

**“Remembering and Remembered Women in Greco-Roman Meals”**  
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**I. Introduction**

The task for this paper is to undertake a reconsideration of the representation of women as participants in the practices associated with meals in the Greco-Roman world, with a particular focus on the first centuries C.E. and on the meal practice of early Christian communities. I conceive of this paper as a working document for our seminar, a “thinking paper,” in order to describe an investigative agenda for future work, not only about women at meals, but also concerning the role of what I call the performance of Christian tradition within the setting of the meal. The paper thus proceeds with broad strokes, gesturing toward a possible way of reconstructing and interpreting fragments of evidence.

Among the many aspects of women’s participation at early Christian meals that we may consider, the question at the heart of this paper pertains to the role of women in the formation and transmission of traditions about Jesus within the context of the meal. This question arises out the use of the “symposium model” for the early Christian meal and for Greco-Roman meals in general, as advanced by Matthias Klinghardt and Dennis

Smith<sup>1</sup> and comprising a core presupposition for the work of this seminar. The symposium model suggests a basic two-part structure to the meal, namely, the *deipnon* at which the food was consumed and the *symposium* proper, an occasion for philosophical discussion, entertainment, and various types of performance. In previous years I have suggested that we see the relationship between the two parts of the meal not solely in sequential terms, but also as interrelated such that the "meal" in total provides a generative matrix for the performances of the *symposium* proper. In other words, I have been interested in the ways in which the symposium model helps us to understand the formation and transmission of formal utterances, such as narrative, song, and sayings, about Jesus in early Christian communities. Elsewhere I have argued, in the case of 1 Corinthians, that the meal practices of the community provide the occasion for the development of narrative traditions concerning Jesus' suffering and death.<sup>2</sup> I mean here "occasion" in a strong sense, that is, as a set of practices of reenactment that contribute to the constitution of a community's identity and interact with the performative speech events of the tradition itself. In the context of this paper, I am interested in the ways in which thinking of the symposium as a generative matrix for performance traditions can help us understanding the role of women as participants both in the meal practices and in the practices of traditions of performative speech. Thus, I seek to understand the activity

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaft und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern* (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, *Jesus' Death in Early Christian Memory: The Poetics of the Passion* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 27–54.

of women in the meal as producers and users, as agents of tradition, in the process of remembering Jesus.

A guiding theoretical orientation in this paper and embedded in its title pertains to the poetics of performance. In this regard I take a cue from the study of the Homeric tradition, which points to a relationship between what is remembered and the process of remembering itself within a tradition.<sup>3</sup> That is to say, in the Homeric poems, the ways in which the heroes are remembered as performers of speech acts provide a point of entrance to understanding the poetics of performance informing the production of the poems themselves. Thus, in this paper, I want to inquire into the representation in texts of women as, in one way or another, as bearers of tradition ("remembering women") and also how women are remembered in relation to meals. On the basis of the interaction between the two poles (women who remember and women who are remembered), I suggest that we can begin to make a case for women as performers of tradition in the context of the meal in early Christian communities and perhaps elsewhere as well.

After a brief discussion of the working presuppositions of this paper, I first examine four "moments" for thinking about women as remembering and producers of tradition. Second, I turn to an investigation of two modalities whereby women are remembered in the context of the meal, each of which is suggestive of a conception of the woman as a performance of tradition or communal memory. Third, in order to understand these modalities and to make a case for how women might be performers of tradition, it is necessary to ask whether women's presence at some meals (or in some meal contexts)

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<sup>3</sup> Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

should be understood as normative or transgressive. How are they remembered? That is, can we ever understand women's performance at the symposium as in keeping with the values of the particular gathering, as those are figured in the text? Are there cases or sets of practices where women's presence and performance are assumed and not marked as transgressive either of "local" norms (i.e., the norms of that type of gathering) or the norms of meal practice in general? In each section of this paper, I want to raise *in nuce* a set of instances relating to each dimension of the investigation and then to outline a series of questions that may appropriately be asked.

Among my working presuppositions are the two that I mentioned above. First, that meal practice was one of the locations or matrices for the formation and transmission of Jesus-traditions as utterances, authoritative speech-acts, or performances within community. It is perhaps most convenient to label these as "narrative traditions," based on the indications in 1 Corinthians 11 and 15, but more work needs to be done on other types of authoritative performance, particularly song traditions, including lamentation, and the expansion of sayings traditions in the context of the meal. Thus, although I may refer primarily to narrative traditions, I do not intend to exclude other types of performance. Second, and again already flagged above, I presuppose that the symposium model for the meal provides a helpful way of looking at the interaction of meal and performance, of eating and speaking in sets of marked practices.

The other working presuppositions for this paper pertain particularly to women. One is that women eat, just as do men, and moreover that women eat in ways marked by form and practice in greater and lesser degrees. In other words, I presuppose that women in antiquity have meals. The question then becomes whether the ways in which women

eat and the occasions of their eating share anything in common with the practices of men. For the purposes of this paper, this question can be focused in terms of whether the forms and occasions of women's eating can contribute to our understanding of women as producers and transmitters of tradition.

Furthermore, following the recent work of Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald, I assume in this paper that, in their words, "women participated in all the activities of the house church in the first generations of the Christian era and that the house church was the center for worship, hospitality, patronage, education, communication, social services, evangelization, and mission."<sup>4</sup> This assumption may not be without dispute, but it shifts the burden of proof to the case of the absence of women from the activities of the house church. My final working presupposition is a corollary of this assumption, namely, that just because women are not mentioned in a text, it does not mean that they were absent from the real practices informing the text. Rather, the various levels of ideology with regard to social practice in general and meal practice in particular may function to erase mention of women where there is nothing marked about their presence. The work of Kathleen Corley and others has highlighted the ways in which the transgressive aspects of women's presence at meals are what cause them ideologically to be marked.<sup>5</sup> What I hope to do in this paper is to bring to the foreground the textual marking of women as performers in ways that are not necessarily transgressive, in order to show the remembrance of women in the practices of communal memory.

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<sup>4</sup> Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, with Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Church in Earliest Christianity* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 2005), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Kathleen E. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993).

## II. Remembering Women

The phrase "remembering women" emphasizes women as subjects in the practices of remembering, women as the producers and transmitters of traditions. It is hardly necessary to point out that this is one of the many areas in which the texts of early Christianity, as elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world, are largely silent. We may particularly note, however, the apparent silence concerning women as the "tellers" of traditions about Jesus in the context of the meal. I want here, nevertheless, to draw out a set of indications that suggest the possibility of just such a role for women in early Christian meal practice. In doing so, I am building on the work that others have done in recovering and reconstructing the activity and voices of women in the texts.<sup>6</sup> The four "moments" of "remembering women" that I propose here are the following: (a) women as bearers of narrative in the gospel tradition; (b) the possibility of women as producers of tradition in a meal context in Luke 24; (c) traditions of lament and Greco-Roman funerary meals; and (d) the singing of women at the meal among the Therapeutae.

(a) Women as bearers of narrative in the gospel tradition: An orientation to questions of religious practice in the gospel tradition suggests that we read the account less in terms of what really happened around Jesus and far more for what they refract of the community practices of the time of their writing.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, the ways in which women are figured as tellers of a story about Jesus provide a starting point for thinking

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<sup>6</sup> Notably the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Bernadette Brooten, Karen King, Antoinette Clark Wire, Joanna Dewey, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, Karen Jo Torjesen, and Ann Graham Brock.[bibliographic details to be supplied later].

<sup>7</sup> This is also one of Kathleen Corley's methodological presuppositions in tracing evidence of social conflict through the accounts of women at meals in the synoptic tradition.

about women as active producers of a community's memory. Chief among these moments in the canonical gospels are the accounts of the women at the empty tomb, where the action of women as those who tell others about Jesus' resurrection is emphasized. Matt 28:10 and John 20:18 are the most straightforward in that they do not problematize the women as the bearers of the news of the resurrection. It has been argued, moreover, that the role of Mary Magdalene in John 20 should be connected to Jesus-traditions legitimated through the apostolic authority of Mary Magdalene.<sup>8</sup> It is not so much the question of origins that interests me here as it is the indication of women as the bearers of a tradition about Jesus, indeed women as the authorizing figures for a particular trajectory of remembering Jesus. Luke 24:11 gives evidence of conflict around the authenticity of the women's account, both with its mention of the disbelief of those whom they told and the indication that the disbelief was because they thought it was "an idle tale" (λῆρος). Read into the Lukan world, this may in fact be a stronger indication of women's activity as those who remember in that it signals such activity as a point of contention.

I would also take up here the more complex question of women's activity as disciples in the Gospel of Mark. Noting Mark's use of διακονέω and ἀκολουθέω with reference to the women around Jesus (Mark 15:40–41), Corley argues that these terms bring out the "undertones" of conceptualizing the women as slave women, in faintly scandalous relationship to Jesus. She concludes, however, that these themes are

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<sup>8</sup> Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, Ca.: Polebridge, 2003); Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

subsumed within Mark's larger theological interests.<sup>9</sup> I would propose instead that the women around Jesus in the Gospel of Mark are figured as the ideal disciples, unswerving and able to take in the cross; their presence in household scenes throughout the Gospel is not, *pace* Corley, a matter of containing them within the private arena but rather placing them in the locale where Jesus communicates directly and intimately (cf. Mark 4:19, 31–35). The women are thus configured as the performers of true discipleship, those who reenact the "cross" through their actions. This, I propose, provides a clue to the enigmatic silence of the women at the end of Mark's Gospel, "[the women] said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8). In the context of performance, this conclusion is contradicted by the fact of the telling, suggesting indeed that the women were successful as bearers of the tradition after all. In conjunction with a configuration of women as those who reenact the cross by their discipleship, this points to the importance of women in the Markan community as the transmitters of a story of Jesus' death and vindication.<sup>10</sup>

(b) Luke 24 and women as the producers of tradition: On the principle that women may be present in the text even when they are not specifically named or noted, I turn now to the Emmaus story. I venture here a speculative but possible reading because this account is highly indicative of community practice. That is, although the story shows many signs of careful narrative crafting characteristic of Luke's literary style, it nonetheless narrates the process of mimesis central to the development of a story of Jesus' death in cultic context. It narrates the interaction of scriptural interpretation and

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<sup>9</sup> Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 83–107.

<sup>10</sup> See, in this regard, the work of Joanna Dewey (*Markan Public Debate* [Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979]) and Werner Kelber (*The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983]).

ritual action in the context of the meal, with Jesus portrayed as the authoritative initiator and interpreter of the cultic reenactment.<sup>11</sup> Here the meal becomes the generative matrix of the process of remembrance. It is thus important to inquire into the role of women as participants, even transmitters, in that process of reenactment and remembrance .

I would note, accordingly, that of the two disciples traveling to Emmaus only one is named and thus identifiable as male. The other remains both nameless and without gender, opening up the possibility that it is a woman. The reference in Luke 24:22 to the report of "some women of our group" does not preclude that this unnamed disciple is another woman, simply not one of those who went to the tomb. The return of these two to Jerusalem, after "recognizing" Jesus in the meal, places them among "the eleven and those with them" (Luke 24:33); similarly here the general terms does not preclude the presence of women among the group with the eleven. This is important in that this larger group likewise experiences the "recognition" of Jesus through the meal (in this case a meal of broiled fish) and the interpretation of the scriptures of Israel. Although we cannot be certain of women's participation in this meal, it is nonetheless plausible that Luke's account encompasses their activity as those who are bearers and transmitters of stories of Jesus' death and resurrection in the context of the meal. We might build a similar case for 1 Corinthians, namely, that the conjunction of women (however problematized in the letters) as leaders in the Corinthian community and the reflection on Jesus' death in cultic reenactment of the scriptures of Israel in the context of the meal makes plausible the case that in Corinth women too were those who transmitted early traditions of Jesus' passion.

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<sup>11</sup> See Aitken, *Jesus' Death*, 166–67.

(c) Laments and funerary meals: The prominence of women at the tomb in the gospel traditions as those who tell indicates a fruitful line of inquiry for thinking about women as producers and transmitters of tradition, namely, the practices of lamentation in conjunction with funerary meals as generative of narrative performance. As Angela Standhartinger also points out in her paper for the seminar,<sup>12</sup> the ritual lament uttered by women becomes the medium of remembering the dead in ancient and modern Greek tradition.<sup>13</sup> The poetics of the lament, as also the poetics of grave inscriptions,<sup>14</sup> frequently function so that the performer takes on the voice of the dead: the identity of one who remembers merges with the one who is remembered; the one remembered overtakes the voice of the one who remembers, so that the voice of singer and the dead become interchangeable.<sup>15</sup>

To the accounts of the empty tomb in the gospels, we may add the story of Martha and Mary at the tomb of Lazarus in John 11. What I would highlight here is not only the role of these two women as mourners, but the way in which John takes up their presence, particularly that of Martha, as a narrative site for developing theological dialogue concerning the resurrection. That is, the exchange between Martha and Jesus, like the other dialogues throughout the Gospel of John, represents the activity of the Johannine

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<sup>12</sup> Standhartinger, "Women in Meals," 19.

<sup>13</sup> Here I rely chiefly on the foundational work of Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), as well as Loring M. Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

<sup>14</sup> See Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> See also Martin, *The Language of Heroes*, xiv; Gregory Nagy, "The Sign of the Hero: A Prologue," in *Flavius Philostratus: Heroikos* (trans. and ed. Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean and Ellen Bradshaw Aitken; WGRW 1; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), xxxi–xxxv.

community, carrying on and shaping the Jesus tradition through the genre of theological dialogue. It is also notable that the dialogue results in one of the highest Christological affirmations, out of the mouth of Mary, in the Fourth Gospel (John 11:27). My point here is that a story about the practices of lamentation becomes the occasion for the presentation of performance. The possibility of conceptualizing such practices in this way may suggest that they functioned as a matrix of community memory for the development of the Jesus tradition.

The interrelation of practices of lament with the practices of funerary meals in Hellenistic and Roman culture requires far more investigation, particularly with regard to women as performers in the context of such meals. The importance of funerary meals, burial associations, lamentation at the grave in relation to "eating with the dead," and the prominence of the authoritative utterances of women in such community practices should be taken together. It is particularly significant in that the poetics of such practices allow for women's voices as the medium for the presence of the dead in relation to the meal of remembrance. This, I would propose, may also help us understand aspects of women's "prophecy" in early Christianity as a dimension of how women bear a community's memory.

(d) Women as singers in the context of the meal—the case of the Therapeutae: I want here only to allude to what I developed in great depth for this group last year, namely, the composition and singing of hymns (individual and choral) at the festal meals of the Therapeutae, as depicted in ideal terms by Philo in *On the Contemplative Life* (11.80–88). Philo not only portrays the meals of this community in terms of the symposium, he also highlights the performance of song after the eating is complete. He

does so, moreover, in terms that indicate these song traditions as participating in the performative reenactment of scriptural hymnody, thus indicating that he may understand the meal as an occasion for the composition-in-performance of song. What I would emphasize here in the discussion of women and meals is the presence of women as participants in these performances: they, along with the men, sing in the context of the meal. Moreover, the antiphonal alternation of a women's chorus with a men's chorus raises important questions an additional tradition of women as those who participate in a community's practices of reenactment and remembrance. There are no indications here of practices of lamentation, rather of ecstatic praise, but both as authoritative speech-acts in song may display the activity of women as performers in the context of the meal.<sup>16</sup>

### **III. Remembered Women**

In this section I take up the question of the modalities by which women are remembered in the context of the meal. I ask what various traditions "remember" around the figure of the woman at the meal, what cultural work the figure of the woman is doing within a particular text. I do not want to dismiss consideration of the socially transgressive dimensions of how women are remembered in relation to the meal, which Corley's work highlights. I wish here instead to set these aspects to one side for the time being in order to ask a different set of questions. I ask whether we can perceive any signs that the way in which women are remembered in stories about meals can help us understand women as the bearers of communal memory and tradition in relation to meal practice. I focus on three particular instances: (a) the woman who anoints Jesus in Mark

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<sup>16</sup> See also the recent work of Susan Ashbrook Harvey on traditions of women's choirs in late antique Syrian churches in relation to the eucharistic assembly.

14:3–9; (b) Livy's account of Lucretia in his history of Rome; and (c) the exemplary and problematic behavior of women at meals in the Roman ideology of the symposium.

(a) Mark 14:3–9: As was the case with the gospel traditions explored above, I take this story not as a vignette about an event in Jesus' life but rather as displaying the values and practices important to Mark and a Markan community. The concluding saying, "Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her" (Mark 14:9) not only grounds the story in the ongoing tradition (*anamnesis*) of the community related to this Gospel, but also immediately raises the question of what action it is that is "told in remembrance." Bearing in mind the context of the meal, we may ask if she is to be remembered because she has in some fashion transgressed the social norms of the meal, whether by her very presence as a woman or by her extravagant gesture of anointing Jesus, highlighting a conflict in economic values within the community. I would suggest that, although these may be sub-themes in the story, the story itself emphasizes a different reason why she is to be remembered. Jesus' statement that she has "anointed" his "body beforehand for burial" connects the woman's action to funerary practices and lamentation. In other words, what is to be remembered is her prophetic performance, displaying her understanding—in terms of the values of Mark's Gospel—of the character of Jesus' mission. Like the prophets of Israel, she enacts her "word," here performed in the act of anointing for burial.

For our purposes, we may say that in the context of the meal narrated in Mark 14, the woman becomes the performance. Her action comprises the performance portion of the symposium. What is more, inasmuch as her act partakes of funerary practices, we

may recognize the way she is here remembered as indicative of women's roles in rituals of lamentation and funerary meals. Although in this story the woman is silent, her status as the performer at this meal may be a refraction of the practices of women as more vocal performers in the authoritative laments connected with funerary meals. That is, how this woman is remembered points to her role as one engaged in the production and transmission of utterance in the meals of the death rituals.

(b) Lucretia Remembered: As an example of a woman as a performer of social values in relation to the meal, I turn to the figure of Lucretia as she is remembered in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* (I.57–59.13). The structure of the narrative is that of a contest (at a drinking party) among the men as to the relative virtue of their wives. The "daughters-in-law of the king," depicted as the antithesis to Lucretia, are discovered at a "luxurious banquet" (*in convivio luxuque*) with their friends, when their husbands arrived unexpectedly. Lucretia, in contrast, is found in the "hall of her house" spinning and weaving with her female servants; when her husband arrives with his friends, she "receives" them, whereupon her husband invites them to his table. This rather proper act of hospitality, however, becomes the occasion for Sextus Tarquinius to conceive of the idea of raping Lucretia. Her resultant suicide, out of her shame, further underscores the height of her virtue. Livy tells this story as part of his account of the liberation of Rome from tyranny and of the triumph of the Republic. The "freedom of Rome" is thus correlated closely with the virtue of Lucretia; the avenging of her death is what liberates Rome.

This is a rather different way of remembering a woman in relation to meal practices, but I suggest that in Livy's account Lucretia similarly becomes a performance. In her

case, she is "performs" the values and virtues foundational to the Roman Republic. Her story is, moreover, an act of memorial, a way of lamenting her death and yet upholding her ongoing significance for the society.<sup>17</sup> The centrality of the meal to structure value (virtue and vice) in the story, in my view, may be another indication of practices of memorial intersecting with meal practices. The question that I would like pose here is whether we can connect such narrative remembrances of women as performances in meals to women themselves as performers of acts of memorial in some types of symposia.

#### **IV. What Manner of Symposium?**

In the ideology of the symposium much of the attention to the presence of women focuses on the transgressive rather than the normative. In other words, under the axiom that "women are good to think with," we hear about women in the symposium when it is desirable to emphasize the frivolous, extravagant, erotic, or entertaining. The women in these contexts are accordingly figured typically as the courtesan, the "flute-girl," the foreigner (or one who adopts "foreign" customs), or the potential adulteress (the potentially available wife of another man). If the symposium is the model for the formal meal or banquet, including philosophical, religious, and funerary meals, then we do not assume that such frivolity, sexuality, or extravagance in entertainment is the norm for the symposium. Similarly we should inquire into how we might think of "serious" women present at "serious" meals. (I intend "serious" not as the opposite of "frivolous" but rather to designate the unmarked member of the pair, the "default," as it were, in contrast to

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<sup>17</sup> Nicole Loraux argues for an analogous link between civic values and memorial in funeral orations in classical Athens; see her *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

which the frivolous, extravagant, or erotic symposium is the marked form, emphasized as such in the ideology of the symposium.<sup>18</sup>). To put it another way, it seems to me that the ideology of the symposium remembers women as either exemplary or transgressive, but that it does so not only with regard to women's behavior but also to communicate social values for all.

There are sufficient indications among Roman authors that, at least for the elite, the presence of the women of the household at the formal meal was unremarkable. Achilles Tatius (1.5) depicts the arrangement of a home dinner party—an occasion for great flirtation—at which mothers and daughters were present along with father and son. Tacitus (*Annales* 13.16), although depicting a rather unusual dinner at which Britannicus was assassinated, nonetheless includes Agrippina and Octavia without seeming to remark on their gender as an element in the meal. Plutarch's account of the *Dinner of the Seven Wise Men* (150d) links modesty in food and wine at the symposium with the modest attire of the host's wife at the dinner. Similarly, in *On Love of Wealth*, Plutarch depicts the "everyday" dinner-party of the wealthy man, dining with his wife or comrades (συνήθιοι) as matching the toned-down luxury of the furnishings with his wife's modest dress. *Sophrosunê* is accordingly a virtue appropriate to both man and woman at the meal (528b). In *Advice to Bride and Groom*, Plutarch also commends the practice of husband and wife dining together as cultivating socially appropriate habits with regard to both food and company, "Men who do not like to see their wives eat in their company are thus teaching them to stuff themselves when alone. So those who are not cheerful in the

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<sup>18</sup> I derive the terminology of marked and unmarked from the linguistic theories of the Russian formalists, such as Roman Jakobson.

company of their wives, nor join with them in sportiveness and laughter, are thus teaching them to seek their own pleasures apart from their husbands" (140a, LCL trans.). In assessing these passages, I do not oppose the symposium to other kinds of meals. Rather if the symposium provides a model for understanding communal meal practice in antiquity, then the more ordinary meal of a husband and wife at home (with family and/or friends) may partake of the same structure and conventions, albeit on a more moderate scale.

My point in this section is that it is possible for Roman authors to use the presence of women at meals either as unremarkable or to speak of the values of moderation and *sophrosunê*. That is, in the ideology of the meal women may be configured as bearers of exemplary values. Within this ideology, such a way of remembering women may occupy a less prominent place than the conceptualization of the transgressive behavior of women used to demarcate a problematic set of symposium practices. This more serious way of configuring women's presence at the symposium may, however, be more indicative of the everyday ways in which women shared in meals. We need here to find good ways to negotiate the space between the ideology of the symposium and the lived practices. This is particularly important for the question of women's performance at the meal. If the model of women's performance is as an entertainer (the courtesan or flute-girl model), then this may obscure women's participation in philosophical conversation or as the producers of poetic or narrative traditions.

A link between philosophy and a (serious) women's presence at the meal and in the symposium proper may be evident as Plutarch takes up, in *Table-Talk*, the question "Whether philosophy is a fitting topic for conversation at a drinking party" (612e). In the

course of the discussion the practices of the Persians, the quintessential other, are cited as commended by those who would exclude philosophy from the symposium. Clearly this is the position to be denounced. In place of philosophy, music and theatricals (μουσική, ὑποκριτή) are substituted. Persian practice (aligned with the absence of philosophy and the presence of frivolity) is to associate in the symposium with women other than their wives. What is striking, however, is that the exclusion of philosophy from the symposium is connected to the exclusion of the "matron of the house" (οἰκοδέσποινα) from the symposium. "The pretext they [the opponents of philosophy] very solemnly employ is that philosophy should no more have a part in conversation over wine than should the matron of the house" (613a). One way of reading this passage is to assume that the woman of house is not to be present at the symposium, that in the comparison this is the "norm" upon which the opponents rely to make their case. I would propose a different reading, however, based on the coordinated example of the Persians, namely, a "proper Greek" includes both philosophy and the woman of the house at the symposium, whereas the "improper Persian" excludes philosophy and his wife from the symposium. Although we cannot on this reading make the case for the women as "serious" performers at the symposium, it nonetheless goes toward establishing women's presence as participants in the full set of meal practices.

If it is possible to remember women as present and participants in both what, for lack of a better pair of terms, I am calling here "frivolous" and "serious" symposia, then an appropriate avenue for investigation is where we might locate the variety of early Christian meals along this spectrum. Does the choice of foodstuffs, following Andrew

McGowan's work,<sup>19</sup> align with other values with the result that on many occasions women are unremarkably participants in moderate, *sophros*, and philosophically inclined meals? Is women's participation in such symposiastic conversation make them "performers" of philosophical theology (e.g., John 11). Does the prominence of performance traditions to do with the lamentation of the dead and their presence through the medium of song and narrative itself signal far more serious meals than are emphasized in the ideology of the symposium? What might be said about wedding meals as typological for an understanding of early Christian rituals configured as a ritual of the marriage chamber (as among the Valentinians)? How are women's wedding song traditions reshaped by women performers in such a context?

Moreover, if we maintain the model of the symposium for occasions when women gather to eat and to perform, then we should ask whether there are other ways in which these practices intersect with or run parallel to those of men. In the approaches that I have proposed in this paper I have tried to think in the first place of women and men participating together in the symposium and to glean some evidence of this interaction. It may be, however, more productive to consider, at least for some occasions, models of separate but equivalent meal practices. I would suggest two possibilities, each respecting the coordinated components of *deipnon* and *symposium* proper.

The first possibility is that women and men eat together, but then separate for the *symposium*, with the result being two separate gatherings based on gender for the latter portion. The question then arises what women do in their *symposium*; even if they are

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

primarily occupied with wool-working (as some texts indicate), then we should ask about performance traditions connected with such gatherings. (Material from other times and cultures is suggestive of the association of spinning or weaving with extensive song traditions among women.)

A second possibility is that the separate but equivalent model pertains to both the *deipnon* and the *symposium*. In other words, women and men gather for eating and performance, even on the same occasions, but do so separately. There are some indications of this model among ancient writings, particularly in reference to wedding banquets (see Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 14.644d) and imperial dinner parties (Dio Cassius 57.12.5). As with the previous model, we need to explore what women's performance in such gatherings may have consisted of. I would suggest, however, that the performance traditions with relation to remembering Jesus can reasonably function in all of these models in the mouth of women. Moreover, the traditions of how women are themselves remembered as performers and performances in the meal, even when as in the case of Mark 14 the woman is present with men, may nonetheless embody the practices of women performers in contexts exclusive to women, but known to men. That is, the narrative may not preserve the separation of gender in practice, but rather express in a single event the practice as belonging to the community as a whole, but actively practiced by one segment.

To conclude, my goal has been to try to make some headway in recovering the activity of women as performers in the context of meal practices, to see meals as a generative matrix for women's production and transmission of tradition. In addition to the indications of women as those who do the work of remembering, perhaps particularly in

the context of funerary practices, I have also attended to the way in which women are themselves remembered as performances of cultural values. The provocative and somewhat speculative move that I make, on the basis of approaches to the poetics of traditional performance, is the link the remembrance of women as performances ("heroes") with the activity of women as performers ("poets"). The dynamics of performance are capable of merging the hero and the poet, so that, in some instances, the poet takes on the voice of the hero and, in others, the hero is configured a poet. Along these lines I wish to suggest that how women are remembered in early Christian tradition helps us to understand their role as those who remember, that is, as the producers and transmitters of authoritative speech acts within the context of early Christian meals.