

In Plato's final and longest work, the *Laws*, performance of song, poetry, and choral dance form a cultural infrastructure without which the legal system cannot succeed. In keeping with the critique of poetry in *Republic* II, III, and X, the Athenian argues that poetry has the power to corrupt the population and influence how the citizens interpret their laws (*Laws* 628e-631a). Thus, before establishing the laws and governmental bodies, the three interlocutors design a system of symposium performance, choral song/dance (*khoreia*), and education in poetry (*mousikê*), which disseminates the ethical beliefs necessary for the laws to remain free of corruption (Books I, II, and VII). This paper investigates the performances of one segment of the population, women. Unlike the limited and generally pejorative references to women in performance in the *Republic*, the women of the *Laws* sing and dance publicly from an early age in front of the entire population (796c); act as spectators, teachers, critics, and official judges of poetic and choral performances (798e); perform at religious festivals (794a-c) and symposium *syssitia* (796c); are thought to typify approved genres of song and dance (802d-803a.); and, if they have lived famously virtuous lives, are the subject of encomia (802a).

Studies of gender in Plato generally (Wender 1973; Annas 1976; Vlastos 1989) and in the *Laws* in particular (Morrow 1960; Strauss 1975; Bernardete 2000; Saunders in Powell ed., 1995; Levin 2000) focus on women's innate psychological capacities, presence in (or exclusion from) political office, and role in the military as a strategy to increase the city's defensive forces. In contrast, my analysis of women in performance builds on the work of scholars who stress the social and political dimensions of philosophical production (Nightingale 1995; Ober 1998). It is in the framework of democratic theater, where spectatorship, performance, and criticism constitute political acts and reinforce civic ideology (Goldhill in Winkler and Zeitlin eds., 1990), that one can best situate performance in the *Laws*. However, keeping with the prejudices of Laconizing Athenian elite, Plato opts for an undemocratic, Spartan model of citizenship in which, as Calame (2001) and Pomeroy (2002) have shown, women maintained a variety of legal and political rights and played a significant role in public performance. Having appropriated the politics of democratic theater within a Laconian model of citizenship and popular culture, Plato transforms performance into the context within which male and female citizens cultivate and learn to appreciate a notion of virtue which, as Bobonich (2002) has demonstrated, Plato revised in his final works.

My paper treats women in performance in light of Plato's Laconism and revised ethics. First, I reconstruct the role women play as performers, teachers, critics, priestesses, and subjects of song, poetry, and dance in Magnesia. Then, I focus on two particular performative contexts – *heortai* (religious festivals) and, the center of culture in Magnesia, *syssitia* (communal meals) – which reveal the strategy behind including women in performance. In the latter example, the *Laws* develops *syssitia*, the basic unit of Spartan political community, into the forum for the performance of symposium poetry by the Chorus of Dionysus (666b). In such *syssitia* the members of this chorus, who hold the highest offices in Magnesia, use poetry to persuade the citizens of basic philosophical beliefs. In Book VII, the Athenian declares that women are to have their own *syssitia* with their own *archousai* (806c). Often dismissed as 'ladies' daycare,' these *syssitia* suggest that women have their own symposium culture, mirroring their citizen status. In creating *syssitia* for women, Plato not only includes them in the most influential mechanism of popular culture, but also modifies a Spartan institution into one in which women's performance reflect their political status and educates them in the moral philosophy of the state.