

**Traces of Tribal Puberty Initiation
in Arkadian Religion**
A Survey of Pausanias' Tales

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This article explores one possible area of continuity from ancient times in Arkadian religion, namely how myths may reflect Arkadian rituals for inclusion of young girls and boys into society. In Pausanias' eighth book, we find at least 20 narratives about deities, heroes and kings' sons and daughters and more than 100 additional phenomena typical for such coming-of-age rituals: Hunting/chasing/wooing, abduction/rape/holy wedding with or without resulting childbirth, beauty contests, body scars, trans-dressing, hair-cutting, swimming, bathing, episodes of madness and purification. The myths, *i.e.* the ceremonies, take place in caves, springs and rivers, and involve nymphs and nurses. Myths involve dancing, contests and specific musical instruments. Both participants and gods assume the form of such animals as horses, bears, wolves, birds, deer and fish. Artemis is mostly represented as protectress of young children, and so are Apollon, Hera and Athena, while Poseidon, Zeus, Hermes, Pan, Asklepios and Athena are born, and/or reared in Arkadia. Demeter and Poseidon celebrate holy weddings in disguise and have children.

My assumption is that puberty initiation was a very important celebration in past as well as contemporary tribal societies and always involves ancestors and deities. Traces of the initiatory complex are found not so much in archaeological documents as in the structure of the tales of the society which explain the cultural inheritance. Pan-Hellenic as well as native Arkadian deities play an abundant part in the tales reflecting passage rites in Pausanias' eighth book.¹

1. According to Brelich 1969, 476, each deity plays a role in and is perhaps established from the initial institution. Ucko 1962, 47, and elsewhere, has interpreted prehistoric artefacts as figures connected with initiations, and Sættersdal 1995 describes equipment from African initiation rites today. Initiation of African girls: Turner 1968.

The wolf-pack

The second king of the Arkadians, Lykaon, sacrificed a human baby on the altar of Lykaian Zeus. Immediately after the sacrifice he was changed from a man to a wolf, and “ever since the time of Lykaon a man has changed into a wolf at the sacrifice to Lykaian Zeus, but the change is not for life; if, when he is a wolf, he abstains from human flesh, after nine years he becomes a man again, but if he tastes human flesh he remains a beast for ever”.²

My assumption that this is a tale about an initiation rite is based on two testimonies from Hellenistic time. First, it is said that the Olympic boxing champion Damarkhos changed into a wolf at the sacrifice of Lykaian Zeus and became a man again nine years after. Another story tells about one family where a young boy was regularly selected to undress and swim across a lake, disappear into the wilderness, become a wolf and live among the wolves for eight years. If he had abstained from human meat he could then swim back across the lake, take his clothes on and become human again.³

The nine years' period as well as the role of the wolf in initiation are well known items from Indo-European material,⁴ and also from Greek myths and the Homeric poems.⁵

Beautiful maidens

Penelope has a grave outside Orkhomenos near the stadium where Ladas had exercised. Close by is a sanctuary to Artemis. Games are typically developed from initiations,⁶ and the grave indicates a cult of the primordial maid of the society. The girl is often the king's daughter or a priestess of Artemis, the divine protectress of the group.

Kallisto is the daughter of one primordial king, Lykaon, and the mother of another, Arkas. Perhaps she is also a priestess of Artemis, with whom she hunted when Zeus mated with her. Her grave lies close to the sanctuary of Artemis *Kalliste*.⁷ Hera turned Kallisto into the bear that Artemis shot.⁸

I will assume that both bear and wolf and other animal motives indicate the wild state of the initiatory candidates during the seclusion phase of the passage

2. Paus. 8.2.3.

3. Paus. 6.8.2; Plin. *HN* 8.81-82, after Varro.

4. Bremmer 1978; Burkert 1983, 84-93; Buxton 1987 and 1988.

5. Odysseus was of Arkadian ancestry through his grandmother Neaira. He went hunting with his grandfather Autolykos, the wolf, son of Hermes, when he got the scar on his thigh like a typical initiation candidate: Hom. *Od.* 19.392-395.

6. Paus. 8.12.5. See Dowden 1989, 133, and Burkert 1983, 92.

7. Paus. 8.35.8; 8.3.6. Atalanta's race-course is not far away: 8.35.10.

8. Paus. 8.3.6; he states that he repeats the current Greek legend.

rites and the rural surroundings consisting of mountains, borders and purifying waters.

Kallisto's name ("The most beautiful") reminds us of the beauty contests that were a part of the initiatory rituals all over Greece⁹ – also in Arkadia, in Basilis, where king Kypselos gave his daughter away in marriage. Among the ruins of Basilis are the remains of the sanctuary of Eleusinian Demeter and some stades away, in Bathos, they celebrated the mysteries to the Great Goddesses close to a spring, the river and a fire.¹⁰ Marriage in myth reflects the celebration of rites for incorporating young people in the society, Demeter protecting the marriage and mature women.

...and the hero...

Aristokrates was stoned¹¹ because he raped the young priestess at the sanctuary of Artemis Hymnía "who has been worshipped by all the Arkadians from the most remote time". After this they never appointed a virgin priestess, and the priests in this sanctuary lived their lives in purity. The name of the goddess might indicate a celebration of song and dance. The Orkhomenians and Mantineans shared the sanctuary and the celebrations were annual.¹² Aristokrates' grave is in the same area, and beneath Orkhomenos there are heaps of stones along the road, "commemorating men who fell in war."¹³ Near the city of Orkhomenos is the large cedar tree of Artemis Kedreátis, "The Lady of the Cedar", with a wooden statue of her. As a parallel, "the Lacedaemonian maidens hold chorus-dances" around the image of another tree-goddess, Artemis Karyátis.¹⁴

Water plays a part in the story of Auge, the daughter of king Aleos, who had intercourse with Herakles north of the temple of Athena Alea at the fountain not far from the stadium where they celebrated the Alean Games. Auge is also said to have arranged nocturnal dancing celebrations.¹⁵ While her grave is in Pergamon,¹⁶ the version of the story where she gives birth on the way from the

9. Paus. 8.5.6; 8.29.5; Ath. 13.609 e-f; Calame 1997, 122; 138 n. 140.

10. Paus. 8.29.1. Fire seems to have a meaning of purification. Artemis *Pyrónia* has a sacred fire: Paus. 8.15.9. See for the probable location of these sites the paper by A.V. Karapanagiotou in this volume.

11. Dowden 1989, 139, argues that stones in initiation are connected with punishment and purification.

12. Paus. 8.5.11-12; 8.13.1.

13. Paus. 8.13.3.

14. Paus. 8.13.2 (The Lady of the Cedar); 3.10.7 (Artemis *Karyátis*).

15. Paus. 8.4.8; 8.47.4; Dowden 1987, 133 n. 34, dances; Sen. *Herc. Oet.* 336, nocturnal; Moses Chor. *Progymnasmata* 3.3; Nauck *ad Eur. frags.* 265-281.

16. Paus. 8.4.9.

sanctuary to the market place might reflect a procession ceremony from Athena Alea to the temple of Eileithyia surnamed “Auge on her knees” (*en gónasi*).¹⁷ The variation in the stories about her son tells us that the primordial maiden is central to such stories. Interesting archaeological objects for our case from the sanctuary of Athena Alea, such as male and female figurines, have mostly been found in the area north of the temple, where the fountain lies.¹⁸

Auge had two parallels in Mantinea. One is Phialo,¹⁹ whose father put her out to die on the mountain with the child she had conceived with Herakles, who saved mother and child next to a spring with help from birds. Second is primordial Antinoë,²⁰ who has a tomb called “Common Hearth” (*hestía koiné*) in the centre of the town.

Cults of divine mothers and sons

Birth, upbringing and even death are typical ingredients of the tales the Arkadians tell about their gods, and the divine mothers play just as important a role as the mortal maidens.

Zeus’ birth myth speaks of Methydrion, “Between the waters”, where Rhea came and enlisted Hoplados and his few giants as her allies, in case Kronos should attack her. They allowed her to give birth somewhere on Mount Lykaion. On the summit of the mountain is Rhea’s cave, which may only be entered by women who are sacred to the goddess,²¹ just like the grove of Demeter “in the Marsh” (*en élei*).²² Zeus had his childhood in Arkadia: he was bathed after birth in a river therefore called Lousios,²³ and several nymphs are connected with his infancy.²⁴ On the market-place of Tegea he has an altar and a square image as Zeus *Teleíos*, “Fullgrown”.²⁵

The birth of Poseidon seems to have been celebrated in the Mantinea district²⁶ on “The Untilled Plain” (*to pédion to argón*) near Nestane, where the water disappears into a chasm in the earth. “The Untilled Plain” is also known as

17. Paus. 8.48.7.

18. Voyatzis 1998, 136-9, e.g. the nude female of the 12th century B.C. with her hands to her breasts; Jost 1985, 373-4, a hydrophore and a man with the head of an animal.

19. Paus. 8.12.2-4.

20. Paus. 8.8.4; 8.9.5.

21. Paus. 8.36.2-4; 8.38.2 where Zeus was reared.

22. Paus. 8.36.6.

23. Paus. 8.28.2.

24. Paus. 8.31.4: at Megalopolis, the nymph Neda holds him; 8.38.3, Mount Lykaion, Theisoa, Neda and Hagno are said to have reared him. At Tegea Oinoe carries the child: 8.47.3.

25. Paus. 8.48.6.

26. Paus. 8.7.2.

“The Dancing Floor of Maira” (*chorós Maíras*), who is the daughter of Atlas and has a grave in a village named after her in Mantinea and equally in Tegea.²⁷ Near the Untilled Plain is a well called “The Lamb” (*Arne*) because Rhea after giving birth to Poseidon laid him among the lambs while she went to Kronos, telling him that she had given birth to a horse, and gave him a foal to swallow instead of the child.²⁸ At Pheneos, Odysseus honours Artemis *Heurhíppa*²⁹ because she helped him to find his mares, and then makes an offering to Poseidon *Híppios*. At Tegea, Athena is called *Híppia*.³⁰ A *po-ti-ni-ja i-qe-ja* is mentioned on Linear B tablet 312 = An 1281 from Pylos, where Poseidon was the main god.³¹

Holy weddings and divine daughters

Closest to Poseidon *Híppios* in cult is Demeter. She has a sanctuary with a festival outside the ruins of Nestane. The same couple was most likely celebrated outside Mantinea with horse racing – where Demeter has a grove on Mount Alesion, named after Rhea’s wandering, and Poseidon *Híppios* a sanctuary beneath it. In another part of Mantinea, near Melangeia, they celebrate rare orgies of Dionysos.³² Beside his megaron and the well there is also a sanctuary of a likewise rare Black Aphrodite, reminiscent of the Black Demeter of Phigalia; these are all chthonic deities in some way connected with human marriage. On the borders of Thelpousa, by the Ladon, as well as on Mount Elaïon outside Phigalia, Demeter celebrates a holy wedding with Poseidon *Híppios*, and as a result the Mistress, Despoina, is born.³³ At Thelpousa her name *Erínys* indicates that she goes back at least to Mycenaean times, and *Lousía* that she was purified after giving birth.

The old image of Black Demeter had the head of a horse, and she had a dove and a dolphin in her hands. At the annual sacrifice, three young ‘sacrificers’,³⁴ as in an initiatory procession, accompany her priestess.

At Pheneos is the sanctuary and rites of Demeter called the Eleusinian. Every two years they perform the Greater Rites, when the priest puts on the mask of Demeter *Kidaría*. Most likely this name goes back to the instrument and thus also to the dance performed by young girls undergoing initiation. According to

27. Paus. 8.12.7-8 (Mantinea); 8.48.6 (Tegea).

28. Paus. 8.8.1-2.

29. Paus. 8.14.5.

30. Paus. 8.47.1.

31. Ventris and Chadwick 1973, 483.

32. Paus. 8.8.1 (Nestane); 8.10.1-2 (Mount Alesion); 8.6.5 (orgie of Dionysos).

33. Paus. 8.42.1-5 (Phigalia); 8.25.2-8 (Thelpousa); the sanctuary of the Eleusinian Demeter (8.25.2).

34. Paus. 8.42.11-12.

Pausanias,³⁵ the priest then beats the “Underground Folk” (*hypochthonioi*). In Alea³⁶ they celebrate every two years the feast *Skieria* to honour Dionysos, where women are flogged, “just as the Spartan lads are flogged at the image of the Orthian goddess”. Sexual intercourse, purification, animal motives, mask, beating or flogging as well as music instruments and processions are typical ingredients of initiatory feasts.

Birth and upbringing – even death – of young gods

Hermes in Arkadia has much in common with the initiation candidate, including myths of birth and growing up and a close relationship with the hero – the young dead.

The legend tells that by the Three Springs on the boundary between Pheneos and Stymphalos, Hermes was washed after birth by the nymphs from the nearby mountains.³⁷ On the top of Mount Kyllene, where the Homeric Hymn to him says he was born, is the temple of Kyllenian Hermes, with an image of the god made of juniper wood. Mount Khelydorea³⁸ nearby was the place where the hymn says that he found the tortoise he made his lyra from. The divine child was reared with Akakos son of Lykaon as his foster-father, and was thus called the Akakesian, while Zeus made him the *kourotrophos* of Arkas.³⁹ Hermes is the most important god in Pheneos,⁴⁰ and he is worshipped with his son Myrtilos, who has a grave behind his father’s temple. The legend tells how Myrtilos wooed Hippodameia. Beneath Pheneos is the stadium where the people celebrate games called Hermaia, and near by is the tomb of Iphikles, the brother of Herakles, with a grave-cult. Iphikles was wounded in battle and then nursed before his death by the Pheneate Bouphagos. Another tradition says that Bouphagos was shot by Artemis because he tried to rape her once on Mount Pholoë, and he has himself a river named after him west of Gortys. In Tegea, the temple of Hermes *Aipytos* is close to the temple fountain where Auge had intercourse with Herakles, and to the stadion.⁴¹ In addition to being a prototypical initiation candidate himself, Hermes seems to be involved in celebrations of passage for both sexes.

In Thelpousa are the sanctuary of Boy Asklepios (*pais*)⁴² and the tomb of his

35. Paus. 8.15.1-4.

36. Paus. 8.23.1.

37. Paus. 8.16.1-2 (the grave of Aipytos).

38. Paus. 8.17.1-2,5.

39. Paus. 8.36.10. The place is not far from Lykosoura and the temple of Despoina. Hermes is also represented with the Great Goddesses and Kore in their temples in Megalopolis (8.31).

40. Paus. 8.14.9-12; 8.27.17 (Gortys).

41. Paus. 8.47.4.

42. Paus. 8.25.11: close to the sanctuary of Erinys.

nurse, Trygon. Asklepios was exposed in Thelpousa when he was a little boy and was found by Autolaos, the illegitimate son of Arkas, who reared him. In Megalopolis Boy Asklepios has another sanctuary, and here together with his father, Apollon.⁴³ Also in his temple by the river Bouphagos, Asklepios is a beardless youth.⁴⁴ Other sources also give him graves⁴⁵ both in Arkadia and at Epidauros.

Another candidate for initiation is the native god Pan. In the temple of Zeus *Lykeíos* in Megalopolis he is named *Sinóeis* after his nurse, and in the sanctuary of Despoina at Lykosoura he is tended by nymphs.⁴⁶ An inscription next to the images of Pan and Apollo in the enclosure sacred to the Great Goddesses in Megalopolis says that they are among the first gods. By their pastoral profiles, Pan as well as Hermes can also be likened to Apollo *Kereátas*, and can then be compared with the old horned god from Cyprus, in Greece only known from the Aigytian territory in Arkadia.⁴⁷ On Mount Lykaion the young gods are represented together with father Zeus: Parrhasian Apollo with a grove and Pan with a sanctuary and games. Pan of the Nomian mountains discovered the music of the pipes.⁴⁸ In pan-Hellenic religion Apollon is called Nomian. Pan has his own sanctuary beneath the sanctuary of Despoina, where he is considered as equal to the most powerful gods; “in days of old” he gave oracles with Arkas’ wife Erato as his priestess.⁴⁹

Athena is worshipped at Alipheira together with Asklepios, and people say that she was born and bred among them.⁵⁰ In Teuthis⁵¹ she has a wounded thigh, as heroes often have: Odysseus, Herakles at Tegea, and Iphikles who was healed of his wounds. On the road from Teuthis there are hero graves, which indicate a cult of initiatory type, and Athena is worshipped as the protectress of ephebes. In Kleitor she is called *Koría*, as is Artemis in neighbouring Lousoi.

43. Paus. 8.32.5.

44. Paus. 8.28.1.

45. Jost 1985, 499 n. 9.

46. Paus. 8.30.3; 8.37.2.

47. Paus. 8.31.3 (Megalopolis, both with their instrument) and 8.34.5 (Apollo *Kereátas*).

48. Paus. 8.38.11.

49. Paus. 8.37.11-12. Dowden 1989, 129-35, sets several *aition* myths, also Arkadian, about young people serving as priests in connection with passage rites and not with normal priesthood.

50. Paus. 8.26.5.

51. Paus. 8.28.6-7 (Athena); Odysseus, see *supra* n. 5; Paus. 8.53.9 (Herakles). According to Bremmer 1978 the scar has a initiatory significance. Athena *Koría*, Paus. 8.21.4; Artemis, Callim. *Hymn* 3, 234. If Apollon *Epikóuriós* (Paus. 8.30.3-4; 8.41.7-9) is a helper in war (see Jost 1985, 485-7), he is of the same kind.

Divine maidens protect the young

Above Nonacris in the Aroanian mountains is the cave where the legend says that the daughters of Proitos fled when they were struck by madness.⁵² In this version of the story Melampous brought them down to Lousoi on the borders of Kleitor, where they were healed of their madness in a sanctuary of Artemis called *Hemerasía* by the Kleitorians. Nearby, men smeared with grease sacrifice to Dionysos, who is generally close to Artemis in cult. There is also a spring Alyssos that can cure men from madness. Like many other girls in myths, the Proitids smeared mud in their faces, became mad, were expelled from the society, wandered like wild cows in the mountains, hid in a cave and were cleaned in a spring or river.⁵³

Caves, madness, chasing and purification are well-known ingredients of initiation, and perhaps passage rituals for both sexes were celebrated in this area.

At Stymphalos, Hera has three sanctuaries: for "Girl", "Grown Up" and "Widow" (*Pais, Teleía, Chéra*). The founder was Temenos son of Pelasgos who reared her;⁵⁴ the goddess is herself an initiation candidate, with fostering and a holy wedding.

By the waters of Stymphalos, the man-eating birds are bred which Heracles is said to have shot down – or he drove them away with the noise of rattles. In Stymphalos is the old sanctuary of Stymphalian Artemis, with a gilded wooden image of the goddess. Near the roof are the images of the birds, and behind the temple stand maidens of white marble, with bird's legs, the best illustration of the affinity between young girls and wild animals chased for domestication. There is also a story of Artemis punishing the careless celebration of a festival in her honour there by turning the river into a lake, which only disappeared when a hunter chased a deer and both were swallowed by the waters. This indicates a celebration including the chasing of girls as birds and deer.

One legend from Tegea also seems to imply a ritual chasing. The story is about punishment for not helping Leto when she was in pain.⁵⁵ When Apollo and Artemis visited the house of the king Tegeates, one of his sons, Leimon, suspected his brother Skephrus of blaming him, and therefore killed him. Then Artemis punished Leimon by shooting him. A famine struck the land and the

52. Paus. 8.18.7-8. Jost 1985, 419-20 discusses the name *Hemerasía*; perhaps it is influenced from the name of the games, well attested in epigraphic sources. In other sources she is Artemis *Heméra*, "propitiator" or "healer". According to Calame 1997, 117-8, *Heméra* signifies "taming".

53. Paus. 8.19.2-3 (Alyssos); Dowden 1989, 103-4, gives other examples too. The archaeological material from the sanctuary includes a hydrophore and dancers (Jost 1985, 419-20), which indicates a classical initiatory feast connected with Artemis.

54. Paus. 8.22.2-4,7.

55. Paus. 8.53.1-4.

oracle of Delphi ordered mourning for Skephrus. During the feast of Apollo “Lord of the Streets” (*Agyieús*) rites are performed in honour of Skephrus, and in particular the priestess of Artemis pursues a man, pretending she is Artemis herself pursuing Leimon. Again it seems that masks have been used in a passage ritual.

In the Knakalesian mountains rare mysteries of Artemis are celebrated,⁵⁶ and not far from that place the legend tells how young boys playing with a rope attempted to hang the image of Artemis *Kondylea*. The inhabitants stoned them to death. When they had done this all the babies were still-born, until the Pythian priestess bade them bury the boys and sacrifice to them every year as sacrifice is made to heroes, because they had been wrongly put to death. The oracle also bade them change the name of the goddess to the “Strangled Lady” (*Apanchoméne*). Apart from implying ritual purification, stone-throwing as a primitive mode of battle is a suitable symbol of primitive liminality in initiatory cults.

The myth from the river Ladon outside Kleitor⁵⁷ about Daphne (“Laurel”) and Leukippos (“White Horse”) contains all the ingredients of rites of passage: trees, water, wooing, cross-dressing, hunting, young dead, and the deity involved is Apollo. There is also the element of growing the hair long in honour of the river Alpheios which resembles initiation myths from elsewhere in Greece: in Arkadia, outside Phigalia by the river Neda, where Rhea was cleaned after giving birth to Zeus, the boys cut their hair in honour of the river. Outside Megalopolis, another young boy, Orestes, does the same thing.⁵⁸ The river might carry associations with the ancestors, and of fertility and prosperity for the society where the young people are becoming an important part.

In Arkadian religion animals abound in myths and cult. A curious example is *Eurynóme*, half woman and half fish, believed to be an epithet of Artemis; she received sacrifices at the hot baths above Phigalia.⁵⁹ Outside the sanctuary of Despoina in Lykosoura dwelled her sacred deer;⁶⁰ they were also sacred to Artemis, here appearing with a deer’s hide, serpents and a dog.⁶¹ The drapery of Despoina carries images of a dolphin and of half animal and half human beings (or of humans with masks or animal’s heads), some playing the flute, as in an orgiastic dance⁶² or procession. Beside the young goddesses Despoina and

56. Paus. 8.23.4, 6-7. The story also reminds of the old tradition of hanging figurines in the trees, and perhaps dancing around them as the young girls in Laconia did (*supra* n. 14).

57. Paus. 8.20.2-3.

58. Paus. 8.41.3 (Rhea); 8.34.3 (Orestes).

59. Paus. 8.41.6.

60. Paus. 8.10.9.

61. Paus. 8.37.4.

62. Paus. 8.37.3; Vernant, 1991, 133 (the drapery). The flute-playing Pan had a sanctuary beneath that of Despoina: Paus. 8.37.11.

Artemis stands Despoina's foster-father, the titan Anytos,⁶³ and Demeter, mother of both. The father is present with the altar of Poseidon Horse.

Arkadian tales of young mortals and immortals, with rape, savagery, marriage and death, seem to reflect tribal puberty passage celebrations in rural sanctuaries with chasing, races and grave cults. Such elements as horses and foster-fathers may represent traces of the Indo-European origins. We have also seen that all deities may, in one way or another, be present in such cults.

An interesting testimony of the continuity of initiatory celebrations in Arkadia is given by Polybios,⁶⁴ who describes how men up to 30 years old, and girls as well, still in his time continued to praise their heroes and gods in the theatres by competitions, hymns and dances accompanied by orgiastic flute-playing.

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63. Paus. 8.37.5. The titan protecting Despoina reminds of how Hopladamos protected Rhea, while the kouretes on Crete protected Zeus as a child. The gigantomachy is said to have taken place in Bathos: Paus. 8.29.1.

64. Polyb. 4.20-21. He was himself an Arkadian of the 2nd century B.C. Brelich 1969, 208-15, interprets this as a musical *agon* and compares it with initiatory celebrations for boys and girls in archaic times in Sparta and Crete.

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