

WOMEN IN THE CLASSICAL WORLD

Image and Text

Elaine Fantham
Helene Peet Foley
Natalie Boymel Kampen
Sarah B. Pomeroy
H. A. Shapiro

New York Oxford
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
1994

5

THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD: WOMEN IN A COSMOPOLITAN WORLD

The Hellenistic is the only period in Greek and Roman history defined by the reign of a woman. It begins with the death of Alexander the Great on June 10, 323 B.C.E. and ends after the Roman conquest of Egypt, with the suicide of Cleopatra VII on August 12, 30 B.C.E. and the subsequent eighteen-day reign of her children. The late Sir Moses Finley opened his essay "The Silent Women of Rome" with the observation that Cleopatra was the most famous woman in Roman history (Finley 1968: 129). Because of her fame (and infamy) she will be discussed again in Part II of this book (see Chapter 10). Plutarch's description of Cleopatra suggests that her powerful attraction for great men like Julius Caesar and Mark Antony came not so much from conventional physical beauty as from her charm and intelligence. Living in Alexandria and traveling widely in the Mediterranean, she was at home in several languages and diverse cultures:

For her beauty, as we are told, was in itself not altogether incomparable, nor such as to strike those who saw her. There was a sweetness also in the tones of her voice; and her tongue, like an instrument of many strings, she could readily turn to whatever language she pleased, so that in her interviews with barbarians she very seldom had need of an interpreter, but made her replies to most of them herself and unassisted, whether they were Ethiopians, Troglodytes, Hebrews, Arabians, Syrians, Medes or Parthians. It is said that she knew the speech of many other peoples also, although the kings of Egypt before her had not even made an effort to learn the native language, and some actually gave up their Macedonian dialect.

(Plutarch, *Antony* 27.2; Perrin 1968 modified)

Images of Cleopatra survive in large numbers and in various media, from marble busts (Fig. 5.1) to bronze coins (Fig. 5.2). The well-preserved head in Berlin (Fig. 5.1) was probably made in Alexandria itself and is a good example of the soft, gentle quality that was the hallmark of the Alexandrian style in sculpture. Cleopatra shares the so-



A



B

Figure 5.1. Marble bust of Cleopatra, perhaps from Alexandria A. front view and B. profile. The oval face, with its prominent nose and short chin, are repeated on several images of the queen to convey a distinctly recognizable portrait type beneath the overlay of youthful idealization.



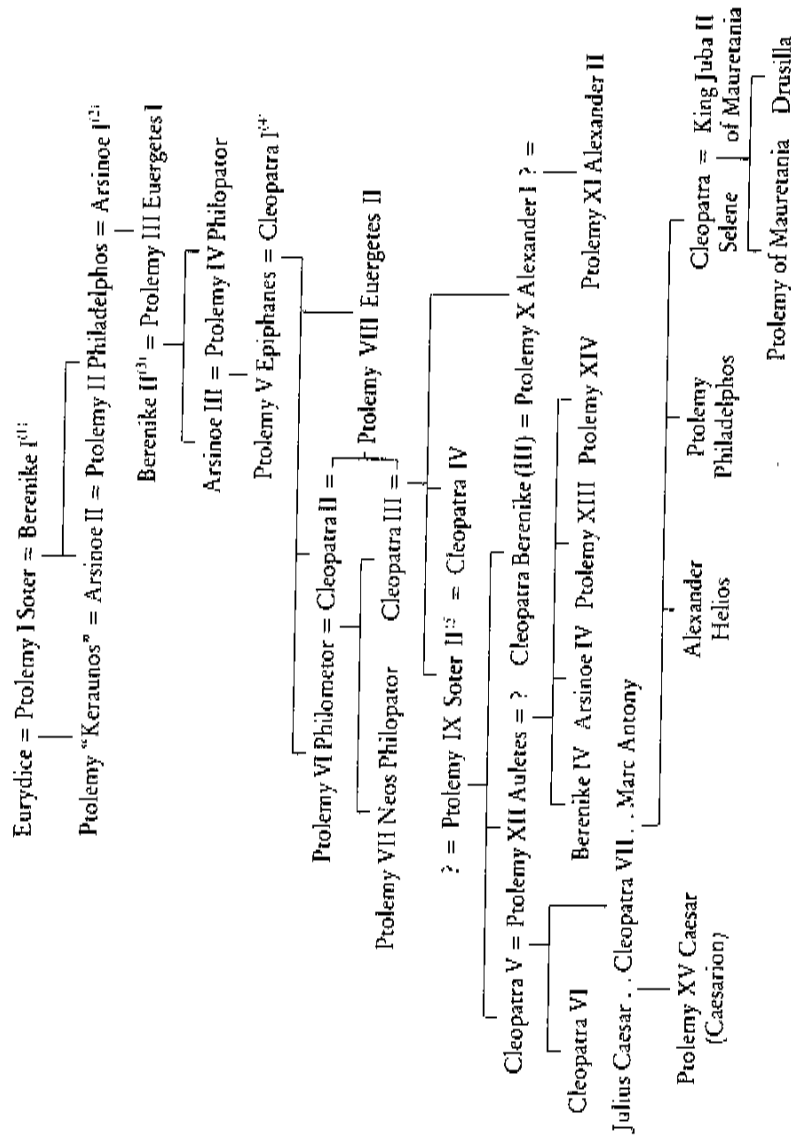
Figure 5.2. Silver tetradrachm of Cleopatra, minted at Askalon (39–37 B.C.E.), which shares the same portrait type as the bust shown in Figure 5.1.

called melon coiffure, with a bun at the back, with many of her Ptolemaic ancestors two centuries earlier, as well as Roman women, and her face conforms to the Alexandrian ideal of the youthful queen. Yet there is also a strong individuality that makes her unmistakable. This is evident in a comparison with a coin she probably had minted in 39 or 38 B.C.E. that shows all the same features (Fig. 5.2). By contrast, a slightly later coin, from the time of her involvement with Mark Antony (Fig. 5.3), has both "Romanized" Cleopatra and "Orientalized" her, especially in the exaggeratedly large, hooked nose, in order to portray her as a "client" (subject ally) of the Romans (Smith 1988: 133-34). Through her involvement with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, and her rivalry with Octavian (the future emperor Augustus), she was indeed as important in shaping the course of Roman history as that of her native Egypt. Like other Ptolemaic queens, Cleopatra was also portrayed in purely Egyptian style (cf. the portrait of Arsinoë II, Fig. 5.10), in sculptures made for the native Egyptians (cf. Bieber 1961, fig. 371). She could even be shown as the Egyptian (male) Pharaoh, with bare chest and short kilt, taking up a tradition that went back to the New Kingdom Queen Hatshepshut, ca. 1500 B.C.E. (cf. *Cleopatra's Egypt*, cat. no. 78).

Although Cleopatra was heir to some ancient Egyptian traditions (Fig. 5.4), she was not an anomaly in a long line of Greek queens (Pomeroy 1984: 3-40). Thus, it is not a distortion of history—even history defined in the traditional sense as political change—to put women like Cleopatra at the center of the inquiry, then to look at other elite women for whom such queens served as models, and finally to discuss how the lives of lower-class and anonymous women differed from those of their counterparts in preceding periods of Greek history.



Figure 5.3. Silver tetradrachm of Cleopatra minted at Antioch (37 B.C.E.) with the very large nose and enlarged jaw that was preferred by moneyers in the period when the queen was involved with Mark Antony.



- (1) A Macedonian Greek noblewoman
- (2) Daughter of King Lysimachos of Thrace (Greece)
- (3) Daughter of the Greek King Magas I of Cyrene, the son of Berenike I
- (4) Daughter of the Greek King Antiochus III of Syria
- (5) It is possible that Ptolemy IX is actually the son of Ptolemy VIII and Cleopatra II

Figure 5.4. The Ptolemies: an abbreviated genealogy.

The Cosmopolis: The Range of the Sources

Cleopatra VII is paradigmatic of her time. Information about her is found in a wide variety of sources, visual and textual, and in languages of the western, eastern, and southern Mediterranean world. Thus it is clear that the extant sources for the history of Hellenistic women are much more diverse than those for Greek women in earlier historical periods. Our evidence for the Classical period was mainly for Athenians and Spartans. In the wake of Alexander's defeat of Persia, Greeks began to settle in areas such as Egypt that had formerly belonged to the Persian Empire, and to found new cities like Alexandria.

The Hellenistic was a period of migration for Greek women as well as for men. In the Classical period, respectable women—at least those of Athens—had been able to look forward to only two journeys: the first from their father's house to their husband's, the next from their husband's house to the grave. But in the Hellenistic period both women and men migrated to the newly conquered territories and forged new lives for themselves in the frontier outposts of Hellenism. In the new cosmopolitan cities, some restrictive conventions of the old city-states were retained, but others were altered or discarded in response to changing societal and individual needs. For example, in Alexandria nonroyal Greek women still needed to conduct their legal and economic transactions through the intermediary of a male guardian, but royal women and women who used the Egyptian or Jewish legal systems did not do so. Among the Greeks, a dowry was still a prerequisite for marriage, but respectable unmarried women who chose to work in the liberal arts and professions are noted with admiration in the historical sources. Poetic sources, however, including Theocritus and the poets of the *Greek Anthology* (Paton 1968), portray the vicissitudes of women living independently and outside the strictures and protection of the Classical *oikos*. These women are the predecessors of the "New Women" of the late Roman Republic (see Chapter 10). Our evidence for women's history at this period is also ethnically diverse: thus it is possible to compare the legal status of Greek women living in Egypt with the status of Egyptian, Jewish, and Roman women who were their contemporaries. It is not, however, always possible to determine the ethnicity of individual women, unless they are Greeks at the top of the ruling class. Furthermore, the documentary material from non-Greek sources that could provide information about lower-class and native women has not yet been fully exploited by historians, because very few can read the demotic script in which the Egyptian language was written in this period.

New types of primary historical sources appear in abundance. The climate of the Egyptian countryside was conducive to the preservation of papyri. Documents written on papyrus including those recording marriage contracts, divorces, wet-nursing contracts, and private letters are a rich source for women's history (Pomeroy 1984). A major problem in

dealing with these texts is that most often a woman is known from only one document. Thus it is not clear whether the source describes a common phenomenon or an idiosyncratic situation. Papyri also often provide the only texts of literary works such as Callimachus's "Victory of Berenice" and "Lock of Berenice." Though some scholars will inevitably ask whether evidence from Greco-Roman Egypt is typical of that which might have been found in the rest of the ancient world if the climate had been favorable to the preservation of papyri, with the exception of the Canopus decree and the depictions of Blacks in the cult of Isis (which will be discussed later in this chapter), the documents cited in the present chapter do not seem exotic and probably had their analogues in the rest of the Hellenistic world.

In the wake of Alexander the Great, workshops of Greek artists throughout the Mediterranean recorded the rhythms of urban life with a new sophistication and realism. Terra-cotta figurines from all corners of the Greek world give insights into women's daily lives and testify, for example, to women's literacy (Fig. 5.5: a girl holding a book roll; see below, "Education and Professions"). They often show ethereally pretty young women engaged in carefree activities like dancing, playing games (Fig. 5.6),¹ or talking with one another. The same spirit of intimacy between women is depicted by Hellenistic poets, such as Herodas, who, writing for a largely male audience, imagines two women having a frank discussion about sex:

METRO: Please tell me the truth, dear Koritto, who stitched you the scarlet baubon?²

KORITTO: Where have you seen it, Metro?

METRO: Oh, it was Nossis, Erinna's daughter, who had it given me a couple of days ago—la! a pretty present!³

KORITTO: Nossis! From whom did she get it?

METRO: Will you betray me if I tell you?

KORITTO: By these sweet eyes, Metro dear, not a soul shall hear from Koritto's mouth anything you say.

METRO: It was Eubule, wife of Bitsas, who gave it to her, and told her that no one was to know about it.

KORITTO: Women, women, this woman will be the death of me one day. I had pity on her entreaties and gave it to her, Metro, before I used it myself, and she snatches it like some treasure-trove and makes a present of it to improper people; I bid goodbye, dear, for ever to such a woman as this; let her choose some other friend instead of me henceforward. I shan't lend anything to Nossis, daughter of Medokes—if I speak more strongly than a woman should, may Nemesis forgive me—not even a rotten baubon, if I had nine hundred and ninety-nine besides.

(Herodas 6.12–36; Headlam and Knox, 1922, modified)

A scene in one of Theocritus's *Odes* illustrates how women were free to move about and to address male strangers in public in a large cosmopolitan city like Alexandria. (Contrast, in Chapter 3, the situation of respectable women whose names could not even be mentioned outside



Figure 5.5. Terra-cotta figurine from Benghazi (330–300 B.C.E.) of a woman with a writing tablet.

the family circle.) In this passage, two friends accompanied by their slave women are on their way to the palace, to attend a festival of Adonis sponsored by Queen Arsinoë II (on the patronage of Arsinoë II, see Pomeroy 1984: 17–20):

PRAXINOA: Heavens, what a crowd! How and when are we to get through this plague? They're like ants—there's no numbering or counting them.

The Hellenistic Period

143



Figure 5.6. Terra-cotta figurine from Tanagra (ca. first half of third century B.C.E.) of young women playing a game resembling piggyback (ephedrismos). The long and elegant figures, clearly beyond early childhood, mix innocent conduct with a touch of sensuality.

You've done us many a good turn, Ptolemy, since your father was in heaven. Nowadays no ruffian slips up to you in the street Egyptian-fashion and does you a mischief—the tricks those packets of rascality used to play, one as bad as another with their nasty tricks, a cursed lot.

WOMEN IN THE GREEK WORLD

Dear Gorgo! what will become of us? The king's chargers! My dear sir, don't tread on me. The chestnut's reared; see how wild he is. Keep clear, Eunoa, you reckless girl. He'll go for the man that's leading him. It's lucky I left the baby at home.

GORGO: It's all right, Praxinoa; we've got behind them now, and they've gone to their place.

PRAXINOA: And now I'm collecting myself again too. A horse and the cold snake I've been afraid of more than anything else ever since I was a child. Let's hurry; we're being swamped in this mob.

GORGO: Are you from the palace, mother?

AN OLD WOMAN: I am, my children.

GORGO: Is it easy to get in?

OLD WOMAN: The Greeks got into Troy by trying, my pretties; everything's done by trying.

GORGO: The old lady has pronounced her oracles and gone off.

PRAXINOA: Women know everything—even how Zeus married Hera.

GORGO: Look, Praxinoa, what a crowd there is round the doors.

PRAXINOA: Terrific. Give me your hand, Gorgo, and Eunoa take Eutyche's, and mind you don't get separated from her. We must all go in together. Eunoa, stick close to us. Oh dear, oh dear, my shawl is torn in two already, Gorgo. For heaven's sake, sir, mind my wrap as you hope for happiness.

(Theocritus 15.44–71; Gow 1952)

Literary sources for this period, however, are relatively meager and fragmentary. We do not have the dramas or orations that we know reflected the views of a large part of the population of a city like Classical Athens. Nor do we have a historian who commands the respect due a Thucydides and gives a consistent interpretation of events. Instead, we quote, for example, from the epitome that Justin (third century, C.E.) made of Pompeius Trogus's moralizing narrative. Although Plutarch wrote biographies of great men rather than history, and lived in a later period, his work continues to provide crucial evidence for the history of women of this period, as it did for those of preceding generations. Thus the history of women, like the following account, must be pieced together from diverse sources, Greek and Latin, of uneven worth.

Berenice II

Berenice II (ca. 273–221 B.C.E.) of Egypt is a good example of a Hellenistic queen who exercised real political power and who left her mark on poetry and religion. She had access to a large fortune, which she spent as she chose on perfume made of roses and on racehorses that competed in Panhellenic games on the Greek mainland.⁴ (Owning racehorses was a traditional form of conspicuous consumption among men; cf. Chapter 1, Semonides on the mare-woman.) Berenice was sole heir to the city of Cyrene and also derived some of her income from shipping. Like some

other elite and royal women, Berenice owned ships that transported grain on the Nile (*P. Rylands* 4.576; see Hauben 1979). Her life, like that of her famous descendant Cleopatra VII, included intrigue, incestuous adultery, with mother and daughter vying for the same man, and intra-familial homicide: themes formerly found in myth and tragedy became historical reality in the days of the Ptolemies.

Berenice was the daughter of Magas of Cyrene, and Apame. The political fate of Cyrene was linked to Berenice's marriage and decided by a struggle between Berenice and Apame. Berenice's father had betrothed her to her cousin Ptolemy III—a marriage that would reunite Cyrene with Egypt.

After the death of Magas, his widow Apame invited the Macedonian Demetrius the Fair to Cyrene to marry her daughter in order to thwart the plan to reunify the two kingdoms. The mother competed with her daughter for the same man.

Magas, king of Cyrene, died. Before his illness he had betrothed Berenice, his only daughter, to the son of Ptolemy II after ending a dispute with him. But after the death of the king, Arsinoë [that is, Apame] the mother of the unmarried girl, because she was opposed to the betrothal, had it annulled and sent envoys to fetch Demetrius (who was the brother of King Antigonos and himself descended from a daughter of Ptolemy I), so that he could marry the girl and become king of Cyrene. Demetrius did not delay. With the help of the winds, he came at once to Cyrene, and relying on his good looks he began to ingratiate himself with his mother-in-law. From the very start he was proud of his royal descent, had no power with the army, and shifted his desire to please from the girl to her mother. When the liaison was discovered, first by the girl, then by the populace and the army, it caused disgust. Accordingly, when everyone favored the son of Ptolemy, a plot was prepared against Demetrius. When he had retired in his mother-in-law's bed, assassins were sent in. But when Arsinoë heard the voice of her daughter standing at the door and warning the assassins to spare her mother, she shielded the adulterer a little while with her own body. When he was killed and Berenice had piously avenged the adultery of her mother, in her subsequent marriage she carried out her father's plan.

(Justin [*Pompeius Trogus*] 26.3.2–8; trans. Sarah B. Pomeroy)

There are portraits of Berenice II on coins (Fig. 5.7), in stone (Fig. 5.8), and on some of the best preserved faience oinochoai, small blue jugs used in the ruler cult at Alexandria (Fig. 5.9). All these portraits share certain characteristics: the full, fleshy face; large, dreamy eyes, and a simple coiffure enhanced by a metal diadem (missing from the marble bust, Fig. 5.8). They are not so idealized, however, as to conceal signs of middle age, like the sagging flesh under the chin, to indicate that her influence and power continued to increase with age. Her own ample proportions echo the material prosperity of Egypt that is intimately linked with her, in the cornucopia that she carries on the oinochoe (Fig. 5.9) and that also appears on the reverse of her coins (Fig. 5.7B). The cornucopia alludes to the queen's role as preserver of fertility and incarnation of the goddess of good fortune, Tyche. The two caps

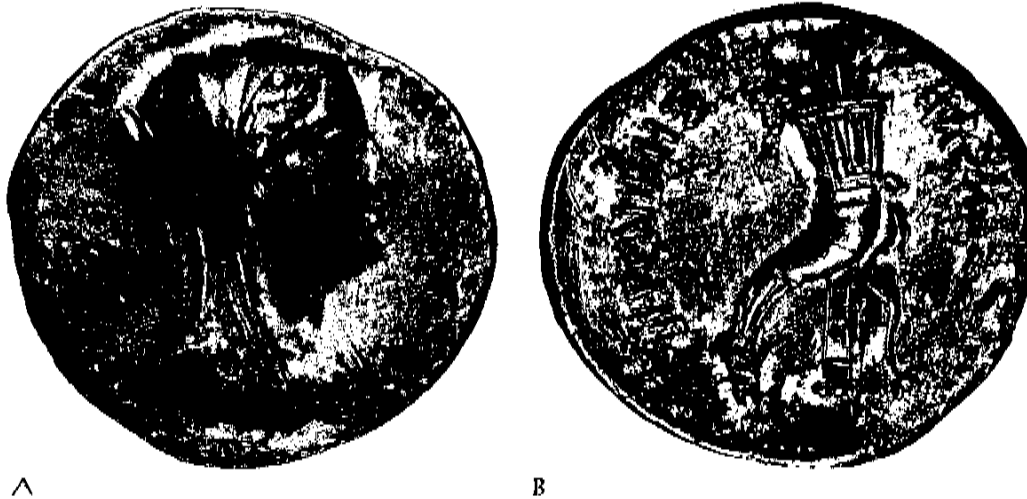


Figure 5.7. **A.** Silver tetradrachm minted at Alexandria (246–221 B.C.E.) of Queen Berenice II. Signs of maturity help to convey the queen's power. **B.** Reverse of the same coin. The cornucopia, which also appears on the vase in Figure 5.9, connects the queen with the goddess of good fortune, Tyche, and with fertility.

beneath it on the coin may refer to Castor and Polydeuces, sons of Zeus and protectors of seafaring (hence to Berenice's own descent from Zeus and her association with Aphrodite and the sea). On the oinochoe, an inscription identifies Berenice as queen and invokes good fortune, while another associates her with the "Benevolent Gods." She stands near an altar and pours a libation from a *phiale*. Such vessels, perhaps containing wine, would have been offered by worshipers for the well-being of the royal house (Thompson 1975: 118).⁵ The Egyptian technique of blue faience is combined with a purely Hellenizing style that likens the queen to maternal goddesses of fertility such as Demeter (cf. "Canopus Decree" [quoted later this chapter] and Pollitt 1986: 273).

For her courageous deeds Greek and Roman authors awarded Berenice the most extravagant praise any Greek woman ever enjoyed (see, for example, Callimachus, "The Lock of Berenice," below, lines 25–28). She was herself an accomplished equestrian and rode horses on the battlefield.⁶ She also owned racehorses that competed in the Nemean and Olympic games. Callimachus of Cyrene celebrated the victory of her quadriga at Nemea. The "Victory of Berenice" was, apparently, the first epinician (victory ode) written in honor of a woman owner (for the fragments and bibliography see Lloyd-Jones and Parsons 1983, nos. 254–269). The reconstruction of the fragments of this poem indicates that it was a traditional epinician similar to those celebrating men. Callimachus related the story of Hercules who slew the Nemean lion and of the foundation of the Nemean Games. The poem is now fragmentary; it probably began and ended with references to Berenice's victory at Nemea.



Figure 5.8. Portrait bust (provenance unknown) (second half of the third century B.C.E.) of Queen Berenice II showing the typical full face with large eyes and simple hairstyle, the diadem is missing here but is present on the coin portrait in Figure 5.7.



Figure 5.9. Faience jug from Alexandria, found at Xanthos (ca. 240 B.C.E.), with an image of Berenice II making an offering at an altar. The cornucopia indicates the prosperity of Egypt under the queen's beneficent rule, as do the inscriptions that connect Berenice II with the "Benevolent Gods."

Berenice governed Egypt when her husband went off to campaign in the Third Syrian War (246–241 B.C.E.). She vowed to dedicate a lock of her hair to Arsinoë II–Aphrodite at Zephyrium upon his safe return. (Dedications of hair were normal offerings to Greek divinities, and Arsinoë had by this time been deified and assimilated to Aphrodite; see later under "Religion: Imperial Cult and the Goddess Isis"). Berenice made the dedication, but the hair disappeared. The winged horse of Arsinoë II–Aphrodite had carried it off. Conon the astronomer, grateful for imperial patronage, flattered the queen by identifying her lock of hair among the constellations and Callimachus narrates the vicissitudes of the lock in "The Lock of Berenice." The poet expects Berenice to understand the erudite allusions to astronomical, mythical, and historical matters in the elegy, and to have so cultivated a taste for poetry that she can appreciate his work.

Callimachus's "Lock of Berenice" is too fragmentary to be reproduced in its entirety here (Fragment 110, Pfeiffer). Instead, we print a translation of excerpts from the Latin version by Catullus, who knew personally Roman women who (like Berenice) exercised economic power, were involved in politics, and could appreciate erudite poetry (see Chapter 10). The poem is not only arcane but amusing, as the lock of hair comments on personal and historical events. (Aphrodite is referred to as Venus in Catullus's Latin version):

Conon the astronomer, who has observed every star
 in the sky, determined their risings and settings,
 is the expert on solar eclipses, the corona's splendor,
 the slow precession of the constellations,
 and into what cave on Latmos the Moon-Goddess descends
 when love's vibrations disturb her orbit—
 this Conon has also observed in the velvet night sky
 yours truly, a lock of hair from Berenice's head,
 glowing serenely, which she dedicated to All Goddesses,
 stretching out her slender arms in supplication,
 what time the king, her newlywed husband, sated and proud,
 sallied forth to annex Syria to his realm,
 displaying, I might add, on his royal person the marks
 of the previous night's struggle for virgin spoils.
 Query: is Aphrodite really distasteful to brides? Are those
 crocodile tears they shed at the bridal chamber's threshold,
 blubbering away while their parents are weeping for joy?
 Dissimulated groans, so help me gods,
 as I deduced from my mistress's pitiful lamentations
 the day her new husband went off to war.
 Oh, but you say you weren't mourning your desolate bed
 but the poignant departure of a cherished brother?
 And yet the sorrow consumed you down to the marrow,
 your bosom heaved with exquisite anxiety,
 you were senseless with grief! And this from a woman
 I've known as courageous from girlhood on.
 Or have you forgotten the noble crime by which you secured
 your royal marriage? Who else would have dared it?
 What a fit of *tristesse*, what a maudlin send-off you gave him!
 Zeus! How many times did your hanky dab your eyes?
 A character change wrought by some god? Or do lovers
 simply resent the absence of the body loved?
 Anyway, you dedicated me to All Goddesses (with a good deal
 of bull's blood) toward your husband's return,
 and return he did, in fairly short order, having annexed
 half of Asia to his eastern frontier.
 For which exploits and in expiation of which vow
 I have been enrolled as a member of this celestial club.

 My sister strands, just recently parted, were bewailing my fate,
 When Memnon's brother, Arsinoë's dainty mount, pumping

WOMEN IN THE GREEK WORLD

dappled wings, whisked me away through the ethereal dark
 and deposited me in Aphrodite's chaste lap.
 Zephyritis herself had commissioned this flight,
 the Hellenic lady who haunts Egypt's shores.
 And Aphrodite, lest the crown from Ariadne's temples
 be the only such fixture to light the night sky,
 arranged that I too, blonde consecrated spoils dripping
 with tears, should illumine the precincts divine,
 installing me as a new constellation 'midst the old.

.....
 And now, Virgin Nemesis, forgive me
 for the outspoken candor of what I feel I must say,
 And may the stars spare me their scalding gossip:
 I am not so happy with this state of affairs that I don't
 suffer terribly at the permanent separation
 from my mistress's head, together with whom I have imbibed
 perfumes galore (though we abstained when she was a virgin).
 So this is my plea: You virgins blessed by the bridal torch,
 before offering your bodies to your ardent husbands,
 before you even pull off your dress to bare your nipples,
 offer me some ointment from your onyx jar—
 but only if you're devoted to what a chaste bed allows.
 If any adulteress should pour a libation,
 may dry dust soak it up and render it void. I want
 no propitiation from disreputable women.
 My wish is rather that conjugal harmony inhabit
 the homes of all brides, and constant devotion.
 And you, my queen, when on your way with festal lamps
 to appease Aphrodite you look up at the stars,
 do not allow me, once yours, to remain unperfumed,
 but propitiate me from your royal largesse!

A prisoner of the stars!

If only I could be on a queen's head again, Orion
 could shine up to Aquarius for all that I care.

(Catullus 66.1-39; 51-61; 79-93; Lombardo and Rayor 1988)

Berenice II and Ptolemy III had four children: Ptolemy IV, Arsinoë III, Magas, and Berenice. The younger Berenice predeceased her parents and was deified (see the "Canopus Decree" below). Arsinoë III eventually married her brother Ptolemy IV (on brother-sister marriage, see the next section). After the death of Ptolemy III in 222 B.C.E. Berenice attempted to gain the support of the army for her favorite Magas (Plutarch, *Cleomenes* 33; Polybius 15.25). But his brother ordered him to be scalded to death. The subsequent murder of Berenice by her son's command is indicative of the political power she continued to wield:

At the time when they [Ptolemy IV and his advisers] were plotting the murder of Magas [Berenice's younger son] and Berenice, being in great fear of their project failing chiefly owing to the courage of Berenice, they were compelled to conciliate the whole court.

(Polybius 5.36; Paton 1967: 89)

Although Ptolemy IV was responsible for his mother's murder, he created a priestesshood in her honor. The athlophoros (prize-bearer) of Berenice the Benefactor was awarded precedence over priestesses of all other queens. The title of the priestess, athlophoros, may refer to the victories of Berenice's horses at Nemea and Olympia. Ptolemy IV also built a temple for Berenice with the epithet "Savior" on the shore at Alexandria (Fraser 1972: 1: 238–39). Thus, following the model of male heroes in Greek tradition who underwent multiple trials and survived thanks to their courage and cunning, Berenice truly earned her apotheosis.

Religion: Imperial Cult and the Goddess Isis

"The Lock of Berenice" (lines 56–58) alludes to the deification of Arsinoë II as Aphrodite-Zephyritis, and the Canopus Decree refers to the deification of Berenice, daughter of Ptolemy III and Berenice II, and of Berenice's daughter and namesake. Portraits of the queens often indicate their divinity through their clothing and the attributes they hold (cf. Fig. 5.10).

The cults of the queens as divine required the appointment of priestesses. The priestesses were usually young daughters of the Alexandrian aristocracy. Their principal function, from which their titles derived, was carrying items such as baskets in processions. Thus their religious activities were similar to those of the girls on the Parthenon frieze, and probably were created in conscious imitation of their Classical predecessors (cf. Figs. 3.3 and 3.5).

Unlike the Athenians, however, the names of the Alexandrian girls were widely known, for they appear frequently in the dating formulas of inscriptions and documents written on papyrus. For an example, we turn now to the Canopus Decree, which indicates that the Egyptians accepted the Ptolemies' claim to divinity as descendants of the Pharaohs and as incarnations of both Greek and native Egyptian gods. Berenice herself is linked to Demeter through the imagery of ears of grain. Note the many echoes of earlier rituals, such as the singing of hymns by choruses, fertility offerings to the goddess, and the reference to the kanephoros of Arsinoë (cf. the kanephoroi on the Parthenon Frieze—fig. 3.5), as well as new Egyptian elements in the cult.

Decree of Egyptian Priests in honor of Ptolemy III and Berenice II, Canopus, March 4, 238 B.C.E.

In the ninth year of the reign of Ptolemy, son of Ptolemy and Arsinoë the Brother-and-Sister Gods, the priest of Alexander and the Brother-and-Sister Gods and the Benefactor Gods being Apollonidas son of Moschion and the kanephoros of Arsinoë Philadelphos being Menecrateia daughter of Philammon, on the seventh of the month Apellaios, the seventeenth of the Egyptians' (month) Tybi: decree: the chief-priests and the prophets⁷ and those who enter the shrine for

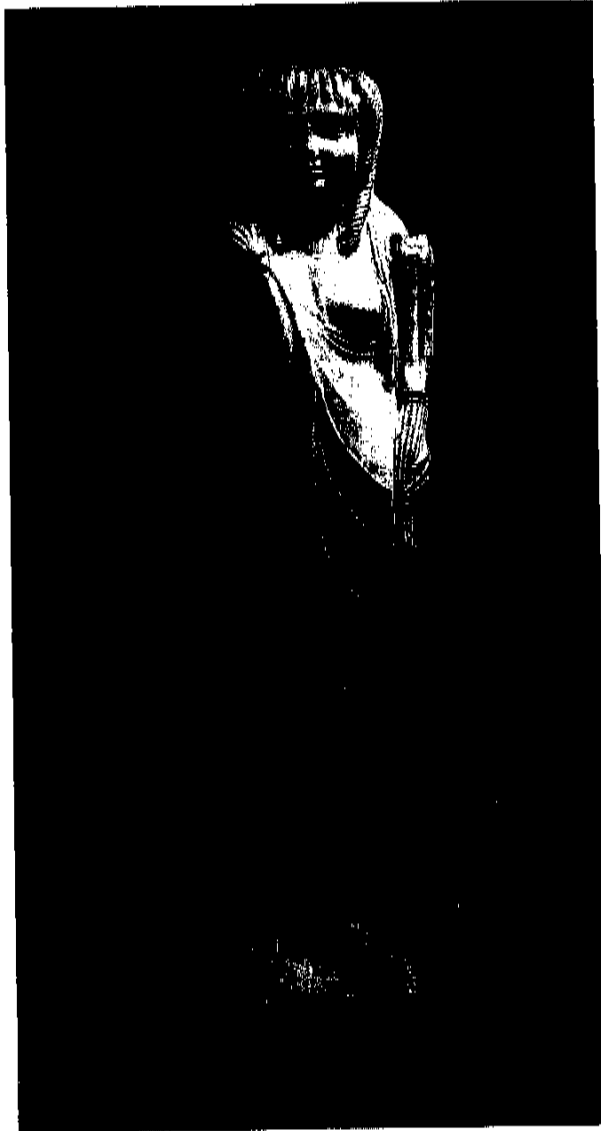


Figure 5.10. Portrait (provenance unknown) (ca. 270–246 B.C.E.) of Ptolemaic queen Arsinoë II in a traditionally Egyptian (Pharaonic) style.

the adoring of the gods and the feather-bearers and the sacred scribes and the other priests who come together from the temples in the country for the fifth of (the month) Dios, on which day is celebrated the birthday of the king, and for the 25th of the same month, on which day he received the kingdom from his father, (all these) having assembled together on this day in the temple of the benefactor Gods in Canopus spoke: Whereas King Ptolemy, son of Ptolemy and Arsinoë the brother-and-Sister Gods, and Queen Berenice, his sister and wife, the Benefactor Gods, continually bestow many and great benefactions on the temples in the country and increase ever more the honors of the gods, and in all respects they exercise concern, with great expense and abundance, for Apis and for Mnevis⁸ and for the other renowned sacred beasts of the country; and the king marched out and brought back safe to Egypt the sacred images, which had

The Hellenistic Period

153

been carried out from the country by the Persians; and returned them to the temples whence each had originally been taken away; and he has maintained the country in a state of peace, fighting wars on its behalf against many peoples and those who rule among them; and they provided law and order for all those in the country and for the others who are ranged under their rule; and when the river once overflowed its banks insufficiently and all those in the country were terrified at this happening and were thinking upon the destruction that had taken place under some of the former kings, in whose reign those dwelling in the country met with droughts, exercising provident care over those in the temples and the others inhabiting the country, by exercising much forethought and forgoing not a little of their revenues for the sake of the safety of the people, and by sending for grain for the country from Syria and Phoenicia and Cyprus and many other places at rather high prices they saved the inhabitants of Egypt, leaving behind an immortal benefaction and the greatest record of their virtue both for contemporaries and for future generations; in return for which the gods have granted them their kingdom peacefully established and will give them all the other good things for all time; with good fortune, be it resolved by the priests of the country:

To increase the already existing honors (paid) in the temples to King Ptolemy and Queen Berenice, the Benefactor Gods, and to their parents the Brother-and-Sister Gods, and to their grandparents the Savior Gods; . . . be it resolved: To perform everlasting honors to Berenice, the princess born of the Benefactor Gods, in all the temples in the country, and, since she went to the gods in the month of Tybi, the very month in which also the daughter of Helios, whom her father lovingly called sometimes his crown and sometimes his sight, in the beginning departed from life, and (since) they hold in her honor a feast and a boat-procession in the month of Tybi in all the temples in the country for four days from the seventeenth, on which day the boat-procession and the conclusion of the mourning for her originally took place; and to fashion a sacred image of her, of gold and precious stones, in each of the first- and second-rank temples and to set it up in the holy place; the prophet or (one) of those who [enter the shrine] for the adorning of the gods shall carry it in his arms, whenever there are processions or festivals of the other gods, in order that, being seen by all it may be honored and obeisance may be done to it, being called (the image) of Berenice Mistress of Maidens; and for the royal crown set upon her image, as distinct from the one set upon the images of her mother Queen Berenice, to consist of two ears of grain, in the middle of which shall be the asp-shaped insignia and behind which a commensurate papyrus-shaped scepter, such as the goddesses are wont to hold in their hands, about which the tail of the (asp-shaped) insignia shall be wound, so that the name of Berenice, in accordance with the symbol of the sacred script, will be signified by the arrangement of her royal crown; and, when the Kikellia are celebrated in the month of Choiach before the boat-procession of Osiris, for the maiden daughter of the priests to fashion another image of Berenice, Mistress of Maidens, to which they shall likewise perform a sacrifice and the other rites performed at this feast; and for it to be permitted in the same way to the other maidens, who so wish, to perform the rites to the goddess; and for her to be hymned by the chosen sacred maidens who are in the service of the gods, when they have put on the individual royal crowns of the goddesses whose priestesses they are accounted as being; and, when the early sowing is at hand, for the sacred maidens to carry up ears of grain to be laid before the image of the goddess; and for the men and women

singers to sing to her each day, during the feasts and festivals of the other gods, whatever hymns the sacred scribes write and give to the teacher of songs, of which also copies shall be entered in the sacred books.

And whereas provisions are given to the priests from the sacred (revenues) whenever they are brought to the group (of priests of each temple) (be it resolved) for there to be given to the daughters of the priests from the day of their birth food from the sacred revenues, such as shall be determined by the councilor priests in each temple in proportion to the sacred revenues; and for the bread given to the wives of the priests to have its own particular shape and to be called the bread of Berenice. And let the appointed supervisor and chief priest in each temple and the scribes of the temple inscribe this decree on a stone or bronze stele, in sacred characters⁹ and in Egyptian (characters),¹⁰ and in Greek (characters), and let them set it up in the most conspicuous place in the first- and second- and third-rate temples, in order that the priests in the country may be seen to honor the Benefactor Gods and their children, as is just.

(*Oriens Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae* 56.
Bagnall and Derow 1981: 222–26, no. 136)

This syncretism of Greek and Egyptian elements is also evident in royal iconography. A Ptolemaic queen deified after her death, such as Berenice II or Arsinoë II, could be depicted in purely Egyptian style. In the portrait of Arsinoë (fig. 5.10), the corkscrew locks of hair were painted black, and the face would originally have been gilded. The facial features—large, wide-open eyes, arched brows, and full, curved lips—all conform to Egyptian, rather than Greek conventions. A hieroglyphic inscription on the back pillar indicates that the figure was dedicated after the death and deification of Arsinoë in 270, but during the lifetime of her husband/brother Ptolemy II (d. 246). From the beginning of the Ptolemaic dynasty, the old Egyptian gods and goddesses were enthusiastically honored by the Macedonian rulers. According to the most complete account of Alexander's campaigns, that of Arrian, writing in the second century C.E., Alexander himself laid out the plan of Alexandria in Egypt in 330 B.C.E., designating temples for the Greek gods and for "Isis of Egypt" (3.1.5). Under Ptolemy I and II, the museum (an association dedicated to the Muses, i.e., to intellectual and artistic pursuits) sponsored scientific research under the patronage of Isis. At least by the time of Ptolemy III, Isis was established in the role of divine protectress of the king, as she had been for the pharaohs (Solmsen 1979: 21–25).

In this period of syncretism and cosmopolitanism, the Greeks identified Aphrodite with the Egyptian goddess Isis. However, as the following inscription demonstrates, in Egyptian and Hellenistic thought the single goddess Isis embodied forces and exercised powers that the Greeks had distributed among many divinities, both male and female:

Demetrius, the son of Artemidorus, who is also (called) Thraseas, a Magnesian from (Magnesia on the) Maeander, an offering in fulfillment of a vow to Isis. He transcribed the following from the stele in Memphis which stands by the temple of Hephaestus:

I am Isis, the tyrant of every land; and I was educated by Hermes and together with Hermes I invented letters, both the hieroglyphic and the demotic,

in order that the same script should not be used to write everything. I imposed laws on men, and the laws which I laid down no one may change. I am the eldest daughter of Cronus. I am the wife and sister of King Osiris.¹¹ I am she who discovered (the cultivation of) grain for men. I am the mother of King Horos. I am she who rises in the Dog Star.¹² I am she who is called goddess by women. By me the city of Bubastis was built. I separated earth from sky. I designated the paths of the stars. The sun's and the moon's course I laid out. I invented navigation. I caused the just to be strong. Woman and man I brought together. For woman I determined that in the tenth month she shall deliver a baby into the light. I ordained that parents be cherished by their children. For parents who are cruelly treated I imposed retribution. Together with (my) brother Osiris I stopped cannibalism. I revealed initiations to men. I taught (men) to honor the images of the gods. I established precincts for the gods. The governments of tyrants I suppressed. I stopped murders. I compelled women to be loved by men. I caused the just to be stronger than gold and silver. I ordained that the true be considered beautiful. I invented marriage contracts. Languages I assigned to Greeks and Barbarians. I caused the honorable and the shameful to be disguised by Nature. I caused nothing to be more fearful than an oath. He who unjustly plotted against others I gave into the hands of his victim. On those who commit unjust acts I imposed retribution. I ordained that suppliants be pitied. I honor those who justly defend themselves. With me the just prevails. Of rivers and winds and the sea I am mistress. No one becomes famous without my knowledge. I am the mistress of war. Of the thunderbolt I am mistress. I calm and stir up the sea. I am in the rays of the sun. I sit beside the course of the sun. Whatever I decide, this also is accomplished. For me everything is right. I free those who are in bonds. I am the mistress of sailing. The navigable I make unnavigable whenever I choose. I established the boundaries of cities. I am she who is called Thesmophoros. The island from the depths I brought up into the light. I conquer Fate. Fate heeds me. Hail Egypt who reared me.

(*Die Inschriften von Kyme* 41. White marble stele from the temple of Isis, late first century B.C.E. or first century C.E.; Burstein 1985: 146–48, no. 112)

Images of Isis in Hellenistic art show her both in Hellenizing style and with Egyptian features (Figs. 5.11 and 5.12). On a carved marble votive relief (Fig. 5.11), a goddess in purely Greek style, usually identified as Isis, leans on a pillar beside an august seated god, an amalgam of Zeus and Osiris (Havelock 1970: no. 168). The mortal worshipers, on a much smaller scale, include a family with two children, as well as more women and children observing. The relief was probably made in Athens and shows the spread of the more popular Egyptian divinities, especially Isis, north from Egypt. A figure that may show a Ptolemaic princess wears an outfit characteristic of Isis in Egyptian art, a sheer, tight-fitting dress with a knot between the breasts (Fig. 5.12; see Bieber 1961: 97). The syncretism of Isis with Aphrodite is also manifested in the minor arts (cf. Fig. 5.18).

Women in Public

Like the Hellenistic queens and priestesses other wealthy, elite, women were awarded public honors, including magistracies. Some of these hon-



Figure 5.11. Marble votive relief (late second century, B.C.E.) from Athens, showing Isis and an enthroned god worshipped by a family with women and children.

ors were the result of their kinship with men who enjoyed similar honors; some were probably granted as a result of the women's generosity. For example, Phile was the first woman to be selected as the *stephanephoros*, the eponymous magistrate¹³ at Priene.

Decree of Priene in honor of Phile, first century B.C.E.

Phile daughter of Apollonius and wife of Thessalus, the son of Polydectes, having held the office of *stephanephoros*, the first woman (to do so), constructed at her own expense the reservoir for water and the city aqueduct.

(*Die Inschriften von Priene* 208; Burstein 1985: 59, no. 45)

Gravestones attest to a new level of prosperity for nonroyal women in the Hellenistic period. Large numbers of gravestones from all over the Greek world give a sense of the norms and values expected of women, especially in the urban, middle-class society typical of most Hellenistic centers. One such center was Smyrna (modern Izmir) in Asia Minor (Fig. 5.13; on these monuments, see Pfuhl and Möbius 1977). The deceased, seated on a large chair with footstool, demonstrates her modesty by wrapping both arms in her voluminous garments. Not one but two small slave girls attend her, one displaying the spindle that alludes to



Figure 5.12. Statue in black granite (Ptolemaic period) of a woman in the costume of Isis, the dress with the so-called Isis-knot between the breasts. She may represent a woman of the Ptolemaic court.

the age-old convention of the noble wife as spinner and weaver. The other displays a large chest with its lid open, as if inviting a glance at the mistress's jewels. Her name and her father's name—Phile, daughter of Apollas—are inscribed above, along with another inscription, "the people," suggesting that she or her family held a prominent position in the city.

Independence of action in public is envisioned for the married

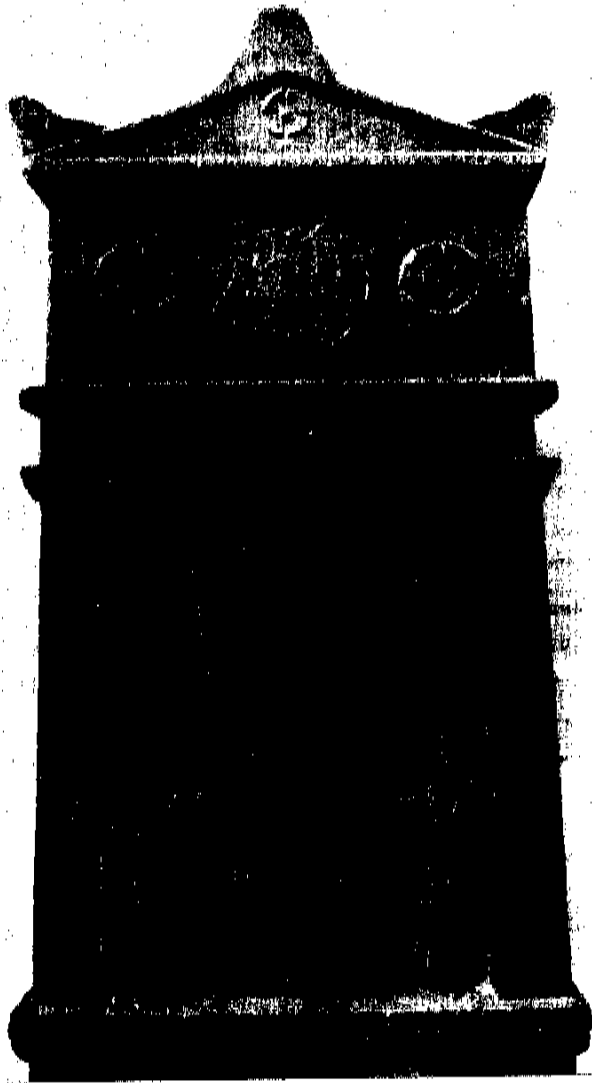


Figure 5.13. Tombstone (second century B.C.E.) from Izmir (ancient Smyrna) showing a seated woman with two slaves, one holding a spindle to remind the viewer of the virtuous domestic life of the deceased who, like all other good wives, spun and wove the cloth for her family.

woman. The earliest extant Greek marriage contract gives detailed provisions for self-help. The aggrieved wife will be obliged to have dealings with men who are not her close kin when she seeks retribution from her husband:

In the seventh year of the reign of Alexander, son of Alexander, the fourteenth year of Ptolemy's administration as satrap, in the month of Dios.

Contract of marriage of Heraclides of Temnos and Demetria. Heraclides takes as his lawful wife Demetria of Cos from her father Leptines of Cos and her mother Philotis. He is free; she is free. She brings with her to the marriage clothing and ornaments valued at 1,000 drachmas. Heraclides shall supply to Demetria all that is suitable for a freeborn wife. We shall live together in whatever place seems best to Leptines and Heraclides, deciding together.

The Hellenistic Period

159

If Demetria is caught in fraudulent machinations to the dishonor of her husband Heraclides, she shall forfeit all that she has brought with her. But Heraclides shall prove whatever he charges against Demetria before three men whom they both approve. It shall not be lawful for Heraclides to bring home another woman for himself in such a way as to inflict contumely on Demetria, nor to beget children by another woman, nor to indulge in fraudulent machinations against Demetria on any pretext. If Heraclides is caught doing any of these things, and Demetria proves it before three men whom they both approve, let Heraclides return to Demetria the dowry of 1,000 drachmas which she brought, and forfeit 1,000 drachmas of the silver coinage of [Ptolemy bearing a portrait head of] Alexander. Demetria, and those representing Demetria, shall have the right to exact payment from Heraclides and from his property on both land and sea, as if after a legal action.

This contract shall be decisive in every respect, wherever Heraclides may produce it against Demetria, or Demetria and those helping Demetria to exact payment may produce it against Heraclides, as though the agreement had been made in that place.

Heraclides and Demetria shall each have the right to keep a copy of the contract in their own custody, and to produce it against one another.

Witnesses:

Cleon of Gela, Anticrates of Temnos, Lysis of Temnos.

Dionysius of Temnos, Aristomachus of Cyrene, Aristodicus of Cos.

(*P. Elephantine* I [311–310 B.C.E.]; Pomeroy 1984: 86–87)

A new current of autonomy and assertiveness can be detected even in the letters and petitions of ordinary women who are widowed or who seem to live in households without men. A request from a widow for the appointment of a male guardian which Greek law required:

To King Ptolemy greetings from Nicaea daughter of Nicias, Persian. My husband Pausanias died in the 23rd year, leaving a will of the same year, of the month of Panemos [in which] he designated . . . Naius his son as my guardian. It has now happened that he has died in the 4th year, in the month of Daisios which is Hathyr of the Egyptians, and I have no relative who can be registered as my [guardian. Therefore, so that] the legacy to me from my husband may not be dissipated for that reason, [since I have] no guardian with whom I can make arrangements about these things, I ask you, O king, to order Diophanes the *strategus*¹⁴ to give me as guardian Demetrius the Thracian, a 60-aroura holder of the troop of Ptolemaeus son of Eteoneus of the . . . th hipparchy, to whom Pausanias married his sister, and for the *strategos* to make written records about these things, so that this may be in the official register; and since, being old and getting infirm, I am not able to make the trip to Crocodilopolis, I have sent the aforesaid Demetrius to deliver the petition, for Diophanes to write to Dioscurides the *epistates*, to make a description of me and of the guardian whom I am requesting, and to send them to Diophanes. If this is done, I shall have benefited, O king, from your kindness. Farewell. (Response) To Dioscurides. Taking some of the elders of the village go to Nicaea and if ———, their descriptions, and send me a report. Year 4, Daisios 27, Hathyr 29. (Docket) Year 4, Daisios 27, Hathyr 29. Nicaea, daughter of Nicias, Persian, about a request.

(*P. Enteuxis* 22 [218 B.C.E.]; Bagnall and Derow 1981: 200, no. 123)

A woman who works with her hands lodges a complaint against a male bath attendant concerning bodily injury:

To King Ptolemy greeting from Philista daughter of Lysias resident in Tricomia. I am wronged by Petechon. For as I was bathing in the baths of the aforesaid village on Tubi 7 of year 1, and stepped out to soap myself, he being bathman in the women's rotunda and having brought in the jugs of hot water emptied one (?) over me and scalded my belly and my left thigh down to the knee, so that my life was in danger. On finding him I gave him into the custody of Nechthosiris the chief policeman of the village in the presence of Simon the epistates.¹⁵ I beg you therefore, O king, if it please you, as a suppliant who has sought your protection, not to suffer me, who am a working woman, to be thus lawlessly treated, but to order Diophanes the strategus to write to Simon the epistates and Nechthosiris the policeman that they are to bring Petechon before him in order that Diophanes may inquire into the case, hoping that having sought the protection of you, O king, the common benefactor of all, I may obtain justice. Farewell. (Docketed) To Simon. Send the accused. Year 1, Gorpiaeus 28 Tubi 12. Philista against Petechon, bathman, about having been scalded. (*P. Enteuxis* 82 [220 B.C.E.]; Hunt and Edgar 1968: 235-37, no. 269)

An abandoned wife scolds her husband for using religion as a pretext to avoid coming home:

Isias to her brother Hephaistion [greeting]. If you are well and other things are going right, it would accord with the prayer which I make continually to the gods. I myself and the child and the household are in good health and think of you always. When I received your letter from Horos, in which you announce that you are in *katoche*¹⁶ in the Serapaeum at Memphis, for the news that you are well I straightway thanked the gods, but about your not coming home, when all the others who had been secluded there have come, I am ill-pleased, because after having piloted myself and your child through such bad times and been driven to every extremity owing to the price of wheat, I thought that now at least, with you at home, I should enjoy some respite, whereas you have not even thought of coming home nor given any regard to our circumstances, remembering how I was in want of everything while you were still here, not to mention this long lapse of time and these critical days, during which you have sent us nothing. As, moreover, Horos who delivered the letter has brought news of your having been released from detention, I am thoroughly ill-pleased. Notwithstanding, as your mother also is annoyed, for her sake as well as for mine please return to the city, if nothing more pressing holds you back. You will do me a favor by taking care of your bodily health. Farewell. Year 2, Epeiph 30. (Address) To Hephaistion.

(UPZ 1.59 [168 B.C.E.] = *Select Papyri* 97; Bagnall and Derow 1981: 235, no. 144)

In 220 B.C.E. a father complained that he was abandoned by his daughter:

To King Ptolemy greeting from Ctesicles. I am being wronged by Dionysius and my daughter Nice. For though I had nurtured her, being my own daughter, and educated her and brought her up to womanhood, when I was stricken with bodily infirmity and my eyesight enfeebled she would not furnish me with any

The Hellenistic Period

161

of the necessities of life. And when I wished to obtain justice from her in Alexandria, she begged my pardon and in year 18 she gave me in the temple of Arsinoë Actia a written oath by the king that she would pay me twenty drachmae every month by means of her own bodily labor; if she failed to do so or transgressed any of the terms of her bond, she was to forfeit to me 500 drachmae on pain of incurring the consequences of the oath. Now, however, corrupted by Dionysius, who is a comic actor, she is not keeping any of her engagements to me, in contempt of my old age and my present infirmity. I beg you therefore, O king, not to suffer me to be wronged by my daughter and Dionysius the comedian who has corrupted her, but to order Diophanes the strategus to summon them and hear our case; and if my words are true, let Diophanes deal with her corrupter as seems good to him and compel my daughter Nice to yield me my rights . . . For by this means I shall no longer be wronged, but having sought your protection, O king, I shall obtain justice. (Docketed) We have delegated . . . (Endorsed) Year 1, Gorpiaeus 30 Tubi 13. Ctesicles against Dionysius and Nice his daughter concerning a written oath.

(*P. Enteuxis* 26; Hunt and Edgar 1968: 2:233, no. 268, modified)

Despite such indications of female autonomy in the public sphere, society was still strongly patriarchal, and female infants, in particular, continued to be devalued. The Greeks, in Egypt and elsewhere, practiced infanticide, especially in order to reduce the number of females. In contrast to the Greeks, the Egyptians reared all their children. Diodorus Siculus draws attention to this peculiar practice and attributes the lack of infanticide to the fertility of the soil and the ease of rearing children in Egypt:

The Egyptians are required to raise all their children in order to increase the population, on the ground that large numbers are the greatest factor in increasing the prosperity of both country and cities. Nor do they hold any child a bastard, even though he was born of a slave mother; for they have taken the general position that the father is the sole author of procreation and that the mother only supplies the fetus with nourishment and a place to live, and they call the trees which bear fruit "male" and those which do not "female," exactly the opposite to the Greek usage. They feed their children in a sort of happy-go-lucky fashion that in its inexpensiveness quite surpasses belief; for they serve them with stews made of any stuff that is ready to hand and cheap, and give them such stalks as the *byblos* plant as can be roasted in the coals, and the roots and the stems of marsh plants, either raw or boiled or baked. And since most of the children are reared without shoes or clothing because of the mildness of the climate of the country, the entire expense incurred by the parents of a child until it comes to maturity is not more than twenty drachmas. These are the leading reasons why Egypt has such an extraordinarily large population.

(Diodorus Siculus 1.80.3-6; Oldfather 1968 1:275-77)

Evidence for infanticide in Egypt appears just after the Roman conquest. In the following letter a husband instructs his wife to expose a baby if it is female. The husband addresses his wife as "sister." This term may merely indicate closeness and affection, or it may be a reflection of reality; brother-sister marriage occurred among both Greeks and Egyptians. (See Fig. 5.4; the Canopus decree, above, for references to Arsinoë

II and her brother and husband Ptolemy II as "Divine Siblings"; and the "Praises of Isis" [this chapter] for the marriage of Isis to her brother Osiris; and see further, Carney 1987).

Letter of Hilarion to Alis:

Hilarion to his sister Alis very many greetings, likewise to my lady Berous and Apollonarian. Know that we are still in Alexandria. Do not be anxious; if they¹⁷ really go home, I will remain in Alexandria. I beg and entreat you, take care of the little one, and as soon as we receive our pay I will send it up to you. If by chance you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it be, if it is a girl, cast it out.

(*P. Oxyrhynchus* 4.744.1-10 (1 B.C.E.); Hunt and Edgar 1968: 1: no. 105)

Like papyri, New Comedy, which began in Athens in the late fourth century, shows that older traditions about women were preserved while new ones were introduced. In the third century B.C.E. a poet of New Comedy wrote: "Everyone, even a poor man, raises a son, everyone, even a wealthy man, exposes a daughter" (Poseidippus, *Hermaphroditus*, frag. 12 Kassel-Austin).

But New Comedy also includes female characters who try to act for themselves and manipulate their world. This new genre, which originated in Athens, was characterized by typical plots and typical bourgeois or lowlife characters. In a standard plot, a young man falls in love with a woman who is unsuitable for him to marry until it is discovered that she is actually of high birth. Or a young man rapes a young woman at a festival. After the birth of the child, other characters—typically slaves or a courtesan with a heart of gold—contrive to bring the couple together in a satisfactory marriage. The fragmentary remains of plays in the second group, such as Menander's *Samia* or *Epitrepontes*, are notable for the alliances built between respectable wives, young women, and courtesans. In other plays, henpecked husbands complain about the tyranny or treachery of their wives with all the vigor of Euripides' misogynistic *Hippolytus* (for example, Alexis, frag. 146 Kock; Menander, frag. 333 Körte). In New Comedy the young hero and heroine are often displayed as passive victims of circumstances; but occasionally even a young woman could stand up for herself.

The following papyrus fragment of the second century B.C.E. has sometimes been attributed to a tragic imitator of Euripides and sometimes to a New Comedy, but all agree that the scenario is predictably New Comic. The heroine tries to persuade her father not to marry her off to a man richer than her present husband:

The words I speak, father, you should be speaking: it is fitting that you should be wiser than I, and speak what the time demands. Now, in your default, it remains for me, I think, perforce to plead myself the cause of justice. If my husband has done me a great injury, is it not for me to exact a penalty therefor? And if he has wronged me, must I not perceive it? Perhaps I am a fool and know it not. I will not answer no: and yet a woman, father, though a fool in judgment of all else, may perhaps have good sense about her own affairs. But be it as you will. Only tell me this, wherein he wrongs me? For wife and husband there is a

The Hellenistic Period

163

law laid down: for him, to love his woman for ever till the end; for her, to do whatever gives her husband pleasure. All I demanded, my husband has been to me; and all that pleases him, father, pleases me. You say he is good to me but he is poor! So now (you tell me) you give me in marriage to a man of wealth, that I may not live all my life in distress. Where in the world is all that money, father, which—if I have it—will cheer me more than the man I love? How is it just or honorable, that I should take my share of the good things he had, but in his poverty take no share at all? Say, if the man who is now about to take me (which dear God forbid, nor shall it ever be!—at least not of my will, nor while I can prevent it)—if he should lose his substance hereafter, will you give me to another man? And then to another, if he too loses all? How long will you use my life, father, for your experiments with fortune? When I was a child, that was the time for you to find a husband to give me to, for then the choice was yours. But when you had once given me, father, at once it was for me to look to my own fate. And justly so, for if I judge not well, it is my own life that I shall injure. There is the truth. So by the goddess of our home, do not rob me of the man to whom you wedded me. This favor I ask of you—a just one, father, and full of loving kindness. If you refuse, you shall do your pleasure by force: and I shall try to endure my fortune as I ought, without disgrace.

(Menander; Sandbach 1972: 328; Page 1970: 185–87)

Education and Professions

Increased opportunities for education as well as the focus on the individual contributed to the emergence of women poets in several parts of the Greek world (Pomeroy 1977). Some of the women traveled to festivals and recited their poetry. For celebrating the city in her poetry, Aristodama was awarded public honors usually reserved for men by Lamia.¹⁸

Decree in honor of Aristodama of Smyrna, 218–217 B.C.E.

Of the Aitolians the strategus is Hagetas, a citizen of Kallion. With good fortune. Resolved [by the city] of the Lamians. Since Aristodama, daughter of Amyntas, a citizen of Smyrna in Ionia, epic poet, while she was in our city, gave several [public recitations] of her poems in which the nation of the Aitolians [and] the People's ancestors were worthily commemorated and since the performance was done with great enthusiasm, she shall be a proxenos¹⁹ of the city and benefactor, and she shall be given citizenship and the right to purchase land and [a house] and the right of pasture and inviolability and security on land and sea in war and peace for herself and her descendants and their property for all time together with all other privileges that are given to other proxenoi and benefactors and Dionysios, her brother, and his descendants shall have the rights of a proxenos, citizenship, inviolability.

(*Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* 3 532.

Trans. adapted from Burstein 1985: 86–87, no. 64)

At the end of the first century B.C.E. Antipater of Thessalonica described the canon of women poets:

These are the divine-voiced women that Helicon fed with song, Helicon and Macedonian Pieria's rock: Praxilla; Moero; Anyte, the female Homer; Sappho,

glory of the Lesbian women with lovely tresses; Erinna; renowned Telesilla; and you Corinna, who sang the martial shield of Athena; Nossis, the tender-voiced, and dulcet-toned Myrtis—all craftwomen of eternal pages. Great Heaven gave birth to nine Muses and Earth to these nine, the deathless delight of mortals.

(Adapted from Paton 1968: 3:17, Book 9:epigram 26)

Erinna of Teos, or Telos, who probably lived at the end of the fourth century B.C.E., was highly praised by Ancient critics. Her poetry contains echos of Sappho. In the "Distaff," she takes the traditional female theme of spinning and turns it into a piercing, never-ending lament for her friend Baucis who had died soon after her marriage. Erinna recalls their childhood together when they played the tortoise game and played with dolls, and describes Baucis's abrupt transition from girl to wife. The "Distaff" once consisted of 300 hexameters, but is now fragmentary.

of a girl . . . maidens [or dolls?] . . . tortoise . . .
 tortoise . . . wave
 from white horses
 I shouted loudly . . . tortoise . . .
 the yard of the great court . . .
 wretched Baucis, I cry out this lament . . .
 these games lie in my heart
 still warm. But [those are] already ashes.
 of dolls . . . in the bed-chambers . . .
 maidens [or dolls] . . . once at dawn
 Mother . . . to the wool-workers
 . . . sprinkled with salt
 little . . . Mormo brought fear.²⁰
 . . . she roamed on her four feet
 and changed her visage from [one thing to another].
 But when into the bed . . . , you forgot everything which still
 in your innocence . . . having heard your mother,
 dear Baucis. Forgetfulness . . . Aphrodite.
 Therefore you, weeping . . . but other things I leave;
 for my feet [are] not permitted . . . for the house,
 nor [am I able] to look upon a corpse, nor to lament
 with uncovered hair . . . shame
 tears me around my cheeks . . .
 nineteen . . . Erinna . . . distaff . . . shame . . .
 maiden-songs . . . looking . . . hair . . . dear Baucis . . .
 flame . . . Hymenaios . . . Hymenaios . . . alas,
 wretched Baucis . . .

(Erinna, "Distaff"; Snyder 1989: 93)

Erinna, like most of the other poets of the period, also wrote epigrams (short poems on a variety of themes). Erinna wrote two sepulchral epigrams for Baucis:

O stele and Sirens and mournful urn of mine,
 you who hold this small heap of ashes that belong to Hades,
 Give greetings to those who pass by this my grave,
 whether they are citizens or visitors from other towns.

The Hellenistic Period

165

Say that this tomb holds me, who was a bride; say also this,
that my father called me Baucis, and that my family
Was of Tenos, so that they may know, and that my companion
Erinna inscribed these words upon my tomb.

(*Palatine Anthology* 7.710; Snyder 1989: 91)

I am the tomb of the bride Baucis; passing by
this much lamented stele, say this to Hades beneath the earth:
"Hades, you are envious." But to you who see them,
these beautiful monuments will announce the cruel fate of
Baucis:

How with the pine-torches with which Hymenaios was hymned
her father-in-law set the girl ablaze upon this pyre,
And you yourself, Hymenaios, changed the tuneful song of marriage
into the mournful sound of lamentation.

(*Palatine Anthology* 7.712; Snyder 1989: 90)

Other women poets also give intimate glimpses of women's worlds. Not much seems to have changed since the Classical period in the daily lives of women. What is new, however, is the existence of women poets who wrote for and about women. Nossis of Locri in Italy (ca. first half of third century B.C.E.) wrote lyrics and epigrams. Only the latter are extant. She defines herself as a poet in relation to Sappho. The form of the poem is that of a funerary epigram, similar to those by Erinna quoted above:

Stranger, if you sail to Mytilene of the lovely dances
to be inspired with the flower of Sappho's graces,
say that the Locrian land bore me, one dear to the Muses
and to her. Having learned that my name is Nossis, go.

(Epigram 11 [Gow and Page]; Skinner 1991: 34)

As the quotation from Herodas (see earlier) suggests, Nossis gained a reputation as a poet of love, perhaps of lesbian relationships. Epigram 1 is frankly erotic: the poet rejects honey, because she finds Eros is sweeter. The allusions to Aphrodite, flowers, and roses evoke echoes of Sappho:

Nothing is sweeter than desire. All other delights are second.
From my mouth I spit even honey.
Nossis says this, whom Aphrodite does not love,
knows not her flowers, what roses they are.

(Epigram 1 [Gow and Page]; Skinner 1991: 33)

In Epigram 3 Nossis dedicates a valuable garment that she and her mother had woven as a gift to the goddess Hera at Lacinia in southern Italy. "Noble" indicates that, like most other women who had time to devote to poetry, Nossis was upper-class. She proudly refers to herself, and to her mother, in turn, by matronymics (Skinner 1987; Skinner 1991: 20-47). Matrilineal naming was the local custom at Locri though patri-lineal naming was the usual practice in the rest of Greece (see Chapter 3):

WOMEN IN THE GREEK WORLD

Most reverend Hera, you who often descending from Heaven
 behold your Lacinian shrine fragrant with incense,
 receive the linen wrap that with her noble child Nossis
 Theophilis daughter of Cleocha wove for you.
 (Epigram 3 [Gow and Page]; Skinner 1991: 22)

Anyte of Tegea in Arcadia was probably a contemporary of Nossis. Like male poets, she celebrated war and was one of the first Hellenistic poets to write bucolic poetry. She also wrote epigrams, among them several for girls who died before marriage. These poems were probably genuine grave inscriptions. Because marriage was the most important event in a woman's life, dying unwed occasioned great lamentation over an unfulfilled life (cf. Chapter 1 on Phrasicleia and Chapter 3 on Ioutrophoroi as funeral vases for the unmarried). In the following poems the pathos is increased because the daughter predeceased her parents. Although the scenario is the same, the epigrams are not repetitive. Note in particular the attention paid to Antibia's intelligence, a quality prized in the Hellenistic period among families where daughters were educated.

Throwing her arms around her dear father,
 Erato, melting away in moist tears, spoke these last words.
 "Father, I am no more; dark black Death
 covers my eyes as already I perish."

(*Palatine Anthology* 7.486)

Often in lamentation upon this girl's tomb her mother Cleina
 bewails her beloved child who dies before her time.
 She calls forth the soul of Philanis, who—before her marriage—
 crossed the pale stream of the River Acheron.

(*Palatine Anthology* 7.649)

No bed-chamber and sacred rites of marriage for you.
 Instead, your mother put upon this marble tomb
 A likeness which has your girlish shape and beauty,
 Thersis; you can be addressed even though you are dead.

(*Palatine Anthology* 7.490)

I mourn for the maiden Antibia, to whose
 father's house many suitors came, drawn by
 Report of her beauty and wisdom. But deadly Fate
 whirled away the hopes of all of them.

(*Palatine Anthology*, epigrams 1–4 [Gow and Page];
 Snyder 1989: 68)

Corinna of Tanagra was probably Anyte's contemporary (West 1990). She wrote narrative lyrics replete with Boeotian myth. In a brief fragment she proclaims:

But I myself [sing] the excellent deeds
 of male and female heroes.

(Frag. 664b *Poetae Melici Graeci*;
 Snyder 1989: 44)

The Hellenistic Period

167

Much of Corinna's poetry, like Anyte's, was probably directed to audiences of men and women. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that her work, like that of other women poets, survived, became famous, and was incorporated into the cultural mainstream. For Roman poets of the Augustan age, her name was synonymous with talent and erudition. Ovid calls his mistress "Corinna," and Propertius 2.3.22 claims that his mistress wrote verses that were as good as Corinna's. Fragment 2 was addressed to a group of girls who are probably members of a chorus who will learn to perform Corinna's songs (for similar *partheneia*, see Chapters 1 and 2):

Terpsichore [summoned me] to sing
 beautiful tales of old
 to the Tanagraean girls in their white robes.
 And the city rejoiced greatly
 in my clear, plaintive voice.
 For great things . . .

. . . the broad-plained earth . . .
 I, having done honor to the oracles
 in the time of our fathers . . .
 . . . to the maidens . . .

I myself often honored with words
 the leader Cephissus [the river god]
 but also often great Orion
 and the fifty mighty youths
 whom [he begat] by mating with
 nymphs . . .

(Frag. 664b *Poetae Melici Graeci*;
 Snyder 1989: 50)

Women poets probably read the works of other writers and wrote their own poetry in the privacy of their homes. But some respectable, educated women pursued professions that required them to work in the public sphere and to have dealings with men who were not kinsmen. In Classical Athens, a few women had studied at Plato's Academy: "Among his disciples were . . . two women Lasthenia of Mantinea and Axiothea of Phlius who dressed like a man" (Diogenes Laertius 3.46, similarly, 4.2).

A third female student is mentioned in *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* 52.3656. Starting in the later fourth century B.C.E. even more women became philosophers. Hipparchia (ca. 300 B.C.E.) learned about Cynic philosophy and was attracted to Crates through her brother, but her decision involved rebelling against her parents and convention. She shaped her own life and created her own identity:

Hipparchia too, sister of Metrocles, was captured by their doctrines. Both of them were born at Maroneia. She fell in love with the discourses and the life of Crates, and would not pay attention to any of her suitors, their wealth, their high birth or their beauty. But to her Crates was everything. She used even to

threaten her parents she would make away with herself, unless she were given in marriage to him. Crates therefore was implored by her parents to persuade the girl, and did all he could, and at last, failing to persuade her, he got up, took off his clothes before her face and said. "This is the bridegroom, these are his possessions; make your choice accordingly; for you will be no helpmeet of mine, unless you share my pursuits."

(Diogenes Laertius 6.96-98; Hicks 1922)

Some Hellenistic women also became artists. Most of the women painters we know of were the daughters of male artists and seem to have worked on the same sorts of subjects as their male contemporaries. However, the most famous woman artist of all, Laia, or Lala, of Cyzicus, is not known by a patronymic; nor did she marry. Her subjects were predominantly female:

There were also women painters: Timarete the daughter of Micon, who painted the very ancient picture of Artemis at Ephesus; Irene, daughter and pupil of the painter Cratinus, who did the girl at Eleusis, a Calypso, an old woman, and Theodore the juggler and Alcisthenes the dancer; and Aristarete, daughter and pupil of Nearchus, who painted an Asclepius. When Marcus Varro was a young man [mid-first century B.C.E.], Iaia [Laia or Lala] of Cyzicus, who never married, painted pictures with the brush in Rome, chiefly portraits of women, as well as a large picture on wood of an old woman, at Naples, and a self-portrait done in a looking glass. No one else had a quicker hand in painting, while her artistic skill was such that the prices she obtained far outstripped the most celebrated portraitists of the day.

(Pliny, *Natural History* 35.147-48; Rackham 1968)

The painters grouped together here range in date from the fifth century to the first B.C.E., and most are otherwise unattested. It is striking, however, that, as in the Renaissance and Baroque, most women artists are daughters of male artists who taught them their art.

In the Hellenistic period women also began the formal study of medicine. Hagnodice, the first female obstetrician in Athens, studied with Herophilus, probably in the last quarter of the fourth century B.C.E. (see Chapter 6). Some details about women being excluded by law (rather than by custom as was probably the case) from practicing medicine in Athens are likely to be fabrications. Nevertheless, Athenian women did begin to practice obstetrics in the fourth century B.C.E.:

The ancients had no midwives, and therefore women died [in childbirth], led on by their sense of shame. For the Athenians had taken heed that no slave or woman should learn the science of medicine. A certain girl, Hagnodice, as a young woman desired to learn the science of medicine. Because of this desire, she cut her hair, put on male clothing, and entrusted herself to a certain Herophilus for her training. After learning this science, when she heard that a woman was having labor-pains, she used to go to her. And when the woman refused to entrust herself [to Hagnodice], thinking that she was a man, Hagnodice lifted her undergarment and revealed that she was a woman. In this way she used to cure women.

(Hyginus, *Fabula* 274.10-11; p. 167 Rose; von Staden 1989: 53)

The Female Body

A new interest in the female body and the problems of reproduction is suggested by a group of grave stelai and other funerary monuments from the mid-fourth through the third centuries that show a woman in labor (Fig. 5.14). The funerary context implies that she has died in childbirth. These are almost unique among Greek grave monuments in alluding so directly to the manner and moment of death. The transparent garment focuses our attention on the belly, even if it is not shown as realistically pregnant. The awkward pose and dishevelment of hair and clothing are quite different from the quiet, composed grief of Classical gravestones (cf. Introduction, Fig. 1; Chapter 3, Figs. 3.1 and 3.2). The dying woman is surrounded by members of her family, who sometimes grieve openly. It has been suggested that these scenes heroize the dead woman, in a manner analogous to the heroization of men who have died in battle (Vedder 1988). For most women, the noblest service to the community continued to be the production of male offspring.

From the fifth century on, Hippocratic and later doctors used the female reproductive system (see Chapter 6) to explain women's apparently erratic behavior, propensity for Dionysiac ecstasy, and susceptibility to romantic love. Stimulated by these interests, as well as by the fascination with the symptoms of erotic passion in the Archaic lyric poets (especially Sappho), Hellenistic writers repeatedly elaborated upon the literary portrait of the female victim of Aphrodite, who is generally pitifully abandoned after her clandestine seduction or her bold leap into love regardless of family, friends, and social mores. The fascination with female eroticism, seduction, and desertion is perhaps understandably characteristic of a period of shifting and sometimes unsettled social lives in the Greek community, and other poetic genres generally do not offer the comic and bourgeois solution to the abandoned or raped female found in New Comedy. Apollonius of Rhodes's *Medea* (to be abandoned at Corinth by Jason) is not the angry and articulate wife of Euripides' play, but a young girl overwhelmed by her first experience of passion:

And fast did her heart throb within her breast, as a sunbeam quivers upon the walls of a house when flung up from the water, which is just poured forth in a cauldron or a pail maybe; and hither and thither on the swift eddy does it dart and dance along; even so the maiden's heart quivered in her breast. And the tear of pity flowed from her eyes, and ever within anguish tortured her, a smouldering fire through her frame, and about her fine nerves and deep down beneath the nape of her neck where the pain enters keenest, whenever the unwearied Loves direct against the heart their shafts of agony.

(*Argonautica* 3.755–65; Seaton 1980)

Similarly, in Theocritus 2, Simaetha, a poor but respectable virgin who lives alone with a maid, falls in love with and solicits a young athlete named Delphis. Here she narrates her own first reaction to her soon-to-be faithless lover:



Figure 5.14. Tombstone from late fourth or third century, B.C.E. Attica showing a woman who may have died in childbirth.

Hardly halfway along the road—about at Lycon's—
I saw Delphis: he was walking with Eudamippus.
Their beards were more golden than curling honey-suckle,
and their chests had such a sheen—brighter than you, Moon,
for they were fresh returned from the genteel toil of the gym.

The Hellenistic Period

171

Tell, how Eros fell on me, Lady Moon!
 The moment my eyes lit on them, madness lit on me,
 and fire was laid to my heart, poor wretch that I am!
 My looks were a faded flower; I took no more note of my possessions,
 and I know not how I got home; a burning fever was shaking me,
 and I lay in my bed for all of ten days and nights.

.....
 . . . And I, as soon as I was aware,
 by the light foot fall, it was he crossing the threshold.

.....
 I froze, through and through to the bone, colder than snow,
 and the sweat ran from my forehead, more like a heavy dew.
 I couldn't utter a word, not so much as a broken word
 children whimper in sleep to their mother. My once fresh
 complexion became like a wax doll, exactly.

(Theocritus 2.76-86, 103-110; Rist 1978)

Simaetha is only one of the young women in Hellenistic poetry who apparently live without male supervision and engage in love affairs with men without being courtesans or prostitutes.

The following fragmentary pastoral poem entitled the "Oaristus" or "Whispered Erotic Dialogue" was attributed to Theocritus, but in fact was composed by an imitator of a later but uncertain date. Here a cowherd gradually seduces a young girl who is pasturing goats. The youth wears down the maiden's reluctance with themes that also appear in marriage songs (epithalamia)—the woman's fear of losing her virginity and of childbirth is countered with reminders of the short bloom of youth and the rewards of children. This poem leaves the result of the seduction unclear. Daphnis mimics in a pastoral mode all the protestations of a responsible suitor, but both the girl's aged father and the cowherd's homestead are quickly ignored in favor of the physical consummation that the "little satyr" has been aiming at from the start. By contrast, in Longus's later Greek novel *Daphnis and Chloë*, the poet makes a point of delaying the consummation of the pastoral couple's desire until after marriage.

MAIDEN: Paris, another cowherd, abducted chaste Helen.

DAPHNIS: No, Helen of her own free will captured the cowherd with a kiss.

MAIDEN: Don't be so sure, you little satyr. They say a kiss is a trivial thing.

DAPHNIS: Yet there is sweet pleasure even in trivial kisses.

MAIDEN: I wipe off my mouth and spit out your kiss.

DAPHNIS: You're wiping your mouth? Give it back to me to kiss.

MAIDEN: A kiss is a good thing for your calves, not for an unwed girl.

DAPHNIS: Don't be so sure. Soon life will pass you by like a dream.

MAIDEN: Supposing I am growing a bit older, I drink milk and honey now.

DAPHNIS: A half-ripe grape will be a raisin. What is now a rose will dry up and fade.

MAIDEN: Don't put a hand on me. Still on me? I'll tear your lip.

DAPHNIS: Come here under the wild olives so I can tell you a story.

MAIDEN: I don't want to. You tricked me with a lovely story once before.

DAPHNIS: Come here under the elms so you can hear my pipe.

WOMEN IN THE GREEK WORLD

- MAIDEN: Please yourself. A woeful song does not please me.
- DAPHNIS: Unfortunately even you must respect the Paphian's [Aphrodite's] anger, maiden.
- MAIDEN: Never mind the Paphian, as long as Artemis protects me.
- DAPHNIS: Don't say that, lest she strike you and put you in a net from which you cannot escape.
- MAIDEN: Let her strike as she wished. Artemis will protect me.
- DAPHNIS: Your won't escape love. No virgin ever has.
- MAIDEN: By Pan, I will escape. But may you bear his yoke.
- DAPHNIS: I am afraid he will give you to a lesser man.
- MAIDEN: Many have courted me, but not one was pleasing to my mind.
- DAPHNIS: And I too, one of many, have come as your suitor.
- MAIDEN: What am I to do, my friend? Marriages are full of pain.
- DAPHNIS: Not pain. Marriage does not bring grief but dancing.
- MAIDEN: Yes, they say wives fear their bedfellows.
- DAPHNIS: No, they always control them. What do wives fear?
- MAIDEN: I am afraid to give birth. The bolt of Eileithyia [the goddess of child-birth] is harsh.
- DAPHNIS: But Artemis, your queen, lightens the pains of childbirth.
- MAIDEN: But I fear to give birth lest I destroy my lovely flesh.
- DAPHNIS: Yet if you bear children, you will see a new dawn of youth.
- MAIDEN: And what bridal gift do you bring me, worth marriage, if I do say yes.
- DAPHNIS: You will have my whole herd, and all my groves and pasture land.
- MAIDEN: Swear that after marriage you won't leave me against my will.
- DAPHNIS: No, by Pan himself, even if you want to get rid of me.
- MAIDEN: And will you build me a bridal chamber? Will you build me a house and farm?
- DAPHNIS: I will build you a bridal chamber. And I shall tend your beautiful flocks.
- MAIDEN: And my old father, what, oh what story shall we tell him?
- DAPHNIS: He will praise your marriage when he hears my name.
- MAIDEN: Say your name. Even a name is often pleasing.
- DAPHNIS: I am Daphnis. My father is Lycidas, my mother Nomaea.
- MAIDEN: You are from a good family. Mine's no worse than yours.
- DAPHNIS: I know. You are Acrotome and your father is Menalcas.
- MAIDEN: Show me your grove, where your cowherd's hut stands.
- DAPHNIS: Come and see how my slender cypresses bloom.
- MAIDEN: Keep feeding, my goats. I am going to look over the cowherd's farm.
- DAPHNIS: Feel well, bulls, so I can show my groves to the maiden.
- MAIDEN: What are you doing, you little satyr? Why are you touching my breasts inside my clothes?
- DAPHNIS: First of all, I will give those velvety apples a lesson.
- MAIDEN: I feel faint, by Pan. Take your hand out.
- DAPHNIS: Take courage, dear girl. Why are you afraid of me? How very fearful you are.
- MAIDEN: You are throwing me into a ditch and dirtying my lovely clothes.
- DAPHNIS: But don't you see that I am putting a soft fleece under your clothes?
- MAIDEN: Oh dear, you have taken off my girdle. Why have you loosed it?
- DAPHNIS: I am making this my very first offering to the Paphian.
- MAIDEN: Wait, you fool. Maybe someone is coming. I hear a sound.
- DAPHNIS: The cypresses are prattling about your marriage to each other.

The Hellenistic Period

173

MAIDEN: You have made a rag of my clothes. And I am naked.

DAPHNIS: I'll get you another robe larger than your own.

MAIDEN: You say you'll give me everything. But perhaps later on you won't give me salt.

DAPHNIS: If only I could add my very life to the gifts.

MAIDEN: Artemis, do not be angry that I no longer rely on your precepts.

DAPHNIS: I will give a heifer to Love and a cow to Aphrodite herself.

MAIDEN: I came here a virgin, and I go home a wife [or woman].

DAPHNIS: Wife, mother and nurse of children. A girl no more.

And so delighting in their fresh young bodies they whispered to each other. Their furtive mating was accomplished. She got up and went back to pasture her flocks with downcast eyes, but the heart within was glad. And he, delighted with his marriage bed, went to his herds of bulls.

([Theocritus] 27; trans. Helene P. Foley)

In an epigram, Asclepiades, a contemporary of Nossis and Anyte, also played with the theme of virginity and seduction:

Pretty maiden, what's the good
of hoarding up your maidenhood?
Once in Acheron we must,
maiden, come to bones and dust.

(Epigram 2; trans. J. S. Phillimore, in Wallace and Wallace
1941: 9)

The portrayal of the female body in Greek art underwent radical changes starting about the middle of the fourth century (Bonfante 1989). In the art of the Ancient Near East, nudity for goddesses was not taboo or unusual, so that occasionally, under Eastern influence, there are examples in early Greek art of the eighth and seventh centuries. But in Archaic and Classical Greek art, there are only a few specific contexts in which female nudity may occur: hetairai and other prostitutes on Attic pottery made for men's use at symposia (cf. Chapter 3, Figs. 3.25–3.27); and narrative contexts that require nudity, such as the Rape of Cassandra at Troy (Fig. 5.15). Here, on a vase of about 500 B.C.E., the frontal nudity of the Trojan princess about to be violated during the sack of Troy is intended to be shocking rather than erotic. The beauty of the female body was not explored for its own sake, and only the youthful, athletic male body was considered an object of admiration in publicly displayed monuments. Statues of women that were set up in public, such as the korai on the Athenian Acropolis, are always modestly dressed, and the drapery itself becomes the principal vehicle for conveying female grace and beauty (cf. Chapter 1).

The first experiments with the nude female in monumental art are to be found in statues of Aphrodite by the sculptor Praxiteles in the mid-fourth century, such as the famous Cnidia (Fig. 5.16). The proportions of the body are still closer to the athleticism of male statuary than the soft features of the face, for which Praxiteles was renowned. As the first



Figure 5.15. Athenian vase (ca. 500 B.C.E.) showing the sack of Troy, the nude figure of Cassandra, the doom-predicting priestess whose punishment for her transgression was that no one would believe her, clings, at the lower left of the figure, to the city's cult statue of Athena, but it cannot save her from her Greek attacker, the Lesser Ajax. Her nudity stands as the sign of her imminent rape.

entirely nude female in Classical sculpture, the Cnidia gave rise in antiquity to many romantic anecdotes: Praxiteles' mistress, Phryne, was said to be the statue's model; a man supposedly became enamored of the statue, Pygmalion-like, and made love to it; and the goddess Aphrodite herself, on seeing the statue, allegedly asked indignantly, "Where did Praxiteles see me naked?" (Paton 1968: Book 16.160).

Praxiteles did not continue to work into the Hellenistic period, but through the influence of his son, also a sculptor, and his workshop, the type of the nude Aphrodite became one of the central images of Hellenistic and Roman art. The choice of Aphrodite, goddess of love and sexual desire, is of course not accidental, and no other female divinities were shown nude. Even Aphrodite's nudity is always motivated by a narrative element (for example, she was born from the sea and is portrayed bathing or preparing to bathe), to mitigate the exhibitionistic quality and overt eroticism of what must at first have seemed a shocking exposure.

The body type that evolved for the nude Aphrodite by the third cen-



Figure 5.16. Statue of *Aphrodite* from *Cnidos* (Asia Minor) by *Praxiteles* (ca. 350 B.C.E.). The type of nude *Aphrodite* spawned a series of similar statues in the Hellenistic period and of copies made in the Roman period.

tury is assumed to express contemporary standards of female beauty, which look very different from the standards for Classical women who, when nude, are usually lean and athletic, the physique differing little from that of young men. The High Hellenistic Aphrodite (late third to second century B.C.E.) is fleshy and emphasizes certain feminine features such as wide hips, large buttocks, and, in the crouching pose, creases in the Rubensesque torso (Fig. 5.17). It is not certain whether this awkward pose was intended to be erotic or unflattering, or simply to explore the reaction of the body to certain movements that had been neglected in Classical sculpture. The invention of the crouching Aphrodite was traditionally ascribed to the sculptor Doidalsas of Bithynia and dated to the mid-third century, but it may be no earlier than the beginning of the second (Ridgway 1990: 230–32). In Hellenistic Egypt where, as we have seen, Aphrodite became merged with Isis, the result may hark back to the earliest Near Eastern nude female figures, with unabashed emphasis on fertility (Fig. 5.18).

Along with the preoccupation with ideals of youthful feminine beauty in Hellenistic art came a fascination with its opposite: the grotesque caricature (Fig. 5.19). This is part of a broader interest in all physical types that deviate from the norm (handicapped people, emaciated beggars, etc.), as if in deliberate reaction to the two centuries of

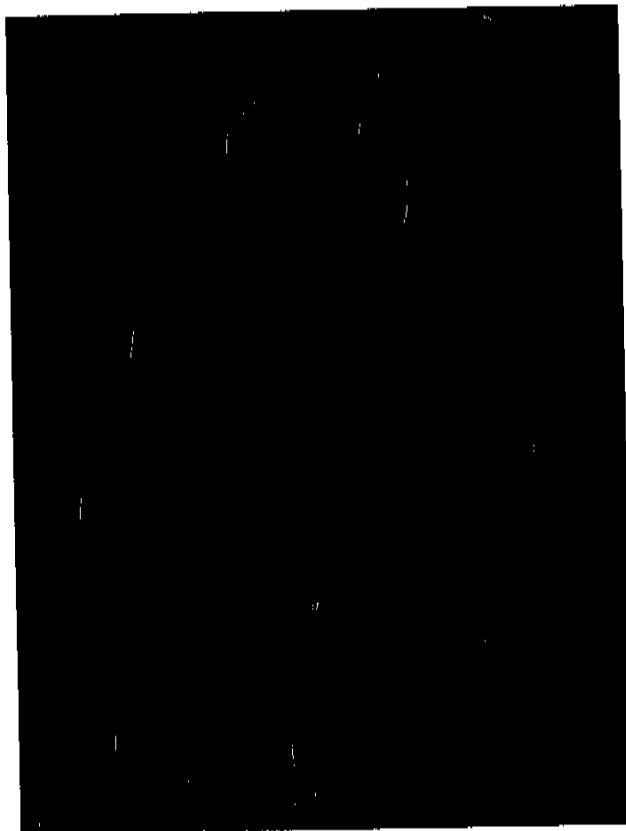


Figure 5.17. Statue of the crouching Aphrodite, said to be bathing. Found in Vienne in Gaul, the statue may testify to the circulation of Hellenistic originals and Roman copies to provincial areas.

The Hellenistic Period

177

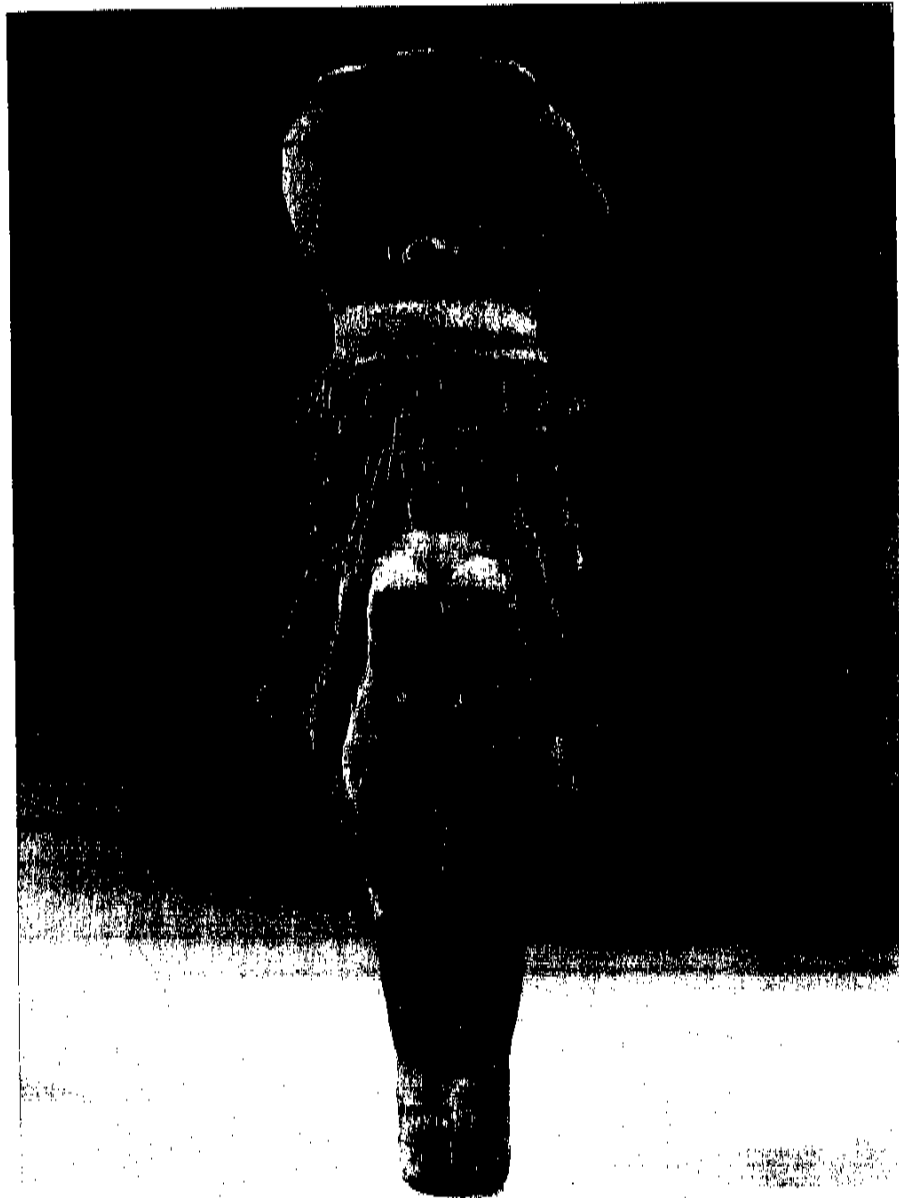


Figure 5.18. Terra-cotta statuette from Naucratis (first century B.C.E. to first century C.E.) of Aphrodite-Lisis. The broad hips and heavy breasts assert the connection of this composite goddess with fertility.

Classical idealism that had gone before. Particularly noticeable is the exploration of old age and the toll it takes on the body, whether male or female. The well-known figure of a drunken old woman convincingly renders such traits as the bony chest and sagging breasts, ravaged face and toothless mouth (Fig. 5.20). At the same time, we are not meant to



Figure 5.19. Hellenistic terra-cotta statuette from Tanagra (ca. 350–325 B.C.E.) of a woman with a heavy and aging body. The contrast with the idealized attenuation of the figurines of young women (see Figures 5.5 and 5.6) is striking, and, along with other images of older women (see Figure 5.20), it seems reminiscent of the ridicule implicit in the images of aging prostitutes in earlier Greek vase painting (Fig. 3.27).

The Hellenistic Period

179



Figure 5.20. Statue (third century B.C.E.) of a drunken old peasant woman, probably made for the decoration of a villa or for a private art collection of the sort known from the Roman empire.

pity her, for the splendid wine vessel she caresses suggests that her inebriation is the gift of the god Dionysus, a happy consolation for the infirmity of age (Zanker 1989). Appreciation of old women and of a life well spent appeared as well in poetry:

WOMEN IN THE GREEK WORLD

Stranger, know that I who rest here
Was once a priestess of Demeter,
And Priestess too of the Cabiri
And later also of Cybele;

That this old woman, now dust in earth,
helped many through the pains of birth
And bore two sons, in whose arms I
Closed my eyes. Farewell. Pass by.

(*Palatine Anthology* 7.728; Lombardo and
Rayor 1988)

Miccos kept his Phrygian nurse Aischra
Well cared for all her life, and when she died
Set up her statue in perpetual gratitude
For the old woman and her nursing breasts.

(*Palatine Anthology* 7.458; Lombardo and
Rayor 1988)

NOTES

1. The game, known as *ephedrismos*, was a kind of piggyback ride and was played by both little girls and young women, but less often by boys or men.
2. A *baubon* is a leather dildo.
3. Erinna and Nossis were poets (see "Education and Professions"), but not related. The use of their names here may be facetious.
4. Athenaeus 15.689a. Arsinoë II, Berenice's predecessor as the queen of Egypt, had also been fond of horses and of perfume made of roses. For the horses, see Hesychius, s.v. *hippia* and Callimachus, "The Lock of Berenice," line 54. See the excursus on Sparta for Spartan queens who owned horses that were victorious at Panhellenic games and, for recent epigraphic evidence, Tracey and Habicht (1991).
5. For the role of the empress in the Roman imperial cult see Chapter 13.
6. Hyginus, *Astronomy* 2.24. Although Hyginus is not a trustworthy source, similar stories about Macedonian and Ptolemaic queens riding in combat help to confirm Hyginus's report about Berenice II. See further, Pomeroy 1984: chap. 1.
7. Interpreters of writings concerning gods.
8. Apis and Mnevis were sacred bulls.
9. Hieroglyphics.
10. Demotic Egyptian script.
11. Osiris was King of the Dead.
12. Sirius, which rose on July 19 and signaled the beginning of the new year.
13. The calendar year was identified by her name. See, for example, the dating formula at the beginning of *P. Elephantine* 1, quoted on pp. 158-159.
14. Local governor.
15. Local magistrate.
16. Perhaps "in confinement" or "in detention" by the god's order.
17. Probably his companions.
18. Chalaion also honored Aristodama: *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecarum* 2 (1925) 263 (Delphi, third century B.C.E.).
19. "Friend of the state," an honor awarded to foreigners as acknowledgment of their benefactions or importance.
20. Mormo was a female bogey traditionally used to frighten children into obedience.

The Hellenistic Period

181

TRANSLATIONS

- Hicks, R. D. 1922. *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.
- Hunt, A. S., and C. C. Edgar. 1968. *Select Papyri*. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.
- Lombardo, Stanley, and Diane Rayor. 1988. *Callimachus: Hymns, Epigrams, Select Fragments*. Baltimore, Md.
- Oldfather, C. H. 1968. *Diodorus Siculus, Bibliotheca historica*. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.
- Paton, W. R. 1967. *Polybius: The Histories*. Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 5. Cambridge, Mass.
- . 1968. *The Greek Anthology*. 5 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.
- Perrin, Bernadotte. 1968. *Plutarch's Lives*. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.
- Rackham, H. 1968. *Pliny: Natural History*. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.
- Rist, Anna. 1978. *The Poems of Theocritus*. Chapel Hill, N.C.
- Rose, H. J. 1934. *Hyginus Fabulae*. Lugduni Batavorum.
- Seaton, R. C. 1980. *The Argonautica*. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass. (Originally published 1912.)
- Staden, Heinrich von. 1989. *Herophilus: The Art of Medicine in Early Alexandria*. Cambridge.

WORKS CONSULTED

- Bagnall, Roger S., and Peter Derow. 1981. *Greek Historical Documents: The Hellenistic Period*. Chico, Calif.
- Bieber, Margarete. 1961. *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*. 2d ed. New York.
- Bonfante, Larissa. 1989. "Nudity as a Costume in Classical Art." *American Journal of Archaeology* 93: 543-70.
- Burstein, Stanley. 1985. *The Hellenistic Age from the Battle of Ipsos to the Death of Kleopatra VII*. New York.
- Cameron, Alan. 1981. "Asclepiades' Girl Friends." In *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, edited by Helene P. Foley, 275-302. New York.
- Carney, Elizabeth D. 1987. "The Reappearance of Royal Sibling Marriage in Ptolemaic Egypt." *Parola del Passato* 42: 420-39.
- Cleopatra's Egypt*. 1988. Exhibition catalogue. Brooklyn Museum.
- Dittenberger, W. 1903-05. *Oriens Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*. Leipzig.
- Dittenberger, W., ed. 1915. *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*³. Leipzig. Rep. 1982 Olms, Hildesheim.
- Finley, M. I. 1968. *Aspects of Antiquity*. London.
- Fraser, P. M. 1972. *Ptolemaic Alexandria*. 3 vols. Oxford.
- Gow, A. S. F., ed. 1952. *Theocritus*. 2 vols. Cambridge.
- Gow, A. S. F., and D. L. Page. 1968. *Greek Anthology, Hellenistic Epigrams*. 2 vols. Cambridge.
- Hauben, H. 1979. "Le transport fluvial en Egypte ptolémaïque: les bateaux du roi et de la reine." In *Actes du XV e Congrès internationale de papyrologie. (Papyri Bruxelenses Graecae 19)*, 68-77. Brussels.
- Havelock, Christine M. 1970. *Hellenistic Art*. Greenwich, Conn.
- Headlam, Walter, and A. D. Knox. 1922. *Herodas: Mimes and Fragments*. Cambridge.
- Hondius, J. J. E. et al. eds. 1923- *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*. Leiden.
- Kassel, R., and C. Austin. 1989. *Poetae Comici Graeci*. Berlin.
- Kock, T. 1884. *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*, vol. 2. Leipzig.
- Körte, A. 1957. *Menandri reliquiae*. Leipzig. Teubneri.
- Lloyd-Jones, Hugh, and Peter Parsons. 1983. *Supplementum Hellenisticum*. Oxford.

- Page, D. L. 1970. *Greek Literary Papyri*. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass. (Originally published 1941)
- Page, D. L. 1962 (rep. 1975). *Poetae Melici Graeci*. Oxford.
- Pfeiffer, R. 1949-58. *Callimachus*, 2 vols. Oxford.
- Pfuhl, Ernst, and Hans Möbius. 1977. *Die ostgriechischen Grabreliefs*. Vol. 1. Mainz.
- Pollitt, J. J. 1986. *Art in the Hellenistic Age*. Cambridge.
- . 1990. *The Art of Greece: Sources and Documents*. Cambridge.
- Pomeroy, Sarah B. 1977. "Technikai kai Mousikai: The Education of Women in the Fourth Century and in the Hellenistic Period." *American Journal of Ancient History* 2: 51-68.
- . 1984. *Women in Hellenistic Europe from Alexander to Cleopatra*. New York. (paperback ed., Detroit, 1989)
- Ridgway, Brunilde S. 1990. *Hellenistic Sculpture*. Vol. 1. Madison, Wis.
- Rist, Anna. 1978. *The Poems of Theocritus*. Chapel Hill, N.C.
- Rose, H. G. *Hyginus Fabulae*.
- Sandbach, F. H. 1972. *Menandri reliquiae selectae*. Oxford.
- Skinner, Marilyn B. 1987. "Greek Women and the Matronymic." *Ancient History Bulletin* 1: 39-42.
- . 1991. "Nossis Thelyglossos." In *Women's History and Ancient History*, edited by Sarah B. Pomeroy, 20-47. Chapel Hill, N.C.
- Smith, R. R. R. 1988. *Hellenistic Royal Portraits*. Oxford.
- Snyder, Jane McIntosh. 1989. *The Woman and the Lyre: Women Writers in Classical Greece and Rome*. Carbondale, Ill.
- Solmsen, Friedrich. 1979. *Isis among the Greeks and Romans*. Cambridge, Mass.
- Thompson, Dorothy B. 1975. *Ptolemaic Oinochoai and Portraits in Faience*. Oxford.
- Tracey, Stephen V., and Christian Habicht. 1991. "New and Old Panathenaic Victor Lists." *Hesperia* 60: 187-236.
- Vedder, Ursula. 1988. "Frauentod—Kriegertod im Spiegel der attischen Grabkunst des 4. Jhs. V. Chr.," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts (Athens. Abt.) Grabkunst* 103: 161-91.
- Wallace, W., and M. Wallace. 1941. *Asklepiades of Samos*. Oxford.
- West, M. L. 1990. "Dating Corinna." *Classical Quarterly*, n.s. 40: 553-57.
- Zanker, Paul. 1989. *Die trunkene Alte*. Munich.

FURTHER READING

- Fantham, Elaine. 1975. "Sex, Status and Survival in Hellenistic Athens: A Study of Women in New Comedy." *Phoenix* 29: 44-74.
- Fowler, Barbara Hughes. 1989. *The Hellenistic Aesthetic*. Madison, Wis.
- Griffiths, Frederick T. 1981. "Home before Lunch: The Emancipated Woman in Theocritus." In *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, edited by Helene P. Foley, 247-73. New York.
- Onians, John. 1979. *Art and Thought in the Hellenistic Age*. London.
- Thompson, Dorothy J. 1988. *Memphis under the Ptolemies*. Princeton, N.J.