The condition of women in Greece

Bruno Cariou Posted on July 6, 2013 by Elements of Racial Education

I. - The family

After having researched what the condition of women was among the Aryans of Asia, we will now continue our investigation, transporting ourselves to the Aryans of Europe and starting with our intellectual ancestors, the Greeks of our classical antiquity, the creators of the beautiful Hellenic civilization, representatives of a chosen race whose origin seems to have been Asiatic; but we must not forget that the Hellenes were preceded in Asia Minor, in mainland Greece and in the Mediterranean archipelagos, by precursors belonging to a more primitive race and probably Berber, at least for a large part.

If, now, without worrying more about ethnic origins, we only look for those of the Hellenic family, going back as far as possible, we can see that in Greece, as everywhere, political societies began, not by the small family. , relatively modern, but by the clan, which in Greece is called genos. By aggregating, the clans formed phratries and these, tribes and cities. Tradition cannot take us back to the very origin of the Greek clans; but it nevertheless notes that the Hellenic clans, at the dawn of historical times, still had common goods and a common burial; that their members were united by close solidarity and that the mutual obligation of vendetta sanctioned this solidarity; finally, that each clan had its leader, its archon.In protohistoric times, the family had already broken free from the original clan of confused kinship; but this family was still maternal and the degrees of consanguinity were regulated according to uterine filiation. A passage from Varro, quoted by Saint Augustine, says that, in early Athens, children bore the names of their mothers, and that the latter had the right to vote in the public assembly (1). Cecrops, the first, would have given a father to the children and founded the marriage ”. Following a flood, the Athenians, to appease Neptune, would have withdrawn from their wives the right to vote and forbidden to the children to bear the name of their mother. But the maternal family lasted a long time yet. Homer continues to distinguish fraternity through the mother, uterine fraternity, from paternal fraternity,and he considers the second relationship to be much closer than the first. So Lycaon tries to pity Achilles, telling him that he, Lycaon, is only the paternal brother and not the uterine brother of Hector, Speaking of their brothers, Helena and Briseis, in the Iliad, only speak of their brothers on the maternal side (Iliad , III, 235, XIX, 250, XI, 257, XII, 376, XXIV, 45. Odyssey, IV, 224). In Athens and Sparta, it was permissible for a man to marry his father's sister, but not his uterine sister. Herodotus also relates that the Lycians had a custom, in his eyes, very singular, "and which, he says, is not found in any of the other men: they bear the name of their mother and not that of their father. If one of them asks another who he is, the latter, starting from his mother, enumerates his entire maternal line ”(2). Herodotus further adds that if a female citizen marries a slave, her children are deemed to be of free birth, but that if a citizen, even the first, marries a foreigner or a concubine, her children are degraded ”.

The Greeks are justly renowned for their love of the city, their local patriotism; but this patriotism must have been, in principle, matriotism; for the Cretans still said metrie instead of peerage.

The primitive filiation, in Greece, was therefore purely maternal. When the paternal relationship was established, it strove to be also one-sided, but in the opposite direction. Thus Aeschylus, in his Eumenides, has Apollo expound the unilateral theory of kinship, in order to justify the matricide of Orestes. “It is not the mother,” says Apollo, “who engenders what is called her child: she is only the nurse of the germ poured into her womb; the one who begets is the father. The woman, like a foreign custodian, receives the germ and, when it pleases the gods, she keeps it. "Apollo gives a proof in support of his theory, unfortunately it is a mythological proof: the gestation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter:" She was not nourished, he said, in the darkness of the maternal breast .What goddess had ever produced such an offspring? "In his tragedy ofOrestes, Euripides still puts the same idea in the mouth of Orestes: "My father begot me," said Orestes, "and your daughter brought me to light, as an earth receives the seed that another has entrusted to her, but , without a father, there would never be a child. This theory, so risky, which we put under the patronage of the gods, perhaps because it was difficult to support with the help of human arguments, served above all to veil self-serving reasons: the desire not to not to dismember the family property (3). As long as this good remained inalienable, the family system had only a theoretical and secondary importance: at the most one gave some dower of some kind to the girl who passed in another clan or in another family; but, when a man's personal property was divided by inheritance among his children, it was very important for the brothers to oust their sisters.In Solon's time, the paternal parents already inherited by intestate, up to the 4th degree: in the absence of a male, paternal parent, the closest maternal relative comes to the succession; but, in the time of Isée, the law goes further; she refuses the mother any place among the heirs of her son.

However, the theory, which denied the mother any consanguinity with her child, was very apt to justify this exheredation. Moreover, Athenian law made it very easy to obtain male descendants, more or less fictitious. Thus the citizen, who had sons, did not have the right to adopt. Did he only have daughters? He could, on condition, however, that one of his daughters be married to the adoptee. Adoption was so favored in Athens that it was possible, even after the death of the adoptive father, by posthumous fiction and presentation of the adoptee to the members of the gens and the phratry, as one made of a new child. born. Likewise, in ancient Athens, when a citizen died intestate leaving only a nubile daughter, his next of kin had the right and the duty to marry him;but the first son of this marriage was considered the son of the grandfather, whose family he continued. In fact, the girl was not inheriting; she passed with the succession to the nearest agnate, who was to marry her. In case of previous marriage of one of the two, one resorted to divorce.

II. - Marriage in Sparta.

In the various cities of historic Greece, marriage ends up taking on a fairly uniform physiognomy; however, in Sparta, a conservative and even retrograde country, the conjugal union has particular features, which can proceed from ancient marriages between the communal clans of primitive Greece. Herodotus still speaks of a tribe, that of the Agathyrsis, living in the north of the Thracians and who, he says, had their wives in common. Their goal would have been solely to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood between them. In Sparta, the laws attributed to Lycurgus had also regulated marriage, especially for a political purpose. In the mind of the legislator, the modesty and sanctity of marriage had given way to the reason of State. The young Lacedaemonians wore a tunic,whose shape and cut had been combined to veil the nudity as little as possible; this sleeveless tunic only came down to the knees and was split at the bottom and side. Even, according to Plutarch, the young girls got rid of this tunic, yet so uncomfortable, while they indulged in certain games in the presence of the young men. Plutarch strongly approves this custom: "It was," he said, "a scare, which attracted young men to marry, I hear these games, dances and esbatemens, which the naked girls played in the presence of young men, no. not by constraint of geometric reasons, as Plato says, but by attacks of love ”. Certain other customs, the simulated or symbolic abduction of the bride "not not a little girl," says the Plutarch of Amyot,but a tall, vigorous girl, already ripe to bear children ”; the obligation of the young husband to see his wife only clandestinely for a certain time; the indulgence encountered even by the real kidnapping of another's fiancée, for example that of Percale, fiancée of Leotychides, by Democrat, whom Herodotus mentions as a very simple thing: all this seems to attest, that Sparta, marriage was instituted and considered above all from a demographic point of view. The thing becomes even more manifest, when we see how easily we lost interest in the conjugal fidelity of women, when the utility of the social body seemed at stake: "it was open to an honest man, who loved the wife of women. another, to see her wise, modest and bearing beautiful children, beg her husband to let him sleep with her to sow there,as in lush and fertile soil, beautiful and good children, who, by this means, came to have communication of blood and parentage with people of good and honor (4). "

To marry first, then to have children, beautiful children, in Lacedaemon, it was imperative civic duties. Hardened bachelors were noted for infamy: they were forbidden to attend public games; they were forced to roam the city in winter in a state of complete nudity. In their old age, no consideration was due to them. In an assembly, a young man refused to give up his place to Dercyllidas, renowned general: "You have no children," he said to him, "who can one day return the favor to me".

Doubtless these Lacedaemonian customs are not delicate; but they are those of a still crude people who have preserved traditions, survivals dating from a much cruder social state still (5).

III - The Athenian marriage

In Lacedaemon, marriage was, according to the laws of Lycurgus, an institution much more political than individual. It was doubtless the same in very primitive Athens; only the city of Minerve had remained less attached to the past, less closed to innovations and marriage there evolved more quickly. Before Cecrops, says the Athenian tradition, women were in common and no one could know his father. This assertion may be inspired by a confused reminiscence of community marriage between clans (6). But once the individual marriage was established, the city of Athens was careful not to lose interest in it. In Greece, moreover, and from one city to another, marriage was forbidden, unless there was a special agreement; the woman was a citizen, although in power, only a citizen could only marry one citizen,born in an Athenian clan, presented at birth to the phratry and accepted by it. It was only to poor citizens that we constituted public dowries.

According to an article of the laws of Solon, it seems that in return for the dowry, public or private, the City expected children from the wife, since the legal text is expressed as follows: "In case the legitimate husband d 'an endowed woman would be helpless, let the bride unite with the agnates of the bridegroom'. The dowry was the hallmark of legitimate marriage, so the word "endow" may simply mean "legitimize". Plutarch mentions, while blaming her, this law which is nevertheless of Solon, and of which he gives the text as follows: "If none, having married, according to the right which the law gives him, a rich heiress, is powerless or incompetent to carnally use and live with her, that he lets the woman live with whom she likes relatives of her husband. »The wife's loan made by the husband,does not even seem to have been very severely prohibited in Athens, since, in the biography of Cimon, the same Plutarch tells how this great man yielded his wife to Callias, a rich Athenian (7), who had fallen in love with her. Similarly, it is reported that Socrates loaned his wife Xantippus to Alcibiades (8). Finally, theoretically, in his Laws, in his Republic, Plato blames Minos and Lycurgus for not having declared common women (9).

Obviously, these customs can be social and mental relics of a very old period of community marriage, having existed before individual marriage. Other Greek customs would even support this view, for example, the custom, long preserved by the Lydians, of letting their daughters amass a dowry through prostitution before marrying in legitimate marriage.

During the monogamous period, which is also the historical period of Athens, the woman has only a very relative marital freedom. In general, the woman must then have a master. This master is, in the first place, the father; but, in the absence of the father, the latter's brother inherits this right and he can legally marry the orphan. Once married, the woman has her husband as her natural master. Before marriage, this guardianship function belongs, in Athens, to the closest male relative, whoever he is. In Attic law, the woman was legitimately married by the father first, then by the father's brother, then by the paternal grandfather. Marriage was only legitimate if the woman was given in marriage by her master, her legal guardian, father, paternal grandfather, paternal uncle. During his lifetime, the father could marry his daughter at his will;he could even bequeath it by will, as and with his property. In his plea against Aphobos, Demosthenes recounts how he was thus bequeathed with his mother and his sister: “My father Demosthenes, judges, left a fortune of about fourteen talents when he died, a son of seven years old, that was me, my sister, who had five, and our mother, who had brought fifty mines into the house. On the verge of death, he made arrangements for us and put everything (all these things) in the hands of Aphobos, here is, and of Demophon, son of Demon, his two nephews, one of his brother, the other of his sister ... To Demophon, he gave my sister and two talents payable on the spot; to my adversary, he gave our mother with eighty mines of dowry and more the use of my house and my furniture, etc. ". " All these things ",as the will says, that is to say the widow, the two minor children and the property needed to be under the tutelage of a master; the father had freely provided for this in his testamentary act. By giving his daughter to Demophon, he provided her with a dowry, according to custom. Of this dowry, belonging to a five-year-old girl, Demophon has and should never have that the enjoyment: it is the girl's own property, even after her marriage. By his will, the father of Demosthenes had thought of and provided for everything, according to the customs and habits of Athens at the time; but he had done so by having his wife and daughter as master. Moreover and in general, female persons were awarded prizes by males and, in successions, they only collected to transmit.The institution of the dowry or the dower in the time of Demosthenes is posterior to the laws of Solon, who had abolished it. By this measure, the legislator had claimed to remedy the plague of the dowry-runners; one would no longer have married, he thought, but poor girls, even very poor ones: “Besides,” said Plutarch, “he took away the dowries from marriages and wanted women to bring their husbands only three robbes with a few other furniture of very small value, without anything else, not wanting them to buy their husbands or that one feit trafficked of marriages, like other merchandise, to gain there, so that the conjunction of the man and of the woman pretends to have lineage and for pleasure and love, not for money (10).But Solon's intentions did not stand against the need to at least ensure the subsistence of the wife, so subordinate to the good pleasure of the husband. The dowry was instituted, declared inalienable, guaranteed by the goods of the husband. In the event of divorce and the woman's second marriage, the first husband gave the dowry to the second or paid the interest on it at nine obols.

The Athenian wedding ceremony was purely family-oriented. In the presence of all the people of the family, the father, or more exactly the master, declared to give the girl in marriage and thereby authorize her to renounce the worship of her ancestors.

The bride was therefore released from all ties with her family; she no longer had to sacrifice except to her husband's ancestors and home. She was taken to this husband's house, probably with the device described by Homer in his description of Achilles' shield. At the husband's door, the latter carried his wife over the threshold, for if she had entered the house of her own accord, she would have been likened to a stranger by this fact. Once introduced into the house, the wife's first act should be to perform the rites in front of the husband's home, in order to mark the fact that she had changed families. In Boeotia, a symbolic custom served to remind women that when they got married they were literally transplanted. They were taken to the marital home on a wagon, the tiller of which was then burned,to put it out of service and therefore back.

Once in her household, the Athenian of free condition, the only one whom one could marry, played a very withdrawn role. No doubt she was honorably admitted to the Thermophories; but she could not receive the parents, the friends of her husband, the foreign visitors without being authorized to do so by this husband and this one saw in her little more than a servant: in the Lysistrata of Aristophanes, a husband answers his woman who allowed herself to question him about public affairs: “That's none of your business. Shut up, otherwise you will be beaten… Weave your web ”. Strict fidelity was a duty for women; but the husband himself could freely associate with courtesans, hétaïres and foreigners, whom one could not marry, but whom it was allowed to court. A married woman remained a minor and, without her husband's permission,she could neither alienate nor bind herself beyond the value of a measure of barley. Later the women took their revenge in mercantilized Greece, when the property, mobilized to excess, could accumulate in the hands of the more able or the luckiest, when the lemmas could largely possess. Aristotle was already warning Greek husbands against the tyranny of their wives, but he only heard a sentimental warning. But Aristophanes, Menander, etc., portray something else to us: the arrogance of wives, rich heiresses, the insolence of money. In their writings, it is easy to pick up a bunch of typical quotes on this point.mobilized excessively, could accumulate in the hands of the most skillful or the luckiest, when the lemmas could largely possess. Aristotle was already warning Greek husbands against the tyranny of their wives, but he only heard a sentimental warning. But Aristophanes, Menander, etc., portray something else to us: the arrogance of wives, rich heiresses, the insolence of money. In their writings, it is easy to pick up a bunch of typical quotes on this point.mobilized excessively, could accumulate in the hands of the most skillful or the luckiest, when the lemmas could largely possess. Aristotle was already warning Greek husbands against the tyranny of their wives, but he only heard a sentimental warning. But Aristophanes, Menander, etc., portray something else to us: the arrogance of wives, rich heiresses, the insolence of money. In their writings, it is easy to pick up a bunch of typical quotes on this point.rich heiresses, the insolence of money. In their writings, it is easy to pick up a bunch of typical quotes on this point.rich heiresses, the insolence of money. In their writings, it is easy to pick up a bunch of typical quotes on this point.

In Menander, a husband cries out: “I married a witch with a dowry. I took her for her fields and her house and that, O Apollo, is the worst of evils ”. - "If, being poor, you marry a rich woman, you will be reduced to being at the same time a slave and poor". - "Cursed be the first who invented marriage, and then the second and the third and the fourth and all those who imitated them". But there is still, besides the arrogant woman and always according to Menander, the devout and spendthrift woman, who ruins her husband in costly and pious sacrifices with timpani, perfumes, golden cassettes to tighten his sandals, slave women lined up in circles, etc. - This is the marriage that can be called gynocratic, the historical period when the woman, the rich woman, takes her revenge from the Homeric age,during which the Hellenic husbands brought back to their house captives, women slaves, whom they made their concubines without worrying in any way about the rights, at least moral, of their legitimate matrons. Even women slaves, simply bought, fulfilled the role of domestic concubines: they had no position; their children did not inherit paternal property; they worked and openly shared the master's bed. This is what Achilles brutally says in the Iliad, refusing the priest Chryseis to give him back his daughter: "she will weave my web and share my bed"; but these poor slave concubines sometimes inspired love: "Me too," said the same Achilles, speaking of Briseis, which Agamemnon took from him; I too loved her with all my soul, although a captive. """which they made their concubines without caring in any way about the rights, at least moral, of their legitimate matrons. Even women slaves, simply bought, fulfilled the role of domestic concubines: they had no position; their children did not inherit paternal property; they worked and openly shared the master's bed. This is what Achilles says brutally in the Iliad, refusing the priest Chryseis to give him back his daughter: "she will weave my web and share my bed"; but these poor slave concubines sometimes inspired love: "Me too," said the same Achilles, speaking of Briseis, which Agamemnon took from him; I too loved her with all my soul, although a captive. "which they made their concubines without worrying in any way about the rights, at least moral, of their legitimate matrons. Even women slaves, simply bought, fulfilled the role of domestic concubines: they had no position; their children did not inherit paternal property; they worked and openly shared the master's bed. This is what Achilles brutally says in the Iliad, refusing the priest Chryseis to give him back his daughter: "she will weave my web and share my bed"; but these poor slave concubines sometimes inspired love: "Me too," said the same Achilles, speaking of Briseis, which Agamemnon took from him; I too loved her with all my soul, although a captive. "Even women slaves, simply bought, fulfilled the role of domestic concubines: they had no position; their children did not inherit paternal property; they worked and openly shared the master's bed. This is what Achilles brutally says in the Iliad, refusing the priest Chryseis to give him back his daughter: "she will weave my web and share my bed"; but these poor slave concubines sometimes inspired love: "Me too," said the same Achilles, speaking of Briseis, which Agamemnon took from him; I too loved her with all my soul, although a captive. "Even women slaves, simply bought, fulfilled the role of domestic concubines: they had no position; their children did not inherit paternal property; they worked and openly shared the master's bed. This is what Achilles brutally says in the Iliad, refusing the priest Chryseis to give him back his daughter: "she will weave my web and share my bed"; but these poor slave concubines sometimes inspired love: "Me too," said the same Achilles, speaking of Briseis, which Agamemnon took from him; I too loved her with all my soul, although a captive. "they worked and openly shared the master's bed. This is what Achilles says brutally in the Iliad, refusing the priest Chryseis to give him back his daughter: "she will weave my web and share my bed"; but these poor slave concubines sometimes inspired love: "Me too," said the same Achilles, speaking of Briseis, which Agamemnon took from him; I too loved her with all my soul, although a captive. "they worked and openly shared the master's bed. This is what Achilles brutally says in the Iliad, refusing the priest Chryseis to give him back his daughter: "she will weave my web and share my bed"; but these poor slave concubines sometimes inspired love: "Me too," said the same Achilles, speaking of Briseis, which Agamemnon took from him; I too loved her with all my soul, although a captive. "

Much later, in civilized Athens, free union persisted alongside legitimate marriage; it was even legal, since it was often preceded by an agreement relating to the property of the two contracting parties; but it did not include a dowry: this was the privilege and the mark of the legitimate marriage between Athenians.

IV. - The dissolution of marriage.

A. As a general rule, the lower the position of the wife in conjugal society, the more the law and customs place her at the discretion of the owner husband, the more at the same time adultery is considered criminal and the more it attracts those , and especially on those, who committed it, a cruel penalty.

However, in Greece, the woman was not only the pupil, but the subject of her husband, she was even the property, since he disposed of it by will, like a slave. On the subject of adultery, Homer, to whom we owe so much precious information on protohistoric Greece, only gives us the account of the adulterous loves of Venus and Mars, that is to say of what we can call the adultery of the great world, in Homeric Greece. We know how the jealous Vulcan, after having skilfully arranged invisible steel networks above his bed, feigned a trip, like a vulgar husband, a trip to Lemnos. Mars always on the lookout, took advantage of the opportunity; Venus did not resist, to resist is not in her character; but barely lying down, the loving couple was caught in the nets which fell on him and immobilized him.Without fear of scandal, Vulcan summons all the gods so that they can contemplate his catch. In this somewhat ridiculous situation, he was more angry than furious and swore to keep the culprits in his trap until Venus' father had returned to him the rich hymen gifts he had given him, by contracting this so reckless marriage; because it was mainly from the pecuniary side that he saw the accident. The people of the gods, at his hasty call, admired “the wonderful work of the prudent Vulcan”. In L'by contracting this imprudent marriage; for it was mainly through the pecuniary aspect that he envisaged the accident. The people of the gods, at his hasty call, admired “the wonderful work of the prudent Vulcan”. In L'by contracting this imprudent marriage; for it was mainly through the pecuniary aspect that he envisaged the accident. The people of the gods, at his hasty call, admired "the marvelous work of the prudent Vulcan". In L'Iliad , these Immortals are not at all scandalized and laugh at the adventure. “Vulcan,” they say, “will get the fine that is due for adultery. Apollo and Mercury find that at this price they would gladly afford the pleasure of sleeping with Venus; and these words redoubled the hilarity of the Olympians. Neptune, alone, does not laugh and intercedes with Vulcan so that he delivers Mars, of which he stands surety. Vulcan has little confidence in this promise; however, Neptune having formally undertaken to pay, if necessary, in place of Mars, all the pecuniary compensation which may return to the blacksmith god, the latter yields and delivers the lovers.

This curious story, which resembles a news item from our newspapers, seems to prove that the Homeric Greeks did not take adultery tragically and made it above all a matter of money. It is true that in the adventure of Vulcan, this unhappy husband had before him gods, whom death could not reach.

But we can infer from the anecdote that the deceived spouses of that time were not always bloodthirsty; although the laws of several Hellenic cities have enacted severe penalties against adultery. Among the Locrians, for example, a law of Zaleucus ordered that adulterers be put out of their eyes. Dracon, according to a law which was never abolished, delivered the adulterous lover to the complete discretion of the husband. Solon still authorizes the husband to kill the adulterer, in the event of flagrante delicto. At the same time, the legislator of Athens forbids fathers and brothers to sell their daughters or sisters, unless they have forfeited their honor as wives, which obviously included the case of adultery. In Athens, the woman, caught in the act, could not only be killed on the spot,but even to be deliberately put to death by the husband in the presence of witnesses. Atimy, civic degradation, struck any husband who pushed indulgence to the point of hiding his wife's adultery: then, no doubt, he was suspected of self-interested complicity. The lover could be imprisoned at the request of the injured party. He was only released on payment of a fine and a surety for his future conduct. Other cities had enacted moral penalties against adultery. A law of the Thurians authorized to name, in comedies, adulterers and no other person. In Cumes, a whole degrading ceremony punished the adulterous woman. It was first the exhibition on a stone serving as a pedestal, then a ride on a donkey, after which the culprit was brought back to the infamous stone, held to be "polluted" from that point on.As for the woman, she was therefore stigmatized with a meaningful epithet: Onobâtis. But the semi-cloistered life of the gynaeceum was, in Greece, to make the occasions of adultery rare; for the woman could not receive any stranger; even her husband's friends did not sit down at her table. It is not probable, that in Greece, the marriage was broken by the very fact of adultery, since the husband had to repudiate his guilty wife, on pain of atimy. But this right of repudiation granted to the husband was practically hampered by the correlative obligation to restore the dowry or to pay the interest thereon, at the rate of nine obols; not to mention that the guardian of the woman was justified in judicially claiming alimony. The wife, however, and this is a sign of advanced civilization (11), was allowed to ask for a divorce;then she had to appear in person before the archon and give him her written request.

B. Widowhood. - For the husband's heirs, widowhood entailed the same obligations as divorce; since the dowry was mortgaged on her property and that, during the husband's lifetime, furniture belonging to the wife could not be seized; but often the husband bequeathed his wife by will to a friend, that is to say, obliged her to accept, as a second husband, the man appointed by the first; a certain donation usually accompanied this bequest and made its execution probable, unless the woman's property could suffice to disinterested the legatee. In this case, the woman remained a widow, but only changed masters. In the absence of a second husband, she found a relative who had authority over her. This parent could even be his son and the imperious tone with which, in the Odyssey, Telemachus speaks to his mother,proves enough that the fate of the un-remarried widow was not always worthy of envy: “Go back to your apartment; take care of your work, the spindle, the canvas; order your wives to finish their task. The word belongs to men and especially to me who am the master here. This imperious admonition is addressed, however, to Penelope, that is to say to the model widow, fidelity itself, and it comes from Telemachus, also a model, the model of the sons. What brutal treatment was the widow in danger of being exposed to by coarse and greedy parents? The husband consequently kept silent an act of human foresight, by automatically marrying his wife by testamentary disposition. Women, moreover, were well aware of their humble situation; submission was usual for them, judging by the way in which Penelope accepts,in L'Iliad , the harsh mercurial of his son: "Penelope, quite moved, went up to her apartments, depositing in her soul the wise speech of her son". He was therefore a person perfectly trained in obedience to his master, whoever he was.

V. - Social condition.

Everything I have just said about marriage and the family in Greece, as well as the place occupied by women therein, gives us the idea of ​​a great moral and legal subjection, but usually without brutal oppression. Plutarch speaks, with some astonishment, of the humiliated condition of barbarian women, who, he says, neither ate nor drank with their husbands, never called them by name, etc. The Athenians were not there; but the law and mores made them perpetual minors, forming one body with property, incapable of owning and inheriting for themselves, married by the will of a father or by his will, even by the will of a first husband; forced, in some cases, to marry the main agnate of the family. The right to divorce, in principle left to women, was most often,for them, an illusory right.

Their education, moreover, predisposed them to this passive and self-effacing role. Athens did not have schools for girls; in distinguished families, they received only reading and writing lessons. In ordinary families, the mother, herself uneducated, gave her daughters some popular notions of religion; above all she tried to make them housewives by teaching them to spin, weave, and sew. Half-cloistered in the gynaeceum, the girls lived apart, seeing little more than relatives or friends, meeting with young people of the opposite sex only officially, at religious festivals. Finally, they were married around the age of fifteen, leaving the husband to complete their education. On this point of female education,Sparta had been more liberal and more innovative than Athens, since she exercised all her youth, girls as well as boys, in the same gymnastic exercises, in dance and in music, in the broad sense that the Greeks gave to this word.

Married, Athenian women had first of all the moral obligation to breastfeed their children themselves. The greatest importance was attributed to this breastfeeding, which was to convey to infants both the physical and moral nature of parents. In its Economic, Xenophon shows us, in the form of a dialogue with Socrates, how weak was the moral and intellectual bond between women and their husbands; at the same time he lets us know what is, according to him, the ideal of the wife: "Are there people with whom you talk less than with your wife?" - There are very few. - When you married her, was it not a child or at least a woman who had seen nothing, heard nothing? - It's very true. Socrates, ah! How was she given me educated? She was barely fifteen when I married her. Until then, it had been subjected to the laws of austere surveillance. They wanted her not to see, to hear almost nothing, to ask as few questions as possible. Was it not enough, I beg you, to find a woman who knew how to spin wool to make clothes?Who would have seen how the task is distributed to the servants? For sobriety, Socrates, he had been perfectly trained there. From the entire dialogue it follows that all Xenophon asks of his wife is to be an attentive, careful, thrifty, hard-working housewife. Let her learn to spin the new slaves; that she runs the bakery, even while kneading with her hands, for example; that she distribute to the spinners their task and their wool; that it supervises the manufacture of clothing, the distribution of provisions; she will have done her duty. She is the hardworking bee, living in the hive; man is the dog, who watches over the sheep. - In Xenophon's opinion, the role of model housekeeper, which he attributes to the woman of the well-to-do class, goes quite far,until ensuring that the slaves do not have children against the wishes of the masters.

In our journey through mankind, we have so far seen the woman, most of the time enslaved, taking on a great deal, often the greatest part, of social labor, of mechanical labor. In Homeric Greece, it was still so, at least in the homes of the great, where all the painful occupations were the lot of women, but female slaves. In the palace of Alcinous, Homer shows us fifty female slaves not only weaving wool but turning the heavy millstone to grind the grain. In the palace of Ulysses, twelve female slaves are also responsible for grinding wheat; twenty go to the fountains to draw water; others work indoors. Xenophon's little economic dialogue teaches us that, on a smaller scale, it was the same in Athens among the wealthy bourgeoisie.On the condition of the women of the free proletariat, but poor, we are almost lacking lessons; but we know that their husbands often worked, in the workshops, with slaves and like them: the lot of women could hardly differ from that of their men.

There is still the category of downgraded, courtesans. We have the right to believe that their destiny was very similar to that of gallant women today: a short period of idleness and mercenary debauchery; then abject poverty. We are always told about the aristocrats of the profession, Aspasia, Lois, etc. But even among these, those who had not been thrifty ended very badly, if we judge from what has been said about the old age of Lois herself: "This Law is now idle and drunk. . All day long, she watches those who eat and drink. Proud, in her youth, etc., she goes, now that the beautiful whole of her person has fallen into ruins, to drink with the first comer. For her, a triobol is a fortune; she reaches out to everyone, etc. ".- The condition of women was therefore of the most modest in Athens and, however, the composition of Hellenic Olympus proves that at the origin of Greek societies, women were not considered inferior beings.

(…)

VII - Character and mentality of the Greek woman.

From all the facts and information that I have just cited and summarized, it follows, with great evidence, that, since the Homeric period, the Hellenic woman, the woman of free status, the citizen has lived in a state of legal subjection . First submitted to her father, who married her by authority, then to her husband to whom paternal authority was transmitted; confused with property, obliged to marry its heir; treated, most often without brutality, but always as a being of an inferior race, to whom education was useless, sometimes even ceded on occasion by her husband, the Greek woman was perpetually underage and subject to a master. Let us add that, semi-cloistered in a gynoeceum, she lived there without having almost any relation with her male relatives. Under such conditions,the Greek woman could hardly develop morally and intellectually; but she often had to acquire the faults, faults and even vices customary to the weak.

We have seen that the stronger sex had to undergo the consequences, when the women, or at least a good number of them, acquired economic independence and were able to put the tyrannical power of money on men. - It is interesting to know the impressions felt by this stronger sex, the judgments that men carried on women, while emancipated, but without having had neither the time nor the opportunity to ennoble their lower instincts, they drew from their ancient enslavement an unconscious revenge. Now, Greek writers have a very poor opinion of women in general.

In the Iliad, when a warrior wants to insult another, to show him a deep contempt, he calls him "woman". Thersites calls the Greeks "women". Hector, pursuing Ajax, shouted to him: "You run away like a woman".

However, if Homer pays little attention to women, it is above all from the point of view of warlike valor. Hesiod goes further: “He who confides in a woman confides in a thief”. The woman is therefore, according to him, an essentially perfidious being, which is more serious than lacking military courage. But here is a philosopher, the broadest mind of Greece, Aristotle. Now, he establishes a gradation, according to the development of reason, between the slave, the woman and the child: “The slave,” he says, “is entirely deprived of the faculty of deliberating; the woman has it but weak and ineffective, and the child has it too, but incomplete and imperfect. As is natural, it is especially the comic and satirical writers who have exercised their verve at the expense of women. As an example, I will cite Ménandre,of which only fragments remain to us but which abound in lines of biting criticism aimed at the fair sex. I will make a little anthology of it: “A girl is a very expensive asset, also difficult to keep and to invest. "-" There are many monsters on the land and in the sea; but the greatest of all is still the woman. "-" When a poor man marries a woman who brings him money, he does not take a wife, he gives himself up to his. " - " Do you want to marry; know that you will be very happy, if you are only a little unhappy. »-« Your life will be good if you don't have women. "-" Women only know one thing: what they want. "-" By women the most beautiful, the best ordered lives are destroyed. "-" A woman's jealousy sets the whole house on fire. "-" The sea, the fire, the woman:three plagues. "-" Woman "weed of life, a necessary evil. "-" Woman is a suffering that does not let go of us. "-" Nothing worse than a woman, even a beautiful woman. - The woman is a golden garbage. "-" Woman is the most charming of plagues. "-" For her husband, a wicked wife is a storm at home. - Most of these sentences, according to scholars, were falsely attributed to Menander; but they reflect his spirit well. In his comedies, Menander, the real one, does not however fail to criticize money marriages and those who make them: "We have the money brought to the table, so that the expert examines whether it is of good quality. , this money which will not stay five months in our hands; and the one who will be, throughout our life sitting in our home, we do not seek to reprove,we take it at random. - I chose these excerpts from among many others. We could add quotes from Aristophanes, even from Euripides; but the general meaning would be the same. All these comic, tragic, satirical, humorous judgments only prove that in the eyes of a great number of Greeks, the woman was an inferior being, impulsive, sensual, perfidious and light. However, a society where the majority of women deserve such criticism could obviously not survive (12). Greek women had no public life; the existence of the majority flowed silently in the shadow of the gynaeceum; It is therefore certain that this bitter criticism can only target a female minority, which should not constitute the elite of the sex. Finally, whatever may have been the moral value of women in Greece,we can affirm that it was the work of men and conclude by saying that a country, a large society always have the women that the men in this country and in this society generally deserve (13).

Charles Letourneau, The Condition of Women in Various Races and Civilizations , V. Giard, E. Brière, Paris, 1903, p. 408-433.

(1) It is necessary to emphasize that the uterine filiation described here is specific to the society of the matriarchal type of the time that Bachofen calls “pre-cecropsian”, in which Attica was still inhabited by those whom Letourneau qualify as “ precursors ”of the Hellenes and to whom he attributes a Berber origin; however, the pre-Hellenic substratum of Greece, which is referred to generically as Pelasgians, was not of Indo-European origin. Maternal right was supplanted there by paternal right, when clans of the patriarchal type and of Indo-European origin, such as the Dorians, the Achaeans and the, took over the Pelasgians at the end of the Bronze Age ( Thucydides, Peloponnesian War, 1, 12; Herodotus, 9) Therefore, the fact of presenting the customs of ancient Greece without "dealing with ethnic origins", that is to say without distinguishing, on the one hand, those which were typical of the Pelagian populations in the cults Dionysiacs and lunar spirituality and, on the other hand, those which were peculiar to the clans of Indo-European origin, is an aberrant error of perspective, which will be rectified whenever necessary in this chapter. (NDE.)

(2) See note 1.

(3) It is necessary to have a singularly “modern” and, therefore, out of whack spirit to consider “the desire not to dismember the family property” as a tendency based on “reasons” interested ”. (NDE.)

(4) This custom dates from the decadence of Sparta, a decadence which coincides precisely with the emancipation of the Spartan (cf. D. Astle, The Babylonian Woe , 1975, chap. “Sparta, the Pelanors, Wealth, and Women”) . (NDE.)

(5) Here again, it is not surprising that manly qualities such as austerity, warlike courage, rigid manners and frugality appear to be "crude" to a "modern" mind and, therefore, predominantly female. (NDE.)

(6) See note 1. (NDE.)

(7) Callias was above all a metic. (NDE.)

(8) Let us recall that Socrates, according to the descriptions given to us by Plato and Xenophon, had a crushed nose, protruding eyes, thick lips. But what betrays Socrates' non-Hellenic origins above all, more than his physical appearance, is his cosmopolitan thought. (NDE.)

(9) Let us not forget that Plato was the pupil of Socrates. (NDE.)

(10) The desire to base marriage on sentiment alone is one of the anti-traditional aspects of Solon's laws. (NDE.)

(11) From a patriarchal point of view, the legal authorization of divorce for women is, in a patriarchal-type society, only a sign of feminization and, therefore, of regression. (NDE.)

(12) More exactly, a patriarchal-type society in which women are not kept in their rightful place “obviously could not survive”. (NDE.)

(13) The author does not understand, or pretends not to understand, that these judgments do not relate to Athenian women in particular but to women in general. (NDE.)