

DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE AS RHETORICAL DEVICE: THE GYNAECONITIS IN
GREEK AND ROMAN THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

Kelly I. McArdle: Domestic architecture as rhetorical device: The *gynaecoonitis* in Greek and Roman thought
(Under the direction of Hérica Valladares)

In this thesis, I explore the gap between persistent literary reference to the *gynaecoonitis*, or “women’s quarters,” and its elusive presence in the archaeological record, seeking to understand why it survived as a conceptual space in Roman literature several centuries after it supposedly existed as a physical space in fifth and fourth-century Greek homes. I begin my study by considering the origins of the *gynaecoonitis* as a literary motif and contemplating what classical Greek texts reveal about this space. Reflecting on this information in light of the remains of Greek homes, I then look to Roman primary source material to consider why the *gynaecoonitis* took up a strong presence in Roman thought. I argue that Roman writers, although far-removed from fifth and fourth-century Greek homes, found the *gynaecoonitis* most useful as a mutable and efficient symbol of male control and a conceptual locus of identity formation.

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INTRODUCTION

In his *Attic Nights*, written in the second century C.E., Aulus Gellius records a story about Alexander Molossus, the uncle of Alexander the Great. While crossing into Italy, Molossus proclaims that he fought the Romans as if fighting against a nation of men while his nephew fought the Persians as if fighting against a nation of women (*dixisse accepimus se quidem ad Romanos ire quasi in andronitin, Macedonem ad Persas quasi in gynaeconitin*, 17.21.33-4). The author's word choice is striking: he uses the terms *andronitis* and *gynaeconitis*, traditionally used to describe the "men's quarters" and "women's quarters" of fifth and fourth-century Greek homes. Gellius evidently understands these architectural terms as linguistically charged enough to make his joke: Rome was a well-organized and powerful nation while Persia was feminine, luxurious, and weak; the Romans were akin to virile men, the Persians to defenseless women. In this passage, Gellius follows a long tradition of Greek and Roman authors using the *gynaeconitis* as a rhetorical trope,¹ a tradition complicated by the apparent absence of spaces clearly differentiated by gender in the archaeological remains of Greek homes.

In this paper, I seek to understand why the *gynaeconitis* survived as a literary trope in Roman literature long after there was any physical evidence to which it could be tied. I begin by considering the Greek origins of the *gynaeconitis* as a literary motif, highlighting what source materials reveal about the space and reflecting on this information in light of the remains of fifth

¹Roman authors use either the term *gynaeconitis* or the Latinized *gynaeceum* depending on personal preference. I vary terminology according to the choice of each author.

and fourth-century Greek homes. Archaeologists have recently complicated our understanding of literary sources by demonstrating that the *gynaekonitis* was more likely a conceptual construct than a clearly demarcated physical space within Greek homes.² That is, the *gynaekonitis* may be more accurately described as a fluid but functional set of spatial practices that allowed a man to control the movement of certain members of his household, particularly women. In light of these studies, I look to the Roman literary material to consider why the *gynaekonitis* took up such a strong presence in Roman thought. This literary study is not exhaustive, but demonstrates through a wide variety of textual examples that a distinctive archaeological space was not important to the use of the *gynaekonitis* in the literary tradition, even to the likes of Roman authors like Vitruvius, who insists on its existence as a clearly demarcated suite of rooms. The *gynaekonitis* was, instead, a space whose conceptual features (e.g. locked and bolted doors, defensibility) could be used to anchor abstract discussions about power and identity.

²Jameson (1990), 172, 184; Nevett 1995; Nevett 1999, 12-20; Antonaccio (2000).

CHAPTER 1: THE GYNAECONITIS IN EARLY GREEK THOUGHT

The earliest mention of the *gynaeconitis* in extant Greek literature appears in Aristophanes's comedy *Thesmophoriazusae*. In this play, the women of Athens have summoned Euripides to trial for his misogynistic portrayal of women. During the *Thesmophoria*, a festival exclusive to women, they outline their argument—Euripides' depictions of women on stage have caused their husbands to carry misogyny back home, disrupting the function of domestic life³—and they debate the best course of revenge. One of the women, while making her case against Euripides, explicitly mentions the *gynaeconitis*:

εἶτα διὰ τοῦτον **ταῖς γυναικωνίτισιν**
σφραγίδας ἐπιβάλλουσιν ἤδη καὶ μοχλοὺς
τηροῦντες ἡμᾶς, καὶ προσέτι Μολοττικοὺς
τρέφουσι μορμολυκεῖα τοῖς μοιχοῖς κύνας.
καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ξυγγνώσθ'. ἂ δ' ἦν ἡμῖν πρὸ τοῦ
αὐταῖς ταμειῦσαι καὶ προαιρούσαις λαθεῖν
ἄλφιτον, ἔλαιον, οἶνον, οὐδὲ ταῦτ' ἔτι
ἔξεστιν.⁴

Then it's on his account that to **the women's quarters** they apply bolts and even bars keeping a suspicious watch on us, and beyond that they keep Molossian dogs as boogies for adulterers. Pardon all this; but it used to be we who, all by ourselves, managed and fetched things from the storeroom, the flour, the oil, the wine, but this is no longer the case. (414-421).⁵

³Stehle (2002), 399-403.

⁴Austin and Olson (2004), 18.

⁵All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

As Colin Austin and S. Douglas Olson point out, the restriction of women within the home is a common theme in Euripidean texts, but is usually depicted as a wasted effort. They suggest that this speech, in particular, parodies Euripides' fragmentary play *Danae*,⁶ which presents a typical account of the Danae myth: Acrisius locks away his daughter to prevent her from becoming pregnant, but his plan is foiled by Zeus in the guise of a golden shower.⁷ Additional plays and fragments of Euripides present similar concerns with unwanted or unseemly visitors to women within the home, whether male adulterers⁸ or corrupting female friends.⁹ It makes sense, then, that the central gag of the *Thesmophoriazousae* revolves around attempts to limit women's freedom and that the above speech represents the *gynaecoonitis* as a room which the master of a house could use to limit the movement of women, whether for the purposes of protecting their chastity and controlling their sexuality or maintaining stricter control of his property and foodstuffs. It appears that the interior function of the space is of less concern than its ability to be locked and guarded. That is, it does not matter what women do within the *gynaecoonitis*, so long as they cannot get out and outsiders cannot get in. The *gynaecoonitis* is, in the case of *Thesmophoriazousae*, essentially a function of the husband's power, which has failed; despite

⁶Austin and Olson (2004), 183.

⁷For reception of this concern in Latin literature, see Horace 3.16.1-4.

⁸Lisa Nevett points out that, in this period, a woman's fidelity to her husband was particularly important to ensuring the rightful inheritance of sons, so attempts to control or limit the movement of women through domestic spaces, especially to protect against unknown men, are in no way surprising. See Nevett and Bergmann (2012), 217.

⁹See *Andromache* 930-53, in which Hermione blames the women who visited her at home for corrupting her thoughts; fr. 320, which briefly states that "no wall or property or anything else is as difficult to guard as a woman,"; fr. 1063, which warns that a husband who keeps his wife locked up too frequently makes her more desirous of the outside world and, therefore, more prone to trouble.

their best efforts, the men of Athens are incapable of controlling their wives and now Euripides is faced with the comic consequences. Such a representation of the *gynaecoonitis* is not surprising in a play that is largely concerned with dynamics of gender, sex, and space, written by a playwright who had taken up similar issues in other works.¹⁰

Similar anxieties about the free movement of women play out in Lysias's first oration on the murder of the adulterer Eratosthenes. In the late fifth-century court case, Lysias speaks on behalf of a defendant, Euphiletos, who has murdered Eratosthenes for sleeping with his wife. Appealing to the jury, the orator explains the layout of Euphiletos' home, which was important to the execution of the crime:

πρῶτον μὲν οὖν, ὧ ἄνδρες, (δεῖ γὰρ καὶ ταῦθ' ὑμῖν διηγήσασθαι) οἰκίδιον ἔστι μοι διπλοῦν, ἴσα ἔχον τὰ ἄνω τοῖς κάτω κατὰ **τὴν γυναικωνίτιν** καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἀνδρωνίτιν. ἐπειδὴ δὲ τὸ παιδίον ἐγένετο ἡμῖν, ἡ μήτηρ αὐτὸ ἐθήλαζεν: ἵνα δὲ μὴ, ὅποτε λοῦσθαι δέοι, κινδυνεύῃ κατὰ τῆς κλίμακος καταβαίνουσα, ἐγὼ μὲν ἄνω διητώμην, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες κάτω. καὶ οὕτως ἤδη συνειθισμένον ἦν, ὥστε πολλάκις ἡ γυνὴ ἀπῆει κάτω καθευδήσουσα ὡς τὸ παιδίον, ἵνα τὸν τιτθὸν αὐτῷ διδῶ καὶ μὴ βοᾷ.¹¹

First of all, men, (for it is necessary to thoroughly explain these affairs to you), my home is split into two floors, equal on both, according to **the women's quarters** above and the men's quarters below. When we had the child, its mother breastfed it and in order that, each time that it needed to be washed, she not put herself in danger by descending by the stairs, I was living above and the women below. At that time, it had become so customary that my wife would often leave me and go down to sleep with the child, in order to feed it and stop it from crying (1.9-10).

This oration sheds new light on the *gynaecoonitis*, since Lysias reveals that it was sometimes a space confined to upper floors, but that it could be moved, if necessary, to provide for ease of movement. Moreover, he describes it as a sleeping quarters for women and perhaps, too, for the

¹⁰See Stehle (2002) and Zeitlin (1996) for further discussion of the play's gendered dynamics. See also Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazousae* and *Lysistrata*, which consider the consequences of women transgressing their expected social and civic functions.

¹¹Todd (2007), 66.

master of the house when he wanted to sleep with his wife. In general, however, the *gynaecoonitis* represented in Lysias' oration functions similarly to the *gynaecoonitis* of *Thesmophoriazusa*, since Lysias goes on to say that Euphiletos' wife once locked her husband in the upper apartments when he returned home unexpectedly. In an attempt to conceal that Eratosthenes was in the house, she locked the door from the outside and left him there overnight (1.11-13). This story demonstrates, like the Aristophanes play, that the part of the house that was typically occupied by women would have been protected by lock and key, allowing the master to control their movement and protect their chastity from strange men. In this case, the reversal, wherein the master ends up locked inside and his wife moves freely with her adulterer, exemplifies male anxieties about the corruptibility of women: although Lysias attempts to characterize himself as a thoughtful husband who moved his wife downstairs for her own convenience,¹² his plan, nevertheless, backfires; his wife, a woman once agreeable and faithful, has been overcome by a malevolent outsider because she was not properly safeguarded.

The *gynaecoonitis* appears again in Lysias's third oration against Simon. In this case, the defendant and Simon have fallen in love with the same boy. According to the defendant, desire to win the boy's affection causes Simon to act erratically and violently. Lysias recounts an incident in which Simon drunkenly arrives at the defendant's home in search of the boy:

πυθόμενος γὰρ ὅτι τὸ μαιράκιον ἦν παρ' ἐμοί, ἐλθὼν ἐπὶ τὴν οἰκίαν τὴν ἐμὴν νύκτωρ μεθύων, ἐκκόψας τὰς θύρας εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὴν γυναικωνίτιν, ἔνδον οὐσῶν τῆς τε ἀδελφῆς τῆς ἐμῆς καὶ τῶν ἀδελφιδῶν, αἱ οὕτω κοσμίως βεβιώκασιν ὥστε καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν οἰκείων ὀρώμεναι αἰσχύνεσθαι. οὗτος τοίνυν εἰς τοῦτο ἦλθεν ὕβρεως ὥστ' οὐ πρότερον ἠθέλησεν ἀπελθεῖν, πρὶν αὐτὸν ἠγούμενοι δεινὰ ποιεῖν οἱ παραγενόμενοι καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ ἐλθόντες, ἐπὶ παιῖδας κόρας καὶ ὀρφανὰς εἰσιόντα, ἐξήλασαν βία.¹³

¹²Usher (1999), 56 n.11.

¹³Todd (2007), 290.

Learning that the boy was at my house, he came there at night in a drunken state, and after breaking down the doors he entered **the women's quarters**. Within were my sister and my nieces, who have lived in such a well-ordered manner that they are ashamed to be seen even by their kinsmen. This man, then, came to such a point of hubris that he did not go away until the people who were present and those who had accompanied him, supposing he did a terrible thing by intruding on young girls and orphans, drove him out by force (3.6-7).

This passage, providing no additional clues as to specific internal functions of the *gynaecoonitis*, again presents it as a space in which women might sleep, but that might also be closed up in order to protect their modesty. Lysias underscores the latter function of the *gynaecoonitis* by asserting that the women of the defendant's family are so virtuous that it is a source of shame for them to be seen by any men at all, including kinsmen. Still, it is notable that Simon breaks into this particular space looking for the young boy. While it is true that the beloved boy may still be on the threshold of youth that would reasonably expect a woman's care, Simon's decision to target this location within the house may suggest that the boy bears a certain similarity to women insofar as he is neither an adult male nor a fully realized citizen. In the eyes of citizen men, he is not yet a rational and self-sufficient person, but a vulnerable object of sexual desire for other men. In the case of women, it is precisely this state of inferior personhood that suggests potential risk to the master of the house, because it is assumed that they cannot be trusted with defending their own chastity either mentally or physically: the master must protect and control them. Simon therefore assumes that the boy, like the women of the house, must be contained in this highly protected space.

While describing Simon's intrusion, Lysias uses the terms ὕβρεως and δεινὰ ποιεῖν, coloring the crime as an egregious affront to virtue which should not to be taken lightly: Simon has entered a space that is not supposed to be accessible to unknown visitors. In fact, S.C. Todd suggests that the plural τὰς θύρας may indicate that Simon has broken down both an outer

courtyard door *and* an internal door separating the *gynaecoonitis* from the rest of the house.¹⁴ This double assault on the boundaries of the house speaks to the extent of Simon's aggression and moral depravity. Furthermore, Lysias adds that the men who accompany Simon eventually drag him away by force. The notion that Simon's actions are rejected even by his drinking buddies emphasizes Lysias' underlying point that social mores favor the defendant: intruding on another man's home and, more importantly, offending the modesty of his female relatives is repugnant even to this band of brutish drunkards.¹⁵ The fact that Lysias thinks this argument will be effective demonstrates his understanding of the *gynaecoonitis* as a locus of male power and control that must not be violated.

Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, following the convention of both Aristophanes and Lysias, also mentions the *gynaecoonitis* in the context of household management. The actual location of the *gynaecoonitis* and any activities that occur internally remain unclear in Xenophon's description. Furthermore, the *gynaecoonitis* is again depicted as a space that functions to control the movement of certain members of the household based on gender, age, and status. Such a consistent description demonstrates that the *gynaecoonitis*' power as a device for consideration of male, citizen power in the household persisted across time, author, and genre. In the *Oeconomicus*, Socrates recalls an encounter with Ischomachus, who explained the methods he had used to educate his young wife in the correct manner of household management.

Ischomachus says:

ἔδειξα δὲ καὶ τὴν γυναικωνίτιν αὐτῇ, θύρα βαλανωτῇ ὠρισμένην ἀπὸ τῆς ἀνδρωνίτιδος, ἵνα μήτε ἐκφέρηται ἔνδοθεν ὅ τι μὴ δεῖ μήτε τεκνοποιῶνται οἱ οἰκέται ἄνευ τῆς ἡμετέρας

¹⁴Todd (2007), 313.

¹⁵Ibid, 314.

γνώμης. οἱ μὲν γὰρ χρηστοὶ παιδοποιησάμενοι εὐνούστεροι ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ, οἱ δὲ πονηροὶ συζυγέντες εὐπορώτεροι πρὸς τὸ κακουργεῖν γίνονται.¹⁶

I also showed her **the women's quarters**, separated by a bolted door from the men's quarters, so that nothing be taken out that doesn't need to be and so that the slaves don't breed without my permission. For useful slaves who have produced children are much more well-disposed, while wicked ones, when coupled, become more prone to acting out (9.5).

Ischomachus, like Lysias and Aristophanes, describes the *gynaeconitis* as a highly-protected space with a bolted door. Like the statement made by one of Aristophanes' characters in the *Thesmophoriazousae*, Ischomachus' comment highlights the homeowner's concern over the movement of household goods: the master must have absolute control over the objects that constitute his wealth. Ischomachus presents a unique case, however, insofar as he mentions slaves in conjunction with free-born women. In general, his speech makes clear that he has concern for the virtuous behavior of his wife and kinswomen, but he imparts to his wife a particular concern for the social and economic implications of controlling slaves.¹⁷ The ability to have sex and produce children, meeting privately outside the view of the master, is presented by Ischomachus as a privilege and reward, which can only be granted to those slaves whom he trusts not to betray him. Xenophon thus demonstrates that status as well as gender plays an important role in the restricted use of domestic space: the master of the house performs and constantly re-exerts his control over women and slaves alike by reminding them that even a regular human function (i.e. sex and reproduction) can only happen with his permission.

¹⁶Marchant (1921), ad loc.

¹⁷Garlan (1988) discusses the reproduction of slaves in ancient Greece. It appears that Greeks did not force their slaves to reproduce because it was not only cheaper to purchase a slave than to raise one, but also posed less danger to female slaves within the home.

A fragment from Menander's lost play *Pseudherakles*, although written over a century later and somewhat difficult to place in context because of its fragmentation, reveals concerns similar to those expressed in earlier Greek texts and underscores the continued usefulness of the *gynaecoonitis*. Menander writes:

νῦν δ' εἰς **γυναικωνίτιν** εἰσιόνθ' ὅταν
ἴδω παράσιτον, τὸν δὲ Δία τὸν Κτήσιον
ἔχοντα τὸ ταμιεῖον οὐ κεκλειμένον,
ἀλλ' εἰστρέχοντα πορνίδια—¹⁸

But now whenever I see a parasite entering
the women's quarters, and Zeus, Protector of Property,
leaving the storehouse unlocked,
but letting prostitutes in—

It is unclear what character would have spoken these lines, but it is, nevertheless, notable that concerns about the women's quarters being entered by a parasite, the storerooms being unlocked, and prostitutes being allowed to enter the house are expressed together. The fact that Zeus is invoked under the cult title *Ktêsios*, or "Protector of Property," but has failed to lock the storerooms, speaks to the negative coloring of all three events. Like the *Thesmophoriazousae* and *Oeconomicus*, then, this fragment clearly demonstrates the broad concerns citizen men had when it came to the protection of their households. The chastity of women and the safety of goods and foodstuffs were connected insofar as successful protection of both spoke to effective household management. Perhaps, then, the male head-of-household in the *Pseudherakles* provides a precursor to the *paterfamilias* of Roman New Comedy, who failed to uphold both the sexual chastity and financial security of his household, as we will discuss in the following chapter.

The literary sources discussed above provide a cursory understanding of how Greeks conceptualized the *gynaecoonitis*, even if they speak little of the actual, physical characteristics of

¹⁸Menander fr. 519 Kock

the space. There is agreement among the sources that the *gynaecoonitis* is protected by locked and bolted doors. Lysias suggests that, at least in some cases, it is restricted to the upper floors of the house, but can be transferred to other areas in extenuating circumstances. The *gynaecoonitis* is also inhabited by free members of the household, slaves, and possibly by very young children, including adolescent boys in the case of Lysias' defendant. Evidently, its most important function was to grant more control to the master of the house with regard to the movement of his family members and slaves. Whether he was protecting his wife and female relatives from strange men, preventing slaves from reproducing without his permission, or ensuring proper care of foodstuffs and household goods, the man of the house exercised his power and protected his estate through the *gynaecoonitis*, thus reasserting control over the household; any unauthorized breach of the space thus represented the failure of said power.

Aside from these characteristics, the *gynaecoonitis* remains an obscure space. It is peculiar, then, that archaeologists have tended to look for a clearly demarcated room (or suite of rooms) for women in the remains of Greek homes, as if to suggest that because the label *gynaecoonitis* exists, it represents a marked and identifiable space.¹⁹ In his book on the Roman houses of Pompeii and Herculaneum, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill addresses the misapplication of primary sources, arguing that they have “been ransacked for labels, as if to designate an area *triclinium* or *oecus* or *diaeta* were to explain it.” He goes on to argue that “connections need to be made between the archaeological and literary evidence not only at the obvious level of finding explicit descriptions of specific objects and architectural forms but at the more difficult level of exposing the rhythms of social life that underlie and are implicit in the physical remains.”²⁰

¹⁹e.g. Walker (1983).

²⁰Wallace-Hadrill (1994), 6.

Indeed, recent studies on fifth-century Greek homes have found an approach favoring social movement and rhythm more fruitful, suggesting new possibilities for the organization of domestic space and the function of the *gynaecoon*.

Lisa Nevett, in a study on house and households in antiquity, demonstrates that the archaeological remains of fifth-century Greek houses show no evidence of binary, gendered division. These houses, she explains, were built with mudbrick on a stone foundation, had terracotta roof tiles, consisted of one or two stories, and featured rooms with varied uses radiating from a central courtyard such that all adjoining rooms were observable. Nevett convincingly argues that such a layout of rooms indicates a high degree of visibility: all movement into, out of, and through the house was apparent to all of its inhabitants. Therefore, “keeping outsiders separate from female family members and ensuring the surveillance of individual family members was relatively easy.”²¹ That is to say, the strict gendered division of a house was not necessary for exerting control over members of one’s household; women and slaves need not be confined to a specific space or spaces if their male relatives could easily see everything they did and keep tabs on their interactions. The texts of Lysias and Xenophon underscore the point that using locked rooms may have only been useful or necessary at particular times of the day (i.e. at night when the master was asleep and the threat of dangerous intruders or illicit sexual encounters was heightened).

Carla Antonaccio advances a similar argument. Like Wallace-Hadrill, Antonaccio argues that “texts cannot serve as a simple handbook to reading the archaeological record.”²² She notes that there are few spaces within excavated Greek houses whose fixtures or plan dictate a specific

²¹Nevett and Bergmann (2012), 217-8.

²²Antonaccio (2000), 521.

use. In fact, it is only the *andron*, the men's dining room, that frequently has distinguishing features, such as decorated floors or markings for the placement of dining couches.²³ Antonaccio builds on the arguments of Nevett and Michael Jameson,²⁴ who argue that domestic arrangements were flexible: dining, cooking, and weaving could have been accomplished in a variety of different spaces. Furthermore, this flexibility is evidenced by the temporary exchange of living quarters in Lysias' first oration. Antonaccio adds, "That flexibility was the norm can be inferred from the fact that Euphiletos had to explain the arrangement of space in his house, but needed no defense for flexibility."²⁵ Ultimately, Antonaccio concludes that behavior and material culture mutually influence each other and that space in Greek homes was negotiated and rearranged when necessary (e.g. temporally or seasonally). "The *gynaecoon*," she says, "was a space where women could retreat when male visitors were present. It was fluid, changeable, and permeable. Women's space could expand and contract, but it was not a cloistered seraglio."²⁶

It seems, then, that Nevett is correct when she states that the traditional normative picture of Greek women being kept in complete isolation is "at best, an oversimplification of patterns of domestic social relations" and "likely to have been more of a rhetorical ideal than a behavioral reality."²⁷ Even in the Greek literary sources considered above, the *gynaecoon* emerges as a spatially ambiguous but functionally concrete concept, insofar as we do not learn what it looks like internally, but we do know that it is used to exert the master's control. Each speaker employs

²³Ibid, 526.

²⁴Jameson (1990).

²⁵Antonaccio (2000), 529.

²⁶Ibid, 532.

²⁷Nevett (1999), 16-7.

the *gynaecoonitis* principally as a representation of the power, virtue, and honor accorded to the master of the house, rather than an immovable, physically distinctive space. In

Thesmophoriazousae, the inability of men to control women becomes a comic plot that entails cross-dressing, if only to underline the point that, with their wives free from the confined spaces of their homes, Athenian men have lost their hold on correct gender roles; in Lysias' orations, men who violate the women's quarters of fellow citizens, thereby negating their control over the household, are deemed to be wild, unlawful, and even deserving of death; in Xenophon, control is instituted through a chain of command, where male anxieties over the most vulnerable members of a household are expressed. The *gynaecoonitis* is thus defined by what is *not* supposed to happen there and who is *not* supposed to be there; it is fundamentally relational; it is a means for expressing concern over male authority and control. These observations lend themselves to an understanding of the *gynaecoonitis* as a domestic space more valuable for what it represents—male control over the household—than for its actual function (or functions), at least in the literary record.

CHAPTER 2: THE GYNAECONITIS IN ROMAN THOUGHT

Given the strong symbolic value of the *gynaecoonitis* in classical Greek texts, it is not surprising that Romans latched onto the concept, especially given their interest in articulating the power and role of the Roman citizen male. As the city of Rome expanded, conquering and absorbing cities and states from around the Mediterranean, Roman authors became especially invested in defining what it meant to be Roman. As we have seen in the context of Greek literature, it was not uncommon for proper citizen male behavior to be defined against both the foreign and the feminine. Thus, the *gynaecoonitis*, imbued with Greek otherness and charged with gendered notions of control, was an appealing rhetorical device for Roman authors in their quest for self-definition.

The earliest extant Roman source to use the term *gynaecoonum*, the Latinized version of *gynaecoonitis*, is Plautus' comedy *Mostellaria*, which stages the tale of Philolaches, a son who over-indulges in love, Theopropides, a father who over-indulges in domestic architecture, and Tranio, their clever slave. Although the play is set in Greece, Plautus presents an apparent blend of Greek and Roman elements: a meta-theatrical nod to the contrived nature of comic plots and the crafty hand of the playwright.²⁸ Through juxtaposition of a Greek setting and the apparent *Romanitas* of his characters, Plautus explores Roman concerns about the use of domestic space and architecture at a safe distance. The *gynaecoonum* serves an important function in these broader moral considerations, because Theopropides' desire to construct a "women's quarter" is directly

²⁸See Sharrock (2009), 1-21 and Nichols (2010), 42.

related to his loss of control over both his own home and his son's affair with a prostitute. That is, as Theopropides loses the domestic control a Roman *paterfamilias* ought to have, he becomes more invested in luxurious Greek building practices and decoration.

Upon returning home from a trip abroad, Theopropides finds himself locked out of his home: the first signal to the audience that he has lost control of his household. Unbeknownst to him, his son Philolaches has been partying inside and has spent a large sum of money to purchase a *meretrix* girlfriend.²⁹ In order to cover for the younger master, the slave Tranio convinces Theopropides that his house is haunted and that Philolaches has purchased the neighbor Simo's house. Then, in an attempt to gain entrance into Simo's home, Tranio tells Simo that Theopropides wants to build a new women's quarters in his own house and is looking for a model:

TR. scio equidem istuc. sed senex
gynaecium aedificare volt hic in suis
et balneas et ambulacrum et porticum.
SI. quid ergo somniavit? TR. ego dicam tibi.
dare volt uxorem filio quantum potest,
ad eam rem facere volt novom **gynaecium**.
nam sibi laudavisse hasce ait architectonem
nescio quem exaedificatas insanum bene;
nunc hinc exemplum capere volt, nisi tu nevis.
nam ille eo maiore hinc opere ex te exemplum petit,
quia isti umbram aestate tibi esse audivit perbonam
sub divo columine usque perpetuom diem.³⁰

TR. I know that. But the old man
wishes to build **women's quarters** here in his halls
and baths and a promenade and a portico.
SI. What has he dreamed up then? TR. I'll tell you.
He wants to give his son a wife very soon and
for that business he wants to build new **women's quarters**.
For he said some architect had praised your house

²⁹See James (2012) on amatory narratives in comedy.

³⁰Lindsay (1905), ad loc.

to him as one that was extremely well constructed.
Now he wants to take it as an example, unless you disagree:
he's especially looking to take this example from you
because he heard that you have excellent shade in the summer
all day long under a divine roof (754-65).

When Tranio and Theopropides have been allowed inside and completed their inspection of Simo's house, Tranio asks whether his master liked the property: "What are the women's quarters like? What about the portico?" Theopropides responds, "Awfully good. I don't think there's any bigger than this on the public street," to which Tranio retorts that, indeed, it is the biggest, for he and Philolaches have measured them all (908-11). Kristina Milnor notes the peculiarity of this exchange, especially the presence of the *gynaeceum*. She argues that Romans viewed this uniquely Greek domestic concept as bizarre and that Plautus uses it to demonstrate that the father's domestic ideals are as extreme as his son's. That is, Theopropides, by praising a home that juxtaposes the ultra-private space of the *gynaeceum* and the ultra-public space of the portico, "ultimately commits the same crime as his son: by ignoring the difference between inside and outside structures, he too collapses the distinction between public and private space."³¹

The *gynaeceum*, then, has a clear rhetorical coloring in the *Mostellaria*: it distinguishes Roman domestic ideals from extreme, luxurious, and foreign Greek concepts in order to explore how a Roman household ought to be run. Unlike the orations of Lysias or the philosophical treatise of Xenophon, which use the *gynaeconitis* in a moralizing discourse, Plautus' *gynaeceum* has a pronounced comedic effect as a marker of Greekness and Greekness is portrayed as ridiculous.³² Moreover, as Milnor points out, the joke about the *gynaeceum* "draws on what the

³¹Milnor (2002), 21-2.

³²For more on Plautus' comedic adaption of Greek prototypes see Nichols (2010), 42.

audience has already seen of Philolaches' courtesan-beloved." Even if she were to represent a Greek rather than a Roman courtesan, "she is hardly a good Athenian girl in need of a *gynaecium* to keep her out of the company of men."³³

The portico-measuring scene further underscores the point that Theopropides' domestic ideals are meant to be comic: his desire for the *gynaecium* and the portico, but especially his attention to their size, seems to allude to another sort of bodily "measuring contest." Like many fathers in the Roman comic plays, Theopropides has lost sight of proper Roman ideals and become obsessed with excess; his attention to acquiring this new and outlandish home distracts him from the fact that his son has wasted his inheritance and spoiled the family's reputation by shacking up with a courtesan. Thus, Plautus' *gynaecium* retains the rhetorical significance it had in the works of his Greek predecessors insofar as it speaks to male control over the household. Here, however, it is employed to emphasize extravagant householding ideals and a lack of moderation rather than proper Greek mores. That is, Theopropides' desire for a *gynaecium* does not represent his control over his household, but a lack thereof; his concept of control is misplaced, for while he considers a space for the women of the household, his son runs wild without his knowledge or consent.

Terence also makes reference to the *gynaecium* in his play *Phormio*. The comedy follows a predictable pattern wherein two young men, Phaedria and Antipho, attempt to gain the objects of their lust behind their fathers' backs. With the help of the clever slave Phormio, Antipho marries a poor orphan girl named Phanium. Demipho at first objects to the marriage, but later discovers that Phanium is the illegitimate daughter of his brother Chremes: the marriage can go on as planned. When the slave Geta reveals Phanium's true identity to Antipho and Phormio, he

³³Milnor (2002), 18.

mentions that he was kept from the women's quarters because Chremes and Demipho were inside speaking to the girl.

GE. omitto proloqui; nam nil ad hanc rem est, Antipho.
ubi in **gynaecium** ire occipio, puer ad me adcurrit Mida,
pone reprehendit pallio, resupinat: respicio, rogo
quam ob rem retineat me: ait esse vetitum intro ad eram accedere.³⁴

GE. I'm leaving out the prologue; it's not relevant to this matter, Antipho.
When I began to go into **the women's quarters**, the slave boy Mida ran up to me, tugged at my cloak from behind, and pulled me back. I looked back and asked him why he was stopping me. He said that it was forbidden to enter to see the mistress (861-64).

It is worth noting that, in this case, the *gynaecium* plays an important dramatic role: it provides a space off-stage where the playwright can delay a girl's recognition scene by keeping her hidden and can also suggest the occurrence of dramatic action without having to stage it.³⁵ That is, Terence can have Geta reveal that Chremes and Demipho exposed Phanium's identity inside the house without having to stage their conversation and thus save time for scenes he deems more important.³⁶ Furthermore, as in the *Mostellaria*, the *gynaecium* plays a central role in a joke about the master's loss of control. Chremes and Demipho, despite the gendered division of their houses, have lost control of their households. The excessive love affairs of their sons and the sneaky behavior of their slaves create a constant state of domestic chaos. It is only by addressing the problems in the women's apartments and restricting physical and social movement through the home (e.g. limiting Geta's access to the *gynaecium*, struggling to undo Phormio's acquisition

³⁴Lindsay and Kauer (1963), ad loc.

³⁵Plautus uses such a tactic in *Casina*, wherein the titular slave character is eventually discovered to be the lost daughter of the family next door, but not until the main action of the play is over. See O'Bryhim (1989) for more on *Casina*'s recognition.

³⁶It is noteworthy that in every case where young women in new comedy are recognized as citizen daughters, they are immediately ushered off stage and no longer speak.

of a dowry) that they can attempt to regain their authority. Like Plautus, then, Terence makes great rhetorical use of the *gynaeceum* in satirizing Greek attitudes toward excessive control; the male heads of household in the *Phormio* are never truly able to attain order, despite continuous attempts to regulate the sexuality of their sons, slaves, and female family members.

The *gynaeconitis*' next appearance in Roman literature, a shift from fictional, staged drama to biographical prose, demonstrates that, like the Greeks, Romans understood the rhetorical power of the *gynaeconitis* as effective enough to operate across both time and genre. Cornelius Nepos' *Lives of the Eminent Commanders*, a collection of biographies written in the first century B.C.E., recounts the achievements of the most outstanding commanders in the Greek and Roman world. The preface of the collection operates as a *recusatio*, explaining the style of his writing, which he claims some will not find sufficient for the characters of the commanders. However, it is necessary, according to Nepos, for the reader to understand that the same customs are not becoming to all people; Greeks and Romans must be judged according to their respective conceptions of honorable behavior, rather than according to a monolithic moral code. Among his examples of the ways in which Greeks and Romans differ, he writes:

Contra ea pleraque nostris moribus sunt decora quae apud illos turpia putantur. quem enim Romanorum pudet uxorem ducere in conuiuium? aut cuius non mater familias primum locum tenet aedium atque in celebritate versatur? quod multo fit aliter in Graecia. nam neque in conuiuium adhibetur nisi propinquorum, neque sedet nisi in interiore parte aedium, quae **gynaeconitis** appellatur, quo nemo accedit nisi propinqua cognatione coniunctus.³⁷

Many actions are becoming according to our morals which are thought to be shameful among the Greeks. What Roman would be ashamed to take his wife to a dinner-party? What matron does not occupy a primary space within her home and show herself in public? But it is very different in Greece; for a woman is prohibited from a dinner-party, unless relatives alone are present, and she sits only in the interior part of the house, which is called “**the women’s quarters**” to which nobody has access unless of close relation (6-7).

³⁷Guillemin (1961), ad loc.

Nepos' introduction of the *gynaecoonitis* is unsurprising because he, like Plautus, explicitly uses the *gynaecoonitis* as a means of distinguishing between Greek and Roman morality. He clearly understands it as characteristically Greek space and a powerfully charged symbol of otherness. While Greeks limit their wives to the point of total seclusion from unrelated men, he says, Roman women are free to attend dinner parties when accompanied by their husbands and roam the front rooms of their homes.³⁸

Interestingly, Nepos describes this Greek practice of female seclusion as if it were contemporary, using present tense verbs (*adhibetur, sedet, accedit*) despite the fact that the *gynaecoonitis* was supposedly a feature of homes that existed many centuries earlier and there is no archaeological evidence of such a practice in his time.³⁹ The truth of the practice itself and the archaeological reality of a *gynaecoonitis* is not necessarily important to Nepos because, regardless of the veracity of the claim, the concept of a markedly isolated *gynaecoonitis* helps Nepos make a more distinctive point about cultural relativism in which to foreground his work: it primes the reader of the *Lives* to consider different conceptions of morality and broaden their understanding of what it means to be an eminent commander. Nepos is not writing an account of glorious Roman commanders praised for their *Romanitas* and foreigners and losers condemned for their

³⁸Cf. note 27.

³⁹Nevett (2010), 72-8 describes the different designs of Hellenistic homes in the Greek East, particularly on early Roman Delos in the second century B.C.E. She explains that two contrasting sets of spatial organization existed simultaneously: in one group of houses domestic space was conceptualized as an "essentially secluded environment," while in another group "the interior of the house was deliberately placed on view." Nevett argues that "this contrast might be interpreted as evidence for the co-existence of two different cultural groups, since the defining features of each accord well with what we know of some of the main characteristics of Greek and Roman housing traditions." Indeed, this evidence seems to constitute a bridge between earlier Greek house plans and the more open domestic layouts that emerged on the Italian peninsula under Roman rule.

moral failings. Instead, he includes in his work, for example, Hannibal the Carthaginian, a prominent enemy of Rome. In order to understand praises of a man like Hannibal, the author insists that his audience must open their minds to foreign modes of social organization, for which concept the *gynaecoonitis* is an effective shorthand.

Cicero, too, takes up the *gynaecoon* as a rhetorical tool in his prose, but uses the term's potent connotations of gendered power and Greek otherness in order to embolden his critique of Antony; unlike Nepos' appeal to cultural relativism, in this context the *gynaecoon* is explicitly negative. Modeling his orations on the *Philippics* of Demosthenes, Cicero attempts to rally Romans, especially Octavian, against Antony. The second oration is the longest and includes vehement attacks on Antony's ambitions, a catalogue of his atrocities, and a thought-provoking mention of the *gynaecoon*. According to Cicero, Antony and his wife Fulvia had begun to accept lavish bribes in exchange for decrees forged in Caesar's name. One of these decrees restored territory to Deiotarus, the king of Galatia.⁴⁰ Cicero remarks:

Ille numquam—semper enim absenti adfui Deiotaro— quicquam sibi quod nos pro illo postularem aequum dixit videri. syngrapha sesterti centiens per legatos, viros bonos, sed timidos et imperitos, sine nostra, sine reliquorum hospitem regis sententia facta in **gynaecio** est, quo in loco plurimae res venierunt et veneunt.⁴¹

But [Caesar] while alive—I know this, for I always supported Deiotarus, who was far away—never said that anything that we asked for on Deiotarus' behalf appeared just to him. An agreement for ten million sesterces was made in [Antony's] **women's quarters**, in which many things have been sold and are still being sold, through Deiotarus' ambassadors, good men, but timid and inexperienced, without my advice or that of the rest of the close friends of the monarch (2.95).

In this passage, Cicero recounts previous appeals to Caesar on Deiotarus' behalf. He argues that hatred of the Galatian king was characteristic of Caesar, and, therefore, that the new decree must

⁴⁰Ramsey (2003), 295.

⁴¹Ramsey (2003) ad loc.

have been forged and procured by means of bribery. Indeed, Cicero names the amount of the bribe and says that it was made in Antony's *gynaecium*. John Ramsey argues that this comment is a jibe at Antony's wife Fulvia, whom Cicero's letters to Atticus⁴² name as the one through whom the decree was purchased (*per Fulviam*).⁴³ Of course, speaking of Antony's *gynaecium* is peculiar, considering Nepos' assertion that a *gynaecium* is an exclusively Greek architectural phenomenon, as well as the remains of contemporary Roman homes which show no evidence of such a space.⁴⁴ Rather than suggesting that Antony literally had a women's quarter in his home, however, the *gynaecium* seems to be rhetorical in this context, functioning as a tangible image of Antony's corruption. As in earlier Greek texts, corruption of the *gynaecium* is symbolic of corrupted male control and specifically a lack of control over women. In Cicero's view, the fact that Fulvia conducts these secretive and illegal transactions speaks to her immorality, but even more so to Antony's. If Antony were an honest Roman man, he would not accept bribes in the first place, but would especially not allow his wife to become involved in his corrupted politics; she is, ultimately, a reflection of his morality and his effeminacy.

Andrew Riggsby's work on the Roman *cubiculum* provides another productive lens through which we might view this critique of Antony's behavior. Considering a wide range of literary sources, Riggsby argues that Romans viewed the privacy of the *cubiculum*, or bedroom, not as a right and a privilege, but rather as a simple lack of public quality. Privacy, he says, was mostly a privilege of the elite, who had business that needed to be conducted in non-public spaces, but was also a mandate to contain behaviors that were inappropriate when performed in

⁴²Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* 14.12.1.

⁴³Ramsey (2003), 299.

⁴⁴See Wallace-Hadrill (1994) for appropriate figures.

public, like sex.⁴⁵ Riggsby's work reveals that privacy and private business transactions were not, then, inherently taboo; it was expected, to a certain extent, that powerful men had a right to privacy in certain affairs and that they would conduct such affairs in the seclusion of the *cubiculum*. Nevertheless, Cicero purposely avoids the word *cubiculum*, which might indicate an acceptably private political transaction, choosing instead a space known for its ultra-secluded, anti-Roman quality. In this case, the *gynaecium* becomes a crystallized signifier of Antony's otherness, especially with regard to his control over the women in his family and his inappropriately secretive business transactions. Cicero thus draws on the legacy of the *gynaecium* as both a symbol of male power and of un-Roman ideals in order to paint Antony's political dealings in a negative light: if he were conducting his affairs for the public good, he would neither conduct them so secretly nor allow his wife to get involved.

Vitruvius' *De Architectura*, probably written about two decades after the *Philippics*, demonstrates that Cicero's use of the *gynaecium* as an indicator of anti-Roman isolation was rhetorically powerful. Like Cicero and Nepos before him, Vitruvius uses the *gynaecium* as a means through which to construct Roman identity against a foreign and unusual "other," albeit in less explicitly political or personal terms than Cicero. In the sixth book of his architectural treatise, Vitruvius discusses domestic buildings, explaining why diverse climates require different sorts of building practices. Importantly, he notes that some divine providence has allotted Rome a temperate climate, allowing its citizens to excel in both body and spirit. Indeed, he says, they are the "masters of the world" (*orbis terrarum imperii*, 6.1.11). Going on to explain the various rooms used in Roman domestic architecture, Vitruvius pauses in the seventh chapter

⁴⁵Riggsby (1997), 43-53.

of book six to consider the Greek domestic arrangement. He notes the lack of an atrium, describing other features of the entryway, then writes:

in his locis introrsus constituuntur oeci magni, in quibus matres familiarum cum lanificis habent sessionem. in prostadis autem dextra ac sinistra cubicula sunt conlocata, quorum unum thalamos, alterum amphithalamos dicitur. circum autem in porticibus triclinia cotidiana, cubicula, etiam cellae familiaricae constituuntur. haec pars aedificii **gynaeconitis** appellatur.⁴⁶

Great halls lie within, in which the matrons spend time spinning with their maids. On the right and left of these vestibules there are bedrooms, of which one is called the *thalamus*, the other the *amphithalamus*. Around the porticoes are the everyday dining-rooms, the bedrooms, and even servants' rooms. This part of the building is called **the women's quarters** (6.7.2).

Vitruvius provides the most in-depth architectural description of the *gynaeconitis* of any author in the literary tradition. He describes the *gynaeconitis* as a collection of rooms with its own halls, bedrooms, and dining quarters, which is adjoined to a larger assemblage of rooms designed specifically for men. Women, he says, are barred from the *andronitis* (*eo mulieres non accedunt*), for it is meant to be a place where men can convene without the intercessions of women (*sine interpellationibus mulierum*, 6.7.4-5). Such a statement about the function of the *gynaeconitis* is significant, for it implies that it serves, to some extent, to provide privacy for men in their daily affairs. Vitruvius focuses less on the danger posed to women by outsiders, as in the orations of Lysias, or the danger they pose to their husbands, as in *Thesmophoriazousae*, and more on the notion that their presence is a burden and an interruption to the men of the house.

Due to its detailed physical descriptions, Vitruvius' account provided the basis for many reconstructions of Greek houses before they had begun to be excavated. While some scholars proclaimed that Vitruvius' text was evidence enough for separation of male and female spheres

⁴⁶Frank Granger, LCL 280, ad loc.

as a normal feature of Greek life,⁴⁷ others remained skeptical. As discussed above, eventual excavations provided little evidence for the complex and binary arrangement of rooms that Vitruvius describes, instead showing a simplistic, open, highly visible floor plan. As Nevett points out, the lack of physical evidence to back Vitruvius' claims is unsurprising, especially because we neither know what time period and specific geographical region he is referring to, nor do we know his original source of information.⁴⁸

Considering the fact that book six is subtly set up as a testament to geographical difference and Roman exceptionalism, as noted above, the *gynaecoonitis* as it is presented underscores the point that Roman domestic architecture is both wildly different from and better than what came before it. Despite the physical unreliability of Vitruvius' description, his *gynaecoonitis*, like Nepos', effectively operates as a symbol of otherness. The *gynaecoonitis* of the Greek house and its exclusion of women remind Vitruvius' readers how geographical and moral variation contribute to architectural paradigms and how architecture reinforces ethos. While Vitruvius does not explicitly draw on the notions of male control that his predecessors explored via the *gynaecoonitis*, he does clearly intend to make an implicit statement about the morality of the Greeks: he "builds Roman identity through and against the Greek."⁴⁹

Roman authors' fascination with *gynaecoonitis* continues into the imperial period. Unlike their Republican and early imperial predecessors, however, imperial authors do not contemplate

⁴⁷Antonaccio (2000), 524-25.

⁴⁸Nevett (1995), 363.

⁴⁹Nichols (2017), 24. Nichols here summarizes the argument of Wallace-Hadrill (2008), adding that the *De Architectura*'s definition of Romanness is not simply constructed as the opposite to Greekness, but "self-consciously composite," distinguished by absorption, adaption, and deletion of foreign elements, and, more importantly "by enduring preservation of their disparate origins."

the function of the *gynaecoonitis* within the Greek home or highlight the fact of its isolation. It may be the case that these authors came to understand the *gynaecoonitis* as a generic descriptor of spaces where women slept and worked, but it may also be true that like Nepos, Vitruvius, and 19th century archaeologists, they believed it was a stable space defined by its isolation and inaccessibility; it is difficult to draw conclusions based on the textual evidence. Still, as in previous cases, the author's conception of the *gynaecoonitis* as an archaeological phenomenon seems unimportant when it comes to its literary function.

Of the known imperial authors, Plutarch and Lucian provide a majority of the references to the *gynaecoonitis*. Writing in the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E. respectively, these authors provide interesting case studies because they both hail from the east and write in Greek rather than Latin. Plutarch is also particularly important because he references the *gynaecoonitis* in his works a total of 23 times⁵⁰—more than seven times as many references as Lucian, who mentions it second most frequently of all authors mentioned above. The fact that Plutarch and Lucian use the term so frequently despite living several centuries after the space supposedly existed speaks to its rhetorical power. Examining a handful of examples from Plutarch and two examples from Lucian, I consider how these authors conceive of that rhetorical power and shape the term to fit their respective projects.

⁵⁰I will not explore every one of these examples in the present study, but provide the following list for reference. Mentions in the *Moralia*: *Quaestiones Convivales* 3.6, *Apophtegmata Laconica* 57, *Amatorius* 4 and 12, *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* 26, *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur* 19, *Mulierum virtutes* 19, *De tranquillitate animi* 2, *De cohibenda ira*, *Coniugala Praecepta* 48, *De Vitosio Pudore* 3, *De curiositate* 1, *De heroditi malignate* 35; Mentions in the *Lives*: *Comparison of Demetrius and Antony* 3, *Caesar* 9, *Cato the Younger* 30, *Lucullus* 7, *Pelopidas* 9, *Cleomenes* 16, *Phocion* 19, *Themistocles* 31, *Artaxerxes* 28, and *Alexander* 9.

Plutarch uses the term *gynaecoonitis* as a generic descriptor of women's bedrooms and the spaces in which they work in only two cases. In *Quaestiones Convivales* he considers if and when a husband ought to sleep in a bed chamber with his wife (τῆς γυναικωνίτιδος, 3.6), and in the *Life of Pelopidas*, the *gynaecoonitis* appears as a place where young children stay with their mothers apart from the spaces and affairs of men (παραλαβὼν ἐκ τῆς γυναικωνίτιδος τὸν υἱόν, 9). The 21 remaining references to the *gynaecoonitis*, however, take on the symbolic, gendered connotations employed by Plutarch's predecessors. Through close examination of these references, one can draw out a few distinctive, but interrelated threads of use.

Like Aulus Gellius, Plutarch finds the term *gynaecoonitis* particularly useful as a stand-in for general feminine weakness and luxury, especially with regard to war. In one humorous quotation from *Apophthegmata Laconica*, he writes "Panthoedas was going on a trip to Asia and when they pointed out to him a very strong wall he said, 'My goodness, strangers, a fine **women's quarters!**'" (Πανθοΐδας πρεσβεύων εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν, ἐπιδεικνύοντων αὐτῷ τεῖχος ἐχυρόν, εἶπε, 'νῆ τοὺς θεοὺς, ὃ ξένοι, καλὴ γυναικωνίτις,' 57.1). Panthoedas' comment is a multi-layered joke that suggests both the weakness of the Asian fortifications and the femininity of the men emerging from within: both are frail and susceptible to attack by virile Greek soldiers. Furthermore, in the view of Panthoedas, a Spartan, the very presence of a wall represents weakness. Indeed, in another section of the *Apophthegmata Laconica*, Plutarch writes that when someone asked Agesilaus the Great why Sparta had no walls, "he pointed to the fully armed citizens and said, 'These are the walls of the Spartans,'" (ἐπιδείξας τοὺς πολίτας ἐξοπλισμένους ταῦτά ἐστιν εἶπε τὰ Λακεδαιμονίων τείχη, 2.29). Putting this comment in the mouth of a Spartan general, Plutarch plays on long-standing Greek stereotypes of Eastern culture: Asian peoples

were, like Greek women, seen to be luxurious, feminine, and feeble.⁵¹ Tim Whitmarsh notes in his study on the Second Sophistic that the employment of these stereotypes is characteristic of the period. As Greek writers under Roman rule sought to create their own identity, they found binaries like masculine/feminine and civilized/barbaric useful.⁵² Plutarch's re-hashing of these stereotypes declares that the Greeks of Pantoedas' time were powerful and manly as compared to peoples of the east, but also reasserts the powerful and manly lineage of the author and his contemporaries.

Drawing on similar concepts of Eastern otherness and feminine weakness, Plutarch writes in his comparison of Demetrius and Antony:

ἐν δὲ ταῖς τοῦ πολέμου παρασκευαῖς οὐκ εἶχεν αὐτοῦ τὸ δόρυ κιττόν, οὐδὲ μύρων ὠδώδει τὸ κράνος, οὐδὲ γεγανωμένος καὶ ἀνθηρὸς ἐπὶ τὰς μάχας ἐκ **τῆς γυναικωνίτιδος** προήει, κοιμίζων δὲ τοὺς θιάσους καὶ τὰ βακχεῖα καταπαύων ἀμφίπολος Ἄρεος ἀνιέρου, κατὰ τὸν Εὐριπίδην, ἐγένετο, καὶ δι' ἡδονὴν ἢ ῥαθυμίαν οὐθὲν ἀπλῶς ἔπταισεν.⁵³

But in his preparations for war [Demetrius] did not have a spear that was tipped with ivy, nor did his helmet smell of myrrh, nor did he go into battles from **the women's quarters**, polished and blooming, but, quieting down the revels and stopping the Bacchic rituals, became a 'minister of unhallowed Ares,' according to Euripides, and did not stumble at all because of his luxury or pleasure (3).

This passage reveals that Demetrius, despite his otherwise luxurious lifestyle, does *not* emerge from the *gynaecoonitis* in times of war. Instead, he embraces his more masculine traits and abandons feminine adornment and excess. Plutarch underscores Demetrius' masculinity by

⁵¹Hall (1991), 115: In her study on the creation of Greek identity, Edith Hall argues that by the fifth century B.C.E., Greek writers shaped Greek identity via creation of an eastern "other." Hall argues that eastern stereotypes fall in diametric opposition to the dominant cultural forces, often the same stereotypes that mark inferiors within the dominant community, whether they be women, slaves, or metics.

⁵²Whitmarsh (2005), 32-7.

⁵³Bernadotte Perrin, LCL 101, ad loc.

adding that he thus becomes a “minister of Ares” and puts down the Bacchic rites. That is, he leaves off from a god typically associated with the East and with feminine ritual and becomes a fierce soldier. Such a striking contrast between Demetrius’ usual lavish behavior and his ability in war is not surprising considering what Plutarch says in his introduction to the *Life of Demetrius*, where he argues that these men bear testimony to a saying of Plato: great natures exhibit great vices as well as great virtues (καὶ κακίας μεγάλας, ὥσπερ ἀρετάς, αἱ μεγάλοι φύσεις ἐκφέρουσι, 1).⁵⁴ The *gynaecoonitis* serves Plutarch’s attempt to represent Demetrius’ dual nature well, specifically because it had already been used in the Greek and Roman literary traditions as a symbol of both foreign and feminine otherness.

Plutarch’s understanding of the *gynaecoonitis* as a powerful signifier of femininity and moral weakness in men at war is well-defined, for the physical space is used as such an indicator four out of the 23 times he mentions it.⁵⁵ He tends to manipulate the symbolism, however, depending on context, and a few other patterns of the term’s use can be discerned. Like Cicero, for example, Plutarch uses the incidence of political dealings in the *gynaecoonitis* as a marker of illicit and immoral politics. In his biography of Cato the Younger, Plutarch writes about Pompey’s attempts to create a political alliance with Cato. Pompey sends Cato’s friend Munatius

⁵⁴Scholars are uncertain what passage of Plato he is referring to.

⁵⁵For additional examples see: *Lucullus* 7, which argues that Mithridates first attempt to attack the Romans was unsuccessful because he was too concerned with the ostentatious appearance and luxury of his troops, so in his second attempt, he did away with, among other things, the luxurious women’s quarters on his ships and loaded them down with arms and missiles instead; *De cohibenda ira*, in which anger is expressed toward men who exhibit anger that is allegedly more fitting for fitting for the women’s quarters than the men’s; and *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* 26 for a related example, which does not deal directly with a story of war, but a heroic journey undertaken by powerful men. Plutarch here claims that the Argonauts, upon abandoning Heracles, needed to have recourse to the *gynaecoonitis* and feminine spells in order to obtain the golden fleece. Thus a strong, violent, masculine figure is pitted against engagement with typically feminine tactics.

to speak on his behalf and proposes that he and his son wed Cato's two marriageable nieces.

Although the women seem overjoyed at the thought of alliance, Cato replies:

‘βάδιζε, Μουνάτιε, βάδιζε, καὶ λέγε πρὸς Πομπήϊον ὡς Κάτων οὐκ ἔστι διὰ τῆς γυναικωνίτιδος ἀλώσιμος, ἀλλὰ τὴν μὲν εὖνοιαν ἀγαπᾷ, καὶ τὰ δίκαια ποιοῦντι φιλίαν παρέξει πάσης πιστοτέραν οικειότητος, ὄμηρα δὲ οὐ προήσεται τῇ Πομπηίου δόξῃ κατὰ τῆς πατρίδος.’⁵⁶

“Go, Munatius, go and tell Pompey that Cato will not be captured through **the women's quarters**, but he values Pompey's good will and will grant him a friendship more trustworthy than any marriage if he acts justly. Still, he will not give hostages for the glory of Pompey to the detriment of Rome (30).”

Like Cicero's oration against Antony, this use of the *gynaecoonitis* does not make reference to a real physical space within Cato's home. Instead, it demonstrates that Cato sees Pompey's attempt to secure alliance via marriage as misguided: he thinks Pompey would seek friendship more appropriately by proving that he is just and trustworthy to Cato himself. Plutarch thus shows his audience that politics, in the view of a successful Roman man, is the dominion of men and he uses the term *gynaecoonitis* as a catch-all term for the dominion of women; these two spheres must remain separate and recourse for political bargaining through the women of his house must not be allowed.

A similar usage of the term *gynaecoonitis* appears in Plutarch's *Life of Themistocles*, where Plutarch describes Themistocles' attempts to assuage the anger of a satrap through the women's quarters: “But when the Barbarian became angry and threatened to write a letter to the King, Themistocles was afraid and sought refuge in **the women's quarters** and, by winning the favor of the satrap's concubines with money, appeased his anger” (χαλεπαίνοντος δὲ τοῦ βαρβάρου καὶ βασιλεῖ γράψειν φήσαντος ἐπιστολὴν, φοβηθεὶς ὁ Θεμιστοκλῆς εἰς τὴν γυναικωνίτιν κατέφυγε καὶ τὰς παλλακίδας αὐτοῦ θεραπεύσας χρήμασιν ἐκεῖνόν τε κατεπράυνε

⁵⁶Bernadotte Perrin, LCL 100, ad loc.

τῆς ὀργῆς, 31). Like many representations of Themistocles, this scene has a sneaky and immoral coloring.⁵⁷ Rather than work things out with the satrap himself, Themistocles resorts to secretive dealings with women, offering up bribes for their assistance in mollifying the heated situation. As in Cicero's *Philippic*, the *gynaeconitis* here represents an anti-Roman space. In the first place, it is associated with a man whom Plutarch refers to as a barbarian (τοῦ βαρβάρου) and contains concubines rather than a proper wife or other female members of the satrap's family. Furthermore, it is an ultra-secretive space where political dealings that ought to take place between two men are corrupted by the inclusion of depraved women (whether a power-hungry wife, in the case of Cicero, or, in this case, prostitutes).

Plutarch underscores this point in the *Life of Artaxerxes* when an advisor to Artaxerxes reminds him that “he is very foolish if, after his brother had entered into affairs of state through **the women's quarters**...he could suppose that he would undertake a secure succession. (κάκεϊνον ἀβέλτερα φρονεῖν, εἰ, τοῦ μὲν ἀδελφοῦ διὰ **τῆς γυναικωνίτιδος** ἐνδουμένου τοῖς πράγμασι...οἶεται βέβαιον αὐτῷ τὴν διαδοχὴν ὑπάρχειν, 28). Taken together with the example from the *Life of Themistocles*, such a comment clearly demonstrates not only that these texts express unease at specific sorts of political tactics, but that Plutarch, following Cicero, picks up on the powerful symbolic potential of the *gynaeconitis*: he, too, understands the weight it can carry as a marker of excessively secretive, backhanded politics. The repeated use of this political

⁵⁷For example, see Herodotus *Histories* 8.4-5, in which Themistocles enacts a shady deal to persuade the Greek fleet to remain in Euboea. After receiving a payment of 30 talents from the Euboeans, Themistocles convinces two generals to remain with small bribes. Neither of the two generals knows, however, that Themistocles has received this money from the Euboeans, instead believing that the money has come from Athens. Thus, when his trick successfully escapes the notice of the others, Themistocles keeps 22 talents for himself.

concept specifically in Plutarch's *Lives*, a literary endeavor intended to explore virtue, vice, and how these affected the lives of eminent men, speaks to Plutarch's project of identity formation.

As the examples above demonstrate, Plutarch was invested in defining proper masculinity and exploring the morality of men. Rather than reflecting on male subjectivity alone, however, he sometimes considers the morality and subjectivity of women. In particular, he demonstrates how willing use of the *gynaeconitis* represents feminine virtue. In *Mulierum virtutes*, he tells the story of Aretaphila, a Cyrenean woman of the first century B.C.E. According to Plutarch, Aretaphila plays an important role in disposing of the tyrant Nicocrates, whom she is forced to marry. Through political maneuvering and pure bravery, she arranges the murder of Nicocrates and organizes the overthrow of his entire political alliance. Although the Cyreneans, upon recognizing that their freedom has been restored, wish to honor her, Plutarch writes:

ἡ δ' ὡς ποικίλον τι δρᾶμα καὶ πολυμερὲς ἀγωνισαμένη μέχρι στεφάνου διαδόσεως, ὡς ἐπεῖδε τὴν πόλιν ἐλευθέραν, εὐθὺς εἰς **τὴν γυναικωνίτιν** ἐνεδύετο, καὶ τοῦ πολυπραγμονεῖν ὀτιοῦν παραβαλλομένη, τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον ἐν ἰστοῖς ἡσυχίαν ἄγουσα μετὰ τῶν φίλων καὶ οἰκείων διετέλεσεν.⁵⁸

She, just as one who had played through some varied drama with many roles up to the winning of the crown, when she saw the city free, straightaway withdrew to **the women's quarters**, and, rejecting any sort of meddling, led the rest of her life quietly at the loom with the company of her friends and family (19).

In this passage, the *gynaeconitis* represents both the appropriate domestic sphere of women and Aretaphila's praiseworthy chastity. Although her time spent in the political realm of men was necessary for the safety of the city, her honor ultimately rests upon her decision to withdraw from politics when the city has been restored, returning to a space and to a set of activities more appropriate for women. Indeed, this point is underscored by the fact that Aretaphila's withdrawal into the *gynaeconitis* and her dedication to the loom are contained in the powerful last sentence

⁵⁸Frank Cole Babbitt, LCL 245, ad loc.

of the story: this statement sticks with the reader. Furthermore, Plutarch's suggestions that the other citizens want to honor her and that she has been playing a part in a drama are significant. The first imbues Aretaphila's choice to return home with more power, because rather than relish in the glory of her victory, she rejects the honors offered to her and returns home straightaway; while the other citizens have lost sight of proper gender roles, she takes the lead in restoring them. The second implies that Aretaphila was only temporarily fulfilling the political role of men in a dire situation: she put on the mask of masculinity, but now knows that she must take it off. On the whole, Aretaphila's willingness to withdraw to the women's quarters in a showing of modesty, rather than needing to be forcibly locked away by a husband or male relative, is a testament to her integrity.

A passage from the *Life of Caesar* also considers feminine virtue. Plutarch here reveals the questionable behavior of Publius Clodius and Caesar's wife Pompeia:

Πόπλιος Κλώδιος ἦν ἀνὴρ γένει μὲν εὐπατρίδης καὶ πλούτῳ καὶ λόγῳ λαμπρός, ὕβρει δὲ καὶ θρασύτητι τῶν ἐπὶ βδελυρία περιβοήτων οὐδενὸς δεύτερος, οὗτος ἦρα Πομπηΐας τῆς Καίσαρος γυναικὸς οὐδὲ αὐτῆς ἀκούσης, ἀλλὰ φυλακαὶ τε **τῆς γυναικωνίτιδος** ἀκριβεῖς ἦσαν, ἣ τε μήτηρ τοῦ Καίσαρος Αὐρηλία, γυνὴ σώφρων, περιέπουσα τὴν νύμφην ἀεὶ χαλεπὴν καὶ παρακεκινδυνευμένην αὐτοῖς ἐποίει τὴν ἔντευξιν.⁵⁹

Publius Clodius was a man from a patrician family and distinguished for his wealth and eloquence, but in hubris and impudence he was second to none among all men infamous for their boldness, for he was in love with Pompeia the wife of Caesar and she was not unwilling. But a close watch was kept upon **the women's quarters**, and the mother of Caesar, Aurelia, a prudent woman, always watched the young woman vigilantly, and made any meeting difficult and risky for them (9).

This mention of the *gynaecoonitis* is especially interesting, not only because it again appears in the context of a Roman home but also because it is the only extant example in which a woman uses the space to keep watch over another woman. Considering the context of the story, such a

⁵⁹Flacelière (1975), 154.

usage makes sense. While Plutarch explains in no uncertain terms the bad morality of Publius Clodius (ὑβρεῖ, θρασύτητι) and Pompeia (οὐδὲ...ἀκούσης), he calls Caesar's mother Aurelia a prudent woman, attaching to her one of the most virtuous epithets a woman in the Greek-speaking world could attain to (σώφρων). In fact, Lysias comments in the first oration that Euphiletos considered his wife to be the most prudent woman in the whole city (πασῶν σωφρονεστάτην, 1.10), an assertion which is undermined by her purposeful misuse and abuse of the *gynaecitis* to conduct her affair. Bearing the contrast between Aurelia and the wife of Euphiletos in mind, the former emerges as virtuous specifically because of her willingness to forcibly rectify Pompeia's faults by limiting her movement and keeping watch over her in the *gynaecitis*; she is not only virtuous herself, but, like the men of earlier Greek texts, also takes special care to maintain the virtue of her family members. Plutarch thus attempts to show that women are not only objects of social mores, who must be controlled by men, but that they, too, have agency in upholding and enforcing proper behavior.

The examples discussed above are only a small selection of the *gynaecitis*' appearances in the works of Plutarch, but they effectively exhibit the author's concerns with identity formation. In particular, these examples demonstrate that gender played an important role in Plutarch's understanding of virtue and vice: virtuous Greek and Roman men were appropriately masculine while foreigners and citizen men who engaged in vice were luxurious and feminine; while many women were feeble-minded, those who understood their proper place could be deservedly praised. The fact that the *gynaecitis* had already been part of such a vibrant Greek and Republican Roman literary history—specifically embedded in discussions about male power, the otherness of foreigners, and the proper place of women—made it an

obvious choice for Plutarch's own works and explains why he used it so often and so readily. It is not surprising, then, that Lucian also mentions the *gynaeconitis* in his works.

In two examples from the works of Lucian, the *gynaeconitis* also carries a great deal of rhetorical weight and acts as a tool of identity formation.⁶⁰ The *Teacher of Rhetoric*, for example, is partially spoken in the voice of an instructor who tells his followers not to engage with difficult material, but to be concerned about their physical appearance. After advising his students to publicly slander and abuse others, he says:

Τοιαῦτα μὲν τὰ φανερά καὶ τὰ ἔξω. ἰδίᾳ δὲ πάντα πράγματα ποιεῖν σοι δεδόχθω, κυβεύειν μεθύσκεσθαι λαγνεύειν μοιχεύειν, ἢ αὐχεῖν γε, κἂν μὴ ποιῆς, καὶ πρὸς ἅπαντας λέγειν καὶ γραμματεῖα ὑποδεικνύειν ὑπὸ γυναικῶν δῆθεν γραφέντα. καλὸς γὰρ εἶναι θέλε καὶ σοὶ μελέτω ὑπὸ τῶν γυναικῶν σπουδάζεσθαι δοκεῖν· εἰς τὴν ῥητορικὴν γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο ἀνοίσουσιν οἱ πολλοί, ὡς διὰ τοῦτό σου καὶ ἄχρι **τῆς γυναικωνίτιδος** εὐδοκιμοῦντος.⁶¹

Do these things plainly and in public. In your private life, be resolved to do anything at all—to play dice, to drink deep, to live high, and to keep mistresses, or at least to boast of it even if you do not do it, telling everyone about it and showing notes that purport to be written by women. Aim to be elegant and take pains to create the impression that women are devoted to you. Even this will be set down to the credit of your rhetoric by the public, who will infer from it that your fame extends even to **the women's quarters** (23).⁶²

As Whitmarsh points out, this text is a satire on the new fashion of sophistic oratory, which explains why the instructor is particularly fond of luxury and ostentation: a common stereotype about sophists was their affinity for effeminate aesthetics.⁶³ That Lucian was intending to mock the sophist instructors can be further inferred from the fact that the teacher satirically

⁶⁰It is worth noting that the *gynaeconitis* also appears in *The Rooster*, Lucian's Cynic dialogue in praise of poverty. In this text, it seems to be a space in which both women and young boys dine separately from men. It does not, however, play a particularly important or rhetorically powerful role in the story. I, thus, pass over it here.

⁶¹A.M. Harmon, Loeb 162, ad loc.

⁶²Adapted from translation by A.M. Harmon, Loeb 162.

⁶³Whitmarsh (2005), 26-7

recommends all manner of typically bad behavior: drinking, playing dice, keeping mistresses and boasting about it. The comment that such behaviors will cause the student’s good reputation (εὐδοκίμοῦντος) to extend even to the women’s quarters magnifies the comedic effect of the passage; the term for “good reputation” is, of course ironic, but is even more so because of the fact that the rumor reaches a space where drinking and adultery have specifically been considered illicit and disruptive activities. This joke also demonstrates an underlying stereotype about women as busybodies and gossips: to be famous among the ranks of women or to be a part of any gossip, more generally, is not conceived of as a favorable trait. The *gynaeconitis* thus takes on an important role in a text that relies heavily on concepts of gender to mock sophists; they are not only inappropriately feminine, but also engage with women in problematic ways, whether conducting illicit sexual affairs or corrupting women’s conversations with rumor of their bad behavior: a place in the home that is supposed to keep women safe loses its power when men behave badly.

Lucian uses a similar turn of phrase in *The Mistaken Critic*. After walking past a fellow citizen and criticizing him loudly enough to be heard, Lucian is in turn mocked for his diction.

Responding with an aggressive attack, Lucian says:

τοιγαροῦν οὐ μεμπτὰς ἡμῖν τίνεις τὰς δίκας, ἀλλὰ μέχρι καὶ τῆς γυναικωνίτιδος περιβόητος εἶ. πρόην γοῦν ἐπειδὴ τινα γάμον ἐν Κυζίκῳ μνᾶσθαι ἐτόλμησας, εὖ μάλα ἐκπεπυσμένη πάντα ἢ βελτίστη ἐκείνη γυνή, “Οὐκ ἂν προσείμην,” ἔφη, “ἄνδρα καὶ αὐτὸν ἄνδρὸς δεόμενον.”⁶⁴

Well then, you are paying us a penalty not inadequate, but your notoriety extends even to **the women’s quarters**. Recently, for example, when you had the audacity to go looking for a Cyzican wife, that excellent woman, who had especially thoroughly inquired into every matter said: “I would not accept a man who needs a man (28).”⁶⁵

⁶⁴A.M. Harmon, Loeb 302, ad loc.

⁶⁵Adapted from translation by A.M. Harmon, Loeb 302.

As in *The Teacher of Rhetoric*, fame that extends to the *gynaecoonitis* here implies an infamy that ought to be mocked; the student of rhetoric and the enemy of Lucian are not well-renowned, but gossiped about for their unseemly, unmanly behavior. This assertion is underscored by Lucian's suggestion that the woman the man desired as a wife did not want to have a "man who needs a man." By placing the accusation of homoerotic behavior in the mouth of a woman, Lucian more directly critiques his enemy's failure to uphold the proper role of a man and a husband. Thus the *gynaecoonitis* is again a loaded term embedded in a larger conversation about gender and identity; it denotes a space whose corrupted boundaries (in this case corrupted by rumor) stand in for corrupted constructions of gender. Taken with the examples above, this late example shows that the *gynaecoonitis*' literary history imbued it with enough rhetorical power to live beyond its early Greek origins. Its inherent suggestion of gendered power struggle was especially useful for men like Plutarch and Lucian: Greek men writing under the Roman empire and struggling with concepts of identity and power.

CONCLUSION

The textual history of the *gynaecoonitis* demonstrates the remarkable ability of linguistic metaphor to span time, space, and genre. Indeed, the term *gynaecoonitis* outlasted any physical space that could be tied to it, and, despite the lack of physical evidence, the space seems to have been, in some sense, “real” to the Greeks and Romans. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson write in their work on metaphor and its role in constructing experience:

The idea that metaphor is just a matter of language and can at best only describe reality stems from the view that what is real is wholly external to, and independent of, how human beings conceptualize the world—as if the study of reality were just the study of the physical world. Such a view of reality—so-called objective reality—leaves out human aspects of reality, in particular the real perceptions, conceptualizations, motivations, and actions that constitute most of what we experience.⁶⁶

Using Lakoff and Johnson’s framework in the context of the literary trope of the *gynaecoonitis*, we can begin to understand how both the transparent etymology of the word and its consistent play upon notions of gendered domestic space and male control made its meaning(s) clear and powerful. For classical Greek writers and orators, the *gynaecoonitis* provided a means for talking about morality and sexuality within a household, particularly the male master’s role in protecting his physically and mentally vulnerable inferiors: female family members and slaves. For Romans, spanning many centuries from the early Republic to the early Empire, the *gynaecoonitis* was applied broadly as a rhetorical paradigm to talk about cultural difference and otherness, to make jokes relying on gendered stereotypes, and to comment on the maintenance of correct

⁶⁶Lakoff and Johnson (2003), 146.

gender roles. In each case, the term invoked a long history of gendered behavior, pitting Greekness against Romanness and public against private, and provided a useful mirror for shaping male, citizen identities.

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