

Clarifying the Role of Women at *symposion* and *deipnon*.  
Laurie A. Kilker (Ohio State University)

Scholars on ancient dining are the first to admit that the ancient Greek word “*symposion*” might be over-used and not entirely understood by modern authors. Further, the term is often ambiguous in meaning when it is used by ancient authors. George Paul writes, “[t]he first [question] concerns a problem in the ancient evidence, namely that writers do not always distinguish clearly in their accounts between *symposion* and *deipnon*, or they use terms such as *synousia* or *convivium* where the meaning is not clear-cut.”<sup>1</sup> First, this paper reconstructs the components of a meal (*deipnon*) and drinking party (*symposion*) in ancient Greece in the Archaic and Classical periods.<sup>2</sup> Second, my specific contribution is to consider the sources that describe circumstances in which female dining is permitted and those cases where women were prohibited. Scholars have assumed that men and respectable women never drank together under any circumstances because sources attest to the fact that they did not do so at *symposia*; however, literary evidence confirms specific cases in which it was appropriate for men and women to dine together.<sup>3</sup> I show that the wedding banquet and religious celebrations, such as the *Thesmophoria*, had a dining portion. Indeed, the presence of dining rooms in many Greek sanctuaries, as well as the remains of animals and drinking vessels, indicates that eating and drinking took place there.<sup>4</sup> A re-examination of this evidence illuminates how women dined and clarifies the Greek terms used to describe eating and drinking.<sup>5</sup> This study, therefore, helps to identify women’s precise role at ritual and marital dining events and responds to Oswyn Murray’s comment that: “whether Greek citizen women were present even at major religious and family occasions needs investigation.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Paul, “Symposia and Deipna in Historical Writing,” in W. J. Slater, ed. *Dining in a Classical Context* (Ann Arbor, 1991): 158.

<sup>2</sup> Pauline Schmitt Pantel admits that modern authors use *symposion* too broadly (“Sacrificial Meal and *Symposion*: Two Modes of Civic Institutions in the Archaic City,” in Oswyn Murray, ed., *Symptica: A Symposium on the Symposion* [Oxford, 1999]: 15).

<sup>3</sup> Menander’s *Dyskolos* 950-952 and *Samia* 287-288, Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophistae* 2.71ef, Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* 241-246 and *Clouds* 407-408, Lucian’s *Convivium* 8, and Euripides’ *Heracles* 925-928.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Bookidis, “Dining in the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Corinth,” in *Hesperia* 68.1 (1999): 3.

<sup>5</sup> Most scholarship employs an anthropological rather than a philological approach; see, for example, Marek Wećowski, *Towards a Definition of the Symposium* (Rome, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Oswyn Murray, “Symptotic History,” in Oswyn Murray, ed., *Symptica: A Symposium on the Symposion* (Oxford, 1999): 6, n. 14.