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A note on Alexis, fr. 42 KA and the use of κερκίς

Abstract

This paper presents a new reading of Alexis' fr. 42 KA from the comedy *Gynaikokratia*, with a particular focus on the use of the term *kerkis*. The term, which means 'section of the theatre', also has a polysemic reference to 'weaver's shuttle', a more commonly known meaning of the word. This reduction of women to their domestic roles finds parallels in other gynococratic comedies.

Il contributo offre una nuova interpretazione del fr. 42 KA di Alessi, tratto dalla commedia *Gynaikokratia*, con particolare attenzione all'uso del termine *kerkis*. Il sostantivo, che nel frammento indica una 'sezione del teatro', cela un riferimento polisemico alla 'spola del telaio', significato più comunemente attestato del termine. Tale riduzione delle donne ai loro ruoli domestici presenta paralleli in altre commedie ginococratiche.

I.

Alexis, fr. 42 KA is one of the two surviving fragments of the comedy *Gynaikokratia*¹. The title is quite explicit, referring to female rule or women overpowering men, albeit in a context that we cannot delineate. It is the only surviving title composed of -κρατία, and the noun itself is attested elsewhere in the 4th century only in a passage in Aristotle's *Politics*, a discussion about democracy degenerating into tyranny². The fragment by Alexis reads³:

¹ Alex. fr. 42f. KA, on which see the commentaries by ARNOTT (1996, 152), and STAMA (2016, 119f.), the latter also for updated references on literature about comic gynocracies. The title is also attested for Amphis (fr. 8 KA), on which see PAPACHRYSTOSOMOU (2016, 61-65). Since there are no elements to establish dating for either Alexis' or Amphis' *Gynaikokratia*, we do not know which of the two was staged first, nor what relationship there might be between the two productions, if any.

² 1313b34 καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν δημοκρατίαν δὲ γιγνόμενα τὴν τελευταίαν τυραννικὰ πάντα, γυναικοκρατία τε περὶ τὰς οἰκίας, ἵν' ἐξαγγέλωσι κατὰ τῶν ἀνδρῶν, καὶ δούλων ἄνεσις διὰ τὴν αὐτὴν αἰτίαν, «also the things that occur in connexion with the final form of democracy are all favourable to tyranny—dominance of women in the homes, in order that they may carry abroad reports against the men, and lack of discipline among the slaves, for the same reason» (Transl. RACKHAM 1932, 463). Significantly, Aristotle provides an evaluative definition of the label, rather than a descriptive one, that is, 'women getting out of hand', and the situation in which this is said to happen is even more revealing. It is interesting to note, concerning the democracy degenerating into tyranny in Aristotle's passage, that, among the 5th-century utopian comedies, Pherecrates' *Tyrannis* is also included, of which fragment 152 KA suggests that it could be a female dictatorship over men (for an up-to-date *status quaestionis* see now FRANCHINI 2020, 226-28, 232-35). Furthermore, also in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, men compare the women's takeover of power to tyranny at different moments (lines 618f. and 630f.).

³ The fragment and the apparatus are drawn from the edition by R. Kassel – C. Austin, *Poetae comici graeci*, Berolini-Novi Erboraci 1991, 47. Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.

ἐνταῦθα περὶ τὴν ἐσχάτην δεῖ κερκίδα
ὕμᾱς καθιζούσας θεωρεῖν ὡς ξένας

1 ἐσχάτην om. FS δεῖ CL : δὲ FS 2 ὕμᾱς om. CL ξένους Herw. in ed. Ar. Pac. (1897) II p. 169

There, around the last section (*κερκίς*), you must sit / and watch (the spectacle?),
like foreign women.

The fragment is preserved by Pollux (IX 44) for the use of *κερκίς*, in the context of a discussion about the nomenclature of various infrastructural parts of the theatre: προσαριθμητέον δὲ τοῖς δημοσίοις θέατρον, καὶ θεάτρον μέρος πρὸς τοῖς προειρημένοις (see IV 121) κερκίδα, ὡς ἔστιν εὐρεῖν ἐν Ἀλέξιδος Γυναικοκρατία — (fr. 42 KA).

It has attracted scholarly attention as it represents the only literary evidence regarding the access of foreign women to dramatic performances in 4th-century Athens⁴. As I will show, the lexicon employed in the passage is much more characterised than what it has previously suggested. The verb *θεωρεῖν* might not only imply ‘to watch’, but rather ‘to come from abroad as *theoroi* to attend a performance’, and it strictly engages with *ξένας*, since the *θεωροί* were notoriously foreign dignitaries.

Furthermore, scholars have identified features typical of ancient comedy, as opposed to what we can read from middle comedies. First, Richard Hunter has suggested that the group of women addressed by the speaker could constitute the chorus of the comedy⁵. Second, the fragment stands out for its meta-theatricality – an especially prominent element in the earlier stages of comedy – referring to a section of the theatre (τὴν ἐσχάτην ... κερκίδα) where the performance took place. Moreover, not only is *θεωρεῖν* a verb used for watching a performance⁶ – something the speaker meta-theatrically requests from fellow actors – but it might also imply a movement, namely ‘going somewhere to attend a performance’⁷, which could fit the addressees of the lines,

⁴ See further *infra*.

⁵ HUNTER (1979, 37). ARNOTT (1996, 151) seems to positively consider this insight.

⁶ Used both for athletic games (e.g. the Olympics in Ar. *Vesp.* 1382; Hdt. I 59, 4; VIII 26, 6; Xen. *An.* V 3, 7; Luc. *Tim.* 50, etc.) and theatre performances, see e.g. Ar. fr. 696 KA τοὺς Φρύγας (*scil.* Aeschylus) οἶδα θεωρῶν, com. adesp. fr. 1093 KA θεωρῶν ... κωμωδία; [And.] 4, 23, 7 θ. ταῖς τραγωδίας; Plat. *Phlb.* 48a5 θ. τάς τε τραγικάς, etc. On the semantic spectrum of the verbs of ‘watching’ a performance with a focus on Aristophanes see e.g. JAY-ROBERT (2016).

⁷ This is clear from the Aristophanic uses in the extant comedies: Ar. *Pac.* 342 ἐς πανηγύρεις θεωρεῖν; *Vesp.* 1188f. ἐγὼ δὲ τεθεώρηκα πάποτ’ οὐδαμοῖ, / πλὴν εἰς Πάρον (see BILES – OLSON 2015, 430, *ad loc.*: «The vb. means not just to be a θεωρός (‘spectator’), whether official or unofficial, but to travel in order to

requested to act «as foreign women» (ὡς ξένας⁸)⁹. We are informed of delegations of ξένοι who attended the Great Dionysia and were accorded the biggest privileges, among which the front-row seats: since the Classical period, «the clear majority of those in the front were citizen males and foreign (male) dignitaries»¹⁰.

The use of the feminine in Alexis' fragment poses three different points, the first linked to the long-debated presence of women in the theatre audience; the second implying the possibility for women to be assigned a separate area of the theatre, different from the men's one; lastly, that foreign women were also present and seated in a separate area as well.

As for the first issue, the long-debated presence of women in the theatre is now considered to be quite likely, as many hints in the dramatic and non-dramatic texts seem to suggest¹¹. Regarding the implication that women were seated at the back of the theatre,

serve as one»); *Vesp.* 1382 Ὀλυμπίασιν, ἡνίκ' ἐθεώρουν ἐγώ, cf. e.g. *Thuc.* III 104, 3 ἐς τὰ Ἐφέσια; VIII 10, 1 ἐς αὐτὰ (*scil.* τὰ Ἴσθμια), etc. The substantive θεωρός in turn qualifies someone 'sent' to attend an occasion such as a festival or games (e.g. *Dem.* 19, 128) or to consult an oracle (e.g. *Soph. OT* 114), and the difference from θεατής «spectator» is made clear e.g. by *Ammon.* Π. διαφόρ. λέξεων 226, 1 Nickau: 'θεωρός' καὶ 'θεατής' διαφέρει. 'θεωρός' μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ εἰς θεοῦς πεμπόμενος, 'θεατής' δὲ ὁ ἀγώνων καὶ θεάτρων. See VOELKE (2014, 137): «le terme θεωρός s'applique aux délégués envoyés par une cité pour la représenter dans le cadre d'une fête extérieure au territoire de la cité; quant au terme θεωρία, il s'applique à la fois au groupe des θεωροί et à la mission qui leur incombe, tandis que l'appartenance à une telle délégation et la participation à une telle mission s'expriment à travers le verbe θεωρέω». See moreover BILL (1901) and KOLLER (1958).

⁸ The adjective is not quite widespread in extant comedy referring to persons or personified entities. It is attested in Aristophanes for the Copaid eel (*Ach.* 892), for Heracles' mother qualified as foreign woman (*Av.* 1652) and for Euripides' Relative disguised as a woman (*Thesm.* 890, 893, 896); in *Pherecr.* fr. 122 KA a foreign woman likely appeared on stage (ξένη γυνή γραῦς ἀρτίως ἀφιγμένη); in *Nicostr.* fr. 33 KA a stranger woman is addressed by the speaker (νῆ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην, ὦ ξένη, / βλοσυράν γε τὴν ψυχὴν ἔχεις); in *Xenarch.* fr. 12, 3 KA a foreign woman seems to have interacted with the speaker's daughter (τουτὶ τὸ κακὸν οὐκ ἔστ' ἔτι / κακόν, τὸ θυγάτριόν τε μου σεσινάπικεν / διὰ τῆς ξένης); finally, in *Men. Sik.* 282, a foreign woman is the recipient of the exposition of the baby Stratophanes (ἐ]κρυπ[τε γὰ]ρ σὼμ' ἡνίκ' ἐξεπέμπομεν / πρὸς τὴν] ξένην σε τὴν τότε αἰτοῦσαν τέκνα). Generally speaking, the term qualifies someone 'external, foreign' to the city, see e.g. *DELG s.v.* ξένος.

⁹ This suggestion results from the combined use of θεωρεῖν and ξένας in Alexis' fragment. In post-Aristophanic comedy, the verb generally assumes the more nuanced meaning of 'watching as a spectator', cf. e.g. *Anaxandr.* fr. 48 KA καὶ τὰς ἀλεκτρούνας θεωροῦσ' ἄσμενοι, *Eub.* fr. 67, 3 KA ἐξὸν θεωρήσαντι πρὸς τὸν ἥλιον, *Alex.* fr. 103, 21 KA ἵνα θεωρῶσ' οἱ παρόντες τὸ στόμ' ὡς κομπῶν φορεῖ, *Philem.* fr. 78, 7 KA ἔτερον τό τ' ἀλγεῖν καὶ θεωρεῖν ἐστ' ἴσως.

¹⁰ ROSELLI (2011, 81); see also p. 86 for the composition of the προεδρία in the Classical period and pp. 119-25 for the presence of ξένοι – both as dignitaries and as metics – in the theatre. See further PICKARD-CAMBRIDGE (1968², 261), REVERMANN (2006, 165-67), ROBSON (2017, 71-74). Ambassadors from foreign states are reported as audience members e.g. in *Dem.* 18, 28 and *Aeschin.* 3, 76. Theophrastus (*Char.* 9, 5) testifies to the possibility for ξένοι to be hosted by Athenian citizens and to attend theatrical performances in their company: καὶ ξένοις δὲ αὐτοῦ θέαν ἀγοράσας μὴ δοῦς τὸ μέρος θεωρεῖν, ἄγειν δὲ καὶ τοὺς <υἱεῖς> εἰς τὴν ὑστεραίαν καὶ τὸν παιδαγωγόν, «When his guests from abroad have bought theatre seats he joins them at the performance but does not pay his part of the cost, and next day he even brings his sons and the slave who looks after them» (Transl. DIGGLE 2004, 95 and see further on p. 297).

¹¹ Relevant bibliography has been recently collected by GAVAZZA (2023, 81 fn. 46).

a relevant passage is Ar. *Pac.* 962-67: (Tr.) καὶ τοῖς θεαταῖς ῥίπτε τῶν κριθῶν. (Οι.) ἰδοῦ. / (Tr.) ἔδωκας ἤδη; (Οι.) νῆ τὸν Ἑρμῆν, ὥστε γε / τούτων ὅσοιπέρ εἰσι τῶν θεωμένων / οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεὶς ὅστις οὐ κριθὴν ἔχει. / (Tr.) οὐχ αἰ γυναῖκές γ' ἔλαβον. (Οι.) ἀλλ' εἰς ἑσπέραν / δώσουσιν αὐταῖς ἄνδρες¹². The fact that women could not take the barley grain thrown by Trygaeus might indicate that they were confined to a remote section of the theatre and could not be reached by Trygaeus' throw¹³. A scholion to Aristophanes' *Assembly Women* reports that an otherwise unknown politician, Phyromachus (PAA 966780)¹⁴, introduced a law assigning separate seats for men and women and for free women and prostitutes (*schol. Ar. Eccl.* 22c Regtuit ὥστε τὰς γυναῖκας καὶ τοὺς ἄνδρας χωρὶς καθέζεσθαι καὶ τὰς ἐταίρας χωρὶς τῶν ἐλευθέρων)¹⁵. Regarding this passage and Alexis' fragment, Roselli (2011, 174) notes that «the very layout of the theatre, however, suggests one way of explaining the idea of separate seating for women. Since civic officials (men) dominated if not entirely populated the front rows at least in the fifth century, this may have appeared as a 'men only' area. The presence of women elsewhere in the theatre may have thus created the impression that there were sections for men only and other sections that included women». Finally, the possibility that these women could be foreigners is unparalleled information in our sources¹⁶. Due to the absence of context, it is unclear how ὡς ξένας relates to the women addressed in these lines. However, in consideration of the role of ξένοι as dignitaries and the uses of the verb θεωρεῖν, Alexis may be staging a comic reversal: the ξένοι normally sat as guests in the front rows, whereas the fragment speaker alludes to ξέναι, perhaps implying that the women's place in the theatre was the last section, no matter their social role¹⁷.

¹² «[...] and throw the spectators some of the barley pips. (Sl.) (tossing pips) There. (Tr.) You've tossed them already? (Sl.) By Hermes I have; there isn't a one of these spectators who hasn't got a pip. (Tr.) The women haven't got any. (Sl.) Well, their husbands will give it to them tonight!». Transl. HENDERSON (1998b, 549).

¹³ See e.g. PICKARD-CAMBRIDGE (1968², 264); OLSON (1998, 254f.); REVERMANN (2006, 167); ROSELLI (2011, 179).

¹⁴ Also mentioned in the text, cf. Ar. *Eccl.* 20-23 ἡ δ' ἐκκλησία / αὐτίκα μάλ' ἔσται καταλαβεῖν δ' ἡμᾶς ἔδρας / δεῖ τὰς ἐταίρας κάγκαθιζομένας λαθεῖν, / ἄς Φυρόμαχος ποτ' εἶπεν, εἰ μέμνησθ' ἔτι. / τί δῆτ' ἂν εἴη; See HENDERSON (1991, 141); SOMMERSTEIN (1998, 140); VETTA (1989, 146f.).

¹⁵ However, the name of the politician is corrected by another scholium (22a-b Regtuit) in Kleomachos, a tragic actor: (Φυρόμαχος:) γράφεται "Κλεόμαχος". (22b) ... φασὶ Κλεόμαχον τραγικὸν ὑποκριτὴν.

¹⁶ Hence see the correction in Alexis' fragment of the feminine ξένας in the masculine ξένους by Herwerden (noted in the apparatus criticus *supra*).

¹⁷ ANDRISANO (1990, 19 and fn. 46), commenting on Alexis' fragment, already thought of a comic pun: «Con un comico ribaltamento: gli stranieri, in genere, sedevano, in qualità di ospiti, nelle prime file». See further ANDRISANO (1984-1985, 78 and fn. 27). On Alexis' fragment as evidence for women's theatre attendance see also PODLECKI (1990, 40) and HENDERSON (1991, 140).

II.

As anticipated, Alexis' fragment is quoted by Pollux due to the employ of the term κερκίς in the sense of «wedge-shaped division of the seats in the theatre» (as defined in LSJ⁹ s.v. III.), namely referring to each of the wedge-shaped sections into which the κοῖλον (the 'cavea', the seating area for the audience) was divided. This is the first attestation of the term in this sense, and it is otherwise very rare. It will only be found elsewhere from the 1st century BC in Philodemus of Gadara (*Hist. Ac.* col. X line 2 Dorandi), describing the fortuitous death of Heracleides in the theatre¹⁸:

τῆς κερκίδος σφάλλετα[ι] καὶ | φερόμενος ἕως εἰς μέσον | τὸ θέατρον καὶ ὑπὸ
βάθρου | πληγεὶς συνετρίβη τὴν | κεφαλὴν

He stumbled from his sector and, carried away towards the center of the theatre and striking against a step, shattered his head.

Yet the primary meaning of the word κερκίς is that of a «weaver's shuttle» (LSJ⁹ s.v. I.). The term is attested in this sense from the Homeric poems (Hom. *Il.* XXII 448, *Od.* V 62) and in almost all literary occurrences up to Alexis. The loom was commonly associated with women as a qualifying object. This is evident not only from many tragic and comic passages¹⁹ but also from prose ones. One example is found in Plato's *Laws* (805e6), where the Athenian describes the system underlying his *oikos-nomia*:

εἷς τινα μίαν οἴκησιν συμφορήσαντες, τὸ λεγόμενον, πάντα χρήματα, παρέδομεν
ταῖς γυναῖξιν διαταμιεύειν τε καὶ κερκίδων ἄρχειν καὶ πάσης ταλασίας.

We huddle all our goods together, as the saying goes, within four walls, and then hand over the dispensing of them to the women, together with the control of the shuttles and all kinds of wool-work²⁰.

Conversely, before Alexis, to refer to that section of the theatre, one had been limited to the adjective ἔσχατος, as seen in Ar. *Eq.* 704: ἰδοὺ προεδρίαν· οἶον ὄψομαί σ' ἐγὼ / ἐκ τῆς προεδρίας ἔσχατον θεώμενον «Oho, front-row seat! How I'll love seeing you exchange that seat for one in the last row»²¹.

¹⁸ See DORANDI (1991, 232).

¹⁹ Cf. e.g. Eur. *El.* 307, 539, *Tro.* 199, *IT* 223, *Ion* 747, 1419, *Ba.* 118, 1236, fr. 522, 1 Ka., Ar. *Av.* 831, *Ra.* 1316, etc.

²⁰ Transl. BURY (1926, 61).

²¹ Transl. HENDERSON (1998a, 313).

It is possible that Alexis' choice consciously operates on a *double-entendre* of the word κερκίς in connection of the stereotypical characterization of women as weavers, a motif also found in other comic gynecocracies.

In Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, when Praxagoras is gathering women to go to the Assembly, the Second Woman²² claims to have brought wool carding equipment to make the most of her time while waiting for the Assembly to fill up (lines 88f.): ταυτί γέ τοι νή τὸν Δί' ἐφερόμην, ἴνα / πληρουμένης ξαίνομι τῆς ἐκκλησίας, «That's exactly why I brought this along, to get some knitting done while the Assembly's filling up»²³. Praxagoras gets furious; she cannot risk her plan falling apart because a woman is seen doing something so blatantly feminine when she should be pretending to be a man. Moreover, the woman would have had a basket full of wool and a comb to perform the carding²⁴, difficult to hide, and wool was carded on the leg resting on a stool, with the robe pulled well beyond the – patently not masculine – knee²⁵. However, the woman does not seem to grasp the risk of the situation and responds to Praxagoras (lines 90-92): νή τὴν Ἄρτεμιν / ἔγωγε. τί γὰρ ἂν χεῖρον ἀκροώμην ἅμα / ξαίνουσα;, «Sure, by Artemis. Won't I be able to listen just as well while I knit?»²⁶. This scene, which we can contextualize, shows how even women determined to take power are unable to strip off their habits and step into male shoes, taking on a new 'role'.

Praxagoras also makes herself a reference to weaving, pretending not to know the outcome of the Assembly vote in her exchange with her husband at home, feigning surprise at the new status quo. When her husband announces that the city has been handed over to women²⁷, Praxagoras retorts (line 556): τί δρᾶν; ὑφαίνειν;, «For what job? Some sewing?»²⁸. Here, again, the metaphor is used in political terms with a negative connotation. While it is clear from the husband's words that παραδιδόναι τὴν πόλιν alludes to governing, Praxagoras plays on the common idea of a woman weaving to maintain the facade and pretend not to know anything²⁹.

²² On the characterization of this woman see ANDRISANO (2013a) and ANDRISANO (2013b).

²³ Transl. HENDERSON (2002, 275).

²⁴ See ROGERS (1902, 17); VAN LEEUWEN (1905, 18); USSHER (1973, 87f.); VETTA (1989, 152); SOMMERSTEIN (1998, 146f.); ANDÒ (2005, 82); CAPRA (2010, 190).

²⁵ As illustrated *e.g.* on the cup by Duris (ARV 435, 95) and that of the Stieglitz Painter (ARV 827, 7).

²⁶ Transl. HENDERSON (2002, 275).

²⁷ Lines 554f. κάθησο τοίνυν σηπίας μασωμένη / ὑμῖν δέ φασι παραδεδόσθαι τὴν πόλιν, «Well, sit down and chew some cuttlefish: they say the city's been turned over to you women», transl. HENDERSON (2002, 315).

²⁸ Transl. HENDERSON *l.c.* See USSHER (1973, 152); SOMMERSTEIN (1998, 186); ANDÒ (2005, 82); CAPRA (2010, 226).

²⁹ Referring to both scenes, SAÏD (1979, 40f.) discusses on «la permanence d'une nature féminine» in the women of the comedy, despite their aims.

In Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, the processing of wool is similarly evoked in the scene of women taking power. When the magistrate refuses to accept the women's takeover, Lysistrata and the Chorus propose a role reversal. Now, he will do what most characterizes women (lines 535-38): Γρ. Α. καὶ τουτονὶ τὸν καλαθίσκον. / Λυ. κᾶτα ξαίνειν ξυζωσάμενος κυάμους τρώγων· / πόλεμος δὲ γυναιξὶ μελήσει, «(Gr.A) And take this sewing basket too. (Lys.) Now hitch up your clothes and start sewing; chew some beans while you work. War shall be the business of womenfolk!»³⁰. As noted by Franca Perusino³¹, the reversal of roles is confirmed by the feminine reappropriation of the Homeric quotation that the Athenian husband had used to establish supremacy over his wife, relegating her to silence and weaving in line 520³².

Shortly after, when the magistrate asks Lysistrata how women intend to resolve the conflicts that have brought Attica to its knees, she responds using the metaphor of woolen balls. Jeffrey Henderson rightly points out that the metaphor is «enacted as a lesson in the use of woolworking equipment which the Proboulos was given in 535 ff.»³³. In other words, Lysistrata is explaining to the man how to use the sewing apparatus to illustrate her political agenda. Lysistrata weaves a metaphor that intertwines the lexicon of spinning with the contemporary political situation, likening it to a mass of raw wool that needs to be purified from unusable parts before being worked on further (lines 574-76). The focus shifts from war to city governance and politics (line 573), recognizing that good governance is a necessary condition for good foreign policy. Her strategy involves eliminating the useless or harmful elements to the city (line 575), gathering the positive elements for the city, including those, like discarded wool scraps from a basket, that had been previously excluded (lines 579-84), and putting them in the service of the polis, in its interest. The final metaphor, as well as the final objective, is to «weave a fine new cloak for the people», τῷ δήμῳ χλαῖναν ὑφῆναι (line 586)³⁴. In Lysistrata's indictment,

³⁰ Transl. HENDERSON (2000, 341). See further VAN LEEUWEN (1903, 79); WILAMOWITZ (1927, 154); COULON (1963, 143); SOMMERSTEIN (1990, 181); LANDFESTER (2019, 139); ROBSON (2023, 17, 29).

³¹ PERUSINO (2020, 224).

³² ὁ δὲ μ' εὐθὺς ὑποβλέψας <ἄν> ἔφασκε, εἰ μὴ τὸν στήμονα νήσω, / ὅτοτύξεσθαι μακρὰ τὴν κεφαλῆν· «πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεσσι μελήσει.» (= Hom. *Il.* VI 492), «And right away he'd glare at me and tell me to get back to my sewing if I didn't want major damage to my head: "War shall be the business of menfolk," unquote», transl. HENDERSON (2000, 229). See VAN LEEUWEN (1903, 77); HENDERSON (1987, 135); SOMMERSTEIN (1990, 180); ANDÒ (2005, 59-63); LANDFESTER (2019, 137). On the sociological context of the Homeric passage see now EDMUNDS (2023, 313).

³³ HENDERSON (1987, 141).

³⁴ Transl. HENDERSON (2000, 348). On the passage, see VAN LEEUWEN (1903, 86-88); WILAMOWITZ (1927, 157); COULON (1963, 145); HENDERSON (1987, 141f.); SOMMERSTEIN (1990, 183f.); ANDÒ (2005, 63-69 and 89-91 for the image reuse in Plato's *Politicus*); LANDFESTER (2019, 143-47); PERUSINO (2020, 231f.); ROBSON (2023, 47, 71, 86-91).

the world of women, symbolized by wool processing, intertwines with the male world of war and politics, appropriating it³⁵.

Returning to Alexis, the title of the play suggests a situation in which women impose themselves through an overpowering that possibly assimilates them to figures of prestige, here *e.g.* guests of theatrical performances (see the combined use of θεωρεῖν and ξένος). Women ('strangers' *tout court* to political life) could be subject of a pun by virtue of the comic play of a θεωρεῖν ridiculously confined to the last places. In addition, the invitation to women to sit (note the feminine participle καθιζούσας) around the κερκίς, in the sense of the 'section of the theatre', concealed a potentially disparaging, polysemic allusion to weaving as a qualifying action of women, or the womanly thinking of politics in woolen-terms. This is highlighted in Plato's passage quoted *supra* (*Leg.* 805e6), where it is clearly stated that the only control women can exert is that of «the shuttles and all kinds of wool-work» (κερκίδων ἄρχειν καὶ πάσης ταλασίας), as well in several comic and non-comic loci where the allusion is employed in political context.

³⁵ Not limited to comedy, VETTER (2005) expands on the women's work of weaving as a metaphor for a dialectical approach to the art of politics in ancient Greece from a political-theory perspective. Her study, ranging from Homer's *Odyssey* to Plato's *Statesman* and *Phaedo*, and incorporating Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, underscores the role of female characters engaged in weaving as emblematic of a dialectical approach to political discourse. Vetter highlights that these women embody a conversational style of inquiry with profound political consequences. Moreover, by examining the metaphor's usage by male figures, such as the Eleatic Stranger and Socrates in Plato's dialogues *Statesman* and *Phaedo* respectively, she reveals its recurring connection to the pursuit of a good life and the political frameworks conducive to it. Similar reflections are found in ANDÒ (2005, *passim*). See moreover EDMUNDS (2023) with relevant bibliography.

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