VI. GENDER

In the West, recent years have witnessed a big increase in accepting sexual fluidity, as manifested in the growing visibility of the LGBT community. It was different in antiquity, where a binary culture of masculinity and femininity prevailed, although reality will have been more diverse. Ancient historians and literary scholars have worked on concepts of masculinity in antiquity,[1] but more recent studies of Greek religion have mainly analysed positions and representations of women, in so far as they have focused on gender differences at all.[2] I will therefore first look at some elements of the female life cycle and daily life (§1), then consider representations of women in art and myth, and goddesses as possible role models (§2), and conclude with a discussion of the most important women's festivals (§3).[3] At all times, we should keep in mind, however, that the real life of women probably differed significantly from male ideologies of their worth and proper place. This means that, although I focus on female gendered roles, male gendered roles will play a role too, even if more indirectly than directly in this chapter.[4]

1. The life cycle and daily life

In Athens, gender differentiation was immediately apparent at birth,[5] since parents hung a woollen fillet on the doorpost for girls and an olive wreath for boys.[6] The symbolism seems clear: weaving and spinning were among the main activities of Greek women, whereas an olive wreath was the prize given to meritorious citizens in Athens and the male winners of the Olympic and Panathenaic Games. Regarding

[1] Rosen and Sluiter 2003; Van Nortwick 2008; Rubarth 2014.

[2] For surveys, see Scheer 2011; Foxhall 2013. Bjork-James 2019 provides a useful online bibliography.

[3] As with the chapter on myth, no modern study of Greek religion has a chapter on gender. This absence is also noted by Georgoudi 2005: 70 n. 6, but see Goff and Taylor 2004; Bodiou and Mehl 2009; Dillon, Eidinow, and Maurizio 2017.

[4] For a good introduction to many aspects of gender and history, see Downs and Rubin 2019.

[5] For birth, see Bremmer 2020a.

[6] Ephippus fr. 3; Nonnus, *Dion.* 25.220; Hesychius σ 1981. It is unknown whether this custom was widespread.

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young girls, little is known about religious activities in general, but we are reasonably well informed about their coming-of-age rituals, which have been well researched.[7]

But before we come to these, we have to note a typically Greek manner of looking at girls. As was the case with boys (Chapter IV, §3), adolescent girls were seen as 'untamed' fillies or deer and their initiation as a kind of 'domestication', which on vases was often represented as a 'capture' of a fleeing girl by a youth.[8] The metaphor is very clearly expressed in Euripides' *Hippolytus* when the chorus evokes how Aphrodite gave the girl Iole to Heracles, 'a filly, unyoked to the marriage bed, husbandless before' (546–7). Moreover, girls were compared to unruly heifers, and myth pictured both Io and the daughters of Proitos wandering around as cows.[9] Yet the metaphor of the marriage yoke suggests an important difference from boys' initiation. Despite the similarities, boys became free men on adulthood, whereas women were always imagined as being 'yoked'.

The 'domesticating' function of marriage was represented on the level of cult and ritual as well. Spartan girls worshipped certain prenuptial heroines, the Leukippides, whose name, 'White Mares', reflected their transitional position between youth and married adulthood, as did their sometime appearance as adolescents and as newlyweds. Myth also related their capture by the Dioskouroi, the mythical models of the young Spartan males, whom Alcman significantly calls 'tamers of fast horses' (fr. 2 Calame = 2 Page/Davies). The capture ended in marriage, which was a direct reflection of the Spartan wedding custom of 'kidnapping' the bride. The Thessalians even acted out the equestrian metaphor in their wedding ritual. Here, as Aelian (*c.* AD 170–240) relates

> a man about to marry, when offering the wedding sacrifice, brings in a war-horse bitted and even fully equipped with all its gear; then when he has completed the sacrifice and poured the libation, he leads the horse by the rein and hands it to his bride. The significance of this the Thessalians must explain. (*NA* 12.34)

[7] Calame 1997 (≈ Calame 2019) is still seminal. See also Sourvinou-Inwood 1988; Dowden 1989; Dillon 2003; Neils and Oakley 2003.

[8] For vases, see Sourvinou-Inwood 1991: 58–98; Stansbury-O'Donnell 2009; Klinger 2009: 104; Bernhardt 2014; Tsiafakis 2019: no. 5 (with further bibliography). On 'taming', see Calame 1997: 238–44; Topper 2010 (with latest bibliography).

[9] For Io, see Yalouris 1990. For Proitos, see, most recently, Cairns 2005; Fowler 2000–13: ii.169–78, 239–40; Bremmer 2019e: 40f.

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We need not share Aelian's despair, since the meaning of the gesture seems clear: among the horse-loving Thessalians a man expected his wife to act like a completely domesticated and tamed horse.[10]

Typical motifs of Greek female initiations were the prominence of aristocratic girls, seclusion, humiliation, choral dancing, physical exercise, and attention to beauty, as the following examples may illustrate. In Athens, four girls of noble families, the *arrhêphoroi*, lived on the Acropolis for a number of months (see below). In Attic Brauron, noble girls stayed for a while as *arktoi* ('she-bears'), in the sanctuary of Artemis, where they passed their time with dancing, running, and weaving. In Corinth, seven boys and seven girls of the most prominent families spent a year in the temple of Hera Akraia on the Acropolis dressed in black clothes and with close-cropped hair. In Ilion, two maidens of the best families of Locri had to spend one year in the temple of Athena Ilias, which they had to keep clean, while being barefoot, their hair cut short, and with only one dress to wear. Finally, on Keos marriageable girls had to spend the day in sanctuaries with sport and dancing, but at night they had to perform menial duties in other people's homes. All these rituals are most easily understood as transformations of initiations, since these are their closest parallels.[11]

In Sparta, female initiation lasted longer than anywhere else in Greece. Here the girls received a thorough physical training in palaestras and racing courses to become fit for producing firm and vigorous children. During the later part of their initiation some girls received a female lover. The seventh-century poet Alcman describes the principal girls of a chorus, Hagesichora and Agido, as being in love with each other (fr. 3 Calame = 1 Page/Davies).[12] Comparable 'lesbian' relationships existed on the island of Lesbos, where girls received prematrimonial training by means of dance and song in various circles: the poems of Sappho, the 'mistress' of one of these circles, testify to her passionate love for some of her pupils.[13]

[10] For the Leukippides, see Prange 1992; Calame 1997: 185–91; Baldassi 2018. On 'kidnapping', see Bremmer and Horsfall 1987: 110 (Bremmer). For Thessaly, see Aelian as translated by Scholfield 1959.

[11] For Athens/Attica, see Burkert 2004b: 119–21; Parker 2005: 228–49. For Corinth, see Calame 1997: 120–1. For Ilion, see Graf 2000a. For Keos, see Plut. *Mor.* 249. For Magna Graecia, see Kleibrink 2017.

[12] For Sparta, see Ducat 2006: 241–5, 261–77; Nobili 2014; Calame 1997. For 'lesbian' love in myth and Sparta, see Calame 1997: 252–5.

[13] See Lardinois 1989, 2010; duBois 1995; Caciagli 2011: 97–133.

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In the final part of their initiation, Spartan girls participated in the cult of Helen, who in Sparta was worshipped as a goddess. An important element in her service was running, which was not unique to Sparta: girls in Brauron ran races (see above); in Chios girls ran against boys, and during Hera's festival in Elis girls ran in a very short dress, hair loosened, and right shoulder and breast bare.[14] In Helen's service, the girls also performed choral dances during which these 'little Helens' sang patriotic songs and displayed their beauty. This connection between beauty and female adolescence was widespread. In Athens, it is well illustrated by the maidens on the Parthenon frieze, and an aristocratic, marriageable girl could simply qualify her function as carrier of the sacrificial basket in processions (*kanêphoros*) with 'when I was a beautiful girl'. In Arcadian myth, the exemplary female novice was significantly called Kallisto, or 'the most beautiful'. In fact, in several places female initiation ended with a beauty contest. The parallels suggest that originally the situation in Sparta had not been all that different, but Spartan males, being a minority, had intensified the traditional physical exercise and concern for beauty to ensure that their domination over the Messenian helots was supported in all possible ways.[15]

Although the ritual elements were largely comparable, local myths varied widely and tied the rites more closely to their communities. For example, in the myth of the *arrhêphoria*, which is widely but not universally believed to reflect an initiation scenario, the three daughters of Athens' first king Kekrops (Aglauros,[16] Pandrosos, and Herse), also called the Aglaurides,[17] grew up in the palace on the Acropolis. The goddess Athena gave them a basket to guard and sternly forbade them to look inside it, but one night the sisters opened the basket and saw the child Erichthonius/Erechtheus and two snakes. Panic-stricken by this view they cast themselves from the Acropolis. In addition to explaining the presence of precincts of Aglauros and Pandrosos on the heights and slopes of the Acropolis, this myth

[14] For Chios, see Ath. 13.566E. For, Elis, see Paus. 5.16; also Calame 1990; Serwint 1993; Mirón 2004–5 [2007].

[15] For Helen, see *SEG* 26.457f, 35.320 (?); Kahil 1988; Calame 1997: 191–202. On *kanêphoros*, see Roccos 1995. For Kallisto, see Henrichs 1988: 254–67; Dowden 1989: 182–91; McPhee 1992; Fowler 2000–13: ii.107–8. On beauty contests, see Graf 1985: 275; Gherchanoc 2016.

[16] For her name, which is sometimes spelled as Agraulos, see Fowler 2000–13: ii.454.

[17] *Pace* Parker 2005: 222 n. 17; cf. Eur. *Ion* 23; Hesychius α 611: Ἀγλαυρίδες· νύμφαι παρὰ Ἀθηναίοις.

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associated the *arrhêphoroi* with the heart of the Athenian tradition and motherhood: Erichthonius/Erechtheus was the first human king; a snake who was believed to guard the city was the most famous inhabitant of the Acropolis; and Athenian women put gold amulets in the form of snakes around their own babies, 'observing the custom of their forefathers and of earth-born Erichthonius' (Euripides, *Ion*, 20–1).[18]

Why did only a few aristocratic girls usually participate in these 'initiatory' rites and why was the coming of age of 'lower-class' girls not ritualized? An answer to this difficult question may perhaps be found in Crete, where only the aristocratic boy had a pederastic relationship, even though the other boys 'graduated' with him (Chapter IV, §3). Similarly, the relationship of Hagesichora and Agido seems to have been paradigmatic for the other Spartan girls. Evidently, aristocratic youths played a more prominent role in the ancient puberty rites than other adolescents. When in the course of the archaic period the puberty rites lost their original significance, perhaps because of urbanization, they were not totally abolished but reduced to a symbolic participation of a few boys and/or girls. It is only understandable that these few 'exemplary' youths were recruited from the nobility, considering its dominant position. In democratic Athens, such an exclusively aristocratic privilege became no longer tolerable, as is shown by a vote that all Athenian girls had to be a 'bear' at Brauron, reported by the fourth-century historian Krateros (*FGrH* 342 F 9). This discontent in Athens with the prominent place of aristocratic girls had already come to the fore in the archaic period, when non-aristocrats frequently dedicated statues of their daughters (*korai*) on the Acropolis to advertise their own status.[19] In many places in Greece, however, after the disintegration of the puberty rites the wedding seems to have become the main rite dramatizing the transition from youth to adulthood for girls of all classes.[20]

Married Greek women would soon experience how religion helped to sustain a social system in which they occupied an inferior position, but which, paradoxically, also enabled them temporarily to escape

[18] For this much discussed ritual and myth, see, most recently, Parker 2005: 219–23; Sourvinou-Inwood 2011: 36–50; Räuchle 2015; Meyer 2017: 267–88 (with detailed discussion of the literary, iconographical, and topographical evidence); Mackin Roberts 2019. There are also interesting observations in Sonnino 2010.

[19] Holloway 1992; Meyer 2007. Rühfel 1992, notes that girls' marble statues were often smaller than those of boys; see also Osborne 1994.

[20] Many studies, but see, especially, Oakley and Sinos 1993; Vérilhac and Vial 1998.

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from that system. Women were considered to be more susceptible to impurity and pollution, and giving birth was sometimes linked with defecating and urinating as the three important taboos on sacred ground, which illustrates a regular association of women with 'dirt' and pollution. This association also spilled over into secular life. In the Hippocratic tradition, for example, only female patients were 'purified' with excrements. These negative associations appeared in other ways too. Statues of goddesses were more often washed than those of gods, sexual abstention seems to have been more strictly enforced for priestesses than for priests, and women were more often excluded from sanctuaries, especially from those of macho gods and heroes, like Poseidon (Chapter II, §3) and Heracles (Chapter II, §2).[21]

Still, it was not all gloom for women in religion. Priestesses must have been respected everywhere, and decrees praising their services were widespread in all regions of Greece.[22] Some of them clearly fulfilled highly important positions. The priestesses of Hera in Argos were the basis for Hellanicus of Lesbos in creating 'a chronological scaffolding upon which to hang the events of Greek history from the very beginning'; Aristophanes' Lysistrata is widely, and probably rightly, believed to have been modelled on Athena Polias' long-serving priestess Lysimache; and in Delphi the Pythia must have been a prestigious position for local women, just as another ecstatic seer, the Sibyl, seems to have been active in (especially western) Anatolia. More recently, several inscriptions have shown that female seers were more active than the literary evidence would suggest. It may well be that our male-dominated evidence has given us a skewed idea of the importance of women in religious functions.[23]

As regards female sociability, fetching water from fountains must have long provided an opportunity for women to meet and exchange views and gossip. The importance of the fountain is well illustrated on vase-paintings and in mythology, where fountains are places for gods and heroes to meet mortal women, such as Poseidon and Amymone, Achilles and Polyxena, or Heracles and Auge.[24] Female

[21] On women and dirt, see Parker 1983: 84–5; Cole 1992; von Staden 1992b; Carson 1999.
[22] See Kron 1996: 140–55; Lindner 2003; Pirenne-Delforge 2005; J. Connelly 2007; Bruit Zaidman 2013; Leventis 2019.
[23] For Hera's priestesses, see Fowler 2000–13: ii.683–5 (quotation). For Lysimache, see Thonemann 2020. For the Pythia, see, most recently, Graf 2011; Chalupa 2014. For female seers, see Bremmer 2019e: 153–5.
[24] Richardson 1974: 179–80; Manfrini 1992; Pfisterer-Haas 2002; Kosso and Lawton 2009.

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festivals likewise enabled women to move among other women, albeit for a limited period only (below, §3). Greek males must have realized the importance that women attached to these events. We hear that Democritus did his utmost not to die during the most important women's festival, the Thesmophoria (§3), in order that his sister would not be prevented from attending (Diog. Laert. 9.43).

Women could also show their activities and trades by way of votives, as the many loom weights in sanctuaries show.[25] More importantly, they could even found private shrines and play an important role in the new cults and 'sects' that gradually infiltrated the Greek world – a phenomenon well attested for late antiquity, when women were instrumental in the spread of Manichaeism, a post-Christian world religion which survived until about 1500 in China and Japan, and, in particular, for early Christianity itself. Older Athenian women, who actively used their possibilities of wandering more freely in the streets than was allowed to pre-menopause women, propagated cults of Kybele and Sabazios (Chapter VII, §2).[26] If these women often give the impression of belonging to the lower social strata, this cannot be said of those who were interested in Bacchic teachings. It is rather striking that several of the Orphic Gold Leaves, which derived from Bacchic groups (Chapter VII, §2), have been found in graves of wealthy women in various parts of the Greek world.[27]

From a religious point of view, clearly more went on behind the closed doors of Greek women's quarters than was dreamt of in most scholars' philosophies. Yet male Greeks were not prepared to allow women too much freedom in religion, and festivals such as the Thesmophoria were closely supervised by males. In the fourth century the Athenians executed at least two women for introducing new cults and would have put to death the courtesan Phryne for the same reason, if her lawyer had not spectacularly bared her breasts in front of the male jury.[28]

[25] Ferrandini Troisi 1986; Sofroniew 2012.

[26] On private shrines, see Purvis 2003; Blok 2018. For late antiquity, see Bremmer 2017: 33–41. For old women, see Bremmer 2019e: 234.

[27] On Orphism and women, see Bremmer, 2019c: 80.

[28] On supervision of women, see Cole 1992: 113–14. For Phryne, see Gherchanoc 2012; Eidinow 2016: 23–30; Bremmer 2020c.

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2. Representations and role models

What images, attitudes, and associations of Greek women were mediated through religion? An answer cannot be exhaustive, but two areas especially deserve our attention.[29] Numerous Attic vases display women, especially young ones,[30] practising or participating in various rites, especially wedding rites (above, §1). They often mark the bride's beauty and thus reflect the Greek view of upper-class female adolescents (§1). These vases were given as a wedding present to the bride, and women may well have internalized this view and appreciated these gifts. Equally popular were vase-paintings of women performing libations for departing warriors or participating in funerals as mourners and, especially after the first half of the fifth century, as visitors at a grave. These vases present us with positive roles of women but nearly always being subject to or serving men.[31] This subordinated position also appears on Athenian marble votive reliefs of women, where they are portrayed more often than men in a suppliant position, although their clothing shows a greater variety than that of the males, thus granting them a certain degree of self-expression.[32]

Although positive images of women, then, were not absent, they did not dominate. Mythology, in particular, played an important role in spreading and sustaining negative images of women in all stages of their lives, starting with the myths surrounding the first woman, Pandora, who was credited with bringing evils such as disease and old age to humanity through her curiosity.[33] The recurrent motif of young girls falling in love and betraying their own family presents a more negative portrayal. It is already alluded to in the *Odyssey* (11.321–5), where Odysseus sees Ariadne, whose assistance had been decisive in Theseus' conquest of the Minotaur (Chapter V, §3). Another early example is Medea, who had helped Jason to procure the Golden Fleece. Neither girl fared well after her betrayal, as was to be expected: Greek myth could hardly have condoned such

[29] For Athens, see the nicely produced Kaltsas and Shapiro 2008.
[30] Meyer 2014.
[31] Bérard 1984; Shapiro 1991; Lissarrague 1992 (funeral, libation, marriage, and more); Merthen 2014; E. Giudice 2015: 127–54 (richly illustrated); Gaifman 2018: 74–9 (departure of warriors).
[32] Klöckner 2002.
[33] For the role of mythology, see Gould 2001: 112–57. For Pandora, see Bremmer 2008: 19–34; Steiner 2013.

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behaviour. In these and similar cases, the ambiguous action of the girls (helping and betraying) reflected the ambiguous position between their own and (future) husbands' families in an early society where the support of the family was all-important (Chapter V, §2).[34] In writing his *Antigone*, Sophocles shifted this type of family conflict to a level that fitted the occasion of a public festival attended by many Athenians, perhaps even by many Athenian women, as Antigone has to choose between her brother and the *polis*, a conflict that still elicits many differing reactions among modern students of the play.[35]

Sophocles had probably been inspired by Herodotus' account of Intaphernes' wife, who preferred her brother over her husband (3.119).[36] Other adult women were pictured as betraying their husbands, witness Eriphyle's betrayal of the seer Amphiaraos (Chapter III, §3) for a golden necklace, whereas other women, such as the Lemnian ones and the Danaids, murdered their husbands.[37] Similarly terribly, in the myths of the Phineids the sons are blinded by their mother or, sometimes, their stepmother, and in the myth of Ino Themisto killed her own children by accident while trying to murder her stepchildren. The collective imagination probably considered a murdering mother too harsh and therefore constructed the killing as an accident or replaced the mother by a stepmother, since in some versions of these myths the mother alternates with the stepmother. But they are not the only mothers who killed their children. Greek tragedy even put killing mothers, such as Medea and Procne, on the stage as, presumably, frightening examples. The message seems clear: Greek males and their offspring were highly vulnerable in the family sphere and the loyalty of their wives was never to be taken for granted, despite such positive examples as Penelope.[38]

We find similar ideas about women well beyond child-bearing age, as can be seen from the number of terrifying females who were represented as old women: Empousa, Erinyes, Graiai, Lamia, and Moirai.[39] From adolescence to old age, then, myth regularly depicted

[34] Bernhard and Daszewski 1986 (Ariadne); Neils 1990 (Medea). For betrayal, see Bremmer 2019e: 245.

[35] For opposing views, compare Sourvinou-Inwood 1990 with Foley 1996.

[36] For this example, with ethnographical parallels, see Bremmer 2008: 329–33.

[37] See Fowler 2000–13: ii.217 (Lemnian women); Villagra 2018.

[38] On Eriphyle, see Buxton 1982: 37. For the Phineids and Themisto, see Watson 1995: 236–7 and 224–5, respectively. For Medea and Procne, see Klöckner 2005; E. Giudice 2008; Räuchle 2008.

[39] For old women, see Bremmer 2019e: 244.

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women in more or less negative ways, even though some women could be monstrous and beautiful at the same time. It is important to note that these mythical representations were not seen as something from a distant past but explicitly connected with the present. When Odysseus meets Agamemnon in the underworld, the latter complains about his murder by his wife, Clytaemnestra, and comments: 'she has brought shame on herself and future generations of women, even if one of these were to be honest' (*Od.* 11.433–4, trans. Heubeck and Hoekstra 1989).

Myth not only depicted women as threatening the male order (of the city), but even located them outside the borders of the Greek world. The *Iliad* (3.189, 6.186) only alludes to a tribe of warrior women, the Amazons, 'women equal to men', but the formula looks old and Homer may not have told everything he knew. Other epics were more informative, and the *Aethiopis* related the fight between Achilles and Penthesileia, the queen of the Amazons.[40] In the archaic period, Heracles' battle against the Amazons became one of the most popular feats in the visual arts (Figure 12), only to be succeeded by Theseus. The few data from the tradition made the Amazons into a myth without much content which could be filled by successive periods with their most favourite heroes. This 'emptiness' is also reflected in the widely diverging interpretations of modern scholars: from nineteenth-century matriarchy via initiation to the contemporary 'Other'. Every age gets the Amazons it deserves.[41]

If mythology supplied few females as attractive role models for Greek women,[42] what about goddesses?[43] The armed Athena did not conform to a stereotypical femininity, and Hera's marriage to Zeus was not a real model of harmony, whereas Aphrodite was probably too much associated with physical love to be a proper example. Eileithyia, the goddess presiding over birth (Chapter III, §2), seems to have played only a functional role in the lives of Greek women, but Demeter, the goddess by whom women swore oaths, must have been more attractive to them, in particular because of her Thesmophoria festivals (below, §3). However, Greek parents never gave their daughters the name Demeter, since the distance between gods and mortals was normally

[40] See Pilz 2011a; M. West 2013: 129–62.
[41] Blok 1995 (with bibliography); Dowden 1997; Wünsche 2008; Martini 2013.
[42] See also Meyer 2010.
[43] Loraux 1992 is still fundamental.

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Figure 12. Battle of the Amazons against Heracles (whose head is missing) with his heroic friends. One side of an Attic black-figure band-cup, Phrynos Painter, *c.* 555 BC.

too great to give a child the name of a god (Chapter II, §1). In the classical era, the only exception to this rule was Artemis. From the fourth century onwards, girls could be called after the goddess, although perhaps not daughters of Athenian citizens, and the reason seems apparent. In the *Odyssey*, Nausicaa's pre-eminence among her friends is compared to Artemis' position among her nymphs (6.102–9). By naming a daughter Artemis, parents probably hoped for a similar pre-eminence among her contemporaries.[44]

The reason why goddesses were hardly satisfactory role models lies in one of the peculiarities of the Greek pantheon which we have not yet mentioned: representations of gods and goddesses in no way directly reflected the common role patterns of the sexes in human life. On the contrary, the Greek pantheon contained a striking asymmetry. Whereas the gods did not play important roles in typically female activities, goddesses were often connected with typically male ones. Admittedly, Athena supervised spinning and weaving, but she was also the goddess of artisans, closely connected with war, and always represented in armour (Chapter II, §3). Hera and Aphrodite (Chapter IV, §3) were also, in varying ways, connected with war,[45] and Artemis was the goddess of the hunt (Chapter II, §2). Burkert once argued that archaeological findings prove that this prominent position of goddesses in the male world goes back to pre-agricultural

[44] Masson 1990: 543–7.
[45] Argive initiates received a shield during the Heraia: see Burkert 1983: 163–4; Moretti 1991.

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hunting cultures, but the darkness of prehistory prevents any further understanding.[46] Greek mythology, then, did not offer many positive female role models, and this makes the role of female festivals even more important.

3. Women's festivals

The most widespread women's festivals were the Thesmophoria festivals.[47] I purposely use the plural because modern research regularly discusses the festival in the singular as if it was the same all over Greece, which clearly was not the case. I will sketch the festivals in outline and apply a certain 'ritual logic' in my reconstruction of the order of events during the festivals, but we have to remain aware that they were old, Panhellenic, and displayed local differences.

The festivals generally lasted three days, for which the Athenian names have been preserved, but they were celebrated in Sicily for ten days, since here Demeter and Kore occupied important positions in the local pantheon. In Athens participation was restricted to married women from noble families, but such social differentiation need not have taken place always and everywhere; in some places, girls also seem to have attended.[48] In Athens, the first day was known as Anodos because it started with the 'Ascent' of the women with their equipment, food, and shrieking piglets to the sanctuaries of Demeter, which were often situated on the tops or slopes of hills (Chapter III, §2). They built huts in which they stayed during the festivals, and made beds with twigs of withy, fleabane, and certain types of laurel – all antaphrodisiac plants.[49] On the level of myth, this absence of sexuality was symbolized in Demeter's gift of the Thesmophoria to an old woman (Corinth) or to the maiden daughters of the first king (Paros) – both belonging to categories on either side of licit sexuality. In a Peloponnesian version, the

[46] Burkert 2001–11: vi.104–21.

[47] See, most recently, Parker 2005: 270–83; Chlup 2007 (a sophisticated article to which I refer for the various levels of meaning of the Thesmophoria); Bremmer 2014: 170–7 (thick description). Also Ruscillo 2013; Osek 2018; Patera 2020. I refer to these studies for the sources.

[48] Demetrios of Kallatis *FGrH* 86 F 6 (death of twenty-five girls during the festival); Cic. *Verr.* 4.99 (women and maidens perform sacrifices for Demeter in Sicilian Catane); Lucian, *Dial. meret.* 2.1 (courtesan and virgin attendance); Schol. Theocr. 4.25c (participation by maidens and women), if in garbled and clearly late text, which still suggests the possibility of local varieties and/or later developments.

[49] On huts and beds, see Kron 1988 and 1992: 620–3; von Staden 1992a.

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Danaids who had murdered their husbands during their wedding night had brought the festival from Egypt: an interesting indication of the festival's perceived 'otherness'.[50] Since the women had temporarily deserted marriage, the absence of sexuality was heavily marked during the seclusion – which may well have reassured the husbands.

The second day was called Nesteia, or 'Fasting', which the women spent without food, sitting on the ground, and without the usual flowery garlands. This is the day on which Aristophanes has situated a meeting of all Athenian women in his *Thesmophoriazusae*, although in reality Athenian women never celebrated the festival together but met only in their own demes.[51] As Versnel suggests, it fits the 'abnormal' character of the day that on this day Athens released its prisoners and suspended court sessions and council meetings: the 'reversals' strongly contrasted the 'Fasting' with the return to 'normality' on the last day, when fertility of land and humans became the main focus of activities.[52] And just as the death of Sophocles occurred on the most sombre day of the Anthesteria (Chapter IV, §3), so Plutarch located the death of Demosthenes on 'the most gloomy day of the Thesmophoria' in his *Life of Demosthenes* (30), even if probably wrongly.

Demeter's fasting during her search for Persephone came to an end when, in one version of the myth, an old lady, Baubo, made her laugh by lifting her skirt. As the Demeter myth was closely connected with the Thesmophoria in various places in Greece, it is attractive to connect the lifting of the ritual fasting with the reports about mocking, sham fights, and indecent speech during the festivals: the return to 'normality' had to be marked by a period of highly 'abnormal' female behaviour. Herodotus (2.171.2) mentions that not everything about the Thesmophoria could be freely told, and these 'secrets' may well relate to this part of the festivals. In any case, secrecy was an important part of the festival as the sanctuaries often had high walls, and various anecdotes told of the bad end of males who had tried to break that secrecy.[53]

On the third day, the Kalligeneia, decayed remains of piglets were fetched up from subterranean pits (*megara* or *magara*),[54] where they

[50] Serv. *Aen.* 1.430 (Corinth); Apollodorus *FGrH* 244 F 89 (Paros); Hdt. 2.171 (Danaids).

[51] On play and festival, see Bowie 1993: 205–27; Zeitlin 1996: 375–416. On meeting in their own demes, see Clinton 1996.

[52] Versnel 1993: 242–4.

[53] For Baubo, see Bremmer 2019e: 65 (recent bibliography). On walls and secrecy, see Bremmer 2019c.

[54] Robert 1969: 1005–7 and 1989: 289–90; McLardy 2015; Henrichs 2019: 3–9.

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had been left to rot for some time, and placed on altars as future manure. In addition to this concern for the fertility of the land, there was concern for human procreation: Kalligeneia was invoked as goddess of birth in Athens on this day. It is probably these positive aspects of the day which were celebrated with the sacrifice of pigs, the sacrificial victim appropriate to Demeter (Chapter IV, §2).[55] In a famous study, Marcel Detienne once argued that women themselves were not allowed to sacrifice but that sacrifice was strictly a male business. Yet literary, epigraphical, and archaeological (see Figure 13) evidence all attest to the contrary, and in Bronze Age graves women were buried with sacrificial knives,[56] even though in Sicily quite a few terracotta figurines have been found of women offering small bread, cakes, and fruit, suggesting that women perhaps practised non-animal sacrifice more often.[57] With the sacrifices, normality returned. The women had to return to their homes and their wool baskets: the temporary reversal of the ordinary had only reformulated the status quo.

If the women at the Thesmophoria might have behaved in an unseemly way at times, it was a very different matter with the maenads, the female followers of Dionysos in myth and ritual, whose ecstatic rituals took place every other year on mountains in the winter.[58] Greek myth abounds with startling pictures of their mad behaviour, culminating in the description of their murderous ecstasy in Euripides' *Bacchae*: running over mountains, moving like birds, handling fire and snakes, attacking men, and tearing apart animals, children, and even the Theban king[59] – although more in literature than on vase-paintings.[60] Literature and art have provided us with much information about these rituals, which are also reflected in some of the names of maenads on vases, such as the references to the nightly character of the ritual in the names 'Torch' (Lampas) and 'All night long' (Pannychis): apparently, the rituals could be relatively freely observed or talked about.[61] In recent times much attention has been directed to the disentanglement of myth and ritual in these reports; to

[55] Clinton 1988. For the connection with fertility of the land, note the dedications of ploughs and hoes in the Thesmophoreion of Gela: Kron 1992: 636–9.
[56] Detienne 1979. *Contra*: Kron 1992: 640–3, 650; Osborne 2000. Note also Flemming 2007 (priestesses of Ceres/Demeter).
[57] See Pautasso, 2020.
[58] For Dionysiac ecstasy, see Henrichs 1994; Gödde 2016.
[59] For the *Bacchae*, see March 1989; Versnel 1990: 31–205, *passim*.
[60] As noted by Heinemann 2016: 502.
[61] Kossatz-Deissmann 1991: 175–92.

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Figure 13. Girl sacrificing at an altar. Attic red-figure alabastron, Painter of Copenhagen 3830, *c.* 470 BC.

distinguishing those images of maenads which matched the visual experience of a contemporary viewer from those which were 'invented' by the painter or copied from other images; to the representation of the maenads in literature and art; and to the origin and function of the ritual. Let us look at a few elements of these discussions.

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By taking into account distinctions between myth and ritual (Chapter V, §3) and comparative evidence, we can often reasonably decide in what ways the mythical imagination 'processed' elements of ritual.[62] When in the *Bacchae* maenads are said to eat raw meat, a judicious comparison with the tasting of small portions of meat from domesticated animals in epigraphically attested maenadic ritual shows that the carnivorous women operated only on the level of myth. In the case of the ritual, though, comparisons with ecstatic rituals from all over the world strongly suggest that elements such as walking barefoot, headshaking, moving to shrill music and clappers, and singing in high-pitched voices were not invented by the ancient sources.[63] Regarding the representations on the vases, we can investigate which elements are consistently attested or note the lack of functionality of certain details. For example, long ago it was argued, not unpersuasively, that the consistency in the ways in which the women's poses in maenadic dances were pictured and their absence in other female Dionysiac representations implied that they reflected 'real life' dances. And when for no obvious reasons round cakes (?) appear at the shoulders of the 'idol' of Dionysos on the so-called Lenaean vases, they will hardly have been invented by the painter.[64]

It is clear that poets and painters have been much intrigued by the maenads. Homer compares Andromache to a 'maenad' when she rushes through the house in fear for Hector's life (*Il.* 6.389), and tragedy abounds with allusions to maenadism, especially in Euripides. Sometimes maenadism enables Euripides to let a female character move freely outside her house, as in his *Antigone*. In other cases, mythical maenads are used as a point of comparison for the frenzied behaviour of his male protagonists, as in the *Heracles*.[65] Vase-painters also showed great curiosity about the maenads but certainly not at all times.[66] The high points of interest seem to have been the end of the sixth century and the fourth century. Moreover, interest was clearly limited to certain contexts. Maenads are absent from white-ground lekythoi and, considering the interest of Bacchic mysteries in afterlife

[62] *Pace* Heinemann 2016: 593 n. 2.
[63] Bremmer 2019e: 251–77; McGlashan 2021 (forthcoming).
[64] I owe these examples to Osborne 2010a: 368–404 (interesting methodological reflections) at 377. For additional bibliography on the Lenaean vases and the cakes, see Tsiafakis 2019: 10, no. 10; also Heinemann 2016: 429–33. On dance, see Delavaud-Roux 1995, 2006; Toillon 2017.
[65] Kannicht 1992; Schlesier 1993; Seaford 1993.
[66] Moraw 1998; Fahlbusch 2004; Villanueva Puig 2009; Heinemann 2016; G. Giudice 2018.

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(Chapter VII, §2), it is at least noteworthy that maenads never appear on funerary pots.[67]

There is little known about the origin of maenadism, although a background in initiation is not unlikely,[68] but maenadic ritual, albeit with many local variants, was widespread in the Greek world.[69] It must have fulfilled various functions in Greek women's lives – that is, in the lives of 'upper-class' women, as the ritual was probably limited to that class. First, it gave the women the possibility of a genuine religious experience through their identification with Dionysos during the ritual. Second, the rituals provided occasions for leaving the home and staying with other women without the immediate supervision of males. Third, by going into a trance the women could perhaps reach a more authentic self-expression than in their normal fixed roles. Yet the limited occurrence of the rituals (only every other year), the restricted participation (see above), and the male supervision from a distance should warn us against overrating the importance of these rituals for Greek women, however fascinating they were for Greek males (and modern scholars!).

Our last festival is the Adonia, which took place yearly in high summer.[70] During the festival, women of all classes mourned the death of the divine youth Adonis with ecstatic, nightly dances and planted quickly germinating green salad stuff on sherds, which at the end of the festival were thrown into the sea. The cult, which served more or less the same functions as maenadic ritual, is attested first in the eastern part of the Greek Mediterranean.[71] It clearly derives from Syro-Palestine: witness the connection of Adonis' name with the Semitic title '*adôn* ('Lord'), and testimonies about the offering of incense to Baal on flat rooftops (Jeremiah 32:29). The growing of the gardens seems to have originated in the widespread agricultural custom to grow a few plants in order to test the quality of seeds, but it is obscure how or why this custom was incorporated into the Adonis ritual.[72] In myth, Adonis is painted in very negative colours. He is the product of incest, the toyboy of Aphrodite, a coward who hides himself

[67] As observed by Osborne 2010a: 387.
[68] Bremmer 2019e: 266–9.
[69] See the survey in Versnel 1990: 134–50.
[70] Parker 2005: 283–9; Reitzammer 2016; Cook 2018: 87–110.
[71] Hes. fr. 139; Sappho fr. 140a, 168; Panyassis fr. 22b Davies = 27 Bernabé; Antimachus of Kolophon fr. 92; Epimenides fr. 13.
[72] For all texts, see Bühler 1998: 463–73. See also Hiltebeitel 1988; Holes 2004; Vajda 2008.

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among lettuce plants, is passive in love affairs, and perishes in a hunt: from a male point of view not a very threatening figure. Did the women accept the male negative view or were there female voices whose independent opinions have been lost?

According to a female anthropologist, twentieth-century rural Greek women seemed to have internalized the male negative views about them.[73] There are really no indications that ancient Greek women had developed an alternative ideology.[74] One thing seems sure. As this discussion of the rituals, myths, and festivals has shown, cult provided only limited possibilities to Greek women for status, support, and self-expression. Lower-class women may have fared worse than aristocratic females in this respect, although they perhaps had more possibilities for self-expression by being able to work outside the house.[75] Mythology produced and maintained a stream of negative images about women. In the end, Greek religion was not so very different from the women-unfriendly spirit of Greek culture at large.

[73] Du Boulay 1986.
[74] *Contra* Winkler 1990: 188–209, who drew his modern parallels not from rural areas but from circles that had already come into contact with Western ideas.
[75] E. Harris 2014.

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