

## Introduction

(trans. by Judith Hallett)

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The third volume of our journal is a special thematic issue, comprised of papers presented at a colloquium of the EuGeStA research network, held in October 2012 at the Fondation Hardt in Geneva, entitled “Sex and gender: questions of naming”. If the distinction between “sex” and “gender” is always at work in the field of gender studies, the assumption that sex refers to a biological concept, and gender to a cultural concept, no longer holds true. Like gender, sex is now regarded as a cultural construct as well. The goal of this colloquium was to engage with the question of sex and gender in antiquity from the perspective of language. By shaping the representations of a culture, language – as Giulia Sissa emphasizes – opens the way to our understanding of that culture. We are sharing here the initial findings of an investigation conducted into the meanings and values accorded to words that refer or are applied to women and men. Both provide various types of testimony to the ways in which the ancients thought about the differences between the sexes – even if the evidence is somewhat biased, owing to the male authorship of most surviving documents from that era.

What are the words whose usages can illuminate how the Greeks and Romans conceptualized, in their similarities and differences, the two sexes in terms of the body, sexuality, family, morality, social roles, political power? Our inquiry centers on two linguistic categories. Some

participants have studied the general terms that designate sex (παῖς, γυνή, *uir, femina, mulier...*), in focusing, on the one hand, on kinship relations (*filia, νύμφη, uxor, coniunx, maritus, auia...*), and, on the other, on markers of social status in relationship to the stages of human life (παρθένος, *uirgo, anus, uetula...*). These studies do not overlook relatively uncommon usages. Consider the Latin word *uxorius*, studied by Alison Sharrock. When employed as a substantive, it does not function as an adjective signifying “belonging to a wife” but labels a married man “under a wife’s control”, with negative connotations. Two of the studies included here retrace and analyze various discussions about sexual identity at different times: one from a specific vantage point, on a woman identified by her name Phaethousa; the other from a general perspective, on how one can recognize a παρθένος? Helen King reconstructs a series of readings produced about a case described in the Hippocratic corpus, involving a woman who suddenly sprouted a beard after her husband’s death and the cessation of her menstrual periods. King shows how contrasting opinions over this woman’s sexual identity rest on the signs proposed as markers of difference between the sexes. In this context, King cites and challenges a theory of Thomas Laqueur, who attributes to the eighteenth century an epistemological break resulting from developments in scientific thought: namely, that a single sex model, whose genital organs were placed externally or internally according to the degree of bodily heat, was at that time abandoned in favor of a two-sex model. After discussing the semantic field of the Greek words παρθένος and παρθενία, Giulia Sissa advances a new hypothesis, based on the medical evidence that formed the background to representations of virginity. She argues that ancient medical writers did not include “the hymen” in the anatomy of a healthy young woman. Because they therefore failed to identify what modern forensic medicine calls “the physical signs of virginity, they focused on a different kind of sign establishing that vaginal intercourse had occurred: pregnancy. Another linguistic category of interest is that of adjectives: those formed from nouns designating sex (*puellaris, uirginalis, anilis, matronalis*), those signifying personal qualities (*durus, mollis, ἀπαλός, ὠραῖος...*) and Greek epithets connected with religious cults, formed from the name of a female (Ἥραϊος) or male divinity (Ἄρειος), and at times applied to a divinity of the opposite sex.

This brief introduction will not summarize the different articles in detail. But it is important to highlight the choices by the contributors about the kinds of evidence and analytical methods that they employ, since these choices can be viewed as exemplifying the possibilities for research on “naming”, even if they do not exhaust these possibilities. The evidence examined consists mainly of literary, philosophical, medi-

cal, historical and epistolary texts, but also includes inscriptions such as sacrificial calendars, iconography and the discoveries of archaeological excavations. One cannot comprehend the cultic and cultural diversity of Greek cities, for example, without studying this rich body of material. Stella Georgoudi illustrates how these sources allow nuanced responses, on a case-by-case basis, to the intriguing question of the alternation of gender in the terms used for divinities.

From the perspective of methods, Craig Williams alone treats lexicographical classifications. He demonstrates, in regard to the adjective *mollis* and associated words such as *mollitia* and *mollire*, how the tools developed by linguists in the field of lexical semantics can assist us in supplementing the numerous pieces of evidence furnished by the *TLL* and *OLD*, supporting his claim with a reading of the language of *mollitia* in Catullus 16. A distinctive feature of the EuGeStA research network, and thus of this volume, is that it includes a majority of literary specialists who employ, in their studies of gender, interpretive methods developed in their area of research since the nineteen seventies and eighties. Consequently they have integrated their analyses of linguistic usage into key categories of analysis in literary theory such as the context of utterance, the relationship between author and reader, the historical and ideological background, and considerations of narrative technique and especially literary genre. Complementing the analyses of James N. Adams, Judith Hindermann conducts an investigation comparing the use of synonyms such as *femina* and *mulier*, *coniunx* and *uxor*, in related texts of the same literary genre: the letters of Cicero and the younger Pliny. Her study takes into account not only the context, but also the *persona* and the intentions of the author, considerations that allow her to clarify the reasons for choosing a given word, and the connotations of various terms. Several articles deal with one of the most productive fields of inquiry in recent Latin and Greek literary research: the opposition posited, by ancient authors themselves, between elegy and epic from the perspective of gender, not only in terms of theme, but also in terms of meter and style. Judith P. Hallett relies heavily on metrical evidence to advance a compelling argument explaining the choice of the noun *puella* by Horace and the Roman elegiac poets, as well as the connotations conveyed by this word. Stylistic analysis occupies center stage in the study of Florence Klein, who proposes an original interpretation of the feminine connotations associated with *mollitia* as a quality of poetic writing. Her article shows in particular how Propertius and Ovid actualized the potentially gendered dimension of the adjective *mollis*, a word that designates Latin verses written in the manner of Callimachus: by embodying the stylistic quality of sweetness and suppleness in the sensual walk of young women, celebrated in elegy

as *scriptae puellae*, who symbolize their own poetics. Owing to his focus on Greek choral lyric, Claude Calame adopts the perspective of historical anthropology, along with attention to contexts of utterance analyzed from the perspective of pragmatics, in his article devoted to the names for women in Sappho.

Most of the contributors to this volume foreground or at least implicitly address an important question about representations of gender: what is socially valorized or devalued, if not condemned, in regard to the body, or character, or behavior? James Robson, for example, asks what the comedies of Aristophanes represent as attractive in a young woman or boy. Donald Lateiner interrogates the compliments and insults directed at both sexes in the ancient Roman novels of Petronius and Apuleius. His essay offers a rich analysis of such nouns as *uir*, *homo*, *dominus*, *uerbero*, *stuprator*, *semiuir*, *puella*, *uirgo*, *femina*, *matrona*, *domina*, *anus*, *mulier*, *scortum* as well as such adjectives as *prudens*, *sceleratus/a*, *nequissimus/a*, *uirilis* and *uirginalis*. What makes a good husband? Alison Sharrock poses a new question, whose answer requires dexterity, since ancient authors were silent on this subject. Exploring a wide range of evidence, Sharrock accords particular attention to the figure of Vergil's Aeneas, called *uxorius* by the god Mercury. In the course of her subtle analysis, she advances, by considering the reception of this text, the hypothesis that different readers have been able to suggest different interpretations of the hero's conduct as husband of Creusa, Dido and Lavinia, successively.

The outcome of the investigations conducted in this volume is not merely the highlighting of rules. Inasmuch as one characteristic of literary texts is to multiply contrasting viewpoints, our contributors highlight various interrogations and debates in the ancient texts themselves, and emphasize not only how the meaning and use of words evolved from paradoxical and aberrant choices but also what occurred as a result: modifications in relationships between the sexes and shifts in social roles. Among the techniques utilized by the ancient Greeks and Romans was applying to one sex a term traditionally considered characteristic of the other. Jacqueline Fabre-Serris considers the example of the Latin adjectives *durus* and *mollis*. The Romans created etymological associations between *durus* and *uir*, in connection with *miles*, the Latin word for soldier: considering *duritia*, in the sense of "a hard life", as specific to a soldier". *Mollis* was frequently employed to describe the female body. How did the Roman elegists use these words? They describe their *puella* as *dura* in the sense of being "unfaithful or resistant to love", and they teach that the male lover must endure the hard life imposed by his *domina*, but must also try, by being *mollis*, to soften her by bringing her back into the amatory sphere, characterized by *mollitia*. In this type of study on the

exchange of gendered adjectives, it is not merely a matter of specifying the meaning that such adjectives have when applied paradoxically to a man or a woman, but also seeing what results from the perspective of amatory relationships. If the amatory relationships portrayed by the Latin love elegists do not have a social existence, they are nevertheless representative (and that is probably one of the reasons for the success of this literary genre) of an effort at questioning conceptions of the sexes and of gender relations, transmitted by the *mos maiorum*, a morality clearly challenged at the end of the first century BCE. Alison Keith has arrived at similar conclusions in her study of first century CE epic poetry. Valerius Flaccus, Statius and Silius Italicus adopt different female models inherited from their literary tradition – the mother weeping over the departure of her son, the sacrificed young girl, the frightening witch, the faithful spouse, the fighting Amazon – which they compare to standards of masculinity, in echoing the contestations of the positions and roles assigned to each sex in the Flavian era.

This volume of EuGeStA is not the only project launched by the research network of the same name. It was conceptualized as an initial illustration of studies to pursue on a larger scale. To this end, a forum for discussion will be posted on our website in early 2014. The contributors to the volume have written postings on various adjectives and nouns studied, in which they present a summary of the relevant analyses in their articles, with supporting citations. A call will be sent to associate members of the network to participate in this initiative and more widely to researchers in Gender Studies in Antiquity.

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