

DID THE WOMEN OF ANCIENT ATHENS ATTEND THE THEATER IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY?

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IN 1776 KARL AUGUST BÖTTIGER published an article in *Der Teutscher Merkur* entitled, “Were Women in Athens Spectators at Dramatic Performances?”¹ Böttiger proposed to refute an assertion of the sixteenth-century French scholar Casaubon² that women were present at dramatic performances in ancient Athens and, by discussing the matter thoroughly, to establish firmly that women did not attend theatrical presentations in ancient Athens.

Böttiger’s article sparked a brief debate that lasted until 1808. The matter was taken up once again in 1837,³ and scholarly debate on the issue has continued up until the present time. The question of Athenian women’s attendance at dramatic performances, however, is likely to remain an open one: the ancient evidence on it is inconclusive, and the two most recent contributors to the debate,⁴ like many generations of scholars before them, come to opposite conclusions.⁵

In this article, I do not intend to add to the literature on this question. Rather, as my title suggests, I propose to outline the lineaments of the earliest disputes on the issue of Athenian women’s attendance at the theater, and to discuss briefly the socio-cultural and historical circumstances under which the question first arose as a subject of scholarly debate. Such an investigation is of interest on several accounts:

First, these early debates anticipate much of what was to follow. Thus, in the first section of this article I review the arguments of Böttiger’s three

This article is a slightly revised and lightly annotated version of the eighth George Walsh Memorial Lecture delivered at the University of Chicago in November 1996. George Walsh and I were graduate students together at Yale University in the turbulent 1960s, and it is with fond memories of the times we spent together then that I dedicate this article to his memory. I should like to express my gratitude to Robert Kaster, Laura Slatkin, Chris Faraone, James Redfield, and Martha Roth for their generous hospitality, to Elizabeth Asmis, Jay Katz, and Andrew Szegedy-Maszak for valuable comments and suggestions, and to the many University of Chicago graduate students with whom I had the benefit of enlightening and stimulating discussions during my visit to Chicago.

1. Böttiger 1837a [1796].

2. In his famous 1592 commentary on the *Characters* of Theophrastus, in remarks appended to a discussion of the *προεδρία* of generals, at V (περὶ ἀρεσκείας) 10 (= XXI [περὶ μικροφιλοτιμίας] 7).

3. Passow 1837.

4. Henderson 1991; Goldhill 1994.

5. Henderson 1991, 134 thinks it “very likely that women did participate” in the dramatic festival. Goldhill 1994, 368 is interested more in reformulating the question than in answering it, but acknowledges a proclivity in favor of the view that women were not present.

contributions on the subject, and indicate some points of convergence with and divergence from current discussions.

Second, these early investigations established that the context for the evaluation of the question was the status, role, or position overall of women in Athens. It was this debate, then, that set the parameters for the scholarly study of women in ancient Greece. The well-known scholarly debate on the status of women in ancient Athens in fact derived originally from the discussion of this more limited question. Thus, in reviewing the particulars of the early debate on Athenian women's attendance at the theater, we will recover also something of the origins of the debate on status.

And finally, the question of women's presence in the ancient Greek theater arose at a politically and culturally charged moment in the history of Europe, and the scholarly debate was, as we shall see, conditioned in important ways by trends and events in the wider world. In the second section of this article, I outline four sets of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century developments which, I argue, contributed to an interest in the subject of Athenian women's attendance at the theater. Subsequent scholarship on the question has extracted the issue from the historical context in which it first arose, and thus we have lost sight of those factors that had an impact on its first formulation. Recovery of this context is of interest in and of itself: it shows how what is now a narrow philological issue was once inscribed in a larger and more wide-ranging cultural debate. And discussion of this context will also provide an illustration of an important turning-point in the history of Classics: the professionalization of classical philology as a discipline and the institutionalization of classical scholarship.

K. A. BÖTTIGER AND THE ORIGINS OF THE DEBATE

Karl August Böttiger was an interesting but unquestionably minor figure in the history of classical scholarship. He was, as a recent study acknowledges, "forgotten soon after his death."⁶ And Böttiger did not himself have an exaggerated notion of his own importance as a scholar: in fact, he wrote to his son in 1834, about a year before his death, "I have never been anything more than a learned, good-natured, and frequently berated jack-of-all-trades."⁷

During his own lifetime, however, Böttiger was known to virtually every major figure in the literary and cultural elite of Germany, and to many in France and England as well. And this was a stellar group indeed, one which included such writers as Goethe and the brothers Schlegel, and such classical scholars as Heyne, Wolf, and August Böckh. Thus, it is not surprising that scholars in the field of German studies recently have devoted at least two full-length studies to Böttiger's life and to the influence he exercised through his activities as the editor of several influential journals of the time, and through his manifold contributions to some fifty or so other periodicals and magazines.⁸

6. Sondermann 1983, back cover advertisement.

7. Bursian 1883, 628, citing from *Karl August Böttiger, Eine biographische Skizze von dessen Sohne Dr. K. W. Böttiger* (Leipzig, 1837), 115.

8. Maurach 1971; Sondermann 1983.

In 1796 Böttiger published the first of three articles on the question "Were Women in Athens Spectators at Dramatic Performances?"⁹ He anticipates in the opening section of this essay that a negative answer to the question is bound to seem "surprising to anyone who measures the customs of Greek antiquity by the yardstick of our own" (p. 295). Nevertheless, he goes on to insist, "it seems to me to be firmly established that respectable Athenian women never visited the theater as spectators" (p. 295).

In this first article on the subject, Böttiger argues, to begin with, that Athenian wives and daughters did not ordinarily ever appear in public, with the exception of their participation in certain sacred processions, and that therefore "they were no more likely to have attended dramatic performances than sessions of the assembly" (pp. 295–96). In a later footnote, Böttiger adds that "everything which held good for meetings in the *ekklësia* . . . would have applied to the presentations of drama in the theater" (p. 297, n. ††), and he mentions also the considerations that participation in the choruses was open only to citizens and that dramatic competitions were part of a sacred ritual (p. 304). Furthermore, he claims that "according to the ancient Greeks' cultural conceptions, it would have been just as *inconsistent* as indecent for female roles to have been played in the theater by other than male actors" (p. 296; original emphasis). And, finally, he drew attention to the fact that, at the Lenaea, at any rate, it was a source of special civic pride that attendance was prohibited to "outsiders," both foreigners and allies (p. 304).

Subsequent discussions of the topic (including Böttiger's own) largely lose sight of this civic and ritual framework within which he had first addressed it, and of the considerations of political ideology that he had brought to bear on the question. But it is notable that in this first article Böttiger construed the theater as a civic, political, and ritual arena, and that he based his argument for women's exclusion in part on the development of an analogy between the theater and the assembly.¹⁰ For, as Goldhill has argued recently, an answer to the question of women's presence in the theater will depend in some significant part on whether we think of "the theatre and the Great Dionysia [as] more like the Panathenaia or [as] more like the Assembly."¹¹ Thus, Böttiger's earliest reflections on the issue were conditioned by intimations of an analogy that Goldhill has now brought to bear on the question in a more thorough, sustained, and systematic manner.

In his first essay Böttiger also defended his claim that women were absent from theatrical presentations by appealing to what Goldhill calls the "protocol of invisibility" for respectable Athenian wives and daughters (p. 351), and to which Goldhill attaches some importance in framing the question of women's attendance at the festival. How, Goldhill asks, would citizen women have gotten to and from the theater when they do not otherwise appear in public without the protection of a ritual role? Were tickets

9. Böttiger 1837a [1796]; subsequent references to this article are in parentheses in the text.

10. Böttiger relied in part on the belief that assemblies were normally convened in the theater (p. 297, n. ††), a practice which obtained in Hellenistic but not classical times.

11. Goldhill 1994, 360; subsequent references to this article are in parentheses in the text.

allotted to them as to the men and, if so, how? If they did occupy seats in the audience, would not distinctions among the various classes of women have been maintained, as they were elsewhere, and, if so, by what means? And he concludes by asserting: "it seems to me that the case for women's presence in the theatre has to produce a more plausible picture both of where women sat and how they travelled to, entered, and left the theatre" (p. 365).

Böttiger's own extensive reflections on this "protocol of invisibility" have, in a number of places, a distinctly eighteenth- or nineteenth-century flavor. He refers, for example, like most nineteenth-century scholars who thought as he did about the question, to the "seclusion" of Athenian woman as something that approached "Oriental harem-slavery" (p. 295)—hence the phrase by which it was commonly characterized until recently, "Oriental Seclusion." But he discusses also the "conspiracy of silence" maintained in our ancient sources on the question,¹² asking "should we not have encountered, at least in Athenaeus or Lucian or Alciphron or Aristaeus, *one* trace of visits [of courtesans] to the theater," especially, he adds, "since in our day the theater so often provides the first occasion for amorous adventures?" (p. 296; original emphasis).

Böttiger concludes his discussion by insisting that "anyone only slightly familiar with the conditions governing the relations between women and men in antiquity and between women and what the ancient Greeks construed as public life will not allow himself to be led astray by apparent objections to the claim that Athenian women did not attend the theater" (p. 303). But Böttiger also goes on to add a consideration that was to figure importantly in subsequent discussions of the question—namely, that "no dramatic poet would have made himself guilty of such offensive and exaggerated invective against the second sex as Euripides did, if he had expected women to be among the audience and participants of his plays" (p. 305).

Böttiger's essay, then, combines reflections on the general character of Athenian public life with consideration of the proprieties governing women's lives, attention to some of the evidence on the question, and, finally, some hypotheses that now seem dated about the relationship between the content of the plays and their intended audience. This essay represented the opening salvo in what was shortly to become a fully pitched battle against the "long established and generally prevailing" view of the matter (p. 308). For, in the following year, Böttiger published a second, short essay criticizing the inferences drawn by Friedrich Schlegel from a passage in Plato's *Laws* that is still regarded as one of the chief pieces of evidence for women's presence at theatrical presentations.¹³ And in 1808 a third and much longer piece appeared,¹⁴ in which Böttiger not only undertook to dismiss the evidence of the other two Platonic passages that, like Schlegel's, are still

12. *Ibid.*, 351.

13. Böttiger 1837b [1797]. The passage is *Laws* 2.658A, where tragedy is identified as the amusement most likely to give pleasure to "educated women, young men, and the mass of people generally."

14. Böttiger 1837c [1808]; subsequent references to this article are in parentheses in the text.

brought to bear on the question, but also presented a full-scale review of the chief features defining women's role in the Athenian polis.

In this third essay of 1808, Böttiger admitted that, although some scholars had defended his views, "most have remained unconvinced" (p. 313). Thus, after insisting upon the irrelevance to the question of a second passage from the *Laws*¹⁵ and another from Plato's *Gorgias*,¹⁶ which August Böckh had used to argue against him,¹⁷ Böttiger devotes the remainder of his essay to outlining a set of six "general observations," all but the last having to do with the role of citizen women in the Athenian polis, and all defended with appeals to the evidence from ancient art and literature.

Böttiger makes an exception, first, to the general rule of women's exclusion for those women who sold their wares (and themselves) to the general public of men in the theater, and argues that they slipped in, like Theophrastus' miser and his children, after the performances had begun and when entry was free (p. 315).¹⁸ Second, he reiterates his general claims about the seclusion of citizen women, adding the evidence of a number of passages and insisting that women were generally housebound, visited by only relatives or female friends, and that "an upright Athenian woman appeared in public only on the principal festival days of the goddesses, in festival processions and sacrifices, and on the occasions of extraordinary or unusual gatherings" (p. 315). Thirdly, women were not educated in "what we today call the arts," meaning music, dance, and song, the province proper instead to hetairas in ancient Greece. Wives, he insists, citing the famous passage from the speech against Neaera, were concerned with childrearing and housekeeping (pp. 316–17). Nevertheless, he adds as a fourth consideration, on the evidence of the escapades alleged against them in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, Athenian women knew well enough how to compensate for their disabilities. As for the the plays themselves, they found out about them from their husbands (pp. 317–18). Fifth and, for the moment, finally—for I want to take up the important sixth point later—he asks how it would have been possible for "an Athenian woman of good birth" to have exposed herself to the rowdiness of the theater, for which there is good evidence, when one considers that at home she did not normally enter the men's quarters or dining halls when outsiders were present (pp. 318–19). Böttiger concludes with the assertion that the idea that women who did not either belong to the lower classes or have wares to sell attended the theater runs contrary to everything we know about the ancient Greek way of thinking, and is absurd and inconceivable on its face (p. 319).

There is much in what Böttiger writes that now seems dated; but it is also worth noting how much of what was to follow, over the course of two hundred years, he has anticipated, at least in general outline, in the thirty or so

15. *Laws* 7.817C, where the Athenian stranger bans travelling troupes from setting up in the marketplace and declaiming "before children and women and the whole crowd."

16. *Gorgias* 502D, where dramatic rhetoric is identified as the type that addresses a public composed of "children and women and men, and slaves and free."

17. Böckh 1808, 37–38.

18. Theophrastus 30 (περὶ αἰσχροκερδείας) 6.

pages that he devoted to the subject. Thus it is not altogether accurate to dismiss the earliest scholarly investigations on the question, as Henderson, for example, does, claiming that "nineteenth-century scholars thought that Athenian women and boys, like their own, must have been shielded from theatrical indecency."¹⁹

Immodesty and indecency certainly figured importantly in these scholars' considerations. More common, however, in the first half of the nineteenth century was the argument, like Böttiger's, that women's attendance at the theater was inconsistent with the practice of seclusion, or the contrary view that, as Becker put it in 1840, "it would have indeed been strange if the Greeks, with whom poetry was such a generally acknowledged means of forming the mind, had denied this advantage to the women."²⁰ Henderson, who argues a strong case in favor of women's presence at the theater, concludes his discussion by stating: "Surely the dramatists wanted to interpret the world for all Athenians, not just the men."²¹ This view is on a continuum with that of Becker, although Henderson's overall perspective is quite different, attending especially as it does to recent work on the social function of drama in the polis.

The contributions of the earliest investigators, then, were not so naïve or uninformed as is often thought. But they did take shape at a particular moment in the development of classical scholarship, and within a particular socio-cultural and historical context. Indeed, once we take into consideration some of the facts about Böttiger's career, and about the journals in which he published his essays, several things become clear:

First, Böttiger's interest in ancient Greek theater and its conventions was not surprising, given both his own professional history and developments in the contemporary theory and practice of the dramatic arts. Second, Böttiger's early writings represent a point of intersection between what we might call high popular culture and scholarship. And they were thus instrumental in making the question of women's attendance at the theater in Athens one of the first major debates in the history of scholarship. Third, we can detect at a number of points in the early writings on this question the influence of eighteenth-century Hellenism and its connection with emerging forms of nationalism. Fourth and last, the period of this debate coincided with the first feminist movements in France, England, and Germany. Contemporary discussion of the role and rights of women affected conceptualizations of the status of women in ancient Greece, including the part they did or did not play as members of the theatrical audience.

BÖTTIGER AND THE THEATER

Let us consider each of these factors in turn, beginning with Böttiger's interest in the theater. Böttiger began the most important part of his career in 1791, when he came to Weimar, at the invitation of Johann Gottfried

19. Henderson 1991, 135.

20. Becker 1866 [1840], 404.

21. Henderson 1991, 145.

Herder, to take up a position as director of the Ernestine Gymnasium. By the next year, however, Böttiger had begun to augment his meager school-master's salary by writing essays, articles, and drama reviews for several of the many periodicals that circulated widely and that exercised a formative impact on cultural opinion.

Weimar was at the time only a small town of seven thousand, the capital and seat of the court of Duke Carl August, the benevolent and enlightened ruler of a duchy with a population of under one hundred thousand. But Weimar was also known as "Athens on the Ilm," its river. For residing there or in nearby Jena were most of the major figures associated with that renaissance of the Greek spirit in Germany known as German Hellenism.

The writer Christoph Martin Wieland, for example, author of the historical novel *Agathon*, had come to Weimar in 1772 as tutor to the crown princes. Goethe followed soon afterwards, in 1775, arriving in Weimar first as a companion for the Duke, who had just attained his majority, and becoming shortly thereafter a member of the Duke's Privy Council. And Herder, whose historicist interpretation of Hellenic ideals marked an important revision of Winckelmann's legacy, came to Weimar in 1776 as court preacher and state head of clergy.

In 1791, the year of Böttiger's arrival in Weimar, Goethe took over management of Weimar's Court Theater. Weimar had a theatrical tradition and a court theater dating back to the end of the seventeenth century, and, beginning in 1756, a company of court actors. But in Weimar as elsewhere in this period, theatrical fare was ordinarily light, running to operettas, French comedies, farces, and domestic dramas. Theater critics like Böttiger were thus important allies or adversaries of those theater directors of the time like Goethe who, in an effort to educate German audiences and to raise the level of taste, introduced more ambitious and serious offerings onto the stage: historical dramas, Shakespearean plays, and adaptations of Greek and Roman theater.

In 1792 Böttiger assumed *de facto* editorship of the influential *Weimar Journal of Luxury and Fashion*, and he gradually altered its focus from discussions of fashion, household furnishings, and gossip, to essays on travel, the arts, and, especially, the theater. In his first year as editor, for example, Böttiger published a glowingly favorable review of *King John*, a translation of the Shakespearean play that was Goethe's first production as director of the Weimar Court Theater.²²

Nevertheless, despite occasional cooperative efforts such as a public subscription fund of 1798 for erecting a statue to commemorate a favorite actress who had died tragically young,²³ relations between Goethe the theater director and Böttiger the critic were never harmonious.

Matters came to a head in 1802, with the presentation of August Schlegel's adaptation of Euripides' *Ion*. Goethe had already experimented in 1801 with a production of Terence's *Adelphoe* using ancient costumes and masks,

22. Carlson 1978, 70.

23. *Ibid.*, 129.

and Böttiger reviewed it favorably. A rival faction in Weimar, however, associated with August von Kotzebue, the most popular dramatist of the time in Germany, had gained influence since 1800. Kotzebue's domestic dramas, comedies, and farces made fewer demands on the audiences than Goethe's more ambitious theatrical fare.

Goethe, encouraged by the success in 1801 of the *Adelphoe*, appears to have mounted the 1802 production of Schlegel's *Ion* specifically to defy the Kotzebue faction. But they turned out in force to laugh and heckle during the performance, forcing Goethe to rise from his seat and demand silence. Meanwhile, Böttiger had been overheard during intermission muttering about inaccuracies in Greek mythology,²⁴ and in addition, the assignment, in Schlegel's adaptation, of the account of Creusa's rape to Apollo, was thought indecent. Herder's wife Caroline wrote: "no more shameless, insolent [or] depraved play has ever been given."²⁵

Böttiger was slated to review the production for the *Journal of Luxury and Fashion*, and rumor had it that his assessment would be quite critical. Goethe obtained an advance copy of the review, contacted Bertuch, the chief editor of the journal, and threatened to resign as Theater Director if the review were not withdrawn. As Sandys reports the incident, "[Böttiger's] unfavourable critique of [Schlegel's] *Ion* was withdrawn at the request of Goethe,"²⁶ but the facts of the matter were rather more sensational. Despite Goethe's attempts at quiet suppression, the details of the "*Ion* affair" were an open secret in Weimar; they created a major scandal and aroused no small degree of hostility to what was already regarded as Goethe's despotism over the theater.

The censored review was found among Böttiger's papers after his death, and is printed in his *Kleine Schriften*.²⁷ Of particular interest to us is Böttiger's claim that the original production of the play, performed by men for a male audience—for he asserts confidently that respectable women did not attend the theater in Athens—would have given no cause for alarm. But the choice of such a play for presentation to a mixed audience was, he claimed, offensive, and even more so because of the moral infelicities of the adaptation.

The "*Ion* affair" took place in 1802, but as we noted earlier, Böttiger had followed events in the Weimar theater closely, and had been reviewing its productions since 1792. From the earliest point in his career, Böttiger was interested in the relationship between ancient and contemporary theater. And this was neither a casual nor idiosyncratic concern, related as it was to the project of adapting contemporary ideas of Hellenic cultural, aesthetic, and national integrity to the demands for a specifically German national theater. As Schiller said in 1784, "If we could live to see a national theater, then we should be a nation indeed."²⁸

24. Bruford 1950, 308; 1962, 305.

25. Carlson, 1978, 166; cf. Sillig 1837.

26. Sandys 1967 [1908], 74.

27. Sillig 1837, 340–46.

28. Cited in Bruford 1950, 145.

Furthermore, the question of women as members of the theater audience had a direct bearing on this project, as Böttiger's critique of Schlegel's *Ion* shows. Women had come onto the German stage as actresses from the middle of the seventeenth century, and both the court circles before whom the early companies performed and the market audiences who assembled at fairs for travelling players had included women. But even among middle-class audiences the presence of women could exercise an inhibiting effect on presentation of serious drama. A contemporary historian of the Hamburg theater, for example, reported that a 1777 production of Shakespeare's *Othello* had to be altered to incorporate a happy ending after women fainted and, in some cases, went into premature labor.²⁹ Classicists can hardly fail to be reminded of one of the most frequently cited testimonia for women's presence in the audience in ancient Athens: the report in the ancient "Life of Aeschylus" that his Furies frightened women into miscarriages.³⁰

A first influence on Böttiger's interest in the question of Athenian women's presence in the theater, then, was the theater of his own time and the bearing upon its development of the example of the drama and cultural life of the ancient Greeks. A second factor was the intersection between high popular culture and classical scholarship. This relationship was part and parcel of the school and university reforms of the time, to which I shall now turn briefly.

POPULAR CULTURE AND CLASSICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Eighteenth-century school reforms in Germany aimed generally at increasing state control, breaking down religious orthodoxy, and modernizing the curriculum. An earlier era of reform had led to the creation of the University of Halle in Prussia in 1694, and of Göttingen in Hannover in 1737. But by the end of the eighteenth century there were calls for the abolition of universities, their replacement by specialty schools, and the consignment of higher learning to the academies of science.³¹

For some time before, however, a widespread debate on schools and universities in Germany had begun both within the academies themselves and without, in pamphlets and books. Among those contributing to the debate were some of the leading professors and intellectuals of the day, and the ensuing university reforms had significant effects on the history and development of classical scholarship. For between 1790 and 1820 classical philology was transformed from its eighteenth-century status as a propaedeutic or even remedial program for the higher university faculties of theology, law, and medicine into a profession in the modern sense of the term.³² And by the early nineteenth century the German university system generally, and the seminar in classical philology in particular, had won widespread international recognition—such that in 1815, for example, the

29. J. F. Schütze, as cited in Bruford 1950, 196; cf. Patterson 1990, 15.

30. *Vit. Aeschyl.* 9; Pollux iv.110.

31. On the history of these developments, see Paulsen 1906, McClelland 1980, and Ziolkowski 1990.

32. See Turner 1974, Horstmann 1977, Turner 1980.

first of several groups of young American classical scholars arrived to study at Göttingen.³³

The chief instrument in this transformation was the philological seminar, inaugurated by Gesner at Göttingen in the mid-eighteenth century, but adapted by Christian Gottlob Heyne, Gesner's successor in 1763, to the new ideals of education as *Bildung* or "formation" and of learning as *Wissenschaft*, a comprehensive intellectual program. Thus, instead of textual criticism, dissection of individual passages, recitation, and Latin disputation—all designed to teach imitation of the ancients—Heyne's focus was holistic, historicist, and interpretive. That is, after the rudiments of grammatical knowledge had been mastered, the new philology taught interpretation of works in their historical, archaeological, literary, and social context. The goal was to foster an appreciation for the ancient world as a whole and to recover the spirit of an historical reality that might serve as an inspiration for the present. This new approach was carried out further by Heyne's most famous student, Friedrich Augustus Wolf, who founded the seminar at Halle in 1787 and is known best for his 1795 *Prolegomena ad Homerum*.

In the period with which we are concerned, however—from 1796 to 1808, the years of the debate on Athenian women as spectators—the professionalization of classical philology was as yet incomplete, and the boundaries between scholars and intellectuals, schoolmasters and professors, were fluid. Wolf, for example, had been a schoolmaster before coming to Halle to assume a chair in Philosophy and Pedagogy. Böttiger himself, whose position as director of the Ernestine Gymnasium in Weimar was no longer secure after Herder's death in 1804, was considered for membership in the Berlin Academy and also, according to his son, for a professorship at Göttingen.³⁴

No strict demarcation, then, separated the professor from the schoolmaster or intellectual in this era. And by the same token, contributions to scholarship, including especially classical scholarship, were not restricted during this period to professional journals, for the simple reason that these did not yet exist. (The first one, *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, was founded in 1827.) Indeed, much of what university professors published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries would not qualify as scholarship by later nineteenth-century standards.³⁵ But, conversely, scholarly articles and essays regularly appeared during this period in popular journals.

The debate on Athenian women as spectators is a case in point. The first two of Böttiger's three articles on the subject appeared in *Der Teutsche Merkur*, a journal which the writer Christoph Martin Wieland founded in Weimar in 1773 on the model of the popular and successful *Mercure de France*.³⁶ Wieland had embarked upon this venture after leaving the University of Erfurt, where he had spent two years unsuccessfully attempting

33. Thwing 1928; Diehl 1978.

34. Maurach 1971, 22.

35. Turner 1980, 72.

36. Wahl 1914, 39–42; Stoll 1978, 53–60.

to implement the modernizing reforms we discussed earlier. *Teutsche Merkur* was conceived as an alternative means towards the same end: it was an organ for popularizing scholarly, intellectual, artistic, and literary developments, and its target audience was professors, schoolmasters, state officials, and influential members of the educated public.³⁷

Teutsche Merkur ran articles on a variety of social, political, economic, and cultural topics. Böttiger had contributed to the journal since 1792, and he was responsible for the articles dealing with classical antiquity. Some of these discussed archaeological, literary, and mythological subjects, others were straightforwardly antiquarian, for example, "Locks and Keys in Antiquity." In 1797, however, Böttiger took over as editor of *Teutsche Merkur* (now *Neue Teutsche Merkur*).

Böttiger's first article on Athenian women as spectators appeared in *Teutsche Merkur* in 1796. And we have seen that contemporary developments in the theater of the time and Böttiger's interest in them influenced his focus on this scholarly topic. But scholarly considerations themselves also figured importantly in Böttiger's discussions, and particularly in his first essay.

For in this first article Böttiger explicitly set out to correct an error in the interpretation of the *scholion* to Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* l. 22. Almost half of the article is concerned with this issue—with the dating of the two strata of the scholia, with proposed emendations of the text, and with the overall context in which the play and this passage within it should be understood.

Böttiger's interest in scholia is not surprising: eighteenth-century scholars were much preoccupied with textual history and with the work of those whom they regarded as the first textual critics, the Alexandrian scholars. By the 1770s study of the scholia could even be regarded as a fad.³⁸ Böttiger had studied at Leipzig under Reiz (remembered today principally for the metrical colon that bears his name, the Reizianus), and if Grafton is correct in inferring that Reiz continued to lecture on scholia into the 1780s,³⁹ then it is likely that Böttiger had heard him do so in the 1770s.

Böttiger's articles on Athenian women as spectators, then, are a good example of the intersection between scholarship and high popular culture that characterized this period and with which we ourselves are not unfamiliar today. Scholars and professionals in our own field contribute regularly, for example, to the *London* and *New York Review[s] of Books* or the *Times Literary Supplement*. Public and now even commercial television stations broadcast "specials" on questions that are the focus of contemporary scholarly debate. And videotaped presentations by distinguished scholar-teachers make university-level lectures available to the general population.

37. Stoll 1978, 59.

38. Grafton 1991, 232.

39. *Ibid.*, 231 and p. 316, n. 92.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN HELLENISM

A third influence on the debate over Athenian women as spectators was eighteenth-century German Hellenism. I have discussed some aspects of this supposed "tyranny of Greece over Germany,"⁴⁰ or cult of "aesthetic paganism"⁴¹—as it has been called—in connection with the emergence of a German national theater. It remains for me to address some manifestations of Hellenism in connection with the German Romantic movement, and in particular with the leading literary critic of the period who was also one of the principal exponents of the Romantic ideal: Friedrich Schlegel, the younger brother of August Wilhelm Schlegel, whose drama *Ion* had led to the break between Böttiger and Goethe.

For it was an early essay of Schlegel, published in 1797, that prompted Böttiger's second article on Athenian women as spectators, which appeared later that same year in *Teutsche Merkur*. Schlegel's essay, "On Diotima," was part of a volume entitled *The Greeks and Romans: Historical and Critical Research*. In the essay "On Diotima," Schlegel undertook to challenge the accepted and prevailing views and judgments concerning Greek women, and thereby attempted to shed new light on the public and private life of the Greeks.⁴² The prevailing view, as he describes it, is "that proper women among the Greeks lacked education, were kept secluded from the company of men, and were even oppressed and despised; that education and the company of men were permitted only to female entertainers" (p. 73).

The essay as a whole is structured as an investigation into the identity of Diotima who, Schlegel argues, was not, as was traditionally held, a hetaira. And if she was not a hetaira, he goes on to claim, then either she was an exception to the general rule or there were other groups of educated and/or emancipated women among the ancient Greeks (p. 82). These latter he identifies as Pythagorean women, among whom he ranks Diotima, and Spartan women. And then, having established that there were at least "two examples of Greek women . . . who were not excluded from the society and education of men" (p. 94), he instances two further groups of women as counter-examples: the Macedonian queens and the female lyric poets (pp. 94–97).

Schlegel then goes on to address the issue of Athenian social arrangements affecting women (pp. 108–15). Here he sometimes explains and sometimes excuses the practices of the Athenians, invoking often the obligation of Solon to institute measures to counteract the deleterious influence of the Athenians' so-called Ionian heritage.⁴³ In the premises underlying this argument we can detect both the influence of contemporary racial theories and a foreshadowing of Schlegel's later researches into Sanskrit, which established the basis for the notion of an Indo-European heritage.

40. Butler 1958.

41. Hatfield 1964; see also Behm 1968.

42. Schlegel 1979, 72; subsequent references to this article are in parentheses in the text.

43. See especially the references to "Ionian debauchery" (*Ionische Auffassung*), p. 115.

In this essay, however, Schlegel does not attempt any resolution of his idealization of the Athenian representation of humanity in philosophy and tragic poetry with his evaluation of Athenian social practice. He concludes instead with a commendation of Plato's immortalization of Diotima, who, as he says, "combines the grace of an Aspasia and the soul of a Sappho with a lofty autonomy," and "whose divine intelligence epitomizes a picture of perfect humanity" (p. 115).

His early essays brought Schlegel instant fame, and through them "he gained a position in the literary world overnight."⁴⁴ But this praise was largely restricted to the essay on Greek poetry. Despite plans for other reviews,⁴⁵ the 1797 book received only two notices. One was by Heyne, who was highly complimentary about the work overall, but appended to his review a polemic against the Diotima essay.⁴⁶ The other review was by Böttiger, and it is identical with his second essay on Athenian women as spectators.

In this essay Böttiger, like Heyne, praised Schlegel's volume overall, but went on to remark: "Friedrich Schlegel is so eager to raise Athenian women to the ranks of those educated women to whom the Platonic Diotima perhaps belonged, that he cannot convince himself that Athenian women were excluded from the noble school of the Athenian citizens, from the theater."⁴⁷ In claiming that Schlegel wanted to make all Greek women into Diotimas, Böttiger was, of course, misrepresenting Schlegel's overall argument. But his remarks were directed against one passage, in which Schlegel had claimed, in the 1795 version of the essay, that Athenian women's education, although largely restricted to women's handiwork, had also included attendance at the theater, which Schlegel himself had characterized as "the noble school of the Athenian citizen" (p. 108).

Schlegel had in the meantime considered the implications of Böttiger's first, 1796 essay on Athenian women as spectators, and had modified his own claim in the 1797 publication so that it applied only to tragedy. But he let the passage as a whole stand, citing Böttiger's failure to have considered the evidence of a passage in Plato's *Laws*. The second of Böttiger's essays, accordingly, was structured as a refutation of the implications of this passage.⁴⁸

The implications of this passage, like those of the other two from Plato that Böckh cited as evidence in his 1808 volume on Greek tragedy, are still disputed. Schlegel, like many modern scholars, regarded the passage as a more or less straightforward confirmation of women's presence in the theatrical audience. Böttiger, however, claims that Plato is speaking hypothetically—that is, women would so choose if they were free to choose—and

44. Behler 1993, 38.

45. Behler 1979, clxx.

46. Ibid.

47. Böttiger 1837b [1797], 309.

48. Böttiger argues that Plato is speaking hypothetically, and adds that in any case if we accept it as evidence for women's attendance, then we have to accept it as evidence that slaves and boys attended, which (he asserts) we know on other grounds that they did not. And he concludes, before going on to elaborate his own argument further, "a passage that proves too much, proves nothing" (1837b [1797], 310).

he adds that the educated women envisioned were in any case hetairas (p. 314). Thus, the only thing that is certain is that this passage does not provide decisive evidence one way or the other, and it is still subject to radically different interpretations.

Schlegel's overall view of women in ancient Greece remained, as he put it later in the second of the famous 1812 Vienna lectures on literature, that "in Sparta, and in general among all the descendants of the Doric race, more particularly among those of them who had adopted the ethical principles of the Pythagoreans, the natural rights and dignity of the female character were recognised infinitely more than in the Ionian republics."⁴⁹ The phrase "natural rights and dignity of the female character" (*die natürlichen Rechte und die Würde der Frauen*) is significant. For Schlegel was typical of the German Hellenists, on the one hand, in his idealization of ancient Greek representations of women.

Schlegel, however, was unique among the German Hellenists in his concern, not just for the "dignity" of women, but also for their "natural rights." In his 1812 reference to "the rights of women," Schlegel was harking back to concerns which had preoccupied him and many of his contemporaries during the 1790s. Let us then consider this topic, which is the fourth and last of the factors which influenced the discussion of Athenian women as spectators, namely, contemporary discussion of the role and rights of women.

THE ROLE AND RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Much of this discussion was precipitated by events surrounding the French Revolution of 1789, but some, and particularly debates concerning women's education, had predated it. University education was closed to women at this time, and in fact remained so until the beginning of the present century. And the elementary school curriculum for girls was narrow, emphasizing, in addition to the rudiments of math and letters, such arts as needlework and housekeeping. But by the last third of the eighteenth century, some 250 books and essays had argued vigorously for the improvement of women's education. This advocacy was, to be sure, tied closely to conceptions of women's role and function in society, and thus it emphasized conformity with women's destiny or *Bestimmung*.

Nevertheless, a large number of middle-class women had succeeded in acquiring literacy and learning, either independently or by virtue of enlightened and supportive fathers and, sometimes, mothers. The eighteenth century was the century of the newspaper, magazine, journal, and book in Germany. By the end of the century there were approximately four thousand journals published, as compared with fifty-eight before 1700.⁵⁰

Some of these, and in particular the Moral Weeklies that were popular and widespread from the beginning of the century, were directed at a female audience, advocated the improvement of women's education, and took the

49. Schlegel 1818, 56; 1961, 40.

50. Bödeker 1990, 427–28.

first steps by printing lists of recommended books and other reading matter. Some journals were designed for a female audience, like *The Leipzig Women's Monthly* in which Schlegel had published his early essay "On the Representation of Femininity in the Greek Poets." Others, like *Pomona*, the first independent women's journal, founded in 1783 by Sophie LaRoche, were edited by women for women.⁵¹ And other journals, like *Teutsche Merkur*, which were designed for a general audience, included women both as members of the target audience, and also as writers. *Teutsche Merkur* was one of the most influential and successful journals of the period, and women were regular contributors to it both from the time of its foundation by Wieland in 1773 and throughout the period after 1797, when Böttiger assumed editorial control.

Women were, by and large, excluded from membership in the many reading societies and other types of clubs and associations that sprang up during this same period, and especially in the last third of the eighteenth century. Women were prominent, however, in informal gatherings and in the salons that flourished during the 1790s in Germany, and whose forerunners in France dated back to the seventeenth century. Salons, whose members in Germany were drawn principally from the educated middle classes, functioned as forums where women might participate as equals in discussions on a variety of literary, social, and political topics.

Although their numbers were small, the scholar or learned woman (*gelehrte Frauenzimmer*) and the cultivated woman of the salon (*Salondame*)⁵² were sufficiently prominent so that it was these two groups of women who recurred frequently and regularly in warnings against women's "miseducation" (*Verbildung*). Joachim Campe, for example, a liberal reformer and author of the popular and widely read *Fatherly Advice for My Daughter* (1789), attacked both "book learning" in women and what he called the "epidemic" of women writers.⁵³

The years of the debate on Athenian women as spectators, then, were also a period when women were prominent in Germany's intellectual and literary elite, and when the improvement of women's education was among the most prominent topics of discussion. And these factors influenced in turn the debate on women in ancient Greece—most clearly in the writings of Friedrich Schlegel, who had addressed himself to the topic of women's status generally in his essay on Diotima and in other writings of the same period.

In "On Diotima," Schlegel had written, defending the social practices of the Spartans and Pythagoreans, that "femininity, like masculinity, should be unified in a higher ideal of humanity," and he went on to ask, "what is uglier than the overadorned femininity, more repulsive than the exaggerated masculinity that is so dominant in our culture, our doctrines, and even in our better works of art?" (p. 92). He concludes his discussion by insisting,

51. DiFino 1990, 105–37.

52. See Albisetti 1988, 11.

53. *Ibid.*, 12; cf. Goodman 1986.

“only self-reliant womanliness, only gentle manliness, are good and beautiful” (p. 93).

Views like Schlegel's, however, were part of the cultural currency of the times; many of them had been discussed for years in a wide variety of books, pamphlets, and articles. The writings of Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft are the best known of these, and Böttiger mentions Wollstonecraft in his earliest article (p. 301). But there were similar and in fact more radical writings at the same time in Germany, by Theodor von Hippel (1799 [1792]), and, as a recent publication has established, in the Dutch Republic as well.⁵⁴

We have already taken note of Böttiger's sponsorship of female writers in *Teutsche Merkur*, which during these years was known as a liberal journal sympathetic to the cause of the French Revolution. Böttiger himself had published in 1794 an article in *Teutsche Merkur* comparing the “revolutionary women” of Rome and Paris, and another in 1795 on “Athenians and Parisians.”

An explicit statement of Böttiger's views on some aspects of women and contemporary social life does appear, however, as the sixth and last of the “general observations” in the 1808 essay on Athenian women as spectators. “We must ask ourselves,” Böttiger says, “whether this complete segregation of women from the company of men and from the theater really constituted such a great disadvantage for Greek society as a whole and for culture as many seem to fear” (p. 319). He goes on to reference the remarks of Ernst Brandes, whom he characterizes as “one of the finest observers of the female sex and of its influence on culture” (p. 319). Brandes, as Böttiger explains, was concerned with “the corrupting consequences of mixed society, where women are dominant and set the fashion,” and where, as a result “the male character generally is weakened and feminized” (pp. 319–20).

Brandes was a Hanoverian civil servant, the curator of Göttingen University after 1790, and, as a friend of Edmund Burke, one of the first German writers to criticize the French Revolution. Böttiger was citing from an 1808 volume of Brandes that dealt with the reasons for Germany's decline. More revealing, however, is Brandes' 1787 *Concerning Women*, which constituted one of the earliest and most sustained attacks on female emancipation. Brandes argued, *inter alia*, that the notion of an identity of male and female natures could be refuted by appeals to anatomical and physiological facts, such as women's weak brain nerves, the greater fluidity of female blood, and even the disposition of female corpses to burn more quickly on account of the greater number of loose and fewer number of solid parts in the female body.⁵⁵

The context, then, of Böttiger's discussion of Athenian women as spectators, changes markedly between 1796 and 1808. In the first article he had remarked on the riddle of the coexistence among the ancient Greeks of the “most elevated sophistication and the most refined delicacy of feeling re-

54. Vega 1996.

55. Cited from Epstein 1966, 233.

garding decency and impropriety, [extending even to] a kind of shyness and modesty before respectable women," on the one hand, and on the other, "such a high degree of rude vulgarity in the theater and lack of restraint in expression as soon as the men are alone together" (p. 306). And Böttiger had gone on in the same essay to suggest that, in Rome, opportunities for free association between the sexes had contributed to the development there of gallantry and the refinement of manners (p. 307).

By 1808, however, Böttiger passes a different judgment upon what he calls "modern Nordic romantic gallantry," and upon the "altogether different status in society [that it] assigns to women." Drawing for confirmation upon Brandes' reactionary theories, Böttiger now argues that the presence in the theater of "beautiful although often weak-nerved female spectators" (p. 320) has had a deleterious effect on the development of German drama.

A great deal more than Böttiger's outlook upon social questions, however, had changed between 1796 and 1808. Disenchantment with the ideals of the French Revolution had begun to appear with the Reign of Terror (1793–94). And Germany had been at war with France from 1794. But it was not until the devastating and humiliating defeats of Austria in 1805 and Prussia in 1806, and until the abdication of Francis II brought to an end almost two thousand years of the Holy Roman Empire, that the full impact of French supremacy was felt. It led, not so much to nationalism, as to a reinvigorated concern with cultural autonomy, for which political independence was regarded as the necessary prerequisite.⁵⁶ Thus, in the closing sentences of his 1808 article, Böttiger celebrates "the most liberal versatility in taste and judgment" as "the most precious property of our nation," which, he adds, must not be "endangered or destroyed by any prejudice or by the propagation of any erroneous craze, be it ever so insignificant." For our nation, he claims, "acquires everything in an unbiased way and judges everything only out of herself and according to herself" (p. 320).

By 1808 Schlegel had converted to both Catholicism and political conservatism; by 1809 he was in Vienna and was soon afterwards serving as Metternich's mouthpiece. Schlegel's sister-in-law Caroline Schlegel, who in 1793 had served as the inspiration for his Diotima, now thought of him as "a fat and indolent voluptuary, like a monk."⁵⁷

Thus, by 1808, when Böttiger published the third and last of his articles on Athenian women as spectators, political conservatism was in the ascendancy generally. And the emancipatory strivings of the first wave of feminism were being subverted everywhere into the ideology of separate spheres and the cult of domesticity which, in Germany, were associated especially with the so-called Biedermeier period. The tenor of Böttiger's 1808 remarks on women and theater, then, must be assessed in the light of this socio-political context, and with reference also to the increasing privatization of middle-class family life and the increasingly segregated character of middle-class clubs and other groups and associations.

56. See the remarks on Fichte in Sheehan 1989, 378.

57. Friedrichsmeyer 1992, 132.

CONCLUSION: 1808 AND AFTER

Böttiger's last article on Athenian women as spectators was written in response to remarks by August Böckh in his work on Greek tragedy (1808), and published shortly before Böckh founded at Berlin the philological seminar that became the model for those of the nineteenth century.⁵⁸ But Böttiger's essay of 1808 aroused no immediate response. When the question of Athenian women's attendance at the theater was taken up again, in 1837, it was addressed as a scholarly issue, in the pages of one of the recently founded specialized journals, the *Zeitschrift für die Altertumswissenschaft*. And it was debated according to the protocols of scholarship familiar to us: on the basis of the evidence alone, and without reference to contemporary social or political issues.

Little new was added, however, either then or in the decades of debate that followed. As Becker described the situation in 1840, in a learned essay on "Theatre-Going" appended to a chapter of his historical novel, *Charicles*:

All the passages bearing on the subject have been again and again brought forward in the course of the controversy, but it is worthy of remark, that among them all, there is not one positively deciding the matter either way. Those who argue against the presence of women rely mainly on the assumed seclusion of the sex, and also on the absence of clear positive assertions to the contrary; while their opponents rest chiefly on sundry passages that appear, in their natural sense, to refer to the presence of women among the auditors.⁵⁹

And we may wonder, indeed, how much has really changed since the question of Athenian women's attendance at the theater was first raised for debate in 1796. For punctilious attention to the evidence notwithstanding, the issue remains unresolved, even if recent scholarship has provided us with new and challenging frameworks for considering it.

What has changed, however, is that the intellectual vibrancy that characterized the early years of discussion, and the immediacy of the debate's relevance to the social and cultural issues of the period have disappeared from view. In this article, I have tried to establish a sense of what they once were—to show how the earliest debates on Athenian women's presence in the theater were conditioned by the project for the development of a German national theater, by German Hellenism and its idealization of the socio-cultural integrity of the ancient Greeks, and by the disputes concerning women's education and their status and role in civil society. The issue was not resolved then, any more than it was later or is now. But in the late eighteenth century, it mattered whether Athenian women attended the theater, as it does not now. And it is worth being reminded that it mattered because the answer to the question was relevant then to an historical drama that was to be played out on a new stage—that of the nation-state. The question of women's role on *that* stage, it may be argued, also remains unresolved.

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58. Turner 1980, 88.

59. Becker 1866 [1840], 404–5.

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