According to Ancient Literature

Sinem AYDOĞAN DEMİR\* & Okan DEMİR\*\*

### I. Introduction: Social Status of Roman Women

Education in ancient societies was commonly categorized into two types: traditional education, which involved the transmission of ancestral values to subsequent generations, and higher education, focused on the development of social and political skills. In ancient Roman society, which was marked by a patriarchal structure, traditional education primarily aimed to uphold the established social hierarchy and delineate the roles of men and women within that framework.<sup>1</sup> Conventional Roman education held paramount significance for all social strata, including both elite and common classes, until the latter half of the third century BC. This period is widely regarded as the initiation of Greek influence on the elite segment of Roman society.<sup>2</sup>

The education of Roman women was closely linked to their social status. To comprehend the significance of education within this context, it is essential to analyse the social positioning of Roman women, as Roman

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<sup>1</sup> Rena Van den Bergh, 'The Role of Education in the Social and Legal Position of Women in Roman Society', *Revue Internationale Des Droits de l'antiquité* 47 (2000): 352–53; Aubrey Gwynn, *Roman Education from Cicero to Quintilian* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 12–17; Henri Irénée Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York: The New American Library, 1964), 312.

<sup>2</sup> Cicero, *De republica*, IV.3.3; Pliny, *Epistulae*, VIII.14.4–10.



society adhered to its clan-based structure.<sup>3</sup> In ancient Rome, women played a crucial role in fostering unity and collaboration among various *gentilia* and *familiae*. Marriages served as a means for families to establish alliances and improve their socio-economic status. This practice underscored the strategic importance of women in the social and economic dynamics of Roman society.<sup>4</sup> In ancient Roman society, it was customary to designate females by utilizing the feminine form of the *gens nomen*. For instance, women belonging to the *gens Claudii* were referred to as Claudia, while those from the *gens Iulii* were designated as Iulia. This practice reflects the cultural significance of lineage and nomenclature within the Roman naming conventions.<sup>5</sup>

During the regal period, it is traditionally recorded that Romulus instituted a regulation concerning marriage that conferred complete authority upon husbands over their wives.<sup>6</sup> This situation pertains to the concept of *patria potestas*, which refers to the absolute authority exercised by a man over his household.<sup>7</sup> In Roman law, the status of married women was significantly influenced by the principle of *patria potestas*. In the marriage arrangement termed *cum manu*, a woman's property was entirely controlled by her husband or her husband's *paterfamilias*. Conversely, the other form of marriage, known as *sine manu*, permitted a woman to

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<sup>3</sup> Endre Ferenczy, *From the Patrician State to the Patricio-Plebeian State* (Akadémiai Kiadó: 1976), 17–19; 123ff; J. C. Meyer, 'From a Turkish Village to Republican Rome. Ideology, Mentality and Control', in *Staat Und Staatlichkeit in Der Frühen Römischen Republik. Akten Eines Symposiums, 12. - 15. Juli 1988, Freie Universität Berlin*, ed. Walter Eder (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990), 274–77.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 109–14; Andrew M. Riggsby, *Roman Law and the Legal World of the Romans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 159–60.

<sup>5</sup> Tuomo Nuorluoto, *Latin Female Cognomina: A Study on the Personal Names of Roman Women*, (Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 146, Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica/The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 2023), 5–10.

<sup>6</sup> Dionysius Halicarnassensis, *Antiquitates Romanae*, II.25; Plutarch, *Romulus*, XXII.3.

<sup>7</sup> Alan Watson, *The Digest of Justinian*, Vol. 1. 4 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 1:17–22.

maintain ownership of her property independently of her husband.<sup>8</sup> Although this form of marriage conferred property rights to women, the *paterfamilias* retained the authority to appoint a tutor for women, regardless of their age, on the grounds that women were considered to require guardianship due to a perceived lack of rationality (*propter animi levitatem*).<sup>9</sup>

The case of Roman women protesting the *Lex Oppia* in 195 BC illustrates the attitudes of Roman patriarchy toward women. Enacted in 215 BC, the *Lex Oppia* aimed to curtail women's luxury spending by prohibiting them from owning more than one ounce of gold, wearing garments of multiple colours, and riding in carriages.<sup>10</sup> After a span of twenty years, Tribunes M. Fundanius and L. Valerius sought to propose the repeal of the existing law; however, their proposal encountered opposition from two additional tribunes. Consequently, women from both urban and rural areas convened in the forum, advocating for the law's abolition.<sup>11</sup> It was highly unusual for women to engage in political matters. Senator M. Porcius Cato, the head of the conservative faction and a proponent of Roman *virtus*, voiced his opposition to the involvement of women in the Senate's proceedings. Livius (XXXIV.3) puts these words on Marcus Porcius Cato's mouth:

*"Consider all the laws pertaining to women that the ancients employed to curb their license and make them subject to their husbands; though they are restricted by all of these, you are still barely able to keep them in order. Suppose you allow them to pick away at these laws one by one, to tear them from you, and finally to put themselves on a par with their husbands. Do you believe you will find them bearable? As soon as they begin to be your equals they will immediately be your superiors. "But, you may say, they are protesting so that no new measures should be taken against them; it is not the law they object to but injustice. Not true! What they want is for you to rescind a law that you have accepted and passed with your votes, a law that has met with your approval after many years of experience of living with it; which is to say, they want you to weaken all the other laws by removing this one. No law satisfies everybody; all one asks is that it satisfies the majority*

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<sup>8</sup> Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law & Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 11–14; Alan Watson, *Rome of the XII Tables: Persons and Property* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 16ff.

<sup>9</sup> Gaius, *Institutiones*, I.144.

<sup>10</sup> Livy, XXXIV.1.3; Valerius Maximus, IX.1.3.

<sup>11</sup> Livy, XXXIV.1.4–5.

*and is of general benefit. If a person is to shred and overthrow any law that inconveniences him as an individual, what point will there be in society enacting laws that can shortly afterward be rescinded by those against whom they are directed?" I should like to hear, by the way, what it is that has brought these married ladies to run in an uproar into the streets and why they barely hold themselves back from the Forum and public assemblies. Is it so that their fathers, husbands, children, and brothers in captivity might be ransomed from Hannibal? Such dire fortune is far removed from our state, and may it ever be! And yet, when that misfortune was ours, you refused to accede to the dutiful entreaties of the women. Well, then, it was not family duty or concern for their dear ones that brought the women together—it was religion. They are going to welcome the Idaean Mother, coming from Pessinus in Phrygia! And what reason that might at least sound respectable is offered for this female revolt? 'So that we can shine in gold and purple,' she says. 'So we can ride our carriages through the city on holidays and ordinary days alike, in triumph, as it were, after the defeat and annulment of the law, and after the capture and seizure of your ballots. And so there may be no limit to our expenditure, no limit to our extravagance.'*

The analysis of this speech indicates that Cato's primary concern lies in the recognition of women's demands and their influence on political decisions, which he views as a risk to the patriarchal framework of Roman society and governance.<sup>12</sup> According to him, using the example of Roman matrons and their involvement, women, beyond their familial responsibilities, primarily engage in religious activities. Although he maintained opposition to the demands put forth by women, the sustained pressure from these women ultimately resulted in the repeal of the *Lex Oppia*.<sup>13</sup> Valerius Maximus addresses the tendency of women toward extravagance. He argues that their vulnerability in terms of mental strength

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<sup>12</sup> Georgios Vassiliades, 'The Lex Oppia in Livy 34.1–7: Failed Persuasion and Decline', in *The Ancient Art of Persuasion across Genres and Topics*, ed. Sophia Papaioannou, Andreas Serafim, and Kyriakos Demetriou (International Studies in the History of Rhetoric 12. Leiden: Brill, 2020), 109–20; Peixuan Xu, 'The Repeal of the Lex Oppia: Women's Property Rights and the Fear of Female Power the Transformation of Rome from Republic to Empire: 133–20 BCE', *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 615 (2021): 1564–65; Phyllis Culham, 'The "Lex Oppia"', *Latomus* 41, 4 (1982): 788–93; Derya Çığır Dikyol and Evren Şar İşbilen, 'Antik Roma Toplumunda Kadın ve Eğitimi', *Kutadgubilig* 37 (2018): 464.

<sup>13</sup> Livy, XXXIV.8.1–3.

and their inability to engage in more serious endeavours result in a greater focus on meticulous personal adornment in IX.1.3.10–20. It can be argued that traditional Roman biases concerning women's perceived lack of intellectual capacity are indicative of men's disapproval regarding certain behaviours. These behaviours include the consumption of wine by women, their interaction with individuals deemed suspicious, their participation in public activities without the explicit consent of their husbands, and their negligence in adhering to standards of veiling or modest attire.<sup>14</sup>

## **II. Male and Female Values of Roman Society and Women's Acquisition of Professional Skills**

Social and individual values in ancient Rome are best summarized by the term *virtus*, which means virtue. This concept centres around the ideals associated with the Roman male, originating from the Latin word *vir*, meaning man, thus, *virtus* can be interpreted as manliness. Roman women were expected to embrace these norms, embody them in their behaviour, and pass these values on to their children. These ideals primarily highlighted masculine virtues, especially courage, which were essential in shaping both Roman society and the state.<sup>15</sup> Traditional Roman education should be regarded as a mechanism for the transmission of ancestral virtues to subsequent generations, with a particular emphasis on masculine values. This aspect was of considerable significance throughout Roman history, encompassing both the republican and imperial periods.<sup>16</sup> The Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus, who was active in the first century AD, advocates for the education of women to enable them to effectively apply virtues such as chastity, courage, justice, and, most importantly, self-control (*amuntikai*) in all areas of their lives.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Valerius Maximus, VI.3.9–12: “*ergo, dum sic olim feminis occurritur, mens earum a delictis aberat*”.

<sup>15</sup> Ennius, *Annales*, V.156; Myles McDonnell, *Roman Manliness: “Virtus” and the Roman Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 16–71; Charles Goldberg, *Roman Masculinity and Politics from Republic to Empire* (London: Routledge, 2020), 15–29.

<sup>16</sup> Goldberg, *Roman Masculinity*, 36–42; McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 119.

<sup>17</sup> Musonius Rufus, *Diatribes*, IV.

From ancient sources of Roman history, it can be inferred that common values for Roman males and women<sup>18</sup> were love for the fatherland, obedience to ancestors *fides* (obedience), and gods *pietas* (piety), sacrifice for the common good.<sup>19</sup> Transmission of ancestral norms typically involves virtues for males: *auctoritas* (prestige), *fortitude* (strength), *gravitas* (seriousness), and *dignitas* (dignity).<sup>20</sup> Sometimes virtues that were attributed to men could be observed in women and were generally appreciated by ancient authors.<sup>21</sup> In various funerary steles, Roman women are commemorated by their husbands and sons, who extol their virtues, including obedience, grace, industry, justice, chastity, piety, modesty, loyalty, propriety, devotion, and motherhood.<sup>22</sup>

The Romans recognized the significance of *virtus*, a principle that they inherited from their ancestors through formal education. This understanding of *virtus* played a crucial role in their achievements and their ability to assert dominance over other cultures.<sup>23</sup> In the context of traditional values and education, the social development and ideal roles of Roman women were defined. Generally, the virtues that Roman women were expected to embody included *pudicitia* (chastity), *diligentia* (diligence), *comitas* (affability), and *fecunditas* (fecundity).<sup>24</sup> Considering their limited engagement in the social and political domains of Rome, the education of

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<sup>18</sup> On the commonality of *virtus*, both men and women see Catalina Balmaceda, *Virtus Romana: Politics and Morality in the Roman Histories* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 19–20.

<sup>19</sup> Livy, I.26.2–5; Dionysius Halicarnassensis, VIII.40.1–5; Plutarch, *Coriolanus*, 33.1–5; Cicero, *De officiis*, I.17.53–58; Dikyol and İşbilen, ‘Antik Roma Toplumunda Kadın ve Eğitimi’, 471–72; Balmaceda, *Virtus Romana*, 32–34.

<sup>20</sup> Goldberg, *Roman Masculinity*, 23ff.

<sup>21</sup> Dio Cassius, XLIV.13, XLVII.49.3; Plutarch, *Brutus*, 13, 23, 53; Appian, BC IV.136; Valerius Maximus, III.2.15.

<sup>22</sup> Mary R. Lefkowitz and M. B. Fant, *Women’s Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 16–21.

<sup>23</sup> McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 3; L. R. Lind, ‘Concept, Action, and Character: The Reasons for Rome’s Greatness’, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 103 (1972): 236–49.

<sup>24</sup> Cicero, *De officiis*, I.36.130; Plutarch, *Brutus*, 13, 53; Valerius Maximus, IV.6.5; McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 161–65; Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Élite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 85–88; Balmaceda, *Virtus Romana*, 118–26.

Roman women may be perceived primarily as an absorption of traditional norms. In Martal, *Epigrams*, VIII.12, it is proposed that for a relationship to thrive, a woman's economic standing should be subordinate to that of her husband. The text notes, "You all ask why I don't want to marry a wealthy wife? I don't want to be my wife's wife. The *matron*, Priscus, should be beneath her husband. That's the only way for man and woman to be equal." Furthermore, Valerius Maximus emphasizes that the key virtues for married women are obedience to their husbands, loyalty, and a steadfast commitment to their marriage (VI.7.1–3).

Mothers play a vital role in supporting the principles of *mos maiorum* by acting as co-supervisors in their children's education. While fathers are responsible for teaching foundational skills such as arithmetic, reading, and writing, mothers primarily focus on imparting moral values.<sup>25</sup> Tacitus (*Dialogus de oratoribus*, 28) commends the traditional Roman approach to home education, emphasizing the mother's commitment to her children's academic development. Numerous literary sources portray Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, as the epitome of an ideal wife and mother, as she significantly contributed to raising her orphaned children and guiding their professional paths.<sup>26</sup>

A prominent negative figure among Roman women is Clodia, who is said to have undermined traditional female values. In his speech against Caelius<sup>27</sup>, Cicero launched a scathing attack on Clodia, the sister of his adversary, Clodius Pulcher. Mimicking her ancestor Appianus Claudius Caecus, he sought to discredit Clodia by criticizing her lifestyle and her relationship with Caelius:

"Woman, what hast thou to do with Caelius, with a stripling, with a stranger?  
Why hast thou been either so intimate with him as to lend him gold, or such  
an enemy as to fear poison? Hadst thou not seen that thy father, hadst thou

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<sup>25</sup> Van den Bergh, 'The Role of Education', 353; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 60; Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 313–14; Stanley Frederick Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 14–19.

<sup>26</sup> Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus*, 1.1–7; Plutarch, *Gaius Gracchus*, 4.2–4, 19.1–3; Diodorus Siculus, XXXIV.25.2; Cicero, *Brutus*, 104; 211; Cornelius Nepos, *Fragments*, I.1–2; Valerius Maximus, IV.4, VII.1.

<sup>27</sup> Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 14.

*not heard that thy uncle, thy grandfather, thy great-grand-father, thy great-great-grandfather and his father were consuls? Lastly, didst thou not know that lately thou hadst in marriage Quintus Metellus, a most illustrious and most courageous man, most devoted to his country, who had only to step outside his own door to surpass nearly all his fellow-citizens in courage, in glory and in prestige? When thou hadst passed, by marriage, from a family of high nobility into a most illustrious house, why was Caelius so closely connected with thee? Kinsman? Relative by marriage? Friend of thine husband? None of these. What then was thy reason, if it was not some reckless passion? If the images of the men of our family did not touch thine heart, did not even the famous Quinta Claudia, a daughter of my own race, rouse thee to show thyself a rival of those virtuous women who have brought glory upon our house?" ... "Why did thy brother's vices move thee rather than the virtues of thy father and of thine ancestors, kept alive since my time not only by the men but also by the women of our family? Was it for this that I tore up the peace with Pyrrhus, that thou fortitude daily strike bargains about thine infamous amours? Was it for this that I brought water to Rome, that thou fortitude use it after thy incestuous debauches? Was it for this that I built up a road, that thou fortitude frequent it with a train of other women's husbands?"*

Aside from the elite class, many educated Roman women from lower social strata possessed fundamental skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic. It can be inferred that a significant number of these women, who developed professional competencies, acquired their literacy and numeracy not through formal education but rather through practical work experience in their respective fields.<sup>28</sup> According to various funerary inscriptions, it is evident that some women were trained as professional scribes in both Latin and Greek.<sup>29</sup> The development of professional skills for earning a livelihood, such as trades and craftsmanship, is also fostered within the household for both sons and daughters. In addition to their responsibilities as housewives, free Roman women from common backgrounds acquired various trading skills and crafts to help support their families. The most esteemed profession attainable for a woman from such

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<sup>28</sup> Emily A. Hemelrijk, 'The Education of Women in Ancient Rome', in *A Companion to Ancient Education*, ed. W. Martin Bloomer (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015), 301.

<sup>29</sup> Kim Haines-Eitzen, '“Girls Trained in Beautiful Writing”: Female Scribes in Roman Antiquity and Early Christianity', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, 4 (1998): 634–40.

backgrounds was that of a doctor or midwife.<sup>30</sup> The understanding of female medicine and the role of female physicians was derived from traditional methodologies. It is evident that these practitioners possessed the ability to read medical treatises and formulate prescriptions.<sup>31</sup>

### III. Roman Schools

Although Plutarch, *Ques. Rom.* 59 cites Spurius Carvilius, a freedman from the third century BC, as the first individual to establish an elementary school and the first to charge for teaching, ancient literary sources indicate the presence of such schools as early as the 5th century BC. Furthermore, it is significant that a woman named Vergilia was celebrated as a heroine in the earliest reference to Roman elementary schools in 449 BC (*litterarum ludi*).<sup>32</sup> Vergilia, the daughter of the respectable centurion and *tribunus plebis* L. Verginius, was raised with traditional Roman values, instilled by her mother.<sup>33</sup> As a grown, betrothed young woman (*virgo adulta*), she attended her elementary school accompanied by her nurse (*nutrix*). One of the *decemviri*, Appius Claudius, implemented a final scheme to win her over. Previously, he had attempted to seduce her with money and promises, but as a virtuous Roman girl, she defended her chastity. Claiming Vergilia as his slave, he asserted that she was born to one of his female slaves.<sup>34</sup> Despite the intervention of her fiancé, the tribune L. Licilius, and her father, L. Verginius, alongside support from the Roman plebs, they were ultimately unable to protect her. The obstinacy of the decemvir left her father with no choice but to consider killing Vergilia to defend her honour.<sup>35</sup> This narrative underscores the significance of Roman values and their influence on young women, particularly in social contexts and educational environments.

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<sup>30</sup> Gillian Clark, 'Roman Women', *Greece & Rome* 28, 2 (1981): 198.

<sup>31</sup> Rebecca Flemming, 'Women, Writing and Medicine in the Classical World', *The Classical Quarterly* 57, 1 (2007): 258–79; Rebecca Flemming, 'Gendering Medical Provision in the Cities of the Roman West', in *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*, ed. Greg Woolf and E. Hemelrijk (Brill, 2013), 277–89.

<sup>32</sup> Livy, III.44–49; Dionysius Halicarnassensis, 28–37; Diodorus Siculus, XII.24.

<sup>33</sup> Livy, III.44.2–3.

<sup>34</sup> Livy, III.44.4–6; Dionysius Halicarnassensis, XI.28.3–4.

<sup>35</sup> Livy, III.48.1–8; Dionysius Halicarnassensis, XI.29–37; Diodorus Siculus, XII.24.4; Dio Cassius, V.3; Zonaras, VII.18; Cicero, *De finibus*, II.20.66; Valerius Maximus, VI.1.2; Florus, *Epitome*, I.17.24.



Traditional norms held considerable weight within schools, with Roman society expecting educators in higher learning to align with ancestral customs.<sup>36</sup> The impact of traditional norms derived from the patriarchal framework of the Roman family.<sup>37</sup>

Roman education is classified into two primary categories: basic education and higher education. Basic education may be conducted at home by the *paterfamilias*, a private tutor, or a skilled slave. In contrast, higher education is predominantly delivered in formal educational institutions and primarily emphasizes rhetoric, instructed by an experienced rhetor.<sup>38</sup> In addition to instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic at the *ludus*, or elementary school, for students aged six to thirteen, Latin grammar was also delivered by qualified teachers.<sup>39</sup> Girls from rich families undoubtedly gained more from the intensive educational approaches employed by private tutors. Historical figures such as Cicero and Pliny have noted that the daughters of distinguished families received their education at home, guided by specialized instructors.<sup>40</sup> During this period, private educators, especially those who were previously enslaved and served as *paedagogus* and *custos*, emerged as important figures in the educational landscape.<sup>41</sup> According to Plutarch (*Cato Maior*, 20.4–6), although Cato Maior had a skilled slave, Chilo, a schoolteacher who taught many boys, preferred to teach his son reading by himself and be a tutor of other things, like law, athletics, and riding.

In ancient Rome, public education was not viewed as the duty of the state. According to Plutarch in “*Quaestiones Romanae*” (59), teaching was regarded as an honourable act performed by individuals for their friends and family, and it was only recently that people began to teach for a fee.

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<sup>36</sup> Van den Bergh, ‘The Role of Education’, 352ff; Giuseppe La Bua, *Cicero and Roman Education: The Reception of the Speeches and Ancient Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 5; Mark Joyal, J. C. Yardley and Iain McDougall, *Greek and Roman Education: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2022), 159–61; Dikyol and İşbilen, ‘Antik Roma Toplumunda Kadın ve Eğitimi’, 470.

<sup>37</sup> Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome*, 5–9.

<sup>38</sup> Van den Bergh, ‘The Role of Education’, 354.

<sup>39</sup> Van den Bergh, ‘The Role of Education’, 354.

<sup>40</sup> Van den Bergh, ‘The Role of Education’, 355.

<sup>41</sup> Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome*, 37–38.

The first known individual to establish a grammar school was Spurius Carbilus, a freedman of Carbilus.

This understanding of education can be extended to the broader Mediterranean world in antiquity, particularly exemplified by Sparta during the classical period. In Sparta, education was embraced as a lifelong pursuit, encompassing all aspects of life and aiming to cultivate the ideal Spartan citizen, as recorded by Xenophon in “Laconian Polity” (2) and by Plutarch in his accounts of Lycurgus (13–18).<sup>42</sup>

In Rome, most children’s formal education typically ended around the ages of 13 to 15 when they completed elementary school, largely due to their socioeconomic circumstances. This was particularly true for girls, as they were often expected to marry by the age of 13 or 15.<sup>43</sup> Women from wealthy families have had the opportunity to engage in higher education, particularly from the second century BC. This development can be understood as a reflection of the broader dissemination of educational practices influenced by Greek culture on Roman society.

The framework and delivery of higher education in Rome were notably influenced by Greek traditions. Starting in the second century BC, the emergence of private tutors specializing in Greek and Latin rhetoric coincided with the establishment of schools dedicated to oratory and philosophy. As Rome solidified its status as a global power after the Hannibalic Wars, the Roman elite increasingly sought to acquire knowledge of Greek culture and language, motivated by their interactions with the advanced Hellenic civilization.<sup>44</sup> The Roman ruling class understood the practical advantages of embracing Greek culture and language, which played a significant role in the dissemination of Hellenic culture across the Mediterranean. This influence largely originated from the Greek colonization movement that started in the 7th century BC and was further enhanced by the conquests of Alexander the Great. Remarkably, Southern

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<sup>42</sup> Mark Griffith, ‘The Earliest Greek Systems of Education’, in *A Companion to Ancient Education*, ed. W. Martin Bloomer (John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2015), 44–45; Anton Powell, ‘Spartan Education’, in *A Companion to Ancient Education*, ed. W. Martin Bloomer (John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2015), 90–110.

<sup>43</sup> Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, 39–43.

<sup>44</sup> Van den Bergh, ‘The Role of Education’, 356.

Italy emerged as one of the main bastions of the Hellenic world even prior to Alexander's expansions. As a result, the Romans were acquainted with Hellenic culture from the early stages of their social and political development.<sup>45</sup>

In their pursuit of a fulfilling life and the attainment of happiness, the Roman elite strategically incorporated principles from various Greek philosophical schools, including Stoicism, Epicureanism, and sophism.<sup>46</sup> Each philosophical school offers distinct views on the education necessary to cultivate the ideal human being. Among the Roman elite, Stoicism emerged as the most prominent and influential philosophical school from the second century BC until the fall of the Roman Empire. Its impact can even be observed in early Christian thought.<sup>47</sup> There exist notable distinctions between Early Stoicism and Middle Stoicism, particularly concerning the attitudes of Middle Stoics towards education and the alignment of these perspectives with traditional Roman virtues.<sup>48</sup>

It can be argued that Greek influence on Roman education predominantly occurred at the higher levels. Rhetoric schools served as pivotal institutions for advanced education, equipping young men with essential oratory skills crucial for the public persona of the Roman elite. Additionally, these institutions imparted knowledge in law, literature, and history, thereby enhancing the comprehensive education of their students.<sup>49</sup> The absence of political rights and a defined identity has rendered the pursuit of higher education for women not merely challenging but also seemingly unworthy of effort, as the societal barriers reinforce the perception that such educational attainment offers little meaningful

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<sup>45</sup> William Anton Smith, *Ancient Education* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), 186–91.

<sup>46</sup> A. A. Long, 'Roman Philosophy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*, ed. David Sedley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 184.

<sup>47</sup> Long, 'Roman Philosophy', 191–210.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin Farrington, *Science and the Politics in the Ancient World* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1939), 114–17; 195–208; Christian Felipe Pineda, 'La influencia de la filosofía y la retórica en la educación de la República Romana', *Versiones. Revista de Filosofía* 7 (July, 2015), 55–65.

<sup>49</sup> Eduardo Fernández, 'Rhetoric and Education: An Approach to the Roman School', *Revista Española de Pedagogía* 80, 283 (2022): 481–87; Pineda, 'La influencia de la filosofía', 59–64.

reward.<sup>50</sup> However, the Roman Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus ardently advocates for the education of women, contending that the paramount aim of education is to nurture and sustain a life filled with virtue and goodness. He articulates a belief in the inherent equality of men and women, emphasizing their shared capacity to comprehend and discern between right and wrong, and to pursue a life steeped in moral integrity. For Rufus, philosophy is not merely an abstract pursuit; rather, it is the very science of living. He asserts that women should immerse themselves in the study of philosophy, as it equips them to fulfil their vital roles as wives while simultaneously fostering their own growth and self-improvement.<sup>51</sup> Marcus Fabius Quintilianus exhibits a comparable attitude towards women who pursue higher education. He commends the intellectual achievements of women such as Cornelia, Hortensia, and Laelia, highlighting their contributions to the field of education.<sup>52</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

The educational paradigm of ancient Rome was inextricably tied to its patriarchal foundations, traditional virtues, and class stratification. Education was neither a neutral institution nor merely a conduit for intellectual growth. Instead, it was a powerful cultural mechanism for sustaining Roman identity, social roles, and values across generations. The rigid categorization of Roman education into traditional and higher forms reflects the dichotomy between moral indoctrination and elite formation. Traditional education, primarily delivered within the domestic sphere, instilled *virtus*—a cluster of virtues deeply associated with masculinity, moral discipline, and social order. Higher education, on the other hand, evolved as a domain of civic training and rhetorical sophistication, exclusively tailored for elite Roman males preparing for public life.

At the heart of this system was a vision of society that valued continuity over innovation, hierarchy over equality, and moral discipline over intellectual freedom. Within this model, Roman women played a paradoxical role. On the one hand, their education, when it existed, was

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<sup>50</sup> Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 56–57; Van den Bergh, ‘The Role of Education’, 358.

<sup>51</sup> Musonius Rufus, *Diatribes*, III.

<sup>52</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, I.1.6.

rooted in reinforcing the values of *pudicitia* (chastity), *fides* (faithfulness), and *pietas* (piety), aligning them with their roles as dutiful wives, mothers, and moral exemplars. On the other hand, women's contributions to education and moral transmission within the family were indispensable, especially in the early nurturing of children's character and Roman identity. Mothers, particularly those from elite households, acted as co-educators alongside their husbands, providing moral instruction and emotional formation in line with the ideals of *mos maiorum*.

The case of Roman women protesting the *Lex Oppia* in 195 BC illustrates the tension between Roman patriarchy and women's agency. Though traditionally excluded from formal political participation, women mobilized collectively to challenge legislation they perceived as unjust, revealing that education, whether formal or informal, endowed them with rhetorical skill, strategic thinking, and a consciousness of civic engagement. While figures like Senator M. Porcius Cato resisted such shifts, fearing a collapse of the patriarchal order, the episode demonstrated the potential of Roman women to assert influence even within restrictive societal frameworks.

From a legal standpoint, Roman marriage laws and the enduring principle of *patria potestas* ensured male dominance over familial and marital arrangements. Women's access to property, autonomy, and guardianship was mediated by their legal dependence on male relatives. The forms of marriage—*cum manu* and *sine manu*—reflected this structural inequality. While *sine manu* provided some legal independence, it did not abolish the guardianship system or the deeply entrenched view of female irrationality. Educational expectations for women were, therefore, closely tied to their perceived intellectual and moral fragility—a belief reinforced by philosophers, legal codes, and moralists.

Despite this, figures like Musonius Rufus and Quintilian emerged as rare advocates for the philosophical and moral education of women. His Stoic ideal of shared human rationality and moral potential challenged dominant gender norms, arguing that women, like men, should pursue wisdom, self-control, and virtue. In Rufus's view, the cultivation of virtue through education was not just compatible with the female condition but essential to it. This was a significant departure from mainstream Roman

views, which largely confined women's education to preparation for marriage, motherhood, and modest household management.

It is also critical to recognize the nuanced realities of education among lower-class Roman women. While elite women might have enjoyed private tutelage in literature, philosophy, or rhetoric, many women of the lower classes acquired literacy and vocational skills through practical work experience. Funerary inscriptions and historical accounts testify to women working as scribes, physicians, midwives, and artisans. Their education, informal yet impactful, was rooted in necessity and function rather than cultural prestige. In these cases, education was a tool of empowerment within a constrained socio-political space, allowing women to contribute economically to their households and engage in public life through their professions.

The story of Vergilia, celebrated as a paragon of Roman virtue, encapsulates the complex intersection of education, morality, and gender in Roman society. Her narrative affirms the high value placed on female chastity and honour, as well as the expectation that women personify the virtues taught to them. Despite systemic constraints, her commitment to Roman ideals—even at the cost of her life—serves as a symbolic reinforcement of the traditional moral education expected of Roman girls.

Roman educational values extended into public and elite domains as well. With the Hellenization of Roman education from the second century BC onward, schools of rhetoric, philosophy, and law flourished, embedding Greek pedagogical models within Roman civic and elite culture. These institutions were vital in shaping the future ruling class, offering training in oratory and logic indispensable for senatorial and legal careers. Education in this context was both a status marker and a preparatory stage for leadership. However, these opportunities were largely denied to women, as their exclusion from political life was seen as rendering such education superfluous or even subversive.

The influence of Stoicism, Epicureanism, and other Hellenistic schools further diversified Roman educational thought. While Stoicism in particular emphasized self-discipline, justice, and rationality, its teachings were largely integrated into Roman values of *gravitas*, *fortitudo*, and *auctoritas*. These ideals were essential not only for male citizens but also for

women in domestic spheres, as they were expected to embody and transmit these virtues to their offspring. In this way, education became a multigenerational project that preserved the ideological and cultural continuity of Rome.

In conclusion, Roman education functioned as both a reflection of and a tool for shaping its society. It mirrored the prevailing gender norms, legal frameworks, and social hierarchies, while also reinforcing them through the ideological transmission of values such as *virtus* and other ancestral traditions. Although some women succeeded in establishing roles as scribes, doctors, and midwives, access to education for public professions was primarily limited to men. Ultimately, the educational system was designed to sustain the patriarchal structure of Rome, emphasizing masculine ideals, civic responsibility, and loyalty to family.

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## Chapter Six

# **A Journey Across Dynasties: Georgian Princess Tamara from the Bagrationi Lineage to the Anatolian Seljuks**

Zehra GÜNEŞ\*

### **I. Introduction**

Princess Tamara was a noblewoman with dynastic ties to the ruling houses of two distinct states through both her mother and father. Following her marriage to the Anatolian Seljuk Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw II, she came to be known as *Gurju Khatun* and she possessed a deep familiarity with both Christian and Islamic cultures. The reason for focusing on Gurju Khatun lies in her unique position within both the family she was born into and the one she joined through marriage, as well as the crises she experienced in these contexts. Gurju Khatun married twice, and both unions were arranged for political purposes. While it is unclear whether she directly witnessed the familial conflict between her parents, she was nevertheless compelled to live separated from her father. In her role as a wife, she endured the volatile affection of her first husband, Sultan Kaykhusraw II, and experienced an even more troubled relationship with her second husband, Mu‘īn al-Dīn Parwāna. As a mother, she suffered the devastating loss of her child. Although she attained a position within the ruling elite through Parwāna’s influence, her political significance within the Seljuk dynasty effectively came to an end following the death of her son.

This chapter examines the life journey of Georgian Princess Tamara, one of the most notable female figures of the 13th century, as it extended

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into the Anatolian Seljuk State, within a historical context. Born into the Bagrationi Dynasty, Tamara became a political instrument at a young age and subjected to marriages arranged beyond her own volition and integrated into diverse cultural and political structures. Her first marriage, to the Anatolian Seljuk Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw II, was characterized by a precarious interplay of affection and violence. Her second marriage, to Muʿīn al-Dīn Parwāna, was seemingly driven by political considerations and lacked emotional intimacy. Tamara's strained and conflict-ridden relationship with her mother, Queen Rusudan, reflects the emotional deprivation she had to endure as a daughter within her familial sphere. Amid this intricate network of relationships, Tamara's role as a mother was likewise marked by profound sorrow, culminating in the tragic loss of her son. Despite her noble birth, the Gurju Khatun was unable to transcend the gendered constraints imposed on women by the spirit of her era. Her life represents the existence of a woman in a society shaped by power, faith, motherhood, and identity. By centering on the lived experiences of the Gurju Khatun, this chapter aims to reveal the burdens placed upon women in a society, demonstrating that even aristocratic descent was insufficient to shield women from the gendered and sociopolitical constraints imposed by a patriarchal society.

## **II. The Family of Princess Tamara**

Before delving into Princess Tamara's marital history, it is essential to first consider the familial and dynastic context into which she was born. Named after her grandmother Queen Tamar, Princess Tamara was the niece of King George IV of Georgia. Before his death in 1223, King George IV designated his sister Rusudan as his successor to the Georgian throne. Georgians were not unfamiliar with female rulers; the legacy of Queen Tamar, mother to both George and Rusudan, was still vivid in the collective memory as a symbol of effective and powerful leadership. Although King George had a son named David, the boy was too young to ascend the throne at the time. While designating Rusudan as regent, George simultaneously

entrusted her with David's care and expressed his intent that the crown would eventually pass to his son upon reaching maturity.<sup>1</sup>

After Queen Rusudan ascended to the throne, she entered into a marriage that astonished many. According to the Muslim historian Ibn al-Athir—who described the event under the heading “*a strange and unprecedented occurrence*”—the Christian Queen of Georgia intended to marry someone outside her own faith. The prospective groom was the son of Tughrulshah, the ruler of Erzurum. It was Tughrulshah himself who initially proposed the marriage, expressing his desire for his son to wed Queen Rusudan of Georgia. However, the Georgian nobility opposed the idea of their Christian monarch marrying a Muslim. To overcome this obstacle, Tughrulshah offered for his son to convert to Christianity. The Georgian elite accepted the proposal, thereby approving the marriage between Rusudan and Tughrulshah's son. The young man converted and travelled to Georgian lands to marry the queen.<sup>2</sup> At the time, Tughrulshah was paying tribute to the Georgians and sought to maintain good relations with the Ayyubids to guard against potential threats from Konya.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it would not have been unusual for him to pursue personal advantage through this marriage alliance. A Georgian source praises the groom for his physical perfection, strength, and bravery, claiming he arrived as a captive and that Rusudan fell in love with him.<sup>4</sup> However, in contrast to Ibn al-Athir, the Georgian source neither attributes the marriage proposal to Tuğrulshah nor mentions any dissatisfaction among the Georgian nobility or the issue of religious conversion. While it was not uncommon for women to convert before or during marriage, it was highly unorthodox (within both Georgian and Seljuk cultural frameworks) for a man to do undergo religious conversion.

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<sup>1</sup> Kartlis Tskhovreba, *A History of Georgia*, trans. Dmritri Gamq'relidze, ed. Roin Met'reveli, Stephen Jones, Tbilisi 2014, 322; Ömer Subaşı, 'Türkiye Selçuklu Devleti'nde Güçlü Bir Kadın: Gürcü Hatun Tamara', *Mustafa Kemal University Journal of Graduate School of Social Sciences*, 2016, Vol.13, no. 33, 385.

<sup>2</sup> İbnü'l Esîr, *İslâm Tarihi el-Kâmil fi't-Târih Tercümesi*, Vol. 12, trans. Abdülkerim Özeydin, Ahmet Ağırakça, Ravza Yayınları, İstanbul 2019, 267.

<sup>3</sup> Faruk Sümer, 'Tuğrul Şah', *DİA*, Vol. 41, İstanbul 2012, 347.

<sup>4</sup> Tskhovreba, *A History of Georgia*, 324.

The marriage between Tughrulshah's son and Queen Rusudan took place in 1223.<sup>5</sup> From this union, two children were born: Tamara and David.<sup>6</sup> Historian Ömer Subaşı suggests that Princess Tamara was born within the first year of this union,<sup>7</sup> a claim that appears to be supported by subsequent events. However, the marriage between Queen Rusudan and her husband was short-lived. Despite the brief duration, Queen Rusudan was unfaithful to her spouse. When her husband caught Rusudan in bed with her lover, he became enraged and declared he would not tolerate the situation. In response, Rusudan had him transferred to another city and imprisoned.<sup>8</sup> He was eventually released in 1226 by the Khwarezmshah Jalal al-Din.<sup>9</sup>

In 1232, the Mongols advanced as far as Sivas, devastating the region. Sultan 'Alā' ad-Dīn Kayqubād I, accusing Âmir Kamaladdin Kamyar of encouraging the Mongol invasion, sent him against the Georgians. Unable to withstand the Seljuk forces, the Georgians, led by Queen Rusudan, proposed peace. Along with an apology for the conflict, Rusudan offered a marriage alliance to secure a lasting peace: She suggested that her daughter marry the Sultan's son Ghiyath al-Dīn once she came of age. With Sultan Kayqubād's acceptance of this proposal, Georgian Princess Tamara became engaged to Malik Ghiyāth al-Dīn.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the union between Tamara and Ghiyāth al-Dīn was an example of a consanguineous marriage. Tamara was affiliated with the Seljuk dynasty paternally; her grandfather Tughrulshah was one of the sons of Seljuk Sultan Qilij Arslan II.<sup>11</sup> Tamara's father and 'Alā' ad-Dīn Kayqubād were cousins, making Tamara and Ghiyāth al-Dīn first cousins once removed.

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<sup>5</sup> Turan, *Selçuklular Zamanında Türkiye*, 16th Edition, İstanbul 2018, 434.

<sup>6</sup> Tskhovreba, *A History of Georgia*, 324.

<sup>7</sup> Subaşı, 'Gürcü Hatun Tamara', 387.

<sup>8</sup> İbnü'l Esîr, *el-Kâmil fi't-Târîh*, Vol. 12, 267–268.

<sup>9</sup> Muhammed b. Ahmed Nesevî, *Celâleddin Hârizmşah Biyografisi*, trans. Necip Asım, Prepared for Publication and Footnoted by Mustafa Demirci İstanbul 2021, 123–134; Turan, *Selçuklular Zamanında Türkiye*, 434.

<sup>10</sup> el-Hüseyn b. Muhammed b. Ali El-Ca'feri Er-Rugadi İbn Bibi, *el-Evamirü'l-Ala'iyye fi'l-Umuri'l-Ala'iyye* (*Selçukname*), Vol. II, trans. Mürsel Öztürk, Ankara 2014, 465; Faruk Sümer, 'Keykubad I', *DİA*, Vol. 25, Ankara 2022, 358.

<sup>11</sup> Faruk Sümer, 'Tuğrul Şah', *DİA*, Vol. 41, İstanbul 2012, 346.

### III. Tamara's Transition to Gurju Khatun and Marriages

When Sultan 'Alā' ad-Dīn Kayqubād died in 1237, his eldest son, Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw II, ascended the throne. After resolving certain internal issues within the state, he sent one of his leading officials, Shihab al-Din Kirmani, to Queen Rusudan to formally express his desire to marry his fiancée. The envoy arrived in Tbilisi bearing lavish gifts and was warmly received by Rusudan. Subsequently, Princess Tamara set out to marry the ruler of the Anatolian Seljuk State.<sup>12</sup> According to the Georgian chronicle, the Sultan promised that he would not interfere with his wife's faith nor force her to convert.<sup>13</sup> When Tamara departed for Konya, she brought along a portable church. Sacred relics and clergy accompanied her on this journey.<sup>14</sup>

When the caravan carrying Tamara and her entourage arrived in Erzincan, news was sent to the Sultan. Ghiyāth al-Dīn ordered that every town along the route to Konya be adorned and that no disrespect be shown to the Khatun. Festivities were organized in all the places Tamara passed through. The Sultan himself set out toward Kayseri, where a grand wedding ceremony was held.<sup>15</sup> When the marriage took place in 1238, Tamara was approximately thirteen or fourteen years old,<sup>16</sup> while Ghiyāth al-Dīn was around sixteen or seventeen.<sup>17</sup>

Queen Rusudan sent her nephew David to Konya, where her daughter resided. The reason for distancing her nephew from Tbilisi was her intention to place her own son, David, on the throne. In fact, when her brother King George IV designated Rusudan as regent, he entrusted his young son David to her care, with the expectation that the throne would pass from Rusudan to her nephew David once he came of age. Prince David was well received in Konya by his cousin Tamara and her husband, Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw II. However, in a message sent to her daughter, Queen Rusudan instructed Tamara to eliminate her nephew, David. Thus,

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<sup>12</sup> İbn Bibi, *el-Evamirü'l-Ala'iyye*, 465–466.

<sup>13</sup> Tskhovreba, *A History of Georgia*, 324–325.

<sup>14</sup> Turan, *Selçuklular Zamanında Türkiye*, 435.

<sup>15</sup> İbn Bibi, *el-Evamirü'l-Ala'iyye*, 466–467.

<sup>16</sup> Subaşı, 'Gürcü Hatun Tamara', 389.

<sup>17</sup> Ali Sevim, 'Keyhusrev II', *DİA*, Vol. 25, Ankara 2022, 348.

Rusudan aimed to secure sole succession for her own son David. Tamara and her husband, however, did not share Rusudan's ambition. Consequently, they treated David—who had been sent to them with the intention of being killed—with kindness and hospitality.<sup>18</sup>

When Rusudan did not receive a favorable response to her request, she repeated it several times, but each time her demand was denied. Faced with this, she resorted to a different strategy that could have endangered her own daughter. In a letter sent to her son-in-law Ghiyāth al-Dīn, she accused her daughter of having a secret relationship with her nephew David. In a fit of rage, the sultan physically assaulted his wife and destroyed the religious icons she held dear. His violence extended further, as he also inflicted harm upon Tamara's attendants. David was subjected to various tortures but refused to admit any guilt. His defence centred on a matter familiar to the Sultan: Queen Rusudan's singular desire, which David claimed was the root cause of his suffering. The Sultan did not relent in his anger and ordered David's execution. Although two attempts were made on David's life, he survived.<sup>19</sup> However, considering the circumstances surrounding the second assassination attempt and the Sultan's subsequent lack of pursuit, it is plausible that he eventually became convinced of David's death.

While Queen Rusudan successfully secured the throne for her son David in the Kingdom of Georgia, her daughter's marriage in Konya proceeded with instability. Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn, despite having physically assaulted his wife over an unsubstantiated allegation, remained deeply attached to her. Motivated by his affection, he wished to have his wife's likeness engraved on the coinage. However, senior state officials opposed this proposal and persuaded the Sultan to instead depict lions and suns on the official currency, symbols traditionally believed to bring good fortune to the Khatun.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, it is documented that the Sultan married

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<sup>18</sup> Tskhovreba, *A History of Georgia*, 327–328; Subaşı, 'Gürcü Hatun Tamara', 390.

<sup>19</sup> Tskhovreba, *A History of Georgia*, 336–337; Subaşı, 'Gürcü Hatun Tamara', 390–391.

<sup>20</sup> Ahmed b. Mahmud, *Selçuk-Nâme*, Vol. 2, ed. Erdoğan Merçil, İstanbul 1977, 155.

other women following his union with Tamara; he had two prior wives before the Gurju Khatun, both of whom bore him children.<sup>21</sup>

After marrying Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw II, Georgian Princess Tamara converted from Christianity to Islam. Although the Georgian chronicle claims that this conversion was forced because of the Sultan's physical abuse,<sup>22</sup> Osman Turan argues that the information presented in the chronicle is fabricated.<sup>23</sup> Known more commonly as the Gurju Khatun, rather than by the name given to her by her mother, her close relationships with prominent Sufi figures in Konya indicate that she was genuinely a sincere Muslim.<sup>24</sup>

When the Gurju Khatun arrived in Konya from her homeland Tbilisi, she brought with her a large entourage. These people settled in the palace and its surroundings alongside their mistress, gradually gaining power and earning favor with Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn. Some members of the Georgian retinue abused this influence and contributed to Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn poor governance by encouraging his erroneous decisions.<sup>25</sup> However, statesmen such as her Georgian son Zahir al-Din acted in the opposite direction. During the lead-up to the Battle of Köse Dağ, Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw II assembled an army of eighty thousand in Kayseri. When the Seljuk army reached Sivas, they awaited the Mongol forces. While experienced commanders advised waiting in Sivas, a faction urged the Sultan to take offensive action against the Mongols. As the Mongols swiftly advanced past Erzincan toward Sivas, Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn moved to a nearby region of Köse Dağ that was safe and rich in resources for the army. Commanders such as her Georgian son, Zahir al-Dīn, and Muhazzab al-Dīn 'Alī counseled against further advancement; however, the faction led by Nizāmeddīn Suhrāb persisted in advocating for an attack, ultimately persuading the Sultan to take action. Nizāmeddīn Suhrāb accused the Georgian son Zahir al-Dīn of cowardice and of protecting the Georgians within the Mongol army, emphasizing his Christian faith. The next day,

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<sup>21</sup> Subaşı, 'Gürcü Hatun Tamara', 392.

<sup>22</sup> Tskhovreba, *A History of Georgia*, 336.

<sup>23</sup> Turan, *Selçuklular Zamanında Türkiye*, 435–436.

<sup>24</sup> Subaşı, 'Gürcü Hatun Tamara', 393.

<sup>25</sup> Subaşı, 'Gürcü Hatun Tamara', 391–392.



contrary to the counsel of seasoned statesmen, the army moved forward. Although Nizāmeddīn Suhrāb declared, “*Even if God is with them, I will defeat the Tatars,*” the outcome was drastically different from what was hoped. In 1243, the Seljuks suffered a devastating defeat against the Mongol forces. Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw II fled with his precious and portable belongings. When the Mongols entered the camp a few days later, they found many Seljuk soldiers had abandoned their possessions in haste.<sup>26</sup>

Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn had three sons: the eldest was named ‘Izz al-Dīn, the middle one was Qilij Arslān, and the youngest was ‘Alā’ al-Dīn. Prince ‘Alā’ al-Dīn, the son of the Gurju Khatun, was also recognized as the designated heir to the throne. His mother’s noble lineage gave him an advantage over his brothers in the line of succession.<sup>27</sup> The Sultan’s other sons were born to women of Christian origin residing in Konya. Following the death of Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn in 1246, the question of succession came to the forefront. Although his son ‘Alā’ al-Dīn—born of the Gurju Khatun—had been officially designated as heir, he was younger than his half-brothers. Ultimately, a group of influential statesmen, including Shams al-Dīn Isfahānī, Jalāl al-Dīn Qarāṭāy, and Asad al-Dīn Rūzbah, resolved—following established custom—that the eldest son, ‘Izz al-Dīn, should succeed to the throne.<sup>28</sup>

While Prince ‘Izz al-Dīn ascended the throne in Konya, the capital of Anatolia, another succession was taking place thousands of kilometers away. Following the death of Khagan Ögedei in Karakorum, his son Güyük took the throne. In order to celebrate his enthronement and secure his approval, it was necessary to appear before him. Instead of Sultan ‘Izz al-Dīn, various pretexts were presented to send his brother Qilij Arslān in his place. However, when Qilij Arslān’s atabeg, interpreter Bahā’ al-Dīn, complained about the oppressive rule of Vizier Shams al-Dīn Isfahānī, a *yarligh* (imperial edict) was granted to Qilij Arslān. Vizier Shams al-Dīn was executed, and in 1249, Qilij Arslān arrived in Sivas, from where he

<sup>26</sup> İbn Bibi, *el-Evāmīrü’l-Ala’iyye*, 494–500; Turan, *Selçuklular Zamanında Türkiye*, 451–457.

<sup>27</sup> Kerîmüddīn Mahmud-i Aksarayî, *Müsâmeretü’l-Ahbâr*, trans. Mürsel Öztürk, Ankara 2000, 27–28.

<sup>28</sup> Turan, *Selçuklular Zamanında Türkiye*, 477–478.

dispatched envoys to Konya demanding that the throne be handed over to him. Jalāl al-Dīn Qarāṭāy rejected this demand and instead proposed a new arrangement: The three brothers would rule jointly, and their names would be inscribed in order on the khutbahs and coinage. However, this tripartite arrangement dissolved with the death of Jalāl al-Dīn Qarāṭāy in 1254. Sultan ‘Izz al-Dīn then sent his brother ‘Alā’ al-Dīn, accompanied by a delegation, to the Mongols. Later, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn’s mother, Gurju Khatun, also joined the entourage. Fearing that ‘Alā’ al-Dīn, like Qilij Arslān before him, would receive a yarligh from the Mongols, Sultan ‘Izz al-Dīn had his youngest brother killed before he could reach the Mongol khagan.<sup>29</sup>

The death of Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kaykhusraw II did not only alter the lives of his sons but also brought significant changes to that of his wife, Gurju Khatun. Following the Sultan’s death, she married Mu‘īn al-Dīn Parwāna, the son of Vizier Muhezzab al-Dīn Ali.<sup>30</sup> Parwāna had served as the Amīr of Tokat and the Subashi of Erzincan.<sup>31</sup> Already a member of a powerful family, his influence further increased through this new marriage. Although the union between Gurju Khatun and Parwāna did not appear as harmonious as her previous one, it maintained its own internal balance. Both Parwāna and Gurju Khatun had close ties with the leading figures of the capital Konya. They were also known to be friends of Rumi (Mevlana), and Gurju Khatun had become one of his disciples. Her generosity in charitable acts inspired by Rumi’s path was notable, and in fact, the Mevlana Mausoleum was a work attributed to both her and her husband, Parwāna.<sup>32</sup>

The increased power Parwāna gained through his new marriage led to significant problems in both the domestic and foreign affairs of the Anatolian Seljuk State. Hulegu had divided the realm between the co-ruling sultans, Ghiyāth al-Dīn II and Qilij Arslān IV, by allocating the eastern and western regions to them respectively, and appointed Tuğrai Shams al-Dīn Mahmud as vizier to both rulers. After Vizier Mahmud’s death in 1260, Fakhr al-Dīn Ali became the vizier of Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn, who governed

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<sup>29</sup> Mehmet Ersan, *Türkiye Selçuklu Devleti’nin Dağılışı*, Ankara 2010, 73–80.

<sup>30</sup> Tskhovreba, *A History of Georgia*, 369; Subaşı, ‘Gürcü Hatun Tamara’, 394.

<sup>31</sup> Muharrem Kesik, ‘Muînüddin Süleyman Pervâne’. *DİA*, Vol. 31, Ankara 2020, 91.

<sup>32</sup> Subaşı, ‘Gürcü Hatun Tamara’, 395, 397.

the western regions, while Parwāna was appointed vizier to Sultan Qilij Arslān, who controlled the east. Tensions arose between Ghiyāth al-Dīn and the Ilkhanids due to the Sultan's slow compliance with Hulegu's tax demands, and also due to Parwāna's claims that Ghiyāth al-Dīn was collaborating with the Mamluks.<sup>33</sup> While Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn adopted a defiant stance toward the Ilkhanids and ignored their summons to the Ilkhan's court, Parwana continued to conspire against him. He even persuaded the Sultan's vizier, Fakhr al-Din Ali, to switch allegiance, effectively isolating Ghiyāth al-Dīn. Although the Sultan sought support from his neighboring allies against the Ilkhanids, he could not overcome the network of control Parwāna and Mongol dominance had established. During this time, while maintaining correspondence with both the Mamluks and Byzantium, Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn made a critical miscalculation by seeking asylum in Byzantium.<sup>34</sup>

With Sultan Izz al-Dīn's flight to Byzantine lands and his withdrawal from the political sphere of the Anatolian Seljuk State, the political stage was left to Parwāna. Sultan Qilij Arslān soon relocated to the principal capital Konya. His role as a puppet ruler remained unchanged. However, he was increasingly dissatisfied, and this discontent became more apparent over time. Tensions significantly escalated when Parwana seized Sinop and turned it into his personal property. Qilij Arslān began to pose an obstacle to Parwāna's ambitions. In response, Parwāna informed Ilkhan Abaqa that, like his brother, Qilij Arslān had established contact with the Mamluks and was betraying the Mongols. He requested Abaqa's permission for the Sultan's execution, and his request was granted. In 1266, Sultan Qilij Arslān IV was strangled to death—purportedly by Abaqa's order, but in reality, due to a plot orchestrated by Parwāna himself, through his closest associates, in accordance with Turkish customs. His underage son Ghiyāth al-Dīn was then placed on the throne.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> İbn Bibi, *el-Evamirü'l-Ala'iyye*, 583–587; Ersan, *Selçuklu Devleti'nin Dağılışı*, 85–87; Nejat Kaymaz, *Anadolu Selçuklularının İnhitatında İdare Mekanizmasının Yeri*, Ankara 2011, 144–146.

<sup>34</sup> Aksarayî, *Müsâmeretü'l-Ahbâr*, 50–52; Ersan, *Selçuklu Devleti'nin Dağılışı*, 87–88; Kaymaz, *Anadolu Selçuklularının İnhitâtı*, 147–148.

<sup>35</sup> İbn Bibi, *el-Evamirü'l-Ala'iyye*, 594–598; İbnü'l-Verdî, *Târîhu İbnü'l Verdî (Bir Ortaçağ Şairinin Kaleminden Selçuklular İbnü'l Verdî)*, trans. Mustafa Alican, 2nd

Following Sultan Izz al-Din's departure to Constantinople, a series of Turkmen revolts broke out across various regions of Anatolia. The Turkmens rejected not only Mongol domination but also the Seljuk Sultan Qilij Arslān whom they perceived as a puppet serving Mongol interests. As Parwāna struggled to suppress the uprisings, Mongol pressure on him increased. Realizing that he was beginning to lose the Mongols' trust and growing fearful of their oppressive conduct, Parwāna decided to shift his political strategy.<sup>36</sup> Although he had long accused others of collaborating with the Mamluks to eliminate political rivals, he now sought an alliance with the Mamluks himself to counter the Mongols—or at least gave that appearance. Acting on a decision taken with his close associates, he dispatched an envoy to Sultan Baybars, inviting him to Anatolia and asking for liberation from Mongol oppression. Baybars, in the spring of 1276, responded to the delegation by stating that he was not yet prepared but would come eventually. However, time was running out for Parwāna.<sup>37</sup>

In April 1277, Sultan Baybars entered Anatolia with an army of approximately thirty thousand soldiers via Aleppo. Upon reaching Elbistan, he engaged in battle with the Mongol commanders Toku and Tudavun, who led a force of about fifteen thousand. Although Parwāna was present at the battle on April 15, he refrained from deploying the Seljuk troops and chose to flee.<sup>38</sup> He secretly escaped to Tokat, taking his wife, Gurju Khatun, and

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Edition, İstanbul 2017, 117; Ersan, *Selçuklu Devleti'nin Dağılışı*, 89–90; Kaymaz, *Anadolu Selçuklularının İnhitatı*, 151–154; Turan, *Selçuklular Zamanında Türkiye*, 547–548. While recounting the strained relationship between the Sultan and Parwāna, Aksarayî takes Parwāna's side and adopts a reproachful tone toward Qilij Arslān. Considering the author's position and the context of the work, his account should be approached with caution. Aksarayî, *Müsâmeretü'l-Ahbâr*, 53, 62–65. A similar bias can also be observed in certain passages of Ibn Bibi's writings

<sup>36</sup> *Baybars Tarihi (al-Melik al-Zahir (Baybars) Hakkındaki Tarihin İkinci Cildi*, trans. M. Şerefüddin Yaltkaya, 2nd Edition, Ankara 2000, 33; Ersan, *Selçuklu Devleti'nin Dağılışı*, 90, 103–107; Kaymaz, *Anadolu Selçuklularının İnhitatı*, 149, 150; Claude Cahen, *Osmanlılardan Önce Anadolu'da Türkler*, trans. Yıldız Moran, İstanbul 1979, 278–279.

<sup>37</sup> *Baybars Tarihi*, 34, 49; Ersan, *Selçuklu Devleti'nin Dağılışı*, 107; Kaymaz, *Anadolu Selçuklularının İnhitatı*, 159–160.

<sup>38</sup> İbnü'l-Verdî, *Târîhu İbnü'l Verdî*, 119; Ersan, *Selçuklu Devleti'nin Dağılışı*, 111; Turan, *Selçuklular Zamanında Türkiye*, 562–565. Aksarayî interpreted Parwāna's escape as a clever military manoeuvre. He justified Parwāna's actions by stating that retreating

Qilij Arslân's son, Sultan Ghiyâth al-Dîn, with him.<sup>39</sup> While Sultan Baybars awaited Parwāna's submission, he advanced towards Kayseri, where he ascended the Seljuk throne and minted coins; however, his stay there was not permanent. Parwāna remained elusive, and soon food shortages arose. After six days, Baybars returned to his homeland.<sup>40</sup> Before departing Anatolia, a messenger of Parwāna reached Sultan Baybars, pleading for him not to leave. Not only Parwāna but also the Turkmens wished for Baybars to remain in Anatolia. Nevertheless, Baybars rebuked Parwāna's messenger and rejected the Turkmens' request.<sup>41</sup> According to Necati Kaymaz, by this time Baybars had come to understand Parwāna's plot. Parwāna's aim was to pit the Mamluks against the Ilkhanids on Anatolian soil and emerge as the primary beneficiary of the conflict. Regardless of who lost, the victor too would inevitably suffer significant damage.<sup>42</sup> The Baybars Chronicle explicitly states Parwāna's intention: "*Parwana had requested a respite of approximately fifteen days from the Sultan (Baybars). His intention was to buy time to go to Abaqa and persuade him to march against al-Malik al-Zāhir.*"<sup>43</sup>

Upon hearing of Baybars' victory, Abaqa immediately set out for the battlefield. Overcome with grief and anger, he wept upon seeing the corpses of the Mongol soldiers. Instead of confronting Baybars directly, Abaqa initiated a large-scale massacre in Anatolia, which resulted in the deaths of approximately 200,000 people.<sup>44</sup> The casualties in Anatolia were not limited to the Turkmens alone. Meanwhile, Parwāna was nearing the end of his life. In the eyes of Abaqa and the Mongols, one of Parwāna's gravest offenses was holding back his troops during the battle and watching the slaughter of Mongol soldiers without intervening. Additionally, he had failed to

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in situations where one lacks sufficient power is a wiser course of action. Aksarayî, *Müsâmeretü'l-Ahbâr*, 88.

<sup>39</sup> Şehâbeddin b. Fazlullah el-Ömerî, *Türkler Hakkında Gördüklerim ve Duyduklarım Mesâlikü'l-Ebsâr*, trans. Ahsen Batur, Selenge Yayınları, İstanbul 2014, 136.

<sup>40</sup> İbnü'l-Verdî, *Târîhu İbnü'l Verdî*, 199; Reşîdüddin Fazlullah, *Câmiu't-Tevârih (İlhanlılar Kısmı)*, trans. İsmail Aka, Mehmet Ersan, Ahmad Hesamipour Khelejeni, 2nd Edition, Ankara 2022, 112–113; *Baypars Tarihi*, 84–89.

<sup>41</sup> *Baypars Tarihi*, 88–89.

<sup>42</sup> Kaymaz, *Anadolu Selçuklularının İnhitâtı*, 165–166.

<sup>43</sup> *Baypars Tarihi*, 88.

<sup>44</sup> Reşîdüddin Fazlullah, *Câmiu't-Tevârih*, 113; Ersan, *Selçuklu Devleti'nin Dağılışı*, 117; Turan, *Selçuklular Zamanında Türkiye*, 566–568; Cahen, *Anadoluda Türkler*, 283–284.

accurately report Baybars' arrival and activities to Khan. However, the less visible accusations against Parwāna were no less serious or innocent than those that caught the Mongols' attention. Over many years, he had accused his political rivals of collaborating with the Mamluks, all the while attempting to maintain close ties with both states, manipulating them into conflict with one another.<sup>45</sup>

Baybars was not the only one who saw through Parwāna, Abaqa was also fully aware of the situation. Particularly when he arrived at the battlefield and noticed the absence of Seljuk soldiers among the dead, he understood what Parwāna had done, though he did not carry out the execution there. Parwāna's trial was held in Aladağ. During the proceedings, the envoy entrusted with delivering Abaqa's message—filled with threats and fury—to Baybars returned, bringing with him certain documents sent by Parwāna to Baybars. This confirmed that Parwāna had deliberately lured Baybars into Anatolia and colluded with him. Having fallen into the very pit he had dug for others, Parwāna was executed by beheading alongside thirty-three of his men at the foothills of Aladağ. Whether his grave exists or, if it does, where it is located remains unknown.<sup>46</sup>

There are no historical records about the life of Gurju Khatun after she fled to Tokat with her husband Parwāna. Assuming that Khatun was born around 1223–1224, she would have been fifty-three or fifty-four years old when she went to Tokat in 1277. Today, Gurju Khatun's tomb is located in Erzurum. It is believed that she came to this city and died there because her son is buried there, and the city previously belonged to her grandfather Tughrul Shah. However, the exact time when Gurju Khatun moved to Erzurum remains unknown.<sup>47</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

Gurju Khatun stands as an exceptional figure who offers important insights not only into the political history of 13th-century Anatolia and the

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<sup>45</sup> Kaymaz, *Anadolu Selçuklularının İnhitâtı*, 169.

<sup>46</sup> Reşîdüddin Fazlullah, *Câmiu't-Tevârih*, 114; İbn Bibi, *el-Evamiirü'l-Ala'iyye*, 625–626; *Baybars Tarihi*, 91–93; Kaymaz, *Anadolu Selçuklularının İnhitâtı*, 170–171.

<sup>47</sup> Subaşı, 'Gürcü Hatun Tamara', 391–392.

Caucasus but also into the representation of women. Throughout her life, this woman figure was at the centre of inter-state alliances, palace intrigues and religious conversions. Despite her noble status within the patriarchal order of her time, Tamara was unable to cultivate a subjective sense of happiness. The absence of a nurturing relationship with her mother, the mistrust she endured in her marriages, and the tragic loss of her son collectively shaped a personal narrative marked by profound loneliness and emotional deprivation.

The story of the Gurju Khatun is significant in illustrating how women's destinies were often shaped and constrained by overarching political objectives, frequently at the expense of personal agency. Although her presence held cultural influence that transcended boundaries as a woman in the Seljuk palace, the ruptures she experienced show that this influence was neither consistent nor enduring. Nevertheless, she stands out as a multi-faceted female figure amid the religious, ethnic, and political diversity of her time and serves as a vivid example that women were not only passive but at times took on decisive roles. In this context, this chapter centres on Gurju Khatun's life to analyse the multifaceted nature, power, and vulnerability of female identity in the medieval Eastern world, revealing the fluid relationship between individual tragedy and political history.

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## Chapter Seven

# A Family Crisis in the Ilkhanids: The Case of Baghdad Hatun

Zehra GÜNEŞ\*

### I. Introduction

What was the value of a woman in 14th-century Mongol society? Where did the boundaries of her social and political agency begin and end? How could a woman, who was deprived of the right to choose her spouse rise to a position of power within the structures of state governance? Were strong kinship ties a protective shield that ensured women's privileged status, or did they serve as chains that restricted their autonomy? How significant was family unity and continuity for the Mongols? Was the newly adopted religion capable of transforming the mindset and traditions of the Mongol nation? Although the intermarriages between two men and two women during the second quarter of the 14th century, along with the resulting complex familial connections and socio-political context, may not fully answer these questions, they still offer valuable insights when viewed from a broader historical perspective.

This chapter examines the marriage between Ilkhanid ruler Abu Sa'id Khan and Baghdad Khatun, daughter of Amir Choban, to explore the dynamics of women, power, and family in the 14th-century Mongol-Islamic context. Baghdad Khatun's rise in courtly influence disrupted political balances and ultimately made her the target of fatal conspiracies. The tension between Mongol Yasa and Islamic law (*shari'a*) played a decisive role in this process. The aim of this study is to reveal the political

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agency of women in the Ilkhanid period and to analyse how familial ties influenced struggles for power.

## II. From Marriage to Another

In Mongol society, women's rights regarding marriage were highly restricted. Not only did women lack agency in choosing their spouses, but even the authority of the family patriarch was occasionally undermined. Bride kidnapping was a practice that occurred prior to marriage. Although generally disapproved of, such incidents often triggered retaliatory actions and deepened inter-tribal conflicts.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, these acts could not be completely eradicated and, in some instances, even occurred within existing marriages. Genghis Khan's mother, Hö'elün, had been abducted from the Merkits, and years later, the Merkits took revenge by capturing Genghis's wife, Börte.<sup>2</sup> While it is claimed that Börte's abduction influenced Genghis to impose certain limitations on such practices, the exceptions he made for himself and his successors allowed this custom to persist, albeit to a lesser extent. A khan retained the right to claim any woman he desired—even if she was already married<sup>3</sup>— and it was this very privilege that gave rise to a major familial crisis in the Ilkhanid context.

Abu Sa'id Khan (1317–1336) ascended the Ilkhanid throne at the age of just over ten upon the death of his father, Oljeitu. The early crises of his reign were relatively easily overcome through the efforts of Atabeg Sevinj Aka and the army's highest-ranking commander, Amir Choban. However, as a result of successful military campaigns, skilfully executed politics veiled under displays of loyalty, and strong familial alliances, power within the state increasingly became concentrated in the hands of Amir Choban.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sümeyye Melek Öncel, *Moğollarda Kadın*, (Master's Thesis, Necmettin Erbakan University, YÖK Tez: 568130), Konya 2019, 31– 32.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Paul Roux, *Moğol İmparatorluğu Tarihi*, trans. Aykut Kazancıgil, Ayşe Bereket, Istanbul 2018, 86–87; Timothy May, *Moğol İmparatorluğu*, trans. Ülkü Evrim Uysal, Istanbul 2021, 66; David Morgan, *The Mongols*, Malden (MA/USA) 2001, 61; Şîrîn Beyânî, *Moğol Dönemi İran'ında Kadın*, trans. Mustafa Uyar, 3rd ed., Ankara 2023, 117–118, 124–125.

<sup>3</sup> Enver, 'Bağdat Hatun', *DİA*, Vol. 4, Istanbul 1991, 444.

<sup>4</sup> Bertold Spuler, *İran Moğolları Siyaset, İdare ve Kültür İlhanlılar Devri, 1220–1350*, trans. Cemal Köprülü, 3rd ed., Ankara 2011, 133–138; Abdulkadir Yuvalı, *İlhanlı Tarihi*, 2nd ed., Istanbul 2019, 279–282; P. Jackson, 'Abū Sa'īd', *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online*

A member of the prominent Sulduz clan among the Mongols, Choban was the grandson of Tuda'un, one of Hulagu's leading commanders.<sup>5</sup> He had strengthened his political position further by marrying Satī Beg, the daughter of Oljeitu, thereby establishing a kinship tie with Abu Sa'id.<sup>6</sup> Through his noble lineage, marital connections, and achievements, Choban became a charismatic leader, particularly within the Mongol military. Not only did he benefit personally from his rising power, but he also ensured that his nine sons were appointed to govern key regions of the empire. His son Timurtash governed Anatolia on behalf of the Ilkhanids; another son, Hasan Shah, ruled over Khorasan, while yet another, Dimashq Khwaja, was appointed as regent in the capital. The growing dominance of Choban and his sons across many levels of government began to provoke resentment among his opponents and Abu Sa'id himself. The court poet Shabankara'i captured the criticism surrounding Choban's expanding influence in a subtle yet poetic manner: "*In the end, the branches of fortune borne by Choban and his sons grew so heavy with fruit that they broke under their own weight*".<sup>7</sup>

The first major conflict between Abu Sa'id Khan and Amir Choban arose due to Choban's daughter, Baghdad Khatun. The Khan fell in love with her, a woman renowned for her beauty, and wished to marry her. However, at the time, Baghdad Khatun was already married to Amir Shaykh Hasan of the Jalayirid family and was the mother of two sons.<sup>8</sup> Amir Choban refused to allow his daughter to divorce her husband and marry the Khan, thereby exacerbating the already strained relationship between the two men. Additionally, opposition groups around the Khan, who sought to turn him against Choban, took advantage of the situation.<sup>9</sup> At this point, the sincerity of Abu Sa'id's love for Baghdad Khatun becomes questionable. Did he truly wish to marry her out of affection, or was this a calculated move to test

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Edition (Vol. I, 374–377), Leiden 1983. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-said-bahador-khan>.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Melville, 'Cobān', *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online Edition* (Vol. V, 875–878), Leiden 1992. <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/coban-cupan-ar>

<sup>6</sup> May, *Moğol İmparatorluğu*, 359.

<sup>7</sup> Muhammed b. Ali b. Muhammed Şebânkârî, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb (Hânedanlar Târîhi)*, trans. Fahri Unan, Ankara 2021, 237–238.

<sup>8</sup> Şebânkârî, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 252.

<sup>9</sup> Spuler, *İran Moğolları*, 138–139; Melville, 'Cobān'.

Choban's loyalty or provoke him? Was the Khan attempting to assert who truly held supreme authority in the realm? Some scholars argue that this initiative was intended to demonstrate the subordination of Islamic law (*shari'a*) to the Mongol Yasa, to force the Choban family to submit to Mongol traditions over religion, and to remind them of their subordinate status.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, the significant political power granted to Baghdad Khatun after their marriage suggests that Abu Sa'id's actions were motivated more by genuine affection than by a desire to undermine Choban. Furthermore, Abu Sa'id, as a Muslim ruler of the Hanafi school,<sup>11</sup> went against Islamic principles by making such a marital demand. While Mongol law allowed a ruler to claim a married woman if he desired, such an act was strictly forbidden in Islam. Engaging in a practice prohibited by religion would have damaged the ruler's public image and rendered the move a risky provocation. As will become evident, such a bold manoeuvre was neither strategically necessary nor especially advantageous; Choban's sons were already influential enough to pose a threat on their own.

In an attempt to ease the tension resulting from his daughter's situation and to deescalate his strained relationship with Abu Sa'id, Amir Choban requested permission in 1326 to launch a military campaign in Khorasan. While setting out, he took several of his political opponents with him, likely to maintain calm at court in his absence.<sup>12</sup> He also sent his daughter and son-in-law to Karabagh, hoping that their removal from the public eye would cause them to be forgotten.<sup>13</sup> Abu Sa'id Khan, however, found the spark he had been looking for to move against Choban in the figure of Choban's son, Dimashq Khwaja. Dimashq had begun to attract attention due to his growing wealth and increasingly conspicuous behaviour. While contemporary observers such as Ibn Battuta and

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<sup>10</sup> Öncel, *Moğollarda Kadın*, 127–128.

<sup>11</sup> Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Maḥāsīn Ibn Taghrībīrdī, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhira fī Mulūk Mişr wa'l-Qāhira*. Vol. IX, Cairo 1392 AH [1972 CE], 309.

<sup>12</sup> Spuler, *İran Moğolları*, 139; Melville, 'Cobān'.

<sup>13</sup> Öncel, *Moğollarda Kadın*, 127–128.

Muhammad Shabankara'i spoke favourably of Amir Choban, they adopted a markedly critical tone when referring to his son, Dimashq Khwaja.<sup>14</sup>

Following Amir Choban's departure for the Khorasan campaign, a warning from Abu Sa'id's mother prompted the execution of Dimashq Khwaja. According to her account, in addition to his immense wealth, Dimashq had begun to frequent the royal harem and had entered into a relationship with Kotoktay Khatun, one of the favoured consorts of Oljeitu. Acting on his mother's warning, Abu Sa'id ordered the execution of Dimashq Khwaja. Moreover, he did not stop there; he commanded the elimination of all remaining members of the Choban family.<sup>15</sup>

Although the court poet Shabankara'i claimed that some individuals continued to incite Abu Sa'id against Choban after the execution of Dimashq Khwaja, and that the Khan nevertheless remembered the Amir with respect,<sup>16</sup> the reality was far graver. Writing years later with the benefit of hindsight, the poet's use of language evoking respect and loyalty does little to conceal Abu Sa'id's role in Choban's demise. Upon hearing of his son Dimashq's execution, Amir Choban attempted to display the same loyalty to the dynasty that he had shown during his son Timurtash's previous transgressions. He acknowledged that his son had erred and accepted the legitimacy of his punishment.<sup>17</sup> However, when he received no conciliatory response from Abu Sa'id, Choban sought to defend himself through military means and began moving westward. He hoped to secure support from Egypt through his son Timurtash.<sup>18</sup> When the two forces met, Choban's troops deserted him, and rather than surrender himself to the Khan's will, the Amir fled eastward in one final attempt to escape. He sought refuge in Herat, where he had a long-standing friendship with Amir Ghiyath al-Din.

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<sup>14</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 239, 243; Ebû Abdullah Muhammed Tancî İbn Battûta, *İbn Battûta Seyahatnâmesi*, Vol. I, trans. A. Sait Aykut, 6th ed., Istanbul 2020, 322–323.

<sup>15</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 239–240; İbn Battûta, *İbn Battûta Seyahatnâmesi*, Vol. I, 323; Ensar Macit, 'Celayirler'de Kadın ve Siyaset', *USAD*, no. 11, 2019, 16–17.

<sup>16</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 240.

<sup>17</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 240

<sup>18</sup> Spuler, *İran Moğolları*, 140.

Though initially received with courtesy, Amir Ghiyath al-Din ultimately could not defy Abu Sa'id's execution order and carried it out in 1327.<sup>19</sup>

Abdulkadir Yuvalı has argued that Amir Choban made a grave mistake by seeking refuge in Herat, despite having been advised to flee to the Chagatai Khanate or even further to the Golden Horde. He draws a parallel to one of Choban's predecessors, Amir Nawruz, who met a similar fate after taking the same course of action.<sup>20</sup> This assessment is supported by information provided by Ibn Battuta, who notes that when Choban was abandoned by his troops and began considering refuge in Herat, his elder sons warned him against it. They warned him that Ghiyath al-Din, the ruler of Herat, was known for his unreliability and had a reputation for failing to offer protection to those who sought refuge under his patronage. Nevertheless, ignoring these warnings, Amir Choban sought asylum in Herat with his younger son.<sup>21</sup> According to Shabankara'i, when Choban realized he could not stand against Abu Sa'id, he decided to go to Herat, invoking a mutual protection pact between himself and his old friend Ghiyath al-Din. Records show that this agreement was also acknowledged by the ruler of Herat himself.<sup>22</sup> It is highly unlikely that Choban was unaware of what had happened to Amir Nawruz in Herat; his decision seems to have rested on his trust in a personal friendship bound by a diplomatic agreement. Indeed, when Choban realized he would be executed, he reportedly voiced bitter reproach and accused Ghiyath al-Din of violating their pact.<sup>23</sup>

Following Amir Choban's execution, his sons sought refuge in various states; however, due to their conduct and the threat they posed, they ultimately shared their father's fate. Jean-Paul Roux aptly described Abu Sa'id's situation after Choban's death by stating that "*he no longer had anyone to rely on.*"<sup>24</sup> While this observation is valid, it is also important not to overlook the fact that, alongside his loyal service, Choban had begun to consolidate power within his family, creating a near-monopoly over state

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<sup>19</sup> İbn Battûta, *İbn Battûta Seyahatnâmesi*, Vol. I, 323–324; Melville, 'Cobân'.

<sup>20</sup> Yuvalı, *İlhanlı Tarihi*, 286.

<sup>21</sup> İbn Battûta, *İbn Battûta Seyahatnâmesi*, Vol. I, 323–324.

<sup>22</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 242.

<sup>23</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 242.

<sup>24</sup> Roux, *Moğol İmparatorluğu*, 440.

affairs. Roux further noted that marching against the khan with an army was tantamount to rebelling against Genghis Khan himself. The blood of the ruling family was considered sacred, and any direct assault on the sovereign could not be forgiven.<sup>25</sup> Given the extent to which relations had deteriorated, even if Choban had been pardoned, it is highly doubtful that Abu Sa'id would have ever trusted him again.

Following the death of Amir Choban, the greatest obstacle to Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan's union with Baghdad Khatun was removed. At that time, Baghdad Khatun was still married to Amir Shaykh Hasan, who belonged to the Jalayirids, one of the two most powerful families of the Ilkhanate. His great-grandfather was Ilge Noyan, a prominent figure in the founding of the Ilkhanid state.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, Shaykh Hasan was connected to Hulagu's lineage through kinship ties. As a grandson of Arghun Khan, Shaykh Hasan<sup>27</sup> was also Abu Sa'id's cousin—since Abu Sa'id himself was another grandson of Arghun Khan. To fulfil his desire, the Khan sent Qadi Mubarakshah to his cousin Amir Shaykh Hasan, instructing him to persuade Hasan to divorce his wife. The Qadi warned Shaykh Hasan, stating, "*To oppose the opinion deemed appropriate by the Khan is tantamount to washing one's hands in one's own blood,*" implying grave consequences if he refused. Shaykh Hasan, raising no objection, divorced his wife, Baghdad Khatun. As a reward for complying with the sovereign's command, he was granted control over Azerbaijan and several surrounding cities. In accordance with religious law, a three-month waiting period (*'idda*) was observed. After this interval, Abu Sa'id Khan and Baghdad Khatun were married in an elaborate ceremony in 1328.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the marriage was formalized in compliance with

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<sup>25</sup> Roux, *Moğol İmparatorluğu*, 439–440.

<sup>26</sup> Abdulkadir Yuvalı, 'Şeyh Hasan', *DİA*, Vol. 16, Istanbul 1997, 311.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Nujūm al-Zāhira*, Vol. X, 323; Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf b. Abī al-Maḥāsīn Ibn Taghribirdi, *al-Manḥal al-Şāfi wa'l-Mustawfī ba'da'l-Wāfi*. Vol. 5, ed. Nabil Muhammad 'Abd al-'Aziz, 1988, 70.

<sup>28</sup> Shihāb al-Dīn 'Abdullāh b. Lutfullāh b. 'Abd al-Rashīd al-Ḥāfi Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū, *Zayl Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh al-Rashīdī*, ed. H. Bayānī, Tehran 1317, 139–140; Cem Tuysuz, *İlhanlılar Tarihinde Çobanoğulları (Sulduslar)*, (Doctoral Dissertation, Atatürk University, YÖK Tez: 144597) Erzurum 2004, 96–97; Macit, 'Celayirler'de Kadın ve Siyaset', 17–18; Firdevs Özen, 'İlhanlı Devleti'nin Son Hükümdarı Ebû Sa'îd Bahâdır Han'ın Emîr Çoban'ın Ölümünden Sonraki Faaliyetleri ve Ölümü (728–736/1327–1335)', *Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, no. 74, 2022, 270.



both Mongol law (*Yasa*) and Islamic legal requirements—though, in reality, *shari'a* had been circumvented. With the most powerful figure in the state, Amir Choban, now dead, there remained no one to oppose the circumstances of this union. The Jalayirids, for their part, had already acquiesced.

### III. One Woman, Three Roles: Wife, *De Facto* Ruler, and Opponent

In the early years of their marriage, Abu Sa'id Khan demonstrated deep devotion to Baghdad Khatun, bestowing upon her the title *Khudāvandigār* (Sovereign) and informally raising her to the rank of co-ruler. Imperial decrees (*yarlıghs*) issued in her name were honoured across the realm as if they had come from Abu Sa'id himself—a practice that even the traveller Ibn Battuta noted with astonishment. In his writings, Ibn Battuta explicitly remarked on the prominence of Mongol noblewomen, observing that high-ranking Amirs were jointly dispatched in their names, that they possessed vast fortunes, maintained independent military encampments, and even accompanied the sovereign to battle. These accounts underscore the exceptional political influence wielded by elite women within the Ilkhanate.<sup>29</sup>

Abu Sa'id Khan's passionate devotion to Baghdad Khatun was disrupted several years later by a consequential incident. Her growing political influence reignited opposition factions that had previously resisted her father, Amir Choban. The resurgence of Chobanid loyalists, now aligned with Baghdad Khatun, provoked unease among the Ilkhanid elite. In 1331, rumors began circulating that Baghdad Khatun had secretly conspired with her former husband, Shaykh Hasan, to assassinate Abu Sa'id Khan. No concrete evidence of such a plot ever surfaced, but the allegations nevertheless tarnished her standing. Though she fell from favour, Abu Sa'id refrained from divorcing her. When the slander was later exposed, Baghdad Khatun regained the Khan's trust and—alongside Vizier Ghiyath al-Din, son of Rashid al-Din—effectively governed the Ilkhanate in his name. Shaykh Hasan, spared execution due to his mother's intercession, was exiled instead. Abu Sa'id dispatched his cousin to Kamakh and later

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<sup>29</sup> İbn Battûta, *İbn Battûta Seyahatnâmesi*, Vol. I, 324–325; Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 252; Beyânî, *İran'ında Kadın*, 134.

appointed him governor of Anatolia. The chronicler Shabankara'i's metaphorical description of Abu Sa'id's bond with Baghdad Khatun "*they were as though clothed in a single garment*" reflects the depth of his enduring affection.<sup>30</sup> Even during the unresolved assassination allegations, the Khan's refusal to punish or divorce her further corroborates this interpretation.

The claims made about Baghdad Khatun are particularly striking. Although her marriage process was formalized in accordance with the *Yasa* and religious rules, it prepared the ground for doubts regarding her loyalty to Abu Sa'id. Later, these same doubts would resurface after the Khan's death, ultimately leading to her demise. The fact that Baghdad was accused twice in the same manner and that those around her harboured expectations of her causing harm to the ruler can hardly be explained solely by the hostility of her opponents. Shabankara'i provides information that state officials continuously warned the ruler about this woman. They advised that she had not married Abu Sa'id in good faith and should not be trusted.<sup>31</sup> Is the distrust towards Baghdad Khatun a result of her being forced to remarry someone else after being divorced by her husband, or was it because of a fear that she might hold Abu Sa'id accountable for the tragic fate that befell her father and brothers? Based on these two reasons, did Baghdad Khatun, with the power she had gained, wish to continue her father's mission and even surpass it by taking control of the administration, either alone or by sharing it with her former husband? As will be explained below, can the cause of her downfall be solely attributed to her jealousy? Regardless of the reasons that led the state officials to suspect her, it is important not to overlook the fact that Baghdad Khatun did not have a son from Abu Sa'id Khan. There is no significant evidence to suggest that Abu Sa'id loved her as much as he did his other wife. We also cannot know whether she secretly blamed the ruler for what happened to her and her family. However, even if there was such discomfort, there was no foundation for Baghdad to act against the Khan and protect herself

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<sup>30</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 243, 252; Yuvalı, *İlhanlı Tarihi*, 286; Konukçu, 'Bağdat Hatun' mad., *DİA*, Vol. 4, 444; Tuysuz, *Çobanoğulları (Sulduslar)*, 97–98; Macit, 'Celayirler'de Kadın ve Siyaset', 18; Özen, 'Ebû Sa'îd Bahâdır Han'ın Ölümü (728–736/1327–1335)', 272–273.

<sup>31</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 252.

afterward. When she had become strong enough to govern the country alongside Vizier Gıyâseddin, what awaited Baghdad Khatun in the absence of the Khan and the unborn heir? On the other hand, beyond her personal life, being the daughter of Amir Choban alone might have been sufficient for suspicion to fall upon her.

By 1335, Abu Sa'id Khan's affection for Baghdad Khatun had waned significantly. Baghdad, who had been raising her brother Dimashq Khwaja's daughter, Dilshad Khatun, in her own household, presented the young woman to the Khan in accordance with Mongol tradition. As noted by the court chronicler Shabankara'i, Mongol custom dictated that nobles were expected to offer their beautiful daughters to the ruler for marriage. Abu Sa'id accepted this "gift" and married Dilshad—yet, ironically, Baghdad herself soon grew jealous of the very niece she had introduced to the Khan.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, discontent with Baghdad Khatun's political influence continued to escalate, intensifying pressure on Abu Sa'id.<sup>33</sup> The once-powerful queen, who had ruled alongside the Khan, now faced growing opposition from court factions wary of her authority.

Abu Sa'id Khan passed away while his wife, Dilshad Khatun, was two months pregnant. Since he left no living heir at the time of his death, and the gender of Dilshad's unborn child remained unknown, the Ilkhanate faced an immediate succession crisis. With no clear candidate from Hulagu's direct lineage deemed worthy of the throne, the court briefly considered Abu Sa'id's sister, Sati Beg, as a potential ruler. However, fears that her ascension would provoke instability led to her rejection. The solution was found in a distant branch of the family: Arpa Khan, a descendant of Ariq Böke from the Toluids, was elevated to the throne. To strengthen his legitimacy, Arpa Khan married Sati Beg (Abu Sa'id's sister and Baghdad Khatun's stepmother) thereby tying his rule to the previous dynasty through marital alliance.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 252–253; Charles Melville, 'Delsâd Kâtûn', *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online Edition*, (Vol. 7, 255), Leiden 1994. [www.iranicaonline.org/articles/delsad-katun/](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/delsad-katun/)

<sup>33</sup> E. Macit, 'Celâyirler'de Kadın ve Siyaset', 19.

<sup>34</sup> İbn Battûta, *İbn Battûta Seyahatnâmesi*, Vol. I, 360; Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 250–251.

In the early days of his reign, Arpa Khan's greatest challenge was Baghdad Khatun. Defiant and still wielding considerable influence, she showed no intention of submitting to the new ruler. Old accusations resurfaced: it was claimed that Baghdad, jealous of Abu Sa'id Khan's affection for Dilshad Khatun, had poisoned him. Additionally, rumours circulated that she had corresponded with Uzbek Khan to form an alliance against Arpa Khan<sup>35</sup>. Ibn Battuta even recounts a dramatic account—that during an evening spent with the ruler, she allegedly suffocated him by pressing a handkerchief to his face.<sup>36</sup> However, Shabankara'i dismisses these claims as slander driven by jealousy toward Baghdad Khatun. The same chronicler notes that Abu Sa'id had spent his final days indulging with "fairy-faced beauties," and that his health had deteriorated due to excessive drinking and exhaustion seventeen days before his death.<sup>37</sup>

Did Baghdad Khatun truly feel jealousy toward Dilshad Khatun, or did she bring her before Abu Sa'id Khan solely because Mongol traditions required it? Baghdad Khatun, who married Abu Sa'id in 1328, did not bear him a son. On the other hand, Abu Sa'id desired an heir,<sup>38</sup> and in this context, Baghdad Khatun's attempt to secure a successor through another woman from the Chobanid lineage would not have been an implausible act. Moreover, the portrayal of Baghdad Khatun as a jealous, sidelined woman whose honour had been wounded would only serve to further damage her already fragile public image, which was marred by distrust. Even if she had indeed experienced jealousy, it is unlikely that this alone would have driven her to orchestrate the Khan's death; she would have had more substantial and diverse motivations. Shabankara'i notes that Arpa Khan endured Baghdad Khatun's behaviour out of respect for Abu Sa'id, but once she refused to submit to Arpa Khan's authority, accusations of this nature began to surface.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 253; Tuysuz, *Çobanoğulları (Sulduslar)*, 99; Zehra Odabaşı-Esra Özel, 'Ölüm ve Tedavi: İlhanlı Hanlarının Ölüm Sebepleri (1256-1335)', *Selçuk Üniversitesi Selçuklu Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 21, 2024, 41; Macit, 'Celayirler'de Kadın ve Siyaset', 20.

<sup>36</sup> İbn Battûta, *İbn Battûta Seyahatnâmesi*, Vol. I, 325.

<sup>37</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 244, 248.

<sup>38</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 250.

<sup>39</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 253.

Baghdad Khatun was denied any opportunity to defend herself against the accusations. Shabankara'i notes that Arpa Khan, known for his volatile temper, acted swiftly upon mere suspicion rather than verified evidence, immediately moving to eliminate her.<sup>40</sup> A young amir named Khwaja Layli struck Baghdad's head with a heavy mace, killing her on the spot. The body, with its private parts covered, remained in that state for days.<sup>41</sup> The course of events gives the impression that Baghdad Khatun was unaware of the latest developments concerning herself. The absence of any formal investigation may have stemmed not so much from Arpa Khan's temperamental nature, but rather from the perceived necessity of swiftly eliminating Baghdad Khatun, who could have posed a dangerous threat as a political rival.

Despite eliminating Baghdad Khatun and solidifying his position through marriage to Sati Beg, Arpa Khan failed to establish lasting legitimacy among the amirs. Power struggles emerged among prominent tribes such as the Jalayir, Uirat, Suldus, and Sutay over the distribution of authority. Arpa Khan's accession to the throne initiated a new tradition among the tribes: if Abu Sa'id had no son, any Mongol noble with ties to the royal lineage could be placed on the throne as a puppet ruler. All eyes turned to Dilshad Khatun's unborn child, as Arpa Khan's legitimacy hinged on its gender. Had she borne a son, Abu Sa'id's lineage might have stabilized the realm. After the death of her husband, Dilshad Khatun sought refuge with Abu Sa'id Khan's maternal uncle, Ali Padishah of the Uirat tribe. Ali Padishah was one of Arpa Khan's opponents. Rejecting Arpa Khan's authority, he nominated a man named Musa from the lineage of Baydu as a contender for the throne. The political crisis soon escalated into armed conflict, resulting in the death of Arpa Khan. Shortly thereafter, Dilshad Khatun gave birth to a daughter, thereby ending any dynastic claim of Abu Sa'id Khan's lineage to the throne.<sup>42</sup>

The political strategy that Ali Padishah had once employed against Arpa Khan was now used against him by Amir Sheikh Hasan. Declaring a

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<sup>40</sup> Şebânkârei, *Mecma'u'l-Ensâb*, 253.

<sup>41</sup> İbn Battûta, *İbn Battûta Seyahatnâmesi*, Vol. I, 325; Tuysuz, *Çobanoğulları (Sulduslar)*, 99.

<sup>42</sup> Spuler, *İran Moğolları*, 144–145; Yuvalı, *İlhanlı Tarihi*, 288.

Mongol noble named Muhammad as ruler, Sheikh Hasan marched against Ali Padishah and had him killed.<sup>43</sup> In a calculated move, Sheykh Hasan then married Dilshad Khatun—the widow of Abu Sa'id Khan, who had sought refuge with Ali Padishah. Ibn Battuta creates the impression that Sheikh Hasan, seeking revenge on Abu Sa'id Khan for taking his wife, Baghdad Khatun, had undertaken such an action, even though Abu Sa'id was already deceased, by stating, "*because previously, Abu Sa'id had taken his wife Baghdad Khatun!*".<sup>44</sup> Although there is information suggesting that Sheikh Hasan married Dilshad Khatun to solidify his position, considering the possibility of her bearing a male child,<sup>45</sup> this information is chronologically inaccurate. Dilshad Khatun gave birth nine days after the battle between Arpa Khan and Ali Padishah.<sup>46</sup> However, Dilshad's marriage occurred after Ali Padishah's death.

After eliminating Ali Padishah, Amir Shaykh Hasan declared Tabriz his capital and secured the allegiance of other amirs. However, disputes over the Ilkhanid throne did not end with his capture of Tabriz. Facing opposition from Hasan b. Timurtash—grandson of Amir Choban—Shaykh Hasan suffered defeat in their conflict and was forced to retreat. He first sought to retain control of Persian Iraq (Iraq-i Ajam) and later Baghdad. Though he pledged allegiance to a Mongol noble of the Abaqa lineage and even submitted to the Mamluks in exchange for military support, his efforts ultimately laid the foundation for the Jalayirids, who would rule Baghdad until 1431.<sup>47</sup>

By the side of her new husband, Amir Shaykh Hasan, Dilshad Khatun wielded influence comparable to that of Baghdad Khatun under Abu Sa'id Khan. When Malik Ashraf, another grandson of Choban, attacked Sheikh Hasan, it was Dilshah Khatun who convinced him to stay in the city, while Amir Hasan chose to flee. This woman, known for her charitable and generous nature, was highly praised by the poets of the time. In the absence of her husband, she took over the administration and contributed to the

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<sup>43</sup> Yuvalı, 'Şeyh Hasan' mad., *DİA*, Vol. 16, 311–312.

<sup>44</sup> İbn Battûta, *İbn Battûta Seyahatnâmesi*, Vol. I, 325.

<sup>45</sup> Macit, 'Celayirler'de Kadın ve Siyaset', *USAD*, 21.

<sup>46</sup> Patrick Wing, *The Jalayirids Dynastic State Formation In The Mongol Middle East*, Edinburgh 2016, 77.

<sup>47</sup> Yuvalı, 'Şeyh Hasan' mad., *DİA*, C. 16, 312.

consolidation of the Jalayirid rule in Baghdad through her successful governance and support for construction projects. She passed away in 1354, two years before the death of her husband, Sheikh Hasan.<sup>48</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

The example of Baghdad Khatun is a historical case symbolizing the complex structure brought about by the Mongol-Islamic synthesis and the dilemma faced by women within this structure. This event highlights the extent of the ruler's absolute powers within the framework of the Mongol Yasa and how these powers disrupted religious-political balances. The rise and fall of Amir Choban demonstrate how power centres within the Ilkhanid administration were formed and how the delicate line between loyalty and threat became increasingly fragile. Baghdad Khatun's political power clearly illustrates the active role that women at the Ilkhanid court could play in governance, while also showing how easily this power could be met with suspicion and become the target of conspiracies that could result in death. What happened to Baghdad Khatun reveals the boundaries of women's freedoms in the Mongol world, underlining the conditions under which these boundaries could be exceeded and the consequences of such actions.

The example of Baghdad Khatun can be analysed not only from the perspective of women and power but also in terms of family dynamics. Marriages, which collapsed like domino pieces in the shadow of politics, led to the reconstruction of new families upon the debris of the old ones, using the same pieces. While the situation of cousin marriages is controversial in terms of family health, it had political consequences since it was practiced within the ruling class. Abû Sa'id Khan found the love he was searching for, but he passed away before he could achieve the desired succession. Baghdad Khatun became powerful enough to protect the declining Chobanoglu family, but ultimately, she was defeated and lost her life in the power struggle. Although Dilshad Khatun could not continue the Hulagu lineage through a male heir, she played an active role in a new political formation that emerged from within the Ilkhanate. In the case of Sheikh Hasan, his fate was either to become the consort of Baghdad or to become the ruler of

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<sup>48</sup> Beyânî, *İran'ında Kadın*, 136–137; Macit, 'Celayirler'de Kadın ve Siyaset', 21–22.

Baghdad. Having abandoned Baghdad Khatun, Sheikh Hasan was rewarded with the governance of various regions and, through his political and military policies, laid the foundation for a political formation that would govern Baghdad for many years.

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## Chapter Eight

# The Legal and Social Worlds of Ottoman Women in 16th Century Istanbul Court Records

Okan BÜYÜKTAPU\*

### I. Introduction

The Sharia Court Registers (*şer'iyye sicilleri* or *sicillât-ı şer'iyye*) are among the most valuable historical sources from the Ottoman Empire. The term *sicil*, whose dictionary definitions include writing, record and document, refers to an official ledger or *defter* where formal documents were recorded.<sup>1</sup> In the Ottoman context, these registers were carefully kept by judges (*kadıs*) or their deputies (*nâibs*) in court districts and represent a vast repository of information about the legal, economic, social, and administrative life of the empire.<sup>2</sup> As primary sources, these ledgers are in many ways unique for the study of Ottoman history. They offer a direct look into the daily lives of the people, enabling researchers to understand the social and economic structure of a specific town or

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<sup>1</sup> James W. Redhouse, *A Turkish and English Lexicon: Shewing in English the Significations of the Turkish Terms* (Constantinople: American Mission, 1890), 1041.

<sup>2</sup> For more detail, see Suraiya Faroqhi, 'Sidjill' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, eds. C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs, and G. Lecomte, volume 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 539-545; Fethi Gedikli, 'Osmanlı Hukuk Tarihi Kaynağı Olarak Şer'iyye Sicilleri', *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi*, nr. 5, (May 2005): 187-214.

region. Through these records, it is possible to study family structures<sup>3</sup>, marriage customs,<sup>4</sup> social dynamics between Muslim and non-Muslim communities,<sup>5</sup> the functioning of guilds<sup>6</sup> and public order, etc.<sup>7</sup>

This is especially true when examining the lives of Ottoman women, who are often kept out of the eyes of traditional historical narratives. A close look at these court records challenges the traditional, one-sided image of the Ottoman woman as silent, isolated, and without power. While women certainly lived within a patriarchal society that placed many limits on them, the registers show they were not simply passive. On the contrary, these documents reveal that women were strategic individuals who understood the legal system well. They used the courts skilfully to protect their rights and advance their interests, appearing as plaintiffs, defendants, buyers, sellers, creditors, debtors, and founders of charities, and actively participating in legal cases involving marriage, divorce, and inheritance.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> İlber Ortaylı, 'Anadolu'da XVI. Yüzyılda Evlilik İlişkileri Üzerine Bazı Gözlemler', *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 1 (1980): 33-40; Hayri Erten, *Konya Şer'iyye Sicilleri Işığında Ailenin Sosyo-Ekonomik ve Kültürel Yapısı* (XVIII. YY. İlk Yarı), (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Judith E. Tucker, 'Ties That Bound: Women and Family in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Nablus', in *Women in Middle Eastern History*, ed. Nikki Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 233-253.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Jennings, 'Zimmis (Non-Muslims) in Early 17th Century Ottoman Judicial Records: The Sharia Court of Anatolian Kayseri', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 21, no. 3 (1978): 225-293.

<sup>6</sup> Abdul-Karim Rafeq, 'The Law Court Registers of Damascus, with Special Reference to Craft Corporations During the First Half of the Eighteenth Century', in *Les Arabes par leurs archives*, ed. J. Berque and D. Chevallier (Paris: CNRS, 1976), 141-159.

<sup>7</sup> Çağatay Uluçay, *XVII. Asırda Saruhan'da Eşkıyalık ve Halk Hareketleri*, (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi, 1944); Suraiya Faroqhi, *Coping with the State: Political Conflict and Crime in the Ottoman Empire, 1550-1720* (İstanbul: Isis Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> For a pioneering studies on this topic, see Ronald C. Jennings, 'Women in Early 17th Century Ottoman Judicial Records: The Sharia Court of Anatolian Kayseri', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 18, no. 1 (Jan. 1975): 53-114; Haim Gerber, 'Social and Economic Position of Women in an Ottoman City, Bursa, 1600-1700', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 3 (1980): 231-244.

This study draws exclusively on *sicil* records from the Istanbul courts of Balat<sup>9</sup>, Beşiktaş<sup>10</sup>, Eyüb<sup>11</sup>, Galata<sup>12</sup>, Tophane<sup>13</sup>, and Üsküdar<sup>14</sup>, dating from the mid- to late 16th century (1557-1587). Through a micro-historical analysis of these primary sources, this research focuses on women's experiences as reflected in their direct interactions with the court. By examining the types of cases women brought, the legal strategies they employed, and the outcomes they achieved, we can move beyond prescriptive legal theory to understand the law in practice. The central argument is that these records reveal a complex reality in which

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<sup>9</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 41 Balat Mahkemesi 1 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 964-965 / M. 1557-1558), ed. M. Âkif Aydın et al. (İstanbul: Kültür AŞ, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 42 Beşiktaş Mahkemesi 2 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 966-968/ M. 1558-1561, project director M. Âkif Aydın, editor Coşkun Yılmaz, Arabic translation Mehmet Akman, transliteration/readings Yılmaz Karaca and Sinan Satar, (İstanbul: Kültür AŞ., 2019).

<sup>11</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Eyüb Mahkemesi (Havâss-ı Refîa) 3 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 993-995/ M. 1585-1587), project director M. Âkif Aydın, editor Coşkun Yılmaz, Arabic translation Tahsin Özcan, prep. by Baki Çakır et al., (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi (İSAM), 2010).

<sup>12</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Galata Mahkemesi 5 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 983-984/ M. 1575-1576), project director M. Âkif Aydın, editor Coşkun Yılmaz, prep. by Mehmet Akman, controlled by M. Âkif Aydın, (İstanbul: Kültür AŞ., 2011); *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Galata Mahkemesi 7 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 985-986/ M. 1575-1576), project director M. Âkif Aydın, editor Coşkun Yılmaz, prep. by Mehmet Akman and Fethi Gedikli, controlled by M. Âkif Aydın, (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi (İSAM), 2010).

<sup>13</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 43 Tophane Mahkemesi 2 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 966-967/ M. 1558-1559), project director M. Âkif Aydın, editor Coşkun Yılmaz, Arabic translation Mehmet Akman, transliteration/readings Rifat Günelan, Mustafa Oğuz and Mehmet Akman, controlled by M. Âkif Aydın, Mehmet İpşirli, Feridun M. Emecen, İdris Bostan, (İstanbul: Kültür AŞ., 2019).

<sup>14</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi 51 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 987-988/ M. 1579-1580), project director M. Âkif Aydın, editor Coşkun Yılmaz, prep. by Rifat Günelan, Arabic translation Mehmet Cantar and Mehmet Akman, controlled by Feridun Emecen, (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi (İSAM), 2010); *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi 56 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 990-991/ M. 1582-1583), project director M. Âkif Aydın, editor Coşkun Yılmaz, prep. by Hilal Kazan and Kenan Yıldız, Arabic translation Mehmet Akman and Tahsin Özcan, controlled by Mahmut Ak, (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi (İSAM), 2010).

Ottoman women exercised considerable legal and economic agency, even while navigating a patriarchal system. They actively leveraged the specific provisions of Islamic law to secure their rights, manage their wealth, and shape the course of their lives, particularly in the realms of property ownership, financial transactions, and marital negotiations. At the same time, this study demonstrates the dual nature of the legal system, which, while empowering women in certain domains, also served as a powerful instrument for enforcing social and moral constraints. To explore this dynamic, this study is structured into four thematic sections. The first section explores women's deep involvement in the property market as owners, buyers, and sellers, and their use of pious foundations as a tool of economic and social power. The second section details their financial autonomy, focusing on their ability to secure dower and inheritance rights and their status as slave owners. The third section analyses the family, investigating how women negotiated the marital contract, initiated divorce, and used the court to secure the rights of their children. Finally, the fourth section examines the court's dual role in both affirming women's social standing and honour while simultaneously policing their behaviour and enforcing social norms.

## **II. Women as Owners, Buyers, and Sellers**

The Qur'an establishes the fundamental equality of men and women in creation, rights, and responsibilities.<sup>15</sup> This spiritual and legal parity was reflected in Ottoman society through Islamic law principles, particularly under the Hanafi school's interpretation, which recognized women's equal capacity to own and control property. The Ottoman legal system did not create special laws for women but applied general Islamic legal principles to both genders. In civil matters, women largely shared the same rights and obligations as men, with some exceptions in areas like divorce and inheritance. However, in practice, women faced systematic barriers that limited their economic participation. They were excluded from military, political, and legal positions, as well as from influential artisanal guilds that controlled key sectors of production and

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<sup>15</sup> *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, trans. and comm. by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Brentwood, MD: Amana Corporation, 1989), 3:195, 9:71.

trade. These restrictions affected women's economic standing, as seen in court records where women typically dealt with smaller financial sums and more modest assets, such as single residential properties, in their charitable endowments and legal disputes.<sup>16</sup>

Despite these constraints, women in 16th-century Istanbul were active economic agents. They participated in real estate transactions, credit markets, and business partnerships. Family connections remained crucial for women's access to wealth, with inheritance laws, spousal support (*nafaka*),<sup>17</sup> and child custody arrangements serving as primary mechanisms to claim shares of family property.

The sharia court system played a vital role in protecting women's rights. Women could petition courts personally or through representatives, following standard Ottoman legal procedures that primarily involved local courts but also allowed direct appeals to the Imperial Council (*Divan-ı Hümayun*). While some courts designated special days for women's cases, this practice was not common.<sup>18</sup> Women demonstrated remarkable legal literacy, regularly using courts to defend their interests and skilfully navigating procedural challenges, even when facing biases like the higher evidentiary value placed on male testimony. This complex picture reveals Ottoman women as neither fully equal nor passive- they operated within a system that recognized their legal personhood while imposing practical limitations on their economic and social participation. Their ability to actively engage with property markets and legal institutions demonstrates significant agency within the constraints of their historical context.

The most direct evidence of women's economic agency lies in their recorded activities as both sellers and buyers of real estate. These transactions, often involving substantial sums of money, were conducted with full legal formality, with the court serving as the official

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<sup>16</sup> Mohammad Hadi Hosainy, 'Women's Property Rights in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul' (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2016), 33-37.

<sup>17</sup> Celal Erbay, 'Nafaka', *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 32, (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2006), 282-285.

<sup>18</sup> M. Âkif Aydın, 'Kadın', *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 24, (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2001), 91; Ensar Köse, 'Osmanlı Devleti'nde Kadınların Hak Arama Kültürü', in *II. Türk Hukuk Tarihi Kongresi Bildirileri*, vol. 1 (2016): 294.

registry to ensure their validity and enforceability. Women appear frequently as sellers of property, a clear indication of their recognized ownership rights (*mülk*) and their authority to alienate those rights. For instance, Mihriban bt. İlyas is recorded selling her house to another woman, Fahrünnisâ bt. Sinan, a transaction that underscores a real estate market in which women dealt directly with one another.<sup>19</sup> In a high-value transaction, Gevherhân Hatun bt. Ahmed Bey sells a large residential complex, complete with multiple rooms, a kitchen, a stable, and courtyards, for the significant sum of 60,000 akçe. The court carefully records not only the sale but also the buyer's confirmation of payment, completing the legal circuit.<sup>20</sup> In a particularly interesting case, Yasemin bt. Abdullah sells a house to her husband, Mustafa b. Abdullah, a transaction that legally affirms the separation of their individual property within the marriage.<sup>21</sup>

Rather than passively liquidating family assets, women in Istanbul were active and strategic investors in the real estate market. A prime example of this is Mihrimah Sultan (d.1578), daughter of Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566) and Hürrem Sultan (d. 1558), whose property acquisition near the Hippodrome was documented in the court registers. The court record, dated 20 Zilka'de 983 (1576), details how Mihrimah Sultan, represented by her legal agent (*vekil*) Mehmed Bey b. Abdullah, purchased an entire farm complex (*çiftlik*) in the village of Nakkaş, near Istanbul, from Neslihan Hatun Sultan for a substantial 46,000 akçe. The precise delineation of the property's boundaries, bordering Meryem Hatun's land, public roads, and the sea, demonstrates the intricate nature of women's real estate dealings. The presence of numerous witnesses, including scholars and officials, further underscores the formal legitimacy of these transactions within the Ottoman legal system. This case powerfully illustrates several key aspects of elite women's economic agency: Their capacity for high-value transactions, social

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<sup>19</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 41 Balat Mahkemesi 1 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 964-965 / M. 1557-1558), 84.

<sup>20</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 41 Balat Mahkemesi 1 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 964-965 / M. 1557-1558), 197-198.

<sup>21</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi 51 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 987-988/ M. 1579-1580), 307.

acknowledgment of property rights, and engagement in diverse real estate: They were involved in complex transactions involving agricultural land, not just urban residences. The comprehensive recording of this transaction in the *kadı* register, with its formal legal language and multiple layers of verification, clearly shows how the Ottoman legal system both institutionalized women's property rights and reinforced social hierarchies through its ceremonial language.<sup>22</sup>

A crucial mechanism that facilitated women's participation in the public sphere of the market and the court was the use of a male agent, or *vekil*. Far from being a sign of female legal incapacity, the appointment of a *vekil* was a sophisticated and pragmatic strategy that allowed women to conduct business while adhering to prevailing social norms of female propriety and seclusion. The court fully recognized and validated this practice, provided the appointment of the agent was formally witnessed and recorded in the *sicil*. For instance, Raziye Hatun bt. Hüseyin, from Sütlüce village, appeared before the noble *sharia* court to formalize the transfer of her deceased brother Mürüvvet b. Hüseyin's inherited share to her husband, Ali b. Halil. The documentation of this transaction, including the appointment of a legal representative whose authorization was confirmed by the testimony of Mustafa b. Abdullah and Hüseyin b. Abdullah, and the explicit consent of all parties, illustrates the procedural rigor applied to women's property transfers.<sup>23</sup>

Even more striking is the case of Kamer Hatun, daughter of the late Sinan Bey, who died in captivity in Avlonya. Described with honorifics such as "the pride of virtuous women, the glory of honoured ladies" (*fahrü'l-muhadderât zahrü'l-mükerremât*), she appointed her husband, Osman Bey b. Abdülmennan, as her legal representative to manage inherited assets, including cash, real estate, and other properties. The document, dated 26 Zilka'de 964 (1557), reveals three significant aspects: first, elite women directly inherited substantial movable and immovable assets; second, there was a formal mechanism for appointing

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<sup>22</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Galata Mahkemesi 5 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 983-984/ M. 1575-1576), 153-154.

<sup>23</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Eyüb Mahkemesi (Havâss-ı Refîa) 3 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 993-995/ M. 1585-1587), 178-179.



male relatives as legal representatives without diminishing the women's proprietary rights; and third, the court played a crucial role in authenticating such arrangements through multiple witnesses, including imams and local notables.<sup>24</sup>

A third transaction, dated 967 (1560), exemplifies the nuanced interplay between women's property rights and the Ottoman legal practice of *vekil* (legal representative) representation. The case involved the sale of a strategically valuable waterfront estate in Kuruçeşme village, complete with harbour access, a garden parcel, and meticulously documented boundaries, adjacent to the holdings of Yanola and Cani, public thoroughfares, and the Bosphorus shoreline. While the property's scale, reflected in its substantial price of 7,000 *akçe*, underscores the economic agency of the female seller, the transaction's execution reveals the systemic reliance on male intermediaries. The seller, Seliha bt. Salih, appointed Ahmed Bey b. Süleyman as her *vekil*, granting him full legal capacity to negotiate the sale on her behalf. This delegation was formalized through witnessed testimony, ensuring the arrangement's validity under Sharia court procedures. The presence of high-status witnesses, notably Reis-i hâs Ali b. Halil, a palace official, signals the transaction's importance while reinforcing the social expectation that elite women's dealings required verification by prominent male figures. Though the *vekil* system enabled women to participate in the property market, it also embedded a layer of patriarchal oversight. The court record meticulously notes Ahmed Bey's role in "acknowledging and confirming" (*bi'l-muvâcehe tasdîk*) the sale, emphasizing his agency as distinct from Seliha's ownership. While Seliha's name appears as the ultimate proprietor, the document foregrounds her male representative's actions, reflecting a legal culture that prioritized male actors in public transactions even as it protected women's proprietary rights.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri* 41 *Balat Mahkemesi* 1 Numaralı Sicil (H. 964-965 / M. 1557-1558), 102.

<sup>25</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri* 42 *Beşiktaş Mahkemesi* 2 Numaralı Sicil (H. 966-968/ M. 1558-1561, 177-178).

### III. Women and Their Foundations

The court registers are replete with examples of *waqfs* founded by women from various social strata. These were not minor acts of charity but significant endowments that shaped the urban landscape and provided essential social services. The records of the Balat Court, for instance, detail numerous foundations established by women, such as the *waqfs* of Safiye Hatun, Hatice bt. Hamza, Şâh Hûbân Hatun bt. Abdülkerîm, and Zülfüsiyah Hatun. These endowments, ranging from cash to extensive properties, were established to fund the construction and maintenance of mosques, schools, fountains, and other public works. The act of establishing a *waqf* was a testament not only to a woman's piety and generosity but also to her financial independence and legal capacity. The case of Sitti Hatun bt. Hilmi Çelebi, who endowed her houses and shops in both Istanbul and Kastamonu, underscores the considerable control women could exercise over their personal property, dedicating it to the public good in perpetuity.<sup>26</sup>

Alongside cash, women frequently endowed real estate. Property *waqfs* involved the dedication of assets such as houses, shops, agricultural lands, and farms. The endowment of a house by Habibe bt. Abdullah is a case in point, illustrating how women turned their personal assets into sources of communal benefit. These properties would provide rental income for the *waqf* or serve a direct charitable purpose, such as housing for the poor or for students.<sup>27</sup>

A compelling example of a non-royal woman's endowment comes from the Galata court records of 1577-1578. A woman named Mehlika Hatun, daughter of Abdullah, appeared before the court to legally register the endowment of her house. The *waqf* she created was a sophisticated legal instrument with clear, long-term objectives. The terms of her foundation stipulated that a certain Nefise would have the right to live in the house for the duration of her life. After her, the benefit would pass to a man named Şaban b. Yusuf, and then to his descendants,

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<sup>26</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 41 Balat Mahkemesi 1 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 964-965 / M. 1557-1558), 308-309.

<sup>27</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 41 Balat Mahkemesi 1 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 964-965 / M. 1557-1558), 312-314.

generation after generation. If Şaban's lineage died out, Mehlika Hatun stipulated that the foundation's benefit should pass to a pious individual who would, in return, recite one part (*cüz*) of the Qur'an daily and be responsible for the upkeep and repair of the endowed house. This single court record illuminates several key aspects of women's foundations: it shows a woman using her private property to provide for the long-term security of specific individuals, while also ensuring a perpetual act of charity and the preservation of the asset itself.<sup>28</sup>

Beyond real estate, women also endowed cash. The records of the Üsküdar court mention a foundation established by a woman named Server Hatun, which was based on a sum of money. The records detail a legal case concerning the renunciation of the trusteeship (*mütevellilik*) of this cash foundation, demonstrating that these endowments were actively managed entities that required legal oversight. Cash foundations offered greater flexibility, allowing the generated income to be used for a variety of charitable purposes, from providing loans to supporting students.<sup>29</sup>

The pious endowment, or *waqf*, represented another vital pillar of the social support structure, often intersecting with the judicial process. Many endowments bore female names, like the Gülfam Hatun Waqf, which records show acting as a creditor, indicating they were established either by or for women, cementing their philanthropic legacy.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, women actively managed these charitable funds, as seen with Fatma bt. Hasan, who appointed agents for a money waqf she founded, and later retrieved the funds through the court.<sup>31</sup> Underpinning all these mechanisms was the fundamental recognition of women's property rights and economic independence. The court registers are unequivocal in documenting women's full participation in the economy.

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<sup>28</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Galata Mahkemesi 7 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 985-986/ M. 1575-1576), 56-57.

<sup>29</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi 51 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 987-988/ M. 1579-1580), 302.

<sup>30</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 42 Beşiktaş Mahkemesi 2 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 966-968/ M. 1558-1561), 304.

<sup>31</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi 51 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 987-988/ M. 1579-1580), 244-245.

They appear as independent actors selling houses, vineyards, and gardens. They possessed the legal standing to emancipate their own slaves. Perhaps most strikingly, the records show a freed slave, Mihribân bt. Abdullah, purchasing a house from her former master, a powerful testament to the socioeconomic mobility possible within the system and the universal application of property rights.<sup>32</sup>

#### IV. Pathways to Freedom

Under Ottoman law, an enslaved person was considered property (*mal*) and could be bought, sold, and transferred. However, despite their classification as property, the path to freedom was not entirely closed. The Ottoman legal system provided several formal mechanisms for emancipation. The most common and direct form of manumission found in the records is the unilateral declaration by an owner to free their slave. This was frequently motivated by religious sentiment, as freeing a slave was considered a highly meritorious act in Islam, believed to bring divine reward (*sevâb*). A definitive example from the 1582–1583 Üsküdar court records illustrates this perfectly. An Armenian man named Yuvan v. Vartaz appeared before the *kadı* to formally record the freedom of his female slave, Güllü. The court scribe documented Yuvan's declaration with precision, noting the pious motivation behind the act: "...I have freed my owned female slave named Güllü of Armenian descent from my property for the sake of God Almighty (*hasbeten li'llâhi'l-azîm*). Henceforth she is free like all other freeborn people..."<sup>33</sup> This record is significant for several reasons. It shows a non-Muslim slave owner participating in a legal practice deeply rooted in Islamic tradition. The use of the specific phrase *hasbeten li'llâhi'l-azîm* leaves no doubt as to the stated religious purpose of the manumission. The presence of Güllü in court to accept her freedom and the subsequent validation by the judge (*hükm olundu*) demonstrates how a personal act of piety was transformed into a legally binding and socially recognized change of status. The records from the Balat court show numerous similar

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<sup>32</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi 51 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 987–988/ M. 1579–1580), 332.

<sup>33</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi 56 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 990–991/ M. 1582–1583), 62.

instances of this, such as Ayşe Hatun bt. Mustafa Kethüdâ, freeing her two female slaves, and a woman named Hasna bt. Abdullah freeing her female slave.<sup>34</sup>

While the dramatic act of immediate, voluntary manumission stands as a powerful symbol of an owner's piety, the legal landscape of 16th-century Istanbul offered more structured and forward-looking pathways to freedom for enslaved women. The Ottoman court records reveal that the promise of liberty was not merely a matter of an owner's whim but could be formalized through legally binding contracts and declarations. Two such crucial mechanisms were *mükâtebe*, a contractual agreement for a slave to purchase her own freedom, and *tedbir*, an irrevocable promise of post-mortem emancipation. These practices provided enslaved women with tangible, legally protected routes to liberty, granting them a degree of agency and a secure hope for the future.

The practice of *mükâtebe* transformed the hope of freedom into a formal business transaction, sanctioned and recorded by the court. This legal contract allowed an enslaved person to buy their freedom from their owner for a specified price, often paid in instalments over a set period. It represented a negotiated, concrete path out of bondage. A clear example of this is the case of Sevastaryan, a Christian female slave whose story is preserved in the Tophane court records from 1558-1559. Her owner, Mevlânâ Mehmed b. Mustafa, appeared in court to officially register a *mükâtebe* contract with her. The agreement was precise: Sevastaryan would gain her freedom in exchange for a payment of five thousand akçe. By having this contract recorded by the *kadı*, both parties were legally bound. Sevastaryan was no longer subject to the arbitrary will of her owner regarding her eventual freedom; she now had a legal right to it upon fulfilling her side of the bargain. This process empowered her, turning her from a passive object of ownership into an active participant in securing her own liberty.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 41 Balat Mahkemesi 1 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 964-965 / M. 1557-1558), 65, 122.

<sup>35</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 43 Tophane Mahkemesi 2 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 966-967/ M. 1558-1559), 105.

Another powerful tool for emancipation was *tedbir*, a formal declaration by an owner that a particular slave would be freed upon the owner's death. Once made, this declaration was legally irrevocable and could not be rescinded by the owner or their heirs. A slave who had been granted this status was known as a *müdebber* (if female) or *müdebber* (if male). The case of Yasemin, documented in the Üsküdar court records of 1582-1583, vividly illustrates the legal weight of this status. Yasemin is identified as a *cariye müdebber*, having been promised her freedom by her owner, Kara Dîvâne Bey, upon his passing. Her story reveals that this status was far more than a simple promise. It conferred tangible legal standing. While still technically enslaved, Yasemin was able to enter into a marriage contract. In a fascinating legal arrangement, her new husband, Mehmed b. Ali, formally guaranteed to the court that he would pay any outstanding sum required for her freedom should her owner's estate be unable to cover it.<sup>36</sup> This demonstrates that Yasemin's future freedom was a legally recognized certainty, a fact that shaped her present life and enabled her to enter into contracts and plan for a future as a free woman. The court's involvement ensured that the promise of *tedbir* was not a hollow one, but a protected legal right that would be enforced upon her owner's death. The stories of women like Sevastaryan and Yasemin, preserved in the court records, show us that enslaved women were not merely passive recipients of fortune. Through these established legal mechanisms, they could actively participate in their own emancipation or live with the legally protected certainty of future freedom, demonstrating a remarkable degree of agency within the confines of a system of bondage.

## **V. Life After Freedom: Economic and Social Agency**

For those who achieved freedom, the transformation was profound. Manumission conferred full legal personhood, allowing the freedwoman (*atika*) to own property, engage in commerce, marry freely, and utilize the court system to protect her rights. The records show that many freedwomen did precisely that, becoming active and successful

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<sup>36</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi 51 Numaralı Sicil (H. 987-988/ M. 1579-1580)*, 171.

economic agents. The accumulation of wealth by freedwomen is most clearly seen in their estate records (*tereke*). The *tereke* of a freedwoman named Yümnâ bt. Abdullah, recorded in 1582, listed household items including a kilim, various cushions, kitchenware, and clothing, all of which were legally inventoried and distributed among her heirs. This shows not only the ability to own private property but also to pass it on, securing a legacy for her family.<sup>37</sup> Beyond inheritance, freedwomen actively participated in the property market. Fâtıma bt. Abdullah, identified as a freedwoman of a deceased vizier, is recorded as a party in the sale of a house, demonstrating her legal capacity to engage in real estate transactions.<sup>38</sup> Other records show freedwomen like Hümâ bt. Abdullah using the courts to collect debts, in her case from a man named Nuh Bâli b. Çalabverdi, further cementing their role in the local economy.<sup>39</sup>

This legal agency extended to deeply personal matters. Hasnâ bt. Abdullah, a freedwoman, initiated a divorce from her husband Ali through *muhâla'a*, a form of divorce requested by the wife in exchange for financial compensation to the husband. The court recorded their mutual agreement, formalizing the dissolution of the marriage and the settlement of their assets.<sup>40</sup> Such cases were not isolated; women like Emine bt. İdris<sup>41</sup> and Nâzenin bt. Abdullah also used the *muhâla'a* process, indicating that freedwomen were adept at navigating the legal system to control their personal and financial destinies.<sup>42</sup> The court records of 16th-century Istanbul offer a vital corrective to a simplified understanding of slavery in the Ottoman Empire. They bring to life the

<sup>37</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi* 56 Numaralı Sicil (H. 990-991/ M. 1582-1583), 220-221.

<sup>38</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Galata Mahkemesi* 7 Numaralı Sicil (H. 985-986/ M. 1575-1576), 37.

<sup>39</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi* 51 Numaralı Sicil (H. 987-988/ M. 1579-1580), 195.

<sup>40</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 43 Tophane Mahkemesi* 2 Numaralı Sicil (H. 966-967/ M. 1558-1559), 187.

<sup>41</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi* 56 Numaralı Sicil (H. 990-991/ M. 1582-1583), 152.

<sup>42</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Eyüb Mahkemesi (Havâss-ı Refîa)* 3 Numaralı Sicil (H. 993-995/ M. 1585-1587), 57.

stories of women who, despite beginning their lives as property, utilized established legal avenues to gain their freedom. More significantly, these records testify to the reality that freedom was not a mere change in status but a gateway to full participation in society. As owners of property, litigants in court, and active participants in the economy, freedwomen like Fâtîma, Hasnâ, and Hümâ demonstrate a remarkable degree of agency, crafting independent lives from the ashes of servitude and leaving their indelible mark on the historical record.

## VI. Marriage, Divorce, and Motherhood

The Ottoman court was a central institution in the regulation of family life, and the *sicil* records provide a detailed picture of how women navigated the legal terrain of marriage, divorce, and motherhood. While the family was a patriarchal institution, it was governed by a contractual framework that afforded women specific rights and avenues for recourse. Women appear in court not as passive participants but as active agents who consented to marriage, initiated its dissolution, and advocated for the financial well-being of their children.

Marriage in the Ottoman legal system was fundamentally a contract, and a woman's consent was a necessary component for its validity. This is demonstrated in cases where women appoint an agent, or *vekil*, to contract their marriage on their behalf. For instance, Aynî Hâtun bt. Mahmud formally appoints Eynesi b. İsmail as her agent to arrange her marriage to Yunus b. İbrahim, with the court recording her consent as the basis for the union.<sup>43</sup> More strikingly, the records reveal a well-established and frequently used mechanism for a woman to initiate the termination of the marital contract: divorce by mutual consent, or *muhâla'a*. This procedure allowed a wife to seek a divorce from her husband, typically in exchange for forfeiting some or all her financial claims, most notably her deferred dower (*mehr-i müeccel*). The *muhâla'a* was a formal, state-sanctioned pathway for a woman to exit an undesirable marriage, transforming her personal desire for divorce into a legal reality. The *sicils* show that this was a routine and standardized

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<sup>43</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi 51 Numaralı Sicil (H. 987-988/ M. 1579-1580)*, 96.



procedure. Mülâyim bt. Abdullah, for example, appears in court with her husband, İbrahim b. Hamza, after a period of “severe dispute” (*münâza’a-i şedîde*). She formally renounces her 1,000-akçe dower and all other financial claims on the condition that he grant her a divorce, which he does.<sup>44</sup>

However, women did not always passively forfeit their rights. The process of *muhâla’a* was often a negotiation, and women with leverage or legal acumen could achieve highly favourable outcomes. The case of Gevher Sultan is a masterclass in strategic litigation. She first appears in court to confirm that she has received her massive deferred dower of 61,000 akçe from her husband. Only after securing this substantial sum does, she then proceeds with the *muhâla’a*, effectively achieving both her financial security and her freedom.<sup>45</sup>

Other cases show the court’s default position of protecting a woman’s financial rights in divorce proceedings. When Feraḥşad bt. Abdullah sues her ex-husband for her dower and child support, he claims she had already renounced it as part of the divorce. The court, however, places the burden of proof on him. When he fails to produce evidence, the court is prepared to accept Feraḥşad’s oath to the contrary, highlighting a legal process that favoured the woman’s documented contractual rights over the man’s unsubstantiated claim.<sup>46</sup> In another instance, the agency of Ayşe bt. Boğzan is evident in a sequence of events. After her husband’s family brings her to court to complain about her behaviour (traveling to Istanbul without his permission), she counters not by defending herself against the accusation but by initiating a *muhâla’a* to leave the marriage entirely, turning a moment of social pressure into an opportunity for liberation.<sup>47</sup> As can be seen from these individual cases, *muhâla’a* was a key site of female agency, allowing

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<sup>44</sup> İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 42 Beşiktaş Mahkemesi 2 Numaralı Sicil (H. 966-968/ M. 1558-1561, 245.

<sup>45</sup> İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 41 Balat Mahkemesi 1 Numaralı Sicil (H. 964-965 / M. 1557-1558), 82.

<sup>46</sup> İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 42 Beşiktaş Mahkemesi 2 Numaralı Sicil (H. 966-968/ M. 1558-1561, 236-237.

<sup>47</sup> İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi 51 Numaralı Sicil (H. 987-988/ M. 1579-1580), 72.

women to actively terminate their marital contracts and reshape their lives through calculated financial and legal negotiation.

Motherhood was not merely a biological or social role in Ottoman society; it was a legally defined status that endowed women with specific rights and responsibilities, particularly the right to advocate for their children's financial welfare in court. The court, in turn, consistently recognized the mother as the primary caregiver and empowered her to hold the paternal line financially accountable for the support of their offspring. The most common way mothers exercised this agency was by suing for child support (*nafaka*). Islamic law obligates a father to financially support his children, and the *sicils* show that women were the primary agents who enforced this obligation through the courts, acting as their children's de facto legal representatives. When the mother of the orphaned girls Kaya and Emine petitions the court, a daily allowance is set for them to be paid from their deceased father's estate.<sup>48</sup> Ümmî Hatun bt. Sâlih successfully sues her ex-husband to collect four years of back-support for their daughter, Zeyni, demonstrating that the father's obligation continued after divorce and that the court would enforce it retroactively.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, the court frequently entrusted women with the financial affairs of their children by appointing them as legal guardians (*vasi*). This appointment gave a woman the legal authority to manage her minor children's inheritance and property. After the death of her father, Andreyra, Zanbiya appears in court to settle inheritance matters with her mother and siblings. While her mother is not explicitly named as *vasi*, her involvement in the inheritance settlement of her minor children suggests a guardianship role.<sup>50</sup> In another record Fahrünnisâ bt. Sinan is

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<sup>48</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Eyüb Mahkemesi (Havâss-ı Refîa) 3 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 993-995/ M. 1585-1587, 188.

<sup>49</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Eyüb Mahkemesi (Havâss-ı Refîa) 3 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 993-995/ M. 1585-1587, 152.

<sup>50</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 42 Beşiktaş Mahkemesi 2 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 966-968/ M. 1558-1561, 153.

appointed *vasi* for her orphaned nephew, Yusuf, demonstrating that a woman's capacity for guardianship could extend to her wider kin group.<sup>51</sup>

The court also played a role in formalizing fostering arrangements, recognizing women as primary caregivers in these situations as well. In one case, Hemsâye Hâtun bt. Abdullah legally takes in a young girl, Şâhî bt. İbrahim, as a foster child (*tebenni*). The court records this transaction, validating the new caregiving relationship and Hemsâye's role.<sup>52</sup> Through these various legal avenues, securing *nafaka*, acting as *vasi*, and formalizing foster care, women's agency extended beyond their own personal interests to encompass the protection and welfare of their children, using the court as a vital tool to secure the next generation's future.

## VII. Status and Reputation in the Courtroom

The *sicil* records reveal several ways in which women's social standing was publicly asserted and protected. For elite women, the very language of the court record served to cement their status. The elaborate honorifics (*elkab*), used to describe women of the imperial family or the upper echelons of the bureaucracy were not mere pleasantries. Their inclusion in a permanent legal document was a public affirmation of their high status and honour. When Mihrimah Sultan purchased her house, she was described with a long list of titles, including "The pride of the chaste and veiled ladies, the crown of the great women, the ornament of the respected women, the possessor of good fortune and happiness, the Aisha of the age, the Fatima of the era, the one of great renown, who seeks the pleasure of the Most Merciful, queen of queens, angelic in being, the one specially chosen for the abundant favor of the ruler, the Benefactor, Mihrimah Sultan." (...*fahrü'l-afâ'ifi'l-muhadderât, tâcü'n-nisvetü'l-mu'azzamât, zeynü'n-nisvâni'l-muvakkarât, sâhibetü'l-ikbâl ve's-se'âdât, Âişetü'z-zamân, Fâtımatü'd-devrân, celîletü'ş-şân, talibetü rızâi'r-rahmân, meliketü'l-melikât, melekıyyetü'z-zât, el-muhtassa*

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<sup>51</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 41 Balat Mahkemesi 1 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 964-965 / M. 1557-1558), 247.

<sup>52</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Üsküdar Mahkemesi 51 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 987-988/ M. 1579-1580), 100.

*bi-mezîdi inâyeti'l-meliki'l-mennân Mihrimâh Sultân...).*<sup>53</sup> In another record, the honour certificate is described as “sultans of sultans, the fruit of glory and happiness, the crown of women in all the worlds, the chastity of the world, the one specially chosen for the abundant favour of the ruler, the Benefactor, Mihrimah Sultan, daughter of the deceased and forgiven Sultan Suleyman Khan” (...*meliketü'l-melikât netîcetü'lizzî ve's-sa'âdet tâcü'n-nisâ fî'l-âlemîn ismetü'd-dünya el-muhtas bi mezîdi inâyeti'l-meliki'l-mennân hazret-i Mihrimah Sultan bt. el-merhûm el-mağfûrun leh es-Sultan Süleyman Hân...).*<sup>54</sup> Similarly Gülfem Hatun is referred to as “The exemplar of the great ladies, the cream of the magnificent women, of noble personage and high rank, the one chosen for the grace of the Generous God, Gülfem Hatun, daughter of Abdürrahim, may her chastity be everlasting and her virtue increase.” (...*kıdvetü'l-havâtîni'l-mu'azzamât zübdetü'n-nisvânî'l-müfahhamât aliyetü'z-zât refî'atü'd-derecât el-muhtassatü bi-inâyeti'l-meliki'l-kerîm hazret-i Gülfem Hatun bt. Abdürrahim dâmet-ismetühâ ve zâdet iffetuhâ...).*<sup>55</sup> These formal titles, entered into the official record, reinforced their social power and distinguished them from ordinary subjects.

For women of all classes, the court was the ultimate arbiter of the most fundamental aspect of status: freedom. To be wrongly enslaved was the ultimate dishonour, and the court was the venue to reclaim one's status as a free person. The case of Şah Hûbân bt. Abdullah is a powerful example. Despite being held as a *cariye* by the son of the Crimean Khan, a powerful foreign dignitary, she successfully sued for her freedom in the Galata court. The court ruled in her favour, issuing a judgment that affirmed her status as a freeborn Muslim woman.<sup>56</sup> This case demonstrates that the court's authority to protect the rights of an Ottoman subject could extend even to the households of the powerful. In

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<sup>53</sup> İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 41 Balat Mahkemesi 1 Numaralı Sicil (H. 964-965 / M. 1557-1558), 75.

<sup>54</sup> İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Galata Mahkemesi 5 Numaralı Sicil (H. 985-986/ M. 1575-1576), 154.

<sup>55</sup> İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 41 Balat Mahkemesi 1 Numaralı Sicil (H. 964-965 / M. 1557-1558), 64-65.

<sup>56</sup> İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Galata Mahkemesi 5 Numaralı Sicil (H. 985-986/ M. 1575-1576), 100.

a court case dated 1576, a woman named Emine bt. Memi successfully sued for her freedom against a man named Mehmed b. Sinan, who held her in his possession. The case hinged on proving Emine's freeborn status, which was accomplished by establishing the free status of her mother. Two witnesses from the town of Niğbolu testified that Emine was born in the local Tatar quarter to a free woman named Ayşe bt. Ali. By documenting that her mother was a free woman and that she herself had never been subjected to slavery, Emine solidified her own lineage and legal status as free. The court accepted the testimony and formally ruled in her favour, affirming her liberty against any claims of servility.<sup>57</sup>

Beyond establishing status, the courts were crucial for defending it against attack. The most severe form of defamation a woman could face was an accusation that tarnished her sexual honour. Such allegations could have devastating social consequences, and women took them with the utmost seriousness. These accusations could also be deployed strategically in personal disputes. A particularly striking case from Beşiktaş demonstrates a woman's willingness to use the court system strategically to achieve a desired legal outcome. This instance involves a woman named Zülfi bt. Abdullah, who sought to dissolve her marriage to Hafız Mehmed Çelebi. The first court record shows that Zülfi appeared in court and levelled the grave and defamatory accusation of sodomy (*livâta*) —an act strictly prohibited in islamic law— against her husband. After her husband denied the charge, the court, rather than ruling immediately on the difficult-to-prove claim, took the procedural step of placing Zülfi in the temporary custody (*emânet*) of a third party for three days while her claim was to be investigated. A second court record, dated shortly after the first, reveals the resolution of the dispute. The couple reappeared in court, but this time the issue was framed as "severe incompatibility". In this proceeding, Zülfi agreed to a divorce. She formally renounced all of her financial claims on her husband including, her deferred dower (*mehr-i müeccel*) of 1,500 *akçe* and her right to maintenance (*nafaka*), on the condition that he grant her a divorce. The husband accepted these terms and gave her an irrevocable

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<sup>57</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Galata Mahkemesi 5 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 985-986/ M. 1575-1576), 152-153.

divorce (*talâk-ı bâin*), officially ending the marriage.<sup>58</sup> When viewed together, these two records paint a clear picture of a sophisticated legal strategy. Zülfi appears to have deployed the grave and reputation-destroying accusation of sodomy not necessarily to see her husband punished, but as powerful leverage to compel him to agree to a divorce that he might otherwise have refused. The court did not have to rule on the sodomy charge; the accusation alone created enough pressure to lead to the negotiation of the divorce. This case thus demonstrates a woman's remarkable, if audacious, willingness to introduce a powerful accusation into the public record to achieve a legal aim—in this case, escaping an unbearable marriage and turning a moment of social pressure into an opportunity for liberation. Furthermore, women's reputations could become collateral damage in disputes between men. In a property case from Beşiktaş, for instance, witnesses testified that another man had been allowing women onto a property belonging to Pîrî Ağâ, describing them with the term *yaramaz avratlar* a common euphemism for prostitutes. While the central issue was the misuse of property, the testimony served as a direct and public attack on the reputation of the unnamed women. By associating them with immoral behaviour in a formal court proceeding, their honour was impugned to strengthen a legal argument, underscoring that matters of reputation were considered relevant evidence by the court.<sup>59</sup> Direct public insults were also met with swift legal action, as demonstrated by a case from the Balat court records of 1557–1558. In this instance, a woman named Yasemin bt. Abdullah appeared before the court to file a complaint against a *sipahi* named Musa b. Abdullah. Yasemin testified that while she was walking, Musa publicly accosted and insulted her, saying, "...come this way, you whore (*kahbe*), where are you going". When Musa denied the charge, the court followed procedure by requesting witnesses. Two men, Ali Sofu b. İlyas and Cafer b. İlyas, testified in support of Yasemin, confirming that Musa had indeed sworn at (*şetm etti*) her with those exact words. The court accepted their testimony, and at Yasemin's request, the incident

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<sup>58</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 42 Beşiktaş Mahkemesi 2 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 966–968/ M. 1558–1561, 228–229.

<sup>59</sup> *İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 42 Beşiktaş Mahkemesi 2 Numaralı Sicil* (H. 966–968/ M. 1558–1561, 84–85.

was formally entered into the court register.<sup>60</sup> This case clearly illustrates that a woman's honour was not a trivial matter; a public verbal assault using a term like *kahbe* was a serious offense that could be officially challenged and recorded within the Ottoman legal framework, providing the victim with a formal acknowledgement of the wrong committed against her. As can be seen, women, far from being passive, understood their rights and were prepared to enter the male-dominated space of the courtroom to defend their reputations. Whether facing accusations within a marriage, public insults, or being used as pawns in the disputes of men, these women sought and received the court's intervention.

### VIII. A Quantitative Overview of Women's Court Appearances

Based on a comprehensive review of the provided court records, a detailed quantitative analysis reveals that cases explicitly involving women constitute approximately 8.62% of the total cases. While this figure may seem modest, it is crucial to interpret it alongside the qualitative evidence. The relatively low frequency of women's appearances suggests that they may not have engaged the court for minor issues, but when they did, it was for matters of significant personal, financial, and social importance. The substance of these cases, as explored in the preceding sections, demonstrates that women were active and strategic participants who understood and utilized the legal system to their advantage.

The breakdown of cases per court record illustrates this dynamic. For instance, in the İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri Balat Mahkemesi 1 Numaralı Sicil, 62 out of 5,721 total cases explicitly involved women in actions such as selling property, seeking inheritance, initiating divorce (*muhâla'a*), and establishing pious foundations (*vakıf*). The Beşiktaş Mahkemesi 2 Numaralı Sicil shows a higher proportion, with 61 of 635 cases involving women in property sales, divorce, and debt disputes. Similarly, the Eyüb Mahkemesi 3 Numaralı Sicil had 61 female-centric cases out of 329, dealing with inheritance, property transfers, and the emancipation of

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<sup>60</sup> İstanbul Kadı Sicilleri 41 Balat Mahkemesi 1 Numaralı Sicil (H. 964–965 / M. 1557–1558), 78.

slaves. The two Galata Mahkemesi sicils (5 and 7) showed 46 out of 241 cases and 35 out of 223 cases, respectively, also concerning inheritance and property. The Tophane and Üsküdar courts present a similar pattern. The Tophane Mahkemesi 2 Numaralı Sicil included 46 cases with women out of 893, often related to alleged misconduct or altercations. The Üsküdar Mahkemesi 51 Numaralı Sicil had 46 such cases out of 750, covering marital issues and financial matters. Notably, among the excerpts from the Üsküdar Mahkemesi 56 Numaralı Sicil, no specific cases explicitly involving women could be identified from the 497 total cases.

In total, across all the court records examined, 357 cases out of a combined 4,140 explicitly involved women. This yields the calculated figure of 8.62%. This percentage provides a vital quantitative backdrop to the central argument: while Ottoman women operated within a patriarchal system that may have limited their court appearances compared to men, the legal records definitively prove that they were not absent. Rather, they accessed the courts deliberately and effectively to exercise their considerable legal and economic agency.

### **IX. Conclusion**

The Sharia Court Registers of 16th-century Istanbul offer invaluable evidence, revealing Ottoman women as active, strategic agents within the patriarchal framework of their society. Far from being passive or confined, women demonstrated sophisticated legal literacy, leveraging the court system to assert significant economic and legal rights. They owned, bought, and sold property, including high-value assets, often using representatives strategically. Elite women engaged in complex transactions and established pious foundations for financial security and social influence. Enslaved women pursued and secured freedom through formal legal mechanisms, becoming active economic participants. Within the family sphere, women negotiated marriage consent, initiated divorce, claimed child support, and defended their honour and social standing in court. These documented actions across diverse domains underscore their remarkable resilience and agency, challenging simplistic narratives of female subjugation and highlighting



the dynamic interaction between societal structures and individual initiative.

While these findings illuminate women's capabilities within the unique context of Istanbul, important limitations must be considered to fully contextualize the evidence. The focus on the imperial capital naturally raises questions about generalizability; the experiences documented here may differ significantly from those of women in rural areas or provincial centres across the vast Ottoman Empire. Similarly, the relatively low ratio of women's cases compared to the total caseload, evident in quantitative data, invites questions about potential barriers to court access, such as distance, cost, social constraints, or reliance on informal mediation, that may have affected women disproportionately, particularly those outside elite circles. Furthermore, the nature of court records, documenting formal disputes and resolutions, inherently leans towards showcasing instances where women succeeded in utilizing the system; it provides less systematic insight into cases where women faced insurmountable obstacles, encountered judicial bias, or chose not to engage with the courts despite grievances.

Therefore, the compelling picture of female agency drawn from the Istanbul *sicils* should serve as a starting point for deeper research. Future research comparing court registers from diverse Ottoman regions and social strata is essential to understand the full spectrum of women's experiences beyond the capital. Researching the reasons behind the lower frequency of women's litigation, potentially through analysing court fee records, travel distances, or complementary sources like petitions, would provide crucial context for understanding access limitations. Exploring documented cases where women faced setbacks within the legal system would also yield a more complete understanding of the challenges coexisting with their demonstrated agency.

In conclusion, the 16th-century Istanbul court registers fundamentally reshape our understanding of Ottoman women. They were active participants, skilfully navigating the legal and economic landscape to protect their interests, manage resources, and shape their lives. While acknowledging the need for broader comparative studies and deeper investigation into barriers and systemic failures, the evidence

from these records unequivocally demonstrates that Ottoman women possessed significant legal and economic agency, actively contributing to the social and economic fabric of their world.

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## Chapter Nine

# A Woman Fighting Against Plague and Poisons: Signora Isabella Cortese among *i Professori de' Secreti*

Kadir ÇELİK\*

### I. Introduction

In 1555, a new literary genre “the books of secrets” emerged with the publication of *Secreti del Reverendo Donno Alessio Piemontese* by Girolamo Ruscelli (d. 1566), writing under the pseudonym Alessio Piemontese. His work inspired several subsequent authors whom the 16th-century writer Tommaso Garzoni (d. 1589) later referred to as *the professors of secrets* (*i Professori de' Secreti*), including figures such as Giovanni Ventura Rosetti (Venice, 1555), Giambattista della Porta (Venice, 1560), Timotheo Rossello (Venice, 1561), Leonardo Fioravanti (Venice, 1561) and so on.<sup>1</sup> This emerging books of secrets literature of the

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<sup>1</sup> William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 135–36; Penny Bayer, ‘Women’s Alchemical Literature 1560–1616 in Italy, France, the Swiss Cantons and England, and Its Diffusion to 1660’ (PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2003), 103. Although William Eamon’s famous book on the books of secrets in Italian literature remains authoritative and foundational, an expanding body of scholarly works has since continued to build upon and contribute the field; see Allison Kavey, *Books of Secrets: Natural Philosophy in England, 1550–1600* (University of Illinois Press, 2007); William Eamon, *The Professor of Secrets: Mystery, Medicine, and Alchemy in Renaissance Italy* (National Geographic Books, 2010); Elaine Leong and Alisha Rankin, *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science 1500–1800* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Julia Gruman

second half of the 16th century might have created a distinctive space for a woman to engage visibly in the history of science and intellectual culture. Publishing her own book of secrets in 1561, Signora Isabella Cortese (fl. 1561), regarded as both a noblewoman and a practicing chemist, came to be recognized the only woman among this predominantly male group, the Professors of Secrets.<sup>2</sup> Within a few decades of the publication of her work, other women began to contribute and publish books in the field of chemistry. For this reason, the representation of women as scientific figures, as apparent in the case of Cortese, particularly within the discipline of chemistry, holds significant importance, as it challenges traditional historical narratives in which women were predominantly portrayed as queens, princesses, maids, midwives, witches or prostitutes rather than as scientists. This chapter examines the first *libro* of Cortese's *I Secreti*, focusing specifically on five against-plague-and-poison recipes. It is evident that, like her male contemporaries, Cortese composed remedies treating plague and poisoning simultaneously.

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Martins, ““Secrets of Women”: Translating the Female Body in Early Modern Books of Secrets (1555–1700).” (PhD Thesis, King’s College London, 2022); Kadir Çelik, ‘Domenico Auda’nın “Breve Compendio di Maravigliosi Secreti” Adlı Eserinin Garşûnî Tercümesi ve Osmanlı Lûbnan’ında Tıbbî Bilginin Dolaşımı’ (Master’s Thesis, Istanbul, Istanbul Medeniyet University, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> However, it is important to note that the historicity and biographical background of Cortese have been the subject of scholarly discussion. Meredith K. Ray has argued that the name “Isabella Cortese” may have been a pseudonym strategically employed to appeal to a female readership—a common literary strategy of the period, as illustrated by the case of Alessio Piemontese, the pseudonym used by Girolamo Ruscelli. Taking Ray’s argument into account, I prefer to set aside the question of whether ‘Isabella’ was a pseudonym or a historical figure. What is essential, however, is that women increasingly appeared as named authors on title pages and were portrayed as scientific figures within the predominantly male intellectual culture of the period. For further discussion on Cortese’s historicity and biographical background, see Bayer, ‘Women’s Alchemical Literature’, 96–105; Meredith K. Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy: Women and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), 55–62.

## II. A Noble-born Female Chemist: Signora Isabella Cortese

Beyond being the only woman among the group, Cortese was also regarded as one of the earliest known female alchemists. Our knowledge of Isabella's life and career relies exclusively on her sole known work *I secreti*, or literally "*The Secrets*".<sup>3</sup> Yet the details it offers are so fragmentary that her personal background, education, formative years, marital circumstances and even professional identity remain largely obscure. The title "*Signora*" suggests that she was likely of respectable, possibly noble, origin, and the dedication of her book to Mario Chaboga (d. 1582), the Archdeacon of Ragusa (whom Eamon refers to as her brother-in-law) indicates that she maintained influential connections.<sup>4</sup>

Like other Professors of Secrets, Cortese claims to have travelled extensively throughout Italy and central Europe in search of alchemical recipes and techniques, gathering knowledge from alchemists and various other individuals.<sup>5</sup> She further asserts that she studied the works of medieval alchemists and philosophers, such as Geber, Ramon Lull and Arnaldus de Villa Nova, for over thirty years, a claim that reflects her sustained engagement with alchemical literature.<sup>6</sup> However, she cautions her "beloved brother" that she ultimately found these texts to be useless and a waste of time, rejecting book-based learning and advocating for experiential knowledge, she chooses to write in the vernacular.<sup>7</sup> Her remarks suggest that Cortese not only engaged critically with what she refers to as "fictions" and "riddles" but also actively practiced alchemy herself.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Isabella Cortese, *I Secreti de La Signora Isabella Cortese* (Venetia: Giouanni Bariletto, 1561); Paula Mollà Galvany, 'I Secreti della Signora Isabella Cortese. Edición crítica' (Ph.D. Thesis, Valencia, Universitat de València, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 137, 164–65; William Eamon, 'How to Read a Book of Secrets', in *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science 1500–1800* (Ashgate, 2011), 28. Penny Bayer investigates the various potential roots of her familial background, see Bayer, 'Women's Alchemical Literature', 96–101.

<sup>5</sup> Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 164.

<sup>6</sup> Cortese, *I Secreti*, 9–10; Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 164; Bayer, 'Women's Alchemical Literature', 106.

<sup>7</sup> Cortese, *I Secreti*, 9–10; Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 164; Bayer, 'Women's Alchemical Literature', 104.

<sup>8</sup> Cortese, *I Secreti*, 9–10; Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 164.

One might reasonably ask how Isabella (if she was indeed a historical figure) managed to establish herself among the professors of secrets, and how she accessed education and the opportunity to publish her work as a woman during the period of the *Querelle des Femmes*<sup>9</sup>. Although these questions remain unanswered, Cortese was likely educated at home, as was common among noblewomen of her era.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, it is also important to clarify that Cortese's achievement in securing a place among the male-dominated ranks of the professors of secrets and authoring a medico-alchemical text should be recognized as a significant instance of a woman emerging as a scientific figure in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. From another point of view, Isabella's publication might have helped pave the way for later European female engagement in scientific authorship in the late 16th and 17th centuries in England, France and Switzerland from figures such as Lady Margaret Clifford, Madame de la Martinville, Jeanne du Port and Marie Meurdrac whose writings will be discussed at a later chapter in this volume.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For further insight into *Querelle des Femmes* (debate over women), a long-standing intellectual and literary debate that revolves around questions concerning women's nature, their roles in society, their rights, and whether they are inherently inferior to men, see Joan Kelly, 'Early Feminist Theory and the "Querelle Des Femmes", 1400-1789', *Signs* 8, no. 1 (1982): 4-28; Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'The "Querelle Des Femmes": A Continuing Tradition in Welsh Women's Literature', in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al., vol. 3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2000), 101-14; Mónica Bolufer, 'Medicine and the Querelle Des Femmes in Early Modern Spain', *Medical History* 53, no. S29 (2009): 86-106; Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 73-110; David F. Hult, 'The Roman de La Rose, Christine de Pizan, and the Querelle Des Femmes', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 184-94.

<sup>10</sup> Sharon D. Michalove, 'Equal in Opportunity?: The Education of Aristocratic Women 1450-1540', in *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Barbara J. Whitehead, *Studies in the History of Education* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1999), 53-69.

<sup>11</sup> Bayer, 'Women's Alchemical Literature'; Penny Bayer, 'Women Alchemists and the Paracelsian Context in France and England, 1560-1616', *Early Modern Women* 15, no. 2 (2021): 103-12. However, both prior to and during Cortese's time, other female authors, such as Caterina Sforza (d. 1509), Camilla Erculiani (d. after 1584) and Anna Maria Zieglerin (d. 1575) in Germany, also composed medicinal

Returning to the primary focus of this chapter, a summary of Isabella's *I Secreti* would be helpful. The book was widely disseminated, with eleven editions published in Italian between 1561 and 1677, and German translations appearing between 1592 and 1596.<sup>12</sup> Copies and translations of the work made their way into libraries and private collections across Germany, France, England and New England in America, demonstrating her acceptance among both male and female readers, within a predominantly patriarchal society and amid the intellectual climate shaped by the ongoing debates and tensions of *Querelle des Femmes*.<sup>13</sup> The questions of how Cortese achieved and distinguished herself among other male authors, or why she emerged specifically within Italian literature and society, and why her work appears to have gained particular interest among German readers (as evidenced by the two German editions) rather than that of other European audiences, such as the French, English (except for an incomplete translation in a manuscript housed in Bodleian Library alongside the deliberate expurgation of her identity) or Spanish remain unresolved.<sup>14</sup>

Like other books of secrets, Cortese's secrets comprise a compilation of medicinal, chemical and technical knowledge. It might be regarded as a kind of recipe book, offering remedies alongside

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and chemical recipes, see; Pier Desiderio Pasolini, *Caterina Sforza: Documenti*, vol. 3 (Roma: Ermanno Loescher E. C., 1893), 599–807; Tara E. Nummedal, 'Alchemical Reproduction and the Career of Anna Maria Zieglerin', *Ambix* 48, no. 2 (July 2001): 56–68; Joyce De Vries, *Caterina Sforza and the Art of Appearances: Gender, Art and Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 210–11; Camilla Erculiani, *Letters on Natural Philosophy: The Scientific Correspondence of a Sixteenth-Century Pharmacist, with Related Texts*, ed. Eleonora Carinci, trans. Hannah Marcus, vol. 77, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series* (New York, Toronto: Iter Press, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Bayer interprets the translation of the book into German as evidence of its commercial viability and popularity at the time; see Bayer, 'Women's Alchemical Literature', 95–96, 141, 144.

<sup>13</sup> Bayer, 141–46.

<sup>14</sup> Bayer also states that she discovered a manuscript in the Bodleian Library containing the English translation of Isabella's works, in which, as she notes, her identity was expurgated and her contribution is entirely cut out; see Bayer, 144.



instructions for ointments, salves, syrups, electuaries, liqueurs, perfumes, cosmeceutical products, essential oils, dyes, varnishes, inks, gilding, metallurgy and various other artisanal techniques. The book divided into three main chapters, each referred to as a “*libro*” (literally means “book”).<sup>15</sup> The first *libro* deals with remedies for a range of ailments, including mainly plague, poisoning, syphilis, ringworm, scrofula, lesions, ulcers and other wounds, kidney stone, gout and spleen disease.<sup>16</sup> The second and third *libri* focus on alchemical processes and practical applications. In the second *libro*, the author provides prescriptions for producing dyes used in colouring bones, fabrics and metals, as well as for preparing inks, varnishes, soaps, candles, acids, methods for gilding and hardening of iron and techniques removing stains from clothes.<sup>17</sup> The final *libro* is primarily concerned with perfumes, cosmeceutical products for skin, faces, teeth and hands, the creation of counterfeit items, the distillation of essential oils and other related substances.<sup>18</sup>

Although Cortese and her work have received considerable modern scholarly attention, this section focuses specifically on the recipes she provides for treating plague and poison.<sup>19</sup> Cortese’s engagement with these topics was not exceptional, as many contemporary professors of

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<sup>15</sup> After the 1561 edition, the text appeared in a revised format, divided into four chapters. Cortese, *I Secreti*; Isabella Cortese, *I secreti de la signora Isabella Cortese...con altri bellissimi secreti aggiunti* (Venetia: appresso Giouanni Bariletto, 1565); Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*, 58–60.

<sup>16</sup> Cortese, *I Secreti*, 1–9.

<sup>17</sup> Cortese, 9–40.

<sup>18</sup> Cortese, 40–88.

<sup>19</sup> For modern scholarly studies, see Claire Lesage, ‘La Littérature Des “Secrets” et I Secreti d’Isabella Cortese’, *Chroniques Italiennes* 36 (1993): 145–78; Bayer, ‘Women’s Alchemical Literature’; Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*; Kathleen P. Long, ed., *Gender and Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Galvany, ‘I Secreti’; Martins, “‘Secrets of Women’”; Isabel Antonello Flores, ‘Os Segredos de Se Fazer Bela: Representação, Discurso e Práticas de Um Ideal de Beleza Feminino Através Da Fonte “I Secreti de La Signora Isabella Cortese”(Itália, Século XVI)’, *Melancolia* 8 (2023), [https://revistamelancolia.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/5\\_Antonello.pdf](https://revistamelancolia.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/5_Antonello.pdf).

secrets similarly assembled recipes to counteract plague and poisoning.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, in line with her contemporaries, Cortese presented only five formulations targeting these threats. Accordingly, this chapter is structured around the following central research questions: what knowledge or perspectives does Cortese's work provide concerning the plague and poison? What remedies or substances does she propose? In terms of both content and approach, how do Cortese's recipes compare with those found in other books of secrets? Do they reflect notable differences, or are they largely consistent with prevailing medical and practical traditions of the period? Before addressing these questions, it is first necessary to investigate the contemporary medical and intellectual understandings of plague and poison in the mid-sixteenth century.

### III. The Idea of Poison as a Cause of Plague

Plague, a zoonotic bacterial infection transmitted to humans and other animals through the fleas that have fed on infected wild rodents and caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, has historically been known

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<sup>20</sup> For further details on the number of plague and poison recipes addressed by authors, see Alessio Piemontese and Girolamo Ruscelli, *Secreti Del Reverendo Donno Alessio Piemontese* (Venetia: Sigismondo Bordogna, 1555), 81–94, 107; Giovanventura Rosetti, *Notandissimi secreti de l'arte profumatoria: a fare ogli, acque, paste, balle, moscardini, uccelletti, paternostri, e tutta l'arte intiera, come si ricerca cosi ne la citta di Napoli del Reame, come in Roma, e quiui in la citta di Vinegia nuouamente impressi* (Vinegia: Francesco Rampazzetto, 1555), 46; Timotheo Rossello, *Della Summa de'Secreti Universali in Ogni Materia Parte Prima* (Vinegia: Appresso il Barezzi, 1559), 19, 22–29; Pietro Bairo, *Secreti medicinali di M. Pietro Bairo da Turino, gia medico di Carlo secondo duca di Savoia. Ne quali si contengono i rimedi che si possono usar in tutte l'infermita che uengono all'huomo, cominciando da capelli fino alle piante de piedi. Et questo libro per l'utilita sua si chiama. Vieni Meco* (Venetia: Francesco Sansovino, 1561), 247; Leonardo Fioravanti, *Del Compendio de i Secreti rationali* (Venetia: Apresso Andrea Rauenoldo, 1566), 68–70; Giovanni Battista Zapata, *Li Maravigliosi Secreti di Medicina e Chirurgia*. (Deuchino, 1586), 8, 110; Giambattista della Porta, *Natural Magick by John Baptista Porta, a Neapolitane; in Twenty Books ... Wherein Are Set Forth All the Riches and Delights of the Natural Sciences*. (London: Printed for Thomas Young and Samuel Speed, 1658), 225–27, <https://name.umd.umich.edu/A55484.0001.001>. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Accessed January 14, 2025.

by various names, including *peste*, *peste noire*, *pestilence* and *Black Death*.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the Black Death, regarded as one of the most devastating pandemics in history, unfolded between 1347–1353, and caused widespread devastation across both Europe and the Islamic world, leaving profound and lasting effects on religion, intellectual life, politics, and socio-economic structures.<sup>22</sup> However, these effects will not be discussed in detail, as the present study does not focus on the comprehensive history of the plague or the pandemics.

Despite anticipations of its decline, the plague which persisted into 18<sup>th</sup> century maintained its prominence well into the 16<sup>th</sup> century, to the extent that even Tycho Brahe (d. 1601), although renowned for his contributions to astronomy, did not refrain from composing a prescription against it.<sup>23</sup> Nearly three centuries after the first emergence,

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<sup>21</sup> Modern scholars have identified three major historical pandemics caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*: The Justinian Plague (541–750), the Black Death (1346–1353) and the Hong Kong Plague. See, Peregrine Horden, 'Mediterranean Plague in the Age of Justinian', *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, 2005, 134–60; Lester K. Little, *Plague and the End of Antiquity: The Pandemic of 541–750* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), Ann G. Carmichael, 'Bubonic Plague', in *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 629–31; Nükhet Varlık, *Plague and Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean World* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 11; Edward G. Pryor, 'The Great Plague of Hong Kong', *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1975, 61–70.

<sup>22</sup> For the socio-economic effects of the plague, see Wim Blockmans, 'The Social and Economic Effects of Plague in the Low Countries: 1349–1500', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'histoire* 58, no. 4 (1980): 833–63; John H. Munro, 'Before and After the Black Death: Money, Prices, and Wages in Fourteenth-Century England', in *New Approaches to the History of Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Selected Proceedings of Two International Conferences at The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters in Copenhagen*, vol. 104 (Historisk-filosofiske Meddelelser, 2009), 335–65; Carlos Álvarez Nogal, Leandro Prados de la Escosura, and Carlos Santiago Caballero, 'Economic Effects of the Black Death: Spain in European Perspective', 2020; Mark Bailey, *After the Black Death: Economy, Society, and the Law in Fourteenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 2021); Ole Jørgen Benedictow, *The Complete History of the Black Death* (Boydell & Brewer, 2021).

<sup>23</sup> John T. Alexander, *Bubonic Plague in Early Modern Russia: Public Health and Urban Disaster* (Oxford University Press, 2002); Christopher J. Duffin and Renzo Console, 'The Pharmaceutical Contributions of Tycho Brahe (1546–1601): Translations and Commentaries', *Pharmaceutical Historian* 54, no. 1 (2024): 7–25.

by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, new outbreaks of plague had reappeared across many parts of Europe and the Mediterranean, most notably during the Venice plague of 1629–1631 and the London outbreak of 1665–1666. The epidemic that affected the Mediterranean coast of Spain between 1647 and 1654 reached the island of Sardinia in 1652.<sup>24</sup> Domenico Auda (fl. 1664), a 17th-century professor of secrets and the chief pharmacist at the Hospital of the Holy Spirit in Rome, was still prescribing plague recipes between 1652–1664.<sup>25</sup> Publishing more than two centuries after the initial outbreak of the Black Death, like other professors of secrets, Cortese continued to provide recipes for treating the plague. What is particularly noteworthy is that 16th-century professors of secrets approached the treatment of plague, poison and occasionally fever in a similar manner. The author of *Magia Naturalis* (Natural Magic), Giambattista della Porta, clarified his opinion on the nature of plague and poison: “I have spoken of poysons, now I will of the plague, being of the same nature, and cured almost by the same medicines”.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, during the initial outbreak of the Black Death (1346–1351), seeking explanations for the unprecedented scale of mortality, physicians proposed the notion of the plague as a form of poison.<sup>27</sup> A number of scholars, including

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<sup>24</sup> Alfani notes that from 1656 to 1657, mortality rates soared, with 80–130 deaths per 1,000 individuals in Rome, 490 per 1,000 in Genoa, and as high as 500 per 1,000 in Naples, see Guido Alfani, ‘Plague in Seventeenth-Century Europe and the Decline of Italy: An Epidemiological Hypothesis’, *European Review of Economic History* 17, no. 4 (2013): 408–30.

<sup>25</sup> Domenico Auda, *Breve Compendio Di Marauigliosi Secreti* (Roma: Per Angelo Bernabò, a spese di Gio. Sucetti Librario in Piazza Navona, 1660), 1–10;

<sup>26</sup> Porta, *Natural Magick*, 225. This notion was likewise prevalent among Ottoman physicians, including prominent figures such as Ibn Sharif (fl. 15th century) and Şâlih ibn Naşr Allâh ibn Sallûm al-Ḥalabî (d. 1669), both of whom recognized the poisonous nature of the plague. Ibn Sharif explicitly articulates this view, stating that “...the plague, whose substance is poison...”. See, Tabîb İbn-i Şerîf, *Yâdigâr: 15. Yüzyıl Türkçe Tıp Kitabı Yâdigâr-ı İbn-i Şerîf* (İstanbul: Merkezefendi Geleneksel Tıp Derneği, Zeytinburnu Belediyesi, 2017), 309; Salih bin Nasrullah, *Beden Sağlığının Korunması Gâyetü’l-Beyân Fî Tedbîri Bedeni’l-İnsân* (İstanbul: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2019), 334.

<sup>27</sup> For further discussion, see Jon Arrizabalaga, ‘Pestis Manufacta: Plague, Poisons and Fear in Mid-Fourteenth-Century Europe’, in “It All Depends on the Dose”: *Poisons and Medicines in European History*, ed. Ole Peter Grell, Andrew Cunningham, and Jon Arrizabalaga (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018), 62–80;

figures such as Melissa P. Chase, Frederick W. Gibbs and Marilyn Nicoud, had already pointed out that in the light of the plague treatises, the plague was, in fact, appeared as a form of poisoning caused by a poison in a general sense.<sup>28</sup> This notion provides a framework for an explanation of plague: sudden outbreak of a disease that causing high mortality among large numbers of people at the same time strongly resembles a case of poisoning, in which a plenty of individuals die due to poisons or toxic substances (referred to as a “*venonum*” in the air, enters the body and causes poisoning leading to the corruption of the individual’s vital forces).<sup>29</sup> Gibbs asserts that this concept of poisoned air differs from the ancient “*miasma*” theory, which held that air became corrupted through various causes and, upon entering the body, led to disease. He further argues that 14th-century plague writers did not merely describe the air as corrupted, but introduced a new idea that the putrefied air contained a poisonous substance which is responsible for causing the plague.<sup>30</sup> Without delving deeply into this topic, it is important to note that the conceptualization of plague as a form of poisoning, or as poison itself, provided the theoretical basis for treating both poison and plague through similar remedies. For that reason, the medicinal authors generally wrote prescriptions for both plague and poison together in accordance with that notion. Cortese, the only female professor of secrets, presented her remedies within the same conceptual framework;

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Frederick W. Gibbs, *Poison, Medicine, and Disease in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2019), 116–41; Alisha Rankin, ‘Plague, Poison, and Print: An Artisan’s Viewpoint’, *Harvard Library Bulletin*, accessed 1 May 2025, <https://harvardlibrarybulletin.org/plague-poison-and-print-artisans-viewpoint>.

<sup>28</sup> Melissa P. Chase, ‘Fevers, Poisons, and Apostemes: Authority and Experience in Montpellier Plague Treatises’, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, Science and Technology in Medieval Society*, vol. 441, no. 1 (1985): 155–57; Gibbs, *Poison, Medicine, and Disease*, 116–17; Marilyn Nicoud, ‘A l’épreuve de La Peste. Médecins et Savoirs Médicaux Face à La Pandémie (XIVe–XVe Siècles)’, *Annales HSS* 78, no. 3 (2023): 517–18, 538.

<sup>29</sup> Chase, ‘Fevers, Poisons, and Apostemes’, 162; Gibbs, 116–17.

<sup>30</sup> Gibbs, 118–19. See also, Chase, ‘Fevers, Poisons, and Apostemes’, 161–162; Nicoud, ‘A l’épreuve de La Peste’, 505–41.

the five recipes included in the first *libro* of her work examines both plague and poison, alongside a range of other ailments.

#### IV. Treating Plague and Poisoning

Cortese begins her first *libro* with treatments for both plague and poison. Neither the titles nor the texts clearly articulate her theoretical approach to the aetiology of plague or poisoning. However, without going into too much detail, she gave some signs that indicated both plague and poison were handled together. The first prescription titled *Against Plague and Poison* describes a complex pharmaceutical recipe attributed to Fra Gregorio Mezzocapo, prepared for Pope Clement VII (d. 1534) as a remedy for plague as well as poison. The author asserts that the efficacy of the oil was allegedly demonstrated through its application on two condemned prisoners, one of whom survived after treatment while the other died. To lend credibility to this claim, she emphasizes that the outcome was witnessed by Senator M. Simon Tornaboni and the chamberlain of Pope Clement VII.

The preparation of the remedy involves multiple stages of maceration, solar infusion and water-bath boiling using a wide array of botanical and animal substances, including classical pharmacological compounds to treat poisoning such as Mithridate and theriac. Notably, the inclusion of Mithridate and theriac, both of which remained highly popular among apothecaries of the period, underscores the continued reliance on classical antidotes.<sup>31</sup> An examination of these recipes reveals that the substances employed generally resemble those commonly found in early modern books of secrets, particularly in remedies formulated for the treatment of plague and poisoning by Girolamo Ruscelli, della Porta and Domenico Auda.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, authors such as Honofri Fedele and Francesco Scarioni favoured more accessible ingredients such as garlic, rue, egg, rosemary, walnut, nutmeg and dried fig in their

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<sup>31</sup> See, Gilbert Watson, *Theriac and Mithridatum: A Study in Therapeutics* (London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1966), 100–152.

<sup>32</sup> Piemontese and Ruscelli, *Secreti*, 81–94; Porta, *Natural Magick*, 225–26; Auda, *Breve Compendio Di Marauigliosi Secreti*, 1–9.

remedies.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, writers like Rossello, Fioravanti, Rosetti and Bairo deliberately avoided the use of classical compounds such as theriac and Mithridate, as well as substances like white dittany, Armenian bole, tormentil, St. John's Wort, gentian, and spikenard.<sup>34</sup> As Gibbs has demonstrated, the substances used in the treatment of plague and poisoning—both of which were believed to involve poisonous substances that penetrated the body, reached the heart, and corrupted the blood and vital spirit—were primarily intended to prevent the poison from reaching the heart and causing the decay of the blood. Accordingly, the central therapeutic strategies outlined in plague tracts consistently emphasized the evacuation of toxins from the body and the protection and fortification of the heart against corruption.<sup>35</sup> For this reason, pre-modern pharmaceutical texts commonly described such substances as capable of “cheering” the heart and either expelling or resisting poisons, for examples tormentil, zedoary, carline root, among others.<sup>36</sup>

In explaining the virtues of the oil, Cortese emphasizes that this oil should be administered both to individuals who have ingested toxic substances and to those afflicted by the plague. However, she recommends external applications, specifically advising that the heart and wrists should be anointed with the oil. Additionally, in cases involving bites from venomous animals, rabid dogs, or injuries caused by poisoned weapons, she suggests applying the oil directly to internal wounds. What is particularly notable is that Cortese also claims the oil can be administered to individuals suffering from a range of ailments, including cholic pains, side and sting-related pains, intestinal parasites,

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<sup>33</sup> Francesco Scarioni, *Centuria Prima di Secreti Medicinali, Politici, e Naturali* (Perugia: Bernardino Florimi, 1630); Fedele Honofri, *Centuria di Secreti Medicinali, et Naturali: Nella quale si contiene cento secreti, tutti approvati, & sperimentati* (Roma: Righettini, 1637), 10.

<sup>34</sup> Rosetti, *Notandissimi secreti de l'arte profumatoria*, 46; Rossello, *Della Summa de' Secreti Universali*, 19–21; Bairo, *Secreti medicinali*, 247; Fioravanti, *Secreti rationali*, 69–70.

<sup>35</sup> Gibbs, *Poison, Medicine, and Disease*, 116–41; Nicoud, ‘A l'épreuve de La Peste’, 538.

<sup>36</sup> See, Nicholas Culpeper, *A Physical Directory, Or, A Translation of the Dispensatory Made by the Colledg of Physitians of London* (London: Peter Cole, at the sign of the Printing-Press in Cornhil, 1649), 6, 11, 18–19.

spasms, and other related conditions. The oil can be applied both internally and externally, with specific attention to areas such as the heart, nostrils, wrists, stomach, nape, neck and the fontanel. The frequency and duration of application might change according to the nature of the illness, with certain treatments extending up to twenty days. In the absence of very aged oil, she advises using distilled olive oil as a substitute, provided it is refined three to four times to receive the necessary therapeutic quality.

Like the first one, the second recipe describes a potent plague and poison remedy commissioned by King Ferdinand. The recipe involves soaking a detailed mix of herbs, roots, seeds, and resins, including juniper berries, rue, cinnamon, theriac, and carline root, in distilled alcohol called *aqua vitae* overnight. After adding juniper oil and fine theriac, the mixture is distilled to extract a healing spirit. After all, the leftover residue is then redistilled with frankincense oil to extract a secondary medicinal oil. The said distilled water is used internally to counteract poison or plague, and its doses vary by age. For instance, it is administered 5 *libra* for adults, 3  $\frac{3}{4}$  for youth, 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  for children. Similar to the first one, it is to act directly on the heart and detoxify the body. When plague symptoms appear, the oil is applied to the area, followed by bloodletting from a nearby vein. The patient is then made to sweat under heavy covers for three hours without sleeping. Afterward, food is given, and recovery is expected. As in the first recipe, she again claims that the distilled water cures any form of poisoning, whether ingested or drunk, while the oil can expel the intestinal parasites when applied to specific areas of the body such as the throat, navel, stomach, wrists, and kidneys.

The third recipe outlines the preparation of a medicinal oil centred on St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), intended once again for the treatment of plague, poisoning, and a range of other ailments. Olive oil is combined with turpentine, saffron, rhubarb, gentian, blessed thistle, white dittany, and various parts of St. John's wort and momordica. The St. John's wort is first rinsed with fine wine and left to rest in a cool place for three days. The ingredients are then gently boiled in oil to reduce moisture. The resulting mixture undergoes a three-stage aging process: 30 days in warm manure, 15 days buried underground, and at least two



months exposed to sunlight. The final product is stored in a sealed glass vessel and applied as needed for its therapeutic properties.

The last two recipes clarify two methods for preparing a medicinal “scorpion oil”, intended for the treatment of plague and various other ailments. Different forms of the scorpion oil recipe can also be found in the books of Ruscelli, Rossello and Italian medical writer Pietro Andrea Mattioli, and even a seventeenth-century Italian pharmacist Domenico Auda continued giving the scorpion oil recipe after a century.<sup>37</sup> In Isabella’s prescriptions, both procedures utilize aged olive oil and live scorpions as primary ingredients. In the first method, 100 live scorpions are boiled in aged olive oil using a water bath until they are completely dried out. The oil is then strained and combined with finely powdered rhubarb and refined theriac, stirred continuously until the mixture cools. Finally, the preparation is strained once more and stored in a well-plugged glass vessel.

In the second method, she employs 140 scorpions, specifically captured under the zodiac sign of Leo. These are left to macerate in aged oil until the sign of Leo passes, after which the mixture is boiled in a copper vessel until the scorpions rise to the surface. At this point, rue and southernwood are added, and the mixture is boiled further until the scorpions cracked. The resulting mass is then pressed, and a mixture of refined theriac, rhubarb, white dittany, fresh gentian root and tormentil is incorporated. Once thoroughly blended and cooled, the infusion is transferred to a plugged glass vessel and exposed to continuous sunlight for forty days. Signora also provided a separate section instructing the way of using the medicinal oil in cases of plague, fever, swelling and worms. When a person infected with plague feels ill and feverish, they should anoint the area around the heart, wrists, and nostrils, which is said to bring recovery. On the other hand, she also deals with other health problems such as carbuncles or abscesses. In the case of them, the

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<sup>37</sup> Piemontese and Ruscelli, *Secreti*, 88–89; Rossello, *Della Summa de’Secreti Universali*, 19–20; Auda, *Breve Compendio Di Marauigliosi Secreti*, 5–6; Pietro Andrea Mattioli and Pedanius Dioscorides, *Discorsi di M. Pietro Andrea Mattioli sanese, medico cesareo, ne’ sei libri di Pedacio Dioscoride anazarbeo della materia medicinale*. (presso Niccolo Pezzana, 1744), 795.

oil should be applied around the affected area daily, and the patient should be kept in bed, well-covered, to sweat for six hours. After sweating, clean clothes should be provided to patients, along with a bowl of broth and cordial remedies to ensure recovery. Even in cases where the patient does not suffer from plague but presents with fever or general bodily pain, the application of the oil as prescribed is recommended, provided the fever is not of pestilential origin. For the case of intestinal parasites, she advises that the oil should be applied to the pit of the stomach, followed by anointing the throat's fontanel, a measure for her to prevent the worms from rising and causing suffocation. Additional applications to the dorsal area opposite the pit of stomach and the nape are also recommended. She finally asserts with evident exaggeration that this will cure the patient within two hours.

## **V. Conclusion**

The new literature, books of secrets, emerged in 1555, inspiring a wave of similar publications by authors later named "professors of secrets". Among them, Signora Isabella Cortese was regarded the only woman and one of the earliest known female alchemists. Her *I Secreti* (1561) included recipes and instructions spanning medicine, alchemy, cosmetics, and artisanal practices for both male and female readership. These aspects collectively indicate that, although women were largely excluded from universities, Cortese somehow found the opportunity to publish her alchemical and medica work and reach a diverse readership, both male and female, across Europe and America. In this case, she appeared as a successful female figure, establishing herself among the male-dominated professors of secrets and emerged as a notable "scientific" figure in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In a broader perspective, Cortese's appearance as a female author on a book cover, like the other female alchemists in the following century, provides a new perspective that beyond the traditional portrayals as queens, princesses, maids, midwives, witches or prostitutes in historical narratives, the depiction of women as practicing alchemists illuminates their roles in intellectual and scientific domains in the history of women.

On the second hand, published over two centuries after the Black Death, her *I Secreti* reflects continuity in early modern approaches to

plague. Like other professors of secrets, Cortese offered treatments for plague and poisoning within a shared conceptual framework similar with other professors of secrets and plague literature. In *I Secreti*, her approach suggests a conceptual overlap between plague and poisoning, as evidenced by her inclusion of remedies intended to combat both simultaneously. Some recipes include classical antidotes such as Mithridate, theriac and the recipe of “scorpion oil” were a popular remedy at that time. Analysing the recipes written in her work, Cortese adheres to the premodern medical framework of humoral pathology. At the same time, she incorporates a concept commonly found in contemporary plague literature, the belief that, in addition to being corrupted as in the miasmatic theory, the air itself includes a poisonous substance.

**Text and Translation<sup>38</sup>**

**Contra peste & contra veneno. Cap. I.**

Olio di Fra Gregorio Mezzocapo, che fece per Papa Clemente VII, contra veleno e peste, e fu provato in due pregioni di Campidoglio, che erano condannati alla morte, e fece la prova, ch'uno morì, e l'altro che fu aiutato con questo olio, scampò, alla qual esperienza intravenne il senatore M. Simon Tornaboni et il cameriere del detto Papa.

Piglia del'olio vecchissimo lib. vi e, di maggio, habbi manipoli vi delle foglie di perforata et mettile in olio sopradetto, e bollano in bagno maria per hore quattro e lassa raffreddare in un vaso ben turato, poi cola e spremi le foglie nel torcitore, poi metti in vaso ben turato, e appendi al sole, e lassa così stare fin che la perforata comincia fiorire, e tanti manipoli de fiori, quante libre furono del detto olio, ne metterai dentro e fa che bollano in bagno come di sopra e spremi come di sopra e un'altra volta nel vaso bene turato s'appicchi al sole, finché 'l sol sarà in Leone, e la luna in Scorpione, poi piglia per ogni libra del sopradetto olio centovinti scorpioni, e più se potrai, e mettilgli nel detto olio, e fa bollire in bagno maria per quattro hore e spremi come di sopra, poi sospendi al sole finché i frutti di perforata siano maturi, et in ogni libra del predetto olio metti un manipolo delle predette frutta nel detto e fa bollire et spremi come di sopra, poi si metta al sole. Ma sempre innanci che si sprema l'olio, lascialo raffreddare nel vaso, nel quale haverà bollito. Poi per ogni libra del detto olio piglia termentilla, carlina, aristologiaro, sandali rossi, radici di carlina, spico, nardo, dittamo bianco, grana di ginepre 3 5; cedoaria, gentiana, ana 3 ii; centaurea, imperatoria, ana 3 i. Queste due cose ultime metti se ti piace e tutto menutamente tagliato et alquanto pesto nel mortaio, mettasi in infusione di vino vecchissimo grande, nero o bianco o malvagia o acqua vita, che sarà meglio, et ivi si lassi per tre dì, poi si metta nel detto olio e fa bollire per sei o per otto hore in bagno maria, e spremi e torci come di sopra. Poi per ogni libra del sopradetto olio,

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<sup>38</sup> I based my translation on Cortese's 1561 edition, and everything in the original old-Italian text was strictly adhered to, see Cortese, *I Secreti*. Symbols and Units of Measurement in the text: 1 Libra = 12 Ounces (℥), 1 Oncia (℥) = 8 Drachmas (ʒ), 1 Drachma (ʒ) = 1/8 of an Ounce. I would like to thank my colleague Selin Gül Mutlucan for her careful proofreading of the texts.

### Chap. I. Against plague and poison

Oil of Fra Gregorio Mezzocapo, which he made for Pope Clemente VII, against poison and plague, and it was proved in [the case of] two Capitoline prisons who were condemned to death. It proved that one died and the other who was helped with this oil survived. The senator M. Simon Tornaboni and the chamberlain of the said Pope were present at this experience.

Take vi *libras* of very aged oil, and in May get vi handfuls of St. John's wort<sup>39</sup> leaves and put the leaves in the aforementioned oil. They boil in water bath for four hours. Let it cool in a well-plugged vessel. [Once cooled] strain and squeeze the leaves in the twister. Then put [the strained oil] in the well-plugged vessel and hang it in the sun. Leave it there until the St. John's wort begins to bloom. Then, as many handfuls of flowers as the *libras* of the said oil, you will put inside and boil them in a water bath and squeeze it as before. Once again, in the well-plugged jar, place it in the sun until the sun is in Leo and the moon is in Scorpio. Afterward, for each *libra* of the said oil, take one hundred and twenty scorpions, or more if you can, and put them in the said oil. Boil in a water bath for four hours, then squeeze it as before. Then, suspend it in the sun again until the fruits of St. John's wort have matured, and for each *libra* of the oil, put a handful of the said fruits in that. Boil and squeeze again as before. After it, place it in the sun. But always, before squeezing the oil, let it cool in the vessel in which it will be boiled. Then for each *libra* of the said oil, take tormentil, carline, birthwort, red sandalwoods, roots of carline, spikenard, white dittany and juniper grains, 5  $\frac{3}{4}$  [of each]; zedoary and gentian, ii  $\frac{3}{4}$  each; centaury and masterwort, i  $\frac{3}{4}$  each. Put these last two things if you like, and all finely cut and slightly crushed in a mortar; let it be infused in very old strong wine, red, white, or Malvasia or aqua vita, which will be better, and left [to steep] for three days. Then put it into the said oil and boil it for six or eight hours in a water bath, then squeeze and twist it as before. After it, for each *libra* of the aforementioned oil,

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<sup>39</sup> I preferred to rely on the *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* as well as Elsevier's and A. Bedevian's polyglot plant dictionaries for the corresponding English and scientific plant names, see Armenag K. Bedevian, *Illustrated Polyglottic Dictionary of Plant Names* (Cairo: Medbouly Library, 1994); Geoffrey Creber and Murray Wrobel, *Elsevier's Dictionary of Plant Names: In Latin, English, French, German, and Italian* (Elsevier, 1996).

piglia bolo armeno, mirrha, reubarbaro eletto, zaffrano, aloe epatico, sandali ana 3. ii. tutto si polverizi, et un'altra volta fa che bolla in bagno maria per sei o per otto hore, e non spremere pel torcitore, poi per ogni libra piglia di mitridate, tiriaca fina ana 3. ii. e fa bollire insieme col predetto olio per dodici hore, e non si sprema più, poi sospendi al sole per quattro dì nel vaso ben turato, e sera compito.

### ***Virtù del detto olio***

Se fosse persona che havesse preso veleno per bocca, ungasi il cuore e i polsi di sei hore in sei hore, per due dì naturali, poi una volta il giorno per infino a quattro dì. Chi havesse sospetto di magnare veleno in alcun luogo, dove andrà a magnare ungasi prima che vi vada una volta il cuore, e poi che serà tornato un'altra volta. Chi volesse preservarsi dalla peste, ancor praticando con gli ammorbati, ungasi il cuore et li polsi una volta il giorno, quando ne va a dormire. Se alcuno fosse morsicato da qual si voglia animale velenoso, o cane arrabbiato, o ferito d'arma avvelenata, ungasi intorno alla piaga e li polsi et il cuore, di otto hore in otto hore, insin a quattro giorni et poi una volta il dì persino passato il settimo giorno. S'alcuno havesse pontura di mal di costa, ungasi la doglia et il cuore per due giorni, di quattro hore in quattro hore. S'alcuno havesse dolore de fianco, ungasi il dolore et il cuore e li polsi, e questi tre mali vuol essere l'olio caldo. S'alcuno havesse dolore colico, ungasi fra le due nature et il cuore. Alli vermi per li putti, ungetegli il cuore e li polsi, e la nuca, e le nari, la fontanella della gola e quella dello stomaco. S'alcuno havesse spasimo in una ferita, overo in altra maniera, ungasi intorno al male et il cuore, et li polsi, di otto hore in otto hore, insino passato il quarto giorno e poi due volte il giorno per quattordici giorni. S'alcuno fosse appestato, ungasi intorno il cuore et intorno al male di quattro hore in quattro hore infino al settimo dì, et poi una volta la mattina et una la sera infino a venti giorni. E nota che quando non si potesse havere l'olio vecchissimo, farai destillare l'olio della oliva per tre o quattro volte e serà della medesima perfettione

take Armenian bole, myrrh, selected rhubarb, saffron, hepatic aloes, and sandalwoods, ii 3 of each, all are pulverized. Once again boil it in a water bath for six or eight hours, but do not squeeze it in twister. Then for every libra [of the liquid], take Mithridate and fine theriac, ii 3 of each, and boil it together with the said oil for twelve hours, and do not squeeze it anymore, then suspend [the final product] in the sun for four days in a well-plugged vessel and it will be done.

### ***Virtue of the said Oil***

If it is a person who has taken poison by mouth, they should anoint the heart and the wrists every six hours for two natural days, then once a day for up to four days. Whoever had suspicion of eating poison in some place where they are going to eat, they should anoint the heart once before they go there and once again after they have returned. Whoever wishes to protect themselves from the plague [or epidemic], even while practicing with the afflicted [by the plague], they should anoint the heart and the wrists once a day, when going to sleep. If someone were bitten by any kind of venomous animal, or by a rabid dog, or wounded by a poisoned weapon, they should anoint around the wound, as well as the wrists and the heart every eight hours for up to four days, and then once a day until the seventh day has passed. If someone has stabbing pain in the rib, they should anoint the painful area and the heart every four hours for two days. If someone has pain in the flank, they should anoint the painful area, the heart and the wrists, and the oil must be applied warmly in all these three ailments. If someone has colic pain, they should anoint the area between the two genitals and the heart. For worms in children, anoint the heart, the wrists, the nape, the nostrils, the fontanel of the throat, and that of the stomach. If someone has spasms in a wound, or in another manner, they should anoint around the pain, the heart, and the wrists every eight hours until the fourth day has passed, and then twice a day for fourteen days. If someone were afflicted [with the plague], they should anoint around the heart and the affected area every four hours until the seventh day, and then once in the morning and once in the evening for up to twenty days. And note that when the very old oil cannot be found, you will distill olive oil three or four times, and it will be of the same perfection.

**Contra peste et veneno, del Re Ferdinando. Cap. 2.**

Piglia lib. ii d'acqua vita ottimamente rettificata nella quale poni queste cose: zuccaro fino, radici di carlina ana ʒ.iii. cedoaria, seme di cardo santo, ana ʒ. i.; reubarbaro, ʒ. i. grani di ginepre. ʒ. ii. s. terra sigillata, bolo armeno, ana ʒ. i. seme di ruta. ʒ. iii. foglie di ruta. ʒ. v. cinnamomo eletto. ʒ. v. silo balsamo, carpobalsamo, foglie di sena, macis, legno aloe, doronico, ana. ʒ. ii; dittamo bianco. ʒ. vii. seme santo, e di portulaca, ana. ʒ. iii. seme d'acetosa, cicorea e di cedro mondati, ana. ʒ. iii. radici di termentilla, gentiana, ana. ʒ. vi. tutto si polverizi e pongansi nell'acqua predetta per una notte, che'l vaso stia ben chiuso, poi aggiungi lib. i. d'olio di ginepre, e lib. i. di tiriaca fina, e tutto si ponga nel orinale col suo lambicco poi metti al fornello e stilla fin che tutta l'acqua ardente sia distillata, e servala che è preciosissima, in qualche vaso di vetro, benissimo turato, e sopra le feci, che resteranno nel orinale, poni libra i d'olio d'incenso, e di grado in grado aumenta il fuoco finché tutto l'olio serà distillato fora, il quale serva nel vetro ben turato. E quando sopravvenisse ad alcuno la febre pestifera subito, innanzi che dorma, se è huomo di età pfetta, gli darai ʒ. v. della detta acqua e se'l fosse di mezza età gli darai. ʒ. iii. e se sera piccolino. ʒ. ii. & incontanente detta acqua si rappresenterà al cuore e libererà da ogni veleno. E dove apparirà il segno pestifero, ongi subito col sopradetto olio, e subito da quella parte dove appare fallo sanguinare alla vena comune, poi si ponga nel letto, e sudi quanto potrà e stia coperto de panni quanto può e sudi per tre hore, et non dorma; poi gli si dia a magnare e guarrà. La sopradetta acqua maravigliosamente sana tutti quelli che gli fosse dato veleno, a magnare, overo a bere e, bevuto de detta acqua, subito sarà libero. Et se havesse vermi di qual si voglia spetie, se gli onga la fontanella della gola et attorno l'ombilico e la bocca dello stomaco e le polsi e le reni co'l detto olio, e subito sarà libero.



## Chap. 2. Against plague and poison, from King Ferdinand

Take ii *libra* of well-rectified aqua vitae, into which you shall place these things: fine sugar and roots of carline, iii ʒ of each; zedoary and blessed thistle seed, i ʒ of each; rhubarb, I ʒ; juniper grains, ii and a half ʒ; terra sigillata and Armenian bole, i ʒ of each; rue seed, iii ʒ; rue leaves, v ʒ; elected cinnamon, v ʒ; *silo balsamo*, carpobalsam, senna leaves, mace, aloeswood, and doricum, ii ʒ of each; white dittany, vii ʒ; “holy seed” (*Judean wormwood*) and purslane seed, iv ʒ of each; sorrel seed, chicory seed, and peeled citron seed, iii ʒ of each; tormentil root and gentian, vi ʒ of each. All should be pulverized and placed into the said water for one night (ensuring the vessel is well-closed). After it, add one *libra* of juniper oil and one *libra* of fine theriac. Put the entire mixture into a urinal pot with its alembic. Then set it upon a furnace and distill until the ardent water has been completely distilled. Preserve it, which is of great value, in a well-plugged glass vessel. Over the residue remaining in the urinal pot, pour i *libra* of incense oil, and gradually increase the heat until all the oil has been distilled, store this oil in a well-plugged glass [vessel]. And when the pestilential fever suddenly comes upon someone, before they sleep, if the patient is an adult age, give them v *libra* of the said water. If of middle age, give iii ʒ; if a very small, ii ʒ. Immediately, the said water will present itself in the heart, and it will free the person from all poison. And wherever the pestilential sign appears, anoint immediately the area at once with the said oil, and immediately draw blood from the common vein on the [same] part where the sign has appeared. Then lay the patient in bed, and let him sweat as much as he can, keep him covered with as many cloths as possible, and let him sweat for three hours, without sleeping. Afterwards, give him something to eat, and he will recover. The aforementioned water marvellously cures all those who have been given poison, whether through food or drink; and having drunk the said water, he will immediately be recovered. And if someone has worms of any kind, anointing the fontanel of the throat, around the navel, the mouth of the stomach, the wrists, and the kidneys with the said oil, he will immediately be recovered.

### **Cap 3. Olio de perforata a peste, veleno et altri mali.**

Piglia olio d'oliva. ʒ. xviii. Terebintina. ʒ. iii. zaffarano. ʒ. 5. reumbarbaro eletto. ʒ. ii. gentiana, cardo benedetto, dittamo bianco ana. ʒ. i; perforata con li fiori e con l'herba e la semente assai quantità, momordica, i frutti, le frondi et i fiori per la metà, o altrotanto. Taglisi ogni cosa menutamente, e la perforata vorrà essere sbroffata con ottimo vino, lassandola per tre dì in loco fresco; dapoi si ponga nel olio sopradetto e si faccia bollire a fuoco temperato tanto che cali l'humidità del vino. Poi levisi dal fuoco e pongasegli la terebintina e la momordica e l'altre cose, e che bolla di nuovo e non faccia bollor grande, per due o tre hore, poi si tenga in vaso di vetro ben serrato sotto'l letame caldo per trenta dì, dapoi in luogo freddo sotto terra per tre braccia, per quindici dì, dapoi si ponga al sole per due mesi e se più, più et al sereno ben serrato et adopera come disopra.

### **Cap. 4. Olio di scorpione contra peste et altri mali.**

Piglia dell'olio vecchissimo lib. i. scorpioni vivi numero cento, falli bollire in bagno maria col detto olio, tanto che i detti scorpioni siano secchi, poi colagli et in detto olio ponigli. ʒ. i. di reubarbaro eletto, polverizzato sottilmente, tiriaca fina ʒ.i. sempre misticando fin che sia fredda, poi cola e spremi forte e serva il liquore in vaso ben serrato.

### ***Altrimenti***

Piglia olio vecchio lib. i. scorpioni numero 140. quali siano presi in sol Leone, et mettilgli nel detto olio fin che'l sole sia passato del segno di Leone, e fallo bollire poi in una caccia di rame, tanto che i scorpioni vengano a galla di sopra, allhora ponivi dentro ruta, abrotano an. ma. i. e lassa bollire tanto che detti scorpioni siano crepati, poi spremigli fortemente, e nella detta espressione metterai tiriaca fina, quanto più si puo: reubarbaro eletto. Ana. ʒ. i. dittamo bianco gentiana, ana ʒ. 5. che sia di quell'anno le radice dette; termentilla, ʒ. ii. & ogni cosa si tagli sottilmente e si ponga in detta infusione in una scodella, sempre mescolando con un bacchetto fin tanto che sarà raffreddato; poi mettilo in vaso di vetro ben chiuso e per quaranta dì si tenga al sole di continuo poi si serbi.

### **Chap. 3. Oil of St. John's wort for plague, poison, and other ailments**

Take xviii ʒ of olive oil, iii ʒ of turpentine, 5 ʒ of saffron, ii ʒ of selected rhubarb; i ʒ each of gentian, blessed thistle, and white dittany; a large quantity of St. John's wort with its flowers, leaves, and seeds; and of *momordica*, its fruits, leaves, and flowers, in half the amount, or the same quantity. All things should be finely chopped, and the St. John's wort will need to be sprayed with excellent wine and left in a cool place for three days. Afterward, place it in the aforementioned oil and boil over moderate heat so much that the moisture of the wine decreases. Then remove it from the heat and add the turpentine, *momordica*, and the other things. Boil it again and don't make a vigorous boil, for two to three hours. [Once completed] keep it into a well-plugged glass vessel under the warm manure for thirty days. Then [transfer it] to a cool place three spans deep underground for fifteen days. Finally, place it in the sun for two months or longer, the better [the vessel will be] well-plugged in the clear sky and use it as before.

### **Chap. 4. Oil of scorpion against plague and other ailments**

Take i *libra* of very old oil, one hundred live scorpions; boil them in a water bath with the said oil so much that the scorpions are dried out. Then strain it and into the said oil, add i ʒ of finely powdered selected rhubarb and i ʒ of fine theriac, stirring continuously until [the mixture] has cooled. [Once cooled], strain and squeeze it strongly. Store the liqueur in a well-plugged vessel.

#### ***Another***

Take one *libra* of old oil, 140 scorpions, which are collected while the sun is in the sign of Leo. Put them in the said oil until the sun has exited the sign of Leo and boil it in a copper vessel until the scorpions rise to the surface. At that time, add rue and southernwood, i handful of each, and let it boil so much that the scorpions have cracked. Then squeeze it strongly and put fine theriac, as much as possible, in the said squeezed; i ʒ of selected rhubarb; white dittany and gentian 5 ʒ of each, (ensuring that) the said roots are from that year; and ii ʒ of tormentil. Everything should be finely cut and added into the said infusion in a bowl, stirring constantly with a stick until [the mixture] has cooled. Then put it into a well-closed glass vessel and it [should] be held continuously in sunlight for forty days, it is then to be stored.

***Il modo d'usarlo sarà questo***

Quando l'appestato si sente male et ha febre, si unga intorno il cuore e li polsi et le nari e guarrà. Contra carbone et apostema ogni del detto intorno il male e fallo stare in letto ben coperto che sudi per hore sei e come haverà sudato, mutisi i panni bianchi e netti e dagli a bere una scodella de consumato et altre cose cordiali e sarà libero. Et nota che ancora che non havesse la peste et habbia la febre e dolore di corpo o di capo, ongasi come di sopra è detto e sarà libero, quando non fosse febre pestilentielle. Contra i vermini, ongi del predetto oglio a chi havesse vermi, o grande o piccolo che serà, la bocca dello stomacho e subito poi ontagli la fontanella della gola, perché altrimenti i vermini salendo potriano affogarlo, poi ongigli la schiena all'incontro della forcella dello stomaco e ongigli ancora la nuca, e serà libero in due hore.

***The method of its use will be as follows***

When the plague-stricken [individual] feels unwell and has a fever, it shall be anointed around the heart, the wrists, and the nostrils, and he will recover. Against carbuncles and apostem, anoint the said daily around the affected area and keep [the patient] in bed, well-covered to induce sweating for six hours. Once sweated, change his garments for clean white ones and give him a bowl of broth and other cordial remedies to drink, he then will be cured. And note that even if [the patient] does not have the plague but has fever and pain in the body or head, let him be anointed as described above, and he shall recover when the fever is not pestilential [in nature]. Against worms, anoint with the said oil anyone, whether an old or young, who has worms, on the pit of the stomach; and immediately thereafter, apply it to the fontanel of the throat, for otherwise the worms, rising upward, might cause suffocation. Then anoint the back opposite the pit of the stomach, as well as the nape, and [the patient] will be cured within two hours.

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## Chapter Ten

# **Teaching Women Chemistry: Marie Meurdrac on Hair Care in 17th Century European Scientific Literature**

Kadir ÇELİK\*

### **I. Introduction**

Envisioning premodern women, one might assume that they were living under unsanitary conditions that made them appear malodorous, unkempt and unclean with dishevelled hair. However, it is essential to ask to what extent this assumption can be accurate. Did people, or especially women, in premodern times neglect truly personal hygiene? Did they refrain from using personal care products or did they avoid combing their hair? Did they even consider it possible to change the colour of their hair? Premodern people were far from indifferent to matters of personal grooming and aesthetic presentation. In fact, it appears that they actively devised and applied a variety of hair dyes, combed and perfumed their hair, adorned themselves with decorative accessories and artificial hairpieces, hairnets, ribbons, pins and veils, and undertook deliberate efforts either to remove unwanted body hair or to promote its growth, even if such practices were limited to women of noble or affluent backgrounds. For that reason, when considering premodern women, such practices challenge the common assumption that concerns with beauty and hygiene are exclusively modern preoccupations. Supporting that view, a growing body of modern

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scholarly research<sup>1</sup> has turned its attention to hygiene, cosmetics, personal care products and perfumery in premodern life; within this expanding field, particular interest has been directed toward hair care products and grooming practices, reflecting an increasing recognition of their cultural and historical significance in shaping premodern concepts of the body and beauty.<sup>2</sup> Building upon this growing scholarly interest, the present chapter delves into specifically 17th-century hair care recipes, formulated through chemical means by the French self-taught and practicing female alchemist, Marie Meurdrac (1610–1680). Although Meurdrac was not the first author writing hair care products, her chemistry book, written by a woman for a female audience, provides modern minds with a valuable example of women's engagement in scientific literature during a time when the debate over women's right to education was still ongoing in a patriarchal society. By writing in support of women and aiming to teach them the fundamentals of chemistry, Meurdrac can be viewed, from a different perspective, as a female lecturer of her time, operating not within the university, but through the medium of the written tradition. In doing so, she once again, like the case of Signora Cortese, challenges the clichéd depictions of premodern women and the traditional historical narratives that

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<sup>1</sup> In 2019, a number of scholars contributed to a series of edited volumes: *A Cultural History of Hair* series, published six volumes by Bloomsbury Academic examined the topic from antiquity to the modern era; see Geraldine Biddle-Perry et al., eds., *A Cultural History of Hair*, 6 vols (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019). However, those editions are not the only books contributing to the topic. For example, in addition to the books on hairdressing and fashions throughout the ages by Joyce Asser, Ann Charles and Roger DeAnfrasio, another edited book, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2018, features several scholarly writings on the topic of facial hairs; see, Joyce Asser, *Historic Hairdressing* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons Ltd, 1966); Ann Charles and Roger DeAnfrasio, *The History of Hair: An Illustrated Review of Hair Fashions for Men Throughout the Ages, Plus a Complete Guide to Hair Care for Men* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1970); Jennifer Evans and Alun Withey, eds., *New Perspectives on the History of Facial Hair: Framing the Face* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> For the Medieval and Renaissance hair caring see, Laura Michele Diener, 'Production and Practice', in *A Cultural History of Hair: In the Middle Ages*, ed. Roberta Milliken, vol. 2 (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 71–90; Edith Snook, 'Health and Hygiene', in *A Cultural History of Hair in the Renaissance*, ed. Edith Snook, vol. 3 (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 85–97.

predominantly portrayed them as queens, princesses, witches or prostitutes, rather than as scientists.

## II. Marie Meurdrac (1610–1680) and Chemistry for Women

The details of Marie Meurdrac's life remain scant, with only limited biographical information surviving. She was supposedly the sister of Catherine Meurdrac, also called Madame de la Guelle; however, as Lucia Tosi notes that, although Catherine Meurdrac refers to her sister in her memoirs, she never discloses her name.<sup>3</sup> Pierre Nicol claimed that her sister was Marie Meurdrac, the wife of a commander of Charles de Valois' *garde*, Henry de Vibrac and resided at the Château de Grosbois.<sup>4</sup> Marie and Catherine's father, Vincent Meurdrac, originally from the Cotentin region of Normandy, relocated to the Paris area at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; as Tosi notes, Catherine makes no mention of her sister as either a practicing alchemist or a *femme savante*.<sup>5</sup> It is not clear how Marie acquired her knowledge of practical chemistry or gained access to a laboratory equipped with furnaces, devices that, according to a royal edict, were prohibited for general use by all people without the permission of the King;<sup>6</sup> however, she somehow managed to accomplish this, much like Signora Isabella Cortese in the previous chapter in this volume. Marie also managed to publish a book on chemistry, directed toward women who wished to pursue chemical practices independently. Her book "*La Chymie charitable et facile, en faveur des dames*", literally "The Charitable and Easy Chemistry in favour of Women", being published originally in French in 1656, was one of the earliest chemical works written by a female writer.<sup>7</sup> The book was translated

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<sup>3</sup> Lucia Tosi, 'Marie Meurdrac: Paracelsian Chemist and Feminist', *Ambix* 48, no. 2 (2001): 69.

<sup>4</sup> Although I have not had the opportunity to consult Pierre Nicol's study directly, I cite here the article by Tosi as a secondary source; see Pierre Nicol, *A L'Ombre Des Thibault* (Athens: editions Syros Alternatives, 1990), 99; Tosi, 'Marie Meurdrac', 69.

<sup>5</sup> Tosi, 'Marie Meurdrac', 69.

<sup>6</sup> Tosi implied that she might have attended public lectures on medicinal chemistry, which were free of charge but did not confer any formal certification. For further discussion see, Tosi, 73.

<sup>7</sup> Although some researchers assert that the book was first published in 1666, the existence of a 1656 edition clearly demonstrates that the 1666 version was not the first, see Marie Meurdrac, *La chymie charitable et facile, en faveur des dames. par*

into German in a few decades.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the Italian translation of the book was published in Venice, under the title “*La Chimica Caritatevole e Facile in Favor delle Dame*”, translated by Narbonte Pordonì in 1682, and dedicated to an Italian noblewoman Donna Anna Altieri Colonna (d. 1723), the princess of Corbognano, while Meurdrac dedicated, in French edition, her book to the Countess of *La Guiche*, Marguerite-Louise-Suzanne de Bethune (1643–1726).<sup>9</sup> The dedication of both the French and Italian editions of the work to noblewomen, along with the inclusion of the phrase “*in favour of women*” in the title, clearly indicates that the book was intended for a female readership. As Marie makes clear in her book, she offers not only medicinal remedies but also recipes for perfumes, cosmetics, and hair care, tailored specifically for women.

Marie’s work is noteworthy not only for being intended for a female readership, but also for having been authored by a woman herself, which enhances the distinctiveness of the work in the context of early modern chemistry literature. In fact, as she claimed in her preface, she conducted numerous chemical experiments over the course of her life and sought to share the knowledge gained from these experiences with other women.<sup>10</sup> On the other point of view, Marie’s reflections reveal that the *Querelle des femmes*, the ongoing debate over women’s right to education and professional engagement, was very much alive in her time. She openly acknowledges that she once believed women should remain silent, content to listen and learn without disclosing their own knowledge. However, she

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*Damoiselle M.M.* (Paris: Se vend ruë des Billettes, 1656); Lloyd O. Bishop and Will S. DeLoach, ‘Marie Meurdrac – First Lady of Chemistry?’, *Journal of Chemical Education* 47, no. 6 (1970): 448–49; Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?: Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 113; Tosi, ‘Marie Meurdrac’, 69; Sandy Feinstein, “‘La Chymie’ for Women: Engaging Chemistry’s Bodies’, *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 4 (1 September 2009): 225; Sarah Gordon, ‘Chemistry, Medicine, and Beauty on the Edge: Marie Meurdrac’, in *Women on the Edge in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Lisa Hopkins and Aidan Norrie (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 45–70.

<sup>8</sup> Feinstein, “‘La Chymie’ for Women’, 225.

<sup>9</sup> Meurdrac, *La chymie charitable*; Marie Meurdrac, *La Chimica Caritatevole e Facile in Favor Delle Dame*, trans. Narbonte Pordonì (Venetia: Pontio Bernardon, 1682); Tosi, ‘Marie Meurdrac’, 69.

<sup>10</sup> Meurdrac, *La chymie charitable*, pt. Avant-propos; Tosi, ‘Marie Meurdrac’, 70.



ultimately rejected this view, affirming instead that “*the mind has no sex*”, arguing that if women’s intellects were nurtured with the same attention, time and resources as those of men, they would be equally capable of achieving intellectual heights.<sup>11</sup> In a world where women had no recognized right to publish, one might well ask how Marie was able to bring her chemistry book to print. Tosi highlights that Marie held no official title or professional license and was therefore not authorized to sell medicines. He further explains that, during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, women were allowed to practice medicine only insofar as they neither profited from their remedies nor publicly asserted any medical authority. On this basis, she also suggests that Marie emphasized her free distribution of remedies to the poor.<sup>12</sup>

Putting these discussions aside, it should be noted that, in a broader intellectual context, like Signora Isabella Cortese in the previous chapter in this volume, Marie’s work serves as a notable example of the active participation of women in the scientific and intellectual spheres during the early modern period.<sup>13</sup> Turning back to the current subject, this chapter, places particular emphasis on the final ten recipes in the sixth part of Marie’s *La Chymie charitable*, all of which pertain to hair care practices. Before delving into hair care practices, it is essential to construct the theoretical background of Marie’s formulations.

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<sup>11</sup> Meurdrac, *La chymie charitable*, pt. Avant-propos; Tosi, ‘Marie Meurdrac’, 71–72.

<sup>12</sup> Tosi, ‘Marie Meurdrac’, 73.

<sup>13</sup> Marie Meurdrac and her work have received considerable attention in modern academic studies; see, Lucia Tosi, ‘La Chymie Charitable et Facile, En Faveur Des Dames, de Marie Meurdrac, Une Chimiste Du XVIIe Siècle’, *Chronique de La Chimie* 2, no. 2 (1999): 531–34; Tosi, ‘Marie Meurdrac’, Feinstein, “‘La Chymie’ for Women”, 223–34; Laís dos Santos Pinto Trindade, ‘Práticas Femininas: La Chymie Charitable de Marie Meurdrac’ (Doutorado em História da Ciência, São Paulo, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, 2010); Núria Solsona-Pairó, ‘Los Instrumentos de Vidrio En Los Tratados de Nicaise Le Fèvre y Marie Meurdrac’, *Educación Química* 26, no. 2 (2015): 152–61; Gordon, ‘Chemistry, Medicine, and Beauty’.

### III. Establishing the Theoretical Background of Hair Care Practices in History

Hair care practices can be traced to antiquity, with sufficient documentation found in early literary sources. The ancient Egyptian medical work, Hearst Papyrus (1450 BCE), has four prescription handling hair growing and removing it in any limb.<sup>14</sup> Plinius and Dioscorides also dedicated several chapters on hair care practices in their own works.<sup>15</sup> In the medieval period, this tradition was continued by figures such as Paul of Aegina, Ibn Sinā, the authors of *The Trotula* and *The Leechbook*, who also contributed to the body of knowledge on hair care practices.<sup>16</sup> Followingly, this interest persisted into the Renaissance and Early Modern Era, during which numerous authors, following their ancient and medieval predecessors, compiled an array of cosmetic and medicinal formulations related to hair care aimed at stimulating hair growth and modifying hair colour, frequently embedded within wider frameworks of personal grooming and hygiene. For example, some of the professors of secrets such as Alessio Piemontese (Girolamo Ruscelli), Leonardo Fioravanti and Italian noblewoman Signora Isabella Cortese addressed several recipes, and another noblewoman Caterina Sforza (d. 1509) astonishingly added more than fifty prescriptions for hair care in her writings.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the 17th-

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<sup>14</sup> George Andrew Reisner, *The Hearst Medical Papyrus: Hieratic Text in 17 Facsimile Plates in Collotype* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1905), 2, 11.

<sup>15</sup> John Bostock and H. T. Riley, 'The Natural History of Pliny: Book XXVIII, Chapter 46.'; John G. Fitch, *On Simples, Attributed to Dioscorides: Introduction, Translation, Concordances*, vol. 57 (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2022), 50–52.

<sup>16</sup> Aegineta Paulus, *The Medical Works of Paulus Aegineta, the Greek Physician: Translated into English, with a Copious Commentary, Containing a Comprehensive View of the Knowledge Possessed by the Greeks, Romans, and Arabians, on All Subjects Connected with Medicine and Surgery.*, trans. Francis Adams, vol. 1 (London: J. Welsh; Treuttel, Würtz, 1834), 235–38; Warren Dawson, *A Leechbook or Collection of Medical Recipes of the Fifteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1934), 149–51; Monica H. Green, trans., *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 168–75; İbn-i Sina, *El-Kânûn Fi't-Tıbb Dördüncü Kitap*, trans. Esin Kahya, vol. IV (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, 2017), 500–525.

<sup>17</sup> Alessio Piemontese and Girolamo Ruscelli, *Secreti Del Reverendo Donno Alessio Piemontese* (Venetia: Sigismondo Bordogna, 1555), 147–53; Isabella Cortese, *I Secreti de La Signora Isabella Cortese* (Venetia: Giouanni Bariletto, 1561), 29, 32–33, 69, 74–

century French chemist Nicolas Lémery included more than thirty recipes related to this subject in his *Nouveau Recueil des plus beaux Secrets de Médecine*.<sup>18</sup>

Most recipes written by those authors deal with similar problems related to hair loss, and they are intended to prevent it. For that reason, many of them bear similar titles “to make hair grow, to make hair long, to promote hair growth in bald individuals”. Like those found in the work of Paul of Aegina, the *Trotula* text and the *Leechbook*, several recipes documented by Fioravanti and Lémery were specifically designed to stimulate hair growth in individuals affected by baldness.<sup>19</sup> However, the authors did not limit their discussions to scalp hair alone, and they also addressed body and facial hair, including beards, eyebrows and eyelashes. In fact, the loss of hair, both scalp and body, can result from a variety of medical conditions such as leprosy, syphilis, ringworm, trichotillomania, lupus and androgenic alopecia, all of which may lead to different forms of alopecia.<sup>20</sup> In the eyes of premodern authors, the treatment of hair loss was often intertwined with the management of certain illnesses. For instance, in her *I Secreti*, Cortese prescribes an ointment intended to promote hair growth as part of a remedy for ringworm (*tigna*).<sup>21</sup> Similarly during the syphilis outbreak in 16<sup>th</sup> century, Niccolò Massa in his *Il Libro del Mal Francese* and Pietro Rostinio in

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76; Leonardo Fioravanti, *Del Compendio de' Secreti Rationali* (Appresso Marc'Antonio Bonibelli, 1597), 66, 127, 128–29, 135; Pier Desiderio Pasolini, *Caterina Sforza: Documenti*, vol. 3 (Roma: Ermanno Loescher E. C., 1893), 652–61.

<sup>18</sup> Nicolas Lémery, *Nouveau Recueil des plus beaux Secrets de Médecine*, vol. 3 (Chez Ribou, 1737), 4–25; Nicolas Lémery, *Nouveau Recueil Des plus Beaux Secrets de Médecine*, vol. 4 (Paris: Lambert, 1740), 162.

<sup>19</sup> “A far nascere [& crescere] i capelli & la barba a chi fosse pelato”, “Pour faire empêcher les cheveux de tomber”, “Pour faire croître les cheveux”, “Pour faire croître les cheveux aux personnes chauves”, “Pour empêcher que les cheveux ne tombent”, “Pour faire les cheveux longs”, “Pour venir les cheveux promptement”, “Pour faire revenir les cheveux à la tête des hommes et des femmes”. For the titles, see Fioravanti, *Secreti Rationali*, 66; Lémery, *Nouveau Recueil*, 1737, 3:4, 6–7, 18, 20, 23–25.

<sup>20</sup> T. Grant Phillips, W. Paul Slomiany, and Robert Allison, ‘Hair Loss: Common Causes and Treatment’, *American Family Physician* 96, no. 6 (15 September 2017): 371–78; Ahmad M. Al Aboud, Hasnain A. Syed, and Patrick M. Zito, ‘Alopecia [Updated 2024 Feb 26]’, in *StatPearls [Internet]* (Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing, 2025), <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK538178/>.

<sup>21</sup> Cortese, *I Secreti*, 8.

his *Trattato del Mal Francese* described the loss of scalp and facial hair as a common symptom observed during the outbreak, and treated alopecia as part of the disease.<sup>22</sup>

Premodern authors generally explained the causes of hair growth and loss within the framework of humoral pathology, leading to similarities in their therapeutic approaches. For example, Ibn Sīnā, one of the most influential figures in both European and Islamic medical traditions, explained variations in human hair through the lens of humoral theory.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Ibn Sīnā was not the first to address this subject. Aristotle and Galen had already engaged with similar discussions on hair and its relation to bodily constitution long before him: Aristotle discussed the topic in the fourth century BCE, particularly in his *On the Generation of Animals* and *History of Animals*, while Galen later expanded upon it in his works *On Temperaments* and *Art of Medicine*.<sup>24</sup> Offering a detailed humoral and physiological account of hair formation, Galen notes that hair comes out through a natural expulsive process in which the body's inner heat draws internal moisture upward and releases it through the skin. As this moisture rises, it undergoes a transformation from fine vapor to a thicker, more material substance, which then solidifies into hair. The specific qualities of the hair, including its texture, colour and density, are shaped by the body's humoral composition and the physical properties of the skin, particularly the openness and structure of its pores.<sup>25</sup> In addition to factors such as skin, pores, and humours, Galen, like Aristotle, asserts in *On Temperaments* that climate significantly influences hair type, noting that Ethiopians have curly hair due to the effects of a hot environment.<sup>26</sup> For that reason, following the teachings of Aristotle and Galen, premodern philosophers held that the growth, texture and colour of hair were determined by the interaction of

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<sup>22</sup> Pietro Rostinio, *Trattato del Mal Francese Nel Quale Si Discorre sopra 234 sorti di esso male*. (Venetia: per Lodouico Auanzi all'insegna dell'albero, 1559), fols 80–88; Niccolò Massa, *Il libro del Mal Francese* (Venetia: Appresso Giordano Ziletti, 1565), 245–48.

<sup>23</sup> İbn-i Sina, *El-Kânûn Fi't-Tıbb Birinci Kitap*, trans. Esin Kahya, vol. I (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, 2017), 211–12; İbn-i Sina, *El-Kânûn*, 2017, IV:500–525.

<sup>24</sup> Snook, 'Health and Hygiene', 85–86.

<sup>25</sup> Snook, 86.

<sup>26</sup> Snook, 88.

heat and moisture within the body.<sup>27</sup> In the humoral theory, hair was regarded as a visible expression of the body's internal balance among the four humours (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile). Citing the Dutch physician Levinus Lemnius, Anu Korhonen notes that a body with a well-balanced humoral composition typically produced chestnut-coloured hair in the eyes of premodern authors. In contrast, variations in the body's heat (reflecting hot or cold temperaments) can result in black or blonde hair.<sup>28</sup>

Beyond medical concerns, L. Michele Diener notes that blonde hair symbolized beauty and youth in medieval culture, reflecting ideals still present in the modern West, as old age is portrayed negatively, with particular emphasis on the ugliness of white hair as a marker of decline.<sup>29</sup> The significance of hair colour to premodern writers is underscored in the work of Christine de Pizan: "*There is nothing in the world lovelier on a woman's head than beautiful blonde hair*".<sup>30</sup> Diener states that in medieval European literature, blonde hair was consistently idealized as a symbol of beauty and youth for both men and women; conversely, white or grey hair symbolized aging and decline. Citing the French text *La Clef d'Amors* and focusing on women's hair, she also observes that medieval women with grey hair were encouraged to dye it, indicating that hair dye not only served to achieve a more aesthetically desirable colour but also functioned as a means of concealing signs of aging.<sup>31</sup> In this context, premodern medical and cosmeceutical texts also contained recipes intended to alter the colour of hair. Some formulations were designed to lighten the hair to a blonde shade, while others aimed to darken it to black. Beyond those who merely collected

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<sup>27</sup> Snook, 85–86.

<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, each complexion (sanguine, melancholic, choleric and phlegmatic) was believed to correspond with a distinct type of hair, characterized by variations in colour, shape, length, and thickness. Moreover, it was thought that one could discern an individual's complexion by closely examining the qualities of their hair. See Anu Korhonen, 'Self and Society', in *A Cultural History of Hair in the Renaissance*, ed. Edith Snook, vol. 3 (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 40. For further discussion, see Korhonen, 39–52; Snook, 'Health and Hygiene', 85–90.

<sup>29</sup> Diener, 'Production', 77.

<sup>30</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City Ladies or the Book of the Three Virtues*, trans. Sarah Lawson, Revised Edition (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 117; Diener, 'Production', 77.

<sup>31</sup> Diener, 'Production', 77–79.

and compiled recipes on the subject, one of the notable early modern female writers on chemistry, Marie Meurdrac, devoted the final chapter of her 17th-century work to hair care recipes. The next part examines Meurdrac's formulations for women's hair care.

#### IV. Meurdrac's Formulations for Women's Hair Care

*La Chymie charitable* is divided mainly into six separate parts (*parte*), each has distinct headings (*capitolo*). The first part consists of nine headings that address fundamental chemical substances and operations, including apparatuses, furnaces, vessels, symbols and measures used in chemistry. The second, third, and fourth parts focus specifically on products derived from plants, animals, minerals, and metals, employing various procedures such as distillation, boiling, sublimation, extraction and others. The fifth part comprises six main headings devoted to the preparation of remedies for a wide range of ailments. The final part consists of fifteen headings, primarily concerned with cosmeceutical formulations.

Marie begins the sixth part of her work by emphasizing the purpose of the writing. She explains that, due to a lack of sufficient knowledge about the ingredients in the face-care products used by women, they sometimes encounter hazardous accidents during the preparation. For that reason, she aimed to teach and educate them by simplifying the explanation of the procedures, enabling them to make these products on their own.

"I have added this part to my book in favour of Ladies, to save them from an infinite number of mishaps that occur due to applying to the face things whose compositions they do not know. I simplify the operations by explaining myself as best as possible, in order to teach them how to make the things, which they will need, by themselves."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Italian edition (1682): "Ho aggiunta questa parte al mio libro in favore delle Dame, per salvarle da un numero infinito di accidenti che accadano per porsi sopra il viso dalle cose di cui esse ignorano la compositione. Io facilito le operazioni spiegandomi meglio che sia possibile, per insegnarle a fare à loro stesse le cose di che hauranno di mestieri." See, Meurdrac, *La Chimica Caritatevole*, 195. French edition (1656): "J'ay adjousté cette Partie à mon Livre en faveur des Dames, pour les garantir d'un nombre infini d'accidens qui arrivent en se mettant des choses au visage, dont elles ne sçavenc point les compositions. Je facilite les operations, & m'explique le plus intelligiblement qu'il se peut,

The initial recipes are intended for facial embellishment, aiming to preserve and whiten the skin, as well as to remove wrinkles, impurities, sunburn, scars, signs of smallpox (*segni de i Vaioli*), pimples and redness.<sup>33</sup> However, facial recipes are not the sole focus of her work; several prescriptions also address conditions such as fissures and chapping of the lips and hands.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, before presenting the ingredients for hair care preparations, she provides a number of formulations dedicated to dental embellishment including waters, powders, opiates and sticks produced to strengthen the gums, whiten the teeth, clean and promote overall oral hygiene.<sup>35</sup> Following the sections on facial, dental and hand treatments, she concludes with a series of ten hair care recipes. Before analysing that, one may ask what are these remedies or recipes, particularly those used for women's hair care in Marie's book? These include tinctures, waters, pastes and pomades formulated to promote or inhibit hair growth, induce curling, alter hair colour and remove dandruff or scurf accumulating at the roots.<sup>36</sup> As previously noted, the act of colouring the hair blonde was mentioned by her in the initial recipe presented in chapter fifteen. This tincture includes copper fillings, rock salt and *serpentaria* root (*Dracunculus vulgaris*). After infusing all the substances overnight and subsequently distilling the mixture, she combined it with a solution of gum tragacanth prepared in rose water. Additionally, she advises her women readers to comb their hair prior to application, and this preparation is to be applied warm to the hair using a brush.

In addition to this simpler recipe, she offers another formulation employing a similar method, though with a modest increase in the number of ingredients. This time, the practicing chemist pulverizes tins of mirrors, rock alum, Roman vitriol (iron or copper sulphate), yellow sulphur, aloe, saffron and turmeric and distils them. However, for the use of this preparation, she adopts a different procedure from the previous one: she

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*pour leur apprendre à faire elles-mêmes les choses dont elles auront besoin.*" See, Meurdrac, *La chymie charitable*, 251.

<sup>33</sup> Meurdrac, *La Chimica Caritatevole*, 196–244.

<sup>34</sup> Meurdrac, 229, 243–45. She also gives two water recipes to make someone sleep; see Meurdrac, 246.

<sup>35</sup> Meurdrac, 249–52.

<sup>36</sup> Meurdrac, 252–56.

mixes the water with white wine and honey, then exposes the mixture to sunlight in a glass vessel for forty days, shaking it three times daily. As with the initial recipe, the resulting preparation is applied to the hair slightly warmed, using a brush. Analysing the formulations for achieving a yellow or golden hue in hair dyeing, Meurdrac employs copper filings, sulphur, turmeric and saffron. Gums and rock alum were commonly employed as binding or fixative agents in inks and dyes, serving to stabilize the mixtures and enhance their adherence to surfaces.<sup>37</sup> Rock salt and tin are likely used to impart a lustrous or shiny appearance to the hair.

On the second hand, Madame Meurdrac provides two additional tincture and paste recipes for dyeing the hair, this time not for a blonde or golden hue, but for a black colouration. In the first recipe, Meurdrac uses gall nuts boiled in olive oil, powder of *Satirión* (*Himantoglossum hircinum*) charcoal, common salt, powdered dried lemon and orange peels. The mixture is boiled in water until it reaches the consistency of an ointment. She advises her women readers to rub this tincture into their hair and leave it dry. When dried, the hair is to be combed. According to Meurdrac, this tincture not only dyes the hair black but also strengthens the brain. She ensures that the hair will never turn red again. However, the durability of the dye appears limited, as Meurdrac advises reapplication once a month. In the second recipe, Meurdrac mixes quicklime (soaked in water and reduced to powder) with the litharge of silver, which has been thoroughly washed two or three times in rosewater. After dried, the substances are formed into a paste. Like the first recipe, this paste is to be rubbed into the hair. Meurdrac emphasizes that the application should occur in the evening, and the hair will be combed the following morning.

Having concluded her section on hair dyes, Meurdrac turns to prescriptions for promoting hair growth, offering both lye and pomade formulations. For the lye, she instructs the female readers to dry and burn the roots of white vine, hemp, and cabbage stalks, then prepare the lye from

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<sup>37</sup> For the substances used in colouring, see Emmanuel Ohifueme Alegbe and Taofik Olatunde Uthman, 'A Review of History, Properties, Classification, Applications and Challenges of Natural and Synthetic Dyes', *Heliyon* 10, no. 13 (15 July 2024): e33646. J. R. Barnett, Sarah Miller, and Emma Pearce, 'Colour and Art: A Brief History of Pigments', *Optics & Laser Technology*, Colour and Design in the natural and man-made worlds, 38, no. 4 (1 June 2006): 446–47.



the resulting ashes. Meurdrac instructs her readers to cleanse the scalp with the prepared lye after massaging honey into the hair over the course of three days. Followingly, in a separate formulation intended to promote hair growth, she prepares a pomade by melting together chicken fat, linseed oil and honey, mixing them until the mixture attains the appropriate consistency. As with the lye treatment, she recommends applying this preparation to the scalp; however, in this case, the application is to be sustained for a period of eight days.

In presenting her recipes, Meurdrac offers no theoretical explanation for her selection of ingredients or application she employs. For promoting hair growth, she most likely seeks to cleanse and open the pores of the scalp, from which hair emerges, by stimulating transpiration and heat. This method appears to be grounded in humoral theory, which held that enhancing moisture and warmth in the head created optimal conditions for the nourishment and regeneration of hair. In comparison to hair, the 7th-century Byzantine Greek physician, Paul of Aegina, clarifies that there are two primary reasons why plants dye: either due to dryness resulting from a lack of sap, or because of the supply of sap that is unsuitable in quality. According to him, baldness results from the hair's deficiency in its natural juice or moisture, whereas conditions such as alopecia and ophiasis arise from the presence of natural juice of an unsuitable or corrupted quality. The treatment of all these conditions follows a twofold approach. The primary objective is the evacuation of harmful humours through purgation, thereby addressing the underlying cause of the corrupted natural moisture; this is followed by the local application of medicinal substances intended to restore the appropriate quality and balance of that moisture.<sup>38</sup> Ibn Sīnā claims that substances with cooling properties inhibit the growth of body hair and are therefore used for hair removal, whereas preparations intended to preserve or stimulate hair growth tend to possess mildly warming qualities.<sup>39</sup> The underlying rationale is clear: if a cold quality, or a cooling property, impedes the growth of body hair, then, according to the humoral

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<sup>38</sup> Paulus, *The Medical Works of Paulus Aegineta*, 1:235.

<sup>39</sup> İbn-i Sina, *El-Kânûn*, 2017, IV:502, 505, 513.

principle of treating opposites (*contraria contrariis curantur*),<sup>40</sup> the condition must be addressed with substances possessing a hot or warming quality.

Continuously, Meurdrac offers two additional preparations intended for the removal of body hair. In the first recipe, she distils the oak polypody after digesting it in white wine. The resulting distillate is applied by soaking a piece of linen cloth in the liquid and placing it on the intended area overnight. She advises repeating this process until the desired effect is achieved. For the same purpose, she provides an alternative recipe using a distillation of the leaves and roots of greater celandine combined with garlic. The second recipe, also intended for hair removal, consists of water distilled from quicklime. Marie explains the reason for its inclusion: unlike the previous remedies, quicklime acts more rapidly and requires only a single application due to its highly caustic nature. She notes that although this distillation yields very little liquid, it is extremely potent, warning readers to apply it strictly to the intended area and to avoid contact with surrounding skin. To mitigate the harsh effects of the quicklime, she recommends applying a soothing ointment or an oil made from the four cold seeds<sup>41</sup>. However, she assures that a single application of this emollient is sufficient to counteract any irritation.

Meurdrac's concern extends beyond hair dyeing, growth or removal; she also addresses scalp health, offering a remedy for dandruff or scurf forming at the roots of the hair. For this purpose, she provides a pomade recipe composed of flowers of sulphur, calcined alum and pork fat. As with her previous treatments, the pomade is to be applied by rubbing it into the

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<sup>40</sup> Jerry Stannard, 'Hippocratic Pharmacology', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 35, no. 6 (1961): 516.

<sup>41</sup> The 17th-century Italian pharmacist Ippolito Cecceralli divided cold seeds into two categories: great (*maggiori*) and small (*minori*). According to Cecceralli, the great cold seeds include those of cucumbers (*cetrioli*), watermelons (*cocomeri*/or cucumber according to Pietro Andrea Mattioli), pumpkin (*cocuzza* or *cuzza*), and melon (*meloni*). The small cold seeds, on the other hand, are those of endive (*endivia*), lettuce (*lattuca*), purslane (*porcachie*), and escarole (*scariola*); see Pietro Andrea Mattioli, *I discorsi di M. Pietro Andrea Matthioli nelli sei libri di Pedacio Dioscoride Anazarbeo della materia medicinale* (Venetia: apresso Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1568), 543; Ippolito Ceccarelli, *Antidotario romano latino, e volgare* (Roma: ad istanza di Gio. Angelo Ruffinelli; stampato da Andrea Fei, 1624), 196.

scalp; however, in this case, she instructs that it be used two or three times, allowing an interval of two to three days between each application.

The final product Meurdrac offers is intended to curl the hair. For that, she employs elemi gum, which is dissolved and boiled in rose water. Once the mixture has cooled, she instructs her female readers to moisten their hair with it. However, Meurdrac clarifies that this preparation serves merely as a curling aid, to achieve the intended shape, women must also use paper curlers or a bonnet to set the curls in place.

Her formulations, techniques and applications in the text shed light on the practical chemistry of her time. Making hair care products required a variety of techniques from calcining to distilling and laboratory equipment ranging from water bath and distillation vessels to furnaces, reflecting the scientific and chemical knowledge of the time. For example, she used copper fillings, copper sulphate, sulphur, saffron, turmeric, *serpentaria* root (*Dracunculus vulgaris*), to dye the hair blonde; oak galls, lead oxide, soot, pitch, charcoal and copper sulphate to dye black or deepen the colour while she preferred gums and resins as fixatives to provide durable colour. Meurdrac also follows the medical paradigm of the time, humoral pathology, when it comes to stimulating hair growth or removing it, and the substances she preferred defined in line with the same theory. Particularly, for hair removal recipes, both for scalp and body hair, the author employed caustic, toxic and corrosive substances such as quicklime, orpiment, lead, ammonium chloride and others. Lye and soaps were often used as cleaning agents, while beeswax, animal fats, natural oils and honey were preferred to transform mixtures into pomades, oils and ointments.

## V. Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter specifically focused on hair care recipes written by one of the first female practising chemist, Marie Meurdrac. Her chemistry book entitled “*La Chymie charitable et facile, en faveur des dames*”, or “The Charitable and Easy Chemistry in favour of Women” comprises diverse recipes such as cosmetics, perfumes, dyes, chemicals and medicines. Like Signora Isabella Cortese a century earlier, Meurdrac’s engagement with scientific literature demonstrates that even amid debates over whether women should be educated or pursue professions, both women nevertheless succeeded in securing a place for their work within

scientific discourse. Like Cortese, Meurdrac's educational background remains unknown; however, as both authors clearly state, it is evident that women succeeded in practicing chemistry within a male-dominated society. The dedication of the work to high-ranking women, along with its title, which explicitly states that it was written in favour of women, demonstrates that Meurdrac's book was intended for a female audience, although it could also be read by men.

Speaking explicitly about women's education and participation in science and professional life, Marie Meurdrac put into words that if women were given the same rights and opportunities as men, they would be equally capable, because, as she famously stated, "the mind has no sex". In this context, she offers women the opportunity to learn and apply chemistry independently in some fields such as cosmetics, medicines, dyes, perfumes and body care. Putting Meurdrac's book aside, in fact, in 16th- and 17th-century Europe, women became more visible in the scientific domain, and their work was published across the countries.

## **Text and Translation<sup>42</sup>**

### **[1] On the Tincture for Hair**

#### **[1.1] Tincture for blond [hair]**

Take filings of copper, rock salt, half a libra each, and one libra of the root of *Serpentaria*. Cut the roots finely and grind them, then place them in a Cornuta with the salt and filings. Leave them to infuse overnight, then distil with a wheel fire until no more vapor is seen. To use this water, one must dissolve gum tragacanth in rosewater as much as it can dissolve. Take one part of this water with one part of the distilled, warm it slightly, and wash the hair with it using *sedarine* or small brushes. Then allow it to dry before combing it.

#### **[1.2] Another method for the same**

Take tin of mirrors, rock alum, Roman vitriol, yellow sulphur, one lib. each; hepatic aloes, four ounces; saffron, one ounce; turmeric, two ounces. Make all into powder and place it in a Cornuta, then distil with a wheel fire. Take one lib. of the said water, two lib. of white wine, and one lib. of white honey. Place everything in a glass vessel and expose it to the sun for forty days, shaking it two or three times a day; to use this water, one must apply it a bit warm with a brush.

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<sup>42</sup> I based my translation on Meurdrac's 1682 Italian edition, and everything in the old-Italian text and the original old-French text in the footnotes were strictly adhered to. See, Meurdrac, *La chymie charitable*, 329–34; Meurdrac, *La Chimica Caritatevole*, 252–56. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my colleague Selin Gül Mutlucan for her attentive and thoughtful proofreading of the texts.

## **[1] Della Tinture per i Capegli**

### **[1.1] Tintura per il biondo**

Pigliate limatura di rame, Sal gemma ana lib. mezza, radici di Serpentaria vna lib. tagliate le radici minute, e pestatele, e ponetele in Cornuta col Sale e le limature, lasciatele infusione per vna notte, poi disstillate à fuoco di ruota, fin che non si vegga più fumo. Per seruirsì di quest'acqua, bisogna far dissoluere gomma draganti in acqua rosa quanta ne potrà dissoluere, pigliate vna parte di quest'acqua, con vna della distillata, e fatele vn poco scaldare, e bagnatene i capegli con sedarine, ò piccioli penelli, e lasciateli seccare auanti di pettinarui.<sup>43</sup>

### **[1.2] Altro modo per lo stesso**

Pigliate Stagno di Specchi, Alume di rocca, Vitriolo Romano, Zolfo giallo, anna lib. vna, Aloe Epatico quattr'onc: Zafrano vn'onc. Curcuma due onc. fate tutto in polue, e ponete in Cornuta, e distillate à fuoco di ruota, pigliate vna lib. della detta acqua, due lib. di vino bianco, Miele bianco vna lib. e ponete tutto in boccia di vetro, ed esponetela al Sole per quaranta giorni ed'aggitatela per due ò trè volte al giorno; per valersi di quest'acqua, bisogna applicarlo vn poco calda con vn penello.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> 1656 edition: "*Des teintures pour les cheveux. Teinture four faire le peil blond. Prenez limaille de Cuivre, Sel gemme, de chacun demie livre; racines de Coulevrée une livre: coupez les racines, & les pilez, & les mettez dans une Cornuë, & le sel & limaille: faites les infuser une nuit, puis distillez au feu de rouë jusques à ce qu'il ne forte plus de fumée. Pour se servir de cette eau il faut faire dissoudre de la gomme Adragant dans de l'Eau-rose ce qu'elle en pourra dissoudre: prenez une part de cette eau, & une part de l'eau distillée, & les faites un peu chauffer, & moiüillez les cheveux avec des brosses, ou un petit pinceau, & laissez secher avant que de se peigner.*" See, Meurdrac, *La chymie charitable*, 329.

<sup>44</sup> 1656 edition: "*Autre maniere de teindre les cheveux en blond. Prenez Estain de glace, Alun de roche, Vitriol Romain, Soufre jaune, de chacun une livre; Aloës epatique quatre onces, Safran une once, Cucurma deux onces: reduisez le tout en poudre, & le mettez dans une Cornuë, & distillez au feu de rouë. Prenez une livre de ladite eau, deux livres de vin blanc, miel blanc une livre; mettez le tout dans une phiole de verre, & l'exposez au soleil par quarante jours, & l'agitez deux ou trois fois par jour. Pour se servir de cette eau il faut l'appliquer un peu chaude avec un pinceau.*" See, Meurdrac, 329–30.

**[1.3] Tincture for black [hair]**

Take one lib. of gall nuts, cut them into bites, and boil them in olive oil until they become soft; dry them and grind them very good into powder. Mix this powder in equal parts with powder of Disatirios charcoal, a handful of prepared and ground common salt, and a little powder of dried lemon and orange peel. Boil everything in twelve lib. of water until the substances become the consistency of an ointment. Rub this ointment into the hair and the hair is covered under a bonnet for it dries. Once dry, the hair must be combed. This tincture is excellent, it strengthens the brain, and the hair will never turn red again. One must reapply it once a month.

**[2] Paste for the same.**

Take two ounces of quicklime, slake it in water as is needed to reduce it to powder. Mix one ounce of well-washed litharge of silver two or three times in rosewater. Once dried, incorporate all and make them paste. One must rub this into the hair in the evening and comb the hair in the morning.

### [1.3] Tintura per nero

Pigliate Noce di Galla vna lib. tagliatela in bocconi, e fatela bollire in oglio di Oliue, fin che siano tenere fatele seccare, e pestatele benissimo, e fatene polue misturatela in parti vguali con polue di Carbone di Disatirios v.1. vn pugno Sal commune preparato, e pesto vn pugno vn poco di corteccie di Limoni, e di Aranci, secche in polue, fate bollire tutto in dodici lib. di acqua, sin che le materie rimangono inconsistenza d'vnguento, di cui si fregarà i Capegli, e si paranno doppo sotto la cuffia perche secchino, e quando saranno secchi, bisogna petinarsi. Questa Tinta è eccellente, e fortifica il ceruello, i Capegli non vengono mai più rossi, e bisogna replicare vna volta al mese.<sup>45</sup>

### [2] Pasta per lo stesso

Pigliate calce viua due onc. estinguetela nell'acqua che vi vuole à ridurla in polue, incorporate con essa polue vn'onc. di Litargirio d'Argento ben lauato due, à trè volte in acqua rosa, e poi secco incorporate tutto, e farene pasta, bisogna fregarsene i Capegli la sera, e petinarsi la matina.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> French text: “Teinture four faire le poil noir. Prenez noix de Galle une livre, coupez les par morceaux, & les faites bouïllir dans de l’huile d’olives jusques à ce qu’elles soient tendres: faites les secher, & les pilez tres-bien, & en faites poudre; messez avec partie égale; de poudre de charbon de Sault une poignée; un peu d’écorces de Citrons & d’Oranges seichées & en poudre: Il faut faire bouïllir le tout dans douze livres d’eau, jusques a ce que les drogues demeurent en consistance d’onguent on frottera les cheveux, puis on les mettra sous le bonnet pour les faire secher: quand ils seront secs il faut se peigner. Cette reinture est excellente, & fortifie le cerveau; les cheveux ne rougissent jamais: il faut en mettre une fois le mois.” See, Meurdrac, 330–31.

<sup>46</sup> French text: “Paste pour teindre le poil en noir. Prenez de la Chaux vive deux onces, éteignez-là dans de l’eau ce ce qu’il en faudra pour la reduire en poudre: incorporez avec ladite poudre de Chaux une once de Litarge d’argent bien lavée deux ou trois fois dans de l’Eau-rose, & sechée: incorporez le tout, & en faites paste. Il faut s’en frotter les cheveux le soir, & se peigner le matin.” Meurdrac, 331.



### **[3] Lye to grow and return hair**

Take roots of white vine, hemp roots, and tender cabbage stalks, two handfuls of each. Dry and burn them, then make lye from the ashes. Before washing the head with this lye, one must rub it with honey and continue both the one and the other for three days.

### **[4] Pomade to make the hair grow**

Take chicken fat, linseed oil, and honey, 4 ounces each. Melt everything in a small basin and mix together until it reaches the consistency of a pomade. Rub it into the head for eight consecutive days.

### **[5] Water to make the hair fall out.**

Take polypody of the oak, cut it into small bites, and place it in a cucurbit. Pour over it enough white wine to cover it by about a finger's width. Let it digest for twenty-four hours in a water bath, then distil it with boiling water until nothing more rises. Soak a piece of linen cloth in this water and apply it to the area from which you wish the hair to fall. Leave it on overnight and continue the treatment until the hair has fallen out. A similar effect is achieved by using water distilled from the leaves and roots of greater celandine and garlic, applied in the same way.

### [3] Lessiva per far crescere, e ritornar i Capegli

Pigliarete radici di Vigna bianca, radici di Canape, e torsi di verze teneri di cadaun due pugni, fateli seccare, e bruggiare, e delle ceneri fate lessiua, auanti di lauarsi il capo con questa lesssiua, bisogna fregarlo con Miele, e continuare l'vno, e l'altro per trè giorni.<sup>47</sup>

### [4] Pomato per far venire i Capegli

Pigliate grasso di gallina, oglio di semenza di lino, e Miele anna onc. 4. Fate fondere tutto in catinello e d'incorporate le assieme fino che siano in consistenza di pomata, fregateuene il capo per otto giorni continui.<sup>48</sup>

### [5] Acqua per far cadere il pelo

Pigliate Polipodio di Rouere, che tagliarete in bocconcelli, e porrete in vna Cucurbita, versateui sopra vino bianco, che fourapaffi di vn dero, fate digerire venti quattro hore al Bagno, poi distillate à acqua bollente, fino che non afcendapiti cose alcuna, bisogna bagna revna pezza di lino inquest'acqua e dapplicarla foura il luogo di doue si vorrà che caschino i peli, se laciariuelo tutta la notte continuando sin che sia caduto, 1 acqua di foglie, era dici di Celidonia di Aillata, & applicata come sopra fàlo stesso effetto.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> 1656 edition: "*Lessive pour faire croistre & revenir les cheveux. Vovs prendrez racines de vigne blanche, racines de chanvre, & trognons de choux tendres, de chacun deux poignées; faites-les secher, puis brusler, & des cendres faites-en lessive. Avant que de se laver la teste de cette lessive, il faut la frotter avec du miel, & continuer l'un & l'autre trois jours de suite.*" See, Meurdrac, 331–32.

<sup>48</sup> 1656 edition: "*Pommade pour faire venir les cheveux. Prenez graisse de poule, huile de chennevié, & miel, de chacune quatre onces: faites fondre le tout dans une terrine, & les incorporez ensemble jusques à ce qu'ils soient en consistance de pommade. Il se faut frotter la teste huit jours de suite de cette pommade.*" See, Meurdrac, 332.

<sup>49</sup> 1656 edition: "*Eau pour faire tomber le poil. Vovs prendrez; du polipode de Chesne, que vous fendrez & couperez par morceaux, & le mettrez dans une Cucurbite: versez dessus du vin blanc qu'il surpasse d'un doigt; faites digerer vingt-quatre heures au Bain, puis distillez à l'eau boüillante jusques à ce qu'il ne monte plus rien. Il faut tremper un linge dans cette eau, & l'appliquer sur le lieu d'où l'on voudra faire tomber le poil, & l'y laisser toute la nuit. Il faudra continuer jusques à ce qu'il soit tombé. L'eau de feuilles & racines de Celidoine distillée, & appliquée comme dessus, fait le mesme effect.*" See, Meurdrac, 332–33.

**[6] Lime water for the same.**

Distilled quicklime water acts more promptly than the previous ones, because it is enough to apply it only once, as it is more potent: Take quicklime freshly taken from the kiln, reduce it to powder, and put it into a Cortuna, which you will fill to three parts; then distil it over a wheel fire. Very little water is extracted from this process; it must be applied with a quill or fine brush to the area where one wants the hair fall off. Take care not to touch any other area. After application, one must anoint the place with a pomade or with oil of the four cold seeds. One single time [application] is enough.

**[7] Pomade to remove dandruff or scurf that forms at the roots of hair**

Take half a lib. of pork fat, melt it in a small ceramic basin, and mix in flowers of sulphur and calcined alum, one ounce each. Make it boil briefly, then strain and press it. One must rub this into the head two or three times, with an interval of two or three days between each time.

**[8] Water to curl the hair**

Take one ounce of elemi gum and let it soften in one lib. of rosewater. Boil it for half a quarter of an hour. Once cooled, one must moisten the hair with it and set it in paper curlers or under a bonnet to shape the curls.

### **[6] Acqua di Calce per le stesso**

L'Acqua di Calce viua distillata, opera piu prontamente che le precedenti, perche basta di applicarla vna sol volta, come ch'ella è piu violente. Pigliate Calce viua sortito tosto dalla sortuna, fatela in polue, e mettetela in Cortuna, che riempirete della tre parti, poi distillate a fuoco di ruota. Si cava poco'acqua da questa operazione, bisogna applicarla con vna penna, soura il luogo di doue si vol far cadere il pelo, ed'osseruar bene di metterne altroue doppo haverla posta, bisogna vnger il luogo con pomata, o con oglio della quattro sementi frigide, ed'vna sola volta basta.<sup>50</sup>

### **[7] Pomata per leuare le forfore, ò pagliole che viene alla radice di Capegli.**

Pigliate Grasso di Porco mezza lib. fatela disfare in catinello di terra, incorporateui, fiori di Zolfo; ed'Alume calcinato anna onc. vna, fate gettare vn bollo, poi passatela, ed'esprimetela. Bisogna fregarsene il capo due, ò trè volte con lo spazio di due, ò trè giorni frà vna fiata, e l'altra.<sup>51</sup>

### **[8] Acqua per far ricciare i Capegli.**

Pigliate Gomma d'Elemi, vn'oncia, e mettetela à molle in vna lib. d'acqua rosa, che farete bollire per mezzo quarto d'hora, quando sarà fredda, bisogna humidirne i Capegli, e porli nelle carte, ò sotto la Cuffia. <sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> 1656 edition: "*Eau de Chaux pour le mesme effect. L'eau de Chaux vive distillée opere plus promptement que les precedentes; une seule fois suffit, mais aussi elle est plus violente. Prenez de la Chaux vive comme elle sort du fourneau, reduisez-la en poudre, & la mettez dans une Cornüe, que vous remplirez des trois parts, puis distillerez au feu de rouë. On tire peu d'eau de cette operation. Il la faut appliquer avec une plume sur le lieu d'ou l'on veut faire tomber le poil, & se donner de garde d'en mettre ailleurs. Apres l'avoir mise il faut frotter le lieu avec de la pommade, ou avec de l'huile des quatre semences froides; une seule fois suffit.*" See, Meurdrac, 333.

<sup>51</sup> 1656 edition: "*Pommade pour oster la farine qui vient à la racine des cheveux. Prenez graisse de pore demie livre, faites-la fonder dans une petite terrine: incorporez avec fleurs de Soufre, & Alun calciné, de chacun une once: faites jetter un boüillon, puis passez & exprimez. Il faut se frotter la teste de cette pommade deux ou trois fois, & laisser deux ou trois jours entredeux.*" See, Meurdrac, 334.

<sup>52</sup> 1656 edition: "*Eau pour faire friser les ceveux. Prenez de la gomme Elemy une once, & la mettez tremper dans une livre d'Eau-rose, laquelle vous ferez boüillir un demy quart d'heure: quand elle seta froide il en faut humecter les cheveux, puis les mettre dans des papillottes, ou sous le bonnet.*" See, Meurdrac, 334.

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## Chapter Eleven

# Findings on the Female Body and Sexuality in European Society from the Early Modern Period to the 19th Century

Cihan ÖZGÜN\*

*“An elephant never changes his mate. He loves her tenderly. With her he couples not, but from three years to three years. And that only for five days, and so secretly that he is never seen in the act. But the sixth day, he shows himself abroad again, and the first thing he does is to go directly to some river and wash his body, not willing to return to his troupe of companions till he be purified. Be not these goodly and honest qualities in a beast by which he teaches married folk not to be given too much to sensual and carnal pleasures?”<sup>1</sup>*

St. François de Sales

### I. Introduction: Female Body, Sexuality and Power

Sexuality is a multidimensional concept with biological, physiological, and psychological foundations, and it has been a subject of human curiosity throughout history.<sup>2</sup> A healthy sexual life is considered to be an important parameter of general harmony and quality of life in society.<sup>3</sup> However, throughout history, the concepts of sexuality and

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Sexuality and Solitude’, *London Review of Books* 3, no. 9 (1981).

<sup>2</sup> Mehmet Sefa Doğru, “Cinsellik ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Bağlamında Sinemanın Kadına Bakışı”, *İletişim ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, no. 14 (2017): 3; Tuğba Yılmaz Esencan and Nezihe Kızılkaya Beji, “Günümüze Değin Cinsellik Konusunda Yapılan Çalışmaların İrdelenmesi”, *Androloji Bülteni* 17, no. 63 (2015): 301.

<sup>3</sup> Yılmaz and Beji, “Günümüze Değin Cinsellik”, 301.

women have been redefined, positioned and shaped under the influence of dominant ideologies.<sup>4</sup> The use of the human body, and especially the female body, as a social value and control area has revealed various points of abuse throughout history.<sup>5</sup> Sexuality is not only a reproductive act by nature but also a domain that shapes the foundation of social life. It is heavily influenced by cultural norms and values.<sup>6</sup> Anthropological studies reveal that sexuality is no longer seen purely as a biological matter but rather as a cultural phenomenon that distinguishes humans from other living beings.<sup>7</sup>

In primitive times, especially during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods, women were considered sacred within the Phrygian and Hittite civilizations through the cult of “Magna Mater,” Kybele. During this period, fertility goddesses were mythologized and sexual activity was regarded as a sacred phenomenon. However, with the advent of toolmaking by men, women’s roles in society began to change. Over time, women came under male control and lost their central role in the symbolic and productive order of early societies.<sup>8</sup>

The need to control the body for maintaining social order was structured according to the specific dynamics of each society.<sup>9</sup> In this context, sexuality became an element that required regulation, as bodily fluids were perceived as threats to social stability. For example, the concept of “honour” generally means sexual purity and cleanliness for women, while for men it is associated with honesty, creating a distinct difference between men and women. The fact that women’s bodies are seen as “guarantors of the continuation of the nation” has led to the inclusion of their fertility within the control mechanisms of national policy. These

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<sup>4</sup> Doğru, “Cinsellik ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet”, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Nilüfer Öztürk, *Bir Beden Sosyolojisi Problemi Olarak Namus Kavramı ve Kadın Bedeni* (Karaman: Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 2012), 2–4 and 10.

<sup>6</sup> Öztürk, *Bir Beden Sosyolojisi Problemi*, 61, 86–87.

<sup>7</sup> Öztürk, *Bir Beden Sosyolojisi Problemi*, 57–58.

<sup>8</sup> Cihan Yıldız, *Avrupa Resim Sanatında Rönesans’tan Realizme Kadın İmgesinin Değişimi*, (Konya: Unpublished Master’s Thesis, 2023), 14, 16, 121–122; Yılmaz and Beji, “Günümüze Değin Cinsellik”, 301.

<sup>9</sup> Öztürk, *Bir Beden Sosyolojisi Problemi*, 25 and 68.

policies draw the boundaries of traditional and modern lifelines on women's civil and official lives.<sup>10</sup>

The perception of the female body and sexuality in European societies has exhibited a complex transformation process intertwined with changing social, religious and legal structures throughout history. Initially different acceptances, such as the identification of sexuality with reproduction and fertility in the early ages and the perception of prostitution as hospitality or a religious service, have experienced a radical change over time as this phenomenon came under state control. This transformation laid the foundation for the female body and sexuality to cease to be an individual practice and become a tool of social order, power and economy. In particular, practices such as Solon's opening of brothels called *Dieterion* in Ancient Greece and using female slaves as capital or the issuance of "certificates" (work permits) to prostitutes in Rome provide historical examples of the legalization of prostitution and its transformation into a sexual industry and the stigmatization of women within this system.<sup>11</sup> In ancient Greece, philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle were sceptical of the power of sexual passion, arguing that it would distract men from their pursuit of reason and knowledge. For them, the invisible world of thoughts was superior to the material world, and women were associated with the body, while men were associated with the mind.<sup>12</sup>

With the rise of Christianity and the Church in medieval Europe, control over sexuality and the female body became even stricter. The Church and theologians aimed to keep sexual life under control with the ideal of creating a pious and morally superior generation, sometimes imposing sexual abstinence and sometimes encouraging marriage. Some

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<sup>10</sup> Öztürk, *Bir Beden Sosyolojisi Problemi*, 25, 57, 63, 68, 146, 152.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, *Cinselliğin Tarihi*, İstanbul: 2007, 131, 227 and 229; Nebahat Özerdoğan, Deniz Sayiner, Nedime Köşgeroğlu, and Özlem Örsal, "Kadın ve Fuhuş Olgusu", *Second International Conference of Women's Studies Center for Women's Studies- Vol. 2* (Kıbrıs: East Mediteranean of University Press, 2006), 3–6; R. A. Tomlinson, *Yunan Mimarlığı* (Homer Press, 2003), 73– 74; Michel Foucault, *Toplumu Savunmak Gerekir*, (İstanbul: YKY Press, 2002), 257, 283 and 284; Gordon Childe, *Tarihte Neler Oldu*, (İstanbul, 2009), 251– 252.

<sup>12</sup> Fatmagül Berktaş, "Avrupa'da Cadılık ve Cadı Avı: Çok Katmanlı Bir Karanlık Tarihsel Olgusu", *Doğu Batı Düşünce Dergisi* 84, (2018): 44.

clerics, such as Pope Gregory the Great, stated that sexual intercourse in marriage was permissible only if it did not cause pleasure.<sup>13</sup> The church viewed sexual intercourse and lust as sinful, and women, descendants of Eve, were described as “weak, prone to sin and temptation” and encouraged them to remain chaste and submissive. Women were often viewed as second-class citizens, excluded from high positions and their lives determined by men.<sup>14</sup>

With the rise of Christianity, religious and moral approaches to sexuality and prostitution became even stricter, emphasizing that sexual intercourse should primarily be for the purpose of reproduction, and condemning all relationships outside of marriage. While cruel attitudes such as seeing prostitutes as “sinners” and even rape going unpunished were exhibited in medieval Europe, the church’s understanding of sexuality focused on monogamy and reproduction deeply influenced social norms. However, despite these harsh prohibitions, especially towards the end of the Middle Ages, the rulers’ expectation of earning income from prostitution caused the phenomenon to become widespread, which revealed the deep contradiction between religious and moral prohibitions and economic realities.<sup>15</sup>

In the Middle Ages, prostitution was a widespread profession and was seen to be linked to economic reasons, especially poverty. Although it was initially restricted by the state and society, city leaders and nobles thought

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<sup>13</sup> Derya Gürtaş Dünder, “Orta Çağ Avrupası’nın Sıradan Kadınları ve Nefret Abideleri: Fhişeler, *International Social Sciences Studies Journal* 8, no. 100 (2022): 2412–2413; Öztürk, *Bir Beden Sosyolojisi Problemi*, 14–15.

<sup>14</sup> Dünder, “Orta Çağ Avrupası’nın Sıradan”, 2414; Bertay, “Avrupa’da Cadılık”, 66– 67; Yücel Aksan, “1450–1750 Yılları Arasında Avrupa’da Cadılık”, *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi* XXVIII, no. 2 (2013): 355–368; Yıldız, *Avrupa Resim*, 22; Öztürk, *Bir Beden Sosyolojisi Problemi*, 77.

<sup>15</sup> Özerdoğan et al., “Kadın ve Fuhuş Olgusu”, 3–4; Alain Servantie, *Batılıların Gözünde Türk İmajının Geçirdiği Değişimler*, *Dünyada Türk İmgesi* (İstanbul: 2005), 31; Stephan Gerlach, *Türkiye Günlüğü 1573–1576*, Vol. 1. (İstanbul, 2007), 240.; Belkıs Konan, “Osmanlı Hukukunda Tecavüz Suçu”, *OTAM*, no. 29 (2011): 151; Gülçin Çandarlıoğlu, “Türk Toplumunda Kadın”, *Hayat Tarih Mecmuası* 2/1, no.4/16 (1966): 23–24; Jack Goody, *Avrupa’da Aile* (İstanbul: Literatür Pub., 2004), 63, 93–95, 158–159; Foucault, *Cinselliğin Tarihi*, 35; Umberto Eco, *Çirkinliğin Tarihi* (İstanbul: 2009), 75 and 87; Alice K. Turner, *Cehennemin Tarihi* (İstanbul: 2004), 105–108 and 143.

that prostitution should be carried out under state control in order to protect themselves from anarchy and aggression and to prevent homosexuality, and they allowed brothels to be opened. These brothels were seen as an important “escape valve” for the rulers until the Black Death. However, during the Black Death, they were seen as dangerous because they prevented population growth and they were closed down. Prostitutes were forced to wear different clothes like Jews in order to be isolated from society. There are examples where brothels made serious contributions to the city’s economy and even a university was founded in Toulouse with the income obtained from prostitutes.<sup>16</sup>

Witch hunts were a phenomenon that swept across Europe from the late Middle Ages to the late 17th century. In this process, in which hundreds of thousands of people, especially poor peasant women, comprising four-fifths of them, were victims, the Church’s struggle against heretical movements and the idea of a contract with the Devil were influential. Sexual sadism and violent torture were applied to women accused of witchcraft. One of the real reasons underlying the witch hunts was the attempt to increase control over the reproductive capacity of women’s bodies and labour, and the dispossession of women during the transition to capitalism. In addition, the exclusion of female healers and midwives by the male-dominated medical profession was an important dimension of these hunts.<sup>17</sup>

In the 18th century, sexuality became a field governed by public power and surveillance, evolving into a matter of “police work.” This shift was closely linked to population control policies and the management of the labour force. This era is often described as the “age of reproduction.” The hypocrisy of 19th-century Victorian England—marked by extreme sexual conservatism yet booming prostitution—exemplifies the moral contradictions of the time. These tensions were reflected in literature through themes like adultery, prostitution, and moral “stain,” as seen in works like *The Scarlet Letter*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Madame Bovary*. This centuries-long history of governing, stigmatizing and exploiting the female

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<sup>16</sup> Dündar, “Orta Çağ Avrupası’nın Sıradan Kadınları”, 2412–2421.

<sup>17</sup> Berktaş, “Avrupa’da Cadılık”, 57–59, 60–64, 68, 77–78; Fatma İlknur Akgül, “Silvia Federici, Caliban ve Cadı: Kadınlar Beden ve ilksel Birikim”, *Hitit Ekonomi ve Politika Dergisi* 1, no.1 (2021): 69, 70–72.

body has also formed the basis of social resistance and the struggle for gender equality.<sup>18</sup>

This study examines the historical evolution of perceptions of the female body and sexuality in European societies, focusing primarily on the period from the Early Modern era to the 19th century, particularly through the lens of prostitution. It provides a broad overview, tracing how sexuality evolved from being linked to fertility in early societies to becoming a regulated social institution under patriarchal control. In addition to legal and social regulations in different civilizations, the impact of religious beliefs on sexuality and marriage, penalties for prostitution, and secular control mechanisms that emerged over time constitute the main themes of this study.

## **II. Sexuality and Prostitution: Control of the Female Body in the Early Ages of History:**

Although sexuality has been perceived as meeting the need for reproduction throughout human history, it has always been a subject of curiosity in social and cultural areas.<sup>19</sup> In the early ages of history, it is necessary to be cautious about talking about prostitution in the current sense, since it was identified with sexuality, reproduction and fertility in primitive societies. Prostitution is a social phenomenon that started in patriarchal societies, which were governed by laws and continued until today. In the early ages, prostitution developed together with hospitality. Prostitution with guests was considered a kind of social service and assistance. In addition to prostitution with guests, religious prostitution developed as a worship ceremony supported by religious figures to serve their own interests. Prostitution, which is considered one of the oldest professions with written records, has existed in different cultures since

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<sup>18</sup> Foucault, *Cinselliğin Tarihi*, 26–35; İlhan Güngören, “Uzak Doğu Kültürünün Bir Klasiği: Kama Sutra”, *Cogito- Aşk* 4 (1995), 126; Alain Servantie, “Batılıların Gözünde Türk İmajının Geçirdiği Değişimler”, *Dünyada Türk İmgesi* (İstanbul: 2005), 36; Christopher Caudwell, *Ölen Bir Kültür Üzerine İncelemeler* (İstanbul: Metis Pub., 2002), 23 and 339; David S. Kidder and Noah D. Oppenheim, *Entellektüelin Kutsal Kitabı* (İstanbul: 2012), 276–277, 390 and 669–670; Ferhat Korkmaz, “Ölümünün 100. Yılında Büyük Bir Romancıyı Anmak”, *The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies* 5, no. I (2012): 204; Özerdoğan et al., “Kadın ve Fuhuş Olgusu”, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Doğru, “Cinsellik ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet”, 3.

Ancient Mesopotamia.<sup>20</sup> In Mesopotamia, there were male and female prostitutes known as experts in “free love”, and this profession was sometimes intertwined with religion, and there were sacred prostitutes called *hiérodoule* who served the goddesses (Inanna/Ishtar).<sup>21</sup>

Around 2300 BC, the practice of sacred prostitution, linked with temples, spread from Mesopotamia to the Middle East. Sexual acts symbolized fertility and ensured that prostitution was viewed as sacred. However, between 1200–800 BC, the Israelites rejected these erotic worship practices, and Moses eventually banned prostitution. Later, prostitution lost its religious significance and became secularized, eventually transforming into a legal institution. One of the earliest examples of this transition was Solon, a Greek politician and lawmaker in Athens, who opened the first state-run brothels called *Dieterion* and used female slaves as capital (circa 640–560 BC). Solon believed that noble Athenian women should remain at home, preserve their beauty, and avoid exertion, while men should fulfil their sexual needs with prostitutes. This perspective contributed significantly to the commodification of women and reinforced gender-based hierarchies in both sexual and social realms.<sup>22</sup> Such attitudes also led to the spatial and social isolation of women. The architectural evolution of ancient Greek homes—from basic huts to complex houses with internal courtyards in the 7th century BC—reflected growing concerns over privacy and female seclusion.<sup>23</sup> The concern was not merely about sexual pleasure outside marriage but about ensuring legitimate lineage. While prostitutes provided sexual pleasure, wives provided legitimate heirs, preserving family structures. Adultery was only considered a crime if a married woman had extramarital relations; male infidelity was largely overlooked.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Dündar, “Orta Çağ Avrupası’nın Sıradan Kadınları”, 2412; Orhan Derman, “Tarihsel Süreçte Toplumsal Cinsiyet”, *Çocuk Sağlığı ve Hastalıkları Dergisi* 64, (2021): 44.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Bottéro, “Her Şey Babil’de Başladı”, *Batı’da Aşk ve Cinsellik*, ed. Georges Duby (İstanbul İletişim Press, 2015), 23–24.

<sup>22</sup> Özerdoğan et al., “Kadın ve Fuhuş Olgusu”, 3–6.

<sup>23</sup> Tomlinson, *Yunan Mimarlığı*, 73–74.

<sup>24</sup> Foucault, *Cinselliğin Tarihi*, 227 and 229.

In the Roman Empire, sexual behaviour was seen as a matter of public interest. Laws were created to address sexual crimes such as adultery and rape. Roman society categorized women by their sexual status, placing prostitutes at the lowest social level.<sup>25</sup> In ancient Rome, sexual corruption had increased considerably, and the city municipalities began to issue work permits, or certificates, to those involved in prostitution, a practice that has survived to this day. This practice in Rome resulted in women being stigmatized throughout their lives, reduced to a state of slavery,<sup>26</sup> and seen as “ordinary sinners”.<sup>27</sup> In the rapidly changing social situation of women in the Hellenistic Roman period, the relationship between slavery and prostitution reached even more tragic dimensions. Female slaves of Greek, Jewish, Armenian, Germanic, black and Arab origins became the capital of the prostitution sector by being sold in a geography extending from Britain, Ethiopia, Southern Russia, Morocco, Iran and Spain to the large international market in Delos to be distributed to Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage, Rome or Pergamum.<sup>28</sup>

### **III. The Female Body and Prohibitions: The Church’s Oppression in the Medieval European World**

Although Christianity initially tolerated sexual activity and prostitution, over time, it adopted stricter views. It emphasized monogamy and considered sexual relations meaningful only for reproduction. Prostitution was increasingly condemned, even as clandestine practices persisted due to the continuation of slavery.<sup>29</sup> The medieval church blessed marriage and condemned all sexual relations that did not have a reproductive purpose, prompting Westerners to change their attitudes on the subject. The church also took a serious stance on monogamy and sexual relations being meaningful only when they were aimed at a product, namely a child. Moreover, when Islam began to spread, the Christian church used this detail of monogamy and polygamy to prevent its congregation from converting to Islam, while denigrating it as a sinful religion; it claimed that

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<sup>25</sup> Derman, “Tarihsel Süreçte Toplumsal Cinsiyet”, 44.

<sup>26</sup> Özerdoğan et al., “Kadın ve Fuhuş Olgusu”, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Turner, *Cehennem Tarihi*, 54.

<sup>28</sup> Childe, *Tarihte Neler Oldu*, 251– 252.

<sup>29</sup> Özerdoğan et al., “Kadın ve Fuhuş Olgusu”, 3–4.



the situation in Islam that opened the door to polygamy was no different from committing adultery.<sup>30</sup> Medieval Europe had such a cruel and dismissive attitude towards women in prostitution that the rape of prostitutes went unpunished.<sup>31</sup> However, in the pre-Islamic Turks, there were sanctions protecting women's rights in the *Uluğ Law*, and the penalty for raping a woman was death.<sup>32</sup>

Prostitutes were seen as irredeemable sinners. Medieval sermons and texts painted prostitutes as dangerous seductresses. In Umberto Eco's *The History of Ugliness*, medieval illustrations depict prostitutes suffering in hell, reflecting the extreme moral condemnation of female sexuality during the period. Umberto Eco quotes the "Book of Steps" from the eighth century and presents the situation of those who work as prostitutes in hell with the following lines: "...I saw others hanging by their limbs with red-hot hooks, and they were adulterers in the world. And afterward I saw a multitude of women, innumerable, all of them hung by their private parts on very large red-hot beams. And I asked Gabriel who these women were. He told me that they were prostitutes who had never given up their lust and adultery".<sup>33</sup> Apparently, medieval Europe was pleased with the rapidly expanding Islamic religion's approach to sex outside of marriage, and despite all criticism and opposition to Islam, it supported the growing religion's prohibitions on adultery and prostitution. The most prominent theme in the depiction of medieval hell was undoubtedly adultery. A constant connection was made between closeness to family values and distance from hell.<sup>34</sup> In the middle of the eighth century, the Carolingians introduced the rule of marriage until death.<sup>35</sup> Emperor Charlemagne banned prostitution with the laws he passed in 801 AD.<sup>36</sup> European clergymen did not remain idle either. In a sermon book called *Elucidarium*, written in the early 12th century, Honorius of Autun

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<sup>30</sup> Servantie, *Batılıların Gözünde Türk*, 31. A similar situation can be observed in the attitude of the Jews to test the prophethood of Jesus during their opposition to Christianity. "The Jews addressed Jesus as follows: Since you are the son of God, make chaste women out of these three prostitutes". Gerlach, *Türkiye Günlüğü*, 240.

<sup>31</sup> Konan, "Osmanlı Hukukunda Tecavüz Suçu", 151.

<sup>32</sup> Çandarlıoğlu, "Türk Toplumunda Kadın", 23.

<sup>33</sup> Eco, *Çirkinliğin Tarihi*, 75 and 87.

<sup>34</sup> Turner, *Cehennem Tarihi*, 105–108.

<sup>35</sup> Goody, *Avrupa'da Aile*, 63.

<sup>36</sup> Özerdoğan et al., "Kadın ve Fuhuş Olgusu", 3–4.

described two hells, one above the other, and wrote that sinners such as the unchaste, the adulterous and the lustful would be turned upside down in the lower hell, their backs turned to each other and stretched out continuously. Perhaps the most painful punishment for these sinners was to have their own family members watch their situation in hell.<sup>37</sup>

In medieval Europe, charities were also established to care for children born as a result of sexual relations outside of marriage and abandoned, and aid funds were established for poor women. However, adulterers were definitely expelled from the church.<sup>38</sup> It was clear that the slightest mercy shown to extramarital relations by the public or the church would create an opportunity for the encouragement of adultery. The general character of the history of prostitution since Charlemagne can be evaluated as a succession of attempts to regulate and prohibit prostitution. The first health examinations of prostitutes are dated to the 1370s in Sicily. Towards the middle and end of the Middle Ages, the constant financial difficulties of the rulers fed the state's expectation of income from prostitution and supported prostitution, which in turn caused prostitution to become widespread. The money earned from the slave trade and taxes began to be seen as an important source of income for many rulers in Medieval Europe.<sup>39</sup>

#### **IV. The Female Body, Oppression and Control: Biopolitical Attitude from the Early Modern Period to the 19th Century**

With the Renaissance, the replacement of religious thought in Europe with a nature-centred understanding and the rise of Humanism, which placed humans at the centre of the universe, revived interest in art, science and literature. During this period, artists began to portray women again with the ideal understanding of beauty in the Ancient Age, and nudity, which was considered sinful in the Middle Ages, became the subject of paintings. However, this did not mean that women were completely liberated; the issue of women being coded as an object that “*satisfies visual pleasure*” in the narrative of some mainstream art branches has never been overcome. Initiatives such as the expulsion of adulterous couples from the

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<sup>37</sup> Turner, *Cehennem'in Tarihi*, 143.

<sup>38</sup> Goody, *Avrupa'da Aile*, 95.

<sup>39</sup> Özerdoğan et al., “Kadın ve Fuhuş Olgusu”, 3–4.

church in Calvinist Geneva after the Reformation and the closure of brothels in Germany in the 15th century to protect respectable women did not change the reality of prostitution in Europe.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, according to the extremely strict rules prevailing in the Calvinist churches in Geneva, adulterers were executed, women were put in a sack, and men were beheaded. Men were forbidden to talk to women or young girls or to joke around. This was only tolerated in buying and selling transactions and among very close acquaintances.<sup>41</sup> The spread of syphilis to Europe in the late 15th century led to the prohibition of prostitution again.<sup>42</sup> The cruelty of justice in 16th-century Hungary continued violently with the issue of prostitutes. Anyone tried for adultery, whether male or female, was executed by being beheaded with a sword.<sup>43</sup>

The Church continued to implement its policies, which prioritized Christian marriage ethics such as the priority of reproduction, the prohibition of abortion and homosexuality, the protection of the marital relationship, and the accusation of adultery with disgrace, not only in Europe but also in these new lands immediately after the conquest of Mexico in the 1520s and 1530s, despite experiencing major problems with the natives.<sup>44</sup> Despite this determined policy of the Church, the moral corruption of the nobility and some of the priesthood in Europe caused great reactions in the public. With the law of 1560, brothels were closed in France and some regulations were made to prevent venereal diseases.<sup>45</sup> In 1656, the first hospital in Paris, Hospital Général, was established to house prostitutes, in addition to vagrants, the unemployed, and the idle. Approximately nine years after such a solution<sup>46</sup> to control the deviant behaviour of modern society, a shelter and correction centre called the “shelter” for prostitutes was established in Paris in 1665. In these centres, under the name of correction, prostitutes were given hard labour and

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<sup>40</sup> Goody, *Avrupa’da Aile*, 93–94.

<sup>41</sup> Gerlach, *Türkiye Günlüğü*, 333.

<sup>42</sup> Özerdoğan et al., “Kadın ve Fuhuş Olgusu”, 3–4.

<sup>43</sup> Gerlach, *Türkiye Günlüğü*, 274.

<sup>44</sup> Goody, *Avrupa’da Aile*, 53.

<sup>45</sup> Özerdoğan et al., “Kadın ve Fuhuş Olgusu”, 4.

<sup>46</sup> Selçuk Candansayar, “Tıbbın Eşcinselliğe Bakışı İçin Bir Arkeoloji Denemesi”, *COĞİTO/ Cinsel Yönelimler ve Queer Kuram*, no. 65–66 (2011): 160.

subjected to physical and psychological torture.<sup>47</sup> Similar attitudes towards prostitutes existed in America as in Europe. Moreover, in cases of sexual intercourse outside of marriage, the parties were not separated from each other, and the Massachusetts colony subjected men who committed adultery to very harsh punishments, and did not hesitate to apply strict laws based on the Bible.<sup>48</sup>

From the 17th century onwards, the tendency to talk about and encourage sexuality increased, which led to the invention of various devices for the translation of sexuality into discourse. As Foucault points out, the relationship between power, knowledge and gender has been based on oppression since ancient times.<sup>49</sup> While Rome and Venice were cities where prostitution was common in Europe in the previous century, it is determined that the number of prostitutes increased in Paris and London from the end of the 17th century onwards. Although all licensed brothels disappeared in the 17th century, institutions for the rescue of fallen women were developed in Italy.<sup>50</sup> In France, there was a great increase in the number of brothels between 1715–1723. With the great revolution in France, prostitution was regulated by law. The law dated July 19, 1781 provided an opportunity for the development of controlled and legal prostitution. This law brought the understanding of tolerance to brothels to the fore in order to ensure effective control. Necessary measures were taken for prostitutes to work comfortably and the principle of keeping police records of working girls was introduced. In addition to these, among the basic articles of the law were that working girls had to undergo regular and mandatory health checks twice a month.<sup>51</sup>

In 18th-century Paris, one in ten women earned part of their income from prostitution.<sup>52</sup> The social changes brought about by the industrial revolution, the existence of many widows parallel to the high death rates, and the life of women who were abandoned or forced to be looked after by

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<sup>47</sup> Özerdoğan et al., “Kadın ve Fuhuş Olgusu”, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Kidder and Oppenheim, *Entellektüelin Kutsal Kitabı*, 260.

<sup>49</sup> Doğru, “Cinsellik ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet”, 4; Derman, “Tarihsel Süreçte Toplumsal Cinsiyet”, 43–44, Esencan and Beji, “Günümüze Değin Cinsellik”, 307.

<sup>50</sup> Goody, *Avrupa’da Aile*, 93–94.

<sup>51</sup> Özerdoğan et al., “Kadın ve Fuhuş Olgusu”, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Goody, *Avrupa’da Aile*, 93–94.

others was becoming increasingly difficult. Especially in London, many unemployed young girls turned to prostitution to make ends meet. The lucky women were able to find work in factories and generally establish their own lives in their own homes.<sup>53</sup> Until the end of the 18th century, sexual habits were regulated by church law, Christian teachings and civil law, which focused on marital relations. Violating the laws of marriage or pursuing strange pleasures were definitely punishable behaviours. Sexual intercourse outside of marriage or adultery were among the grave sins.<sup>54</sup>

Sexuality was not something that could be condemned or tolerated, and could also be managed within the authority of public power. This approach caused sexuality to become a police business in the 18th century, thus strengthening or increasing the power of the state and ensuring public happiness. Perhaps we should not only look at this situation from the perspective of the fact that sexuality was banned, but it is also possible to interpret it as a policy in which the necessity of regulating sexuality through useful and public discourses is prioritized. The fact that the changing social and economic structure of the 18th century was addressed not according to the natural increase of the population, but according to the needs of industrialization and production activities makes such an interpretation strong. The concern to reshape a sexual relations system that secures the population, reproduces the workforce, and sustains social relations emerges spontaneously, and this policy even allows us to characterize the 18th century as an “age of multiplication” that distinguishes it from the next century.<sup>55</sup>

With the Industrial Revolution, the transition from production based on human and animal power to machine power in the European world, especially in England in the 18th century, led to population growth and economic growth. During this period, industrial and mechanical metaphors were used about sexuality, and sexual drive was described as steam in an engine or water spreading through pipes. The concept of “modern sexuality” entered Western languages in the 19th century, especially in the 1800s. During this period, the emphasis on “sexual identity” increased, but

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<sup>53</sup> Goody, *Avrupa'da Aile*, 158–159

<sup>54</sup> Foucault, *Cinselliğin Tarihi*, 35.

<sup>55</sup> Foucault, *Cinselliğin Tarihi*, 26– 35.

practices defined as “crimes against nature” such as homosexuality continued to be tried in Church courts.<sup>56</sup>

The main reason why sexuality became a field of strategic importance in the 19th century must have been the population policy implemented in the previous century. Sexuality, with its *fertilizing effects*, began to express a broad biological process that concerned not only the body of the individual but also the crowded unity of the population. The fact that sexuality is the meeting place of the body and the population is enough to indicate that this can be regulated. For this reason, sexuality is a field where the power established over human and social life manifests itself in two forms, with the “anatomo-politics of the human body” and the “bio-politics of the population”.<sup>57</sup>

The 19th century in particular represents a period when sexual conservatism peaked in England. Of course, we should not ignore the hypocrisy and exaggerated growth of interest in sexuality behind the truth behind sexual conservatism. We should also say that this conservatism reached an understanding in Victorian England that did not allow good family girls or women to undress or take off their underwear even while washing. The most striking fact about the real contradiction is that England at that time became a paradise of brothels. As a result of the reaction against this kind of sexual conservatism, a few irregular people who were interested in pornography grew up in Victorian England. It is also during this period that Sir Richard Francis Burton and his friend Foster Fitzgerald Artbutnot found and published the Kama Sutra together.<sup>58</sup> What is even more surprising is that in the works written in the mid-nineteenth century in Europe, where moral values were so hypocritical and extramarital affairs increased as a result of marriages where love was not observed, references to the East were constantly made and themes of adultery and prostitution were emphasized. The image of a brothel was attributed to the place called the “*Turkish house*” and this kind of depiction of a Turkish house is clearly

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<sup>56</sup> Yıldız, *Avrupa Resim*, 27– 29; Derman, “Tarihsel Süreçte Toplumsal Cinsiyet”, 43 and 46–47; Esencan and Beji, “Günümüze Değın Cinsellik”, 301; Öztürk, *Bir Beden Sosyolojisi Problemi*, 152; Akgöl, “Silvia Federici, Caliban ve Cadı”, 70.

<sup>57</sup> Foucault, *Toplumu Savunmak Gerekir*, 257, 283 and 284.

<sup>58</sup> Güngören, “Uzak Doğu Kültürünün Bir Klasığı”, 126.

encountered in Guy de Maupassant's play *A la feuille de rose, maison turque*. Similar references are also present in Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale*. This analogy between harem and brothel, concubine and prostitute, adultery and polygamy are images that were spontaneously born of the prejudices against harems at a time when brothels and prostitutes served as safety valves that made the Victorian family yoke bearable for middle-class men. Referring to the East and its pathological aspects is an indirect way of referring to the hidden European realities in brothels, that is, a metaphorical approach.<sup>59</sup>

The increase in the rate of illegitimate children in Europe from the mid-18th century to the mid-19th century also reveals the existence of a vexing question as to why so many women became pregnant without getting married and then abandoned their newborn children. The difficulties related to marriage and divorce until the mid-19th century were perhaps one of the most fundamental reasons for this problem. First, the prevention of the legitimization of extramarital relationships and second, the attitude towards the rejection of extramarital relations must have been among the sources of this problem. It should be added that extramarital sexual relations were rejected not only because they disrupted morality and the family structure but also because they caused problems in the way property was transferred.<sup>60</sup>

The Contagious Diseases Act, which came into effect in England in 1864, remained on the agenda for 22 years. The "Venereal Diseases Hospitals" established with this act resembled prisons more than patient care facilities. In these hospitals, the understanding that venereal diseases developed more as a result of sinfulness was widespread, and therefore more emphasis was placed on moral and physical rehabilitation. This Contagious Diseases Act, which remained in effect for 22 years, pushed women into prostitution more strongly than economic pressures. Keeping a prostitute on record would push her into prostitution for life. The Ladies' National Association, founded by Josephine Butler in 1869, including Florence Nightingale, waged serious struggles for the removal of legal measures that served the interests of brothel owners and the repeal of the

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<sup>59</sup> Servantie, *Batılıların Gözünde Türk*, 36.

<sup>60</sup> Goody, *Avrupa'da Aile*, 65 and 185.

Contagious Diseases Act. With the campaigns they carried out, they took important steps in eliminating the double standards regarding sexuality and achieved remarkable success in terms of women's equality.<sup>61</sup>

The phenomenon of prostitution has also found a considerable place in European literature. The word “*stain*” was frequently used to describe sexual relations outside of marriage. In the plays of the famous Irish writer George Bernard Shaw, he defined all the money earned through rent, interest and profit and spent on crime, alcohol and prostitution as “stained money”.<sup>62</sup> A similar concept is encountered in Nathaniel Hawthorne's best-known work *The Scarlet Letter: A Romance*, which features Hester Prynne, a young woman living in the Puritan town of Boston in the 1600s. After being married to an older man in England and not going to the New World with her elderly husband, Hester becomes pregnant and gives birth to a baby girl as a result of an extramarital affair. Despite intense pressure from the leaders of the Puritan town, Hester refuses to reveal the name of the child's father. This refusal causes her to be ostracized from society. Moreover, she is forced to wear “*a red spot in the shape of an A, visibly embroidered on a gold-coloured cloth*” as a shameful reward for her adultery. The novel sheds light not only on the social isolation of an adulterous woman, but also on social and moral problems in the context of British colonialism. A similar novel character is encountered in the famous Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. “*All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.*” The character that gives the novel its name is an intelligent, provocative woman who is unhappy with her husband and seeks love in someone else. Finally, after falling in love with a military officer, she leaves her marriage and young son behind in return for the society's scorn for her adultery, and chooses love, but ends up committing suicide at the end of the novel. Gustave Flaubert demonstrates great courage by depicting a woman who is not satisfied and pursues adultery in his novel *Madame Bovary*. Syphilis, a disease that represents a great sin, is also among the frequently used examples in European literature. Prostitution, adultery, and illicit sexual relations are also frequently used elements in the themes of novels. One of the striking examples in this regard is the execution of Cunegonde, one of

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<sup>61</sup> Özzerdoğan et al., “Kadın ve Fuhuş Olgusu”, 4.

<sup>62</sup> Caudwell, *Ölen Bir Kültür Üzerine İncelemeler*, 23 and 339.



the heroes in Voltaire's *Candide*, after being sold as a sex slave and contracting syphilis.<sup>63</sup> Although similar themes have also found a place in the novels of Turkish intellectuals, Ahmet Mithat's novel *Henüz On Yedi Yaşında* is quite important in this respect in terms of examining "the approach to a fallen woman". In this novel, which deals with Kalyopi's sinking into the swamp of prostitution at the age of seventeen, Ahmet Mithat saves her from this swamp with the help of a young Muslim Turkish man and marries her to a young man with whom she will be happy.<sup>64</sup>

## V. Conclusion

In the early ages of history, it is understood that in primitive societies, sexuality was mostly identified with reproduction and fertility. This also shows that sexual activity was perceived as a natural function for the purpose of biological and social continuity. In this process, the female body and sexuality ceased to be an individual practice and became a tool of social order, power and economy. In the period from the Early Modern period to approximately two hundred years ago, the female body and sexuality in European society were the target of constantly changing control mechanisms shaped by religious, legal and social norms. During this process, women lived a complex experience in which, on the one hand, their sexuality was limited to reproduction and the institution of the family, and on the other hand, they were exploited, stigmatized and disciplined in line with economic and power-oriented interests. However, these mechanisms of oppression and control also paved the way for the emergence of social resistance and the foundation of the struggle for gender equality.

From an analytical perspective, there is a deep hypocrisy and paradox in the attitude of European societies towards the female body and sexuality. Although the rise of Christianity, the acceptance of all extramarital relations as "sin" and the "curse" of prostitutes, and even cruel practices such as rape going unpunished, indicate the existence of a strict moral framework, the expectation of the rulers to earn income from prostitution in the same period and the legalization of prostitution and its transformation into a "sexual industry" revealed the permanent and sharp

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<sup>63</sup> Kidder and Oppenheim, *Entellektüelin Kutsal Kitabı*, 276–277, 390 and 669–670.

<sup>64</sup> Korkmaz, "Ölümünün 100. Yılında Büyük Bir Romancıyı Anmak", 204.

contradiction between religious and moral prohibitions and economic realities. This situation indicates that female sexuality was redefined as a resource that could be manipulated in line with economic and political interests rather than a moral “sin” area. By the 18th century, the fact that sexuality was considered as a “manageable area of public power” and even a “police job” indicates a significant change in the nature of the control mechanisms over the female body. This transformation shows that sexuality had become a biopolitical strategy as a means of reinforcing state control over the population and the workforce. Especially in the 19th century, despite the extreme sexual conservatism in England, the transformation of the country into a “brothel paradise” represents a striking paradox in which moral norms, instead of suppressing the hidden sexual realities of society, fed them with a double-standard system. In this process, the female body became a control area not only for moral judgments but also for the state’s population policies and the labour needs of industrial society. Regulations such as the “Contagious Diseases Act”, the profiling of prostitutes and the physical and psychological tortures they were subjected to under the name of “rehabilitation” presented the most brutal examples of the systematic stigmatization and disciplinary policy carried out on the female body. In this process, women were separated from their sexual selves and autonomy and turned into objects sacrificed in the name of social “improvement” and “order”.

However, these mechanisms of oppression and control also paved the way for the germination of social resistance. The struggles of organizations such as the Ladies’ National Association led by Josephine Butler to eliminate the double standards regarding sexuality and for women’s equality can be interpreted as the beginning of women’s quest to break away from their passive roles and demand their sexual and social autonomy. In European society from the Early Modern period to the 19th century, the female body and sexuality represented a constantly reshaped and conflicting area where many forces, from religious dogmas to economic interests, from state policies to social moral concepts, interacted, and were constantly reshaped. In addition to being a historical process in which women were systematically controlled, stigmatized and exploited through their sexuality, this period should also be read as a turning point in which the first seeds of resistance were sown against this oppression and the

foundations of the modern struggle for gender equality were laid. The fact that European literature deals with this social drama through themes such as “adultery”, “prostitution” and “stain” strikingly reveals that the female body has been a visible mirror of social hypocrisy and power relations for centuries.

In short, the female body and sexuality in European society have undergone a complex and continuously evolving transformation from antiquity to the 19th century. The position of women—once associated with the sacredness of “Mother Goddess” figures in ancient civilizations—was subordinated with the rise of patriarchal systems and monotheistic religions. During the Middle Ages, the Church’s moral oppression stigmatized women as weak and prone to sin, while phenomena such as prostitution and witch hunts established deep mechanisms of control over the female body. In the Early Modern Period and throughout the 19th century, the aesthetic liberation brought by the Renaissance, the socioeconomic shifts driven by capitalism and industrialization, and the advancement of modern medicine turned the female body and sexuality into targets of emerging biopolitical control. Although the emergence of concepts like “modern sexuality” and “sexual identity” sparked debates about individual freedom, religious, political, and societal controls over the female body persisted in various forms. This historical trajectory reveals that women have continuously stood at the centre of power relations and social expectations.

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## Chapter Twelve

# Childhood in the Ottoman Empire: Aspects of Everyday Life in the 19th Century

Yasin ÖZDEMİR\*

### I. Introduction: Children as the Young Members of Traditional Life

The history of childhood has only recently emerged as a subject of historical inquiry. Prior to the publication of *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*<sup>1</sup> in 1960 by the renowned demographer and social historian Philippe Ariès, few scholarly works addressed the history of childhood. In his study, Ariès argued that childhood is not an immutable biological fact but rather a social construct that varies according to historical context.<sup>2</sup> Within this framework, he examined depictions of children in medieval art, observing that they were portrayed as miniature adults. He further noted that this perception extended beyond the visual arts into language, literature, and clothing, where similarly limited distinctions were made. According to Ariès, this state of affairs persisted until the 19th century, when the child-centred family structure gradually took root.<sup>3</sup> Ariès's propositions have elicited both support and criticism from subsequent scholars. Cüneyd Okay endorsed Ariès's thesis that "medieval society did not possess a concept of childhood,"<sup>4</sup> extending it to assert that "up until

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<sup>1</sup> For the English translation of the work, see Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1962.

<sup>2</sup> Mine Tan, 'Çocukluk: Dün ve Bugün', *Toplumsal Tarihte Çocuk*, TVYY, ed. Bekir Onur, İstanbul 1994, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, 33–61.

<sup>4</sup> Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, 128. Yahya Araz, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Çocuk Olmak*, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul 2013, 12.

the Tanzimat period, it was either unknown or unimaginable that children constituted a distinct category with unique needs.”<sup>5</sup> Conversely, Peter Stearns characterized the emergence of childhood historiography with Ariès’s work as a “false start,” a view that is also supported by Yahya Araz.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, understanding the position of children within social and legal spheres requires the adoption of more nuanced and diverse methodological approaches.

In the Ottoman world, the child lived as a member of the family unit. Through customs and ceremonies that began even before birth, children were prepared by their families and communities for adult life. But what specific phase of human life does the period of childhood encompass? Today, childhood is defined within specific numerical limits in legal terms. However, in everyday life, such precise age boundaries are not readily discernible among individuals regarded as children. In Islamic law, the period from birth to adulthood is categorized as childhood.<sup>7</sup> Leslie Peirce, for her part, defines the period of childhood in the Ottoman context as a state of non-adulthood, marked by exemption from social responsibilities. Moreover, this stage is described as the period in which the greatest symmetry exists between males and females.<sup>8</sup> With the end of childhood, social responsibilities were subsequently imposed upon these individuals, now considered adults. When, then, do these responsibilities begin—that is, at what point does a child become an adult? In pre-modern Ottoman legal texts, the end of childhood was contingent upon the manifestation of certain signs in individuals. For girls, the definitive sign was the onset of menstruation. According to Ebussuud Efendi, if this sign appeared, girls were to be considered adults from the age of twelve; if it had not appeared, they were nevertheless deemed adults by the age of seventeen at the latest. In contrast, no such singularly defining moment existed for boys. For male

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<sup>5</sup> Cüneyd Okay, ‘Son Dönem Osmanlı Toplumunda Çocuk (1850–1900)’, *Türkler* 14, YTY, Ankara 2002, 41.

<sup>6</sup> Araz, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Çocuk Olmak*, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Mehmet Akif Aydın, ‘Çocuk–Fıkıh’, *DİA*, Vol. 8, İstanbul 1993, 361.

<sup>8</sup> Leslie Peirce, ‘Ekberiyet, Cinsellik ve Toplum Düzeni: Modern Dönemin Başlangıcında Toplumsal Cinsiyetle İlgili Osmanlı Söz Dağarcığı’, *Modernleşmenin Eşiğinde Osmanlı Kadınları*, trans. Necmiye Alpay, ed. Madeline Zilfi, TVYY, İstanbul 2014, 169.

children, the relevant indicators included the growth of facial hair, the ability to care for oneself, and the attainment of a level of maturity sufficient to sustain a household. Ebussuud Efendi stated that boys who exhibited these signs could be considered adults from the age of twelve, and in the absence of such signs, no later than the age of eighteen.<sup>9</sup>

In the pre-modern Ottoman period, the education and upbringing of children was primarily the responsibility of the family rather than the state. Upon reaching a certain age, boys were either sent to school through *âmin alayları* (school processions), or, as was common in rural villages and towns, they assisted their families in agricultural and pastoral labour, or were apprenticed to a master craftsman in order to learn a trade. Children who attended school acquired literacy and basic religious knowledge,<sup>10</sup> and those who sought further advancement continued their education at various madrasas. Kınalızâde opposed sending children to school, arguing that by the second half of the 17th century, *sıbyan mektepleri* (elementary schools) had become places where individuals of base character congregated.<sup>11</sup> As a result, it was not uncommon for wealthy families to hire private tutors to provide instruction at home.<sup>12</sup> Naturally, this situation did not apply to the palace. Princes (*şehzades*) received their education within the palace at the Enderun School, alongside other children being groomed as future statesmen. As for girls, their education was generally limited to lessons received at home from private tutors, a practice primarily accessible to those of means. It would not be until the 19th century that the education of children came to be regarded as a responsibility to be undertaken by the state.

After receiving their initial education, or in some cases without any formal instruction, boys were placed with master craftsmen in order to learn a trade. In addition to professions such as blacksmithing, tailoring, and shoemaking, children were also employed in the world of entertainment. The area in which children were most frequently involved

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<sup>9</sup> M. Ertuğrul Düzdağ, *Şeyhülislam Ebussuud Efendi Fetvaları Işığında 16. Asır Türk Hayatı*, Enderun, İstanbul 1972, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Ahmet Cihan, *Osmanlı'da Eğitim*, 3F, İstanbul 2007, 32.

<sup>11</sup> Araz, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Çocuk Olmak*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Özdemir Nutku, 'Osmanlı Şenliklerinde Çocuk', *Toplumsal Tarihte Çocuk*, ed. Bekir Onur, TVYY, İstanbul 1994, 57.

in the entertainment industry was dance performances. Alongside dancing, they also performed acrobatic movements. They were further used as assistants in acts that involved displays of strength and endurance, such as the *zorbaz* game, as well as in performances featuring illusionism and juggling.<sup>13</sup> For instance, on the ninth day of the festival held in Edirne in 1675, a large-built tightrope walker was descending while playing a drum, with a child on his back who had been suspended by his hair on a pulley. The pulley gave way, and both fell onto an Armenian spectator.<sup>14</sup>

The documents that have survived to the present regarding the presence of children in everyday public life typically originate from court records in which children became involved due to an incident or misfortune. While walking in the streets or assisting their families in the fields, children frequently encountered various events.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the nature of these incidents reveals that children roamed the streets, played games, and actively participated in daily life. Children made their own toys using boxes, sticks, and wooden pieces they found at home or in the streets. This was largely due to the fact that, apart from a few toy vendors operating in the Eyüp district of Istanbul, such tradesmen were rarely found in provincial areas. For instance, during the reign of Ahmed I, one of the gifts that brought the most joy to children was toy ships painted in blue and red.<sup>16</sup>

The structure of Ottoman neighbourhoods was often designed with security in mind, consisting largely of dead-end streets. In these areas, which correspond to what we would today consider residential streets, children were able to live their lives in relative safety. In the absence of designated playgrounds, children played in mosque courtyards, vacant lots left by fires, cemeteries, and alleyways between houses. Among the games they played were hide-and-seek, blind man's buff, prisoner's base, *pilav pısti*, knucklebone tossing, hopscotch, and spinning tops.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Nutku, 'Osmanlı Şenliklerinde Çocuk', 61–62.

<sup>14</sup> Nutku, 'Osmanlı Şenliklerinde Çocuk', 60.

<sup>15</sup> For more see BOA, MŞH.ŞSC.d., Gaziantep Sicilleri 2, v.3, h.3. Selman Çetin, 'The Number of 64th Manisa Şer'iyye Sijils (Court Registry)'. Master's Thesis, Manisa Celal Bayar University, Graduate School of Social Sciences, 2013, 22–23.

<sup>16</sup> Nutku, 'Osmanlı Şenliklerinde Çocuk', 57.

<sup>17</sup> Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet Merasim ve Tabirleri: Toplum Hayatı*, ed. Kazım Arısan-Duygu Arısan Günay, TVYY, İstanbul 1995, 39.



The times when children spent the most time outdoors were typically during holidays and festivals. In Istanbul, special festivities for children were organized during holiday celebrations in places such as Tophane, Direkleraltı, and Maçka, while in the provinces, similar events were held in large public squares. Particularly during Ramadan, puppet shows and traditional *orta oyunu* performances were staged for both adults and children. Festival activities such as suspended swings with railings, Ferris wheels large enough for adults, small carousels that could accommodate four or five children, and pull carts<sup>18</sup> were among the joyful moments in a child's life.

Children of the 19th century experienced this phase of life with opportunities that differed from those available to earlier generations. As the state began to recognize children as individuals who would shape the future, it increasingly assumed various responsibilities concerning their welfare and development. It is useful to examine in detail how these changes took place.

## **II. The Changing Concept of Childhood**

The 19th century is recognized in Ottoman history as a period marked by significant transformations. The gradual steps toward modernization that had begun in the 18th century accelerated during this era. It is widely acknowledged that these changes affected not only the state and its institutions but also everyday life and the prevailing mentalities. As in other parts of the world, this process of transformation also brought about changes in the lives of children within the Ottoman realm.

In Europe, various thinkers gradually developed differing ideas concerning children. According to Rousseau, the child is akin to a wild flower. While the child's naturalness, joy, and innocence should be celebrated, education ought to be provided in a way that does not corrupt this natural state. In his view, education is essentially a process of subtraction, and the flaws observed in adults are the result of misguided instruction. In *Émile*, Rousseau emphasized the formative role of women in early education, stating: "The earliest education is the most important, and it is undoubtedly the woman's task. If the ruler of nature had intended to

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<sup>18</sup> Nutku, 'Osmanlı Şenliklerinde Çocuk', 58–59.

assign it to men, he would have given them milk to feed the child.”<sup>19</sup> In contrast, John Locke’s perspective, often referred to as the “Protestant Conception of the Child,” described children as future citizens, primarily envisioned as businessmen.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike in the pre-modern period, the definition of childhood underwent certain changes as well. Developments such as the introduction of compulsory primary education for both boys and girls during the reign of Mahmud II, the emergence of newspapers and magazines specifically for children, and the creation of a distinct fashion for children, all reflect this transformation. These public-facing reforms initiated by Mahmud II were undoubtedly rooted in the changes taking place within the imperial court. With the institutionalization of the *kafes* (confinement) system in the palace, princes began to receive instruction from private tutors. The practice can also be traced to the decision of Sultan Abdülhamid I to place Selim III in the *kafes* quarters while nevertheless allowing his education to continue to some extent.<sup>21</sup>

Following Greece’s independence, Turkish students were sent to Europe to fill the vacated positions in the Foreign Ministry and in translation services. These students came to believe that the salvation of the Ottoman Empire could only be achieved through comprehensive reforms. Upon their return, these intellectuals not only worked on the functioning of the state but also focused on children, who were regarded as the future of the nation. The exile of the Circassians in 1861, along with the waves of Balkan migration that began in 1877 and continued intermittently until the end of the empire, created pressing problems. Among these were the sale of migrant children into slavery, their forced involvement in begging, and their drift into vagrancy. For the Ottoman intellectuals who had been exposed to Western ideas, these were urgent issues that demanded practical solutions.

The reformist statesmen of the 19th century effectively declared war on the dead-end streets that had long constituted a fundamental feature of

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<sup>19</sup> Semra Daşçı, *Avrupa Resminde Çocuk İmgesi*, Bağlam, İstanbul 2008, 46.

<sup>20</sup> Tan, 1993, 11–12.

<sup>21</sup> Hülya Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları: Şehzadeler ve Hanım Sultanların Yaşamları, Giysileri, Aygaz*, İstanbul 2006, 21.

Ottoman urban design. For generations, these streets had played a key role in maintaining neighbourhood order and ensuring the safety of children playing outdoors. However, during the 19th century, they were gradually eliminated, particularly in the wake of large-scale fires and urban redevelopment projects. This transformation of the urban layout undoubtedly had a direct impact on the street life of children.

In contrast to Christianity, children in Islam are seen as symbols of purity and innocence. In Christian doctrine, children are born bearing the original sin that expelled the Prophet Adam from Paradise, and they are believed to be cleansed of this sin only through baptism and the application of holy oil. The fate of unbaptized children who die has long been a subject of theological debate. In Islam, by contrast, it is believed that children who die before reaching puberty will enter Paradise. For this reason, in the pre-modern period, there were relatively few legal provisions concerning crimes that might be committed by children.<sup>22</sup> However, as many scholars have noted, the concept of the “dangerous child” began to occupy a prominent place in international discourse during the 19th century. Elites and states increasingly focused on transforming these future citizens into ideal members of society.<sup>23</sup> To prevent children and youth from falling into moral decay through begging or vagrancy, reformatories were established.<sup>24</sup> In these institutions, orphans and children in need not only received basic education but were also given extensive vocational training, with the goal of shaping them into productive and loyal citizens of the nation.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The only provision concerning children in Mehmed II’s kanunname and many subsequent legal codes, apart from cases in which a child is the victim of abduction or sexual assault, states that no punishment shall be given in cases where young children fight with one another. See Ahmed Akgündüz, *Osmanlı Kanunnâmeleri ve Hukukî Tahlilleri, Osmanlı Hukukuna Giriş ve Fatih Kanunnâmeleri*, Vol. 1 (İstanbul: Fey Yayınları, 1990), 350.

<sup>23</sup> Nazan Maksudyan, ‘Evli Evine, Köylü Köyüne, Evi Olmayan? Osmanlı Kent Reformu ve Şehirde İstenmeyen Çocuklar’, *Kebikeç*, no. 34 (Ankara, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Cihan Özgün, ‘Osmanlı Dünyasında Çocuk Dilenciler’, *Geçmişten Günümüze Şehir ve Çocuk*, ed. Osman Köse, Vol. 1, Canik Belediyesi, Samsun 2016, 672.

<sup>25</sup> Talip Atalay, ‘Sokak Çocukları İçin Başarılı Bir Proje: Diyarbakır İslahhanesi’, *Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Diyarbakır*, ed. Bahaeddin Yediyıldız and Kerstin Tomenendal, Vol. 1, Ankara, 2008, 160.

Before delving into all of these developments, it is essential to first examine how children, from the moment of birth to their transformation into adult individuals, constructed their relationships with themselves, their families, and their surrounding environments.

### III. Births as Sources of Household Joy

Preparations for children often began even before their birth. Within the palace, arrangements for children to be born to the consorts of the sultan were overseen by the *valide* sultan. The birth of a royal child was referred to as *velâdat-ı hümayun*. The necessary items for the mother and infant—such as clothing, furnishings, and jewellery—were identified in advance, and the responsibility for their procurement was assigned to the *hazine kethüdası* (steward of the treasury). Once these items were obtained, the steward would submit them along with an expense ledger to the harem. One of the larger rooms in the harem would be prepared specifically for the birth, and the midwife along with the assisting concubines would be designated beforehand.<sup>26</sup> One of the miniatures in *Zenannâme*, a work by Fazıl Enderunî, depicts a birth scene in which a woman is shown seated in a chair known as an *öreke* at the moment of childbirth.<sup>27</sup>

After childbirth, the mother and child would be placed in a specially designated room. While the existence of such rooms in Topkapı Palace cannot be definitively confirmed, some of the chambers in the *Kadın Efendiler Dairesi* (Apartments of the Consorts) in Dolmabahçe Palace have small adjoining rooms at the rear. Scholars such as Esemeli have suggested that these spaces may have served as children's rooms.<sup>28</sup>

Whether in a royal household or an ordinary family, it was generally preferred in Islamic tradition that the family line continue through male offspring. Families often expressed a stronger desire for the birth of a son. It is noted that the joy was significantly greater when a male child was born. The wish to bear a son was even reflected in popular sayings, such as “Let

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<sup>26</sup> Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları*, 69.

<sup>27</sup> Enderunî Fazıl, *Hubanname-Zenannâme*, İÜK, T5502; Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları*, 70.

<sup>28</sup> Deniz Esemeli, *Osmanlı Sarayı ve Dolmabahçe* (İstanbul: Homer, 2002), 85.

the one who gives birth to a boy boast, and the one who bears a girl grieve.”<sup>29</sup>

Beginning in the 17th century, the births of both male and female children were reported to the grand vizier via an imperial rescript (*hatt-ı hümayun*), and the news of the birth was then conveyed to the high-ranking members of the state by the grand vizier. These individuals would present themselves before the sultan to offer congratulations and would bring various gifts.<sup>30</sup> It was customary for the grand vizier to gift a jewelled cradle to the newborn. This cradle would be brought to Topkapı Palace on the sixth day of the mother’s postpartum period in a ceremony known as the *Beşik Alayı* (Cradle Procession). If the child was male, a *sorguç* (plume) would be added to the cradle. The birth would be publicly announced to the people of Istanbul through ceremonial cannon fire. Typically, cannons would be fired five times a day—seven rounds for a boy and three for a girl. Until the 19th century, male children born in the palace were referred to as *şehzade*, and female children as sultan. From the 19th century onward, male children began to be addressed with the title *efendi*. At the age of one, the child would be weaned and assigned a personal retinue composed of three *Hasoda* chamberlains. The figure holding the title *Baş Lala* assumed the role of tutor and played an important part in the child’s upbringing and development.<sup>31</sup>

Among wealthy families living outside the palace, practices similar to those observed within the palace were followed prior to childbirth. The first step was to select a midwife experienced in delivery. If the expectant mother already knew a midwife, that individual would be chosen; otherwise, a recommended midwife would be sought out.<sup>32</sup> As childbirth was undoubtedly a highly stressful event for the mother, it was essential that she liked and felt comfortable with the midwife. Once selected, the midwife would be formally engaged through the presentation of a gift wrapped in an elaborately embroidered bundle, a custom typical among affluent

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<sup>29</sup> Yahya Araz, ‘Osmanlı İstanbul’unda Çocuk Olmak’, *Büyük İstanbul Tarihi*, Vol. 4, İstanbul 2015, 478.

<sup>30</sup> Sabahattin Türkoğlu, ‘Osmanlı Sarayında Çocuk’, *Çocuk Kültürü 1. Ulusal Çocuk Kültürü Kongresi*, ed. Bekir Onur, Ankara Üniversitesi, Ankara 1997, 106–107.

<sup>31</sup> Türkoğlu, ‘Osmanlı Sarayında Çocuk’, 107–108.

<sup>32</sup> Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*, 11.



**Figure 1** – The Birth Scene and the Öreke Chair Depicted in *Zenannâme*.<sup>33</sup>

households. When labour pains began, the midwife would be summoned. If the family home was small, the father would typically relocate to another house nearby; if the house was large, he would withdraw to a distant room, out of earshot of the mother. The woman would be seated in the öreke chair to give birth. The midwife would then cut the umbilical cord approximately four fingers above the navel. Afterward, the newborn would be washed by the midwife in a basin with warm water and soap, and then salted around the neck, ears, inside the mouth, under the arms, and between the legs in order to prevent body odour in the future. In fact, the salting practice was

<sup>33</sup> Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları*, 70

believed to protect newborns, whose bodies had not yet come into contact with air in the womb, from harm and to strengthen their physical resistance.<sup>34</sup> The midwife would also remove the sac in which the baby had developed inside the mother's womb, tear it apart by hand, and place it in an earthenware vessel. It would then be buried in a hole dug in a suitable spot in the garden.<sup>35</sup>

After the infant was swaddled, the child and mother would be placed together in the postpartum chamber (*loğusa odası*), allowing time for the two to bond and become accustomed to one another. The benefits of maternal milk have been recognized since antiquity. In Islam, it is recommended that a mother breastfeed her child for a full two years in order to strengthen the emotional and spiritual bond between them.<sup>36</sup> If the mother was unable to produce milk, a wet nurse (*daye*) of good moral character (someone unlikely to abandon the child after a short time) would be sought.<sup>37</sup> Abdülaziz Bey notes that women from Circassian tribes were often selected for this role. At Topkapı Palace, *daye hatuns* were appointed specifically to breastfeed *şehzades* and *hanım* sultans. If the child's biological mother passed away, these women would continue to care for the child. Should a child under their care ascend to the throne, their influence within the palace would increase significantly.<sup>38</sup>

When infants reached forty days of age, a ceremony known as *kırklanma* was performed. Relatives and close friends, such as the mother-in-law or paternal aunt, would accompany the postpartum mother and her baby to the public bath (*hamam*) to be washed. This ritual, also referred to as *Kırk Hamamı* or *Loğusa Hamamı*, was celebrated with music, dancing, and the singing of folk songs and *manis* (rhymed couplets), turning the occasion into a day-long festivity. Typically held in commercial bathhouses, the event included a number of ceremonial practices. After bathing the mother, the midwife would tighten her waist with a wide sash and, just before she left the bath, would immerse her right hand forty times into a bowl of

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<sup>34</sup> Araz, 'Osmanlı İstanbul'unda Çocuk Olmak', 480.

<sup>35</sup> Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*, 12–13.

<sup>36</sup> Bakara, 2/333. Lokman, 31/4.

<sup>37</sup> Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*, 26.

<sup>38</sup> Türkoğlu, 'Osmanlı Sarayında Çocuk', 108.

water, which she then poured over the mother's head to complete the *kırklanma* ritual.<sup>39</sup>

In the Ottoman Empire, boys and girls remained under the care of their mothers until a certain age. According to a principle known as *hidane hakkı* (the right of custody), boys remained under the mother's responsibility until the age of nine, and girls until the age of seven.<sup>40</sup> This is supported by depictions in Western paintings and, later, photographs, which frequently show young children accompanying women in public spaces such as markets or on the streets. Mothers tended to their children's care during these early years and prepared them for adulthood. Murad Efendi noted that the first years of a child's life were spent behind the closed doors of the harem. He also mentioned that fathers were often distant from the child's early education and interaction, whereas mothers raised their children largely in accordance with long-standing traditions.<sup>41</sup> This suggests that children shared domestic spaces with their mothers within the household. Murad Efendi also observed that in Ottoman society, individuals built their homes primarily for themselves and their immediate children, leaving the fate of future generations to divine will. For this reason, he noted, structural durability was not a major concern in the construction of dwellings.<sup>42</sup>

As children developed physically, the spaces they occupied within the household also changed. Life began in a cradle, and at times children shared a bed or room with their parents. As they grew older, they transitioned to separate beds and eventually to their own rooms. Upon marriage, they would move into separate homes. At Topkapı Palace, *şehzades* resided in the *Şehzade Dairesi* (Princes' Quarters) located within the harem section.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mehmet Zeki Pakalın, 'Kırk Hamamı', *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, Vol. 2, MEB, İstanbul 1993, 269.

<sup>40</sup> Araz, 'Osmanlı İstanbul'unda Çocuk Olmak', 52–53.

<sup>41</sup> Murad Efendi, *Türkiye Manzaraları*, trans. Alev Sunata Kırım, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul 2007, 241–242.

<sup>42</sup> Murad Efendi, *Türkiye Manzaraları*, 162.

<sup>43</sup> The inscription above the gate of the Princes' Quarters reads: *Selam-ı aleküm bima sabir-tüm fenaame ukbâ ed-dar*, (*Peace be upon you for your perseverance. How excellent is the ultimate abode!*) Ar-Ra'd, 13:24. Sedat H. Eldem and Feridun Akozan, *Topkapı Sarayı*, Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, İstanbul 1982, 39.



Initially consisting of a single room and a hall (*sofa*), this space was adorned with tiles on both the interior and exterior walls. Over time, a new upper level was constructed by laying flooring over wooden columns, and the *sofa* was partitioned with glass panels, resulting in the creation of multiple rooms.<sup>44</sup>



**Figure 2** – Princes' Quarters of Topkapı Palace.

These rooms served as sitting areas with floor cushions during the day but were transformed into bedrooms at night by laying out mattresses stored in built-in cabinets. It is highly likely that spaces allocated for children outside the palace followed a similar pattern. Across the territories under Ottoman rule, houses were generally divided into *haremlik* (private/family quarters) and *selamlık* (guest/reception areas). However, the arrangement and use of rooms varied significantly depending on region, financial means, and religious background. Most surviving Ottoman houses

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<sup>44</sup> Eldem and Akozan, *Topkapı Sarayı*, 42.

consist of rooms that open onto a central *sofa* or *hayat* (a semi-open hall or gallery). In homes that were one or several stories high, each room typically belonged to a specific household member. Whether there existed rooms designated exclusively for children remains uncertain. Given the generally high number of children in Ottoman households, it is plausible that multiple children shared a single room. It is also unknown whether girls and boys were assigned separate rooms. In households with limited financial means, it is most probable that parents and children all lived together in a single room.

Within the household, children received instruction from their families based on the expectations associated with their biological sex, both within the family and in broader social life. Concepts such as *edeb* (proper conduct) and *terbiye* (upbringing or discipline) were regarded as essential foundations for a child's entrance into life. These values encompassed every aspect of a child's daily behaviour, including how they should or should not act toward their parents, elders, peers, and neighbours, lessons typically taught within the family setting. Islam places significant responsibility on parents regarding the moral upbringing of children, emphasizing that prospective mothers and fathers must themselves embody good and virtuous behaviour.<sup>45</sup> The most well-known Ottoman ethical treatise directed at children is *Ahlâk-ı Alâî*, authored by Kınalızade Ali. Another contributor to this discourse was Seyyid Vehbi, who died in Istanbul in 1809. In one of his works, Vehbi described religious education as a sacred and inescapable duty of every family. While discussing the sciences, knowledge, and skills that should be acquired, he also addressed those he considered unnecessary or harmful. He provided examples of proper behaviours and situations to avoid, as well as forbidden forms of knowledge and conduct. According to Vehbi, disciplines such as medicine, logic, Sufism, insight (*feraset*), literature, history, *siyer* (biographies of the Prophet), poetry, calligraphy (*hüsn-i hat*), and orthography (*imla*) were fields that children should be exposed to from an early age. In contrast, he considered fields such as philosophy, geometry, astronomy, chemistry, alchemy, talismans,

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<sup>45</sup> Mehmet Emin Üner, 'Osmanlı'da Mahalle ve Çocuk', *Geçmişten Günümüze Şehir ve Çocuk*, ed. Osman Köse, Vol. I, Canik Belediyesi, Samsun 2016, 633.

magic (*sihir*), and music (*musiki*) to be sciences from which children should be kept away.<sup>46</sup>

It is unclear to what extent such *edeb* manuals, which often existed in manuscript form, permeated the general population or how closely these moral prescriptions were followed by the public. Nevertheless, it was generally expected that children would be raised with good character and, in turn, transmit these virtuous qualities to future generations.

#### IV. Neighbourhood Life and Games as Steps Toward Adulthood

Since the earliest periods of history, security has been a central concern in both urban and rural life. In the pre-modern era, people often sought refuge behind thick walls to ensure their safety and took various precautions against potential threats to their cities or neighbourhoods. In the Ottoman Empire, individuals wishing to travel between cities were required to obtain a *mürur tezkiresi* (travel permit), which served to monitor who entered a city, for what purpose, and for how long. A similar logic applied at the neighbourhood level. Ottoman cities, where broad avenues and thoroughfares were relatively rare, generally consisted of dead-end streets. Özer Ergenç defines Ottoman neighbourhoods as “places inhabited by a community of individuals who know each other, are to some extent accountable for one another’s behaviour, and live in social solidarity.”<sup>47</sup> In order to settle in a neighbourhood, it was necessary to have the endorsement (*kefalet*) of an existing resident. The first reason for this requirement was undoubtedly security-related, ensuring clarity regarding the character and background of the newcomer. A relationship of mutual responsibility thus formed between the newcomer and the guarantor. According to Islamic law, all members of a neighbourhood are considered mutually responsible, as in cases where a crime such as murder occurred

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<sup>46</sup> Vehbi states that children should not sing, especially not folk songs. Even if performed secretly at home, someone inevitably hears it, and the child is labelled as dissolute. For this reason, he tells his own child to listen to music only in distant places and only in sorrowful times, as a means of temporary escape. See Necdet Sakaoğlu, ‘Lütfiye-i Vehbi’de (18.yy) Çocuk Eğitimiyle İlgili Görüşler’, *Çocuk Kültürü 1. Ulusal Çocuk Kültürü Kongresi*, ed. Bekir Onur (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi, 1997), 78–81.

<sup>47</sup> Özer Ergenç, ‘Osmanlı Şehrindeki “Mahalle”nin İşlevleri ve Nitelikleri Üzerine’, *Osmanlı Tarihi Yazıları: Şehir, Toplum, Devlet*, TVYY, İstanbul 2013, 75.

and the perpetrator could not be found, the nearest neighbourhood or village could be held accountable. The second reason was fiscal in nature. Neighbourhoods constituted the smallest administrative and financial units in Ottoman cities. Taxes assessed at the city level were apportioned to neighbourhoods and collected collectively. Therefore, attention was paid to whether the new resident would be financially capable of fulfilling their tax obligations.<sup>48</sup>

In the Ottoman Empire, once children reached a certain age and began to venture outside the home, they entered into a tightly knit community in which members were collectively responsible for one another's behaviour. As evident from court records, even an individual's affiliation with the city was often defined through their membership in a specific neighbourhood. Children, undoubtedly, internalized this sense of belonging. While playing in alleyways and courtyards, they spent time in the company of adults and acquired various forms of knowledge through observation and interaction. At times, children also participated in activities beyond the neighbourhood, such as going fishing with older community members.<sup>49</sup>

In the Ottoman context, going outdoors at night was generally prohibited. Exceptions to this rule occurred primarily during Ramadan and public festivals. Even then, participation was occasionally restricted for women and children. For instance, in 1769, the *kadı* (chief judge) of Istanbul prohibited the attendance of women and children at a festival held to celebrate a military victory, citing the risks of fire and abduction as justification for the ban.<sup>50</sup>

The most significant activity undertaken by children within the neighbourhood was playing games with other children. A wide variety of games, transmitted orally from generation to generation, existed throughout Ottoman society. Children played in nearly all spaces they found suitable for their activities. In doing so, they not only engaged in recreation but also gradually adapted themselves to the social environment and to the

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<sup>48</sup> Işık Tamdoğan-Abel, 'Osmanlı Döneminden Günümüz Türkiye'sine "Bizim Mahalle"', *İstanbul* 40, İstanbul 2002, 67.

<sup>49</sup> BOA, A.MKT. MV. 124/70.

<sup>50</sup> Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul 1700-1800*, University of California Press, Los Angeles 2010, 33.

individuals with whom they would interact in adulthood. The fact that each game had its own set of rules taught children the importance of adhering to the norms and regulations of social life.

In the palace, the first companions of the *şehzades* were young boys admitted to the Enderun School. For instance, when Sultan Abdülmecid, born in 1813, reached the age of four, a service staff was assembled for him, and two boys named Salim and Selim from the *Seferli Odası* were brought in to serve as his playmates. Princess Şadiye Osmanoğlu, daughter of Sultan Abdülhamid II, recalled in her memoirs that once the princes began to walk, they were allowed into the garden under the supervision of their nannies, where they played with children of their own age. She also noted that from time to time, young Black boys—some of whom would later become harem eunuchs—joined these playgroups.<sup>51</sup> The *hanım* sultans (imperial princesses), on the other hand, played with their siblings within the harem and were occasionally taken on outings in carriages accompanied by their nannies. A four-wheeled, two-seater carriage from the 19th century, pulled by goats, provides insight into the structure of such vehicles used for these excursions.<sup>52</sup>

The *şehzades* and *hanım* sultans played their games within the protection of enclosed palace walls. Children primarily engaged in various games inside the household. Among these, Abdülaziz Bey lists games such as *El El Üstünde Kimin Eli Var*, *Kovuklardan Balık Kaçtı*, *Köşe Kapmaca*, *Arada Kerede*, *Turanın Ucu Nerede*, *Tura Oyunu*, *Yüzük Oyunu*, *Değnek Çekişmek*, *Yumruk Açmak*, *Kör Ebe*, *Uçtu Uçtu*, and *Giriş Çıkış*.<sup>53</sup> As children grew older, not only their personal spaces but also the settings of their games began to change. Children living in mansions played safely within their gardens, where private and secure spaces were available. However, not every child had access to such private areas. In the absence of designated playgrounds, children played in alleys, cemeteries, open fields, vacant lots, and the ruins of old structures. Abdülaziz Bey also lists a number of games played outdoors. These include *Hamam Kızdı*, *Adım Atmaca*, *Kapamazsın*, *Paça Pişti*, *Uzun Eşek*, *Ebeme Pilav Pişirdim*, *Köşe Kapmaca*, *Yarış*, *Kolan Vurmak*, *Kaydırak*

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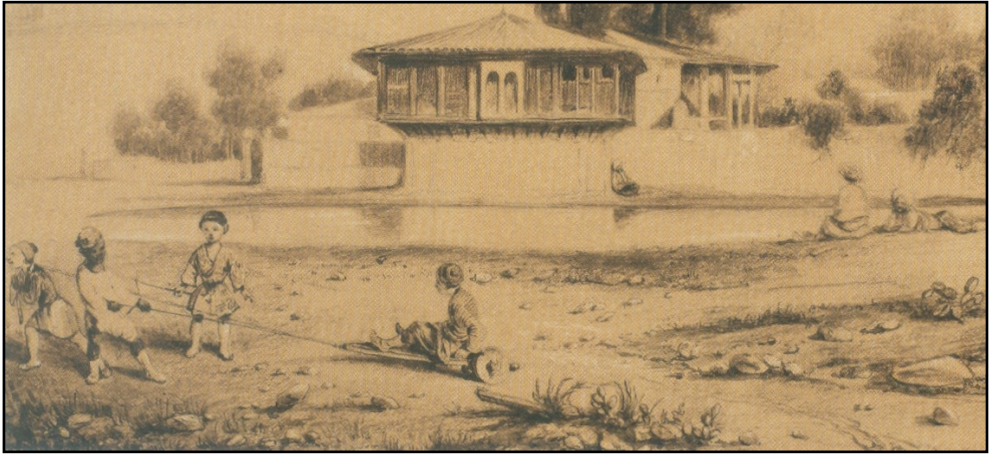
<sup>51</sup> Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları*, 154.

<sup>52</sup> Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları*, 155.

<sup>53</sup> Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*, 39.

*Taşı Atmak, Hamamda Deli Var, Seke Seke Ben Geldim, Kabaramazsın Kel Fatma, Anan Güzel Sen Çirkin, Kör Ebe, Topaç Çevirmek, Kartopu, and Kızak Kaydırmak.*

Metin And notes that in Anatolian village life, particularly during times of crisis, children were often made to perform certain magical practices that resembled ritual games. These acts were carried out on specific days or during particular periods, in which children would go from house to house singing songs and reciting rhymes specific to the ritual. Through symbolic gestures, they were believed to distribute the ritual's blessing and power to every household, while also collecting food and gifts. One notable example took place during times of drought, when a doll—made by tying two sticks into the shape of a cross and dressing it with rags—was carried from house to house. As part of the ritual, water would be poured over the doll. All aspects of the ritual were entrusted to children—not because it was considered a trivial game, but because the villagers genuinely believed that the performance would bring rain.<sup>54</sup>



**Figure 3** – Children playing by a stream with a simple, self-made wheeled toy.  
Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, *Bord d'une Rivière*, 1831.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Metin And, 'Geleneksel Kültürde Çocuğun Yeri ve Anlamı', *Çocuk Kültürü*, ed. Bekir Onur, A. Ü. Çocuk Kültürü Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi, Ankara 1997, 398–399.

<sup>55</sup> *Batılı'nın Fırçasıyla Ege'nin Bu Yakası Sergi Kataloğu*, Arkas Sanat Merkezi, İzmir 2012, 112.

## V. Heroes of the Ceremonies: *Âmin Alayı* and Circumcision

In Ottoman cities and many rural centres, boys who had reached a certain age would begin attending the neighbourhood *mektep* (elementary school). There was no fixed age or legal obligation for starting school. Primary education became compulsory only for children in Istanbul with the promulgation of Sultan Mahmud II's imperial edict in 1824.<sup>56</sup>

In the Ottoman Empire, children's education varied according to religious affiliation. Until the modernization of education, instruction was generally under the authority of religious figures. Among Jews, for example, following the education received within the family, boys from the 18th century onward would first attend preschools (*maestra*) where they learned prayers, and then, at the age of seven, they were sent to elementary school. There were two types of elementary schools among Ottoman Jews. The first were *meldar* schools, where around 50 to 60 children studied together in a large hall under the guidance of a poor rabbi. The second type were Talmud Torah schools, which had multiple classrooms, offered a more advanced level of education, housed rich libraries, and also prepared children for rabbinical training. The language of instruction was Judeo-Spanish (Ladino), and the teaching method was based on translation from Hebrew and memorization. Children began by reading the Hebrew alphabet, then learned the vowel markings, and finally proceeded to read words, memorize prayers, and study the Torah.<sup>57</sup> In the 19th century, Western Jews viewed education as the key to the socio-economic development of Ottoman Jewry. Following the visit of Montefiore to Istanbul in 1840, Turkish began to be taught in Jewish educational institutions. In 1860, a fundamental reform of Jewish education was initiated through the efforts of the Alliance Israélite Universelle.<sup>58</sup>

Orthodox children living in the Ottoman Empire also received their education from religious clergy. Some Greek Orthodox families who had become wealthy through trade sent their children to schools in Europe to

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<sup>56</sup> Reşad Ekrem Koçu, 'Çocuk. İstanbul Çocuklarının İlk Tahsil Mecburiyeti Fermanı', *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 8, İstanbul 1966, 4065.

<sup>57</sup> Siren Bora, *Başlangıçtan Günümüze Tire'de Yahudi İzleri*, Tire Belediyesi, Ankara 2018, 83.

<sup>58</sup> Bora, *Başlangıçtan Günümüze Tire'de Yahudi İzleri*, 84.

pursue education abroad. Following the Imperial Edict of Reform (*Islahat Fermanı*), lay members were admitted into the governing council of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. With the authority to establish educational institutions granted to the Patriarchate under the edict, numerous schools were founded that operated under a religious framework but primarily offered a secular education. In 1861, the Philological Society of Constantinople (Istanbul Helen Philology Society) was established with the principal aim of promoting education among Ottoman Greeks and thereby preventing the erosion of their cultural identity. By 1879, this organization had effectively assumed the role of a ministry of education for the Greek Orthodox population in the empire. Greater attention was paid to Ottoman cities where Greek was not the native language of the local Orthodox population. In these schools, alongside Orthodox saints, children were introduced to classical figures such as Plato, Pericles, and Homer, thereby fostering a Greco-Christian synthesis.<sup>59</sup>

Muslim families in the Ottoman Empire typically sent their children to *mekteps* located within or near their neighbourhoods. While the specific initiation rituals for school attendance among children of other faiths remain unclear, Muslim children customarily began their education with a ceremony known as the *Âmin Alayı* (“Âmin Procession”). As there was no fixed starting age for schooling, there was likewise no designated date for enrolment during the year.<sup>60</sup> Until the 19th century, *şehzades* received their education in the *Şehzade Mektebi*, located on the upper floor of the harem in Topkapı Palace.<sup>61</sup> Following the construction of Dolmabahçe Palace in the 19th century, royal children began to take their lessons there. Esemnli notes that rooms on the lower floors of the *Harem-i Hümayun* and *Hünkâr Dairesi* (located in Block Five) served not only for imperial duties but were

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<sup>59</sup> Elçin Macar, *Cumhuriyet Döneminde İstanbul Rum Patrikhanesi, İletişim*, İstanbul, 2003, 56; Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, *Kutsal Sentez Yunan ve Türk Milliyetçiliğine Dini Aşılacak*, trans. İdil Çetin, Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul 2014, 60; Athanasia Anagnostopoulou, ‘Tanzimat ve Rum Milletinin Kurumsal Çerçevesi’, 19. Yüzyıl İstanbul’unda Gayrimüslimler, ed. Pinelopi Stathis, trans. Foti-Stefo Benlisoy, TVYY, İstanbul 1999, 22.

<sup>60</sup> Üner, ‘Osmanlı’da Mahalle ve Çocuk’, 634.

<sup>61</sup> Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları*, 173.



also used for the education of the sultan's children.<sup>62</sup> Today, Room No. 110—open to visitors—can be identified as a former *şehzade mektebi* (prince's school) based on the presence of small and large lecterns (*rahle*), bookcases, and desks. Princess Ayşe Osmanoğlu stated that Sultan Abdülmecid had a room located below his own bedroom prepared as a classroom for the princes and his daughter Fatma Sultan. During the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, education for royal children was carried out at Yıldız Palace. Like other Muslim children, the princes began their schooling with the *Âmin Alayı*, also known as *Bed'-i Besmele*, a ceremonial initiation into learning. The sultans shared these ceremonies with the public. Before the procession, the *şehzade* was presented with educational materials that would be needed during his studies, such as a lectern (*rahle*), a *cüz kesesi* (a pouch for Qur'anic sections), and an *elifba* (alphabet primer). During the ceremony, the *seyhülislam* would first recite the letters of the alphabet to the child, then offer a prayer and formally entrust the *şehzade* to his tutor. The most magnificent of these ceremonies was reportedly held in 1832 for Sultan Mahmud II's son, Abdülmecid. It took place on the Asian side of Istanbul, in the İbrahim Ağa meadow, and lasted three days. Contemporary accounts claim that 24,000 soldiers pitched tents for the event, the audience numbered around 150,000, and approximately 6,000 young students participated in the festivities.<sup>63</sup> In later periods, these ceremonies began to be held indoors within palace settings. The *bed'-i besmele* ceremony for Princes Reşad, Kemaleddin, and Burhaneddin Efendi took place in 1857 at Beşiktaş Palace, while that of Abdülmecid's five sons was held in 1858 at Çırağan Palace.<sup>64</sup>

More modest versions of the *bed'-i besmele* ceremonies held for *şehzades* in the palace were also commonly practiced among the general public. The families would inform relatives and acquaintances in advance of the day the *bed'-i besmele* ceremony was to take place, and preparations were made accordingly. The *mektep* teacher would inform the children beforehand that an *Âmin Alayı* procession would be held, and on that day,

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<sup>62</sup> Esemenli, *Osmanlı Sarayı ve Dolmabahçe*, 122; Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları*, 173.

<sup>63</sup> Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları*, 173–175.

<sup>64</sup> Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları*, 176.

the children would arrive at school well-dressed and groomed. The procession would proceed in a specific order: first, the *ilahici başı* (lead hymn singer) and the group of *ilahiciler* (hymn singers), followed by the boys, then the girls, all walking in a line to the home of the child who was about to begin school. Once the father and invited guests entered the room prepared for the ceremony, the teacher and the child would recite the *Besmele-i Şerife* (the sacred Islamic invocation, “In the name of God”) together and offer prayers. The child would then begin reading from the *elifba cüzü* (alphabet section of the Qur’an primer) with the invocation of the *basmala*. After completing the letters, the ceremony would conclude with collective *âmin* recitations and final prayers.<sup>65</sup>



**Figure 4** – Amadeo Preziosi, Visit to Eyüp Sultan.<sup>66</sup>

Schoolchildren can be seen on the side, having just left class.

*Sıbyan mektepleri* (elementary schools) did not follow a standardized curriculum. Nevertheless, they ensured that children learned to read the Qur’an, acquired basic knowledge of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), learned how to perform ritual prayer, and became familiar with the life of the

<sup>65</sup> Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*, 59–60.

<sup>66</sup> *Batılı’nın Fırçasıyla Ege’nin Bu Yakası Sergi Kataloğu*, Arkas Sanat Merkezi, İzmir 2012, 90.

Prophet. Some instructors also supplemented the curriculum with folktales, legends, and heroic narratives.<sup>67</sup>

From the second half of the 18th century onward—initially in military education and later in medicine during the 19th century—educational reforms began to gradually transform the structure of children’s schooling. These reforms were introduced during the reign of Mahmud II, as *sıbyan mektepleri* were increasingly seen as inadequate for preparing students for the newly emerging military and technical vocational schools. With the establishment of *rüşdiye* (secondary schools), *idadi* (high schools), and *sultani* (imperial lycées), children slowly began to encounter a more secular and modern educational system.

In world history, special rituals specifically for girls have been exceedingly rare. Apart from baptism in Christianity, most religious traditions maintain distinct customs for boys and girls. In Judaism, male children are circumcised on the eighth day after birth, whereas in Islam, circumcision is typically performed at odd-numbered ages such as seven, nine, or eleven.<sup>68</sup> Each family prepared for the ritual according to its financial means. Undoubtedly, the most elaborate and lavish circumcision ceremonies were those held for *şehzades* (Ottoman princes). Grand preparations were made for these events, known as *Sur-i Hıtân* (Imperial Circumcision Festivities). The circumcision festivities held by Sultan Murad III for his son Prince Mehmed, those organized by Sultan Ahmed III for his sons in Istanbul, and the celebration arranged by Sultan Mehmed IV for his son Mustafa (the future Mustafa II) in Edirne were particularly long and elaborate. These celebrations were recorded in literary works, and in some cases, illustrated manuscript copies were prepared and presented to the sultan.

In 1836, the circumcision ceremonies for Princes Abdülmecid and Abdülaziz were held jointly with the festivities for the marriage of Sultan

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<sup>67</sup> Araz, ‘Osmanlı İstanbul’unda Çocuk Olmak’, 487.

<sup>68</sup> Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*, 39. Murad Efendi (183) states that Muslim boys are circumcised between the ages of 9 and 12. However, this is not always the case. For instance, Sultan Mehmed III is circumcised at the age of sixteen, just before being sent to govern a province, see Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları*, 130.

Mahmud II's daughter, Mihrimah Sultan, to Mehmed Said Pasha. In 1847, a circumcision ceremony was organized for Sultan Abdülmecid's sons—Princes Mehmed, Murad, and Abdülhamid. On such occasions, when princes or the sons of wealthy families were circumcised, children from underprivileged families were often included in the ceremony as well. For example, during the 1847 circumcision festivities for the princes, which lasted twelve days, approximately one hundred additional children were also circumcised. Similarly, when Princes Mehmed Reşad, Kemaleddin, Burhaneddin, and Nureddin underwent circumcision in 1856, nearly six hundred other children participated in the ritual.<sup>69</sup>



**Figure 5** – The Circumcision Room in Dolmabahçe Palace.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları*, 144–146.

<sup>70</sup> Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları*, 145.

The circumcision ceremonies held by ordinary people were, of course, far less extravagant than those conducted in the palace. According to their means, families would first select a skilled and reputable circumciser (*sünnetçi*) and set a date for the event. The child's father would then prepare and distribute written invitations (*davet tezkeresi*) to male guests, while the mother, either personally or through intermediaries, would notify women based on the family's social standing and personal relations. Following the invitations, the family would begin planning the meals to be served and select entertainers—typically jugglers or illusionists—to amuse the circumcised child (or children) and their guests.<sup>71</sup> A special circumcision bed was placed near a window facing the garden or the street, and the entire space was elaborately decorated. The child to be circumcised would be dressed in a fine ceremonial outfit. This outfit was typically made from a fabric called *lahurakî* or *şalakî*, often in blue to ward off the evil eye, and left open at the front. Matching soft-topped skullcaps were sewn from the same fabric, and a white silk sash was tied around the child's waist.<sup>72</sup>

On the day of the ceremony, the entire household would dress early and prepare for the arrival of guests. The child's school friends were especially invited, and they too would arrive at the house wearing their finest clothes. The boy would be prepared for the circumcision in the *selamlık* (the men's quarters), where his nightclothes were removed and he was dressed in the special outfit made for the occasion. The circumciser (*sünnetçi*) would cover his surgical instruments with handkerchiefs to prevent the child from seeing them. The boy's hands were crossed behind his back as he was brought into the room where the procedure would take place. Meanwhile, jugglers or entertainers (*hokkabazlar*) would beat their *def* (frame drums) loudly and rhythmically to prevent the other children from hearing the cries of the circumcised child. During this noise, the circumcision would be performed, and the child would be bandaged and then carried back to the ceremonial bed amid the continued beating of the

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<sup>71</sup> Abdülaziz Bey and Muhibzade Celal state that these jesters are Jewish, see Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*, 41. It is noted that the art of jesting is introduced to the Ottoman Empire from Spain through Jewish communities, see Metin And, *Geleneksel Türk Tiyatrosu: Kukla, Karagöz, Ortaoyunu*, Bilgi Yayınevi, Ankara 1969, 52.

<sup>72</sup> Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*, 42–43.

drums. The performers would remain at the bedside, playing their instruments in an effort to entertain and comfort the child.<sup>73</sup>

## VI. Child Labor, Beggary, and Orphans

Today, the association of children with the world of labour is widely regarded as unacceptable by many. However, from the earliest periods of history (and even in contemporary times) child labour has existed. In the Ottoman Empire, male children living in urban areas who were not enslaved would typically attend neighbourhood *mekteps* (elementary schools) and, after a short period of basic instruction, would face two general paths: either they would continue on to a medrese (Islamic school), although the emergence of Western-style secondary schools in the 19th century gradually altered this trajectory, or they would be apprenticed to a master in order to learn a trade. Abdülmecit Mutaş notes in his study that, although rarely, some children were compelled to work in various jobs due to financial hardship.<sup>74</sup> Still, the practice of placing children as apprentices under a master for vocational training was a tradition aimed at future skill development and remains common even today. When a child was to be apprenticed into a craft, the father, guardian, or an intermediary would petition a senior member of the desired guild. Upon acceptance, the child would be assigned to a master. In the period when guilds (*lonca*) were active, this request was evaluated by the guild council. If accepted, the child's father would send to the guild approximately two *kıyye* (Ottoman weight measure) of ground coffee, several *kıyye* of sugar for sherbet, some aloeswood (*ödağacı*), and a quantity of rosewater. Sherbet would be prepared on-site with the sugar, incense burners would be lit with aloeswood, and rosewater would be poured into sprinklers (*gülabdan*), as the guild members awaited the arrival of the child and his father. Once they arrived, prayers were recited, the child was introduced to the guild, and formally assigned to his master.<sup>75</sup> A 1824 imperial edict sharply condemned the practice of parents removing children as young as five or six from school

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<sup>73</sup> Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*, 46–47.

<sup>74</sup> Abdülmecit Mutaş, 'Osmanlı'da Kent Ekonomisinin En Küçük Bireyleri: Çocuklar', *Birinci İktisat Tarihi Kongresi Tebliğleri*, Vol. 2, İstanbul Ticaret Odası, İstanbul 2010, 170.

<sup>75</sup> Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*, 95.

and placing them into apprenticeships solely for the purpose of earning money.<sup>76</sup>

Apprenticeship training for children could take place under a master in the local market of their city,<sup>77</sup> but in some cases, children were also sent to work as apprentices in other cities, often to individuals whom the family knew or trusted.<sup>78</sup> In the Ottoman Empire, artisans and craftsmen came from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. Apprentices and masters could belong to the same religion or to different ones. For example, Abraham, a Jewish subject living in the town of Tulça, worked as an apprentice under Tütüncü Ali, an Iranian subject. Similarly, a 12-year-old boy named Muharrem, originally from Kayseri, went to Mersin to learn weaving and stayed in the same room as his master, İsmail, at the Abacı Han. A Şehrengiz (urban gazetteer) from the late 19th century notes that certain professions continued to be dominated by specific ethnic groups.<sup>79</sup> For instance, it records that domestic servants were mostly Armenians from Van, gunpowder makers were predominantly Iranians, and rag dealers and glaziers were largely Jews. For other trades where no particular ethnic designation was mentioned, it can be assumed that the composition was more mixed. It is clear that the wages paid to these apprentice children were not substantial.

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<sup>76</sup> Araz, 'Osmanlı İstanbul'unda Çocuk Olmak', 488.

<sup>77</sup> BOA, A. MKT.UM., 466/46. A.MKT.MVL 13/5-1. Archival documents generally reflect disputes between apprentices and their masters. One such document describes the conflicts between Abraham, a Jew residing in the city of Tulça, and Hacı Ali, a tobacco merchant of Iranian origin.

<sup>78</sup> BOA, A.MKT.MVL, 145/100. Twelve-year-old Muharrem was sent from his family in Kayseri to Mersin to apprentice with Muhtaf İsmail Efendi (a weaver), a friend of his father.

<sup>79</sup> This literary genre, whose literal meaning is "one who stirs up the city," includes poems written by poets for handsome young apprentices. While many cities from Urfa to Edirne are represented in this genre, only the Şehrengiz of Istanbul is written for women; the others are written for men, and their total number is 68. See Schick, *Hûbân-nâme-i Nev-edâ*, 15.





**Figure 6 – Coffeehouse Apprentice and Basket Maker.<sup>80</sup>**  
Schoolchildren can be seen on the side, having just left class.

Throughout Ottoman history, Istanbul and other major cities experienced waves of migration. Following the planned internal migration implemented by Mehmed II, large numbers of people flocked to Istanbul during the Celali Rebellions and the Cretan Wars.<sup>81</sup> From the 18th century onward, territorial losses led to significant migrations from the lost lands into Istanbul. These demographic pressures were further intensified by migrations from Circassia and the Rumelian provinces, resulting in substantial urban population growth. This rise in urban populations coincided with the establishment of industrial facilities. Factory owners

<sup>80</sup> Irvin Cemil Schick, *Hûbân-nâme-i Nev-edâ: Bir İstanbul Esnaf Güzellemesi*, Kalem ve Hokka Yayınları, İstanbul 2017, 6, 24.

<sup>81</sup> Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul 1700-1800*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 2010, 35-39



increasingly relied on women and children from Anatolia and the Balkans as a source of cheap labour. One such example was the İplikhane-i Amire (Imperial Spinning Mill), which was established in the 1830s to supply the needs of the Ottoman navy. The factory predominantly employed orphaned children. Initially, Orthodox Armenian orphans from Erzurum, Van, and Sivas were brought in. When their numbers proved insufficient, an additional 100 Catholic and 100 Greek Orthodox orphans were brought from Ürgüp and Niğde, regions known for mohair weaving near Ankara.<sup>82</sup> In 1835, Kurdish children were also recruited to expand the workforce at the spinning mill.<sup>83</sup>

In contrast to their urban peers, children living in rural areas had little to no experience with formal schooling. From an early age, they assisted their families with labour. Children worked alongside their parents in a variety of tasks such as farming and herding livestock. Following the death of his father, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, along with his mother and sister, moved to Rapla village near Langaza to live with his uncle. There, he and his sister were assigned to guard a broad bean field. Atatürk later recalled that he and his sister Makbule sat in a small shelter in the field, scaring away crows that tried to damage the crops.<sup>84</sup>

The participation of girls in working life was more limited than that of boys. Girls typically assisted with household chores or worked alongside their mothers. For instance, a tradition that existed in Ankara from the 16th to the 20th centuries involved poor families placing their young daughters as domestic servants in the homes of wealthy families. In such households, the girls would be raised, cared for, and assigned age-appropriate duties.

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<sup>82</sup> Donald Quatert, 'İslahatlar Devri 1812-1914', *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Ekonomik ve Sosyal Tarihi*, ed. Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataret, Eren Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2004, 1012. After Elif Charlotte Nelson-Keleş, 'Bir Metropol Gerçeği: İplikhane-i Amire'de Çalıştırılan İşçi Çocuklar', *Geçmişten Günümüze Şehir ve Çocuk*, ed. Osman Köse, Vol. 2, Canik Belediyesi, Samsun 2016, 867.

<sup>83</sup> Nelson-Keleş, 'Bir Metropol Gerçeği', 867.

<sup>84</sup> Alattin Uca, 'Atatürk'ün Doğumu ve Çocukluk Yılları (1881-1893)', *A.Ü. Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi* 31, Erzurum 2006, 7.

When the time came, they were married off, and their dowries were prepared by the family that had hosted them.<sup>85</sup>



**Figure 7** – Ovide Curtovich, *Junge Amphorenträgerin*, 1910.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Suraiya Faroqhi, *Osmanlı Kültürü ve Gündelik Yaşam*, trans. Elif Kılıç, TVYY, İstanbul 2011, 141.

<sup>86</sup> *Batılı'nın Fırçasıyla Ege'nin Bu Yakası Sergi Kataloğu*, Arkas Sanat Merkezi, İzmir 2012, 109.

Not only in Ankara, but throughout the empire, young girls were employed in domestic services in large cities. They were referred to by various terms such as “servant” (*hizmetçi*), “door girl” (*kapı kızı*), “foster child” (*besleme*), or “adopted daughter” (*evlatlık*). In a study by Araz and Kokdaş, archival records show that between 1845 and 1911, a total of 259 girls were brought to the capital to be employed in domestic service. Additionally, 177 records were identified in the court registers of Ordu, Kastamonu, Safranbolu, and Gerede concerning girls sent to Istanbul for domestic labour.<sup>87</sup> The study suggests that the great famine which affected Central Anatolia and its surrounding regions in the mid-1840s may have compelled families to send their daughters into domestic service. During this period, most of the girls brought from rural areas were between the ages of five and fifteen.<sup>88</sup>

Not every child is fortunate enough to find the shelter of a home environment. For various reasons, some children end up on the streets. In the 19th century, the emerging “child problem” became a topic of concern for bureaucrats both in the Ottoman Empire and globally. Children who were visibly active in the streets began to be perceived as sources of urban misery and as potential juvenile delinquents. Their primary “offenses” were wandering the streets, sustaining themselves through begging or theft, and being exposed to such a lifestyle that could eventually lead them to vagrancy.<sup>89</sup> In various parts of Istanbul, children either begged on their own or accompanied women to elicit public sympathy. Even very young children, including infants, were used as tools for begging. This situation also introduced a serious safety issue, as children were frequently at risk of being trampled in crowded spaces.<sup>90</sup> In addition to begging, it is known that some children engaged in theft. Between 1883 and 1884, the “Pıtır Ali Gang,” which burglarized 18 houses, consisted of its leader Pıtır Ali, two 15-year-old horse-cart drivers named Osman and Kız Şevket, and two 13-year-olds named Laz Harun and Güzel Hasan. During a burglary at a

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<sup>87</sup> İrfan Kokdaş-Yahya Araz, ‘İstanbul’da Ev İçi Hizmetlerinde İstihdam Edilen Kuzeybatı Anadolu Kız Çocuklarının Göç Ağları Üzerine Bir değerlendirme (1845-1911)’, *TİD*, S.33/1, İzmir 2018, 44-45.

<sup>88</sup> Kokdaş-Araz, ‘İstanbul’da Ev İçi Hizmetlerinde İstihdam’, 46.

<sup>89</sup> Maksudyan, ‘Evli Evine, Köylü Köyüne, Evi Olmayan?’, 160.

<sup>90</sup> Özgün, ‘Osmanlı Dünyasında Çocuk Dilenciler’, 672.

major's home, the creaking of a wooden staircase woke the household, prompting three children to flee; however, Laz Harun was caught. Upon his testimony, the rest of the gang was apprehended. Following the trial, Pıtır Ali was sentenced to fifteen years of penal servitude in chains, while the four children received five years of imprisonment each.<sup>91</sup>

Thanks to reformist statesmen who, during their time in Europe, admired certain practices and sought to adapt them to the Ottoman context, numerous new steps were taken regarding children. According to Nazan Maksudyan, the modern state initiated a coercive and violent “child collection” campaign in the major cities of the Empire during the second half of the 19th century, with the dual aim of protecting children from danger and protecting society from dangerous children. She claims that urban authorities and police forces confined children whom reformers deemed undesirable within four walls.<sup>92</sup> Among the children who were gathered were not only those guilty of crimes, but also beggars, orphans, and abandoned minors. Meanwhile, Özgün argues that due to the growing formal interest of the state, the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century was relatively successful in rehabilitating child beggars and helping them acquire professions, thereby combating begging effectively.<sup>93</sup> Reformist statesman Mithat Pasha established the first reformatory (*ıslahhane*) in Niş in 1863, followed by others in Ruse and Sofia, which soon spread across the Empire. In a 53-article regulation that he prepared, divided into three parts, the first section detailed the admission requirements, curriculum, vocational branches, and stages of instruction for the reformatory. The second section outlined its operational procedures, staffing, and financial regulations, while the final part addressed disciplinary rules and student reward mechanisms.<sup>94</sup>

In 1867, a circular sent across the Empire mandated each province to establish a reformatory for the collection, protection, and education of vagrants, beggars, and orphaned children; within two years, fifteen new

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<sup>91</sup> Koçu, ‘Çocuk’, 4076–4078.

<sup>92</sup> Maksudyan, ‘Evli Evine, Köylü Köyüne, Evi Olmayan?’, 160.

<sup>93</sup> Özgün, ‘Osmanlı Dünyasında Çocuk Dilenciler’, 677.

<sup>94</sup> Atalay, ‘Sokak Çocukları İçin Başarılmış Bir Proje’, 159.

reformatories were established. Over the next thirty years, more than thirty such institutions were founded.<sup>95</sup>

In 1873, Darüşşafaka was established to serve orphaned and underprivileged children. Located in Istanbul, this school was grounded in the philanthropic initiative of the Cemiyet-i Tedrisiye-i İslamiye (Islamic Education Society), which had been founded under a sultanic decree dated March 30, 1864, by prominent statesmen such as Yusuf Ziya Pasha, Gazi Ahmed Muhtar Pasha, Vidinli Tevfik Pasha, Sakızlı Ahmed Pasha, and Ali Naki Efendi, with the aim of providing education to the disadvantaged Muslim youth.<sup>96</sup>

The formation of the *Eytam Nazırlığı* (Orphans Directorate) in 1851 marked the beginning of formal policies for the care of orphans, which accelerated notably during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, largely due to his personal involvement.<sup>97</sup> Deeply affected by the death of his daughter Hatice Sultan following an illness, the Sultan decided to establish a modern paediatric hospital to serve impoverished children. Funded by the Hazine-i Hassa-i Hümayun (Imperial Privy Purse), the Hamidiye Etfal Hospital was regarded as a remarkably modern institution for its time.<sup>98</sup>

## VII. Toys as a Source of Happiness

In the pre-modern period, there were very few items specifically produced for children. Clothing, for instance, was often merely a smaller version of adult garments. One of the few possessions tailored to children was toys. Across all geographies and cultures of the world, regardless of how drastically life conditions may have changed, children and toys have always coexisted.<sup>99</sup> Most toys were simple instruments made from sticks,

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<sup>95</sup> Maksudyan, 'Evli Evine, Köylü Köyüne, Evi Olmayan?', 162.

<sup>96</sup> Vehbi Ünal, 'Osmanlının Son Dönemlerinde Korumaya Muhtaç Çocuklar İçin Kurulan Sosyal Hizmet Kuruluşları', *CÜ Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 36/2, Sivas 2012, 15–16.

<sup>97</sup> Özgün, 'Osmanlı Dünyasında Çocuk Dilenciler', 677.

<sup>98</sup> Nadir Özbek, 'II. Abdülhamid ve Kimsesiz Çocuklar Darülhayr-ı Âli', *Devr-i Hamid Sultan II. Abdülhamid*, ed. Metin Hülagü et al., Vol. 4, Erciyes Üniversitesi, Kayseri 2011, 7–8.

<sup>99</sup> Olcay Pullukçuoğlu Yapucu, 'Osmanlı Kentlerinde Oyuncak Satıcıları', *Geçmişten Günümüze Şehir ve Çocuk*, ed. Osman Köse, Vol. 2, Canik Belediyesi, Samsun 2016, 1181.

wood, or cloth. For example, when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk moved to the farm where his uncle worked as a steward following the death of his father, he (like most children) crafted his own toys.<sup>100</sup> However, there was one exceptional city and its fortunate children in regard to toys: Istanbul, specifically the district of Eyüp, which has been home to toy makers since very early times. Evliya Çelebi mentioned 105 toy makers operating in 100 shops. In the 19th century, Eyüp's toy makers were still concentrated in the Oyuncakçılar Street of the Cami-i Kebir neighbourhood.<sup>101</sup> Murad Efendi remarked that "unless we consider the newer versions decorated with red and blue spots and topped with cylindrical chimneys to resemble steamships as innovations, the toys have been manufactured according to the same models and principles since the reign of Sultan Ahmed."<sup>102</sup> Toys produced in Eyüp were not only sold in local shops but also in herbalist stores (*aktar*) across other districts of Istanbul and by itinerant toy vendors.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, *çerçi* peddlers who sold goods in rural areas likely brought these toys to children living in the countryside.<sup>104</sup>

Information about toys produced in Eyüp is provided by Ahmet Rasim. There was a wide variety of toys such as *şak şak*, *kaynana zırlıtısı* (noisemaker), *şeytan minaresi*, *hacı yatmaz* (roly-poly toy), acrobats, Ferris wheels, swings, mirrored cradles, wooden swords, reed rifles, string-propelled arrows, drums, tambourines, *tef* (frame drums), *darbuka* (goblet drums), pinwheels, spinning tops, storks, grasshoppers, canaries, flutes, reed pipes, whistles, mortars, water jugs, and toy carts.<sup>105</sup> Additionally, there were larger amusement devices that could carry, swing, spin, lift, and lower children—referred to as "big toys". These were particularly common during holidays and special occasions, enjoyed not only by children but also by adults. Items such as swings, Ferris wheels, and carousels fell into this category. In some festivities, large swings were decorated with fruits or

<sup>100</sup> Uca, 'Atatürk'ün Doğumu ve Çocukluk Yılları', 8.

<sup>101</sup> Pullukçuoğlu Yapucu, 'Osmanlı Kentlerinde Oyuncak Satıcıları', 1183.

<sup>102</sup> Murad Efendi, *Türkiye Manzaraları*, 241.

<sup>103</sup> Füsün Kılıç, 'Eyüp Oyuncakçılığı ve İstanbul Belediyesi'nin Eyüp oyuncakları Koleksiyonu', *Toplumsal Tarihte Çocuk*, ed. Bekir Onur, TVYY, İstanbul 1994, 133.

<sup>104</sup> Pullukçuoğlu Yapucu, 'Osmanlı Kentlerinde Oyuncak Satıcıları', 1184.

<sup>105</sup> Kılıç, 'Eyüp Oyuncakçılığı', 133.

nuts hanging from the top, and competitions were held to see who could swing the highest and snatch them.<sup>106</sup>

The era of modernization and globalization undoubtedly had an impact on children's toys as well. With the Industrial Revolution, toys produced in Europe and America entered the Ottoman market. Stores in Beyoğlu belonging to companies such as Louvre and Bon Marché began selling a variety of toys. In the article titled *Children's Games* published in *Çocuklara Mahsus Gazete* (A Newspaper for Children), these imported toys were discussed, including bell-handed dolls, drums, Chinese dolls, roly-poly toys, somersaulting dolls, and mechanical rings, along with German dolls. The toy market grew considerably due to the influx of imported products. Toy weapons, which boys had played with for centuries, became so realistic that they were sometimes indistinguishable from actual firearms, leading to issues at customs. At one point, when the idea of exporting locally produced rag dolls was proposed, it was prohibited to send dolls dressed in traditional Muslim women's attire from Anatolia to foreign countries.<sup>107</sup>



**Figure 8** – Toys belonging to Dürrüşehvar Sultan, daughter of the last caliph, Abdülmecid Efendi.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>106</sup> And, *Geleneksel Türk Tiyatrosu*, 405.

<sup>107</sup> Pullukçuoğlu Yapucu, 'Osmanlı Kentlerinde Oyuncak Satıcıları', 1185.

<sup>108</sup> Tezcan, *Osmanlı Sarayının Çocukları*, 164–165.

Faced with competition from imported Western toys, the toy makers of Eyüp were unable to sustain their position and, by the early 20th century, had begun to lose both the diversity of their products and the mastery of their craftsmen.<sup>109</sup>

### VIII. Childhood Interrupted: Sickness and Death

In pre-modern times, high mortality rates prompted families to have as many children as possible. Children were the most affected by epidemics such as smallpox and plague, as well as by malnutrition and natural disasters. Due to the fragility of children's bodies and their limited resistance to death, midwives would traditionally rub salt on newborns immediately after birth to strengthen their physical resilience. Care was also taken to ensure that children's clothing did not hinder their physical development. In an article published in *Maarif* magazine, Mehmed Mesud emphasized that children should not be tightly swaddled and recommended dressing them in loose-fitting garments whenever possible. He described the ideal clothing for children as a long, wide shirt, and warned against the use of corsets or trousers due to their harmful effects. He also recommended fabrics made of cotton or silk and discouraged the use of linen garments.<sup>110</sup> Physicians who became aware of the dangers of contamination began to stress the importance of breastfeeding, either from the mother or from a trusted wet nurse, in order to protect infants from diseases potentially carried by other foods or animal milk.

Not all childhood illnesses resulted in death. There were diseases such as scarlet fever, smallpox, and whooping cough, from which children could recover with proper treatment. In the Ottoman Empire, it was customary to check on the well-being of the ill frequently, and such attention was given regardless of religious affiliation. Even if a student at a local school (*mektep*) fell ill, it was customary to send some oranges to the child, accompanied by the school assistant (*halife*).<sup>111</sup> However, when adequate treatment was not provided, these diseases could lead to severe outcomes. For instance, in 1888, a rise in child mortality in the village of Tenos (present-day Sarıkışla

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<sup>109</sup> Kılıç, 'Eyüp Oyuncakçılığı', 133.

<sup>110</sup> Mehmed Mesud, 'Çocuklara Elbise Giydirmenin Sıhate Olan Tesirâtı', *Maarif*, Vol. 7, İstanbul 1310, 92.

<sup>111</sup> Abdülaziz Bey, *Osmanlı Âdet, Merasim ve Tabirleri*, 274.



in Sivas) was attributed to a scarlet fever outbreak. In a report submitted to the Ministry of Public Health (Sıhhiye Nezareti), it was stated that the epidemic was brought under control through medical intervention.<sup>112</sup>

With the advent of more modern medical practices and the establishment of pharmacies, chemical substances gradually entered everyday life. An article published in the 83rd issue of *Mutaala* magazine outlined essential medications that should be kept in every household, including remedies specifically for children. For instance, it suggested that 30 grams of ammonia could be applied anywhere on the body except the eyes to treat insect bites. To relieve infant colic and abdominal pain, the article recommended administering 150 grams each of orange blossom water, mint water, and fennel water, with a dosage of four spoonfuls per day. In cases of diarrhoea, which could prove fatal if not treated properly, the article advised a preparation of 100 grams of mint or orange blossom water mixed with 10 grams of lactic acid,<sup>113</sup> to be given in three to four doses daily using a paste spoon. For cracks or lesions on the body, it recommended 100 grams of glycerine, and for sleeplessness in children, a 5-gram dose of Hyphad (Hipinal) was prescribed.<sup>114</sup>

Lady Montagu remarked on the high mortality rates, noting that women commonly gave birth to a large number of children. She observed that many of the women she knew had twelve or thirteen children, and that elderly women would boast of having had twenty-five or thirty. She also noted that when women became pregnant, people would say “God willing, it will be twins” as a hopeful expression. When she asked how they managed to care for so many children, the women reportedly replied: “Half of them die from the plague anyway.”<sup>115</sup> Due to such high child mortality, Ottoman inheritance records (*tereke*) do not show as many children as birth numbers would suggest. In her study on Eyüp’s inheritance registers, Tülay Artan found that non-Muslim families tended to have more children, with some families having up to nine, while Muslim families typically had a maximum

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<sup>112</sup> BOA, DH.MKT., 1756/16. The document is dated H.1308 in the Ottoman Archives; however, upon close examination, it is more likely to be from H.1306.

<sup>113</sup> It is referred to as Hamiz Leben (?) (Acide Lactique).

<sup>114</sup> ‘Aile Eczanesinin Çocuklara Aid Kısmı’, *Mutaala* 83, 23 Şevval 1315, 8.

<sup>115</sup> Lady Montagu, *Şark Mektupları*, trans. Ahmet Refik, ed. Dursun Gürlek, Timaş, İstanbul 1998, 92.

of five.<sup>116</sup> A similar pattern is observed in Tire, where records from 1833 to 1837 show that most families had between one and five children.<sup>117</sup>

Another disease that affected children was syphilis. In cases where either the mother or father was infected, or through non-sexual transmission, children could contract the disease, a condition referred to as “innocent syphilis.” In a lecture titled “Research on Endemic Syphilis in Anatolia,” Dr. During Pasha provided detailed information on this issue. He reported that, during examinations conducted in a village, over 100 out of 140 school-aged children were found to be infected with syphilis. The cause, he explained, was the communal use of a drinking vessel: an individual with syphilitic sores in the mouth had left saliva in the shared cup, and as children drank from it, the sharp edges of the container cut their lips, facilitating transmission of the disease to others.<sup>118</sup>

Children were not only threatened by illness, but also by superstitions. On January 23, 1893, a complaint from Mosul described how children were allegedly dying due to the evil eye. A man named Muhammed Aghazade Yusuf Agha, described as unemployed and idle, wandered from house to house and street to street, and it was claimed that any child or animal who made eye contact with him would suddenly collapse, as if struck by a marksman with a Martini rifle. The complaint, submitted by Süleyman Aghazade, a resident of Mosul’s Rabia neighbourhood, warned that if no action was taken, this man—who had already brought misery upon the people of Mosul—would cause the death of many more children and the loss of more animals. The authorities in Istanbul were requested to ensure that this individual be tried and punished according to the law.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Tülay Artan, ‘Terekeler Işığında 18. Yüzyıl Ortasında Eyüp’te Yaşam Tarzı ve Stabdartlarına Bir Bakış Orta Halliliğin Aynası’, *18. Yüzyıl Kadı Sicilleri Işığında Eyüp’te Sosyal Yaşam*, ed. Tülay Artan, TVYY, İstanbul 1998, 55.

<sup>117</sup> In the inheritance records found in the 1st Sharia Register of Tire between 1833 and 1837, the person with the highest number of children is identified as Şerbetçi Elhac Mehmed b. Ali. He had six children and is recorded as the individual with the second largest estate in the mentioned register. See BOA, TŞS, v.70b–71b.

<sup>118</sup> Fatma Bulut, ‘Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Tehlikeli Bir Miras Frengi’, *Tarih Okulu* 3, İzmir 2009, 112.

<sup>119</sup> See BOA, Y.PRK.MŞ., 4/44. The documents were transcribed into the Latin alphabet using the transliteration method by İlyas Özdemir and published in the journal *Arşiv Dünyası*. See İlyas Özdemir, ‘Çocuklara ve Hayvanlara Etkili Nazarı ile

Even in Topkapı Palace and other imperial residences, there were princes (*şehzades*) and princesses (*hanım sultans*) who died at a young age. In the pre-modern era, beyond being executed for succession-related reasons, many *şehzades* also died from various illnesses. The presence of numerous small graves within sultans' mausoleums serves as a poignant reminder of these early deaths. In the early 1800s, a palace official named Hızır İlyas Ağa, serving in the Enderun (the inner court of the palace), referred to these deaths under the heading "The Princes' Journey to Paradise." Regardless of the historical period, all funeral preparations and rites were conducted within Topkapı Palace. A traditional practice during these funerals was to place three belts (*kemer*) on the funeral shroud.<sup>120</sup>

### IX. Conclusion

The history of children and childhood has only recently been incorporated into the field of historical studies. Initiated by Philippe Ariès in the 1960s, scholarly work in this area has continued to evolve to the present day. In Turkey, the studies of Hülya Tezcan on imperial children and Yahya Araz on ordinary children have been particularly valuable.

In the Ottoman Empire, the voices of children are rarely found in historical records. Most of what we know about them has been recorded by adults. While children in the pre-modern period lived and grew up largely within their own worlds, the 19th century brought a significant shift in perception, both globally and within the Ottoman administration. Recognizing children as the future adults of society, efforts were made to ensure they received proper education and upbringing. Orphaned, homeless, or begging children came to be seen as a state responsibility, and numerous institutions were established under state sponsorship to educate them and provide vocational training.

In everyday life, children in the Ottoman Empire transitioned through many different environments from birth to adulthood. From the moment they were conceived, families—according to their financial means—began preparing for the arrival of the child and its care after birth. While fathers

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Zarar Veren Yusuf Ağa'dan Muzdarip Olan Musul Ahalisinin Mazharı ve Arzuhali', *Arşiv Dünyası*, no. 8, İstanbul, 2006, 58–61.

<sup>120</sup> Türkoğlu, 'Osmanlı Sarayında Çocuk', 122.

focused on establishing a household for their family and children, mothers concentrated on ensuring the baby's healthy birth and upbringing. As many sources indicate, children were primarily raised by their mothers for a period of time. These same sources generally suggest that fathers' involvement with their children was limited.

As in the present day, some children in 19th-century Ottoman society were also part of the working world. Some were apprenticed to learn a trade, others worked in households, and some were employed in factories. In rural areas, children typically helped with family labour from a young age. During exceptional circumstances such as famine, it was not uncommon for families in certain regions to send their children into domestic service.

Whether they belonged to the imperial family or to a poor household, children in the Ottoman Empire went through almost the same stages of life. After spending a period of time with their mothers following birth, they began their education with the *Âmin alayı* ceremony, and boys were circumcised as a symbolic step toward adulthood. The only difference in these ceremonies was the amount of money spent.

One notable change in children's daily lives in the 19th century was in the realm of toys. For a long time, the local Eyüp toy makers met domestic demand, but eventually they were replaced by imported toys from Europe and America.

In the context of everyday life, the word least expected to be associated with children is undoubtedly death. Yet in the Ottoman Empire, child mortality was alarmingly common. Epidemics, natural disasters, and malnutrition affected children most severely. With growing awareness at both the state and public levels regarding child health, and with the onset of modernization in medicine and the pharmaceutical industry, efforts were made to reduce the high rates of child deaths.

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## Chapter Thirteen

### Women from Rumelia to Anatolia

OlcaY PULLUKÇUOĞLU YAPUCU\*

#### I. Introduction

Rumelia is a special region of Ottoman geography. With its fertile lands, port cities prospering from trade, and strategically important regions, this region, which has always held special significance for the Ottomans since the conquest, also witnessed political developments that would shape world history from the 19th century onward. While the great powers, military and political rivalries, and the display of power were the preoccupations of soldiers and politicians, it was primarily the local people who were affected by these developments. The lives of communities who believed in different religions, spoke different languages, but lived together in nearby villages, towns, or cities were forever changed by the developments that began during this period.

The communities that comprised the heterogeneous demographics of Ottoman Rumelia naturally had their own traditions, which influenced the social conditions of girls and women. Each society's cultural heritage and ancestral traditions, whether or not women were perceived as individuals, whether or not they had a say in decision-making processes concerning their future, and their level of "freedom" in family and social relations, also determined the society in which a woman was born. Alterations to normal living conditions within the family and society can have traumatic consequences for all individuals. However, the effects of major social change, major political developments, wars, and large-scale or small-scale migrations have a more profound impact on the communities and

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individuals affected. Trauma processes are likely more challenging for those currently considered disadvantaged groups, such as women, children, and the elderly.

This Chapter focuses on women born in Rumelia, who experienced significant change as a result of the conditions of their society and time, to the extent permitted by the life stories of important female figures in family history and the historical data. While the experiences of Rumelia's 19th-century political, social, and economic circumstances may seem far-fetched to modern-day residents, they are part of the lives of those who were the subjects of these events. While perhaps not ordinary for those of the past, they are not "incredible." The lives of those who migrated from Rumelia to Anatolia at various times and for various reasons were forever changed. The experiences of this period, the process of adapting to new conditions and adapting to Anatolian living conditions in the early 20th century as citizens of the Republic of Turkey, must have left deep scars and traumas on the lives of women, as they do on all individuals. Women struggling to exist in both Rumelia and Anatolia are the primary subject of this study.

## II. Society and Women

Ahmet Cevdet Pasha, one of the most prominent statesmen of the Ottoman bureaucracy, provides accounts of various Ottoman cities and their inhabitants during his official postings in Rumelia. His work *Tezâkir-i Cevdet*, in which he shares his observations on the Ottoman Balkans in the 1860s, offers valuable insights into the region's social life. On the ninth day of the month of Receb in the year 1280 of the Islamic calendar (equivalent to December 7, 1863), Cevdet Pasha arrived in Sarajevo (Saraybosna), where he was welcomed outside the city by a speech delivered in Bosnian by a young Christian girl from a non-Muslim girls' school.<sup>1</sup> In the Ottoman world, women did not enjoy the same educational opportunities as men. However, by the 1860s, when Cevdet Pasha visited Bosnia, the state had begun to take steps to improve the education of girls. The Pasha noted, "Sarajevo is a beautiful city, and learning had begun to flourish there."<sup>2</sup> Yet

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<sup>1</sup> Cevdet Paşa, *Tezakir* 21-39, ed. Cavid Baysun, TTK Yayınları, Ankara 1991, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Cevdet Paşa, *Tezakir*, 21.

how free was life for the girls who had now begun to receive formal education? Could a young woman from Rumelia make her own decisions about her life?

According to Ahmet Cevdet Pasha's account, young Bosniak (*Boşnak*) women could be considered relatively "free" in terms of their dress and lifestyle prior to marriage. The Pasha notes that Bosniak girls would appear in public unveiled until the age of twenty or twenty-five and did not wear the *ferace* (a long outer garment traditionally worn by Muslim women); however, once married, their faces would no longer be seen by anyone outside their household.<sup>3</sup> Yet in the Balkans, each community upheld its own customs, and centuries-old traditions often defined the boundaries of freedom for young women. For instance, within the Greek Orthodox (*Rum*) community, it was generally frowned upon for unmarried girls to appear in public. In the mountainous regions of northern Albania, near the Montenegrin border, where tribal ways of life were deeply rooted, local customs imposed strict control over marriage practices. Among the Pulati, Dukagjini, and Mirdita tribes of the northern highlands, women could only be married in exchange for a negotiated payment—essentially through a form of purchase. In this context, women were perceived almost as commodities. They were regarded as the property of the tribal chief. In areas where the traditional laws of Dukagjin was observed, women had no right to inherit property. Since they had no claim to inheritance, families were not expected to spend money on their marriages. Even in communities where women received a dowry, they were still deprived of inheritance rights.<sup>4</sup> These conditions underscore that there was no uniform standard of living or equality for women across the diverse communities of Ottoman Rumelia. Each group's cultural traditions and social norms played a significant role in shaping the everyday lives of women within their respective societies.

Among Albanians, blood feuds and related acts of violence were quite common, with bride abduction often cited as one of the triggers for such conflicts. For a woman who wished to avoid an unwanted marriage without

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<sup>3</sup> Cevdet Paşa, *Tezakir*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Uğur Özcan and Murat Gökhan Dalyan, '19.yy'da Rumlarda ve Arnavutlarda Evlilik Müessesesinde Başlık Uygulamaları', *History Studies*, 3/3, 2011, 322–323.

provoking a blood feud, the only escape was to take a lifelong vow of celibacy. This practice was known as *verdzin* (sworn virgin). According to Constantine Chekrezi, Albanians placed great value on women and claimed that there were virtually no recorded cases of women being murdered. Drawing a weapon on a woman or killing her was considered deeply shameful and socially unacceptable.<sup>5</sup>

*“In the final years of the nineteenth century, the eldest son of a Muslim Gheg-Albanian (Gega-Arnavut) family killed a Christian. Suspecting that retaliation would soon follow, the father rushed home, instructing his family to gather whatever belongings they could carry and load them onto the cart—they had to leave the village immediately. The mother and children obeyed without question. No one protested or asked why; what mattered was escaping without delay. At the edge of the village stood a bridge, one that would become the point of no return for the family. Waiting there were the relatives of the Christian man who had been killed. Beneath the bridge, they ambushed and murdered the father and his sons. The mother and her young daughter, Asiye, survived the massacre unharmed. But unable to return to their village, they were forced to take to the road, eventually reaching Karaferye (present-day Veroia in northern Greece). The mother never remarried. She raised her daughter and eventually saw her married.”<sup>6</sup>*

Yet this painful story of blood feud and displacement did not end there.

### III. Marriage

Marriage has always been a significant institution in a woman's life, deeply shaping her experiences across different historical periods. In the Balkans, the region's ethnic and religious diversity also gave rise to a wide range of customs, rituals, and celebrations both before and after marriage. Ahmet Cevdet Pasha notes that in Sarajevo (Saraybosna), Bosniak girls and boys were allowed to become acquainted before marriage, and that a form of courtship—*aşıklık* (romantic companionship)—was even considered a customary practice. Of course, this form of interaction remained within certain boundaries and was often conducted under parental supervision. As such, it served a valuable purpose by allowing prospective spouses to get to

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<sup>5</sup> Özcan and Dalyan, '19.yy'da Rumlarda ve Arnavutlarda Evlilik', 325.

<sup>6</sup> I heard this story from my beloved grandmother many times throughout my childhood. Because the heroine of the story, the little girl, was my grandmother's mother. Our great-grandmother Asiye Hanım's story doesn't end there.

know one another. According to the Pasha's observations, it was acceptable for a young man who was courting a girl to visit her home, sit with her parents, and receive coffee served by the girl. However, this interaction came with a strict condition: there must be absolutely no physical contact. Should their hands touch accidentally during the serving of coffee, it would be considered an urgent matter requiring immediate marriage, as any form of physical contact was seen as compromising the girl's honour and thus necessitated a wedding without delay.<sup>7</sup>

According to Ahmet Cevdet Pasha, wedding ceremonies and celebrations among Bosniaks were often highly elaborate and costly. At times, the expenses incurred for such occasions even drew the attention of the state, prompting authorities to caution the public against excessive spending (*israf*). If the groom's family could not afford the costs associated with the wedding, the only remaining option was for the young man to "elope" with his fiancée. A daughter eloping with her betrothed was a deeply distressing event for her parents. In response, they would temporarily sever ties with her, refusing contact for a period. However, reconciliation would typically follow. Eventually, the family would welcome the newlyweds back into the home.<sup>8</sup> It was, and still is, common for relatives from both sides to assist the young couple in such situations—by offering them a place to stay, initiating the marriage ceremony, and acting as mediators to help restore ties with estranged parents. This tradition of familial support and reconciliation continues to be a customary part of the marriage process today.

Prior to marriage, financial arrangements such as bride price (*başlık parası*), mahr (*mehir*), and dowry (*drahoma*) constitute the economic aspects of the union. While the original intent behind giving or receiving bride price was to support the newlyweds in establishing their household, the practice has often been perceived as tantamount to the "sale" of the bride. In some regions, bride price was paid to the bride's family, whereas in others it was paid to the groom's family to help ensure the continuation of the marriage. In societies where payment was made to the groom's side, the term *drahoma* was used. *Drahoma* refers to money or property

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<sup>7</sup> Cevdet Paşa, *Tezakir*, 26.

<sup>8</sup> Cevdet Paşa, *Tezakir*, 25.

transferred from the bride's family to the groom. Among Greek Orthodox (Rum) communities, the term for bride price was also *drahoma*, but unlike in many other societies, it was the bride's family—not the groom's—that bore responsibility for this payment. Initially observed only in Athens, this custom gradually spread more widely. A distinctive feature of *drahoma* was that, in the event of divorce, the amount paid to the husband would be returned to the woman.<sup>9</sup> *Mehir* was a customary practice in Muslim marriages. In Islamic law, during the marriage contract (*nikâh*), the parties would typically agree on the amount and terms of the *mehir* to be paid to the bride. When the marriage was formally recorded in writing, this agreement would also be included in the marriage certificate.

Although both the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* emphasize the obligation of paying *mehir*, most Islamic jurists regard it not as a precondition for a valid marriage but as a legal consequence of the marriage contract. Therefore, even if *mehir* is not specified at the time of the *nikâh* (marriage ceremony), or if the parties agree that it will not be paid, the marriage is still considered valid. *Mehir* may consist of money, tangible property (*mütekavvim mal*), or any benefit with economic value—for example, the right to use a piece of land for a specific period. It may be paid in full at the time of the marriage or deferred in part or in whole. A common practice has been to divide the payment: one part is paid immediately (*mehr-i muaccel*), while the remainder is postponed (*mehr-i müeccel*). In certain periods, the deferred portion of the *mehir* was intentionally set high to prevent the husband from misusing his right to divorce. When no specific payment timeline is set, local customs and traditions determine the applicable norms. In cases of death or divorce, the deferred *mehir* becomes due. The *mehir* belongs solely to the woman, who has full legal ownership and may use it as she pleases. Neither the bride nor her family is required to prepare a dowry (*çeyiz*) in exchange for the *mehir*. In this respect, *mehir* differs from the *başlık parası* (bride price), which was widely practiced among Turks and often entailed an obligation to prepare a dowry in return. However, in practice, this distinction was not always consistently observed across all communities.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Özcan and Dalyan, '19.yy'da Rumlarda ve Arnavutlarda Evlilik', 320.

<sup>10</sup> Mehmet Akif Aydın, 'Mehir', *TDVİA*, Vol. 28, Ankara 2003, 389.

*Drahoma* was the property, land, or money a woman transferred to her husband's side as a contribution to the marriage, intended both for her own benefit and as a means of sharing responsibility within the union. It could consist of household goods, furniture, olive groves, fields, houses, or cash—often a combination of these. Without payment of the pre-agreed *drahoma*, a marriage between a man and a woman could not take place. The groom's side typically received the dowry (*çeyiz*) in the form of immovable property from the bride, while the bride also paid *drahoma* (sometimes referred to as *trachoma*) to the groom in cash. The key distinction between these two institutions lies in their legal and religious recognition: while the dowry was accepted by the Church, *drahoma* was not. As early as the 18th century, in cases where a man abandoned his wife, the woman was required to return the entire dowry she had brought into the marriage. However, she was not obligated to return the *drahoma*. Another related practice was *agriliki*, which varied by region. *Agriliki* was the payment made by the groom to his in-laws in recognition of the effort and expense of raising the bride.<sup>11</sup> In families where a father had more than one daughter for whom he had to provide *drahoma*, the girls were often compelled to enter the workforce in order to save for their own dowries. This typically meant taking up domestic work such as housekeeping, cooking, or cleaning, especially in urban centers. Greek Orthodox (Rum) girls living on the islands were particularly known for taking on such roles. *Drahoma* preparations typically began either from birth or early adolescence, depending on the family's means, in order to avoid financial hardship at the time of the wedding. In poorer households, fathers and brothers would often travel to major commercial centers or even abroad to work and save money to provide a sufficient *drahoma* for their daughters or sisters, ensuring that they would not marry with only a modest contribution. Nevertheless, in economically weaker regions, girls were often compelled to enter the workforce to contribute to their own *drahoma*. Şerafettin Mağmumi notes that in Bursa, young Greek Orthodox girls from rural areas worked in silk factories in order to save money for their bride price. However, this situation occasionally exposed girls to moral vulnerabilities and social risks. In addition, poor families with multiple daughters or orphaned girls were often placed in wealthier

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<sup>11</sup> Özcan and Dalyan, '19.yy'da Rumlarda ve Arnavutlarda Evlilik', 322.

households as foster children. These families employed the girls in various domestic tasks and later married them off with minimal *drahoma* and dowry (*çeyiz*) when they reached marriageable age. A girl's social standing in her husband's household was closely tied to the size of her *drahoma*—a substantial one enhanced her status and the respect she commanded within her new family.

It was not uncommon for engagements to be broken if the agreed-upon *drahoma* was not fulfilled during the engagement period. In such cases, the groom's family was legally and socially obliged to return any *drahoma* previously received from the bride's side, often with interest. To meet the financial demands of their daughters' or sisters' *drahoma*, some Greek Orthodox families went so far as to jeopardize their own financial security. In certain instances, they resorted to mortgages or pledging property as collateral to raise the necessary funds. For orphaned and fatherless girls, mutual aid organizations were established to provide support. One such example is the "Panargeians Society", founded in 1910 to assist girls lacking family protection or financial means.<sup>12</sup>

Among Albanians, girls were generally considered ready for marriage by the age of 15 or 16. While marriages at younger ages were uncommon, exceptions did exist. In traditional Albanian society, marriages within the immediate family or between close relatives were not permitted. In rural areas, the groom's family would appoint a matchmaker known as a *shkus* to initiate the marriage process. The *shkus* would approach the girl's father or older brother to express the family's intention to propose and begin negotiations. These discussions primarily centered on the amount of the bride price. The bride price typically ranged between 1,500 and 2,000 kuruş and was expected to be paid within two or three years. An agreement was also reached regarding how much of this sum would be allocated to the bride's personal belongings and household items. Once the arrangements were in place, a symbolic ring would be sent to the bride-to-be, marking the formal start of the engagement and marriage preparations.

In rural areas, it was often said that brides were "purchased", whereas in urban settings, it was claimed that the groom was the one being "bought". The marriage system in towns closely resembled that in the

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<sup>12</sup> Özcan and Dalyan, '19.yy'da Rumlarda ve Arnavutlarda Evlilik', 322.



countryside, with one key difference: in cities, the bride's family paid the prospective groom. The main point of negotiation was how much dowry the bride would bring into the marriage, since this dowry was expected to support the groom in establishing a business and providing for the household. This urban Albanian custom bore striking similarities to the *drahoma* practice among Greek Orthodox communities. However, in contrast to the Rum tradition, where the bride brought a dowry to the husband, in traditional Albanian practice the groom typically did not receive property or wealth from the bride's side. Instead, he would give the bride a symbolic gift: three gilded coins fashioned into a necklace with silver filigree—an emblem of the bride price. In mountainous regions inhabited by highland Albanians, the scarcity of marriageable women led to an increase in bride price and, over time, to a kind of inflation in marriage transactions.<sup>13</sup>

The imperial decree issued in 1850, which prohibited the collection of bride price, appears to have played a role in the gradual replacement of this practice with *mehir* among Albanian Muslims. According to the decree, demanding large sums of money for girls to be married off in rural areas was “entirely” forbidden. The edict also mandated that this prohibition be disseminated throughout all regions of Anatolia. This legal intervention reflects the state's attempt to regulate and curb economically burdensome marriage customs and may have contributed to a broader shift, at least partially, toward the more religiously sanctioned institution of *mehir* in certain Muslim communities.

#### **IV. Migration**

Even in the absence of formal edicts, migration occurred within Ottoman society. In sparsely populated rural areas, land held value only if there were enough people to cultivate it. For this reason, the state was generally reluctant to encourage population movements that could disrupt agricultural production. Ottoman peasants were legally required to obtain permission from the local official who governed their village and collected taxes before relocating. In cases where such permission was not granted, local authorities occasionally filed lawsuits demanding the return of the

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<sup>13</sup> Özcan and Dalyan, ‘19.yy’da Rumlarda ve Arnavutlarda Evlilik’, 323, 328.

migrant. Even when the court ruled in favour of the migrant, the legal process—requiring appearances in court and the provision of witnesses—was costly and burdensome. Thus, unless there was a compelling reason to leave, it is generally assumed that peasants tended to remain in place. Nevertheless, abandonment of farms and rural lands was a frequent occurrence.<sup>14</sup> Particularly in the late nineteenth century, and again during the 1910s, 1920s, 1980s, and 1990s, societies across the Balkans experienced repeated waves of migration. Often, people were forced to leave their ancestral lands and resettle in unfamiliar places. Some were coerced into migration; others left voluntarily. Which of these migration waves was the most traumatic? The only possible answer is: all of them. Regardless of the cause, migration—whether forced or chosen—leaves a profound mark on human lives. Women shared the burden of displacement alongside men. However, as women, they naturally took on the responsibilities of caring for children and elderly family members during difficult journeys, as well as providing food and sustenance for the family.

Among the many waves of migration, the population exchange (*mübadele*) holds a particularly distinct place. Through a supplementary protocol to the Treaty of Lausanne, it was decided that Muslims living in Greece and Orthodox Christians residing in Anatolia would be relocated, effectively swapping populations based on religious identity. This raised complex questions—how would a marriage between a Muslim and an Orthodox Christian endure under such conditions? On both sides, the continuation of such unions appeared virtually impossible. The migration of populations subject to the exchange was carried out by sea, primarily via steamships. The hardships that would arise for the sick, the elderly, and pregnant women during this journey were foreseeable. Onboard the ships, cabins were designated for the ill, pregnant women, the elderly, and small children. Clean water tanks were installed on the decks, and each vessel was staffed with at least two health officers, a midwife, and a physician to provide care during the voyage.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Faroqhi Suraiya, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Yollara Düşenler*, Kitap Yayınevi, İstanbul 2016, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Kemal Arı, *Büyük Mübadele: Türkiye'ye Zorunlu Göç (1923–1925)*, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, İstanbul 1995, 42, 43.

*“The transfer, reception, and provision of aid and transportation for half a million people to be incorporated into the homeland; the selection of regions suited to their previous social and economic conditions; the provision of means for work and sustenance; and, beyond that, the partial restoration—if only to some extent—of the sources of livelihood and living standards previously enjoyed by those who had been relatively well-off in their former homes—when considered objectively on the basis of concrete data, figures, and numbers—make it immediately clear just how difficult and formidable a task this was for Turkey at the time. These challenges and hardships manifested themselves at every stage of the population exchange (mübadele).”<sup>16</sup>*

But was it truly possible to implement all the planned measures as intended? The first challenge faced during the journey from Greece to Anatolia was simply finding a suitable place on the ship. When weather conditions were favourable, passengers preferred to settle on the decks of these old steamships, ideally near a relative; if not, they sought out a neighbour or acquaintance. In poor weather, however, the ship’s holds were the only option—spaces often shared with livestock. This meant traveling in confined, unventilated, and unhygienic conditions, which likely had an even harsher impact on women, children, and the elderly. Peasants, in particular, chose the lower decks if they had animals with them, preferring not to let their livestock out of sight. Families attempted to sustain themselves with food prepared by women in advance of the voyage. On these overcrowded vessels, which often carried hundreds of passengers, the presence of only a single toilet created further serious sanitary issues. It is not difficult to imagine the kinds of problems women faced under such conditions during the long journey. Among children and the elderly—especially those who were already ill—deaths were not uncommon. In such unhygienic and dire circumstances, the greatest stroke of luck was that no widespread epidemic broke out. The voyage lasted an uninterrupted week, during which there was no way to properly store the bodies of the deceased

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<sup>16</sup> Mübadele ve teffiz muamelelerinin intacı ve kat’î tasfiyesi hakkında 1/824 numaralı Kanun lâyihası ve Dahiliye, Maliye ve Bütçe Encümenleri mazbataları, no: 92, p. 12, 3.11.1931.

until reaching land. The only option was to wrap them in a blanket or sheet and commit them to the sea.<sup>17</sup>

*“My grandmother, Hacer Pullukçuoğlu, was the child of a family relocated from their hometown of Karaferya to Urla as part of the population exchange (mübadele). She used to recount how, before their departure from Greece, an elderly and solitary neighbour had begged her father to let her accompany them on the journey. The woman travelled with the family all the way to İzmir, but once they disembarked, they never saw each other again.”*

What became of that elderly, rootless woman who had left behind her home, her memories, her entire life with no possibility of return? In a city she did not know, where did she go? How long did she live? These questions remain unanswered.” Another trauma awaited the *mübadil* (exchangee) women as they set foot on Anatolian soil: the challenge of settling, or rather, of being able to settle. They may not have even had the time to reflect on the lives they had left behind. The urgency of finding shelter, adapting to unfamiliar surroundings, and rebuilding a sense of stability often overshadowed any chance to grieve or look back. For many, the process of beginning again in a strange land proved to be as disorienting and painful as the journey itself.

Due to a shortage of immovable property and delays in resolving unlawful occupations, the resettlement of *mübadil* (exchangee) populations in Anatolia faced serious challenges. In some cases, migrants who had initially been assigned specific settlement areas had to be redirected to different regions because of overcrowding. This led to extended and arduous journeys, leaving many in extremely difficult conditions. Moreover, the locations where these people were eventually settled were often chosen haphazardly. For instance, many tobacco-farming families were relocated to mountainous regions, while artisans and professionals were placed in rural villages. Some families with rural backgrounds were instead sent to urban centres simply because abandoned homes were available there. Another significant issue was the fragmentation of villages and family networks. This problem began during the boarding process in Greece and persisted during resettlement in Turkey. In order to optimize

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<sup>17</sup> Mehmet Çanlı, ‘Yunanistan’daki Türkler’in Anadolu’ya nakledilmesi II’, *Tarih ve Toplum* 130, September 1994, 246.

ship capacity, entire village populations were sometimes split across different ships. Upon arrival in Turkey, they disembarked at separate ports and were assigned to different settlements. As a result, people who had once formed a single village community in Greece were now dispersed across multiple regions due to the limited availability of housing. While nuclear families were usually kept intact, extended families were often separated. When a village was divided into two or more groups, married sons or daughters might be resettled in entirely different locations, resulting in separations between parents and children or among siblings. Since neighbouring villages in Greece could not be resettled as neighbours in Turkey, kinship networks were also fractured. In the end, one child of a family might be resettled in one corner of Turkey while the rest of the family ended up in another. This fragmentation inflicted deep and lasting wounds on Turkey's social fabric—wounds that proved difficult, if not impossible, to heal.<sup>18</sup>

Due to delays in the resettlement (*iskân*) process, *mübadils* (population exchangees) inevitably faced economic hardship while awaiting compensation for the property and assets they had left behind in Greece. Resolving these issues took time, and it was only over the course of several years that *mübadils* were gradually integrated into the economic production system. However, the psychological impact of displacement—the trauma of forced migration, separation from homeland, and the loss of community—most likely endured for a lifetime. The emotional scars left by the upheaval did not fade easily, even as families rebuilt their lives in a new land.

*"After losing her father and brothers, the young Albanian girl Asiye came to Karaferya with her mother. During the population exchange, she experienced a second traumatic migration in her life, this time as the mother of two grown daughters. She boarded the Gülcemal steamer in Thessaloniki (Selanik) with her husband, her daughters Rabia and Hacer, and an elderly neighbour with no family, and arrived in Urla. In the stories my grandmother told, Asiye Hanım was described as a stern, stubborn, and dominant figure. After settling in Urla, she worked in olive and tobacco production and was an extremely skilled Balkan woman with a talent for trade. In fact, she outshone her husband in matters of commerce. She could not read the new alphabet, but she spoke Turkish, Albanian, Greek, and Bosnian. Yet when she went to*

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<sup>18</sup> Arı, *Büyük Mübadele*, 105–112.

## Women from Rumelia to Anatolia

*the Malgaca Market in Urla, she wore trousers and carried a weapon at her waist. Having lived through such great events and carried their impact throughout her life, that strong woman must still have been a little afraid.”*

*“The little girl who came to Urla from Karaferya as a mübadil (exchange), my beloved grandmother, grew up in İzmir and later married into a family in Aydın. When her dearly loved husband died of tuberculosis at the age of 43, she was only 33, with three children, the eldest just 15. She never remarried. Like her mother, she spoke four languages, yet she never made an effort to teach them to her grandchildren. Instead, she would gather all of us around her and recount the journey to Anatolia that began aboard the Gülcemal steamer. We never forgot what she told us. Thanks to her stories, the Gülcemal, along with 1930s Urla and İzmir, became part of our memories—so vivid that it felt as if we, too, had lived through them.”*



**Figure 1** – Hacer Pullukçuoğlu in Naval Attire on the Right, 1930s  
(From the Family Archive)

To be a woman in the Balkans has often meant, above all, surviving—despite wars, migrations, and unimaginable hardship. Life during these times was surely more difficult for everyone, but especially for women. In the wars of the 1990s, which unfolded before the eyes of the entire world, women in Bosnia and Kosovo endured immense suffering. Rape is a tragically frequent crime in times of war, and many Bosnian women were subjected to sexual violence, later forced to give birth to children conceived through these assaults. Despite everything, women bore the responsibility of holding their families together and raising their children—no matter the circumstances. They never turned away from this duty. Strong, resourceful, resilient, and yet always tender and compassionate, the blue and green eyed women of the Balkans carried all of these qualities with grace. May they have passed this legacy on to their beloved grandchildren.

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## Chapter Fourteen

# **The Long Wait: Ayşe Aliye Köksal and the First Female Parliamentary Representative from Eskişehir**

Murat KAYA\*

### **I. Introduction**

After the foundation of the Republic of Türkiye, there were significant changes in the social status of women. Atatürk's reforms provided women with new opportunities in all areas of life. In the past, women's roles were confined to the home. However, they became more active in social life. One of the most important rights given to women in the first years of the Republic was the right to vote and be elected. In 1930, for the first time, women were granted the right to participate in local elections.<sup>1</sup> Similar to other regions in Türkiye, women in Eskişehir became active participants in political life after gaining their new rights. In the 1934 local elections, three women, Mebrûre Hakkı, Türkan Kazım, and Zehra Sıtkı, were elected as municipal council members in Eskişehir.<sup>2</sup>

In 1934, political rights granted to women were significantly broadened. The provision in the electoral law that gave only men the right to vote and be elected was abolished. Thus, every woman over the age of twenty-two gained the right to vote and every woman over the age of thirty gained the right to be elected.<sup>3</sup> In the 1935 general elections, approximately

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<sup>1</sup> T.C. Resmî Gazete, 14 April 1930.

<sup>2</sup> Kemal Yakut, *Modern Eskişehir'in Doğuşu* (Eskişehir: Kebikeç, 2015), 136.

<sup>3</sup> T.C. Resmî Gazete, 11 December 1934.

one-fifth of the second-tier electorate in Eskişehir, a group responsible for selecting parliamentary candidates, were women.<sup>4</sup> This demonstrates that women in Eskişehir actively participated in politics in the early years of the Republic. However, Eskişehir did not elect a female deputy to the Grand National Assembly in the early years of the Republic. This absence was not limited to the single-party period; Eskişehir did not have a female deputy during the Democrat Party (DP) government and in the three elections following the 27 May 1960 military coup. Eskişehir's first female deputy Ayşe Aliye Köksal was elected to parliament in the 50th year of the Republic of Türkiye (1973).

This study analyses the 1965, 1969, 1973, and 1977 elections, in which Ayşe Aliye Köksal ran for a seat in parliament, with a focus on the political context of Eskişehir. It also aims to evaluate women's political struggles, the difficulties they faced in politics, and the disadvantages associated with being a woman in intra-party competition.

## II. A Brief Biography of Ayşe Aliye Köksal

Ayşe Aliye was born in 1924 in Kula, Manisa.<sup>5</sup> Her father was Haşım from the Müftüzadeler family and her mother was Bahriye from the Beyler family. Both her parents came from leading families in Kula. Ayşe Aliye was the eldest among the five children in the family. She had two sisters, Adile and İhsan, and two brothers, Ali and Selim. Mr Haşım worked as a lawyer in Kula.<sup>6</sup> He was also one of the delegates to the Republican People's Party in Kula. He had a keen interest in theatre and ensured that plays were staged in Kula. Following the enactment of the Surname Law, he adopted the surname Gür. There was a French governess who looked after his children at home. This shows that he was both a wealthy man and a father who attached great importance to his children's upbringing. He offered educational opportunities to all his children regardless of gender.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Yakut, *Modern Eskişehir'in Doğuşu*, 138.

<sup>5</sup> *The Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) Archives*, curriculum vitae of Ayşe Aliye Köksal.

<sup>6</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 21 June 1958.

<sup>7</sup> Atilla Köksal (son of Ayşe Aliye Köksal), *oral history interview conducted by Murat Kaya*, İzmir-Karşıyaka, 26 May 2025.

Ayşe Aliye completed primary school in Kula. She moved to İzmir with her mother, Bahriye, in order to study at İzmir Girls' Institute. She and her mother settled in the Göztepe district of İzmir. She graduated from İzmir Girls' Institute. She was an outstanding student and consistently ranked among the top in every class she attended.<sup>8</sup>

Ayşe Aliye was married to Muzaffer Köksal in İstanbul in 1943.<sup>9</sup> She did not engage in any professional work after her marriage. She remained a housewife. Her husband Muzaffer Köksal served as a doctor in the army. They relocated to Ankara due to his military assignment. Ayşe Aliye Köksal developed an interest in equestrian sports, influenced by her husband's service in the mounted troops. She practised horseback riding for many years. Their first child, Atilla Köksal, was born in Ankara in 1945, followed by their second child, Raşan Köksal, in 1946. After Muzaffer Köksal was transferred to Diyarbakır, the family moved there, and their third and last child, Murat Köksal, was born in 1949.<sup>10</sup>

In 1954, Muzaffer Köksal resigned from military service as a major and moved to Eskişehir with his family, where he began working as the chief physician at the Eskişehir Sugar Factory. Upon her arrival in Eskişehir in 1954, Ayşe Aliye Köksal, notably one of the first women to drive a car in the city, quickly became a prominent figure in its social life. She largely devoted her life to social activities, participating in numerous civic organizations such as the Turkish Child Protection Agency, various state orphanages, the Air Force Strengthening Foundation, the Turkish Red Crescent, and the Association for the Prevention of Traffic Accidents. In addition to her social activities, she also actively participated in politics in Eskişehir. She worked for the Republican People's Party (CHP) for 19 years until she became an MP. She played a pioneering role in establishing the CHP Women's Branch in Eskişehir and served as its chair.<sup>11</sup> A few days before the 1961 general elections, Eskişehir Women's Branch organised a

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<sup>8</sup> Köksal, 26 May 2025.

<sup>9</sup> *The Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) Archives*, curriculum vitae of Ayşe Aliye Köksal.

<sup>10</sup> Köksal, 26 May 2025.

<sup>11</sup> *TBMM Albümü 1920-2010*, Vol. 2 (Ankara: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, 2010), 985; Köksal, 26 May 2025.

major women's rally.<sup>12</sup> This rally became one of the pioneering actions of women's political struggle in Eskişehir. Motivated by the atmosphere of freedom that emerged across the country in the aftermath of the 27 May 1960 military coup, Ayşe Aliye Köksal became increasingly involved in politics. In 1965, she decided to become a parliamentary candidate for her party.

### III. First Attempt at Parliament: The 1965 Elections

At the CHP Party Assembly meeting held on 30 April 1965, the electoral framework was thoroughly assessed. In accordance with the electoral legislation in force at the time, parliamentary candidates were to be selected through party primaries in which delegates would participate. However, İsmet İnönü advocated granting political parties the right to nominate a limited number of candidates through discretionary quotas.<sup>13</sup> Following three days of deliberations, the CHP issued a public statement on 2 May 1965, pledging efforts to ensure that the forthcoming elections would be conducted under fair and secure conditions.<sup>14</sup> On 5 May 1965, İnönü proposed that 5% of the parliamentary candidacies be reserved through party discretion.<sup>15</sup> İsmet İnönü said about the quota candidates that “a party that cannot incorporate new elements cannot survive”. By underscoring the CHP's reformist stance, he advocated for the inclusion of women, workers, and small business owners in parliament. İnönü regarded the quota mechanism as a strategic tool for the CHP to expand its appeal across broader social groups. Moreover, the quota system was seen as a mechanism for facilitating the parliamentary inclusion of underrepresented groups.<sup>16</sup> In the province of Eskişehir, none of the political parties made use of discretionary candidacies. As a result, the parliamentary candidate lists were determined entirely by CHP delegates through internal primaries.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Burcu Çalılıkşu Aykanat, '1961 Genel Seçimlerinin Eskişehir'deki Yansıması', in *International Symposium on Social Human and Administrative Sciences ASOSCONGRESS Conference Proceedings*, ed. Süleyman Uyar (Elazığ: Asos, 2018), 1002.

<sup>13</sup> Nihat Erim, *Günlükler*, Vol. 2 (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi, 2005), 806.

<sup>14</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 3 May 1965.

<sup>15</sup> İsmet İnönü, *Defterler 1919-1973* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi, 2017), 688.

<sup>16</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 6 May 1965.

<sup>17</sup> *Sakarya*, 3 August 1965.

In 1965, Ayşe Aliye Köksal served as the head of the CHP Women's Branch in Eskişehir. Throughout the pre-election period, she devoted considerable effort to strengthening the provincial and district party organisations. She was part of a delegation that attended the CHP Mihalıççık Youth Branch Congress on 2 May 1965.<sup>18</sup> The same delegation visited Seyitgazi on 3 May 1965 to engage with local party members.<sup>19</sup> These initiatives allowed Ayşe Aliye Köksal to forge direct links with rural delegates. During this phase, the CHP women's branches were highly active across various organisational levels, particularly in the context of efforts to restructure the party's internal women's organisation.<sup>20</sup>

In July 1965, following a meeting at the CHP's Eskişehir provincial headquarters, local party members began preparing for the upcoming elections. Party leaders believed that the CHP could attain power if it succeeded in communicating its message effectively to the public. In Eskişehir, which was to elect six deputies, it was widely anticipated that the elections would be closely contested between the CHP and the Justice Party, with each expected to secure three seats.<sup>21</sup>

Towards the end of July, individuals aspiring to become CHP parliamentary candidates in Eskişehir began to announce their intentions to run. The *Sakarya* newspaper ran the headline "There is also a woman candidate in the CHP" in its coverage of the developments. The woman mentioned in the headline was Ayşe Aliye Köksal.<sup>22</sup> The application period for CHP parliamentary hopefuls began on 2 August 1965 and remained open for ten days. A total of ten individuals submitted their applications during this period. The applicants, including Bekir Karacaşehir, İbrahim Cemalcılar, Hayri Başar, Ziya Altuna, Hikmet Savaş, Ayşe Aliye Köksal, Şevket Asbuzoğlu, Lütfü Mumcu, İsmet Yavuz and Hasan Aykut, were each required to pay a fee of four thousand liras.<sup>23</sup> They also pledged to refrain

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<sup>18</sup> *Sakarya*, 4 May 1965.

<sup>19</sup> *Sakarya*, 5 May 1965.

<sup>20</sup> *Sakarya*, 24 May 1965; 23 June 1965.

<sup>21</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 23 July 1965.

<sup>22</sup> *Sakarya*, 22 July 1965.

<sup>23</sup> *Sakarya*, 14 August 1965.

from personal attacks and to campaign solely on promises of public service.<sup>24</sup>

Following the selection of parliamentary hopefuls, intense competition emerged among the candidates for top positions in the CHP's primary elections. A widespread belief persisted, especially in rural areas, that women were unsuited for political life. As a result, Ayşe Aliye Köksal was compelled to conduct a far more challenging campaign compared to her male counterparts.<sup>25</sup> The primary elections held on Sunday, 29 August 1965, yielded several unexpected outcomes. For example, Seyfi Öztürk, who had recently left the Republican Peasant Nation Party and joined the Justice Party, secured the top position on his party's list. Bekir Karacaşehir, who was widely expected to lead the CHP list, ended up ranking sixth.<sup>26</sup> İbrahim Cemalcılar, who had been elected as an MP in 1961 and was once again seeking nomination, failed to make it onto the six-person list.

Name Surname	Number of Votes
Şevket Asbuzoğlu	940
Hayri Başar	657
Hikmet Savaş	616
Ayşe Aliye Köksal	600
Ziya Altuna	585
Bekir Karacaşehir	536
İsmet Yavuz	391
İbrahim Cemalcılar	293
Lütfü Mumcu	162
Hasan Aykut	150

**Table 1 – 1965 CHP Eskişehir Primary Election Results<sup>27</sup>**

<sup>24</sup> Burcu Çalığıuşu Aykanat, 'Türkiye'de Yapılan 1965 Genel Seçimlerinin Eskişehir Özelinde İncelenmesi', *Van Yüzüncü Yıl University The Journal of Social Sciences Institute*, issue 66 (2024): 140.

<sup>25</sup> Köksal, 26 May 2025.

<sup>26</sup> *İstikbâl*, 31 August 1965; *Sakarya*, 31 August 1965.

<sup>27</sup> *Sakarya*, 31 August 1965.

Despite the considerable challenges she faced, Ayşe Aliye Köksal succeeded in securing fourth place in the CHP primaries. She fell short of the second-place candidate by fifty-seven votes and trailed the third-place candidate by only sixteen votes. Despite this achievement, it was considered unlikely that a fourth-place CHP candidate would secure a parliamentary seat in a city like Eskişehir, where the Democratic Party tradition remained strong.

The outcome of the CHP's primary elections triggered unrest within the party. Several local CHP officials in Eskişehir tendered their resignations. These resignations were attributed to the electoral defeat of the candidates they had endorsed.<sup>28</sup> Notably, the most prominent resignations came from the CHP Women's Branch. Given Ayşe Aliye Köksal's previous role as chair of the CHP Eskişehir Women's Branch, her failure to secure a top spot in the primaries may have contributed to these resignations.<sup>29</sup> Public opinion held that these resignations would not weaken the CHP. Some even viewed these resignations as an opportunity for the CHP to reorganise and revitalise itself.<sup>30</sup>

Until then, women had always remained in the background in Eskişehir politics. In the 1965 elections, women candidates began to emerge as visible political figures. In addition to Ayşe Köksal, who stood as a candidate for the CHP, Keriman Kaçar ran for the Turkish Labour Party, while Nezire Demiray represented the Republican Peasant Nation Party. All three women were successfully nominated following the party primaries. Additionally, Malike Gültekin entered the race as an independent parliamentary candidate.<sup>31</sup>

The official campaign period began on 19 September 1965.<sup>32</sup> Over the course of the three-week campaign, parliamentary candidates engaged in intensive political activity in Eskişehir. During this period, Ayşe Aliye Köksal received her strongest support from local workers. Eskişehir workers dubbed Ayşe Aliye Köksal the "workers' sister" in recognition of her

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<sup>28</sup> *İstikbâl*, 2 September 1965; *Sakarya*, 4 September 1965.

<sup>29</sup> *Sakarya*, 4 September 1965.

<sup>30</sup> *İstikbâl*, 6 September 1965.

<sup>31</sup> *Sakarya*, 31 August 1965; *İstikbâl*, 15 September 1965.

<sup>32</sup> *Sakarya*, 20 September 1965.

commitment to labour rights. They campaigned actively in hopes of securing her election to parliament.<sup>33</sup>

On 10 October 1965, nationwide elections were held, resulting in a victory for the Justice Party. In Eskişehir, the Justice Party secured 59% of the vote, while the Republican People's Party obtained 26%.<sup>34</sup> The Justice Party won four seats in Eskişehir, while the Republican People's Party secured two.<sup>35</sup> As a result, Ayşe Aliye Köksal failed to secure a seat in parliament.<sup>36</sup>

#### **IV. A Second Attempt: Running Again in the 1969 Election**

Eskişehir was one of the cities where the CHP would nominate a quota candidate in the 1969 elections. According to Nihat Erim, the decision aimed to prevent an unfavourable outcome in the primary elections.<sup>37</sup> Rumours of quota candidacies provoked unrest within the party during the primaries. Nevertheless, the candidates campaigned intensively in the city centre, districts, and surrounding villages.<sup>38</sup> It was projected that the Justice Party would win four seats and the Republican People's Party two, as in the 1965 elections. For this reason, CHP parliamentary candidates endeavoured intensely to be in the top two in the primary elections.<sup>39</sup>

On 31 August 1969, ten days before the primary elections, the parties completed their candidate lists. The CHP had seven prospective candidates, including Ayşe Aliye Köksal. Among the seven candidates, Bekir Karacaşehir and Şevket Asbuzoğlu were expected to be in the lead. When the results of the primary election were announced, this prediction turned out to be correct.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Sakarya*, 9 October 1965.

<sup>34</sup> Aykanat, 'Türkiye'de Yapılan 1965 Genel Seçimlerinin Eskişehir Özelinde İncelenmesi', 143.

<sup>35</sup> *Sakarya*, 11 October 1965.

<sup>36</sup> *İstikbâl*, 12 October 1965; *Sakarya*, 12 October 1965.

<sup>37</sup> Erim, *Günlükler*, 904.

<sup>38</sup> *İstikbâl*, 16 August 1969.

<sup>39</sup> *İstikbâl*, 30 August 1969.

<sup>40</sup> *Sakarya*, 21 August 1969; 29 August 1969; 30 August 1969; 1 September 1969.



Name Surname	Number of Votes
Şevket Asbuzoğlu	774
Bekir Karacasehir	656
Ayşe Aliye Köksal	612
Niyazi Onal	466
Hüsnü Gök	374
Mail Büyükerman	262
Cahit Aktaş	260

**Table 2** – 1969 CHP Eskişehir Primary Election Results<sup>41</sup>

Ayşe Aliye Köksal, who had placed fourth in the 1965 primaries, rose to third place in 1969, which represented a notable improvement in her political standing. However, due to the dominant political tendencies in Eskişehir at the time, the CHP's prospects of securing three parliamentary seats remained limited. In the 1965 elections, aside from Ayşe Aliye Köksal, one female candidate stood for the Workers' Party of Türkiye (TİP), another for the Republican Peasants' Nation Party (CKMP), and a third ran as an independent. In 1969, there were no women candidates on the parliamentary candidate lists of parties other than the CHP.<sup>42</sup> This ongoing political invisibility highlights the significance of Ayşe Aliye Köksal's second candidacy as a rare instance of female political participation in Eskişehir.

Following consultations in Ankara, CHP Eskişehir Provincial Chairman, lawyer Hikmet Tuncay, announced that the quota candidate on the CHP list would be placed third.<sup>43</sup> This decision meant that Ayşe Aliye Köksal, who had come third in the primary election, would be relegated to fourth place in the MP candidate ranking. The CHP initially intended to nominate a labourer for the third spot. However, the workers stated that they would accept only those places where they were likely to be elected. The CHP headquarters rejected this request and instead placed Nusret Safa Coşkun, a former Member of Parliament and prominent journalist, in sixth

<sup>41</sup> *İstikbâl*, 2 September 1969.

<sup>42</sup> *İstikbâl*, 11 October 1969.

<sup>43</sup> *Sakarya*, 13 August 1969.

place as the quota candidate.<sup>44</sup> This decision proved significant for Ayşe Aliye Köksal. The addition of a strong candidate to the lower ranks increased the CHP's votes and strengthened Ayşe Aliye Köksal's chances of being elected. However, internal tensions persisted within the party, as several members expressed dissatisfaction with the candidate selection process. CHP Eskişehir Provincial Chairman Hikmet Tuncay stated that the resentments were left behind and said: "We fully believe that our party's parliamentary candidates will do useful work for our city and our country. Now everything is behind us. The rivalry between candidate candidates ended with the primaries. From now on, our goal as a party is to ensure the victory of our party in the general elections with a disciplined and organised work. Our aim is to work with this understanding and to get three CHP deputies from Eskişehir."<sup>45</sup>

Contrary to Hikmet Tuncay's statements, internal party problems in Eskişehir remained unresolved. The CHP headquarters sent Hayrettin Uysal, a member of the executive board, to Eskişehir as an inspector. His visit aimed to resolve the internal divisions among CHP members in Eskişehir.<sup>46</sup> However, the divisions within the CHP persisted and were ultimately reflected in the election results.

Elections were held on 12 October 1969. In Eskişehir, the Republican People's Party secured two seats, while the Justice Party won four. However, the Justice Party outperformed expectations in Eskişehir. The Justice Party narrowly missed winning a fifth seat.<sup>47</sup> Had it received only 129 more votes, it would have secured a fifth seat.<sup>48</sup> This result was a failure for the CHP in Eskişehir. Internal disputes negatively impacted the election outcome, and the CHP, having aimed to win three seats, barely managed to secure two. Ayşe Aliye Köksal, who had been placed third on the list, once again failed to gain a seat in parliament.

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<sup>44</sup> *Millî İrade*, 12 September 1969

<sup>45</sup> *Sakarya*, 4 September 1969.

<sup>46</sup> *Millî İrade*, 12 September 1969.

<sup>47</sup> *İstikbâl*, 14 October 1969; *Sakarya*, 13 October 1969.

<sup>48</sup> *Millî İrade*, 16 October 1969.

## V. Victory at Last: The 1973 Elections

Before the 1973 elections, there was stagnation in the Eskişehir organisation of the Justice Party. In contrast, the Eskişehir branch of the CHP was marked by significant dynamism and political engagement.<sup>49</sup> Ayşe Aliye Köksal once again stood as a parliamentary candidate in these elections. At the time, aspiring CHP candidates were required to pay 10,000 liras to the party. Prospective candidates from the Justice Party were required to pay 8,000 liras.<sup>50</sup> Compared to previous elections, the CHP attracted significantly greater interest.<sup>51</sup> Following the application process, candidates began campaigning to win the support of their party delegates.<sup>52</sup> During this period, Justice Party candidates made exaggerated claims, asserting that all recent investments in Eskişehir had been their doing.<sup>53</sup> They occasionally criticised fellow party members who were also standing as candidates. By contrast, CHP candidates refrained from disrespectful behaviour towards one another throughout the primary process.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, the political competition within the CHP was regarded as more refined and civilised compared to that of the Justice Party.<sup>55</sup>

Şevket Asbuzoğlu was elected to parliament as a CHP representative in the 1969 general elections. He later resigned from the party. İsmail Özen made efforts to facilitate Asbuzoğlu's return to the CHP. During the primary elections, he also conveyed greetings from Asbuzoğlu to the party delegates. He went even further during the campaign period, claiming that Asbuzoğlu supported both himself and Ayşe Aliye Köksal. This led to unease among certain party members.<sup>56</sup> Having previously stood as a parliamentary candidate twice and gained considerable support from Eskişehir residents, Ayşe Aliye Köksal did not require such an endorsement. She emerged from within the party organisation and had long been engaged in grassroots

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<sup>49</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 3 October 1973.

<sup>50</sup> *Sakarya*, 11 July 1973.

<sup>51</sup> *İstikbâl*, 16 August 1973.

<sup>52</sup> *Sakarya*, 11 August 1973.

<sup>53</sup> *Sakarya*, 13 August 1973.

<sup>54</sup> *Sakarya*, 16 August 1973.

<sup>55</sup> *İstikbâl*, 18 August 1973.

<sup>56</sup> *Sakarya*, 29 August 1973.

politics. She seemed confident that she would be successful in her third parliamentary candidacy.<sup>57</sup>

In 1973, Eskişehir had a population of 459,367, with 245,905 residing in urban areas and 213,462 in rural villages. In Sivrihisar, in particular, the rural population was notably high. Out of 56,366 residents in Sivrihisar, 47,937 lived in rural areas.<sup>58</sup> These figures underscored the importance of securing support from the rural electorate during the campaign period. During the 1973 elections, parliamentary hopefuls toured villages to rally support from party delegates. A few days before the primaries, most candidates concluded their campaigning in rural areas and focused their final efforts on the city centre. The competition among CHP candidates was particularly intense. It was difficult to predict which candidates would secure the top positions. All candidates appeared to have an equal chance of success.<sup>59</sup>

On 2 September 1973, primary elections were held to determine parliamentary candidates. The CHP candidates received very close votes. According to the preliminary results, Ayşe Aliye Köksal came first, Murat Kahyaoğlu second, İsmail Özen third and Niyazi Onal fourth.<sup>60</sup> The preferences of the Sivrihisar delegates played a decisive role in Ayşe Aliye Köksal's first-place finish in the primaries. Her first-place position was confirmed following the delayed results from Sivrihisar.<sup>61</sup>

According to the initial results, İsmail Özen ranked third with 649 votes, while Niyazi Onal ranked second with 648. Upon review, it was determined that one of Özen's votes was a duplicate, equalising the vote counts of both candidates. It was announced that the third-place candidate would be determined by drawing lots conducted by the electoral board.<sup>62</sup> However, a subsequent review revealed that Niyazi Onal had received 658

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<sup>57</sup> *İstikbâl*, 1 September 1973.

<sup>58</sup> *Eskişehir 1973 İl Yıllığı* (Eskişehir, 1973), 51.

<sup>59</sup> *İstikbâl*, 29 August 1973; 31 August 1973; *Sakarya*, 31 August 1973; 1 September 1973.

<sup>60</sup> *Sakarya*, 3 September 1973.

<sup>61</sup> Köksal, 26 May 2025.

<sup>62</sup> *Sakarya*, 4 September 1973.

votes. Consequently, lawyer Niyazi Onal became the CHP's third parliamentary candidate in Eskişehir.<sup>63</sup>

Ayşe Aliye Köksal expressed great joy upon securing first place in the primary elections. Following the primaries, she issued the following statement: "Turkish women owe their current rights to the Great Atatürk. Thanks to the right to vote and be elected, granted by the Great Leader through his unmatched foresight, Turkish women are now able to serve as members of parliament. I am overwhelmed with joy and deeply moved. I am grateful to all those who supported me, and I extend my sincere thanks to everyone, regardless of whether they voted for me. I will do my utmost to represent Eskişehir in the best possible way as a member of parliament." These statements indicate that she viewed her political success as the outcome of the modernising path initiated by Atatürk. Moreover, her expression of gratitude to those who did not vote for her reflected a desire to foster unity within the CHP during the general elections.<sup>64</sup> The Eskişehir parliamentary candidate list was seen as a successful example of Bülent Ecevit's policy of reaching out to the grassroots within the party.<sup>65</sup>

Name Surname	Number of Votes
Ayşe Aliye Köksal	682
Murat Kahyaoğlu	675
Niyazi Onal	658
Ismail Özen	648
Hikmet Savaş	497
Erol Sönmez	455

**Table 3 – 1973 CHP Eskişehir Primary Election Results<sup>66</sup>**

As in every election, some candidates expressed dissatisfaction with the ranking results following the primaries. There was debate over whether Ayşe Aliye Köksal, one of the high-ranking CHP candidates, could foster

<sup>63</sup> *Sakarya*, 5 September 1973.

<sup>64</sup> *İstikbâl*, 4 September 1973.

<sup>65</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 3 October 1973.

<sup>66</sup> *İstikbâl*, 5 September 1973.

unity among the candidates during the campaign period.<sup>67</sup> In one of his columns, İrfan Uğurluer wrote: “Every parliamentary hopeful who has lost their chance of being elected must continue working as if they were still running.” Such statements were intended to preserve party unity.<sup>68</sup> However, some party members, driven by personal political ambition, targeted top-listed CHP candidates instead of campaigning against the Justice Party. In Eskişehir, those who were at the bottom of the CHP deputy list tried to get themselves elected instead of the candidates at the top through preferential voting.<sup>69</sup> Some CHP members even said “No votes for Ayşe Aliye Köksal and Murat Kahyaoglu.”<sup>70</sup>

Ayşe Aliye Köksal also faced harsh rhetoric from members of the Justice Party. These statements were underpinned by gender-based discrimination. At a fair organised by his party in Gümele, AP deputy İsmet Angı targeted Ayşe Aliye Köksal, declaring: “No one in Eskişehir would vote for the left-of-centre CHP led by Köksal.” These and similar statements demonstrate that pursuing a political career as a woman in Eskişehir was fraught with significant challenges.<sup>71</sup>

On 17 September 1973, the finalised candidate lists of the political parties were published in the Official Gazette (*Resmî Gazete*). Ayşe Aliye Köksal, who topped the Eskişehir list, was officially recorded as a housewife.<sup>72</sup> Once the primary results were confirmed, parliamentary candidates began campaigning without regard to party affiliation. Ayşe Aliye Köksal had been actively involved in social movements in Eskişehir for nearly two decades. She was widely known as “Ayşe Abla” (Sister Ayşe), a colloquial term of endearment and respect commonly used in Turkish to refer to a trusted and familiar female figure in the community. Her biggest advantage in the election process was the support of women voters. Instead of wearing tailored suits or the latest fashions, she opted for shalwar, traditional baggy trousers, during her party’s rural campaign activities. She did not restrict her campaigning to Eskişehir’s city centre; rather, she

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<sup>67</sup> *İstikbâl*, 6 September 1973.

<sup>68</sup> *İstikbâl*, 12 September 1973.

<sup>69</sup> *İstikbâl*, 13 September 1973.

<sup>70</sup> Köksal, 26 May 2025.

<sup>71</sup> *İstikbâl*, 22 September 1973.

<sup>72</sup> T.C. *Resmî Gazete*, 17 September 1973.

visited villages to hear firsthand the concerns of rural residents. In Eskişehir, it was not uncommon for a villager harvesting sugar beet to encounter Ayşe Aliye Köksal in person. Ayşe Aliye Köksal pledged to serve as an advocate for women's rights in parliament. She called on women to resist the family pressure exerted by their husbands or fathers and vote for her. As part of her campaign, she vowed to propose legislation extending maternity leave for women workers, both before and after childbirth.<sup>73</sup>

On 22 September 1973, Bülent Ecevit held a rally in Eskişehir. After the establishment of the DP, Eskişehir had traditionally supported centre-right candidates. However, the size and enthusiasm of the crowd at this rally indicated that the CHP's influence in Eskişehir had grown significantly. Ecevit addressed the crowd of more than 25,000 with the following words: "Not only the workers, peasants, and tradespeople of Eskişehir but even its private sector was so aware, patriotic, and pragmatic that it set an example for Türkiye. The peasant, who leads in wartime, is left behind in peacetime. We will ensure that the peasants take the lead in peacetime as well. Through repeated hardship and the CHP's persistent struggles, the Turkish people have come to recognise the injustice of the existing system. It is the people themselves who will build a just and secure Türkiye." Ecevit concluded his speech by chanting, together with the crowd, the slogan from his election manifesto: "Neither poverty nor oppression, neither the oppressed nor the oppressor – a humane and just order." Held in Odunpazarı, the rally was widely interpreted as a sign that the CHP would outperform its previous electoral results.<sup>74</sup>

The presence of a female candidate at the top of the list also resonated with women who were not affiliated with the party. Shortly before the elections, 80 women from Eskişehir volunteered to assist in the campaign, despite not being members of the CHP.<sup>75</sup> This demonstrated that post-primary discussions questioning Ayşe Aliye Köksal's ability to mobilise the masses were unfounded. However, during the campaign period, internal negative campaigning against Ayşe Aliye Köksal persisted within the CHP.

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<sup>73</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 3 October 1973.

<sup>74</sup> *Gerçek Yol*, 28 September 1973; *İstikbâl*, 22 September 1973; *Sakarya*, 22 September 1973; 24 September 1973.

<sup>75</sup> *Sakarya*, 9 October 1973.

Ayşe Aliye Köksal, although topping the list, became the target of some CHP members who sought to exclude her through the preferential voting system.<sup>76</sup> However, the people of Eskişehir continued to support the candidate who had secured first place in the primaries during the general elections.

The CHP achieved a major nationwide victory in the elections held on 14 October 1973. In Eskişehir, the Justice Party received 60,452 votes and ranked first, while the CHP followed with 47,488 votes.<sup>77</sup> According to these results, both the Justice Party and the CHP secured three parliamentary seats each.<sup>78</sup> From 1946 to 1973, in all elections held in Eskişehir, either the Democrat Party or the Justice Party had consistently won more seats than the CHP. Therefore, it was an important achievement for the CHP to have an equal number of deputies as the Justice Party. This success was not solely attributable to Ecevit, but also to the CHP's parliamentary candidates, especially Ayşe Aliye Köksal. She received her election certificate on 17 October 1973.<sup>79</sup> Those elected as deputies from Eskişehir set off for Ankara after receiving their parliamentary mandates.<sup>80</sup> The total number of women deputies to serve in the parliament in the new term was six.<sup>81</sup>

## VI. Parliamentary Activities in the National Assembly

On 24 October 1973, Ayşe Aliye Köksal took the oath of office at the National Assembly of Türkiye and assumed her role as the Republican People's Party deputy for Eskişehir.<sup>82</sup> After the swearing-in ceremony, she returned to Eskişehir and participated in the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Republic. Alongside her husband, Dr Muzaffer Köksal, she attended a reception hosted by Governor Mehmet Saraçoğlu at the Sugar Factory to mark the Republic's 50th anniversary.<sup>83</sup> The election of Eskişehir's first

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<sup>76</sup> *İstikbâl*, 12 October 1973.

<sup>77</sup> *T.C. Resmî Gazete*, 31 October 1973.

<sup>78</sup> *Sakarya*, 15 October 1973; *İstikbâl*, 16 October 1973.

<sup>79</sup> *The Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) Archives*, The Election Certificate (Mazbata) of Ayşe Aliye Köksal for the 1973 General Elections.

<sup>80</sup> *Sakarya*, 19 October 1973.

<sup>81</sup> Ayşen İçke, *Türkiye'de Kadın Milletvekilleri ve Siyasal Faaliyetleri (1935-1991)* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2014), 51.

<sup>82</sup> *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, 24 October 1973, 4.

<sup>83</sup> *İstikbâl*, 31 October 1973.



female MP during the Republic's 50th anniversary added a special significance to the celebrations.

The cabinet formed under the premiership of Bülent Ecevit received a vote of confidence from Parliament on 7 February 1974.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the Republican People's Party came to power. The most significant achievement of the CHP during this period was the Cyprus Peace Operation. Ayşe Aliye Köksal served as an MP in the government that carried out the Cyprus Peace Operation. However, this coalition government lasted only ten months.

During her three and a half years as a member of parliament, Ayşe Aliye Köksal worked intensively on social justice, rural development, the elimination of deficiencies in social security institutions, and the expansion of public services. During her parliamentary term, she served on the Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Affairs Commission; the Planning Commission; the Health and Social Affairs Commission; and the National Defence Commission.<sup>85</sup>

Her most striking characteristic during her parliamentary term was her refusal to adopt a partisan attitude. Although she had long served in the party, she did not let political affiliation affect her service to the public. According to her, everyone was an equal citizen, regardless of their political views.<sup>86</sup> She endeavoured to solve the problems of those who sought her help, regardless of their political beliefs.

Ayşe Aliye Köksal spoke on the parliamentary floor only once during her term as an MP.<sup>87</sup> Among the six female MPs of the period, she was the least vocal in parliamentary proceedings.<sup>88</sup> Her sole speech in parliament was delivered on behalf of her party during the debate on the 1975 draft budget. This speech reflected the institutional stance of the Republican

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<sup>84</sup> *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, 7 February 1974, 550.

<sup>85</sup> *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, 27 December 1973, 108; 12 February 1974, 570; 13 May 1975, 90; 13 January 1976, 359.

<sup>86</sup> Köksal, 26 May 2025.

<sup>87</sup> *Türk Parlamento Tarihinde Kadın Parlamenteler*, ed. Semra Gökçimen (Ankara: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, 2009), 262.

<sup>88</sup> Yeşim Arat, 'Türkiye'de Kadın Milletvekillerinin Değişen Siyasal Roller 1934-1980', in *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkek*, ed. Ayşe Berkay Hacımirzaoglu (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1998), 261.

People's Party rather than her personal views. In her speech, she stated that the staff of the Court of Accounts were working at an intense pace and bearing a heavy workload. She proposed the construction of a modern building to improve working conditions at the Court of Accounts. She noted that the Court's frugal practices served as a model of fiscal responsibility. She also argued that auditors could carry out their duties more efficiently and accurately using computers in electronic data processing centres. This statement indicates that she kept closely abreast of technological developments.<sup>89</sup>

After being elected as an MP, Ayşe Aliye Köksal raised the issues concerning Eskişehir in parliament. She introduced a bill proposing the elevation of İnönü, then a subdistrict, to full district status.<sup>90</sup> This was among her first legislative initiatives in parliament. However, this proposal was not enacted during her tenure of office and there was no change in the administrative status of İnönü. Thirteen years later, in 1987, İnönü was granted district status.<sup>91</sup>

She took steps to address the needs of those who referred to her as the "workers' sister," drafting legislation concerning labour rights.<sup>92</sup> She proposed that, in the event of the death of a Pension Fund member, the pension be transferred to the surviving spouse.<sup>93</sup> The proposal was not reviewed by the Planning Commission within the required timeframe. Subsequently, she appealed to the Speaker of the Parliament to have the bill placed on the agenda, but her request was rejected by a vote.<sup>94</sup> She also called for a parliamentary inquiry into deficiencies within the Social Insurance Institution.<sup>95</sup>

During her term in office, she also engaged with matters concerning local governance. Her proposal concerning a draft law on village headmen (muhtars), along with her call for a minimum allowance of 100 liras for

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<sup>89</sup> *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, 18 February 1975, 151–153.

<sup>90</sup> *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, 17 January 1974, 214.

<sup>91</sup> Musa Şaşmaz, *Türkiye'nin İdari Taksimatı (1920–2013)*, Vol. 6 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014), 294–296.

<sup>92</sup> *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, 17 January 1974, 214; 11 April 1974, 130.

<sup>93</sup> *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, 6 July 1976, 370.

<sup>94</sup> *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, 30 December 1976, 438–439.

<sup>95</sup> *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, 5 February 1976, 881–882.

members of local advisory councils, demonstrates her commitment to strengthening local governance structures.<sup>96</sup> One of her final legislative efforts concerned poppy cultivation, a highly contentious issue at the time. She supported a proposal granting amnesty for unauthorised poppy cultivation.<sup>97</sup> During the 1973 election campaign, she pledged to extend maternity leave for female workers, both before and after childbirth.<sup>98</sup> However, parliamentary records contain no evidence that this promise was fulfilled.

## VII. Farewell to Politics 1977 Elections

In the 1977 general elections, the number of parliamentary seats allocated to Eskişehir was reduced to five based on the latest population data.<sup>99</sup> This reduction made it significantly more important to secure one of the top two positions in the party's primary elections. According to the party regulations, candidates for CHP parliamentary seats had to apply by 31 March 1977.<sup>100</sup> The party's primary elections were scheduled for 1 May 1977.<sup>101</sup> Ayşe Aliye Köksal sought re-election as an MP representing Eskişehir. Despite her three and a half years of parliamentary service to Eskişehir, her chances were widely regarded as slim.<sup>102</sup> İsmail Özen, who had been placed fourth in the previous election, was expected to secure a higher ranking in the upcoming primaries.<sup>103</sup> Two other CHP deputies from Eskişehir, Murat Kahyaoğlu and Niyazi Onal, also sought re-election.<sup>104</sup> CHP candidates travelled from village to village to gather support from their party's delegates.<sup>105</sup>

Ayşe Aliye Köksal made a public statement shortly before the party primaries: "For 23 years, I worked diligently across all levels of my party, particularly within the women's branch of the CHP. As a result, I was elected

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<sup>96</sup> *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, 15 February 1977, 672.

<sup>97</sup> *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, 15 March 1977.

<sup>98</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 3 October 1973.

<sup>99</sup> *Eskişehir*, 9 February 1977; *Sakarya*, 8 April 1977.

<sup>100</sup> *Eskişehir*, 29 March 1977.

<sup>101</sup> *İstikbâl*, 18 April 1977.

<sup>102</sup> *Eskişehir*, 30 April 1977.

<sup>103</sup> *İstikbâl*, 30 April 1977.

<sup>104</sup> *Eskişehir*, 29 March 1977.

<sup>105</sup> *Eskişehir*, 22 April 1977.

as an MP in the 1973 general elections through the support of the electorate in Eskişehir. I am at peace because I served my nation in parliament in line with my party's principles and policy framework. During this period, I contributed to the passage of critical legislation. I also served effectively on the Planning and Budget Committee as well as the National Defence Committee. My objective is to contribute more meaningfully to public service." Her remarks constituted a retrospective account of her parliamentary activities over the course of three and a half years.<sup>106</sup>

The primary elections were held on 1 May 1977. More than twenty CHP members seeking parliamentary nomination competed in the primaries.<sup>107</sup> This number of contenders was relatively high compared to previous elections. When the results were announced, it became clear that Ayşe Aliye Köksal had been excluded from the list. This outcome was regarded as unremarkable among CHP members. Nonetheless, the results constituted a major disappointment for Ayşe Aliye Köksal. Similarly, Orhan Oğuz, who had headed the Justice Party's candidate list in the previous elections, also faced major disappointment in 1977. In the 1977 primaries, Oğuz secured only fourth place. It is noteworthy that those who topped their parties' candidate lists in 1973 failed to secure sufficient intra-party support three and a half years later. This situation was likely a consequence of the high expectations placed on deputies.<sup>108</sup>

Following her unsuccessful bid for re-election in the 1977 general elections, Ayşe Aliye Köksal withdrew from active political life. After returning to Eskişehir from Ankara, she later settled in Karşıyaka, a district of İzmir, where she spent the final years of her life. Her son, Atilla Köksal, who was a physician, brought her to Ankara for treatment. However, the medical interventions did not yield the desired outcome. She died in Ankara on 5 November 1987, leaving behind a pioneering and inspirational legacy in women's political struggle over the course of her 63-year life.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> *Sakarya*, 23 April 1977.

<sup>107</sup> *Sakarya*, 2 May 1977.

<sup>108</sup> *Sakarya*, 3 May 1977.

<sup>109</sup> Köksal, 26 May 2025.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

According to the 1935 census, the year in which women were first elected to parliament, Eskişehir was among the provinces where the urban population exceeded the rural population. Following the extension of suffrage to women, the vast majority of urbanised cities elected at least one female member of parliament. Eskişehir, however, did not elect its first female member of parliament until 1973, the fiftieth anniversary of the Republic. This suggests that, despite Eskişehir's sizeable urban population, rural cultural norms continued to shape societal values, and women remained marginalised in the political sphere.

Although Ayşe Aliye Köksal had moved to Eskişehir at a later stage, she quickly became one of the prominent figures of the CHP due to her active engagement in politics. She led the establishment of the Women's Branch of the CHP in Eskişehir, assumed its presidency, and played a pioneering role in advancing women's political activism. As a result of her determined political stance, she soon became a respected and popular figure among the residents of Eskişehir. In 1965, she stood as a candidate for Parliament but was not elected. This failure did not drive her away from politics, and she ran again in 1969. She was not elected to Parliament in that election either. In 1973, she stood for election once again, and this time she was elected as an MP. This process illustrated that political persistence could ultimately lead to success.

Although the effectiveness of Ayşe Aliye Köksal's parliamentary activities was a matter of debate, she submitted several bills, addressed Parliament once, and endeavoured to represent the concerns of her constituents during her term in office. Despite these efforts, her parliamentary term was relatively limited in terms of active participation. This situation was not unique to her; most female members of Parliament in that period held largely symbolic positions. However, Ayşe Aliye Köksal did not confine herself to a symbolic role; she actively sought to amplify public concerns through her parliamentary position.

The fact that Eskişehir elected its first female member of Parliament in the fiftieth year of the Republic represents a belated political development in the context of the city's democratic history. Ayşe Aliye Köksal stood for election again in 1977 but was not re-elected. Even more

strikingly, no other woman was elected to Parliament from Eskişehir for many years after Ayşe Aliye Köksal. This situation reveals that women remained marginalised in the city's political sphere. Ayşe Aliye Köksal became the first woman elected to represent Eskişehir in Parliament, despite the structural disadvantages faced by women at the time. Her struggle became an inspiring example for women in Turkish political life.

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