

## Women's work? Who made textiles in the ancient Greek world?

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### Abstract

Although it is often assumed that women were responsible for most textile manufacture in ancient Greece, this idea has regularly been challenged. This paper considers the arguments that have been made in favour of a substantial presence of professional male weavers and their role in Greek economies. Analysis of the sources used to support the importance of male weavers suggests that it has been incorrectly and inappropriately interpreted and that in reality there is little positive or secure evidence for the direct involvement of men in the manufacture of clothing and household textiles with the exception of a very small number of male slaves. Textile manufacture, then, really was 'women's work'.

### Introduction

How do we know who made textiles in the ancient Greek world? Although we have generally assumed, for many good reasons, that textiles were primarily 'women's work', this has regularly been questioned. How can we be sure that it really was women who carried out most of the textile manufacture that took place? The evidence to support this assumption is not, in fact, straightforward, nor has it been systematically or sufficiently rigorously investigated. And yet, properly ascertaining whether this fundamental premise is justified by solid evidence is critically important, since the answer has profound ramifications for wider understandings of gendered ideologies and practices, as well as gendered economies, in antiquity.

Most recently Peter Acton<sup>1</sup> has challenged the assumption that textiles were primarily the products of women's labour. Acton's mission in his book *Poiesis: manufacturing in classical Athens* (2014) is to highlight the importance of manufacturing in the economy of classical Athens. Writing from the perspective of modern business strategy and based on his own experience with a consultancy firm, he attempts to show how the principles of competitive advantage, in tandem with potential for differentiation and barriers to entry structured Athenian manufacturing.

Acton claims that "we know of many male weavers" for whom there is "abundant evidence".<sup>2</sup> He argues that textile production was carried out not only in domestic settings but in large commercial workshops, regularly involving numerous male weavers as well as women, since the textile industry catered for a lively retail market with a level of demand that home production could not meet (Acton 2014: 152-9). Hence, he supports the idea first suggested by

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<sup>1</sup> Acton (2014); (2016).

<sup>2</sup> Acton (2014) 154.

Wesley Thompson that domestic production of ‘ordinary’, basic textiles was carried out by women in households, but specialist and finer quality textiles for the market were made by largely by men in commercial workshops.<sup>3</sup>

Thompson’s argument back in 1982 for the existence of two systems of textile production in classical Athens was based largely on the evidence of Plato and Aristotle. However, Thompson depends entirely on literary texts which he interprets at face value, accepting them as documenting contemporary practice in fourth-century Athens.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, this paper remains widely cited and has not been critically questioned by Acton and other scholars. For example, Barbara Tsakirgis also suggested on the basis of Thompson’s conclusions that “men could spin and weave as well as women” and that work on textile manufacture needs to be “freed from the assumption that only women spun and wove”.<sup>5</sup> She too accepted the idea that luxury textiles were largely made in specialist workshops, while more ordinary textiles were made by women at home.<sup>6</sup>

There are numerous problems with both the methodologies and with the data that have traditionally been used to address the question of who made textiles in classical Greece. Acton, for example, clearly reveals his limited understanding of textile technologies and production in ancient Athens and Greece more broadly, dependent as he is on texts to the neglect of material culture and outdated scholarship. His technical calculations are poorly underpinned by solid data and are uninformed by the key work of the Center for Textile Research.<sup>7</sup> He depicts technology in ancient Athens as “primitive and static” and textile manufacture as needing minimal skills.<sup>8</sup> Both of these premises are demonstrably incorrect. However, addressing these issues in full ranges beyond the scope of this paper. Here I will focus on the evidence that Acton and others furnish for the alleged importance of male weavers in late archaic and classical Greek contexts.

### **Weaving philosophical arguments**

A close look at the texts on which arguments for the for the regular presence of male weavers in Athens and ancient Greece more generally are based suggests that most of the apparent references to them are in philosophical works largely written by Plato and Aristotle. In these texts, references to craft, including textile manufacture, function as part of higher-level philosophical arguments that have little to do with actual weaving or any other craft. The passages on which Thompson and subsequent scholars have focused all appear in contexts where they are part of *exempla* conveying some more abstract philosophical idea, largely in relation to

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<sup>3</sup> Thompson (1982); Acton (2014) 69, 154-55.

<sup>4</sup> Thompson (1982) 217.

<sup>5</sup> Tsakirgis (2016) 285.

<sup>6</sup> Tsakirgis (2016) 183-85; see also Spantidakis (2016) 11-13 who has a more nuanced interpretation but still accepts the textual evidence somewhat uncritically.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Mårtinson *et al.* 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Acton (2014) 147, 152-53, 155; a view also expressed by Harris (2014) 187.

statecraft and the proper governance and rule of a city. Gender (beyond grammatical gender) in these passages is either irrelevant, was deliberately avoided, or is masculinised where the productive roles of women in real Greek communities were deliberately being downplayed. What this means is that these passages provide no evidence whatsoever for the realities of textile production (or any other craft) in classical Athens or any other Greek community, and certainly supply no useful information about the gender balance of the workforce or who did the actual work of weaving and textile making, or how and where they did it.

In Plato's *Gorgias*, Socrates explores with his companions and the rhetor Gorgias the craft (*technē*) of rhetoric.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the dialogue Socrates in his questioning uses illustrations and scenarios from other crafts, regularly flagged as an '*eikōn*' (image, illustration) to present the philosophical points he is making about the value and utility of rhetoric compared to other crafts.

Socrates asks what orators and statesmen have done for the city and its people through the illustration of the craftsmen and retailers who supply the body with crude physical wants and needs (in contrast with those skilled in the crafts of medicine and athletic training which can moderate and advise on appropriate and healthy consumption (the contrast underlying the *eikōn* is, of course between the value of rhetoric and philosophy).<sup>10</sup>

[517C] I at all events believe you have more than once admitted and decided [517D] that this management of either body or soul is a twofold affair, and that on one side it is a menial service, whereby it is possible to provide meat for our bodies when they are hungry, drink when thirsty, and when they are cold, clothing, bedding, shoes, or anything else that bodies are apt to desire: I purposely give you the same illustrations, in order that you may the more easily comprehend. For as to being able to supply these things, either as a tradesman or a merchant or a manufacturer of any such actual things—miller or cook [517E] or weaver or shoemaker or tanner—it is no wonder that a man in such capacity should appear to himself and his neighbours to be a minister of the body; to everyone, in fact, who is not aware that there is besides all these an art of gymnastics and medicine which really is, of course, ministrations to the body, and which actually has a proper claim to rule over all those arts and to make use of their works, because it knows what is wholesome or harmful in meat and drink [518A] to bodily excellence, whereas all those others know it not; and hence it is that, while those other arts are slavish and menial and illiberal in dealing with the body, gymnastics and medicine can fairly claim to be their mistresses. Now, that the very same is the case as regards the soul you appear to me at one time to understand to be my meaning, and you admit it as though you knew what I meant; but a little later you come and tell me that men have shown themselves upright and honourable citizens in our city, and when I ask you who, you seem to me to be putting forward men of exactly the same sort in public affairs; as if, on my asking you who in gymnastics have ever been or now are good trainers of the body, you were to tell

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<sup>9</sup> Pl. *Grg.* 447C.

<sup>10</sup> Pl *Grg.* 517C-518C.

me, in all seriousness, “Thearion, the baker, Mithaecus, the author of the book on Sicilian cookery, Sarambus, the vintner—these have shown themselves wonderful ministers of the body; the first providing admirable loaves, the second tasty dishes, and the third wine”.<sup>11</sup>

[517C] ἐγὼ γοῦν σε πολλάκις οἶμαι ὠμολογηκέναι καὶ ἐγνωκέναι, [517D] ὡς ἄρα διττὴ αὕτη τις ἢ Δπραγματεία ἔστιν καὶ περὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν, καὶ ἡ μὲν ἑτέρα διακονικὴ ἔστιν, ἣ δυνατὸν εἶναι ἐκπορίζειν, ἐὰν μὲν πεινῆ τὰ σώματα ἡμῶν, σιτία, ἐὰν δὲ διψῆ, ποτά, ἐὰν δὲ ῥιγῶ, ἱμάτια, στρώματα, ὑποδήματα, ἄλλ’ ὧν ἔρχεται σώματα εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν; καὶ ἐξεπίτηδές σοι διὰ τῶν αὐτῶν εἰκόνων λέγω, ἵνα ῥᾶον καταμάθῃς. τούτων γὰρ ποριστικὸν εἶναι ἢ κάπηλον ὄντα ἢ ἔμπορον ἢ δημιουργόν του αὐτῶν [517E] τούτων, σιτοποιὸν ἢ ὀσοποιὸν ἢ ὑφάντην ἢ σκυτοτόμον ἢ σκυτοδεψόν, οὐδὲν θαυμαστόν ἐστιν ὄντα τοιοῦτον δόξα καὶ αὐτῶ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις θεραπευτὴν εἶναι σώματος, παντὶ τῶ μὴ εἰδῶτι ὅτι ἔστιν τις παρὰ ταύτας ἀπάσας τέχνη γυμναστικὴ τε καὶ ἰατρικὴ, ἣ δὴ τῶ ὄντι γε ἔστιν σώματος θεραπεία, ἣν περ καὶ προσήκει τούτων ἄρχειν πασῶν τῶν τεχνῶν καὶ χρῆσθαι τοῖς τούτων ἔργοις διὰ τὸ εἰδέναι ὅτι χρηστὸν καὶ πονηρὸν τῶν σιτίων ἢ ποτῶν ἔστιν εἰς ἀρετὴν [518A] σώματος, τὰς δ’ ἄλλας πάσας ταύτας ἀγνοεῖν: διὸ δὴ καὶ ταύτας μὲν δουλοπρεπεῖς τε καὶ διακονικὰς καὶ ἀνελευθέρους εἶναι περὶ σώματος πραγματεῖαν, τὰς ἄλλας τέχνας, τὴν δὲ γυμναστικὴν καὶ ἰατρικὴν κατὰ τὸ δίκαιον δεσποίνας εἶναι τούτων. ταῦτά οὖν ταῦτα ὅτι ἔστιν καὶ περὶ ψυχὴν, τότε μὲν μοι δοκεῖς μανθάνειν ὅτι λέγω, καὶ ὠμολογεῖς ὡς εἰδῶς ὅτι ἐγὼ λέγω: ἦ κεις δὲ ὀλίγον ὕστερον λέγων ὅτι ἄνθρωποι καλοὶ κάγαθοὶ γεγόνασι πολῖται ἐν τῇ πόλει, καὶ [518B] ἐπειδὴν ἐγὼ ἐρωτῶ οἵτινες, δοκεῖς μοι ὁμοιοτάτους προτείνεσθαι ἀνθρώπους περὶ τὰ πολιτικά, ὥσπερ ἂν εἰ περὶ τὰ γυμναστικὰ ἐμοῦ ἐρωτῶντος, οἵτινες ἀγαθοὶ γεγόνασιν ἢ εἰσὶ σωματῶν θεραπευταί, ἔλεγές μοι πάνυ σπουδάζων, Θεαρίων ὁ ἀρτοκόπος καὶ Μίθαικος ὁ τὴν ὀσοποιῖαν συγγεγραφῶς τὴν Σικελικὴν καὶ Σάραμβος ὁ κάπηλος, ὅτι οὗτοι θαυμάσιοι γεγόνασι σωματῶν θεραπευταί, [518C] ὁ μὲν ἄρτους θαυμαστοὺς παρασκευάζων, ὁ δὲ ὄψον, ὁ δὲ οἶνον.

In this passage, the miller, the delicatessen provisioner, the weaver, the shoemaker and the tanner, in fact, have no grammatical gender indicators in the form of definite articles. One of these words, *sitopoiios*, certainly occurs most often as a feminine in classical period texts, where gender is indicated.<sup>12</sup> The point is that this passage is not about *real* millers, weavers or shoemakers, it is about the utility of *people who*, in the abstract, mill grain, produce delicatessen foods, weave or make shoes (whose skills and products Plato clearly did not value very highly, as least in the abstract). For the philosophical point he is trying to make, about the superiority of some crafts (especially statecraft) and the inferiority and subservience of others (notably rhetoric), the gender of the individuals in the exempla who might do these jobs in real life is

<sup>11</sup> Tr. W.R.M. Lamb, adapted.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Htd. 3.150; 7.187; Th. 2.78; 6.22; Thphr. *Char.* 4.7.

irrelevant and Plato is plainly not interested in this. We cannot therefore assume that the gender of those who actually undertook any of these occupations in ancient Athens (or elsewhere in classical Greece) was regularly (or even occasionally) either male or female on the basis of this passage, or similar illustrative passages, *eikones*, in philosophical arguments.

Again, in the *Phaedo*, Plato uses the *eikōn* of a weaver and the cloak they wove as an illustration of the relationship between the body and the soul in the context of mortality.<sup>13</sup>

[87B] I think I may, like Simmias, best express myself in a figure. It seems to me that it is much as if one should say about an old weaver who had died, that the man had not perished but was safe and sound somewhere, and should offer as a proof of this the fact that the cloak which the man had woven and used to wear was still whole and had not perished. Then if anyone did not believe him, he would ask [87C] which lasts longer, a man or a cloak that is in use and wear, and when the answer was given that a man lasts much longer, he would think it had been proved beyond a doubt that the man was safe, because that which was less lasting had not perished. But I do not think he is right, Simmias, and I ask you especially to notice what I say. Anyone can understand that a man who says this is talking nonsense. For the weaver in question wove and wore out many such cloaks and [87D] lasted longer than they, though they were many, but perished, I suppose, before the last one. Yet a man is not feebler or weaker than a cloak on that account at all. And I think the same figure would apply to the soul and the body and it would be quite appropriate to say in like manner about them, that the soul lasts a long time, but the body lasts a shorter time and is weaker. And, one might go on to say that each soul wears out many bodies, especially if the man lives many years. For if the body is constantly changing and being destroyed while the man still lives, [87E] and the soul is always weaving anew that which wears out, then when the soul perishes it must necessarily have on its last garment...<sup>14</sup>

πρὸς δὴ τοῦτο τόδε ἐπίσκεψαι, εἴ τι λέγω: εἰκόνας γάρ τινος, ὡς ἔοικεν, κἀγὼ ὥσπερ Σιμμίας δέομαι. ἐμοὶ γὰρ δοκεῖ ὁμοίως λέγεσθαι ταῦτα ὥσπερ ἂν τις περὶ ἀνθρώπου ὑφάντου πρεσβύτου ἀποθανόντος λέγοι τοῦτον τὸν λόγον, ὅτι οὐκ ἀπόλωλεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀλλ' ἔστι που σῶς, τεκμήριον δὲ παρέχοιτο θοιμάτιον ὃ ἡμπείχετο αὐτὸς ὑφηνάμενος ὅτι ἔστι σῶν καὶ οὐκ ἀπόλωλεν, καὶ εἴ τις [87ξ] ἀπιστοίη αὐτῷ, ἀνερωτῶη πότερον πολυχρονιώτερον ἐστὶ τὸ γένος ἀνθρώπου ἢ ἱματίου ἐν χρεῖα τε ὄντος καὶ φορουμένου, ἀποκριναμένου δὴ τινος ὅτι πολὺ τὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, οἷοιτο ἀποδεδεῖχθαι ὅτι παντὸς ἄρα μᾶλλον ὃ γε ἄνθρωπος σῶς ἐστίν, ἐπειδὴ τό γε ὀλιγοχρονιώτερον οὐκ ἀπόλωλεν. τὸ δ' οἶμαι, ὃ Σιμμία, οὐχ οὕτως ἔχει: σκόπει γὰρ καὶ σὺ ἃ λέγω. πᾶς γὰρ ἂν ὑπολάβοι ὅτι εὐηθεὶς λέγει ὁ τοῦτο λέγων: ὁ γὰρ ὑφάντης οὗτος πολλὰ κατατρίψας τοιαῦτα ἱμάτια καὶ

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<sup>13</sup> Pl. *Phd.* 87B-E

<sup>14</sup> Tr. C. Emlyn-Jones.

ύφηνάμενος ἐκείνων μὲν ὕστερος ἀπόλωλεν πολλῶν [87δ] ὄντων, τοῦ δὲ τελευταίου οἶμαι πρότερος, καὶ οὐδὲν τι μᾶλλον τούτου ἔνεκα ἀνθρωπός ἐστιν ἱματίου φαυλότερον οὐδ' ἀσθενέστερον. τὴν αὐτὴν δὲ ταύτην οἶμαι εἰκόνα δέξαιτ' ἂν ψυχὴ πρὸς σῶμα, καὶ τις λέγων αὐτὰ ταῦτα περὶ αὐτῶν μέτρι' ἂν μοι φαίνοιτο λέγειν, ὡς ἡ μὲν ψυχὴ πολυχρόνιον ἐστὶ, τὸ δὲ σῶμα ἀσθενέστερον καὶ ὀλιγοχροσιώτερον: ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἂν φαίη ἐκάστην τῶν ψυχῶν πολλὰ σώματα κατατρίβειν, ἄλλως τε κἂν πολλὰ ἔτη βιω—εἰ γὰρ ῥέοι τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἀπολλύοιτο ἔτι ζῶντος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, [87ε] ἀλλ' ἡ ψυχὴ ἀεὶ τὸ κατατριβόμενον ἀνυφαίνει—ἀναγκαῖον μεντᾶν εἶη, ὅποτε ἀπολλύοιτο ἡ ψυχὴ, τὸ τελευταῖον ὕφασμα τυχεῖν αὐτὴν ἔχουσαν καὶ τούτου μόνου προτέραν ἀπόλλυσθαι

As is clear from the explanation of the *eikōn* in 87E, this metaphor was chosen as particularly apt for illustrating the relationship between the duration of the soul and the body that Plato wanted to explain. However, the weaver is always described as an *anthrōpos*. The gender of the weaver, perhaps better translated as ‘person who weaves’, is completely irrelevant to the illustration; it is the relationship of clothing and personhood as a metaphor for body and soul that is key for the philosophical point. Again, this cannot be interpreted as evidence for the regular presence of real male weavers in Athens.

In the *Republic*<sup>15</sup>, weavers and other crafts people are mentioned when discussion turns to the kinds of skills that are essential for supplying basic needs for the ideal city.

[369D] Now the first and chief of our needs is the provision of food for existence and life.

Assuredly.

The second is housing and the third is raiment and that sort of thing.

That is so.

“Tell me, then”, said I, “how our city will suffice for the provision of all these things. Will there not be a farmer for one, and a builder, and then again a weaver? And shall we add thereto a cobbler and some other purveyor for the needs of body?”

Certainly.

The indispensable minimum of a city, then, would consist of four or five men.

[369E] Apparently.<sup>16</sup>

[369D] ἀλλὰ μὴν πρώτη γε καὶ μεγίστη τῶν χρειῶν ἡ τῆς τροφῆς παρασκευὴ τοῦ εἶναι τε καὶ ζῆν ἔνεκα.

παντάπασί γε.

δευτέρα δὲ οἰκίσεως, τρίτη δὲ ἐσθῆτος καὶ τῶν τοιούτων.

<sup>15</sup> Pl. *Resp.* 369D-370E.

<sup>16</sup> All passages from Pl. *Resp.* tr. C. Emllyn-Jones.

ἔστι ταῦτα.

φέρει δὴ, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, πῶς ἡ πόλις ἀρκέσει ἐπὶ τοσαύτην παρασκευήν; ἄλλο τι γεωργὸς μὲν εἷς, ὁ δὲ οἰκοδόμος, ἄλλος δὲ τις ὑφάντης; ἢ καὶ σκυτοτόμον αὐτόσε προσθήσομεν ἢ τιν' ἄλλον τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα θεραπευτήν;

πάνυ γε.

εἶη δ' ἂν ἢ γε ἀναγκαιοτάτη πόλις ἐκ τεττάρων ἢ πέντε ἀνδρῶν.

[369E] φαίνεται.

[370C] The result, then, is that more things are produced, and better and more easily when one man performs one task according to his nature, at the right moment, and at leisure from other occupations.

By all means.

Then, Adeimantus, we need more than four citizens for the provision of the things we have mentioned. For the farmer, it appears, will not make his own plough if it is to be a good one, [370D] nor his hoe, nor his other agricultural implements, nor will the builder, who also needs many; and similarly the weaver and leather worker.

True.

[370C] ἐκ δὴ τούτων πλείω τε ἕκαστα γίγνεται καὶ κάλλιον καὶ ῥᾶον, ὅταν εἷς ἐν κατὰ φύσιν καὶ ἐν καιρῷ, σχολὴν τῶν ἄλλων ἄγων, πράττη.

παντάπασι μὲν οὖν.

πλείονων δὴ, ὦ Ἀδείμαντε, δεῖ πολιτῶν ἢ τεττάρων ἐπὶ τὰς παρασκευὰς ὧν ἐλέγομεν. ὁ γὰρ γεωργός, ὡς ἔοικεν, οὐκ αὐτὸς ποιήσεται ἑαυτῷ τὸ ἄροτρον, εἰ μέλλει καλὸν εἶναι, [370D] οὐδὲ σμινύην, οὐδὲ τᾶλλα ὄργανα ὅσα περὶ γεωργίαν. οὐδ' αὖ ὁ οἰκοδόμος; πολλῶν δὲ καὶ τούτῳ δεῖ. ὡσαύτως δ' ὁ ὑφάντης τε καὶ ὁ σκυτοτόμος; ἢ οὐ;

ἀληθῆ.

In this passage, the most basic needs are identified as food, shelter and clothing, for which a farmer, builder, weaver, leather worker and ‘someone to tend the body’ are identified, initially by Socrates specifically as male (*andres*): “the bare necessity for a city would be four or five men” (369D). However, this statement subsequently turns out to be an absurdity, and the reason they are called ‘men’ rapidly becomes evident when Socrates points out in 370C that “we need more than four citizens (*politai*) for the provision of the things we have mentioned”. In Plato’s view, citizens, *politai*, were by definition men in the ideal city he envisaged.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Pl. *Resp.* 449A.

Plato's most extended deployment of weaving as an illustration for understanding the 'proper' relationships of governance is found in the *Statesman* (*Politikos*).<sup>18</sup> Here, the creation of a woollen garment (*himation*) is used as an illustration to explain the operation of statecraft, to show how the whole entity (the overall construction) relates to the component elements included within it (and subservient to it) and which can be separated off from the overall construction.

[279B] Stranger: What example could we apply which is very small, but has the same kind of activity as statesmanship and would enable us satisfactorily to discover that which we seek? What do you say, Socrates, if we have nothing else at hand, to taking at random the art of weaving, and, if you please, not the whole of that? For I fancy the art of weaving wool will be enough; if we choose that part only it will probably furnish us with the illustration we desire.<sup>19</sup>

[279B] ΞΕ. Τί δῆτα παράδειγμά τις ἄν, ἔχον τὴν αὐτὴν πολιτικῆ<sup>1</sup> πραγματείαν, σμικρότατον παραθέμενος Βίκανῶς ἂν εὖροι τὸ ζητούμενον; βούλει πρὸς Διός, ὃ Σώκρατες, εἰ μή τι πρόχειρον ἕτερον ἔχομεν, ἀλλ' οὖν τὴν γε ὑφαντικὴν προελώμεθα; καὶ ταύτην, εἰ δοκεῖ, μὴ πᾶσαν; ἀποχρήσει γὰρ ἴσως ἢ περὶ τὰ ἐκ τῶν ἐρίων ὑφάσματα· τάχα γὰρ ἂν ἡμῖν καὶ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος αὐτῆς μαρτυρήσειε προαιρεθὲν ὁ βουλόμεθα.

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[279E] Now to these protective coverings made of materials fastened without extraneous matter we give the name of clothes; [280A] and just as we called the art statecraft which was concerned with the state, so we shall call the art concerned with clothes, from the nature of its activity, clothes-making, shall we not? And may we say further that weaving, in so far as the greatest part of it is, as we saw, concerned with the making of clothes, differs in name only from this art of clothes-making, just as in the other case the royal art differed from statecraft?

τουτοισὶ δὴ τοῖς ἐκ τῶν ἑαυτοῖς συνδουμένων<sup>1</sup> ἐργασθεῖσιν ἀμυντηρίοις καὶ σκεπάσμασι τὸ μὲν ὄνομα ἱμάτια ἐκαλέσαμεν· τὴν δὲ τῶν ἱματίων μάλιστα ἐπιμελουμένην τέχνην, [280A] ὥσπερ τότε τὴν τῆς πόλεως πολιτικὴν εἶπομεν, οὕτω καὶ νῦν ταύτην προσείπωμεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ πράγματος ἱματιουργικὴν; φῶμεν δὲ καὶ ὑφαντικὴν, ὅσον ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν ἱματίων ἐργασίᾳ μέγιστον ἦν μόριον, μηδὲν διαφέρειν πλὴν ὀνόματι ταύτης τῆς ἱματιουργικῆς, καθάπερ κάκεῖ τότε τὴν βασιλικὴν τῆς πολιτικῆς;

During the course of this extended illustration, the discussion unpicks the various skills and tasks which are together essential for making a piece of clothing (the whole composition, *synkritikē*), but none of which can do so on its own (the division, *diaskritikē*). However, some ambiguity sets in with the term *talasiourgia*, as it appears to be a term encompassing both the

<sup>18</sup> Pl. *Plt.* 279B-283B, see also 308D.

<sup>19</sup> Tr. H.N. Fowler, adapted.



assembly or composition of a piece of clothing as well as being a skill within it. However, the Stranger's argument attempts to demonstrate that this is not in fact the case. This digression is interesting as it may reflect that the common usage of the term to cover generic textile-work (even though strictly speaking it refers to spinning), threatens to derail the analogy with statecraft crucial for the philosophical argument.

[282B] Stranger: And wool-working comprises two divisions, and each of these is a part of two arts at once.

Young Socrates: How is that?

STR: Combing, and one half of the use of the weaver's rod,<sup>1</sup> and the other crafts which separate things that are joined—all this collectively is a part of the art of wool-working; and in all things we found two great arts, that of composition and that of division.

YS: Yes.

[282C] STR: Now combing and all the other processes just mentioned are parts of the art of division; for the art of division in wool and threads, exercised in one way with the rod and in another with the hands, has all the names just mentioned.

YS: Yes, certainly.

STR: Then let us again take up something which is at once a part of the arts of composition and of wool-working. Let us put aside all that belongs to division, making two parts of wool-working, by applying the principles of division and of composition.

YS: Let us make that distinction.

STR: The part which belongs at once to composition and to wool-working, [282D] Socrates, you must allow us to divide again, if we are to get a satisfactory concept of the aforesaid art of weaving.

[282B] ΞΕ. Τῆς δὴ ταλασιουργικῆς δύο τμήματά ἐστων, καὶ τούτοις ἑκάτερον ἅμα δυοῖν πεφύκατον τέχναι μέρη.

ΝΕ. ΣΩ. Πῶς;

ΞΕ. Τὸ μὲν ξαντικὸν καὶ τὸ τῆς κερκιστικῆς ἥμισυ καὶ ὅσα τὰ ζυγκείμενα ἀπ' ἀλλήλων ἀφίστησι, πᾶν τοῦτο ὡς ἐν φράζειν τῆς τε ταλασιουργίας αὐτῆς ἐστὶ πού, καὶ μεγάλα τινὲ κατὰ πάντα ἡμῖν ἦσθην τέχνα, ἢ συγκριτικὴ τε καὶ διακριτικὴ.

ΝΕ. ΣΩ. Ναί.

[282C] ΞΕ. Τῆς τοίνυν διακριτικῆς ἢ τε ξαντικῆ καὶ τὰ νῦν δὴ ῥηθέντα ἅπαντά ἐστιν· ἡ γὰρ ἐν ἐρίοις τε καὶ στήμοσι διακριτικῆ, κερκίδι μὲν ἄλλον τρόπον γιγνομένη, χερσὶ δὲ ἕτερον, ἔσχεν ὅσα ἀρτίως ὀνόματα ἐρρήθη.

ΝΕ. ΣΩ. Πάνυ μὲν οὔν.

ΞΕ. Αὐθις δὴ πάλιν συγκριτικῆς μόνιον ἅμα καὶ ταλασιουργίας ἐν αὐτῇ γιγνόμενον λάβωμεν· ὅσα δὲ τῆς διακριτικῆς ἦν, αὐτόθι μεθιδόμεν<sup>2</sup> ζύμπαντα, δίχα τέμοντες τὴν ταλασιουργίαν διακριτικῶ τε καὶ συγκριτικῶ τμήματα.

ΝΕ. ΣΩ. Δηρήσθω.

ΞΕ. Τὸ συγκριτικὸν τοίνυν αὖ σοι καὶ ταλασιουργικόν [282D] ἅμα μόνιον, ὃ Σώκρατες, διαιρετέον, εἴπερ ἰκανῶς μέλλομεν τὴν προρρηθεῖσαν ὑφαντικὴν αἰρήσειν.

There is every reason to think that these discussions do not reflect the actual practice of crafts and trades in classical Athens or any other Greek city. In the first place, the discussion is hypothetical, about the kinds of citizens that would be needed in an ideal city, not about the kinds of citizens or indeed other people, that lived and worked in Greek cities in reality. In addition, the specialisation and in the *Republic*, insistence on the benefits of (full-time) specialisation of workers clearly does not reflect reality in Greek communities where many trades such as sailing, construction and ceramic production were often practised seasonally, sometimes by necessity, in conjunction with other activities.<sup>20</sup> Hence the gender, and indeed political status, of these workers is irrelevant for this discussion, and should not be interpreted as reflecting the actual operation of textile manufacture or demonstrating the regular presence of male weavers in the Athens of Plato's time.

In fact, Plato only comes to the place of women and children in his ideal city in book 5 of the *Republic*, where in the dramatic setting of the dialogue Glaukon and Adeimantus chide Socrates for neglecting the place of women and children in the ideally constituted city, supported by the rest of the company.<sup>21</sup> Following this, Plato, through the character of Socrates, in the first part of this book presents a discussion of the roles of women in the ideal city premised on their inferior and weaker nature.<sup>22</sup>

In Plato's vision of the ideal society, there appear to be limited productive roles for women, only reproductive functions.<sup>23</sup> Because of their inferior nature they are unable to do the same jobs as men to the same standard, even though the best of the women should be trained in

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<sup>20</sup> Foxhall (2020) and see below.

<sup>21</sup> Pl. *Resp.* 449C-450.

<sup>22</sup> Pl. *Resp.* 451C-457C.

<sup>23</sup> Pl. *Resp.* 453B-C.

the same was as men according to their natural talent and inclinations.<sup>24</sup> Clearly this does not reflect the reality of any classical Greek society.

[453B] Then let's say this on their behalf: "Socrates and Glaucon, there's no need for others to argue with you, since you yourselves agreed at the founding of the state which you were setting up, that every citizen must each engage in one job to which he is innately suited."

We did, I think; yes, we did.

So are there not aspects where a woman is by nature completely different from a man?

How can she not be different?

So is it appropriate to assign different jobs to each of them according to their innate ability?

Certainly.

[453C] So how can you not now be wrong and contradict yourselves by asserting that men and women must do the same jobs despite being naturally very different from each other? Have you any defence against this, you splendid fellow?

"As this is out of the blue, it's not very easy," he said.

But I shall ask you, and I am indeed asking you to interpret our side of the debate as well, whatever it is.

This is precisely what I was afraid of, Glaucon, when I foresaw this and many other problems a while ago, and it's why I was reluctant to get onto the law about the possession of women and the upbringing of children.

Λέγωμεν δὴ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ὅτι ᾿Ω Σώκρατες τε καὶ Γλαύκων, οὐδὲν δεῖ ὑμῖν ἄλλους ἀμφισβητεῖν· αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς κατοικίσεως, ἦν ᾠκίζετε πόλιν, ὠμολογεῖτε δεῖν κατὰ φύσιν ἕκαστον ἓνα ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ πράττειν.'

᾿Ωμολογήσαμεν οἶμαι· πῶς γὰρ οὐ;

᾿Εστὶν οὖν ὅπως οὐ πάμπολυ διαφέρει γυνὴ ἀνδρὸς τὴν φύσιν;'

Πῶς δ' οὐ διαφέρει;

᾿Οὐκοῦν ἄλλο καὶ ἔργον ἑκατέρῳ προσήκει προστάττειν τὸ κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν;'

Τί μήν;

᾿Πῶς οὖν οὐχ ἁμαρτάνετε νῦν καὶ τάναντία ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς λέγετε φάσκοντες αὖ τοὺς ἀνδρας καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας δεῖν τὰ αὐτὰ πράττειν, πλεῖστον κεχωρισμένην φύσιν ἔχοντας; ἔξεις τι, ᾧ θαυμάσιε, πρὸς ταῦτ' ἀπολογεῖσθαι; |

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<sup>24</sup> Pl. *Resp.* 457B.

Ὡς μὲν ἐξαίφνης, ἔφη, οὐ πάνυ ῥάδιον· ἀλλὰ σοῦ δεήσομαί τε καὶ δέομαι καὶ τὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν λόγον, ὅστις ποτ' ἐστίν, ἐρμηνεῦσαι.

Ταῦτ' ἐστίν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὃ Γλαύκων, καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ τοιαῦτα, ἃ ἐγὼ πάλαι προορῶν ἐφοβούμην τε καὶ δ' ὄκνουν ἄπτεσθαι τοῦ νόμου τοῦ περὶ τὴν τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ παίδων κτῆσιν καὶ τροφήν.

Moreover, there are no aspects of life in which women generally outclass men (455C-E):

[455C] Do you then know of anything practiced by human beings in which the male sex is not superior to the female in all these aspects? Or do we have to string it out by mentioning weaving and looking after the cakes and casseroles where the female sex has a reputation, [455D] though if outclassed, they are the most absurd of all?

“What you say is true,” he said; “the one sex is truly surpassed in everything, so to speak, by the other. However, there are a lot of women who are superior to men in a lot of ways, but on the whole what you say holds true.”

In that case there is no job among those who serve the state which is given to a woman because she is a woman, nor any to a man because he is a man, but the natural aptitudes are distributed similarly between the two sexes, and a woman has as much a share in all the jobs depending [455E] on her nature as a man does, but for all of them the female is weaker than the male.

[45C] Οἴσθ' ἂν τι οὖν ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων μελετώμενον, ἐν ᾧ οὐ πάντα ταῦτα τὸ τῶν ἀνδρῶν γένος διαφερόντως ἔχει ἢ τὸ τῶν γυναικῶν; ἢ μακρολογῶμεν τὴν τε ὑφαντικὴν λέγοντες καὶ τὴν τῶν ποπάνων τε καὶ ἐψημάτων θεραπείαν, [455D] ἐν οἷς δὴ τι δοκεῖ τὸ γυναικεῖον γένος εἶναι, οὗ καὶ καταγελαστότατόν ἐστι πάντων ἡττώμενον;

Ἀληθῆ, ἔφη, λέγεις, ὅτι πολὺ κρατεῖται ἐν ἅπασιν ὡς ἔπος εἶπεῖν τὸ γένος τοῦ γένους. γυναικες μέντοι πολλὰ πολλῶν ἀνδρῶν | βελτίους εἰς πολλὰ· τὸ δὲ ὅλον ἔχει ὡς σὺ λέγεις.

Οὐδὲν ἄρα ἐστίν, ὦ φίλε, ἐπιτήδευμα τῶν πόλιν διοικούντων γυναικὸς διότι γυνή, οὐδ' ἀνδρὸς διότι ἀνήρ, ἀλλ' ὁμοίως διεσπαρμέναι αἱ φύσεις ἐν ἀμφοῖν τοῖν ζώοις, καὶ πάντων μὲν μετέχει γυνή ἐπιτηδεύματων [455E] κατὰ φύσιν, πάντων δὲ ἀνήρ, ἐπὶ πᾶσι δὲ ἀσθενέστερον γυνή ἀνδρός.

Here, where Plato does briefly discuss the actual skills and capacities of men and women, he observes women have a reputation for being better at weaving and cooking, but can still be outclassed by men. This is the closest that Plato comes to addressing gendered work in the ‘real world’ of Greek societies, but the extent to which women might undertake productive roles in the society in which Plato actually lived is sidestepped and very explicitly not discussed at all.

Aristotle similarly uses the weaver, the leather worker and other craftsmen as well for illustrations of his philosophical and political ideas, notably when he is engaging directly with Plato's writings. In this literary and peripatetic philosophical context this is hardly surprising. Exactly as in Plato's work, the gender of the craftsperson is largely irrelevant to the point he is trying to make. So, for example, in the *Politics*,<sup>25</sup> the discussion is again concerned with supplying the *ideal* city, as in the previously discussed passages of Plato's *Republic* to which this passage indirectly refers.

[1325b] And as we have prepared the way by this prefatory discussion of the subject, and have previously studied all the other forms of constitution, the starting-point for the remainder of our subject is first to specify the nature of the conditions that are necessary in the case of the state that is to be constituted in the ideally best manner. For the best constitution cannot be realized without suitable equipment. We must therefore posit as granted in advance a number of as it were ideal conditions, although none of these must be actually impossible. I mean for instance in reference to number of citizens and territory. All other craftsmen, for example a weaver or a shipwright, [1326a] [1] have to be supplied with their material in a condition suitable for their trade, for the better this material has been prepared, the finer is bound to be the product of their craft; so also the statesman and the lawgiver ought to be furnished with their proper material in a suitable condition.<sup>26</sup>

[1325b] ἐπεὶ δὲ πεφροίμιασται τὰ νῦν εἰρημένα περὶ αὐτῶν, καὶ περὶ τὰς ἄλλας πολιτείας ἡμῖν τεθεώρηται πρότερον, [35] ἀρχὴ τῶν λοιπῶν εἰπεῖν πρῶτον ποίας τινὰς δεῖ τὰς ὑποθέσεις εἶναι περὶ τῆς μελλούσης κατ' εὐχὴν συνεστάναι πόλεως. οὐ γὰρ οἷόν τε πολιτείαν γενέσθαι τὴν ἀρίστην ἄνευ συμμέτρου χορηγίας. διὸ δεῖ πολλὰ προὔποτεθεῖσθαι καθάπερ εὐχομένους, εἶναι μέντοι μηθὲν τούτων ἀδύνατον: λέγω δὲ [40] οἷον περὶ τε πλήθους πολιτῶν καὶ χώρας. ὥσπερ γὰρ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις δημιουργοῖς, οἷον ὑφάντη καὶ ναυπηγῶ, [1326a] δεῖ τὴν ὕλην ὑπάρχειν ἐπιτηδεῖαν οὔσαν πρὸς τὴν ἐργασίαν (ὄσῳ γὰρ ἂν αὕτη τυγχάνη παρεσκευασμένη βέλτιον, ἀνάγκη καὶ τὸ γινόμενον ὑπὸ τῆς τέχνης εἶναι κάλλιον, οὕτω καὶ τῷ πολιτικῷ καὶ τῷ νομοθέτῃ δεῖ τὴν οἰκείαν ὕλην ὑπάρχειν [5] ἐπιτηδείως ἔχουσαν.

Aristotle's point here is fundamentally that the quality of the material is crucial for the quality of the product both for crafts people and statemen, where craft serves as an *eikōn* for politics. The gender of the crafts people is irrelevant, and in the context of the discussion of an ideal city, it most certainly does not reflect Athenian reality. The same craft image is used in the *Nicomachean Ethics*<sup>27</sup> in relation to dissimilar friendships and knowledge of the ideal good

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<sup>25</sup> Arist. *Pol.* 1325b-1326a.

<sup>26</sup> Tr. H. Rackham

<sup>27</sup> Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1163b.

(1097a), where again the gender of the crafts people is irrelevant to the point he is making and serves only as an illustration.

Careful examination of the passages which apparently refer to male weavers in classical Greek philosophical texts reveal that craft specialization in the abstract is regularly used as an illustration to explain other principles, such as the superior and managerial function of statecraft over other crafts, the minimum necessary skills to support the ideal city, how the naming of things relates to their functions and affordances, or to different kinds of relationships. None of these passages refers to actual, real weavers, and the gender of these hypothetical crafts people is largely irrelevant and certainly cannot be interpreted to reflect reality in contemporary Athens. Indeed, for Plato, the actual productive and economic contribution of women was not something which seems to have particularly valued, and his vision for the roles women might play in his ideal city were quite different from the reality of classical Greek societies. Clearly, these texts cannot possibly provide reliable evidence for the division of labour along the lines of gender as practiced in real Greek cities, societies and economies.

### **What is a weaver?**

Significantly, the word used for ‘weaver’ used in these philosophical contexts, ὑφάντης, and its variants, in these passages, never appears to be used in classical literary and epigraphical texts in reference to actual textile workers. The verb ὑφαίνω is used for the act of weaving,<sup>28</sup> but the noun is not used. Weaving, of course, is only one stage in the textile making process (cf.). In Greek there are words for other stages of the process such as cleaning combing and spinning, as in the *Lysistrata*<sup>29</sup> and the discussion in Plato’s *Statesman*, above. These various stages of textile production carried out by women are also depicted in Attic vase painting.<sup>30</sup> Bundrick argues persuasively that these are largely genre scenes (only a few are certainly mythological), aimed primarily (on the basis of the shapes) at a primarily female audience.<sup>31</sup> *Hetairai* or prostitutes are only rarely identifiable with certainty, mostly these images portray just generic, probably mostly citizen-status women, carrying out the tasks of textile working intimately associated with culturally defined femininity.<sup>32</sup>

Harris’ study of documented occupational names supplemented by Lewis’ list of commodities (in some cases complemented by occupational names) in Athens have provided a useful body of data for considering the range of occupational terms associated with textile manufacture.<sup>33</sup> However, a note of caution is essential; these terms should not be interpreted at face value. Harris’s catalogue includes 173 occupations which appear in masculine forms as

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<sup>28</sup> Ar. *Lys.* 586, in this case referring to women.

<sup>29</sup> Ar. *Lys.* 574-85.

<sup>30</sup> Bundrick (2008) 287.

<sup>31</sup> Bundrick (2008) 295-302.

<sup>32</sup> Bundrick (2008) 286-88.

<sup>33</sup> Harris (2002); Lewis (2016) 393-95.

men's jobs, but only 27 have feminine forms, or are clearly jobs being done by women from the contexts in which the term is used. Of these 27 occupations documented for women, 9 have corresponding male forms but the other 18 do not. This suggests that relatively few women self-identified or were identified by occupation, and this may not of course, correlate with the work that women actually did. Similarly, self-declared occupational designations may reflect what individuals wish to project about themselves rather than what they necessarily do all the time, and such a designation may not reflect their only, or even their main, activity.

In contexts where individuals self-identify their occupation (mostly epigraphical contexts) or are attributed an occupation by others (more often in literary texts) *hufantikos/hufantēs* appears *only* in the philosophical contexts discussed above,<sup>34</sup> and *never* in cases where individuals self-identify as textile workers or a text refers to a real, specific individual.

**Table 1: Textile-related occupational designations in classical Athens (after Harris 2002: 88-97)**

akestria – seamstress	IG II <sup>2</sup> 1556.27-9
amorgantinos – specialist textile worker; <i>amorgis</i> is a plant fibre for making fine cloth, perhaps a type of flax, but this is not certain	Aeschin. 1.97; Ar. <i>Lys.</i> 735
bapheus - dyer	Pl. <i>Resp.</i> 429D; Plut. <i>Per.</i> 12
eripolēs	IG II <sup>2</sup> 1568.7-8
erithos – wool worker– definitely female here	Dem. 57.45
gnaphallou -phantes	IG I <sup>3</sup> 1341 bis [= IG II <sup>2</sup> 7967]
(h)imatiopolis – clothes seller	IG II <sup>2</sup> 11254
(h)yphantikos/hyphantēs – weaver	Pl. <i>Grg.</i> 449D, 517C-518C; <i>Phd.</i> 87B-E; <i>Plt.</i> 279B-283B, 308D; <i>Resp.</i> 369D-370E, 445C; Arist. <i>Pol.</i> 1256a.6 (definitely female), 1325b-1326a
linourgos – linen/flax worker (def. female)	Alexis fr. 36 K-A (= Poll. 7.72)
pluntria (also pluntes and pluneus) – clothes cleaner	IG I3 794; IG I2 12373; 2934; Ar. <i>Plut.</i> 166, 514.
poikiltēs – ornamenter, embroiderer(?)	Aeschin. 1.97; Alexis fr. 329 K-A (=Poll. 7.34)
rhaptēs – clothes mender	Ar. <i>Plut.</i> 513
sindonopolēs -seller of fine cloth	IG III(3) 87.5

<sup>34</sup> Harris (2002) 92 and see Table 1.

stuppeiopolēs – plant-fibre (for coarse fabrics) seller	Ar. Eq. 129; IG II <sup>2</sup> 1570.24-6
talasiourgos - textile-worker (def. female)	IG II <sup>2</sup> 1553.35-7; 1554.32-5, 48-51, 71-3; 1555.14-20; 1556.18-21; 1557.55-8, 76-9, 84-5, 95-6, 97-8, 102-3; 1558.1-4, 29-32, 53-4, 58-62, 68-70, 87-9; 1559.40-3, 74-6, 86-9, 93-5, 98-9; 1560.16-20, 21-5; 1567.7-8; 1570.15-17, 39-41, 48-50, 51-3, 66-8, 95-7; 1576,32-5, 61-2; 1577.2
tuluphantēs - weaver of cushion covers	Hyp. fr. 125 (=Poll. 7.191)

Although being a textile worker is much more than being ‘weaver’, are only a relatively small number of individuals with occupational titles designating specialist skills (*linourgos*, flax worker; *tuluphantes* maker of cushion covers).<sup>35</sup> Two of Timarchus’ slaves were said to be specialist textile workers,<sup>36</sup> although in this forensic context stressing the production of luxury consumer goods and the loss of these valuable slaves may simply be played up to enhance the picture of his loose character that the speaker is trying to depict.

Besides these there was a woman skilled in working *amorgis* [see Table 1], who produced fine goods for the market, and there was a man skilled in ornamentation

ἔτι δὲ πρὸς τούτοις γυναῖκα ἀμόργινα ἐπισταμένην ἐργάζεσθαι καὶ ἔργα λεπτὰ εἰς τὴν ἀγορὰν ἐκφέρουσαν, καὶ ἄνδρα ποικιλτὴν

However, the normal, and most often self-declared, term for a ‘generic’ textile worker seems to be the much-discussed word *talasiourgos*,<sup>37</sup> directly related to the term *talasiourgia* which threatened to undermine the Stranger’s argument in Plato’s *Statesman* (see above). The term appears most often on lists of dedicated ritual vessels (*phialai*) dating to the third quarter of the fourth century BCE, which are most likely associated with manumission, however, their character and purpose has been much debated.<sup>38</sup> Although the word as used in these inscriptions is still thought by some to indicate a prostitute (Wrenhaven 2009; Cohen 2016: 53-9; cf. Buidrick 2008: 296; Spantidaki 2016: 11, 13), in reality, there is no direct evidence that this is the case in relation to these inscriptions. It seems far more likely that in most cases the term is it is exactly what it appears to be, a woman forefronting her particular skill in making textiles as an occupation, whatever else she may also have done in the household where she lived and worked. Whether the work she did included serving as a sex worker to a greater or lesser extent is simply

<sup>35</sup> Harris (2002) 93, 97 and see Table 1.

<sup>36</sup> Aeschin. 1.97.

<sup>37</sup> However [αἰ] ἔριθοι appears in Dem. 57.45.

<sup>38</sup> Rosivach (1989); Mac Arthur (2015) with <https://www.atticinscriptions.com/inscription/Meyer2010/1>; Cohen (2016).



not visible in these inscriptions. However, if the women who appear in these texts are in the process of manumission, as slaves a range of textile working tasks may be what they spent a great deal of their time doing. Again, even ‘generic’ textile workers with special skills workers might identify (or be designated) as textile workers first, but with additional specialist knowledge, as for example the citizen-status woman at Ar. Lys 735-7 also claiming to work with *amorgis*. Similarly, in Euripides’ *Ion*, Creousa, a mythical but unquestionably elite, woman describes a practice piece of weaving ornamented with a gorgon’s head, which she made as a *parthenos*, as part of her training in textile making.<sup>39</sup>

Where we have examples of establishments producing textiles described as owned by a man,<sup>40</sup> it is made clear that the work was done by slaves, said to be foreign, whose gender we do not know. These workshop owners are not referred to as ‘weavers’ and the term ὑφάντης is never used to describe them. To what extent the male manager engaged in the actual work is not clear. Most likely the workshops owned by the kind of wealthy citizen male proprietors mentioned by Xenophon were small independent kin-based units subsumed into the household of a wealthy individual,<sup>41</sup> like Demosthenes’ sword factory or the slave-operated leather workshop (with two leatherworkers) owned by Adeimantus recorded on the Attic Stelae.<sup>42</sup>

Aristarchus, leather worker (*skutotomos*)  
 his equipment: small table, 2 couches, table, sleeping pallets, building timber, and 8  
 unpreserved and unidentified items.  
 Saturos, leather worker (*skutotomos*)  
 [3 lines missing and 3 lines that seem to have been equipment]

[14-16]  
 [Α]ριστάρχος σκυτοτ[όμος]  
 [Σάτ]υρος σκυτοτόμ[ος]  
 [..<sup>5</sup>..]ον οἰκογεν[ές]

[24-39]  
 ἐκ τῶν [Ἀρις]τάρχο τῶσκυτοτ[όμο]  
 [-----]χθεν  
 [...<sup>6</sup>...]ς  
 [...<sup>6</sup>...]ς  
 [τραπέ]ζιον  
 [...<sup>5</sup>...]ν  
 [...]ον  
 [σκήμ]ποδες

<sup>39</sup> Eur. *Ion* 1417-25.

<sup>40</sup> Xen. *Mem.* 2.7.6.

<sup>41</sup> Foxhall (2007) 37-45; cf. Harris (2014) 186-92.

<sup>42</sup> IG I<sup>3</sup> 426.14-16, 24-39.

[χρύ]λα τετράγωνα  
[κλί]νε  
[κλί]νε  
[τράπ]εζα  
[... ]εα  
[...<sup>5</sup>...]α  
[...<sup>6</sup>...]ου  
[...<sup>7</sup>...οι]σὺν

Surely Demosthenes never made a sword in his life, and it seems likely that Adeimantus never made leather goods and that Demeas of Kollytus (Xen. Mem 7.6.8) similarly never wove a cloak. But, it is also clear in virtually the only instance where we might be able to identify a ‘real’ male textile maker, he is a slave, and most likely foreign.<sup>43</sup>

The key insight that emerges from this examination of occupational terms applied to textile workers is that there is a generic term, *talasiourgos*, which in ‘real life’ appears to have been applied only to women, who like all women, participated in a range of different tasks across the textile making process. The special attention paid to the term in the argument of the *Statesman* (general or particular; part of whole?) also supports this interpretation of *talasiourgos/-ourgia* as a generic term referring a range of essential textile skills or someone who possessed them.

There are also terms that can describe an additional, specialist skill that a person has as well as terms that describe the manufacture of a specialist product, or the boss (often of slave status) or free owner of a workshop producing one. Of course, ‘generic’ textile workers may also have had specialist skills, but certainly a great many women will never have been in contexts where an occupational designation needed to be attributed or self-declared, so it is likely that they do not regularly appear in our primary sources. However, it is clear from the examples presented above that the mastery of specialist techniques and skills in textile making was not limited to slaves or foreigners, and that women of all statuses might possess high levels of specialist skills. Clearly there is no reason to believe with Acton and Thompson that only ‘ordinary’ textiles were made by women at home, while ‘specialist’ fine cloth and luxury textiles for the market were made by (male and female) slaves in commercial workshops or factories. The concrete evidence that we have simply does not support this model of textile production. The issue of identifying the places and spaces of textile manufacture in classical Greek settlements and cities are complex, and the subject of a different paper.<sup>44</sup> However, suffice it to say here that in my view, with a tiny number of notable exceptions, large scale textile production workshops of the kind that Acton and others have presumed cannot be identified in Greek cities.

In fact, there are many stronger arguments and considerably more supporting evidence to support the idea that women were the dominant producers of textiles, than there is than for male

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<sup>43</sup> Aeschin. 1.97.

<sup>44</sup> Foxhall forthcoming.

weavers and male managed workshops (where in any case the actual workers are most likely to have been small groups of largely female slaves). Certainly, it is absolutely clear from a wide range of sources beyond the numerous references in literature that textiles and textile manufacture were conceptually and ideologically associated with women. The close association with femininity in visual culture has already been noted above.

The many dedications of clothing in the Temple of Artemis at Brauron recorded on inscriptions on the Acropolis were all made by women (even in the case of male clothing).<sup>45</sup> Textiles and textile tools were regularly dedicated in sanctuaries throughout the Greek world, in many cases definitely, and almost certainly in all other cases, by women, drawing on the underlying ideological link between textile production and feminine identity. Significantly, in the Pantanello sanctuary in the *chora* of Metaponto, certainly dedicated to a Nymph and possibly also to Artemis, the over 400 dedicated loom weights were ones that had been used, all different, but within a narrow weight range comprised of lighter loom weights, suitable for making finer cloth. This clearly contrasts with the loom weights collected in survey and excavation in the Metaponto *chora* associated for the most part with domestic residences or rural production sites which display a much wider range of weights from heavy ones for making sturdy textiles to light-weight ones for making fine textiles. Clearly the women dedicating loom weights at Pantanello were depositing tools they used for producing fine cloth, which clearly they were themselves fully capable of making fit for a deity.<sup>46</sup> This example provides useful archaeological evidence to suggest that women in Greek communities made a range of different kinds of cloth for different purposes.

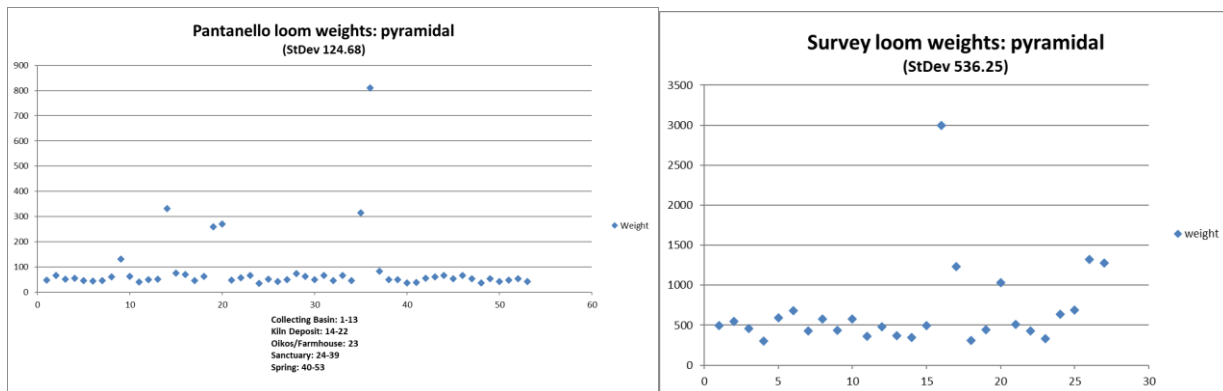


Fig. 1: Weight range of pyramidal loom weights dedicated in the Pantanello sanctuary, Metaponto compared to pyramidal loom weights from survey (largely domestic) contexts.

<sup>45</sup> Linders (1972); Cleland (2005)

<sup>46</sup> Foxhall (2018)

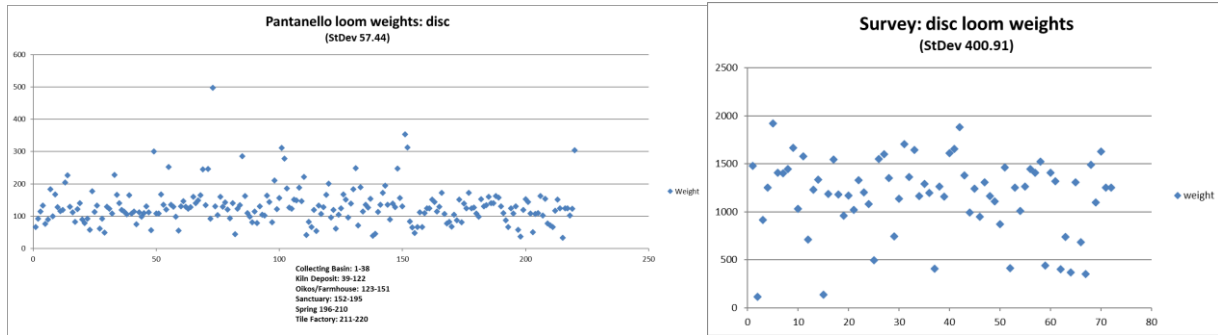


Fig. 2: Weight range of disc loom weights dedicated in the Pantanello sanctuary, Metaponto compared to disc loom weights from survey (largely domestic) contexts.

### Men as textile makers?

It seems highly unlikely, therefore that Greek men in classical times voluntarily engaged in textile manufacture, especially the making of clothing and household textiles, beyond the point that the fiber was removed from the sheep or goat, or the flax harvested. Hence, for the world of classical Greece, the only men who appear to have engaged in the actual work of consumer textile manufacture appear to be slaves, or at best low status and/or non-citizen men. And indeed, very few are securely documented, in contrast to the abundant evidence for the making of textiles by women. This striking gendered division of labour is completely different from the much more extensive, specialised and complex organisation and significance of textile manufacture in the Roman world. Nonetheless, even in Roman times an ideological as well as a practical association with women's work and feminine identity was maintained.<sup>47</sup>

Textiles were valuable household products made by women, for example in the Gortyn code a divorcing woman takes half of what she has woven while living in her husband's house.<sup>48</sup> One could easily think of textiles as stored female labour. Indeed, a very obvious way for a woman to produce wealth from her own labour was via some form of textile manufacture, since virtually all other forms of craft production largely seem to have excluded women. For example, in Demosthenes 57, the speaker's mother, as a destitute widow, made *tainiai*, ornamental borders or bands, for sale.<sup>49</sup> This particular type of textile production was particularly expedient for lone women in poverty since it demanded neither large amounts of raw materials which it is unlikely they could have produced themselves or would have been able to afford to buy. Also, the making of *tainiai* did not demand a full-scale warp-weighted loom, which needs a significant amount of

<sup>47</sup> Gleba and Pásztkai- Szeöke (2013)

<sup>48</sup> Willetts (1967) 40, II.45-52.

<sup>49</sup> Dem. 57.31, 33.

space and at least two people to operate it effectively.<sup>50</sup> The same might be the case for the woman spinning yarn to sell in the agora, as depicted by Aristophanes in *Frogs*.<sup>51</sup>

Textile manufacture was a complicated craft, interwoven with women's work and lives. Skills must have moved with women, from family to family, along with weaving tools themselves, and many of these women were surely exceptionally skilled, to judge from the few finds of textiles that survive.<sup>52</sup> Different women, slave, free and freed worked together sharing their skills, some better than others, some with specialist skills. Girls must have grown up knowing that 'working wool' would consume a huge chunk of their lives, supply their main source of wealth, and serve to underpin their identities and relationships to the other women in their lives. While small numbers of men engaged in textile making, it is fair to say that in classical Greece, the manufacture of textiles really was predominantly women's work.

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<sup>50</sup> Foxhall (2012).

<sup>51</sup> Ar. *Ran.* 1346-51.

<sup>52</sup> Spantidaki (2016).

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