

Papers from the Norwegian Institute at Athens 2

GREECE & GENDER

Edited by Brit Berggreen and Nanno Marinatos

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Cover: Peristera, one of the leaders in Western Macedonia during the Macedonian War. Original in the National Historical Museum, Athens

PAPERS FROM THE NORWEGIAN INSTITUTE AT ATHENS

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PREFACE

Greece and Gender is the title of two interdisciplinary workshops given at the then newly inaugurated Norwegian Institute for classics, archaeology and cultural history at Athens. The first workshop, held in February 1990, brought together people who are interested in the gender aspects of Greek past or present. The next workshop took place a year later, focussing more specifically on the transgressions and ambiguities of gender.

Both workshops were initiated by Brit Berggreen, whose fields encompass cultural history, regional ethnology and gender perspectives, but who is a novice to the empirical materials of ancient Greece. From an early stage, Nanno Marinatos took part as a co-organizer, representing ancient archaeology, philology and religion. Without this close cooperation it would not have been possible to produce this publication. Encouragement from the first director of the Norwegian Institute, professor Øivind Andersen pushed forward the work. Professor Robin Hägg, then director of the Swedish Institute supported the workshops at an early stage, by providing premises. The present director of The Norwegian Institute at Athens, professor Erik Østby has been sympathetic and supportive to the idea of seeing this publication through. Being not only an interdisciplinary group but a multilingual as well, we wish to thank Brenda Conrad for her language washing. Finally Diego Valle and Tomas Hägg, now veterans in preparing NIA manuscripts for printing, shall have our full gratitude. We express our thanks to these and others involved in our project, at an early or later stage.

Athens and Bergen, April 1995

Brit Berggreen

Nanno Marinatos

GENDERING GREECE: INTRODUCTION

Brit Berggreen

The modernization of antiquity

Ancient Greece is central to us all. It has been chosen as the cradle of Western civilization and has penetrated our thoughts and actions through religion and philosophy, statemanship, law and science. The impact of antiquity on modernizing nations from the the Renaissance on is obvious, and the role of Greek antiquity from the late 18th century onwards can hardly be sufficiently stressed. It has been studied and commented upon with terms such as “the cultural heritage of the western world” and “the legacy of Greece”. We are, perhaps, unaware of just how strong this legacy was, but when the United States of America was established serious consideration was given to making the ancient Greek the common language for this melting pot nation. As for democracy there was no other model than that of ancient Athens. In the architecture of state and federate administrative buildings the influence of ancient Greek temples is prominent. This infatuation with things Greek became fashionable among the Germans around 1750:

There (...) poets, literary critics, and historians of art looked to ancient Greece as an imaginative landscape on which they might discover artistic patterns, ethic values and concepts of human nature that could displace those of Christianity and ossified French classicism. The discontinuity between Greece and modern Christian Europe rendered the Greek experience all the more valuable and useful. Greece could represent almost any value and outlook that a writer wished to ascribe to it. (Turner 1981:3f)

That is my main point: Ancient Greece has been explored and exploited to fill the needs of modernizing individuals and nation

builders, but has also been reconstructed to fit and legitimize new values which are, in hindsight, those belonging to a bourgeois society and culture building process. Why, otherwise, would the Athenian woman have been chosen as the preferred female type rather than the Spartan? And why should men choose a version of Athenian democracy for their model state? It is easier, perhaps, to understand why the Spartan male type was chosen as a paragon rather than the talkative and quarrelsome Athenian.

It was perhaps Winckelmann who started the trend: His characterizing words "a noble simplicity and silent greatness" have been much quoted, referring to Greek art, but applied in a much wider sense to the life style. The Bavarian King Ludwig I had the means to create an Athens in Munich — and also a Munich in Athens (Seidl 1981), but others less powerful also looked to the ancients for aspects with which to become infatuated to emulate. The Greeks themselves were "taken in hand by rulers and hellenizing poets of the West, and introduced to a whole museum-load of forgotten marble relations" (Fermor 1983:104) with which to identify after an interruption of more than 2000 years. But the character of the relations was redefined according to the trends of the time. Such image transformations were noticed as early as 1897 when Gilbert Murray (in Turner 1981:13) wrote:

The 'serene' and 'classical' Greek of Winckelmann and Goethe did good service to the world in his day, though we now feel him to be mainly a phantom. He has been succeeded especially in the works for painters and poets, by an aesthetic and fleshly Greek in fine raiment, an abstract Pagan who lives to be contrasted with an equally abstract early Christian or Puritan, and to be glorified or mishandled according to the sentiments of his critics. He is a phantom too, as unreal as those marble palaces in which he habitually takes his ease.

The ancients have not ceased to change along with contemporary needs since then. Waiting to be changed are gender arrangements and interpretations of male and female. Much has been done. The literature is becoming vast. Our contributions in this volume are mainly empirical, presenting or discussing aspects of the Greeks from ancient and classical times through the early Christian epoch, and ending with the new and young woman of Greece today, but also with the conventions and ways of acting out homosexuality and transsexual dispositions in our time. The past is present in Greek matters. The lure of history and the underlying thought that goes from Achilles

to Pericles to Aristotle is unbroken and preserved in popular ways and ceremonial.

Critical modern democrats may ask what kind of a democracy would be based on slaves and the political exclusion of women. Critical modern gender studies examine the role of women behind the exclusively male presentation of their lives and ways (Pomeroy 1975, Lefkowitz 1986), and in this volume there is a reinterpretation of Penelope and her acknowledged shrewdness. She is seen as a woman who is just as fine in her power position surrounded by suitors as like a Queen Elizabeth I of England.

Anyone who wants to examine gender roles must know past and present conventions of accepted behaviour. She or he must investigate situations where conventions are broken and consider transgressions of gender role rules in order to understand total social and cultural patterns. Our two workshops aimed at presenting any aspect of gender associated with the past or present Greek culture. The intention was not to develop theory but to present situations on which theoretical platforms could be considered. Still there are a few presuppositions and theoretical insights that should be mentioned, one concerning the gender concept, the other concerning "gendering" Greece.

Gender has no sex

Granted that cultures are coded systems of display and concealment, there is a challenge for the lay and learned to find out what "really" goes on and with what intention. There are riddles for "the other" to interpret. We may question how women's worlds are interpreted by men who had no access to them. We may also ask what women understand of men's priorities and acts. What we should take for granted is that every culture has scripts — prescriptions — for its members to follow, and that the roles that are prescribed differ according to social status, profession and age group, as well as that of sex.

Conventionally there are two sexes according to our western and modern cultural codes. They are valid for household and family building purposes. At least this is where biology matters. The codes we go by may seem universal and "natural", the patterned ideal overshadowing real structures. Real structures which are not culturally acknowledged must be concealed, some so well that we shall never learn about them. The historical dimension contributes to confusion. What is normal or accepted today might be seen as unusual or even criminal yesterday or vice versa. Consider such a simple thing as colour coding: In her book on sex role manipulations Marjorie Garber (1992) begins by referring to an article in the *New York Times*

in 1989 informing its readers that until World War I pink for little boys was seen as a "stronger, more decided color" while girls wore blue. Blue was seen as "delicate" and "dainty". Even when knowing that until the 1920's little girls and boys were dressed in identically cut frocks, this piece of information startled a reading public, accustomed to gender-colour-coding down to disposable pink and blue diapers. Such small reversals create large effects because minds are conservative but easily reprogrammed to practiced innovations.

In real life there is ambiguity. There are transgressions and concealments. Cross dressing – transvestism – may be based on a practical and occasional need, or on a more physiological and psychological urge. A woman is generally a member of a female sex-social group with its cultural expressions, but she may feel comfortable only in the vestiges of men, just as some men prefer the occasional or constant vestiges of a female, and leave the mainstream male culture. Such cross dressings may occur in order to pass unnoticed, or as part of some ritual or celebration. Women dress as men to fight when conventions say that fighting is a male prerogative, whereas men may dress as women to flee. We know this from many instances. Occasions and situations where cross dressing takes place are multiple. Evidence may be hard to come by when the intention is to avoid being discerned. Interpretations of cross dressing without knowledge of the cultural context may also be difficult. There is much cultural decoding and interpretation ahead.

The word *gender*, both as a noun and a verb has not yet entered the general dictionaries. Still, it is one of the words which more frequently enters headlines, especially within the fields of sex role studies and women's studies. Here it provides a term denoting the close association of cultural phenomena with sex as a classificatory term, as a non-physiological aspect of sex. Within academic disciplines headlines occur as in "gendering archaeology", "gendering anthropology" or "gendering botany" etc. The immediate intention is to signal that any cultural expression has a meaning that differs from one sex to the other. *Gender* was chosen as a technical term to avoid the biological and erotic connotations of *sex* while stressing the social aspect of male and female. We may say that *gender* is the performative aspect of sex, but also its manipulable aspect. Gender rules provide scripts of behaviour related to both males and females, while on the other hand they provide a set of expectations as to what kind of behaviour may be expected from either sex. These are conventions which exist within all cultures, even if the rules are circumscribed and frequently broken.

Joan Wallach Scott (1988) has written with resigned humour on the history of *gender* as an auxiliary term for sex related studies.

“Those who would codify the meanings of words fight a losing battle”, she decides (p.88), quoting from Fowler’s *Dictionary of English Usage* which insists that *gender* is “a grammatical term only.” She then proceeds through observations of persisting patterns, concluding that, “In its simplest usage, ‘gender’ is a synonym for ‘women’:

Any number of books and articles whose subject is women’s history have, in the past few years, substituted ‘gender’ for ‘women’ in their titles. In some cases, this usage, though vaguely referring to certain analytic concepts, is actually about the political acceptability of the field. In these instances, the use of ‘gender’ has a more neutral and objective sound than does ‘women’. (Scott 1988:31)

Turning from history to anthropology we see the same phenomenon occurring. *Gender and power in rural Greece* (Dubish 1986) is in reality a book about women and power. That is, in all chapters but one, it is hard to see that this is not, in fact, a book about women. Michael Herzfeld, who goes a step further, is the only contributor to consider the female bias of gender studies, writing with regard to earlier ethnographers who generated “complementary oppositions” which we are familiar with. He mentions “honor/shame, men/women, public/domestic” as instances. “They”, he writes:

sacrificed *complementarity* to *opposition* and so lost their significance as essentially manipulable and rhetorically subtle symbols. By separating men and women from each other with a rigidity that far surpassed that of the actors they sought to describe, ethnographers for a while ignored the lability of male and female stereotypes and their capacity for variation and change. (Herzfeld 1986:215)

If anything this “capacity for variation and change” is under scrutiny in our volume. The social experience of women and the social experience of men are acknowledged to be differing, and it is obvious to everybody that their cultural expressions differ. Descriptions and generalizations referring to one sex are overwhelmingly likely not to cover the experienced reality of the other. Still, there should be room for doubt. There were the times before and after the French enlightenment philosopher Jean Jaques Rousseau who designed and constructed a new maleness and femaleness which was seen as men’s and women’s nature. There were times before and after the concept of Natural Law which constructed universal rights where before local jurisdiction had presented a varied pattern. There is contemporary research going on to break up and reconsider the modern, western

bourgeois construction of reality. We are in the middle of this process. There is no doubt that the revival of the ancient Greek culture and its selective penetration into Western and westernizing cultures and nation building processes must lead to a new round of investigation and interpretation, and new understanding of cultural forms as belonging to strategies and willed processes.

Gendering Greece

I mentioned "casual astonishments" above in being confronted with our gendered world slightly upset through a change in the history of colour coding. Astonishment is too mild a word to describe my own reaction to Greek revolutionary history from around 1821, and its heroines. There was Laskarina Bouboulina of Spetsai in her role as admiral, commanding a fleet of eight ships, gun in belt. Such warrior heroines multiply as modern Greek history is studied. There was Mando Mavroyeni of Mykonos, a contemporary of Bouboulina, and later Peristera "one of the leaders in western Macedonia" during the Balkan wars. (*Macedonia* 1988:461). The role of Epirot women as warriors in the civil war that followed World War II is well known. Nicholas Gage writes in his "novel" *Eleni*, based on real characters and events, of the shame his sisters felt when communists forced them to carrying weapons dressed in trousered uniforms, omitting that at least the warrior part was not foreign to the population. The history of the area, in fact, presents female warriors as a traditional feature. Such women are far removed from the image of the Greek woman "of the house".

Approximately at the same time as Mando Mavroyeni and Laskarina Bouboulina fought the Turks in the name of freedom, two Norwegian girls wrote letters to each other discussing their prospects for performing heroic deeds for *their* native country, admiringly referring to a "Celia" who swam to Rome to save her country, and to a Spartan woman who bit off her tongue in order not to betray her country. The Norwegian girls concluded that they were permitted to serve their country only as sentries by the tea pot.

Does it matter that ancient Greece had the warrior goddess Athena? And how come that *Panaghia*, the virgin Mary herself, is not above taking part in war in orthodox Greece? Headlines from World War II newspapers relate how she interfered in the battles. It is well known how, in the Boeotian village of Orhomenós the Panaghia — "over-saint" — forced German lorries and tanks into the ditches in 1943. Almost like the ancient Athena she took active part in warfare. Replicas of holy icons showing the episodes are on sale by the village church.



Like ancient goddess Athena the holy virgin Mary takes part in war. This icon shows her celebrated participation in saving the Boeotian village Orhomenós from the German occupation forces during the second world war.

Whatever else was “imagined” and constructed of ancient Greek matters for export to modernizing nations, warlike women were not among them. But in the heyday of infatuation with the ancients, weeping men spread throughout Western Europe. For a while they were in high fashion, as when Goethe’s literary fashion hero Werther

shed tears. So did the Norwegian viking hero Frithjof as described by Sweden's national bard Esaias Tegnér fifty years later, (published 1820-25). These heroes bear a likeness, which cannot be accidental, to the heroes of Homer, as when the Trojans weep tears for their dead while identifying them as they wash blood off their lifeless and disfigured bodies (*Iliad*, 7,426f) or "Phoenix the aged horseman Phoenix"... "spoke out in a stormburst of tears" (9,433f) Nestor "wept warm tears, and gave Achilles his sorrowful message" (18,16ff) and the swift-footed Achilles himself "letting fall warm tears" (18,234). Odysseus, when deeply touched and in disguise had his cheeks wet with tears on hearing a great bard praising the deeds of Odysseus and his Achaian compatriots inside the walls of Troy. But his weeping is, it is commented, "as a woman weeps embracing her beloved husband who has fallen before his own city and his own people and sees the man dying and breathing heavily ..." (*Odyssey*, 8, 520ff). I shall not discuss here the reasons for either male or female weeping, just point to male weeping being surprising for generations accustomed to a blank and tearless expression of grief among male heroes. The romantic heroes Werther and Frithjof of northwestern Europe represent a mingling of sentimental romanticism and ancient Graecaecisms. Werther carries his Homer, and Tegnér's epic is infused with ancient Greece in meters and allusions. Frithjof suggests to his beloved Ingeborg – "a fair haired Iphigeneia who manifests the Goethe-Schillerian feminine ideal" – that they flee to colonise and settle in the deserted temples of Greece. Indeed a union of the Viking age and Greek antiquity. There has been a hellenization or Graecaefication of North European cultures and a Graecaefication of gender roles along with our understanding of male and female as gender classification.

Close reading of ancient texts, new theories, open minded interpretations and scrutinizing of iconography in differing contexts and research lights bring about new images and understandings of antiquity and modern Greece alike. Along go new insights into the consequences of our having been seduced by the building fathers of civilization who were seduced by Greece.

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PART I

**BATTLE AND HARMONY
GENDER ROLES AND GENDER INVERSION
AS AFFIRMATION OF SOCIAL ORDER**

BATTLE AND HARMONY

THE WOMEN IN THE ODYSSEY

Nanno Marinatos

The females in the *Odyssey* are just as intriguing as the male heroes, if not more so. In this paper, I shall deal first with the presentation of the female characters and second with the issue of culturally determined roles. Are the perceptions of gender roles completely culturally bound? Or can we detect genetic blueprints of more general validity? This last topic will be examined at the end.

Domestic women: Arete and Helen

The island of the Phaeacians, where Odysseus will make his final stop before returning to Ithaca, is an island of order *par excellence*. Not without reason has it been suggested that it is the ideal model of a Greek colony with an *agora* and a temple as focal points of the town. No less impressive is Alcinous' palace. His household is a model of harmonious family life: wife, daughter, sons all seem to relate well to each-other and the society around them. That the wife of the king, is a formidable woman is hinted at by Nausicaa when she advises Odysseus to go straight to Arete upon entering the house.

"Directly you have passed through the courtyard and into the buildings, walk quickly through the great hall till you reach my mother, who generally sits in the firelight by the hearth, weaving yard stained with sea-purple, and forming a delightful picture ... clasp my mother's knees if you wish to make certain of an early and happy return to your home..." (6, 297 -315)

Note Arete's position by the hearth. This is important because the hearth (in itself under the protection of a female deity) symbolizes the principal focus of the home; like the household fire. Arete too is the real center of the family. Penelope also is usually seated by the hearth (19, 55). (See also Whittaker in this volume). Equally interesting for our understanding of the Greek perception of the ideal domestic woman is the task that Arete is performing, namely weaving. This

further defines her domestic identity; she must stay indoors for one does not weave in open areas. There is more to weaving, however: women can express their artistic skill in the loom. There was a lot of prestige attached to good handicraft as we can tell by the importance of the *peplos*, woven by eminent virgins of Athens, displayed at the Panathenaic festival. The goddess Athena herself excels in this task. No wonder womanhood and weaving are also associated in Greek art.

Arete seems kindly disposed to Odysseus but she first has to test him. She immediately recognizes the clothes he wears as belonging to her household. They were of course given to him by Nausicaa. Arete, then, emerges as kind but not gullible. She is perceptive, and clever.

Women are very perceptive about clothes for they weave them themselves. Penelope will also cross-examine the beggar (who is no other than Odysseus in disguise) using clothes as a test. When the beggar tells her the fictitious tale according to which he had met Odysseus, she immediately asks: "Tell me what sort of clothes he was wearing and what he looked like ..." (19, 218)

Helen is a much more complex character. Still, the first thing we learn about her is that her womanhood is closely associated with her domestic task: "Helen with her ladies came down from her lofty perfumed room ... Phylo carried her silver work-basket, a gift from Alcandre ... who lived in Egyptian Thebes..." (4, 121-127) In weaving too, her skills are considerable. In book 15 we learn that she gave Telemachus as a parting gift a richly decorated robe, a work of her own hands. (15, 125-127)

More important is her characterization by the poet. Helen is very perceptive, far more so than her rather dull husband, Menelaus. When she first meets Telemachus she is the one who recognizes him as Odysseus' son, struck by the physical resemblance with his father. "Surely this must be king Odysseus' son Telemachus...", she exclaims. (4, 143)

There is another passage where Helen's perception and awareness of reality is sharper than that of her husband. As Telemachus is about to depart, an eagle is seen in the sky, carrying in his talons a great white goose.*

"Menelaus, for all his warlike qualities, was at a loss to give him (Telemachus) the correct interpretation, and his beautiful wife forestalled him. 'Listen', she said, 'while with such inspiration as I have I explain this omen and what I feel sure that it portends. Just as this eagle came down from his native mountains and pounced on our home-fed goose, so shall Odysseus, after many hardships and many wanderings, reach his home and have his revenge.'" (15, 169-178)

Helen is not only perceptive, she is also capable of manipulation, especially when it comes to turning a situation to her own advantage.

As the banquet proceeds, the hosts are inspired to tell stories about the Trojan war. Helen tells of how kind she had been to Odysseus once upon a time in Troy. In this story she wants to convey the impression that she was absolutely loyal to the Greeks even during her Trojan phase. But Menelaus tells quite a different story. Do you remember, when we were inside the Trojan horse, he says, how you imitated the voices of the Achaeans' wives to elicit a response from the hidden warriors and tempt them to come out? The juxtaposition of accounts by husband and wife respectively shows the different faces of Helen. Helen pretends she was totally loyal to the Greeks but Menelaus remembers a different truth: his wife was definitely on the side of the Trojans and tried to lure the Achaeans into destruction. One wonders if Menelaus is too dumb to realize that he is hurting his wife's reputation by divulging this secret. Or are we to understand that there is a subtle hostility underlying the relationship of the couple? I tend to opt for the first alternative and can well imagine Helen kicking Menelaus under the table for his clumsiness.

Helen's specifically female power is expressed in another manner as well. She is in charge of drugs or potions: at the end of an emotionally tiring scene when the dead heroes are remembered by Menelaus and Telemachus, she gives the men a drug which will drown their sorrows. "Helen, meanwhile... had a happy thought. Into the bowl in which their wine was mixed, she slipped a drug that had the power of robbing grief and anger of their sting and banishing all baleful memories." (IV, 220-221) As we shall see, drugs and potions are the province of dangerous women. Poisons can make up for the lack of physical strength.

For the rest, Helen can be considered a good wife. She is a perfect hostess and she seems to have a harmonious life with Menelaus.

The maiden: Nausicaa

It has often been pointed out that the poet of the *Odyssey* was an acute observer of human nature. The primary preoccupation of a virgin of marriageable age is to find a good husband. Thus Nausicaa has a dream in which she is urged by Athena to go and have the household linen washed in preparation for her marriage. Yet maiden modesty puts some constraints on her language. She tells her father that it is her bachelor brothers' clothes that need to be washed. "She spoke in this way because she was too shy to mention her marriage to her father. But he understood her thoroughly..." (6, 66-67)

Later on she will meet Odysseus and her thoughts will once again dwell on marriage. This can be shown by what she tells him "... I can imagine one of the baser sort (in the town) saying... Who is this tall

and handsome stranger Nausicaa has in tow? Where did she run across him? Her future husband no doubt!" Perhaps Nausicaa indulges in wishful thinking here. At any rate, there is no doubt that she has fallen for Odysseus because later at the house she will stare at him : "Now Nausicaa, in all her heaven sent beauty, was standing by one of the pillars that supported the massive roof. Filled with admiration as her eyes fell on Odysseus, she greeted him warmly..." (8, 457-460) Unfortunately Odysseus will have to reject her.

Let us turn our attention to Nausicaa's excursion, however, for it creates an important backdrop for the perception of maidenhood. Nausicaa and her companions, other young girls, will find themselves in a marginal space, namely a place *outside* the city-limits. The separation of the maidens from their home is very reminiscent of female puberty rites in which a period of seclusion precedes marriage. I am not suggesting here that Nausicaa is being initiated into womanhood in a ritual sense, but rather that the literary form of the episode seems to be modelled consciously or unconsciously on a rite of passage.

Actually, several myths or tales exhibit the same basic structure. The maiden is secluded before marriage or at least finds herself outside the urban space. Persephone and companions picking flowers in the field furnishes the best example from Greek mythology, but one might add Red Riding Hood in the woods, Snow-White in the forest. There follows a frightening encounter with sexuality. Hades appears in his chariot from a deep chasm in the earth in the case of Persephone. Snow-White has no frightening experience, her meeting with the dwarfs can rather be seen as a period of apprenticeship in domesticity. But Red Riding Hood has a truly scary encounter with the wolf who, as has been pointed out, may symbolize a threat of rape.

Nausicaa's encounter with Odysseus will take place in extra urban space. Odysseus makes a frightening sight, wild and nude as he is. The fact that Nausicaa holds her own is due to her upbringing and natural poise. The poet has made a real person out of her. Yet this should not obscure the fact that the scene gains momentum because it conforms to a story-pattern of initiation, a pattern familiar to the Greeks which we may, with Burkert, call the 'Maiden's Tragedy'. Note that Nausicaa is compared to Artemis the virgin goddess (6, 151), the domain of which is the wilderness, i.e. marginal space, and one of the functions of whom is to initiate young maidens into womanhood.

The association of the maiden with the wilderness is due to the Greek belief that virgins are not yet conquered, they are untamed. Let us remember that the Greek word for wife is 'damar', subjugated.

Thus while the mature woman is seated by the hearth, maidenhood is expressed through marginality and preoccupation with marriage,

although admittedly there is more to Nausicaa's character than just this.

Marginal seductresses: Circe and Calypso

Marginality does not only characterize maidenhood, but another type of woman, the seductress. She is situated in the wilderness, rather than in urban and domestic space. Dangerous because untamed, such women represent threat to men and the social order. Both Circe and Calypso try to take Odysseus out of circulation, and keep him to themselves.

Circe's domain is an island, lush, jungle-like. We are in the realm of nature, not culture. Her house is set in the woods and is surrounded by wild animals. These animals, of course, are the men that she has turned into beasts. Still their presence reinforces the setting as being part of nature untamed and unpredictable.

I shall not dwell here on the folk motif of Circe's habit of turning men into animals. This has been dealt with by the late Sir Denys Page among others. Rather, I wish to explore Circe's persona and motives. When Odysseus' men first meet her she sits at the loom singing. One might think that the loom is out of place in a witch's home. Yet, since it constitutes an essential attribute of womanhood, it is a necessary attribute to define Circe's femininity. The singing, however, alludes to sexual temptation, for it could be associated with *hetairai*. Remember also the song of the sirens, seductive and dangerous. Circe's home is devoid of servants. There is no hearth. All the elements of domesticity are deliberately omitted. Her weapons are a wand and, more importantly, a potion. Like Helen (and Medea), she is an expert in drugs.

Why does Circe turn men into beasts? I suggest that her action denotes contempt for those men who are no match for herself: only the man who can outwit her will be an appropriate mate. This type of folk motif by which the princess tests the power or skills of her prospective suitors is too widely spread to need much elaboration. From Atalante and Hippodameia to Puccini's *Tourandot*, the pattern is always the same: the suitor who fails is killed, but he who succeeds marries the woman. Thus, when Odysseus does not succumb to Circe's magic and draws his sword, her response is immediate and direct: she asks him to go to bed with her. The dangerous witch is transformed into an ideal partner who is not only innocuous but positively supportive of Odysseus and his men. One can hardly blame them for spending a year there.

Calypso is slightly different; she is a nymph rather than a witch. But she too lives on an island away from the civilized world. Her home is a cave: her domesticity is thus dubious, founded in nature not in

culture. (Note, however, that the loom is a necessary attribute in this case also; when Hermes visits Calypso he finds her working at the loom).

As Vernant has noted, the very name 'Calypso' indicates remoteness from culture. It means the 'hiding one'; for not only is she herself concealed, but she also hides Odysseus from the rest of the world. Nobody, except the gods, knows where he is.

She, of course, hides Odysseus because she wants to keep him forever, even make him immortal. But Odysseus has become bored with her: "the nymph did not please him any longer.." (5, 153) This life does not suit him and he longs for home, where he can express his true identity. Interestingly enough the raft, the vehicle by which Odysseus will be able to depart, represents the intrusion of culture, *techne*, in the wilderness. Odysseus shows himself as a true man of culture when he constructs it. Calypso, the woman of nature, will have to let him go.

The widow: Penelope

It is time now to look at the most important woman in the poem, Odysseus' faithful wife Penelope. Is faithful Penelope above every reproach? Is she the model wife? The answer must be yes, of course, because the necessities of the plot, not to mention the emotional tone of the *Odyssey*, dictate that the hero should come back to a loyal spouse. I shall not dwell here on the good qualities of Penelope, nor on the praise bestowed upon her in the *nekylia* by the ghost of Agamemnon (11, 444-446). Rather, I shall concentrate on those traits of her character which reveal her to be far more complex than we might suspect at first. She too has a bag of feminine tricks. She is perceptive like Arete and Helen, cunning and manipulative like Helen. Above all she is looking after her own best interest: like Circe she is determined to pick the best man. If she hasn't married anyone yet, it is because she hasn't found anybody better than Odysseus.

We are conditioned to think of Penelope as pining away thinking about Odysseus. Yet she allows a number of suitors, the floruit of Cephallonian youths, to court her. Let us see how some of the characters in the *Odyssey* perceive Penelope. "As for her", says Telemachus when speaking about his mother, "she neither refuses (the suitors), though she hates the idea of remarrying, nor can she bring herself to take the final step." (1, 250-251) Telemachus has difficulties understanding his mother's motives and is rightly concerned that his father's fortune is being eaten away.

The suitor, Antinous, says the following, addressing himself to Telemachus: "It is your own mother, that incomparable schemer, who is the culprit. Listen. For three whole years – in fact close to four –

she has kept us on tenderhooks, giving us all ground for hope, and in her private messages to each making promises that she has not the slightest intention of keeping.” (2, 85-92) He goes on to tell the well-known story of how Penelope is weaving in the morning and undoing the work at night because, upon the completion of the work, she will have to choose one of the suitors as a husband. The story, by the way, is corroborated by Penelope herself in book 19 when she tells the beggar (Odysseus in disguise) how she has been tricking the suitors (19, 148-150). Thus, granted that Antinous is an unlikable character, his account of Penelope’s behavior is hardly contradicted by the facts.

That Penelope invites attention of the young men can be shown by a passage in book 18:

“It was now that Athene, goddess of the flashing eyes, put it into the wise head of Icarius’ daughter Penelope to appear before her suitors, with the idea of fanning their ardor to fever heat and enhancing her value to her husband and her son. Turning to one of her maids with a forced laugh she said: ‘Eurynome, the spirit moves me, as it never has before, to pay these lovers of mine a visit...’ (18, 158-168).

All this reveals Penelope as both coquettish and flirtatious. Consider now a dream that she has right before Odysseus will reveal himself as the master of his household. Ironically enough she tells the dream to the beggar, who is no other than her husband in disguise.

“Let me ask you to interpret a dream of mine. I keep a flock of twenty geese in the place. They come in from the pond to pick up their grain and I *delight* in watching them. In my dream I saw a great eagle swoop down from the hills and break their necks with his crooked beak, killing them all. There they lay on a heap on the floor while he vanished in the open sky. I wept and cried out loud, though it was only a dream... But the bird came back. He perched on a jutting timber on the roof, and breaking into human speech he checked my tears. ‘Take heart’, he said, ‘daughter of the noble Icarius. This is not a dream but a happy reality which you shall see fulfilled. The geese were your lovers, and I that played the eagle’s part am now your husband, home again and ready to deal out grim punishment to every man among them.’ (19, 535-550)

It is worth analyzing this dream as it sheds light on Penelope’s psychological state. Let me first make clear that I do not believe that one can interpret the dream in a Freudian sense. After all it is not a real person’s account but rather a literary device, an allegory which is meant to draw attention to certain elements of the situation and thus deepen our understanding of the characters.

That Odysseus is the eagle and the suitors the geese we already know from the omen which Telemachus witnessed before leaving Sparta and which Helen interpreted for him (see above). What is

interesting in the dream is Penelope's relationship to the geese and to the eagle. The geese are her pets, they are *tame* and she tends them. The eagle is superior to the geese but he is also wild and untamable. He kills the domestic birds and flies away.

The geese do not harass Penelope, they serve her. This certainly puts her relationship to the suitors in a different light and contradicts what she tells the beggar.

"But I am left to my misery: the powers above have heaped so many troubles on my head. For all the island chieftains that rule in Dulichium, in Same, and in wooded Zakyntus, or that live here in our own sunny Ithaca, there is not one that is not forcing his unwelcome suit upon me and plundering my house. ... I simply wear my heart out in longing for Odysseus..." (19, 129-136)

To return to the dream: Penelope's first reaction is grief at the loss of her pets; yet, there is no cause for lament. For ultimately she will come to realize that it is better for her to have the eagle, the superior and stronger bird, who is going to return to her. The woman must be pleased to get the strongest: she must choose the best.

The dream in fact foreshadows the test of the bow which Penelope herself will initiate to make sure that she does marry the best man.

"... Penelope, rising on tiptoe, fetched the bow down from its peg in the shining case that covered it.... she set down for the hall to face the proud lords who were courting her, carrying the bow and quiver... Then veiling her cheeks with a fold of her bright head-dress, the noble lady took her stand by the pillar of the massive roof and without further ado issued her challenge to the Suitors:

'... I challenge you to try your skill on the great bow of King Odysseus. And whichever man among you proves the handiest at stringing the bow and shoots an arrow through everyone of these twelve axes, with that man I will go....' (19, 42-79)

Test and dream thus combined shed light on Penelope's personality and especially her situation.

But what exactly is her situation? In fact she conforms to a feminine stereotype which we have not as yet encountered in the other females in the poem: the widow. As O. Andersen has shown, the widow was perceived as dangerous (i.e. threatening the social order) in Classical Greece. Is it a coincidence that in the Funeral Oration of Thucydides, Pericles makes a special appeal only to those women in widowhood (*en chereia*) to uphold their virtue? Andersen finds other examples in ancient literature down to St. Paul showing that widows were perceived as disruptive since they were especially susceptible to sexual temptation. Freed from the constraints that virginity imposes on maidens and yet not being past reproductive age, widows can be objects for male contention. Penelope is attractive and at the same time tempting in a special way.

Before we leave the subject of Penelope, something must be said about another way by which she tests Odysseus. Not being sure that he is not an impostor, she makes a casual remark to the effect that their marriage bed should be moved outside. Odysseus gets exasperated because he knows the bed is unmovable being made out of a tree-trunk which is still rooted. Then and only then, does she get convinced of his true identity. But this is not the point that interests us here; it is rather the fact that Odysseus falls right into her trap. In that way she emerges as his equal in wits.

Perhaps this is why she is interesting. She is not simply the loyal wife. She is also the cunning widow capable of manipulating men and using the situation to her advantage.

Role inversion: The Laestrygonian's wife

All the above females represent different aspects of womanhood. Femininity, however, can be defined also through its opposite, through norm-inversion. For this we must search in the remotest parts of the world where Odysseus' adventures take him. At the northernmost edge of the earth, well beyond the confines of civilization, the hero encounters a tribe of cannibals, the Laestrygonians.

I hope I will be permitted a small digression on cannibalism at this point. A study by W. Arens states that most accounts about cannibals were in fact *not* eye-witness reports; rather, they were based on preconceptions of how savages *ought* to behave. Thus, even in recent times cannibalism is a mark of 'otherness' separating the savage from the civilized.

In the *Odyssey* too the Laestrygonians can be regarded as the savages *par excellence*. Their wives are bound to be unfeminine. In fact, we meet only one, the leader Antiphates' wife. Already her appearance betrays norm-inversion: she was big as a mountain, says the poet. (10, 113) Obviously very large women were not considered handsome. But her least attractive aspect is yet to come. For it is she who notifies her husband to come and have Odysseus' men killed and be cooked up for dinner. (10, 115-116) Cooking humans, and especially guests, inverts the customs of hospitality and the functions of the hearth with which women are associated.

The battle of the sexes

The female characters in the *Odyssey* represent different aspects of womanhood. As we have seen, women are not perceived negatively. They are hospitable and loyal but also complex, clever, manipulative, seductive. Seductiveness conceals danger - this is especially obvious in the case of the sirens whose seductive song leads to death. Granted

that the latter are monsters, they are nevertheless female as J.-P. Vernant points out.

Women, however, should not be seen in isolation but in relation to men. When we observe the interaction of the genders, it emerges that their interests do not always coincide but that something of a battle, subtle but unmistakable, is going on.

For example, all females in the *Odyssey* are sedentary, rooted in their home, be that in the city, or on the islands of Calypso and Circe in the margins of civilization. Odysseus, on the other hand, is a wanderer. He stays with many of his women for a given period of time, but then he moves on.

He will not even stay with Penelope. Before they even made love he tells her: "My dear, we have not yet come to the end of our trials. There lies before me still a great and hazardous adventure, which I must see through to the very end... That was what Teiresias' soul predicted for me when I went down to the House of Hades to find a way home for my followers and myself. So come to bed now, my dear wife and let us comfort ourselves while we can with a sweet sleep in each other's arms." (23, 248-255) But Penelope insists on knowing what he means. Odysseus answers reproachfully: "Why drag it out of me? ... Well you shall hear the whole tale. I'll make no secret of it. Not that you'll find it to your liking!" (23, 264-266) Then he tells her that he will have to wander once more. He is like the eagle who has to fly away although he will eventually return.

If Odysseus is perpetually on the move, his women will employ all kinds of tricks to keep him. Calypso will offer him immortality. Circe will not attempt to make him stay, but there is no sign that she wants him to leave. It is he who initiates the move for departure and he is clearly nervous when he breaks the news knowing that Circe will not like it: "(He) clasped the goddess' knees in prayer, while she listened..." (10, 480-481). The clasping of the knees is meant to appease a potential anger.

As for Nausicaa, she too hopes to keep him. She tells her companions: "Listen my white-armed maids, while I tell you what I have been thinking. This man's arrival among the Phaeacians ... was not unpremeditated by the Olympian powers. For when first we met I thought he cut a sorry figure, but now he looks like the gods who live in heaven. That is the kind of man that I fancy as a husband, if he would settle here. I only hope he will choose to stay." (6, 239-245). Odysseus, however, will wander away.

This pattern is, of course, not unique to the *Odyssey* but I shall abstain from using other examples from ancient literature such as can be found in tragedy or Herodotus or in Virgil's *Aeneid*. That women try to trap men, or at least manipulate them, by using their sexuality, wits or other stealthy weapons, such as poison, is a common

theme in world literature. On the other hand, the Casanovas and Don Giovannis will always try to seduce women and then leave them. The arena of conflict is marriage.

Let me quote from the witty, albeit controversial, American author Henry Louis Mencken who was fashionable in the teens of our century. In his *In Defense of Women*, a satirical little book on the relation of the sexes, he says:

“Turn for example, to the field in which the two sexes come most **constantly** into conflict ... to the field, ... of monogamous marriage.” (21). And further: “A man in full possession of the modest faculties **that** nature commonly apportions to him is at least far enough above **idiocy** to realize that marriage is a bargain in which he gets the worse of it, even when, in some detail or other, he makes a visible gain.” (23)

What sociobiologists tell us

The battle of the sexes, especially when it comes to marriage is such an all-pervading theme in world literature, ancient and modern, that it would seem to be in need of an explanation. I am convinced that it is triggered by a deeply rooted biological mechanism and by a recognition that the sexes *are* really different. This undoubtedly explains sex-based metaphors in literature and art as well as the composite perfect sex of fantasy, the Hermaphrodite (see also Ajoutian in this volume). But what is this biological blueprint?

This is where the relatively new sciences of ethnology and sociobiology come to our aid. Sociobiologists have drawn attention to the fact that men and women have different reproductive interests. Assuming theoretically that each intercourse can result into pregnancy, it costs a man very little to indulge in casual sex. It is, in fact, in his interest to spread his genes as far and wide as possible. The case is different for women. Pregnancy means nine months of carrying the child plus several years of care. This is a considerable investment in the offspring. Women must therefore be choosier than men and they try to secure a good father for their child, a father who will protect both the pregnant mother and the child to be born. Thus: “Women and men usually pursue different strategies because they **usually** have different reproductive interests.” Both sexes get better at these strategies over evolutionary time. “Casanovas will get better at seducing women and then abandoning them, and women will get better at detecting Casanova tendencies...” (Weinreich, 346).

Of course, none of this is to deny that many men are and like to be monogamous, or that many women are polygamous. The biological approach that I am using is not deterministic, it only shows tendencies. Sociobiological theory tries to detect the biological logic of

behavior without presupposing that the rules are binding and irrevocable.

To return to the women in the *Odyssey*. They at first appear sedate and subdued. When they make a public appearance they are often seated or standing by a pillar so as not to attract attention. "Telemachus' mother sat opposite them by a pillar of the hall...spinning the delicate thread on her distaff..." (17, 96) Or: "Nausicaa ... was standing by one of the pillars that supported the massive roof." (8, 458)

Upon closer scrutiny, however, the female characters prove a good match for the men, capable of outwitting them, if necessary. Remember that both Helen and Penelope can outwit their husbands. There again I would like to detect a deeply ingrained biological recognition: that society cannot function without some kind of balance between the genders. Even in a world superficially dominated by men, women have to be given their due credit. The battle of the sexes is just a game which ultimately betokens harmony rather than conflict.

*The translations are from the Penguin Classics edition by E.V. Rieu, Harmondsworth 1946.

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GENDER ROLES IN THE ODYSSEY

Helène Whittaker

I

In any discussion concerning roles of male and female in the *Odyssey* it seems natural to concentrate mainly on the evidence having to do with the situation on Ithaka, both because Ithaka is the most complex and the most fully described society in the *Odyssey* and because, along with the more sketchily portrayed Sparta and Pylos, Ithaka represents normality against which the other environments encountered in the poem are contrasted, implicitly or explicitly, in various ways. In this connection, it is important to note that there is a fundamental antithesis between the real world represented in the main by Ithaka, Pylos and Sparta and the otherness of the literary, mythical landscapes visited by Odysseus between the time of his departure from Troy and his arrival on Ithaka. Characteristic of most of the places visited by Odysseus is their isolation, inwardness, and lack of social context.

In the *Iliad*, men are defined almost exclusively as warriors and this aspect is still prominent in the *Odyssey*. The exploits of the heroes in the Trojan War forms the background to the *Odyssey* and are constantly referred to. Warfare in general is a recurring theme. To prove oneself in war or warlike situations is an intrinsic part of being a man. The main purpose of the cattle raids and hostile incursions into neighbouring territories which are often alluded to seems to be to allow men to prove themselves as warriors in times of peace. The normality and relative frequency of such raids can be deduced from several passages of the *Odyssey*. When the suitors, killed by Odysseus and Telemakhos, are led by Hermes down into the Underworld, they encounter a number of noble souls, among them Agamemnon, who asks them whether the reason for their untimely death is that they were killed while raiding livestock or attacking a town (24.111-113). Agamemnon is himself asked the same question

by Odysseus when they meet during Odysseus's visit among the dead (11.401-408).

War is seen as ennobling and it brings men glory and renown. It gives them the opportunity to exhibit their strength, physical courage, and prowess. Success as a warrior adds to a man's status. The warlike qualities of Odysseus are emphasised by Athena when, disguised as Mentor, she first comes to Ithaka in order to take Telemakhos in hand (1.252-267) and they are often referred to elsewhere in the poem, for example, in the conversations about Odysseus which Telemakhos has with Nestor and Menelaos. Odysseus himself boasts of his achievements in war when talking to the Phaiakians (8.216-220; 9.19-20; 9.40). The story of the Wooden Horse and Odysseus' part in the conquest and destruction of Troy forms the subject of one of Demodokos' songs at the court of the Phaeakians (8.487-520). A recurring epithet of Odysseus is sacker of cities referring to the prominent part he played in the destruction of Troy and perhaps secondarily to acts of piracy such as his raid on the Kikones with which he starts off his account of his adventures to the Phaiakians, at the beginning of book nine. As well one can mention the comparisons between Odysseus and lions which occur several times in the *Odyssey*. For instance, when Odysseus is washed ashore on Skherie and first meets Nausikaa, he is compared to a mountain lion in search of food (6.130-134). Although the simile is in itself appropriate to Odysseus' actual condition, starving after having been at sea for days, it is of the same type as the lion similes which occur in the *Iliad* where lions are described as hunting, prowling, and attacking. In the *Iliad*, lion similes occur almost exclusively in battle scenes and are used to describe warriors fighting or getting ready to fight. Part of the function of this lion simile is to indicate that although Odysseus has been reduced to his lowest point having lost everything, he is still a warrior and a sacker of cities. The purpose of lion similes in connection with Odysseus is made more explicit in another passage where Menelaos compares Odysseus' homecoming and the killing of the suitors to a lion among deer (4.335-340). One of the features which characterise Skherie, and confirms its position as a borderland between reality and irreality is the lack of strife and the distaste of its inhabitants against war (6.6; 6.270).

The *Odyssey*, however, is not primarily a poem about war or piracy and a much wider range of human activities and relationships are described than in the *Iliad* so that the *Odyssey* gives a much more detailed picture of society. Also of relevance is the fact that while the *Iliad* does contain some notable female characters, in the *Iliad* women are seen fairly infrequently and are not as a rule the focus of interest, in the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, they are everywhere and have

major roles in the action; this allows for a clearer conception of gender roles to be developed than would have been possible from the *Iliad*.

II

It is generally recognised that the society of Ithaka as portrayed in the *Odyssey* is a stratified society. As was pointed out by Moses Finley in *The World of Odysseus*, the social order was fixed and hierarchical and social mobility was non-existent. It is reasonable to suppose that gender roles are to a certain extent determined by social condition. Given the nature of epic poetry, however, the social class most fully depicted is the ruling aristocracy. Although the *Odyssey* does show more interest in the lower classes, also as individuals, than does the *Iliad*, there is, on the whole, relatively little information about their situation. In addition it has been observed that Epic poetry is oriented towards the aristocracy to such an extent that the slaves who are individually portrayed constitute special cases and cannot rightly be taken as typical representatives. The swineherd Eumaios, for instance, with whom Odysseus stays when he first arrives in Ithaka, is in reality nobly born but has been reduced to servitude through the disloyalty of a servant-girl.

The central institution of Ithakan society is the *oikos* or the aristocratic household. In addition to the family itself, the *oikos* also included dependents such as servants and slaves. The term also refers to the buildings, land, livestock, and other material possessions belonging to the household. As far as possible, the household was economically self-sustaining.

In the first book of the *Odyssey*, the suitors are feasting in the hall of Odysseus' palace and listening to the bard, Phemios, who is singing about the return of the heroes from Troy. Penelope comes down from her room and asks Phemios to choose another song, since hearing about Troy and the suffering brought about by the war causes her too much sorrow in reminding her of Odysseus. Telemakhos then makes the following reply to his mother Penelope: "go to your room and occupy yourself with your own affairs, weaving and spinning and tell your maids to get busy. Poetry is the concern of men, particularly of me since I hold authority in the house" (1.356-359). In the twenty-first book there is a similar situation. Penelope has arranged a contest with Odysseus' bow in order to test the suitors. Telemakhos, however, prevents Penelope from being present at and watching the contest by again telling her that she should attend to her weaving and spinning since weaponry is the concern of men only (21.350-353). Telemakhos' replies on these two occasions are modelled on Hektor's reply to Andromakhe in the sixth book of the *Iliad* (490-493), where he tells

her that war concerns men only and she should attend to her weaving and spinning. The contexts both of Hektor's words to Andromakhe in the *Iliad* and Telemakhos' to Penelope in the *Odyssey* are closely comparable. Andromakhe and Penelope have stepped outside the boundaries of their female roles. The most significant conclusion that can be drawn from these passages is perhaps the recognition that male and female roles were sharply defined and clearly distinguished so that certain activities were properly considered to be the business of men only, while others concerned only women. In both instances in the *Odyssey*, Penelope accepts Telemakhos' rebuke which indicates that there was an absolute respect for the division of roles. It is also seen that the proper sphere of activity of men can vary according to context, being here concerned with song, weaponry, and war, while a woman's sphere of activity is limited to weaving and spinning.

The head of the household was the man to whom the rest of the household was totally subordinate. In his replies to Penelope, referred to above, Telemakhos emphasises that he is the head of the household and that he makes the decisions. In the first instance, there is a certain amount of pathos in Telemakhos' words, since he very clearly is not in control of his household. The house has been occupied by a horde of suitors who with very little regard to Telemakhos' position are wasting his inheritance. The situation in Odysseus' household illustrates the chaos that can occur in the vacuum created by the departure of the head of the household. Telemakhos cannot establish himself in a position of authority because he is too young and lacks experience, and Penelope cannot do so because she is a woman. She is reduced to stratagems and subterfuge in order to maintain her position. She doesn't want to remarry but she is powerless to throw the suitors out and to establish control over the household. Inherent in the position as head of the household were certain responsibilities. Most importantly, the honour of the *oikos* had to be maintained. Orestes who killed Aigisthos, the murderer of his father, Agamemnon, and the usurper of his throne, is put forward by Athena and Nestor as a role model for Telemakhos (1.298-300; 3.199). A man's status is to a great extent defined by his wealth, wealth in cattle and material possessions, and it was part of the man's role to maintain and if possible increase the wealth of the household. As an illustration of the importance of material possessions one can mention that Penelope is not expected to see anything surprising in the fact that Odysseus although having been away for close on twenty years should yet spend another year travelling around and collecting gifts in Thesprotia in order to add to the wealth of his household (19.272-284). Odysseus is prepared to stay on for a year in Skherie provided the Phaiakians give him plenty of gifts. For, as he says, nothing is more advantageous than to arrive home with full hands since one will then win greater respect

(11.355-361). Menelaos who spent seven years travelling around and collecting wealth before returning home, is contrasted with Aigisthos who destroyed Agamemnon's household (3.301-303; 4.81-82). Piracy and brigandage were considered legitimate ways of adding to a household's material wealth. Odysseus plans to compensate himself for the destruction of his property at the hands of the suitors by raids (23.357).

Related to this is absolute respect for the property of other men. The suitors have offended against the social norms of Ithaka because they have not respected the property of Odysseus. This is clearly stated by Athena (13.377-428), when she and Odysseus meet after he has been put ashore on Ithaka and from the very beginning of the poem, their guilt in regard to Odysseus' property is relentlessly underscored, so that when we come to the bloodbath near the end of the poem, we do not question whether their punishment might not be somewhat excessive.

Throughout the *Odyssey*, the problem with the suitors is considered to be a purely private problem concerning only the household of Odysseus; for instance, when Telemakhos calls the assembly in Ithaca, he says outright that it concerns a private matter (2.44-45). On the other hand, no clear distinction is made between Odysseus's *oikos* and the kingdom of Ithaka. Political dominance was entirely in the hands of men. The form of rule was monarchical and royal power was to a great extent based on personal power. The ruling aristocratic class was subject to internal strife and power struggles. Achilles in the Underworld asks Odysseus whether his father still is king in Thessaly or whether he has been dishonoured because of old age and therefore no longer capable of maintaining his position (11.495-505). Similarly, Odysseus on meeting the ghost of his mother, enquires whether his wife and son have been able to keep his *gevra* intact, *gevra* referring both to his property and to his status as king of Ithaka (11.174-176).

The political dimensions of the actions of the suitors, however, come out clearly in the repeated comparisons between the suitors and Aigisthos. While Agamemnon was fighting at Troy, Aigisthos seduced his wife, Klytaimnestra and took over royal power at Mycenae. When Agamemnon returns, he is murdered. The references to the events at Mycenae function in the poem as a reflection of what could happen on Ithaka. Throughout the poem, close parallels are implied between the case of Aigisthos and that of the suitors and the fate of Aigisthos foreshadows that of the suitors. It is obvious that whatever the charms of Penelope, the main object in marrying her is to gain control over the kingdom of Ithaka. Although Penelope herself does not have the right to bestow royal power in Ithaka, as the wife of the previous king, she would provide a spurious legitimacy to the man who married her.

One of the suitors, Antinous, makes this quite clear when in a reply to Telemakhos he states that Telemakhos will never be king in Ithaka although kingship is his patrimony (1.386-387). Telemakhos also complains on several occasions that the suitors want to both marry his mother and to obtain his father's status (1.386-387).

In Skherie, Arete seems to enjoy exceptional power and influence. Nausikaa advises Odysseus that when he comes into the palace, he should first approach the queen, Arete, in supplication (6.304-315). Later, when he is going into the town, Odysseus meets Athena disguised as a young Phaiakian girl and she gives him the same advice and adds that Arete is honoured as no other woman. By securing her favour, he will have good chances of having the Phaiakians help him return home. Arete's position has sometimes been taken as a survival of matriarchy which is supposed to have existed at some unspecified time in Greek prehistory. This is rather far-fetched. The prominence of Arete is more likely part of the otherness of Skherie. Skherie is not yet reality, although it comes close, being an organised community and therefore comparable to Pylos or Sparta. In fact, Nausikaa's words tell Odysseus and the listeners of the poem that Skherie is not yet normality. In any case, the prominence of Arete is not consistently maintained: throughout the Phaiakian section of the poem, the king, Alkinous repeatedly exercises unmistakable and unchallenged royal authority, and it is explicitly stated that word and deed in Skherie depend on Alkinous.

All social relationships outside the oikos are conducted by men. The institution of guest-friendship and gift-exchange made much of by Finley concerns men only, and the social sphere of women was limited. The normal sphere of women was the house which, as far as we know, they could leave freely, but probably did so only in exceptional cases. In the *Odyssey*, both Arete and Helen are shown as mixing freely with men in the main hall and this has been taken to indicate that it was not irregular for women to take part in the social events of the household. However, neither Helen nor Arete can be considered typical. Helen is the daughter of Zeus, and Arete does not belong to the real world. In most instances, it seems, women were expected to keep to themselves and to occupy themselves at the loom, while men feasted. Nestor's wife, although mentioned (3.404) does not participate in the social life of the palace, and Penelope shows herself only occasionally.

III

One of the crucial factors which distinguish men from the gods is the necessity to work in order to subsist. In the *Odyssey*, both men and

women are shown working. The Homeric household can be described as a segregated rather than joint household; that is to say men and women have separate spheres of activity and responsibility. The activities and responsibilities of the man were centred on the land while those of the woman were based on the house. Women keep house for their husbands the *Odyssey* states (7.68). The term *deuspoina* the etymological meaning of which is mistress of the house, is on several occasions used to describe aristocratic women. Women of the upper classes are most often described as being busy at the loom or occupied with some other form of textile work. This is a reflection of the fact that all the linen and clothing used by the members of the *oikos* was produced in the home, mainly it seems by the mistress of the house herself with the help of her maids. The wool produced on the estate had to be carded, spun, and woven. References are often made to purple-coloured yarn and while nothing is said about the dyeing of wool in the *Odyssey*, presumably this was also done by the women in the house. The preparation of food was done by the female servants and slaves. On the whole not much is said about the actual management of the house in the *Odyssey*; although it is clearly stated that the woman in regard to her position in the *oikos* is subordinate to her husband, it is also evident that she did have a position of some responsibility. An impression of the importance of the woman to the household and of the actual authority she could wield can be gained from Hesiodos. In the *Works and Days*, on two occasions he advises his brother concerning marriage. Concern for the efficient management of the house lies behind his worries about bad wives. Nothing is worse for a man than a bad wife, while a good wife who keeps an orderly house, will make the household prosper.

The activities of men within the house seem to be in the main connected with leisure activities. In general, men are usually identified with work associated with the cultivation of the soil or with the herding of animals. This obviously follows from the fact that the economic base of the *oikos* was its land. Trade is almost universally despised and is in the hands of the Phoenicians while certain very specialised activities are in the hands of particular craftsmen whose social status is uncertain but who seem to have been highly respected in virtue of their skill. While a man's activities can take place both inside and outside the house, women are normally confined to activities which take place inside the house. That this is true for all women regardless of social class can be determined from a passage in the *Odyssey*. Telemakhos and Odysseus have been reunited and are discussing tactics for dealing with the suitors. Odysseus suggests that all the slaves belonging to the household should be tested for loyalty, but Telemakhos counters this by objecting that it is only practical to find out which of the women slaves are guilty of disloyalty since they

can easily be located working around the house. It would be much more difficult to test the loyalty of the men slaves since many of them would be spread out in various places working in the fields and vineyards or herding animals (16.316-320). On the other hand, there must have been some exceptions. Fetching water, for instance, was regarded as woman's work, and water may have had to be gotten from a spring some distance away (7.19; 20.153).

As a general rule, one can say that the distinction between the types of work performed by men and women would seem to be absolute and to be of greater importance than any distinction between social classes in the kinds of work done. There are very few activities which are performed by both men and women and they are rarely seen working together. The exception is in the preparation and serving of meals, and even here there seems to be a division of roles; male servants were responsible for bringing in the meat and wine while the bread was provided by female servants. Only men are described as taking part in agricultural activities or the herding of animals, nor are men ever seen to be occupying themselves with activities considered to be typically female. There is no sense that the type of work performed by women is regarded as inferior to that performed by men. Skill in all types of work is praised.

In the world of the *Odyssey*, physical labour is not looked down upon or regarded with contempt. Odysseus boasts of his skills with the plough and of his ability to work hard. When disguised as the nameless beggar, he has returned to his home and is offered work by one of the suitors, his reply demonstrates that he is very familiar with all aspects of agricultural work and that he is as proud of excelling at it (18.366-375) as he is of excelling in war. Earlier, he has shown himself capable of building a raft in order to take himself away from Calypso's island; the building of the raft is described in great detail (5.228-261). He is proud of the skill with which he constructed his bedroom in his palace on Ithaka (23.189-201).

On the other hand, work is not idealised in any way and considered to be a good in itself. Physical labour is part of the human condition and accepted as such. On the other hand, there is no doubt that life would not be more pleasant without the necessity to work. The absence of male agricultural work defines idealised societies and landscapes. The gods on Olympus, when not meddling in human affairs seemingly spend most of their time feasting. On the island of Aiolos there is non-stop banqueting, and the pleasure the Phaiakians have in feasting and song is a constant of the Phaiakian episode. Similarly, in the *Works and Days* of Hesiod, the life of the Golden Race who lived like gods is characterised by lack of toil and endless feasting (109-115). The man who is solely dependent for his livelihood on the work of his hands is regarded with pity. When Akhilles is complaining

about his situation in the Underworld, he mentions as an example of one of the lowliest states on earth, the man who owns no land and is forced to hire out his labour in order to survive (Akhilles' words have often been taken to indicate that in Homeric society the lowliest state imaginable was not that of the slave, but of the man who although free does not possess any land of his own and is thereby forced to work for others in order to survive (e.g. Finley, 1977, 57). This conclusion does not seem warranted. It seems more reasonable to assume that Akhilles mentions the situation of the landless labourer rather than that of the slave because the idea of identifying himself with a slave, even in unrealistic, would never occur to him. (On the lot of the slave cf 4.244-245. See also M. M. Austin, P. Vidal-Nacquet: *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece: An Introduction*; London, 1977, 44-45).

It is not to be supposed that in reality, Odysseus and other men of his social class spent much of their time working. It was considered important to be capable of hard labour if necessary, but, apart from doing what was necessary in order to supervise the running of the estate, they did so only in exceptional cases. It is significant that when Telemakhos arrives in Pylos, Nestor is sacrificing and when he comes to Sparta Menelaos is celebrating a wedding feast. Telemakhos himself, before setting out on his journey in search of news of his father, spends his days brooding and lamenting over his position and the insolence of the suitors. Among the upper class, only Odysseus' father, Laertes, is shown regularly working in the fields; he has withdrawn from society and spends his time on a lonely farmstead tending his vineyards and orchards, but this is not because of necessity but as a visible expression of his sorrows. Concerning the suitors, the objection is not to their lounging about, passing their time feasting, listening to music, playing games of chance, and in general leading what we might consider to be a reprehensibly idle life; that would be no more than expected behaviour for men of their status and social class. What is blameworthy is that their way of life is parasitical and they are wasting another man's property.

The attitude to work found in the *Odyssey* is basically the same as that found in Hesiodos. Work is ordained by the gods and a necessity since if one does not work one's barns will be empty in winter and the neighbours might not be too ready with the handouts. But work is not a good in itself. Hesiodos, however, writing from a different social perspective condemns idleness and he is far more aware of the actual toil and hardship involved in agricultural work. This attitude towards work is fundamentally different from that put forward by Virgil in the *Georgics* where the necessity to work is considered to be valuable in itself because it forces man to develop and make use of his capacities and powers of invention.

In contrast to men, most women are depicted as working whatever their social status. Weaving and textile-work in general is identified with women to such a degree that not even goddesses are usually idle. Both Kirke and Kalypso, who are goddesses are busy at the loom. In the cave of the Nymphs on Ithaka, one can see the stone looms used by the nymphs to weave their wondrous fabrics. Artemis receives the epithet of the golden distaff. The absence of female labour is not a feature of any ideal world. This follows from the ascertainment that men's work is principally concerned with primary production, while women's work is associated with the processing of agricultural products. Even though, the earth might freely bring forward grain and fruit without the need to plough or harvest, and sheep be always thick-fleeced, the grain still has to be ground and made into bread, and the wool has to be carded, spun, and woven.

It has been observed that, concerning types of work, as far as can be seen, there does not seem to be major distinctions between the different social classes and both free and unfree can be seen engaged in the same activities. Social class does not necessarily or primarily define the type of work done. This is true generally speaking and more so in the case of men than of women, keeping in mind that men don't work if they can help it and this in turn is dependent on status. On Odysseus' estate, the animals were taken care of by slaves such as Melanthios the goatherd or Eumaios the swineherd; when Athena meets Odysseus on Ithaka after he has been put ashore by the Phaiakians, she has disguised herself as a nobly-born shepherd indicating that there was nothing unusual in such a combination. In the case of women, however, social status probably does count. Heavy work such as grinding grain or fetching water would have been done only by slaves. Grinding grain is arduous work and would consequently be left to the cheapest labour, namely female slaves. Odysseus' household has a number of female slaves occupied with grinding the barley and wheat for the household. On occasion, they were forced to work into the night in order to finish their work (20.105-110).

IV

Religious ritual as described in the *Odyssey* is ceremonial and communal. Both men and women are present as can be seen from the description of the sacrifice at Pylos which is the most detailed description of ritual in the poem (3.404-463). Only men, however, take an active part in the proceedings and share in the sacrificial meal. The women remain in the background and only participate by raising a ritual cry when the bull is killed. Respect for the gods is a virtue

often praised in men and lack of it is greatly condemned. That worship of the gods is connected with male spheres of activity, politics, and agriculture, is indicated by a simile in the *Odyssey* (19.109-114) where it is stated that a god-fearing ruler makes his land prosper. The same thought is also found in Hesiod. The *Odyssey* says little about women and religious activity. It could therefore be suggested that the religious activity of women was limited to the private domestic sphere. In the *Iliad*, however, the women of Troy are described as making an offering to the goddess Athena for the salvation of their city, which shows that women could play a significant role in public religion.

V

All the women met with in the *Odyssey* are individuals and not stereotypes. Most of them are portrayed with sympathy. On the whole, emphasis is on their positive qualities. The wisdom and good sense of Penelope, for instance, is often remarked upon. Even in the case of Helen, although her adultery and ambiguous loyalties are not overlooked, the main impression of her that one gets is of intelligence and perceptiveness. Apart from Penelope's faithless maids, who have no redeeming qualities, the only wicked woman in the *Odyssey* is Klytaimnestra who has no part in the action itself, but is mentioned several times and functions in the poem as a reverse mirror image to Penelope. But even she is at one point praised for her good sense (3.266), and on the whole, the main weight of guilt for Agamemnon's murder is placed on Aigisthos rather than on Klytaimnestra. Yet there is a perceptible although weak current of misogyny running through the *Odyssey* which can be compared with the very overt distrust of women found in Hesiodos and Semonides. In several passages of the *Odyssey*, derogatory remarks are made about women in general; they are referred to as fickle, lying, and not to be trusted as well as vicious (e.g. 15.20-23; 11.427-428). To what extent this reflects views current in society in general is impossible to know, but it does represent a definite strain within early Greek poetry. The occurrence of misogynistic views in the Homeric poems may perhaps be considered the result of a conflict between the view of women in the Epic tradition and that of the poet's own time.

VI

The society depicted in the *Odyssey* is one where male values were dominant and where all socially relevant transactions took place between the male members of the community. Such a society

obviously places severe restrictions on the position of women and what is considered to be acceptable behaviour for women, and it is fair to say that the lives of most women were narrow and circumscribed.

There were also clear limitations inherent in the male role. In a world where identity was largely defined through the esteem of others, it was necessary to conform to the socially prescribed pattern of behaviour and derivations were not easily tolerated. Both men and women were expected to live up to clear-cut conceptions of gender roles and there was very little choice involved. Women were in general confined to the house and in their behaviour not allowed to overstep clearly defined domestic boundaries. Men were expected to distinguish themselves as warriors and to preserve the honour and wealth of the *oikos*. The expectations and limitations of the male and female roles in the *Odyssey* are accepted and never questioned. Penelope finds herself in a situation where she is forced to overstep the boundaries of the female role. In terms of the plot, the initiative lies with her since she is expected to come to a definite decision regarding her remarriage. This she cannot do, however, because women did not arrange their own marriages. Penelope's use of the weaving ruse can be seen as symbolic of her acceptance of the limitations of the female role.

To conclude, concerning the question of gender roles in the *Odyssey*, it is not inappropriate to speak of a divided world where male and female spheres of activity are separate and that this division is operative within most areas of life. The position of women was inferior and subordinate but women were not considered inferior beings.

VII

Gender transgressions in the *Odyssey* occur only in similes. Penelope is compared once to a king and once to a ship-wrecked sailor, and Odysseus is once compared to a woman being led off to slavery (19.108-114; 23.233-240; 8.523-531). These similes have been interpreted by Helene P. Foley as indicating a deliberate reversal of sexual roles and therefore having a deeper significance showing identity between men and women. The symbolic weight given to these similes seems over-subtle and over-elaborate. The comparison between Penelope and a good king is not a comment on how Penelope has managed the kingdom of Ithaca during Odysseus' absence. Penelope's good reputation is due to her fidelity and domesticity, and not to the way she has ruled in Ithaca; at this she very obviously was not very successful. The comparison with the sailor belongs with a series of images of safety from the sea which is a well-known theme in early Greek poetry. The point of the simile comparing Odysseus to

a slave woman is to illustrate Odysseus' despair and the utter pitifulness of his plight. The most pitiful fate imaginable was that of a woman about to be led away into slavery. There is no reason to suggest that the simile is meant to signify Odysseus' identity with his former victims. The gender reversal in these similes is coincidental to which no particular symbolic meaning should be ascribed.

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A JOKE WITH THE INEVITABLE

MEN AS WOMEN AND WOMEN AS MEN IN ARISTOPHANES'

THESMOPHORIAZOUSAI AND EKKLESIAZOUSAI

Anne-Britt Høiby

It is not only the jokes in the *Thesmophoria* and the *Ekklesiazousai*, but the whole framework of the gender transgressions which are comic. If the plot of the *Thesmophoriazousai* had taken place in reality, however, it would not have been amusing at all, but a matter of life and death. For a man to have attended the secret mystery rites at the Thesmophoria would have offended against the religious and the civic laws of Classical Athens. The procedure related to grave offences, or at least a glimpse of it, is described in the text. Cleisthenes the effeminate is sent to report the crime to the Council, and it is certain that the conclusion to such an enterprise would have been death, as Mnesilochus himself is aware when he is standing tied to the column, hoping that Euripides will rescue him.

The Thesmophoriazousai and the Thesmophoria

The plot of Aristophanes' comedy, *Thesmophoriazousai* (The Poet and the Women), takes place during one particular day in the three-day-long festival of Demeter Thesmophoros, the Thesmophoria. In the comic plot, Aristophanes makes the women of Athens decide upon the death penalty for the tragic playwright Euripides, because he has slandered them in his plays. In order to avoid the death penalty, Euripides must find a man who, in disguise, can go to the Thesmophoria to defend him. Euripides, being one of the most famous tragic poets in Athens, has an understandable fear that he, however well disguised, would be recognised if he attempted to enter the holy site himself. So off he seeks out another tragic poet, Agathon, who is a well known crossdresser and effeminate. Agathon, however, refuses to take part in the plan; he also claims that he is too well known to risk of such an enterprise. In the end, Euripides persuades an old

friend and relation, Mnesilochus, to enter the holy site disguised as a woman in order to defend him. The disguised man is detected and held captive, while Cleisthenes, another effeminate, who happens to pass by, runs to the Council to report the crime. So far the comedy conveys normal, lawful procedures concerning the discovery of a serious sacrilege, the fact underlined by poor Mnesilochus lamenting that his life should end in such a way. The comedy, however, ends differently. It concludes with the women and Euripides coming to terms; the women, then, withdraw the death penalty, and Euripides promises never to slander them again.

If the plot of the *Thesmophoriazousai* had taken place in real life, however, it would have been a matter of life and death. According to the laws, the proceedings against a person guilty of severe sacrilege were the concern of not only the strictly religious magistrates and laws, but also of the Council and the Assembly. The Assembly suggested a punishment appropriate to the offence, and we learn from several cases that impiety and sacrilege of various kinds were severely punished. We need only recall one of the most famous heretic-cases in Athens, when Sokrates was condemned to death.

The presence of a man at the Thesmophoria would not only have been a source of pollution, which would have affected the efficacy of its purpose: the promotion of fertility, but also would have been a direct offence against Demeter's mystery rites. The Greeks knew stories about men, who, by offending the twain goddesses, Demeter and her daughter Kore, were punished severely. From Herodotus we learn of Miltiades who was punished directly by the two goddesses when he entered their holy site in Paros. Miltiades held Paros in siege, but had no further luck with the enterprise. A priestess of subordinate rank to the earth goddess sought an interview with him. This she obtained and she suggested to Miltiades that, if he really wanted to capture Paros, he had better do as she advised (Hdt.6, 134). Exactly what these suggestions were, we are not told, but they included Miltiades' entering the holy site of Demeter Thesmophoros. Since it was impossible to go beyond the entrance door, he entered the site by jumping over the fence. When he reached the temple, he was suddenly struck by such fear, that he ran away in panic breaking his leg in the process. Later he died of gangrene from the injury to his leg, and the whole army had to relinquish the siege and leave Paros.

Another story tells us of king Battus of Cyrene who wanted to learn about the mysteries of the Thesmophoria. The priestesses tried to resist, but the king would not to be stopped. The women, however, forbade the king to watch what was forbidden for a man to see and hear, but the priestesses did allow him to watch the first part of the

ceremonies which contained nothing out of the ordinary. The priestesses continued with their ceremony, clothed in their holy garments, and wholly possessed because of their initiation into the mysteries. They brandished their naked swords, and sacrificed animals, their hands and faces stained with blood. Then they suddenly halted, as if in response to a hidden signal, leaped upon Battus and removed the part of him that made him a male. No *man* should watch the forbidden. (Suid. *Thesmophoros*.)

The stories about these unfortunate men might be dubious and not all together correct in a strict historical sense. The narratives are, however, highly important as historical sources, because folk stories are true in the sense of revealing sentiment and mentality regarding certain matters: for the people themselves, such stories are thus thought to be correct historical narratives. The narratives about these unfortunate men supported and emphasised the law prohibiting the participation of men. By showing the gruesome consequences of transgression, both the narratives and law protected the mystery rites. Although we have no exact court documents about sacrilege against the Thesmophoria, the pious reactions concerning activities understood as grave offences, can be shown clearly from the case of Socrates.

Why is it then, if such activities were forbidden and had deadly consequences, we find a comedy making jokes about the holy, and highly protected festival of the Thesmophoria? On one level, the purpose of the humor in this comedy is as follows: the plot is the author's trick to put a man in the Thesmophoria in order to make a joke with *the inevitable*. The concept needs some explanation. It is an inevitable fact that every society, in order to *be* a society, must conform to certain basic ideas about right and wrong, from which in turn norm, legislated law and ordered structure develop and get established. In a religious world, society as a whole and the individual being are both confined to a double set of boundaries. Since the values and order of the world are believed to have been initiated through the act of divine creation, the political culture carries out what is believed to be divine sentiments and commandments in its secular institutions, law, stratifications, and allotted responsibilities. In addition, religious law proper manifests itself in dogmas and particular religious practices taking place in marked out sites, buildings and on festival days, altogether regarded as holy. In a well-functioning society such basic ideas are understood as values to be kept and protected. Not only is confinement to basic ideas inevitable on a general level, but certain ideas or norms are thought to be inevitable in themselves in order to achieve ongoing bliss, and avoid outbursts of political chaos.

This is not to say that belief and political approval go without friction. Society, groups within it and the individual, encounter opposite and conflicting loyalties and interests, between themselves and from pressure from beyond, juxtaposed with individual desires and goals. Legislative programs can control conflicts but not necessarily extinguish them altogether. An additional pressure in a religious world is the strict divine law. However blissful, the thought of eternal, celestial monitoring, eternal dogmas and divine order are believed to be definite and absolute. The divine operates with a logic of its own, not always easily intelligible to the human being. It is, among other things, a divine prerogative to establish relations and institutions by commanding a particular group to follow or carry out a god's demand. The superiority held by such a group, with the following comparative subordination of another, or even the rest of society, may be understood as context bound, but, nevertheless, unquestionable and fixed. Hence, in addition to secular stratification, religion itself may create opposing groups.

Thus glued together, society represents structure and norm that are not only inevitable but cherished, and in particular marked out contexts also worshipped. On the other hand, obedience and submission, however necessary, create friction. Several societies, as Max Gluckman's theory goes, in order to avoid real rebellion, acknowledge perpetual friction and make a public display of it on festival days created especially for this purpose. Some societies even go to the extreme of *creating* conflict as a public tableau in order to prevent future problems of that kind. On such festival days, opposing groups exchange status, the younger command the elder, excluded groups are permitted entrance to forbidden areas, and so on. By making a topsy-turvy picture of normality, normality in fact becomes emphasised. Such festivals can be highly dramatic, but also full of teasing and jesting. Their purpose seems to be clear: by combining emphasis of normal order with an element of rebellion, the participants offer a tribute to their norms and structure, while at the same time there is an easing off of friction. The topsy-turvy, however, is strictly confined to its acknowledged time and place. In ordinary life the behaviour that is licenced in these festivals, would necessitate capital punishment.

How does all this fit with the Greeks and the Aristophanic comedies? In the polytheistic religion of the Greeks, two godheads in particular, Dionysos and Demeter, singled out women for special purposes, of which those of Demeter are of special interest for us now.

Since everything concerning Demeter was encompassed with the *unspeakable*, it is difficult to see exactly how and why she chose women exclusively to perform some of her mystery rites (see the Homeric Hymn *To Demeter*, 2.76 ff.) But she did, and thereby must have been the originator of the festival of the Thesmophoria, and we learned from the stories above the gruesome consequences which befell men who attempted to trespass. From what has been discussed above, we may understand the joke with the inevitable in the comedy *Thesmophoriazousai* as follows: the inevitable here is the fact that the whole citizen body of Athens was dependent upon the women to celebrate the rite which allowed Demeter to perform her annual miracle: the fertility of the crops and the blessing of female fecundity. In fact, the whole idea of making a comedy of the holy Thesmophoria is a joke with the inevitable, disguised men or not. To fully understand humor in general and Aristophanes' comedies in particular, I think it will be convenient to define what I call *licence in jokes*. Licence in jokes involves the licence to touch upon subjects normally treated with respect and piety. It is by this licence that humour can penetrate into spheres which in the real world would have been taboo. This is an aspect of humour which offers relief. In the framework of a joke, one can rebel against what are normally thought to be axiomatic truths: the inevitable. Thus, the joke will, in a reversed manner, also express respect. The joke expresses both a rebellion against, and a tribute to, the norm it trespasses.

The Thesmophoria was an exclusively female responsibility, and one of the most ancient and widespread festivals in antiquity. It performed what seems customarily to have been connected with Demeter, namely her secret mystery rites. In fact, I am not sure if we can regard these rites as secrets in the strict sense of the word since they were disclosed to the entire body of mature Athenian women. (It would appear that virgins did not attend this festival). Since the Thesmophoria were the concern of exclusively female citizens in common with some other festivals and rituals, I regard these festivals as female *property*. They were kept and maintained as most private property in antiquity; those who did not belong had no right to interfere or have knowledge of it. Because of this, and maybe also because of the original agreement between Demeter and women, the women kept the rites of the Thesmophoria to themselves, even though the rites were held for the benefit of all. In his comedy Aristophanes does not display any of the mystery rituals because he most probably knew nothing about them. Even if he had, he would have had to

submit to the prohibitions concerning display or communications about Demeter's mysteries. It is for this reason that Herodotus does not tell us what the priestess suggested to Miltiades, just that it had something to do with Demeter, and thereby her mysteries. Thus, in the comedy Aristophanes is making jokes about the *existence* of the festival and some of the *ceremonies* which were not concealed. Here we also can recall the story about king Battus who was permitted to watch that which contained nothing out of the ordinary.

The difference between ceremony and ritual might be defined as follows; a ritual is a holy channel in which human beings and the god can meet in an intimate way. A ritual is characterised by being an *agreement* between the god and the humans about how the channel should function. This agreement is originally thought to have been initiated and established by the god, as the Christian communion was originally initiated by Christ at the Last Supper. Humans are not supposed to initiate rituals themselves since miracles are entirely in the hands of gods. Ceremonies on the other hand, religious or not, are human inventions. Those who are allowed to participate in rituals will in some instances belong to a different category from those who cannot. My point is that half the population of those who were citizens of Athens had access to the secret rituals. Thus, the women of Athens were in possession of a remarkable property; the knowledge and ability to open and re-open the holy channel which connected Athens to Demeter and her fertility miracles. To offend this holy channel would have been to offend an inevitable norm in Classical Athens. Obviously any interference would have been punished severely.

Since the Thesmophoria was one of the most important festivals in Athens owing to its potential influence, this brings us to another joke with the inevitable and the licence of jokes to rebel against what are thought to be axiomatic structures, in this case the female status and power to participate in the holy channel. In a common picture of Classical Athens males and females are described as separate groups who almost never interact. The lack of female interaction in the male sphere of prestige has been treated as a kind of aching tooth in this democratic society, urging scholars to look for clues and evidence that feminist thoughts existed in Classical Athens. Very often this search has been focused upon Aristophanes' "female-plays" in order to find evidence for feminism because of the outstanding female figures in these plays.

It is my understanding of Aristophanes that his errand was not to provoke debate but that he, and other comic playwrights, had the *duty*

to offer opportunities in the annual, *institutionalised* festival for both rebelling and giving tribute to the structures and norms of Athens. We must, after all, recall the context in which Attic dramas were performed, the procedures connected to the drama contests, and the Athenian constitution. This leads us to the other comedy in question, the *Ekklesiazousai* (Assembly women).

The Ekklesiazousai

In the comic plot of the *Ekklesiazousai* the women of Athens perform a formidable *coup d'état*. Disguised as men they enter the Assembly (Ekklesia) and there, since they outnumber the men, by democratic procedure they establish a new political structure. The new order involves a sexual liberty hitherto unknown, for the women in particular. In addition, all ownership of property is abandoned and property and goods are shared equally. The comedy concludes that everybody lived happily ever after in the new established order.

This comedy displays a reversal of normality. It was never the intention of Athenian democracy that everyone should have an equal share of property. This is one of the contrasts between ancient and modern democracies. The latter were born out of the humanistic philosophy as it developed from the 18th century on and emphasised equality of birth; because of this, people were taught to struggle for economic equality in addition to universal suffrage so that everybody should be given an opportunity to influence the composition of the government. The contrary was true in the ancient democracy, no one questioned inequality of birth. Demand for economic equality and universal right to vote were never expressed in the democracy of Athens. Government in the sense of parliamentarism or particularly elected members for the purpose to govern, did not exist. The participation in the Assembly was direct, and given to all mature men, however, only those of Athenian stock. The paramount political value in the democracy of Athens was that one should be given an equal chance to participate in public life with an equal share of duty. The proposed society in this comedy is a total reversal of this fundamental idea. I do not believe that this comedy is either a pre-Marxist dream or that it expresses a real suggestion for changing the structure of Athenian democracy. The one-year period of the thirty tyrants and the re-establishment of democracy was recent history. The time was very well suited for a joking tribute to the beloved democratic institutions of Athens.

The women in this comedy appear uncertain about the procedures held in the Assembly as the men about the rites in the Thesmophoria.

The heroine Praxagora becomes the natural leader of the plot since she has been able to watch the procedures when she and her husband previously lived close to the Pnyx. This is why she knows what to do and what to say: men were apparently not supposed to tell their wives about the procedures or the agenda, or the decisions that were taken. This is also emphasised in the conversation between Blepyrus and Chremes. Again we can see the separate spheres of responsibilities (Arist. *Ekk.* 465ff.).

In both comedies manhood is emphasised by men's body-hair, while the effeminate are pictured shaven with a smooth complexion. In both comedies womanhood is emphasised by the *absence* of body-hair, which the Athenian women removed from arm-pits, arms, legs and also crutch by singeing themselves with oil lamps. Mnesilochus is thus both shaven *and* singed to attain the hairless skin proper for Athenian women before he enters the holy site. In the *Ekklesiiazousai* the women have let their arm-pit hair grow in order not to be detected as women in the customary raising of the arm when taking the oath which opens the Assembly. In addition they have stayed out in the sun in order to ruin their fair skin and of course they are wearing false beards. The two sexes are separated not only in responsibilities, but also in every detail concerning outfit and appearance.

The significance of gender transgression in the two comedies

What is then the significance of the gender transgressions of the comedies in question? In both comedies the main purpose of the gender transgressions seems to be a more profound reversal than just a reversal of the gender roles. This level is reached through the sexes operating in places and situations normally closed to them. They are the channels through which Aristophanes takes the whole audience into a joking rebellion and tribute.

The types of jokes reveal what the basic structures of Athenian society were: the worship of the gods, the democratic ideas and the responsibilities held by each gender. Very often the religious realm is not included in what most people think of as a public, political sphere of prestige since comparisons are too easily made to modern secularised societies where religion is something apart and belongs to the realm of private feelings. In Classical Athens some aspects of life were included in the public sphere, others were conducted apart and belonged to the private sphere, as did some of the religious festivals concerning only a part of the population. The other religious

festivals, like the Thesmophoria, were State festivals because they were held for the benefit of the whole population. The State was responsible for their performance and, therefore, these festivals were included in the State religious calendar. This is significant because *it includes the female citizens in the public maintenance of the State*. The joke in the *Thesmophoriazousai* is a joke with the inevitable; the dependency of society on Demeter and the status of women as Demeter's attendants. In this case the status of females is superior to that of men. The comedy includes men's joking rebellion against this fact, but also their tribute. The reverse seems to be the point in the *Ekklesiazousai*.

It seems to be taken for granted by both feminists and non-feminists that due to their presumed universal inferiority women need to rebel against men from time to time. That men should need the same kind of rebellion against women is either regarded as unbelievable or as male chauvinism. But in a society where power and superiority is connected with areas monopolised by one or other gender and allotted on a more or less equal basis, *men as well as women need to rebel*, thus establishing a joking relationship. Thus, males and females in Classical Athens emerge as two significant groups, holding different kinds of property and responsibility, distinguished also as different, both in appearance and behaviour, non-competitors in one another's arena, not bothered with too much interaction but co-operating on a higher level, the maintenance of the State, that is. I think we can regard gender as being in a way very like guilds, in the way of operating with specific laws and rules, fields of operation, monopolies in work and the like, thereby also developing a specific cultural code and aims in each gender sphere. This seems to be the very social structure of pre-industrial societies, both past and present, as for example in several contemporary African societies. In the African examples the gender structure reveals itself among other things most clearly in connection with boys' and girls' puberty rites, where the novices in the beginning of the rite are surrounded by each gender group, taunting and teasing the other. Victor Turner reports that prior to the young boys' circumcision, manhood is emphasised by the men performing this rite *alone* and far from where the mothers are waiting. They are also in *opposition* to the mothers. The rite contains actions symbolising behaviour and activities for men only, as the women, in the girls' puberty rites, emphasise female prerogatives. This emphasis on gender prerogatives is clear in many of the written texts

from Classical Athens, and in the “female plays” of Aristophanes above all.

This brings us to some other characters, the effeminates. They have their own significance in the comedies in question. Cleisthenes and Agathon are never *disguised* as women like poor Mnesilochus. While Mnesilochus must *pretend* all the way, Cleisthenes and Agathon do not need to. Cleisthenes has a permanent resemblance to a woman, his sympathies are always with the women. His reception at the Thesmophorion is seen as something quite natural; the leader almost excuses herself for not being permitted to reveal the secret rites to him when she questions Mnesilochus about them. The case of Agathon, on the other hand, is not so clear cut. Due to his occupation as a tragic poet, he switches from male to female according to the figures he pictures in his tragedies. His gender transgression seems to be a permanent toing and froing. He seems to be both, and maybe neither, since one never knows what appearance he will display next. The confusion surrounding him puzzles also Mnesilochus in Agathon’s house: “Tell me, why this perturbation of nature? A lute, a yellow gown? A lyre and a hair-net, a woman’s girdle and a wrestler’s oil flask? A sword and a hand-mirror? It doesn’t make sense. What are you — a man? Then where’s your cloak? Where are your shoes? And what have you done with your tool? But if you’re a woman, what’s happened to your bosom? Well, speak up! If you won’t tell me, I shall have to judge by your singing!” (Arist. *Thesm.* 101-67).

The role of the effeminates in the comedy is never to play a role of reversal, as the character Mnesilochus. Agathon and Cleisthenes are historical persons ridiculed by Aristophanes for their effeminacy in *real* life. It appears to have been a comic convention, or at least an aspect of the licence in comedy, to ridicule living persons present in the theatre. Agathon and Cleisthenes are ridiculed in *earnest*, while Mnesilochus is a comic figure only: a tool to make a joke with the inevitable. Even if he had been a historical person, he is, nevertheless, given the function of a masculine man who finds it repulsive to dress as a woman. This underlines his comic function in the comedy. He is cross-dressing only, as the comedy goes, to help Euripides in his desperate situation. The scene is almost heart-tearing for all its comic situation: when detected and held a captive, he grieves that he must face his speedily forthcoming death singed and dressed as a woman.

Agathon and Cleisthenes are never portrayed *disguised* as women in the *Thesmophoriazousai* like poor Mnesilochus. By natural inclination, they *love* to dress as women, and as such they are

displayed, exaggeratedly perhaps, but one of their functions in the comedy is also to be a contrast to Mnesilochus. Mnesilochus, and the women in the *Ekklesiazousai*, serve as roles of reversal to make the comic transgression into the respective forbidden areas. In the real world Agathon and Cleisthenes transgress the normal code of men. In the comedy, however, Cleisthenes in particular is portrayed as so feminine that he is almost received as a woman at the Thesmophoria. This is the uttermost of ridicule: put in a comedy about gender transgression, Cleisthenes is not transgressing! And thereby he is the real transgressor: the one who crosses boundaries in real life that, according to masculine standard, should not have been crossed at all.

The *Thesmophoriazousai*, and the *Ekklesiazousai* alike, must have been hilariously funny according to Athenian standard. The type of jokes in these comedies depend upon a clear understanding of a significant difference between a masculine and feminine world, between men and women's clothing, behaviour and field of operation. As mentioned above, one of the features of the mature man in Athens was his beard. Only ephebes, young men not yet full citizens, and effeminate, seem to have walked about without beards. Women, on the other hand, went to the effort of singeing their bodies to distinguish themselves from men. Nor do the comedies shrink from making jokes about diverging sexual inclinations. In our modern societies this has been made almost impossible, from political correctness, and from equality programs. The only part left might be men dressed as women, and even that is doubtful since fashion among young men in particular is very often effeminate. It is not funny to dress up women as men in comedy when women nowadays constantly appear in this sort of gender transgression and when men and women operate in the same fields as in Norway where men work as nurses and in kindergardens and where women are high ranking politicians or work as bank-directors and carpenters. When the men and women in the Aristophanes' comedies operate in the opposite field, they have to disguise themselves, if not they would have no entrance at all.

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GENDER AND THE GAMES AT OLYMPIA

Synnove des Bouvrie

Introduction

When the Olympic Games were revived in 1896 the organisers explicitly referred to the Ancient Greek games. After the festivities a publication, in both Greek and French, was issued which recorded this first modern event and presented the historical sources of the arrangement. The contributions on Antiquity were written by the Greek archeologists Lambros and Politis, and a report of the recent events at Athens given by the secretary of the Olympic Games, Timoleon Philemon, and others. In his introduction Baron de Coubertin celebrated the present in the light of a glorious past. The modern architects of the Olympic games, were thus aware of the exact nature of the Ancient games, and they wished to copy the Greeks. At one point, however, they deliberately ignored the Ancient model: when they did not admit women at their games.

To be sure, women were not allowed to participate at the men's games in Ancient Olympia, the *Olympia*, which were dedicated to Zeus. However, women had their own arrangement, the *Heraia*, dedicated to Hera, and performed their women's games at the same spot and in the same spirit as their male fellows. This fact is mentioned in the publication to which I just referred. But the games of 1896 were an all-male manifestation. We are thus confronted with an instance of selective use of history in the service, I think, of a middle and upper class Victorian ideology. This suspicion is confirmed by the the book's description of the Ancient women's games, which includes a peculiar error. It tells us that girls ran a distance of 30 m, while, in fact, they ran about 155 m (The error cannot be a misprint since both the Greek and the French text refer to the same number of meters).

To ignore female participation in the first modern Olympian arrangement conflicts with Ancient tradition. Our chief source with respect to the Ancient games, Pausanias, focuses on the female games at Olympia, and he explicitly draws a comparison between female and

male arrangements, which show significant resemblances. He also refers to several other female cults that are related to Olympia and even to the male games. In spite of the fact, then, that the *Olympia* and the *Heraia* were dedicated to different deities and assembled males and females respectively, there is some reason to study these festivals in comparison. Such an approach will not only be an aim in itself, attention to the aspect of gender may be indispensable to the question of the nature of the arrangements as a whole. In order to discuss this broad question we must look at the *Olympia* in context, that is, with the *Heraia* and other cults.

The aim of this paper, then, will be to study the symmetries and asymmetries between female and male games and cults at Olympia within the larger question of the nature of the phenomenon of Olympia. My hypothesis is that these gender elaborations were central to the Ancient celebrations and that an investigation into the relationship between female and male arrangements may shed light on the psychological and cultural processes involved in the phenomenon. In exploring such an all-embracing question a comprehensive approach will be necessary, integrating the results of historical, archaeological and philological investigation. In the following argument I will present the main features of the games at Olympia, both female and male with the many mythical and ritual elements that surrounded the events: There were myths that were told, some that were mapped out in the physical surroundings, and those that were exhibited in visible form on the buildings at Olympia. Additionally the myths motivated ritual acts that were performed at the celebrations. It is this complex of symbolic elements that will be subjected to interpretation in order to present a synthesis of the manifold details of the Olympic phenomenon. This concept is to be understood in a wide sense, including not only the male *Olympia* but also the *Heraia*, as well as a number of cults and iconographic elements that seem to be related to it. This interpretation will be held within an anthropological framework, and will draw on archaeological as well as literary sources. In the analysis of the aspect of gender in the Olympia-complex I propose to offer my tentative interpretation of what kind of phenomenon these games were in the Ancient world.

Sources

As mentioned above, our principal *literary* source for the history of the Greek Olympic games and for the topography of Olympia is Pausanias, a cultural historian living approximately 160 AD. He travelled around in Greece and recorded buildings, works of art, with their history and mythology as well as their cult practices. His

presentation of Olympia is among the richest in his work, and we are thus invited to follow this eye-witness record in order to reconstruct the Ancient arrangement. In addition we have rich archaeological finds as a result of the German excavations during the last century. These excavations have greatly advanced our knowledge of the history of the male Olympic festival. Our sources for the female festival are much less extensive. However, references in literature and art to female race contests in several parts of the Greek world suggest that these competitions were wide-spread, especially at Sparta and at Brauron in Attica. Some archaic bronze statuettes dating from the beginning of the sixth century (Lamb 1929, 97 and Pl. 33) and vase paintings from the fifth century, show girls running in typical 'Heraian' dress near an altar. Various literary sources dating from seventh century Alkman, Sappho, fifth century Euripides, and others allude to female footraces. Taken together this evidence supports our hypothesis of the early development of the female games (Sweet 1987, Bernardini 1988). The structure of the arrangement as well as its parallels to other festivals, among which the *Olympia*, strengthens this hypothesis (Scanlon 1984).

The games

The Ancient Greek world took shape as a definite Hellenic or Greek culture about 800 BC. This culture lasted for more than 1000 years until it was eclipsed by Christianity. The Olympic games were celebrated during this whole time span. They were organised and recorded beginning in 776 BC and forbidden by an edict of the emperor Theodosius in 393 AD. According to Pausanias the games existed before 776, but at that date they were reorganised and from then on the names of the winners in the footraces were recorded. Recent excavations have shed light on the earlier phases of Olympia, and discovered a grave from an early Mycenaean age just beneath the shrine of the hero Pelops. Most archaic remains have been washed away by one of the rivers surrounding Olympia (Kyrieleis 1992). In the course of this long time-span the games changed their character and prestige. However, it would seem that the Olympic festivals reached their classic form in the archaic and classical period (500-320 B.C.9, Ziehen s.v. Olympia, RE XVII, 2, 3435; Herrmann 1972, 19; Brein 1978, 87). The games at Olympia were not the only sport contests. In the sixth century, important celebrations of a similar nature were inaugurated at Delphi, Nemea and Isthmos near Corinth, although the Olympic games remained the most prestigious and central in the time-reckoning of the Greeks. It is conceivable that the combination of the *Heraia* with the *Olympia* constituted another feature that set Olympia apart from the other arrangements.

In historical time, every four years participants from the whole Greek world assembled at Olympia in order to partake in the contests and to win glory for themselves and for their home lands. For a long period the Greek world consisted of small independent states, called *polis*, often not larger than a city with its farm-land around. But even if these states were politically autonomous, they were part of a wide cultural world, extending from Massilia (Marseille) in the West to the inner Black sea in the East. Many of these *polis*-states waged fierce wars with their fellow Greeks, and in order to conduct the Olympic games a general period of peace (the *Ekekheiria*, or Handshake, Paus. V 20, 1; 26, 2) was proclaimed, allowing the participants to travel safely throughout the Mediterranean. This central, 'Pan-Hellenic', celebration was a men's event. We do not know whether women assembled from all over the Greek world to participate in their games.

The central competition consisted of a footrace held in the stadion. The length of this (male) track was about 192 meters. The name of the winner in the footrace was attached to the Olympic year, and so a list of Olympic stadion winners served as a common chronological standard. The four-year period between the games was called an Olympiad. Time was reckoned by the Olympiads and their subdivisions into single years.

According to Greek tradition, Koroibos from Elis was the first to win in the stadion after the reorganisation in about 776 BC (Paus. V

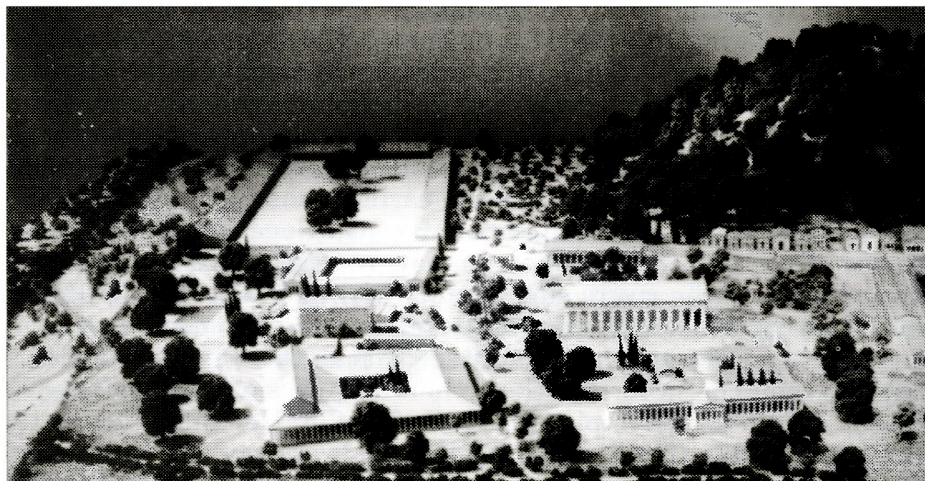


Fig.1. Model of the sanctuary of Hera and Zeus at Olympia. The temple of Zeus is in the middle, in front of the smaller temple of Hera. Part of the stadion is seen at the far right. The hill of Kronos overlooks the area. In the foreground and to the left are official buildings and training grounds. Model in the British Museum.



Fig.2. Vase painting on drinking cup from Athens 500-470 B.C. Male armoured athletes participate in sprinting, the last exercise in the Olympic Zeus games. (British Museum vases E818)

8, 6). Other branches of athletics were introduced as time passed by, such as boxing, wrestling, horse chariot driving, horse race, combined athletics (the *pentathlon*), and an armed race. After the reorganisation of the games in the 77th Olympiad (472, Paus. V 9, 3) the whole program lasted for five days (Paus. V 8, 6-11). The arrangement committee, the *Hellanodikai* or Hellenic arbiters, was recruited from the nearby city of Elis, (Paus. V 9, 5). The winners were honoured abundantly both in Olympia and at home. At the games they received a crown from the wild olive, Zeus' sacred tree. In early times participants seem to have been recruited in particular from aristocratic families and in their honour a victory song was composed by the greatest poets then living (among whom Pindaros). Winners had the right to erect a statue or other monument in Olympia in memory of their victory, and in their home-city they were honoured with substantial material rewards.

As has been mentioned, (married) women were strictly forbidden to attend the male games. They were show a cliff, *Typaion*, and told that from there women were thrown to their death if they intruded into the male celebration (Paus. V 6, 7). Virgins were, perhaps, not forbidden to attend, nor was the priestess of Demeter *Chamyne* (Paus. VI 20, 9). This

segregation of the sexes in itself invites an investigation into the role of gender in these contexts. Women held, however, their own contests in the same area, but perhaps although in the same year at a later date than the *Olympia* (Scanlon 1984, 78, n. 4). The female games were arranged by the revered Sixteen Matrons of the city of Elis (Paus. V 16, 2-3). Whether or not men were secluded from the women's games is not attested. Nor do we know the course of the whole program of the female games. It seems to have consisted of a footrace for girls only. On the whole, Ancient sources on Olympia seem not to have been interested in recording women's activities. This is a general deficiency of Ancient tradition, and should not serve as proof that women's activities did not exist (Bernardini 1988).

Myth and ritual

The place called Olympia was a holy area, demarcated by a ritual boundary and located outside any urban centre. The fact that this sanctuary, like Delphi, was situated in a remote area has been noted with surprise by several scholars (e. g. Herrmann 1972, 15, Mallwitz 1972, 17). It seems, as I will attempt to demonstrate that this location was not chosen accidentally. Within the sanctuary there were temples and shrines dedicated to the central gods of the Greek pantheon as well as to other deities. Its name, Olympia, suggests a link with the mythical home of the Olympic gods, traditionally located on top of Mount Olympos in the north. The sacred area is likely to have been experienced as a meeting point between mortals and immortals, and also the realm of the dead as symbolised by Pelops. The principal gods in this universe were Zeus and his wife Hera. In Olympia the central temples were those of precisely Zeus and Hera, by the 5th century at least, which again suggests the significance of gender at this cult site. Zeus being the supreme authority of the divine world, guarantees the orderly functioning of the social world, by his sanctioning of authority and social relationships confirmed by oaths, primary domains of male activity. Elsewhere and in all periods Hera is connected with marriage celebration or the existence of the polis as a whole. Since the cult of Olympian Hera was connected with the celebration of marriage in Pausanias' time, it seems reasonable to assume that the goddess' role had been the same in earlier times as well. These two deities seem, then, to preserve the fundamental order in the polis and the oikos or household.

During the male Olympic games (from the Classical period onwards) there were several days of contests centering around a main event, the great procession and sacrifice to honour Zeus (Paus. V 9, 3; 13, 8; 14, 2). Participants were divided in age categories, boys up to seventeen years and men (Crowther 1988). Large flocks of oxen were



Fig.3. Female athlete from about 560 B.C. Bronze figurine. 11.7cm high. found at Dodona. Epiros. (Athens National Museum, Carapanos Collection 24)

slaughtered on this occasion. and after the bones were burnt at the altar of the god, the meat was consumed by the participants at a joyous celebration.

At the female games, called the *Heraia*, one or more cows were sacrificed to Hera and consumed in a common meal. Female participants as well were divided into age groups, but only girls up to the age of about eighteen competed, and winners received a crown of the wild olive tree. The female winners were also conceded the honour of commemorating their victory (Paus. VI 16) and in the columns of the temple of Hera marks have been detected (Dörpfeld 1935 I. 170), where it is believed that women winners left their portraits. The



Fig.4. Bronze figurine from about 540 B.C., found in Albania, exhibiting the dress and hairstyle of the athletes at the Heraia, as recorded by Pausanias. Height about 11 cm. left leg has been restored. British Museum Bronzes no.208.

magistrates responsible for both games, the Sixteen matrons and the nine Hellanodikai, purified themselves with the blood of a piglet and water of a sacred spring (Paus. V 16. 8). There are, then, striking parallels between the male and the female celebrations (Scanlon 1984). Since the temple for Hera was built as early as approximately 600 B.C. the conclusion seems inevitable that some cult involving women existed at an early date. Sources that show female participation in footraces in several parts of archaic Greece strengthen the possibility that the Hera-races as recorded by Pausanias are part of a general tradition and date from an early period. Pausanias mentions that "the Eleians trace the maidens' games to ancient times" (Paus. V 16. 4). The *Heraia* were probably reorganised about 580 BC (Scanlon 1984, 86). This is not to say that the female games remained a copy of the male games. It seems more likely that, while the *Heraia* preserved the characteristics of local initiation rites, the *Olympia* evolved into a celebration of a more

secular and Pan-Hellenic nature. According to Bernardini the *Heraia* remained a pre-marriage ritual for young girls, and never became a proper contest. (Bernardini 1988).

In the course of time, then, it seems that the female festival preserved its archaic character of initiation ritual, while the male arrangement attracted a number of other interests and functions. In the absence of some national state structure, single states addressed the officials of great sanctuaries such as Olympia in order to obtain redress from injustice in war time, relying on the effect of divine sanctions against the aggressor (Siewert 1981). As the most central public space within the Greek world, Olympia attracted public speakers who sought an audience for their historical or political messages (Herrmann 1972, 17). As a centre for confirmation of Hellenic identity, Olympia acquired special importance for tribes living at the margin of this world. In particular the Macedonian kings emphatically asserted their relationship with the Greek world in Olympia (Slowikowski 1990, Romano 1990). In the Hellenistic period Greeks felt a special need to assert their Greek identity in a foreign environment (Pleket 1978).

Whatever the numerous secondary interests were, there can be little doubt that the primary motive for coming to the *Olympia* was *philotimia*: the wish to gain honour. We should not wonder at the fact that people who at the same time might be involved in war, gathered at Olympia in order to meet in peaceful contest. War in the Ancient world seems to have been conducted according to strict rules, allowing ritual practices to guide the course of action. It seems, then, that the realm of athletics was not sharply distinguished from the realm of war, both depending on strict rules of conduct (Brellich 1961).

We might still expect that the fierce spirit of competition must have split this already utterly divided Greek world. Apparently, however, that the games united the Greeks. We possess a literary source which tells us that the same men who warred furiously against each other met at Olympia as "relatives" (*syngeneis*) around the central altar (Aristophanes, *Lysistrate* 1128 ff). Even if the participants met in aggressive competition, they were united in their adherence to the same set of rules (Lonis 1979, 25), and, we may assume, in admiration for the Olympic victors. I would point to the fact that Pausanias is careful in describing how frightening the cult statue of Zeus *Horkios* or "Protector of the Oath" was, with thunderbolts in each hand (Paus. V 24, 9). Next to this statue the Olympic oath was sworn by all athletes, their trainers and fathers, promising to respect the rules of the games. Heavy fines were exacted from those who tried to corrupt the judges. The specially appointed *Nomophulakes* or "Lawguardians" supervised the program and instructed the participants in the Olympic rules (Paus. VI 24, 3). All this should not

induce us to believe that foul play never occurred, witness detailed regulations from an early date to witness the need to prevent participants from breaking the rules (Siewert 1992, 115).

From historical sources we gather that the conditions for participating at the Olympic games were to be freeborn, and born sons of Greek parents (Herodotos, *Histories* V 22). From all over the Greek world, then, men travelled to the Olympic centre, and, we may assume, felt like meeting in a crucial celebration of unity. Even if we do not know in detail how people behaved during their voyage, they participated in a ritual gathering. In an unpublished law for trainers and participants at Olympia, restrictions are issued for the use of carriages “either within the city of Elis or for the great procession from Elis to Olympia before the opening of the games” (Siewert 1992, 116). Even if a number of participants must have travelled over sea, precluding any orderly grouping, at least immediately before the celebration all met thus in an initial procession to wander to their distant destination Olympia.

Upon arrival at the sacred centre, they gathered in contests and in a large procession and sacrifice at the altar of Zeus, where they honoured the god as their common protector and as the guarantor of social order. As I have noted, scholars wonder at the location of Olympia and it has been argued that this location, outside the inhabited world, was due to the wish to avoid one city gaining undesired prestige over another, because of its control of the games. I would suggest that this is a too common-sensical explanation, and propose to compare this arrangement with the phenomenon of “pilgrimage”. Breaking up from their daily business, and dissolving the normal state of affairs, war, Greek men travelled a long way from their profane homes to a common cult centre. They did so in order to revitalise their membership in one cultural group, the Hellenic and Greek world. Olympia (as well as other similar centres, especially Delphi) was really situated in the margins of the urban world, and the group may have needed a deserted location, in order to return to its ‘origin’. In Victor Turner’s terms they participated in a liminal process and travelled back to a “sacred space-time” (Myerhoff 1978, Turner 1977, Turner & Turner 1978).

It is noteworthy that the area where the cultic space is laid out was called “Cronos’ hill”. Cronos was the father of Zeus, he had been deposed by his son and relegated to some realm in the underworld on the Islands of the blessed. In cult, as well as in myth, the figure of Cronos represents some early stage after the creation of the world, the “Golden Age”, an age when people lived in a paradise-like state, when the earth provided plenty of food without anybody having to toil. Social differentiation and hierarchy had not been introduced, nor had the hierarchy between the sexes been established. At that Golden Age,

Pausanias tells us, Zeus was born, and while he grew up, his guardians, the Couretes, invented athletic contests (Paus. V 7, 6). The winner was crowned with branches of the wild olive tree, as were the victors in historical days. This may seem surprising, as the cultivated olive branch might seem to be more suited as a symbol of civilisation (Vidal-Naquet 1983, 20, 26). We might, then, interpret this use of the wild species as one more symbol of the return to the primordial past, before civilisation was established. It was, Pausanias tells us, brought from the land of the Hyperboreans, a mythical people living "Beyond the northern wind" (Paus. V 7, 7). In Greek imagination the Hyperboreans are a god-like tribe, who are distinguished by their longevity and their exceptional righteousness. It is to this land the god Apollo travels in order to restore his power to create the social order and justice every year.

Before sailing out to their new settlement, Greek colonists used to consult the oracle of Delphi for guidance in religious matters (Pugliese Carratelli 1992). The Greek communities in the West, Southern Italy and Sicily demonstrated a strong interest in the sanctuary of Olympia, as is evidenced by the treasury-houses they erected at the site. It seems that these settlers felt a special urge to return regularly to the symbolic 'origin' and centre of their culture, the space where the 'Olympic' and human world met. A voyage to Cronos' hill meant not only a return to primordial time, but an act of anchoring their community to *common* time, as measured by the Olympic stadion-winners. A central rite was celebrated for Hestia, the power of the hearth (Paus. V 15, 9). Day and night offerings were made at her altar and the ashes were added to the ash-altar of Zeus, connecting each day with 'Olympic time'. In addition I would suggest that the cult of Pelops structured the realms of the living versus that of the dead in a cult segregating those who sacrificed to Pelops from those who sacrificed to Zeus, stressing the opposition between black and white, night and day (Paus. V 13, 1 ff; Burkert 1983).

The group's need to be incorporated into a common universe may well have remained partly unconscious and overshadowed by the immediate urge to win glory. Likewise, other cultural needs may, unconsciously, have been involved as well. The group has to organise its existence and continuity, *and to anchor this organisation in the metaphysical world*, sheltering the 'sacred truth' against questioning (Moore and Myerhoff 1977). The individual is not only dependent on belonging to a common universe, (s)he must be defined and situated in a social category as well. In spite of the great variety of their constitutions and political functioning, Greek polis-states were primarily organised around the institutions of monogamous marriage and warfare. And beneath professional distinctions between individuals remained their pervasive common 'nature' as women and men.

(Free) women were 'naturally' defined by marriage and men were 'by nature' warriors. The cultural basis of these arrangements was never questioned (apart from exceptions such as Plato and the Cynics) and the values attached to them were taken for granted. It is this 'matter of course' nature of fundamental facts of culture that may obscure to us the fact that they need revitalising. The emotional qualities with which basic cultural institutions have imbued have to be renewed. It is the property of symbolic expressions to serve this end, creating emotional effects in the participants and thus charging institutions with new value. It seems, then, that a number of myths, images, and arrangements at Olympia were part of an unconscious symbolic process, creating a common basis for Greek social life and a Greek 'nature' specified for females and males. It is within this perspective that we should consider some prominent aspects of the phenomenon of Olympia.

The temple of Zeus was adorned with mythical sculptures. These temple decorations are commonly interpreted as commemorating the victory of Elis over the city of Pisa, which originally controlled the games. They are also seen as monuments of the victory over the Persians in the Persian wars or as a more abstract expression of order versus chaos (e. g. Stewart 1983). It is, however, attractive to interpret them at a more concrete level.

At the west pediment of the temple of Zeus, Apollo is presented, while he is commanding the rebellious Centaurs to obey his rule. This unruly race of horse-men is caught in disrupting the wedding of the righteous Peirithoos, the king of the Lapiths. The Centaurs are unable to control themselves, and they attack the wives of their righteous relatives the Lapiths, thus disrupting the social order of monogamous marriage. On the other side of the temple, Zeus is depicted while supervising the athletic contest between Oinomaos, the king of the country and his future son-in-law Pelops. The myth is frozen at the moment when the two are engaged in preparations for the horse-chariot race, a race in which every suitor to the king's daughter had to participate. These contests had ended fatally up to that point, because of Oinomaos' condition that suitors had to win over him in order to have his daughter. The king had already killed thirteen suitors when Pelops arrived. This last suitor wins the contest, thus ending the massacres as well as removing the obstruction to the princess' marriage. Tersini has drawn attention to the prominence of marriage themes in Olympia (Tersini 1987).

On both sides of the temple, then, the dramatic theme of the myth presented is some contest or conflict in which the gods will prevail and the just will overcome. However, implicitly the institution at stake is marriage. The proper order of society, a girl's destiny in marriage (Hippodameia) is obstructed and the monogamous relationship

between the Lapiths and their wives is disrupted. I would thus suggest that this is no accident, and that the correct order of the social world is brought out through the principle of *inversion*. By presenting a disrupted order of society the symbolic representation acts upon its spectators and provokes emotions of outrage, which in turn revitalise the spectators' 'natural' feelings of the proper order. Greek society was based upon a network established through the relationships of marriage between families which regulated the distribution of property in the present and maintained this state of affairs for the future through exchange of brides. The institution of monogamous marriage requires respect for other men's wives. It is taken for granted, as is, it may be argued, the duty to defend the proper order of society by conquering its violators (the Centaurs).

There are other examples of similar symbolism as well. Inside the temple of Zeus stood the huge statue of the god, resting on a base which was decorated with mythical scenes (Paus. V 11, 8). One line of interpretation considers the *hieros gamos* between Zeus and Hera to be the underlying theme (Giglioli 1921). A central image was the birth of the goddess Aphrodite, the power of erotic forces, and not infrequently connected with marriage. Here the newborn goddess is surrounded by a number of divine couples and other pairs of gods who suggest the crucial transitions in the life of males and females, Apollo and Artemis, and the forces of male and female spaces, Hermes (the outside world) and Hestia (the central domestic hearth). (Vernant 1983).

The temple of Zeus, then, presented a number of mythical scenes focusing on the theme of marriage. The temple of Hera, on the other hand, contained a sculpture of Zeus wearing a helmet, an unusual attribute for the god, who normally is presented as a king with his royal paraphernalia, at Hera's side. (Paus. V 17, 1). This crossing of realms in the decorations of the temples is surprising when seen in relation to the athletic games that were held. At the male *Olympia* prowess and proficiency in war were celebrated. From 520 onwards the last exercise in the program was a race in armour. From early times on the cult of Zeus in Olympia centred on warfare. The whole sanctuary was, in addition, a preferred area for erecting war memorials and trophies (Paus. V 14, 4-15, 11). Here the largest amounts of war booty were found offered as votive gifts to Zeus. Early figurines of the god show him as an armed warrior with a helmet, stressing an additional function of the god of authority and social order (Mallwitz 1972, 20 ff. examples in Mallwitz-Herrmann 1980. Byrne 1991). In Olympia the famous families of seers, the Iamids and Clytiads, specialised in sacrificing and giving advice before battle, having knowledge of Zeus' will (Siewert 1992, 117).

The female games, however, were instituted by the first bride at Pisa, Hippodameia, in recognition of her blessing by the goddess Hera, who gave her in marriage to Pelops (Paus. V 16, 4). The whole arrangement seems to have been under the auspices of the powers of marriage. The athletic contests were held at the same race track as the male games, the stadion (Paus. V 16, 2-3). However, the female participants ran their footrace over a shorter distance than the males, the female race being, according to Pausanias, 1/6 shorter than the male one. Romano has compared the dimensions of the temples, and found that these differed in the same proportion as the stadion lengths (Romano 1983, cf. Romano 1981). This may be due to the fact that buildings in Ancient Greece were built on the basis of a foot measure, which differed from place to place. There seems in addition to have been a standard relationship between the length of temple and stadion, the proportion being 1:3 or 200 to 600 feet. Hera's foot, her temple and her stadion thus were 1/6 shorter than Zeus' foot, temple and stadion, that is, 25 cm, 50 m, 150 m and 32 cm, 64 m and 192 m respectively (Romano 1983). Girls participating at the *Heraia*, then, ran a distance of about 155 m, while their male fellows ran 192 m. A common-sense explanation has been suggested as to why females did not run the same distance, namely that, "The difference in the lengths of the men's and the women's stade may *simply* reflect the fact that women's average stride is shorter." (Scanlon 1984. 79, emphasis added). This ignores the fact, of course, that females are not limited in the number of steps they can take. I would suggest an interpretation that fits into the overall symbolic context. These systematic differences, once established by the traditions of religious architecture, were incorporated in the symbolic elaborations implying a 'natural' hierarchy between the sexes.

Even though our information as to the precise arrangements is very fragmentary, we can catch glimpses of other symbolic expressions that support our line of interpretation. In accordance with the ritual calendar at Olympia the priests of Elis performed a series of sacrifices following a strict temporal order (Paus. V 14, 4). The ceremonies started with the goddess of the central hearth, Hestia, after that Olympian Zeus was honoured followed by a number of deities that guided warriors on their campaigns, first and foremost Athena and Artemis. Athena was the inventor of ordered warfare, and among her cult-names in this ritual sequence appears Athena Leitis, the Goddess of Booty. Lonis has interpreted both deities as "kourotrophic", nurturing the warrior from infancy and in adult life (Lonis 1979, 200 ff). Vernant, on the other hand, interprets Artemis as a force between peace and war, the power that inhibits savagery in combat, urging warriors to preserve their balance between necessary killing and senseless slaughter (Vernant 1988).



Fig.5. Marble figure of girl dressed as an athlete. Original, or copy, of the classical or early hellenistic period. Height 124cm. (Paris, Musée du Louvre MA522)

In connection with the male festival a female ritual was held. According to Pausanias, at some distance from Olympia the women of Elis held celebrations based on women's social role. They gathered on a definite day at the beginning of the male Olympic games at a place where the competing athletes were mustered. This area was called "The grave of Achilleus". There, in the evening as the sun was setting, they mourned the death of the mythical hero, honouring with their ritual lament this "greatest of all warriors in history" (Paus. VI 23, 3).

Elsewhere Pausanias refers to the cult of Eileithuia, the power of birth, and of Sosipolis (Paus. VI 20, 2-3). Archaeological investigation has as yet not found the exact location of the shrine. According to Pausanias it was situated within the Olympic sanctuary on the Hill of Cronos, and it is identified by some with the "Idean grotto", which refers to the mythic birth-place of Zeus (Dörpfeld 1935 I, 38 f; Hampe 1951; Herrmann 1972, 31). Women met at the shrine of the goddess and an aged woman priest, who had to live in celibacy, performed the rites for the birth goddess and the divine child Sosipolis. During her performance women and girls met outside and sang a hymn to the goddess and sacrificed incense. The author explains the meaning of the name, adding the myth of this divine power. Once the people of Elis were engaged in war with the people of Arcadia. The enemy was already near, when a woman from Elis ran into the battle field carrying her newborn son. She told the Eleian commanders that she would sacrifice her son in order to protect the city. The commanders accepted the child and laid it naked on the ground. He immediately was transformed into a snake and severely frightened the approaching Arcadian army. The enemy fled and the child was hailed as *Sosipolis*: "Saviour of our *polis*." The myth may however be considerably older than the historical war between the two states in 364 BC (Ziehen RE 35, 55 f).

In the literary text mentioned above a woman expresses her anger at the fact that women are excluded from political decision-making:

We carry a double burden. First we give birth to our sons
and then we send them into war (Aristophanes, *Lysistrate*
589f).

I will suggest that the female rites performed at Olympia provide a precise expression of this fundamental truth. Women lamented the warriors when dead and they gave birth to the next generation of warriors. In addition every four years the Sixteen Matrons of Elis started weaving the sacred robe of Hera including this 'natural task of women' in their religious duties (Paus. VI 24, 10; V 16, 2-6).

The whole complex of rites, myths and iconography as well as physical arrangements suggests that Olympia was the symbolic centre of the Hellenic world. Here mortals and immortals met at the altars of Zeus and Hera. At the great male Olympic festival, time was suspended and the primordial condition when Cronos ruled was reestablished. Chronological time was anchored in a space where human beings touched the world of the Olympic gods. Innumerable gestures and ceremonies seem to have ordered the universe, that is, the Hellenic world, giving a central anchoring to a completely dispersed group of communities.

We know that in Sparta only women who died giving birth and men who died on the battlefield were honoured with a grave monument, thus establishing a dichotomy and equivalence between female and male 'nature': child-birth and war (Loroux 1981). According to Pausanias king Oinomaos, the father of the bride Hippodameia in whose honour the women held their athletic games, used to sacrifice to Zeus Areios. Warlike Zeus, before challenging her suitors, among whom Pelops, the hero of the male games (Paus. V 14, 6). The separation and interrelationship of female and male gods and humans in Olympia confirmed this social dichotomy. In addition the physical ordering of the race distances established a hierarchy of the sexes. A number of rites, myths and arrangements created an absolute foundation for their respective 'nature', and served literally to incorporate, that is, to embody, these truths in their very nervous system. Calame's study of the intertwining of Theseus myth and rites in Athens may illustrate this point (Calame 1986).

The question of the nature of the games at Olympia has been discussed for a long time. Often this question has been directed to the search for origins. Although the historical dimension should never be neglected, an investigation of the functions of the athletic celebrations seems important. Studies like those by Pleket, Poliakoff, Sansone and Evjen have contributed to this (Pleket 1978, Poliakoff 1987, Sansone 1988, Evjen 1992). Poliakoff underscores the violence of the male games, suggesting that an important function was to provide "an outlet for the highly competitive and individualistic impulses Greece developed" (115). Sansone defines Ancient sport as "ritual sacrifice of human energy" (75). Pleket examining the ideology around the male games, is struck by the persistent emphasis on the masculine and military values (301), while Evjen who reviews a number of theories, thinks athletics was a useful background for military service.

However, not only methods focusing on individual psychology and sociology should be applied. The force of symbolic structuring seems to have been at work shaping 'the Olympic phenomenon', requiring an anthropological framework. Not only the needs of individuals were

met. the group had a need to create itself as a group and anchoring its sacre

Larmour draws attention to the similarities between Greek theatre and the athletic games (Larmour 1990). Both manifestations, I would claim, played a central part in the cultural process, creating and revitalising fundamental institutions of the Greek social world (des Bouvrie 1990).

In his study of the modern Olympic games, MacAloon has observed that different 'genres', rite, festival, and spectacle, with their specific moods operate within the same celebration (MacAloon 1984). Indeed it is plausible that many functions may have been at work at the same time. And a long-lived tradition like that in Olympia must continually have been transformed. I would, however, suggest that the fundamental motive for assembling at Olympia was this cultural need, in the perspective of Mary Douglas' *group-grid* model, to anchor one's central Greek 'truth' and to exclude those who were not Greek (Douglas 1982) and to create oneself as a Hellene, man or woman.

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REALITIES AND WISHFUL THINKING
ON THE WOMEN'S CELEBRATION OF 8TH JANUARY IN
CONTEMPORARY GREECE

Brit Berggreen

Introduction

"A celebration for Dionysos and The women's struggle: A curfew on men when Babo is being celebrated". This appeared as a headline in a Swedish weekly magazine (Gernandt 1985), and was my first encounter with the annual 8 January celebration of the midwife's day in contemporary Greece. This particular celebration took place in the village of Monokklisiá in Serres in the Greek province of Macedonia.

The part which mainly roused my interest was the banner reading GYNAIKOKRATIA - "women's rule" - together with information that on this particular day role reversal was taking place, the women taking over the public village arena while the men were sent home to take over the household chores. Gradually other aspects have mingled with my original preoccupation with sex role reversals (Berggreen 1990). There are the inevitable questions of origin and context, and of purpose and pretext for the celebration. What struck me more and more as being of interest is why just Monoklissiá has emerged as the signature village for a kind of celebration which goes on simultaneously and in similar ways in a number of villages. The common name of the day is *Mammi's Day* or *Bábo's Day*, both words being used interchangeably for "midwife", with even the word *máia* for midwife being heard. The clue, as will immediately be suggested, is the weight upon the aspect of women's rule which has caught the attention of mass media as opposed to the preoccupation with childbirth and fertility which lies at the bottom of the celebration.

I shall touch upon different aspects, but mainly concentrate on the information given, on the whole, to mainly foreigners, through guide books and newspaper articles, and contrast these with my personal

observations as a participant and as a reader of some scholarly contributions to the issue of women's festivals.

I took part in the festival at Monokklisiá for two consecutive years (1990 and 1991), and I have visited the village again during the summers of 1990 and 1993. During my last visit I had the opportunity to watch a long unedited video film of the 1992 festival. Thus I have a fairly good control of the proceedings for three years, in addition to Gernandt's article covering the festival of 1985. I shall also take this opportunity to thank Professor Emeritus Demetrios Loukatos, Dr. Voula Lambropolou and Maria Dedé for their kind co-operation in assisting me personally.

By contrasting popular and tourist versions with more scholarly ones, it became apparent that the former show a disregard for reality, and make one wonder at newspapers' and even tourist brochures' indifference for their readers, and journalists' sloppiness in relating what they have thought might be there rather than what was actually there. One may also wonder at their editing of the festival so as to make it live up to their need for headlines or confirmation of presuppositions. Or are they being led by wishful thinking to see what they expected? They certainly direct the participating women to face their video cameras. It is amazing what a journalist with a camera, not to mention a TV team, can accomplish in the way of making their subjects act and pose. There is a tricky moral issue involved when cameramen have village women shout "down with the men", but there is a related issue of verbal accuracy: When you read that three men were "hosed down", does that give the picture of a man being sprinkled with water from a two pints' bucket by means of a sprig of basil?

The main object of this article is to contrast popular presentations of this particular 8 January event with my experiences and information gathered in scholarly reports. The topic is fascinating, and like most Greek cultural expressions there is the ever present wishful thinking of demonstrating links with ancient customs.

Journalism and scholarly attempts

Creating a dividing line between a "them", that is those with a tourism and public press approach, and an "us" who have more scholarly pretensions should not be necessary. Both groups aim at a true-to-life presentation. In seeking for origins and contexts, however, everybody may feel tempted to guess and may even be excused for guessing, as long as the guesswork part is made clear.

The women's festival has the mixed blessings of being a potential tourist attraction, the women themselves being torn between playing for the public arena and celebrating among themselves. The festival is exotic, being immersed in myths, and offers the fascination of the

esoteric, being the domain of married women only. It is closed to males while unmarried women were given access to the festival and evening party for the first time in Monokklissiá in 1990. It may also be of significance that elderly women had just begun to attend the evening party. Contrary to the festival's potential as a tourist attraction, but adding to its myth-making potential is the geographical position of the village, far away from convenient transportation and lodgings. Nor does the time of the year present an asset, the festival taking place just after Christmas with the hazards of winter weather.

There is reason to believe that many journalists have approached the festival rather lightly, without really trying to give a reliable presentation, but preferring to find a sensational twist. The other option has obviously been to lean on former presentations, not taking seriously the fact that the festival is part of a living tradition, full of adjustments and improvisations from one year to the other. There may be many reasons, ranging from convenience, innocence and inattentiveness, to not having been actually present. It must be taken into account that male journalists have limited access to esoteric female celebrations. Scholarly guesswork also is included in these popular presentations, without the necessary reservations and discussions which would accompany them in scholarly journals. Before giving an ethnographic presentation of the Monokklissiá festival, let us see how it and others are presented to, mainly foreign, tourists and newspaper readers.

What "they" say

Probably the most prestigious and standard reference for visitors to Greece is the authoritative *Blue Guide* (1990:617). Its entry reads:

Monokklissiá is notorious for its practice of 8 January, when the women confine the men to domestic chores while they revel in street and tavern. The inhabitants brought the custom from E.Thrace in 1922; it may derive from the Dionysiac rites of ancient Thrace.

This has been unchanged from the 1981 edition. The *Penguin Guide to Greece* (1990:320) had this piece of information:

Also occurring in this area [i.e. near Serres] is another yearly Dionysian-derived ritual from eastern Thrace called the *yinekokratia*, or 'rule of the women'. In this jolly affair, held each January 8 at the village of Monokklissiá (...) women take over the village for the day while the men stay home and (theoretically) cook and clean (and watch TV).

We may notice that only Monokklisiá is mentioned whereas the festival is actually being celebrated in several villages. Probably most authoritative among publications for tourists is the *Travel Agent's Manual*, published by the Greek Tourist organization. In the 1987 edition, after a general introduction to "local festivities, cultural events & trade fairs", the women's festival is presented, and more areas are referred to, both in Macedonia and Thrace, but there is an emphasis on Monoklissiá, the only village which is mentioned:

Custom of female dominion or matriarchy is observed in villages in the prefecture of Komotini, Xanthi, Kilkis and Serres (Village of Monoklissia). On this day the women gather in the cafes and other social centers in their villages while the men stay at home to look after the household, allowed to join their wives in the celebrations only as dusk falls (p.34)

Besides these authoritative and rather permanent presentations, there are the more ephemeral press cuts to discuss. Even if I have had access to only a limited number, the tendency is clear. It is hard to believe that the journalists had attended the same festival as I.

The Greek daily newspaper *Ta Nea* had an article written by its Kavalla correspondent on January 9th 1989. Journalist Paulos Alisanoglou mentioned the custom being observed in the villages of Proskynités, Xylagani, Kessáni, Néa Petra, Chamiló, and Strími Rodópis. The four accompanying photographs, however, are all from Monokklisiá, which is not mentioned in the text or captions. Alisanoglou mentions the roots of the custom in "Eastern Roumelia", a colloquial geographic name, extending from the Bosphorus and westwards. He then states its association with fertility, and puts Mámmi to the forefront as a symbol of the perpetuation of life. She, he states:

paraded on top of the cart on the village roads, while the rest of the women busied themselves with ... backgammon or *préfas* /a card game/ at the cafés.

Men were shut up in their homes with their feet tied, busy with the dishes, the broom, cleaning and "naturally the nursing of children, uncomplainingly confined to 24 hours of graceful complaints in their roles according to custom and tradition." And as it was unavoidable with some "daring disregard of the house arrest", the law breakers would be hunted on the village roads by the women, receiving bucketfuls of water."

The report from Monokklisiá in the weekly *Greek News* of 12-18 January 1991 was of particular interest to me as I had been in the village both the day before and on the actual day of the festival. From the short article headlined "Women Rule" it must be assumed that the female reporter Katerina Grafioti based her article on a combination of oral information and deductions from earlier reports and assumptions. She dates the festival to "every January 9th [!]" and ends with: "After the women finished their card games in the *kafeneons*, the men and women joined together in the main square for dancing, singing and a banquet". This is an amazing amount of wrong information for such a brief article. The next year *Greek News* also brought a report, this time dating the festival to Epiphany, January 6th, putting the women into the café for cards and backgammon, hosing down of three men and then an "official dinner with drinking and dancing until the wee hours of the morning". The *Athens News* report from the 1992 festival seems to be a piece of fiction, written second hand. If such journalism occurred after some soccer or basket ball event I believe the journalists would be severely reprimanded.

Besides wrong dating, the most telling sign of wishful thinking is the fascination with men being showered with water, and the hard lived presentation of the women taking over the village *kafeneion*. The village women of Monokklisiá have had their own assembly house for a couple of decades after their Womens Association was established in 1963. Through the *Greek News* one gets the impression of a wild dissolution of normal order where "women and men shed all inhibitions and change sex roles for a day". Perhaps this is a fair representation of the celebrations of other villages. As for Monokklisiá there are certainly adjustments to be made. Civilization has certainly entered the celebrations.

Village ethnography I: Foreplay

As a married woman my access to the festival would meet with no formal barriers when I went to Monokklisiá for the first time in 1990. My daughter, then aged 21, came with me, and she had the good fortune that just that year the festival had been opened to unmarried women.

It was cold, several degrees below freezing point. All car windows were frosted, and the smell and smoke from wood-burning stoves covered the town of Serres as we headed for Monokklisiá on January 7th, the day of St. John the baptist. Outside the *kafeneion*, the only village cafe, the men were busy barbequeing mutton and drinking wine. They said *they* wanted a men's party when the women had their's once a year.

I negotiated with the board members of the women's association through my interpreter, and it was agreed that I should come back in the evening to take part in the preparations. The activities had started when I arrived, with women cleaning and brushing and cooking. The *Lysistrata* assembly house consists of a board room for smaller assemblies, a hall with a raised stage, and a kitchen, and an additional outdoor kitchen. In the kitchen were piles of chickens and huge dishes of chicken liver. It was immediately obvious that there would be no problems taking photographs. My main contact now was with the president and the vice president of the women's association.

Soon I let them see Eva Gernandt's article, and there were roars of laughter as they pointed at the pictures and commented. There were some inflamed inquiries as to how the "orgies" had come to be photographed as the photographer was male. I explained that according to the article, the photographer had been thrown out, and that the picture would have been taken by the female journalist.

In the assembly house everything was made ready for the next day, surfaces were cleaned and a fresh linen cloth was laid on the mantelpiece. In the fireplace there were cooking utensils and pans, and, in front, a low table was laid surrounded by cushions arranged in a semi-circle, oriental style. This is a reminder of how kitchens and cooking practice had been in their village of origin in Turkey before they were forced to leave in 1922. On a shelf was a model of an ox cart, a reminder of their originating from farmers. Behind the glass doors of a cupboard hung some brown dresses with red ornaments. Such were the dresses they had used before, and these old dresses were now used by the (male) musicians who played for them. The women themselves had their new ethnic costumes at home to be used during the festival. A police uniform was being fitted to one of the women. A small boy of 4-5 years happily tried on the cap, and was loudly admired by the women.

During a generous meal of titbits from the kitchen, the president explained how the celebration of this women's day had begun. "My grandmother's mother was among the first", she said, and continued:

After the Christmas celebrations the women had had enough. What had been one long celebration for the men had been incessant drudgery for the women: "*Gynaika* (woman), do this; *gynaika* do that", were words resounding through every home, not only inside the house but in the fields as well. The women had an enormous workload with children, the elderly, the sick and the animals to tend. The women even tended the draft animals. They were like slaves!

Now the women pounded on their tables and banished their menfolk to the kitchens and child care while they themselves invaded the *kafeneion*.

Soon it became a custom every January 8th that the women “became men” on this particular day and celebrated each other, but especially their mothers who had worked and toiled, with *bábo*, the midwife at the centre of the celebrations. On this day they smoked, danced and drank and chased the men home.

Other voices joined in: “This is a very, very old custom. *Bábo* is old in Thrace”, they said. So much for origin and dating.

The president related, supported by her vice president, and while we tasted the food, they recalled jolly memories of men who had tried to enter the women’s celebrations. There was especially one man who had tried to join the celebration dressed as a woman. They all fell upon him and began to tear off his clothes while he wiggled away from them and ran. But they were so eager that they chased him, and when he tried to climb a tree, they tore his trousers off. At another time an actor had tried to pass as a woman. They had found him out and given him a treatment he would never forget. He had said afterwards that he had played many roles both on stage and in the cinema, but had never attended anything as tumultuous as this. Such were their happy memories. It happened quite often, they said, that men tried to enter their celebration. *My* (feminist) reaction was that the men might leave the women alone on this day, but the women themselves disagreed, finding it added to the excitement and fun.

“The women look forward to this celebration all through Christmas”, said the president. “The widows who, according to custom have always been confined to a shadow existence in their homes have also begun to come to these celebrations. There everybody feels completely free.”

Village ethnography II: The day

“Don’t come before 10-10:30 a.m.”, they said as I left. “Nothing will happen before then”. This was not quite the case. On my arrival on the 8th January there was full activity in the outdoor kitchen. There was a steaming soup kettle and to the left was a kettle where the chickens had been brought to a full boil. The ground was slippery from all the grease. Before I had got my camera into position the women began to pose, and there was pushing and shoving while the pictures were taken.

I had even missed the arrival of the musicians. Now they were fully equipped in brown dresses, red aprons and head scarves, tuning their



Fig.1. Monoklissiá 8 January 1991: Video photographers seeking a fresh motive. A female photographer concentrates on women (mock) playing backgammon outside the women's assembly house, belonging to the women's association "Lysistrate". (Photo: Brit Berggreen 1991)

instruments out in the yard, and starting to play, first a little rusty, then full of vigour. The yard began to be filled with activity, voices and the clapping of hands, and the dancing started. The dance leader had substituted a loaf of bread for the usual kerchief used by the lead dancer. The loaf had been grabbed from the bread basket that had just been carried to the kitchen.

A table with a bottle of Martini and two chairs were set up out in the yard. The street outside had now been closed off, or perhaps the women's area had been closed in. From a distance some men were watching. The whole village had been closed off with a barrier, to be opened only when car drivers agreed to pay a toll. This particular cold January day in 1990 was not inviting to visitors. There were two or three participant observers besides my daughter and myself. Nor was the number of actual participants high. There were about 15 women, conspicuous in their colourful costumes.

The procession was about to begin. Headed by the musicians, but sometimes ahead of them, the women danced along the village roads



Fig.2. Monoklissiá women dancing along the village roads collecting contributions for the evening party. (The male musicians, dressed as women, are usually leading the procession, but they are at the back on this occasion. Notice the Martini bottle held by the woman in front. (Photo: Brit Berggreen 1991)

visiting every house on the way. If men were detected, they were immediately chased, and a fee, *soldi* was demanded and put straight into the money-box before the man was "showered" with water by means of a sprig dapped into a tiny bucket. The women who were at home came out with titbits of sweets or snacks which were eaten on the spot. Some had set out decorated tables with treats. One offered fried chicken, a welcome relief from all the sweets. Together with the sweet Martini, or substitute non-alcoholic beverages from Martini bottles there was a good opportunity to eat oneself sick from snacks while dancing and chewing as the procession went from house to house.

Many old women dressed in black were escorted out from the houses and warmly greeted and kissed. Outside one house there was some extra commotion. That was where the *bábo* lived, the old midwife who would later become the centre of attention. Behind the

window pane was her son, on this occasion holding up his baby son to show he was doing “women’s work”.

The “policewoman” whistled her flute incessantly and made sure that all cars were stopped and a toll demanded. The traffic was far from heavy. Apart from the regular bus from Serres the village was calm, this being a week day with men away and the children at school in the neighbouring village of Provatás. The population of Monokklisiá is ageing, with the younger generation living in Serres or Thessaloniki. Besides there is a limit to how much life may be brought into a village of ca. 500 inhabitants on a freezing cold midwinter day.

When every house had been visited, it was time to go back to the assembly house to eat. Cutlery, bread and glasses were put on the long tables along with plates of hard boiled eggs and *feta* cheese. From the kitchen bowls of chicken soup were passed around. The wine was poured, the same sweet red wine of the previous night. Very little was consumed, while water was gushed down. Afterwards the time had come to fetch *bábo*. All the women gathered, led by the president who now carried a tray in her outstretched arms. She soon got tired, and another took over for a while. *Bábo* received the procession on her porch. She was dressed in a checked dress, wearing a rose on her headscarf partly covering the long braid falling down her back. A low table and cushions were placed on the porch and the women of dignity were seated there after the reception ceremony. The midwife sat in the centre, drinking beer and smoking cigarettes before, shepherd’s stick in hand, leading the dance back to the assembly house. Now she was to be among the guests of honour at a banquet for the district dignitaries, both male and female. Speeches were delivered and words exchanged on the importance of women for home and society. This was the serious part for those specially invited. I was not there, but I was invited to see the boardroom as it had been prepared for the honoured guests.

The evening’s celebration began around 7 pm. The musicians were on the stage. Now they were back in their ordinary clothes. They were in full view of the room. The women had also taken off their ethnic costumes and had mostly put on skirts and blouses, although some were in their Sunday best dresses. Daughters and daughters’ daughters had arrived. The number of women attending the party was 150-180 by my estimate. Supper was served, consisting of chicken and bread, pickled hot green peppers and a mutton/cabbage dish with tomatoes. After the meal money was collected, more than 70.000 drachmas, I was told, which was seen as most satisfactory as they had already received tributes both in cash and kind during the day.

This was a delightful part. It was relaxed and funny, bold and daring with an atmosphere of warm friendliness and joy. There was

dancing, dancing, dancing, mostly traditional, but this was the year of the *lambada*, which was played. Gradually the curtains were drawn. The musicians, being male, must not see the “orgy” part. A roar of laughter swept through the room as a *corps de ballet* entered the room tiptoeing with much flesh and very little clothing. The onlookers made dirty remarks, and slapped bottoms, male style. There was the *lambada* again. After some other skits the phallic part, playing on the relations between good Greeks and bad Turks, marked the end of the fun. At 11 pm. the party was over. The president had lost her voice and could only whisper. The most eager and reluctant continued dancing with their coats on, as long as possible.

Bábo was 78 years old in 1990, and not feeling well. She refrained from taking part in the evening celebration. I decided to follow the festival to see what they would do when she no longer took part, having been told that child births were now taking place in hospital, not in the village. There was, however, another village midwife, a generation younger, to take over the ceremonial role. In 1991 the procedure was as the year before, but the weather being much warmer, more people had gathered to see the fun. There were more journalists and a man with a video camera, eight in all. I had no company this time, and I was of little consequence now, being warmly greeted, but familiar to them after two previous visits. With my still camera I could now record how shots were arranged by the press who demanded certain poses and activities according to myths and expectations. Still, between the women, there was spontaneous fun, as when a “baby” was “born” on *bábo*’s porch. There was a roar of laughter as more and more onlookers became aware of the happening. A little red haired plastic doll was lifted triumphantly up in the air, and later brought to the assembly house. A bus-load of women from the nearby town of Kavalla helped to fill *bábo*’s yard. What was hardly noticed by others afterwards was the doll being baptized in a mock ceremony, the orthodox ritual being observed with chanting and psalms. This addition, proving successful, was repeated in 1992, this time in front of a video recorder. Otherwise this year went on as the two consecutive ones, with minor improvisations only, and a new kind of “orgy” to round off the day.

Challenges: A search for structure, purpose and context

Eva Gernandt had visited Monokklisiá five years earlier. She begins her article:

Once a year the women in the little town of Monoklissiá have a proper celebration. They take a drink, smoke cigarettes and dance at the tavern as the men do. For the males there is a cufew when fertility and its symbol, Babo, the midwife is being celebrated. The women have fun, but this is not the sole purpose of the celebration which also strengthens the women's solidarity in their everyday struggle.

Did she really see the women dance at the tavern, or did she assume it on the basis of other reports? There is no further mention of this dancing in her article which otherwise is in close correspondence with my own notes and observations. But she has certainly missed a crucial point by not associating "Illustrate" with "*I Lisistrate*", that is the main character and name of Aristophanes' comedy, "*Lysistrata*". The name appears on the sign above the main door. After they got their assembly house they no longer needed the men's café, but somehow the fascinating thought of the women taking the village café lingers on, stronger than the notion of the celebration taking place in the women's own assembly house.

This means little for the overall pattern. Still, there are more important changes from Gernandt's experience of 1985 to mine in 1990. She reported that the women were making a round to all the houses in the village the day before to collect food: "eggs, sweets, wine, money and poultry to be prepared for the next day." Five years later there is a predominance in the use of cash to buy the victuals, and then to collect money from the participants to cover their expenses. In the 1990 celebration there was no suggestion as to what should be paid, whereas in 1991 and 1992 there was a poster at the entrance announcing a fee of 500 drachmas.

On *Bábo's* day Gernandt does not report of a morning round to every house in the village before the visit to *Bábo's* house. This seems to be absorbed in the dance through the village *after* visiting *Bábo*, and having presented her with "gifts of food and washed her hands". That village dance is described as a "wild game where men's ways towards women are exploited by women themselves to set their force free." Here is where men are seen in their aprons at home, which *I* saw at the morning round. Gernandt has experienced the same kind of evening arrangement as I did, except for "her" *Bábo* taking a much more active part:

Towards the evening mink coats are mingled with popular costumes in the assembly house where the women eat chicken soup ahead of the Dionysian ecstasy later on. The musicians have changed into electrical guitars and tango to

eardrum breaking level. There is dancing and an encouraging speech on the importance of women's power. The climax is getting closer. A group of women, strangely dressed up. Someone is waving a shining, white phallus symbol. Babo has joined in, dressed in a long kaftan and a turban. Soon they are tumbling around on the floor as if they were having sexual intercourse. This marks the end of the celebration, and the women return to their husbands.

Space prevents a further analysis and commentary on the differences from the 1985 to the 1990 (1991 & 1992) celebrations. The most important is that the midwife does no longer take part in the "wild" dancing from house to house, but is a guest of honour at a formal dinner at mid-day. Earlier photographs show the women in a horse driven cart, with the midwife as the centerpiece. After tractors took over from horses, the women no longer had access to a vehicle to carry the (old) midwife along. The model cart in the assembly house serves as support to the memory of this former practice. Also money has begun to play a part where tributes in kind were common before. I should above all stress the flexibility and adjustments which denote a living tradition, a folklore that has not (yet) become folkloristic and frozen as a fixed ritual, but is wide open to improvisations and adjustments according to convenience or need.

Whereas journalists and tourism promoters may be said to prefer the scenic and the sensational, scholars seek "truth" and authenticity from a non-interfering observation post. True enough this is an ideal, as just by being present, interference is unavoidable. Wishful thinking is involved in both groups. Scholars must not edit events, just interpret them, whereas journalists may feel free to direct events to get good stories and photo angles. To seek roots and links are the arts and ambitions of amateurs and scholars alike, and a fascinating game. The most thrilling of challenges is that of finding roots and links to *ancient* rituals. We feel no real satisfaction when having to settle on uncertainties. When we know that ancient Greece and Rome had women's festivals, there is a temptation to suggest links even when there are about 1500-2000 years which cannot be accounted for, and where no connection can be verified. It is indeed likely that revitalized parts of notions of ancient celebrations and associations with them have been introduced as demonstrations of ethnic Greek adherence. The festival itself is structured around general and vital traits in any culture: There is the society of married women who initiate novices to esoteric knowledge of childbirth and sexuality. There are the younger women of childbearing age venerating the midwife and older women who administered traditional pre-science

knowledge and served as supporters and, not infrequently, as life savers in the most critical moments of women's lives: in the pains and helplessness of giving birth.

What have we witnessed with regard to Monokklisiá? Was it really a *gynaecocracy* as we were told by the banners, or was it a *midwife's day*, or the celebration of all the (grand)mothers of the village. Let me suggest that it was all of it. No obvious rule or law was at the back of the celebration, just tradition kept up by the date, by the population and by the new village of Monokklisiá where the population settled after they had left their original homes near Kirklareli in Turkish Thrace. (The Greek name is Saránda Ekklisíes, literally "forty churches", whereas Monokklisiá means "one church"). This resettling took place during the dramatic events of the winter 1922-23.

Let me suggest that there is a connection between the stress on "women's rule" and the fact that the day is organized by the Woman's association in Monokklisiá which is a political organization.

In the neighbouring village of Ano Kamilla, which I visited briefly 8 January 1991, the local "folkloristic-cultural circle of women" which carries the name *I bábo* ("the midwife") organizes the day as "The Midwife's Day", advertised on posters for the public to come and attend. They promise *ta vrehoudia* ("making wet"), dance and merrymaking". Nevertheless, there is also a banner announcing "women's rule". There is an accumulation of ingredients, and any original focus or purpose has been blurred. It is more than an assumption that the two villages compete both for public attention and for being the village that originally began the celebrations. We cannot pretend that the village populations are ignorant of ancient Greek rituals and practices, antiquity being a building block of the contemporary Greek nation state. Nor can we exclude totally the thought that there has really been a continuity from Thracian antiquity on. In Monokklisiá there are elements present of Dionisiac orgies, Eleusinian secrecy, sex role reversal, revering the *bábo* and celebrating the *yiayía* —grandmother, and female, married, village veterans. Demetrios Loukatos (1977) suggests that the celebration may be in honour of the saint Dominique who allegedly assisted the holy virgin during the birth of Christ.

There is, however, another approach. The Finnish ethnologist Uno Harva wrote an article in 1941 on "Societies of married women" and their annual day for celebrating fertility, strengthening ties between themselves, and ceremonially including women who had entered matrimony during the year, while excluding even old unmarried women from this esoteric society. The celebration centered on sexuality and childbirth. Total secrecy was demanded. Trespassing men were treated with ceremonial violence. This custom was observed in central and eastern Europe. Harva believes in a connection



Fig.3. Poster announcing the women's 8th January festival in Ano Kamilla, neighbouring village of Monoklissiá. The poster shows the midwife while the text promises "women's rule, midwife, splashing of water, dancing, fun". (Photo: Brit Berggreen 1991)

between the Germanic and Slavic practices of the custom, their being too similar for a mere coincidence. Harva (1941:284) suggests the ancient Roman *matronalia* as a possible origin, but cannot trace the custom between ancient Rome and the 16th century.

We are to some extent dealing with the fascination of seeking "the missing link", so fashionable when evolution was prominent in cultural studies. We still feel a professional and psychological

dissatisfaction when being confronted with broken historical lines. Cultural history, however, is no Hollywood film where all bits and pieces can be gathered into a satisfactory or happy ending.

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PART II

**FANTASY: HERMAPHRODITES AND
APHRODITE IN ARMS**

MONSTRUM OR DAIMON

HERMAPHRODITES IN ANCIENT ART AND CULTURE

Aileen Ajootian

Roman sculptures of Sleeping Hermaphrodite type in the Louvre, the Uffizi, and other European museums still have the capacity to surprise viewers (Fig. 1a-b). From the back, the figures look like sleeping women, but we realize our mistake when we move around them for a closer look and glimpse male genitals attached to slender female bodies. This interaction between the image and the viewer appears to have been an intentional, important feature of the sculpture, and a link between it and other later Hellenistic compositions. The ten replicas and variants of this Sleeping Hermaphrodite type are generally thought to derive from a single Hellenistic original, in bronze (Ajootian 1990, 276-277), and in fact, this bisexual phenomenon in ancient Greek art is usually connected with the Hellenistic period. However, while modern commentators associate ancient images of hermaphrodites with Hellenistic "genre" types like the Sleeping Hermaphrodite, or numerous Roman groups of struggling satyrs and hermaphrodites (Ajootian 1990, 277-278; Kell 1988, 21-28), the origins of this intriguing personage can be traced further back in Greek art and culture.

The earliest mention of the name Hermaphroditos in ancient literature occurs in the *Characters* of Theophrastos (370-288 B.C.). His Superstitious Man (*Characters* 14), in addition to many other compulsive acts of piety, performs special rites on the fourth and seventh days of each month by hanging garlands on Hermaphroditos. But still earlier evidence for Hermaphroditos as a god of some kind is provided by an inscribed statue base. Found near Vari in Attica, it has been dated to ca. 385 B.C. by letter forms, and bears an inscribed dedication to Hermaphroditos (Dow and Kirchner 1937, 7-8). The object supported atop this small base, in a nearly square cutting, is now missing. Another inscribed base, found on the island of Kos, dates to the third century B.C., and bears a dedication to Helios, Amera, the



Figure 1a. Florence, Galleri degli Uffizi. Inv. 343. Gab. Fotografico Soprintendenza Beni Artistici e Storici di Firenze.

Horai, Charites, Nymphs, Priapus, Pan and Hermaphrodite (Brisson 1990, 36).

Our earliest physical evidence for images of Hermaphroditos can be dated least to the late fourth century B.C. The fragment of a clay mould for a terracotta figurine found in the Athenian Agora (T 1808) preserves just enough of the essential details to make the identification likely (Fig. 2). This fragment is especially important because it actually appears to be a representation of Hermaphroditos *anasyromenos* (Hermaphroditos exposing itself), the earliest example documented so far. The mould fragment was found with pottery and figurines that constitute the so-called Coroplasts' Dump, located on the north slope of the Areopagus. The date of this deposit, established by coins, must fall within the last quarter of the fourth century B.C. (Thompson 1952, 145, 162; Rotroff 1987, 184). This mould, albeit only a fragment, preserves some of the canonical features of the *anasyromenos* type, the only one in which Hermaphroditos wears more than a loosely draped mantle and the occasional short veil or sandals. In this presentation, the earliest and most widespread of Hermaphrodite images, the draped figure stands frontally, its female

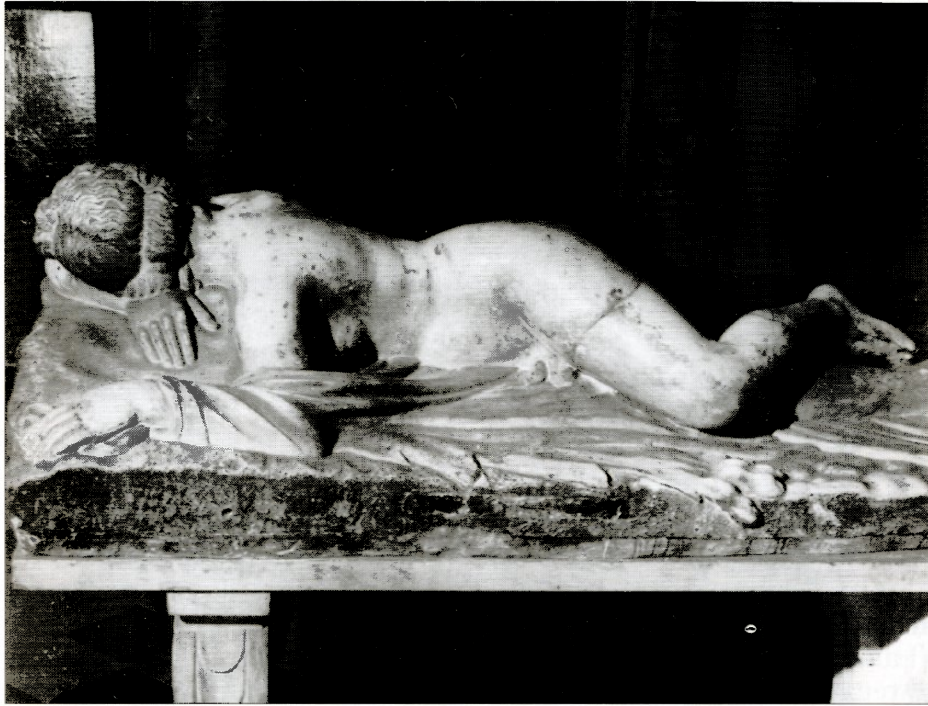


Figure 1b. Athens. Agora T 1808. American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations.

breasts clearly delineated beneath a feminine garment: one of them occasionally is exposed. The figure raises a long skirt revealing male genitals beneath. Most of these images are in small scale terracotta or marble (Fig. 3; Ajootian 1990, 274-276).

While representations of hermaphrodites were apparently new in fourth century Greece, *anasyromenos* representations of women holding aside garments to reveal their sex derive from an older tradition. In the Greek world, the most immediate precursors of our earliest hermaphrodite images can be found on Crete as early as the seventh century (Rizza 1967-1968, 237-238). At the site of Axos, northwest of Knossos, for example, where habitation began in LM III and seems to have flourished during the eighth century B.C., this exposing gesture occurs in a group of Daedalic terracotta figurines and relief plaques of women. In addition, from near one building thought to be an archaic temple to Aphrodite, a large quantity of terracotta statuettes was discovered, the earliest of them Geometric in date. In this assemblage, at least eight examples are females who part their skirts in *anasyromenos* gestures (Rizza 1967-1968, 238).

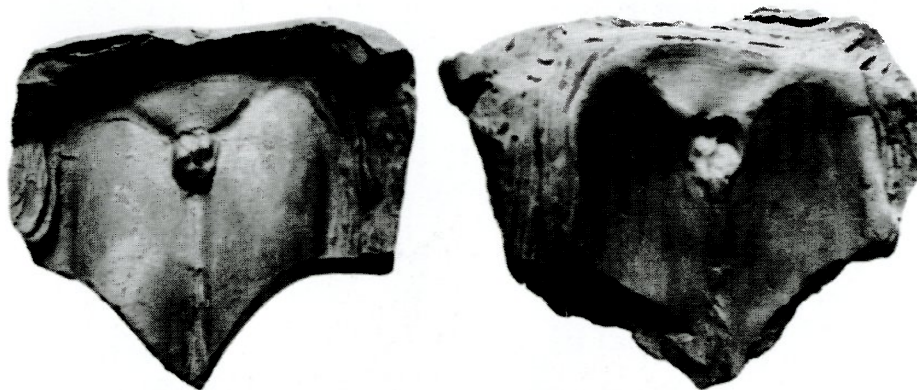


Figure 2 Athens, Agora T 1808. American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavtions.

Also on Crete, at Kato Syme, a terracotta relief plaque depicts a female figure in a similar pose, is dated to the seventh century B.C. (Labessi 1976, 12). Then in Greece there is apparently a gap of at least three centuries before the *anasyromenos* motif appears again. However, from a late fifth century context at Gela in Sicily comes a terracotta figurine that provides evidence for the continued occurrence of the pose. This statuette, now in the Gela Museum (inv. no. 13859), is of a woman with breasts covered, who raises her sleeved chiton (?) to expose her genitals and stomach. Her slightly bulging stomach may mean that she is pregnant. That there might actually be some connection between the earlier Cretan figures and this Geloan statuette is at least a possibility since Gela, according to Thucydides (6.4), was founded by Cretans and Rhodians in 688 B.C.

So the iconographic underpinnings of a divinity apparently new in Greece are old ones, reworked sometime during the fourth century, to supply the three-dimensional manifestation of a new god. How were these *anasyromenos* figures used and what did they mean? Our earliest surviving image of Hermaphroditos, the mould fragment, is part of the fill of an Athenian well. However a few figurines of *anasyromenos* type have been found in later, but securely dated votive deposits that give some idea of the kind of widely popular cultic connections and importance Hermaphrodite might have had, both in Italy and Greece. From a votive deposit dated to the third-second century B.C. connected with the Temple of Athena at Paestum in Southern Italy, for example, comes a terracotta figurine of *anasyromenos* type (Sestieri 1955, 40), one of the few shown leaning against a bearded herm (Hermaphroditos' father Hermes himself?).



Figure 3. Athens, Agora S 1235. American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations.

A similar terracotta *anasyromenos* figurine in fragmentary condition was recently excavated at the Demeter sanctuary at Mytilene, also in a votive deposit dated to the late third - early second centuries B.C. (Williams and Williams 1988, 176-177).

How did Hermaphrodite function in these votive contexts? To attempt an answer to this question let us turn briefly to some of the possible origins of this *mischwesen* in Greek mythology and art. Hermaphrodite is not the only bisexual creature in the Greek mythological tradition. M. L. West has shown that in a variety of earlier Eastern theogonies — Sidonian, Zoroastrian, and Indian — one of the primordial divinities is a force identified as Time, who procreating with itself, brings forth the next, divine generation (West 1983, 90, 202-220). West proposes that some of these eastern ideas about the development of the universe found their way to Greece, and were transformed there sometime during the sixth century B.C. (West 1971, 29-36).

Pherecydes of Syros, around the middle of the sixth century, in his prose account of the creation of the universe, may be the first Greek philosopher to present a version of these eastern concepts, including the presence of a bisexual being who was able, by itself, to produce immortal offspring. Pherecydes' work survives in papyrus fragments dated to the third century A.C., and these are supplemented with the discussions of his writings by several later sources. His treatise, like the two other earliest surviving prose works from Greece, deals with the creation of the universe. According to Pherecydes, there were three primordial forces at the beginning: Zas (Zeus), Chthonie (Ge), and Chronos (Time). The first two entities mated with each other to beget divine prodigy, but bisexual Chronos did this on its own. Chronos may be associated with the earlier eastern bisexual gods and West then suggests that this concept was developed in the Orphic cosmography: the earliest Orphic poems have been dated to around 500 B.C. (West 1983, 7).

Playing a critical role in the Orphic creation of the universe is a bisexual creature variously called Protogonos, Bromios, Zeus, and Eros in different Orphic fragments (West 1983, 203). But in this scheme, Phanes is not the first link in the cosmic genealogy. Here Time in the form of a serpent mates with Ananke, producing Aither and a Chasm. In the Aither, Time creates an egg from which Phanes is born. Possessing both male and female genitals, Phanes by itself creates Night and several other divinities in the next generation. Then, mating with Night, Phanes creates Oceanus and Ge, the sun and moon, and the homes of men and gods. Zeus ultimately swallows Phanes and recreates, as it were, this early form of the cosmos, complete with deities, humankind, and the physical universe.

Empedocles of Akragas (ca. 495-435 B.C.), in his hexameter poem, *On Nature*, also mentions bisexual creatures, however these personages are not gods, but represent an early phase of mortal evolution (Wright 1981, 212-215). In this stage, unattached body parts, human and animal, combine in surprising ways, producing two-headed Janus-like creatures, individuals composed of both animal and human components, and still others in which male and female elements are fused. At a more advanced level of human development, some of these peculiar forms disappear, and the men-women are split in half.

The fate of Empedocles' bisexual creatures presages that of the most familiar — human — bisexuals in ancient literature, the spherical creatures described by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* (189b ff). According to Aristophanes, the first human beings were globe-shaped creatures consisting variously of two male halves (progeny of the sun), two female halves (offspring of the earth), or a half male, half female variety; this last type was produced by Selene, the moon, also considered a bisexual entity here (189d - 190b). The third form, comprised of both sexes, Aristophanes calls an androgyne. Extinct in his day, Aristophanes says, it was remembered only by the name, now reduced to a term of reproach.

The excessive pride of these globe-shaped creatures caused Zeus to have them cut in half, and later other surgical adjustments were made by Apollo to allow the severed halves to mate with each other, ensuring a supply of mortals to worship the gods (190c). After this punishment, the severed halves, according to Aristophanes, were driven by Eros always to seek their lost complements (192c-d). In the earliest of these appearances in Greek cosmographies, the bisexual entity plays an essential role in the creation of the universe. Aristophanes' *androgyne*s produce mortal offspring whose main function is to sacrifice to the gods. Plato takes considerable care to describe physically a phase of human development which in Aristophanes' scheme no longer exists, and is in reality a concept, an motivation for the behavior of contemporary mankind. Perhaps the ideas about personages possessing characteristics of both sexes that had been current in Greek thought at least since the sixth century then made their way into a more popular level of cultural expression may all, in some way, be the predecessors of a daimon called Hermaphrodite that makes its first appearance in Greece early in the fourth century B.C.

Hermaphroditos shares with these earlier personages a role in generation and renewal. This function as an agent of fertility is more clearly expressed in a group of later representations, which we may mention here because of the light they shed on the earlier figurines from votive contexts, and on their function in general. These

compositions depict Hermaphroditos carrying or nursing infants. At least two Roman sculptures are actually of *anasyromenos* type, where the lifted folds of drapery form a cradle for the infants (Stuart Jones 181, pl. 42). In addition to these *anasyromenos* figures of Hermaphroditos, another Roman type also emphasized the divinity's maternal aspect. Some of these sculptures were significantly altered by their modern owners. The original state of one of these works, now a reclining, half draped female, is known only from an early nineteenth century sketch that shows its male genitals, and a baby nursing at its breast, with two more infants by its side (Howard 1968, 405-420).

Returning to the earlier *anasyromenos* figurines from deposits dedicated to Hera, Athena, and Demeter, it is possible that their presence in these assemblages may be explained in terms of their function as divinities who oversee fertility and childbirth. While this nurturing role only survives in Roman imagery, it should be noted here that Hermaphroditos itself is often depicted as a young, immature male, with undeveloped musculature and female breasts, or with the body of a young woman, with male genitals appended. Ovid's Hermaphroditos, as we will see, is a fifteen year old. Perhaps, since it consistently was depicted as a young person, Hermaphroditos was considered a patron of the young. In contrast to its precursors, Hermaphroditos did not, at least to the surviving testimonia, produce offspring or act as a critical link in the evolution of the cosmos. However, the archaeological evidence suggests that Hermaphroditos did preside over fertility and human creation: Hellenistic votives from sanctuaries of Athena at Paestum and Demeter at Mytilene support this interpretation, and as we have just seen, some Roman sculptures even depict the creature holding or nursing a baby.

So the earlier Greek literary evidence establishes bisexual creatures as essential links in the evolutionary chain and the considerably later visual record supports a procreative and nurturing function for Hermaphroditos. In the fourth century B.C., we get our earliest physical evidence not only for the existence of a bisexual deity, but also one for whom votives are appropriate. Why, sometime during the fourth century B.C., and possibly in Attica, does Hermaphroditos appear to have come into its own as a divine personage worthy of votive offerings, with an established iconography? What was the impetus that generated the first three dimensional images of a divine personage possessing both male and female elements? While it is not necessary or advisable always to draw a direct connection between historical events and the development of cults, we may at least observe that the social and religious climate in Greece, and especially in Attica at the end of the fifth century encouraged the introduction of new divinities and new forms of worship.

Several commentators have noted that the political and social disruptions caused in Athens during the second half of the fifth century B.C. by the Peloponnesian War and the two outbreaks of plague that overwhelmed Athens from 430 to 425 B.C. (Thucydides 2.47-54; Morens and Littmore 1993, 271-304) coincide with an Athenian preoccupation with foreign divinities (Mikalson 1984, 217-225; Camp 1979, 403-404). Thucydides (2.47) asserted that during the plague years there was a general feeling among Athenians that the gods had deserted them, or were powerless against the disease. It was at this time in Athens, distressed by plague and possibly an earthquake in 426 B.C. (Thucydides 3.89; Rotroff and Oakley 1992, 51-57), that people may have resorted to extreme religious measures. After an apparent hiatus in religious building activity throughout Attica between 430 and 426 B.C., this situation changed, as several recent studies of late fifth century Attic building projects have shown (e.g. Miles 1989, 228-235). Directly related to the plague and its aftermath was the introduction of the cult of Asklepios to Athens in 420 B.C. (Travlos 1971, 127-128). Amphiaraos, another healing divinity, was established at Oropos by the early fourth century B.C. (Travlos 1988, 301-318). The development of the sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron has also be attributed to Athenian concern about the plague (Travlos 1988, 55-82). Other divinities, foreigners like Isis, Cybele, Attis, Adonis, Sabazios and Bendis entered Athens late in the fifth century, although not all of these gods can be clearly connected with reactions to the devastation of disease and warfare (Simms 1985).

The evidence, though admittedly sparse, suggests that Hermaphroditos *anasyromenos* might be an Athenian development. It is at least an intriguing possibility such three dimensional images developed in Athens, sometime early in the fourth century B.C. Perhaps the first images of Hermaphroditos were the products of a local cult in the city itself, or possibly in the Attic countryside. Possibly, the cumulative losses of life suffered in thirty years of warfare and four years of plague may have decreased the Athenian population to the extent that the guardianship of a figure like Hermaphroditos, who apparently served in the capacity of a fertility figure, might have been sought. While the population in 415 B.C. was apparently adequate to support the Syracusan expedition, only a few years later evidence suggests that there was a shortage of manpower (Strauss 1986, 70-86; Gomme 1933, 6-8).

However, while cult activity involving a divinity called Hermaphroditos appears to have developed in Greece at least by the early fourth century B.C., human beings who possessed elements of both sexes were treated quite differently — in Rome. What may have become of such individuals in the Greek world is less clear, although

Diodoros Siculus (32.12.2-3) provides some evidence. He discusses the case of a woman outside Rome who developed male sexual features, and who was brought before the Roman Senate by her husband. The Senate, following the advice of Etruscan seers, had her burned alive. This event, according to Diodoros Siculus, occurred at the beginning of the Marsian War (91-87 B.C.). Soon after, Diodoros tells us, a similarly afflicted woman in Athens was burned alive.

More precise evidence for the treatment of persons with abnormal sexual features is restricted to the Roman world, where androgynous infants and miraculous sex changes, along with other sexual anomalies cited by Pliny and Phlegon (Mirab. 6 = *FGrHist* IIB), were considered prodigies, at least from the late third through the early first centuries B.C. (MacBain 1982, 126-135). Livy and Julius Obsequens report a series of androgynous births occurring in Rome and elsewhere in Italy between 209 and 92 B.C. At least sixteen of these infants, considered *monstra*, and sinister portents, were identified and drowned at sea or in a river in the course of rituals that required joint action by both the Roman decemviri and the haruspices.

The earliest recorded occurrence of such an androgynous birth, in 209 B.C. at Sinuessae, was reported by Livy (27.11.1-6): *natum ambiguo inter natum ac feminam sex infantem*. A special expiation was apparently not carried out at this time, but two years later, when another infant, *incertus mas an femina esset*, was born, the haruspices drowned it at sea in a wooden chest. This drastic measure was followed by further expiatory rites that included the presentation of a gold bowl at the Temple of Juno in Rome, also a feature typical of these expiations, in addition to a procession of virgins to her temple on the Palatine, and a sacrifice of two white cows (Boyce 1937, 157-171). As MacBain has pointed out, political and historical events in Italy appear to have triggered the occurrence of these abnormal phenomena. The spring of 207 B.C. was a time of tension and danger for Rome as news of the Carthaginian invasion spread. This critical period coincided with the earliest appearance of androgynous infants and other ominous signs that called for special actions by an indigenous body of magistrates and the services of the Etruscan haruspices (Dumezil 1966, 606-610).

Although these *monstra* are described as being of indeterminate sex, no more specific details of their condition are provided, and it is not clear exactly what physical abnormalities may have been present. In nature, cases of children born with uncertain sexual characteristics do occur (Mittwoch 1986; Austin and Short 1982; Dewhurst and Gordon 1969), resulting from genetic, endocrine, gonadal, or hormonal abnormalities, so it is possible that such individuals may actually have been born in Rome and been viewed there as portents.

However, just at the time when individuals of a certain physical type were considered dangerous portents in Rome, representations of beings clearly possessing both male and female sexual features were being produced, in both Greece and southern Italy. No connection is made by Livy or Julius Obsequens between Hermaphrodite the divinity, images of this personage, and the actual appearance of similar phenomena in nature.

Diodoros Siculus, however, writing in the middle of the first century B.C. (4.6.5-7) was apparently aware of this duality. His is the earliest surviving genealogy for Hermaphroditos, as the offspring of Hermes and Aphrodite. In addition, Diodoros articulates a distinction between Hermaphroditos the divinity and humans with physical abnormalities, considered by some, he says, to be monsters. Pliny the Elder also acknowledges this bifurcation. He probably alludes to the expiations of supposedly androgynous infants at 7.34: *Gignuntur et utiusque sexus quos Hermaphroditos vocamus, olim androgynous vocatos et in prodigis habitos, nunc vero in deliciis*. Like Diodoros Siculus, Pliny records a transition in the popular perception of such individual, in earlier times considered threatening portents, and later on, physiological oddities. Pliny notes an accompanying shift in vocabulary, from the use of "androgynous" to "hermaphrodite," but this change is really not borne out by surviving textual and epigraphical evidence. The name Hermaphroditos, as we have seen, first appears in a Greek inscription of the early fourth century B.C., and is mentioned by the late fourth century Greek writer Theophrastus. However, the distinction in vocabulary noted by Pliny might actually reflect the differences between human and divine manifestations of the bisexual condition. By Pliny's day, apparently, the dangerous potential of persons possessing features of both sexes had been diffused.

Where the divine and the dangerous overlap is in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (4.274-391). Ovid's account provides an etiology for Hermaphroditos, but also an explanation for the apparently well known enervating properties of the spring Salmacis, first noted by Strabo (14.656) as having a weakening effect on any many who entered its waters. In Ovid's story Hermaphroditos starts life as a male, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite. He is transformed into a bisexual being in the subsequent narrative, and his story is intertwined with the history and the peculiar properties of the spring Salmacis. Hermaphroditos took his name from his parents. Ovid tells us, and in his face both of them could be recognized: *cuius erat facies, in qua materque paterque/cognosci possent*. According to Ovid, Hermaphroditos was brought up by nymphs in a cave on Phrygian Mount Ida. When he was fifteen, he left this home to travel through Asia Minor. In Caria, Hermaphroditos discovered a spring called

Salmacis, the home of a nymph. Ovid sets the scene at an existing Carian site: his nymph and spring share the name Salmacis with an actual ancient place not far from Halicarnassus (Bean 1971, 103-104, 110-112).

As a nymph, Salmacis, according to Ovid, is an anomaly. Although encouraged by her companions, she refuses to follow Diana in the hunt and spends the days bathing in the spring, admiring her reflections in its waters, combing her hair, or gathering flowers. One day, thus occupied, she spots Hermaphroditos and falls in love with him. Her attempt to seduce the boy (4.320-328) has been noted as a parody of Odysseus' address to Nausikaa in the *Odyssey* (2.8.11-12). Ovid's ironic manipulation of the Homeric scene and its characters, along with his use of heroic epithets and similes to develop Salmacis' erotic nature, gives the episode a slightly threatening tone (Galinsky 1986, 398-399). Salmacis is distanced from chaste Diana, but rather than being the victim of prying strangers, as is more usual, in this story, she is the aggressor.

As Hermaphroditos swims in the spring, Salmacis dives in too and surrounds the boy in an inextricable embrace, entreating the gods as she does so that the two may never be parted. They grant her prayer: boy and nymph are fused, creating a new, bisexual persona. The imagery of their struggle is violent: Salmacis is like a snake twining herself around an eagle, or like a sea polyp gripping its prey in its tentacles (4.360-367). That Hermaphroditos retains something of his previous masculine nature, however, seems clear as he prays to his parents (4.383-386) that the waters of the spring Salmacis thereafter debilitate any man who enters them.

The bisexual metamorphosis of Hermaphroditos, according to Ovid, thus threatens masculinity, and there is really no indication in this account of Hermaphroditos' role as a divinity, although he is born of divine parents. The Ovidian tale highlights the loss of Hermaphroditos' manhood and the subsequent dangerous powers of the fateful spring, Salmacis. The darker aspect of Hermaphroditos' character that we see here may reflect a surviving concern with such sexual *mischwesen* in nature, but also emphasizes another facet of Hermaphroditos' divine persona as a protective or prophylactic entity.

With its exposing *anasyromenos* gesture, Hermaphroditos may be wielding the same kind of apotropaic power displayed by Priapus and other figures whose male genitals are exhibited and accentuated in some way, and thus afford protection against the evil eye. Some of the most convincing evidence for such an apotropaic function comes from Delos. The island has yielded a relatively large number of Hellenistic representations of Hermaphroditos *anasyromenos*, both reliefs and figures in the round, and provides some clues to the possible function and placement of these images (Marcadé 1973, 342-347). Some items

in this group were found during the excavation of the Maison de Fourni, an extensive structure on the south edge of the site, dating to about 100 B.C. (Bruneau and Ducat 1983, 260 - 262, no. 124).

One well preserved relief slab depicts Hermaphroditos *anasyromenos* garbed in the usual high belted chiton covering its breasts, with both hands raising its skirt, a mantle draped over its shoulder and tucked between its arms and sides (Marcadé 1973, 342, fig. 15). The relief, with a small shelf projecting at the bottom edge onto which Hermaphroditos' feet extend, is 0.345 m. high by 0.22 m. wide at the base. On the back of the slab is a boss which might have aided its insertion into a wall. A similar relief plaque of almost identical size was also discovered at this site, but this one depicts a standing, frontal Herakles holding a club (Marcadé 1973, 336-338, fig. 11; Bruneau 1964, 159-168). On Delos, images of Herakles or of his club alone have been found carved on blocks set into the exterior walls of houses and are thought to have served as protective agents for the house and its inhabitants against the Evil Eye (Marcadé 1973, 338-339). The Herakles relief from the Maison de Fourni may well have served a similar purpose, and the Hermaphroditos *anasyromenos* relief that matches it in size could also have functioned as a household guardian.

The bisexual god possibly shared with the androgynous prodigies of second and first century Rome their portentous quality, but as a divinity, perhaps its power was considered less a threat to mankind's welfare than a force that could be channeled constructively. It is likely that all the images, Greek or Roman, whether set up in a garden, a private domestic area, a bath, or a gymnasium, were considered guardians of these areas. Public baths and gymnasia, in fact, were considered especially dangerous places, where naked bodies were exposed and vulnerable to the envious gaze of the Evil Eye, and this may be why statues of Hermaphroditos were apparently appropriate decorations in such settings (Dunbabin 1989) . Images of Hermaphroditos in the home, like the one possibly in the house of Theophrastus' Superstitious Man, may have served a similar use. This protective function is suggested by the relief plaques at Delos bearing images of Hermaphroditos *anasyromenos* that may have adorned exterior walls of houses near their entrances. A few terracotta figurines of Hermaphroditos have been recovered from Hellenistic Greek and Alexandrian graves, perhaps suggesting another aspect of this divinity's role as a guardian of the dead (Ajootian 1990, 273 no. 19; 273 no. 26).

The cultic and iconographic development of Hermaphroditos as a divine personage then, appears to have begun in Greece, perhaps even in Athens, sometime in the fourth century B.C., to judge from archaeological and literary evidence. The ambivalence between human beings possessing physical features of both sexes and a divine

entity transcending both genders is tackled most clearly by Diodorus Siculus in the first century B.C., but by the early fourth century, Aristophanes, in Plato's *Symposium*, already had alluded to this ambiguity. Returning finally to the evocative Roman replicas of so-called Sleeping Hermaphrodite type, it is certain that these figures, along with other Hellenistic "genre" works depicting hermaphrodites must have had specific, serious meanings, even though they engage the viewer in ways that may seem manipulative or frivolous to modern eyes. That many of these images, the *anasyromenos* types exposing themselves, the erotic struggling groups of satyrs and hermaphrodites, the seductive sleeping hermaphrodite, seem humorous and even titillating, should not detract from the power of their function as promoters of fertility and protectors of both the living and the dead.

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THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE ARMED APHRODITE

Johan Flemberg

The Ancient Greek society is generally, and probably rightly, considered to have been dominated by male values and characterized by clearly separated spheres of action for men and women. It may therefore seem surprising that Greek mythology and art can show so many armed females, Athena and the Amazones being two well-known examples. The popularity of the Amazonomachy in art indicates that gender transgression was a theme that interested the Greeks. In a wider context one could also mention the many female monsters in Greek mythology.

The armed Aphrodite is a somewhat different case, since the contrast between her warlike aspect and her ethos as the goddess of love is greater than in the case of Athena and other armed goddesses. However, if "armed" is taken to mean literally armed, we shall see that the armed Aphrodite played a very limited role in Greek religion. Aphrodite with weapons, on the other hand, was a rather common motif in late Hellenistic and Roman art. I will, nevertheless, use the word "armed" in both senses, since the relevant meaning in each case will be clear from the descriptions.

The earliest mention of the armed Aphrodite are two epigrams in the Greek Anthology (ix 9.320; xvi 171) by the poet Leonidas of Tarentum of the mid 3rd century B.C. The latter runs as follows:

Why, Cytherea, hast thou put on these arms of Ares,
bearing this useless weight? For, naked thyself, thou didst
disarm Ares himself, and if a god has been vanquished by
thee it is in vain that thou takest up arms against mortals.

There are at least five other epigrams in the Greek Anthology on the same theme (ix 321; xvi 173, 174, 176, 177). Two of them mention Sparta as the place of the strange statue. This is confirmed by the Greek writer Pausanias (ca. 150 A.D.), who, in his Description of Greece (3.3.15.10; 3.23.1; 3.17.5), mentions *xoana*, that is old, wooden



Fig. 1. Ishtar on an Assyrian cylinder seal.

images, of the armed Aphrodite in temples in Sparta and at Kythera, further a temple of Aphrodite Areia (Warlike Aphrodite) in Sparta, which contained *xoana* that were "as old as anything in Greece". He also mentions a statue (*agalma*) of the armed Aphrodite in a temple on the citadel of Corinth (2.5.1). We can therefore conclude that a cult of the armed Aphrodite existed in Laconia in early Archaic times, perhaps much earlier. We do not know exactly how the images looked, but most probably like *palladia*, i.e. standing female figures with helmet and shield and a spear in the raised right hand.

The origin of this cult is not without importance for the present theme. In my opinion, the Oriental derivation of Aphrodite (which was the view of the ancients) is basically correct, although an Indo-European component is undeniable. (This double origin is reflected in the stories of her birth: in Hesiod she is said to have arisen out of the sea-foam that gathered around the severed member of Ouranos, in Homer she is a daughter of Zeus and Dione.) The warlike aspect is one of several traits that point to the Near East. The west-semitic goddess Astarte and her predecessors, the Babylonian Ishtar and the Sumerian Inanna, are well attested in texts and artistic represen-

tations as goddesses of love and war. To quote just a few examples from the first millenium, Ishtar is called "the lady of confusion, who makes battles terrible", and "the lady of battle, without whom hostility and peace exist not in the land and a weapon is not forged". In a prayer it is said: "It is within your power, Ishtar, to change men into women and women into men". A wall-painting from the palace at Mari, dated ca. 1800 B.C., shows Ishtar with maces on her back and a sword in her hand, standing on a lion in front of a king. Similar representations of Ishtar on seals (*Fig. 1*) and reliefs continue well into the first millenium. Anat, a West-Semitic descendant of Ishtar, is described in text from Ugarit as a fierce and blood-thirsty warrior.

The combination of love and war is a striking feature and not easy to explain in an obvious way. But considering the importance of the Great Goddess, mistress of life and death, in the old civilizations of the Near East and Asia Minor, the all-embracing power of Innana, Ishtar, Anat and Astarte is not surprising. On the more basic level of human behaviour and psychology, the various connections between aggression and sexuality must of course also be taken into account. Further, a possible functionalistic explanation of the phenomenon is indicated by the connection of these goddesses with kingship, considering the role of the kings as leaders in war. Another problem is, of course, whether one can speak of gender roles when talking about deities. The divine world is not a copy of the human world. It is to be noted, for instance, that the bisexuality of Ishtar is hinted at in the sources. But granted that the world of the gods always to a significant degree reflects the society that shaped it, I think one can say that love and fertility on the one hand, and war on the other, represent female and male domains, respectively. The important thing is that these two functions were combined in the great goddesses of the East (even if there were war-gods, too.)

It is usually assumed that the worship of Aphrodite was introduced into Greece by the Phoenicians in the 9th or 8th century B.C.; Herodotus, in fact, says that the sanctuary at Kythera was founded by Phoenicians. I am more inclined to believe that the cult was introduced already in Late Mycenaean times, perhaps in the 12th century B.C. In either case Cyprus is a likely intermediate station. Be that as it may, the early Greek images of the armed Aphrodite in Kythera and Sparta, mentioned by Pausanias, make it likely that the first images of Aphrodite in Greece were armed. (The palladion type is probably derived from the 'smiting god' type of representation, common in the Near East.)

The next important testimony, although a negative one, is a passage in the *Iliad*. In the fifth book the gods interfere in the fighting

and Aphrodite, who is trying to rescue her son Aeneas, is wounded by Diomedes. She is rescued by Iris and by her brother Ares and returns to the Olympus, where she is reproached by Zeus: "Not unto thee, my child, are given the works of war; nay, follow thou after the lovely works of marriage, and all these things shall be the business of swift Ares and Athene". For Homer, then, Aphrodite was clearly *not* a war goddess, unless, of course, this passage was aimed at a cult of a warlike Aphrodite that the poet for some reason disliked; as is well known, the Homeric songs ignore or barely mention some gods, for example Demeter, Dionysos and Adonis. However that may be, in the sources available to us Aphrodite is a love goddess, from Homer onwards. Indirectly, however, she was associated with war through Ares, her brother or husband. The significance of this connection is another difficult point: it may be due to the warlike aspect of the original Aphrodite, or, more likely in my view, it may be a function of Greek gender roles, matching strength and beauty. The Greek tendency to antithetic thinking is another factor that is likely to have been at work here, as in the Theban myth of Harmonia, the daughter of Ares and Aphrodite.

Now let us turn to the treatment of the armed Aphrodite in Greek literature and art. In Archaic and Classical times she only occurs in a few representations of the Gigantomachy, but since practically any god or goddess could take part in this fight, these instances cannot be regarded as evidence of a living notion of Aphrodite as a war goddess. Two Late Classical statues, the Aphrodite from Epidaurus and the Capua type, are more problematic and will be briefly dealt with later. The main version of the motif is the Hellenistic naked Aphrodite with a sword (*Fig. 2*). There are seventeen replicas known of this type, of various size, so the original was evidently a well-known work. It can be dated around 100 B.C. for stylistic reasons, but the sculptor is unknown and so is the place of origin. The original was probably an under life-size, bronze statue, set up as a votive in a sanctuary. The goddess is shown in the act of putting on a sword. The sword, in its sheath, is held by her left hand, while the right hand is putting the baldric on the shoulder. This is clearly not a war goddess, but the love goddess donning the sword of Ares. In some of the statuette versions and in the representations of the motif on Roman Imperial coins other martial paraphernalia are shown next to the goddess: shield, helmet and military cloak.

It is hardly audacious to suggest that this statue is a parallel to the Hellenistic epigram quoted above. The goddess is seemingly acting as a man arming himself, but in reality she asserts herself as the mighty



Fig. 2. Aphrodite putting on a sword. Marble statue in Florence, Accademia di Belle Arti. Height 1.23 m.

goddess of love and beauty, who conquers without weapons. If the sculptor got the idea of creating an 'armed Aphrodite' from the old *xoana*, he created exactly the same thing as the poets, changing a war goddess into the familiar love goddess and thereby reestablishing the normal gender roles of society. (One copy of the naked Aphrodite with the sword, which was found in 1974 in Nea Paphos on Cyprus, has a drawn sword in her right hand; this is obviously due to a change, perhaps made when the statue was repaired after being damaged in an earthquake.)



Fig. 3. Omphale with club and lion's skin. Impression of an amethyst seal. 1st century B.C. Height 2.45 cm.

It is, however, possible that the idea arose independently of the old images. Aphrodite was firmly connected with Ares since Archaic times and already in the fourth century a similar motif, Erotes playing with the weapons of Ares, is attested in the lost painting, known from literature, of the wedding of Alexander and Roxane by Aëtion. Further, in Hellenistic art the armed Eros is a not uncommon motif. A still closer parallel to the naked Aphrodite with the sword of Ares is afforded by Late Hellenistic representations of Omphale with the lion's skin and club of Herakles (*Fig. 3*). The play with contrasts is an important element in Hellenistic art. In the case of the armed Aphrodite and Omphale, the contrast can be said to emphasize the traditional gender roles, but at the same time it makes the power of



Fig. 4. Aphrodite in the Pergamon frieze. Ca. 170 B.C. Height ca. 2 m. Berlin, Pergamonmuseum.

the female apparent: both have triumphed over their lovers and taken their weapons, sword and club, as spoils. Thus a certain ambiguity is inherent in the motif.

The German scholar Wiltrud Neumer-Pfau has recently stressed the importance of the negative view of women in ancient Greek society for the study of Greek art, especially Aphrodite statues. According to her view, women were generally considered to be cowardly and cunning by nature, and this influenced artists and public alike. Thus an ancient viewer of the statue of the naked Aphrodite with the sword would have been reminded of the inferiority and weakness of the female sex. Cunning certainly was considered characteristic of women in general and Aphrodite in particular, but in my opinion, the physical weakness of the female would have been counterbalanced in the mind of the beholder by the thought of the power the goddess.

A better example of a cowardly Aphrodite is the armed Aphrodite of the Pergamon frieze (ca. 170 B.C.). Near the north-east corner of the altar the goddess is shown in front of two fallen Giants (*Fig. 4*). Eros

is flying ahead of her and Ares in his chariot is behind her, just around the corner, driving in the opposite direction. Aphrodite is dressed in a thin chiton and a mantel and is armed with sword and shield. With her right foot, clad in a nicely decorated shoe, she steps in the face of a dead, or dying, Giant, while she pulls a spear (thrown by Ares?) out of his body with her right hand. As already mentioned, the fact that Aphrodite is represented as a fighting goddess here is not surprising. The way she fights, on the other hand, is unusual and probably significant: attacking a dead or dying enemy is hardly brave but more suggestive of cowardice. Setting the foot in the face of the enemy is an action that often occurs in the Iliad and I doubt that it was regarded as particularly cruel, which has been the opinion of modern scholars in this case. But on any interpretation of the action, whether as cruelty or cowardice, I do not think that the artists of the Pergamon frieze were alluding to a warlike Aphrodite but rather making the most of the contrast given by the theme: the love goddess as a warrior.

The naked Aphrodite with the sword is the best known version of the motif in sculpture. A probably earlier version was the original of the so-called Aphrodite of Capua, a half-naked Aphrodite using the shield of Ares as a mirror, usually dated in the end of the 4th century B.C. In this case the designation "armed" may seem questionable, but there is a possibility that the motif was intended as an allusion to the old, armed image of Aphrodite on the citadel of Corinth, since a statue of this type stood there, as shown by Roman coins (Fig. 5).

The earliest rendering of Aphrodite in the act of arming herself is a beautiful ring-stone, signed by Gelon, dated ca. 200 B.C. (Fig. 6).

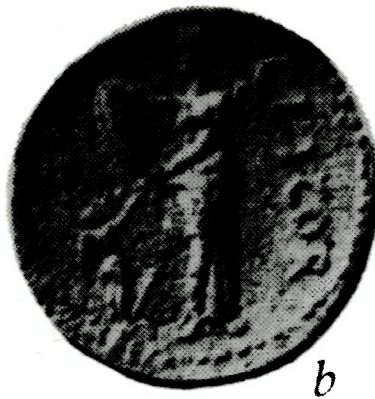


Fig. 5. Aphrodite holding the shield of Ares, with Eros at her side. Roman Imperial coin from Corinth.

The motif is well suited to the oval shape of the stone, in that the goddess stoops slightly in order to put the shield on her arm. A spear is leaning against her shoulder. Her light dress makes it clear that no depiction of a war goddess is intended and we can assume that the same general idea is at work here, viz. the disarming of Ares by Aphrodite. If an allusion to the old cult statues was intended in this case, is of course impossible to tell.

The earliest representation of an armed Aphrodite to be considered here is the so-called Aphrodite from Epidaurus (*Fig. 7*). The original can be dated ca. 380 B.C. and is likely to have been a Peloponnesian work. Unlike the representations mentioned so far, this is a more passive figure, carrying a sword in the way it is normally carried, hung on the shoulder. Dressed in a thin chiton that has slipped from the right shoulder, revealing the breast, and a mantel, the goddess is clearly characterized as a love goddess. Since the hands are missing



Fig. 6. Aphrodite arming herself. Impression of a garnet ringstone from Eretria. End of 3rd century B.C. Height 2.3 cm



we do not know what attributes she may have held, nor do the find circumstances of this statue give any certain clues to the function of the original. An old theory identifies it with the Amyclaiian Aphrodite, made by Polykleitos, which was seen by Pausanias (3.18.1). That statue was part of a monument in the Apollo sanctuary at Amyklai south of Sparta, erected in memory of the Spartan victory over the Athenians at Aigospotamoi in 405 B.C. For various reasons I do not find this identification likely. There are, however, other possible locations. The statue could have belonged to one of the Peloponnesian sanctuaries of the armed Aphrodite or to one in which Ares and Aphrodite were worshiped together. In the first case the sword may have been a kind of allusion to the armament of the old image, in the latter case it would have been thought of as the sword of Ares. In any case, the fact that the goddess is armed can be explained without assuming that Aphrodite was still conceived of as a war goddess in Classical times. It is, however, far from certain that the Epidauros statue is a true replica of the original. There are five copies, only one of which has a sword; three of the others wear instead an animal skin. It is therefore possible that the original represented a Maenad and that the Epidauros copy is a later variant.

With the Roman copies we have already come into Roman art. As is well known, the Romans copied Greek masterpieces to a great extent and used Greek iconography for their gods. This is the case with Venus, too, in spite of the fact that this goddess, at least from late Republican times onward, played a greater role in the state religion than did Aphrodite among the Greeks. This was partly due to the importance of Mars, her consort, and to the fact that the Julian family regarded Venus as their ancestress, through Aeneas, the son of Aphrodite and Anchises. The martial aspect of this victorious Venus (Venus Victrix) is, however, hardly more obvious in the iconography than that of the armed Aphrodite; she may hold a scepter or a spear but is not really armed and is often accompanied by a little Amor. The most common type, which occurs on Roman coins and seal stones, was largely taken over from late Hellenistic glyptic art (cf. *Fig. 6*): a half-naked Venus leaning against a pillar and holding the arms of Mars, usually a helmet, sometimes a sword (*Fig. 8*); but also clear symbols of victory, such as an apple or a palm branch, occur. The type probably

Fig. 7. Aphrodite from Epidauros. Roman marble copy of a Greek original from ca. 380 B.C. Preserved height 1.50 m. Athens, National Archaeological Museum.

goes back to Caesar's signet ring, which is known to have had an image of the armed Aphrodite and which was taken over by Octavian.

Iconographically, then, the motif is the same: the war god disarmed by the love goddess. But is the message conveyed the same? Is Venus victorious only in the sense that she conquers Mars? That this notion was familiar in Rome is shown by a passage in Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (1.29-43):

For you alone can delight mortals with quiet peace, since Mars ... who often casts himself upon your lap wholly vanquished by the ever-living wound of love ... do you, bending around him from above, pour from your lips sweet coaxings, and for your Romans, illustrious one, crave quiet peace.

But the political implications of the Roman Venus were more complex than that and the iconographical type under discussion is sometimes accompanied by the legend "Venus Genetrix". Venus, the goddess of love and grace (the original meaning of *venus*, according to Schilling), also represented the Roman state and when she was depicted holding the arms of Mars the image was intended to evoke not only the power of Venus, but at the same time that of Mars, the symbol of the military power of Rome. This, however, need not mean that the gender roles implied in this mythological, or allegorical, concept were much different from that of its Greek model.

To sum up, the old Greek *xoana* of an armed Aphrodite, that we know existed in a few places, must originally have had a significance in accordance with their shape, i.e. the goddess must have had some quality that made the armed image appropriate. I do not think that her association with Ares is a likely reason, as the Hellenistic poets thought, or pretended to think. Nor is it likely that an Oriental goddess like Anat or Astarte was taken over unchanged by the Greeks. But if not a war goddess, the earliest Aphrodite may, in these places, have been a city goddess, as Athena was later to be in many cities, or the protectress of a ruler, as Astarte and similar goddesses in the Near East seem often to have been.

Later, when the Greek pantheon as we know it emerged, there was no place for a warlike or 'political' love goddess. The protectress of cities was the virgin Athena, the mistress of animals was Artemis, who also was thought of as a virgin. The love goddess was paired with Ares but otherwise thought of as the very opposite of war. The old images survived but were apparently not understood. Poets and



Fig. 8. *Venus holding helmet and scepter. Roman coin of ca. 30 B.C.*

artists were attracted by the motif and transformed it in accordance with their notions of gender. The arms became ornaments or spoils, taken by the goddess from her consort, and the motif was turned into an allegory of the power of love. In terms of gender, this meant the superiority of the female, but in a very restricted sphere.

It must, however, be kept in mind that, although the interest in old and exotic cults was typical of the Hellenistic age, we cannot take it for granted that the artists were directly inspired by the old *xoana* and felt a need to re-interpret them. The starting point of the sculptor who created the naked Aphrodite with the sword, for instance, may well have been a desire to play with the normal gender roles and exploit the effects of contrast. The interest in Hermaphrodites in Hellenistic art is a parallel case.

Concerning cults and rituals in connection with the armed Aphrodite, the sources tell us nothing and one can only speculate about the function of such cults in the Spartan state, where, as is well known, the training for war played a great role; and both Ares and Aphrodite were concerned with youth. It is also possible that the statues were associated with rites of "inverted normality", like the *Hybristica* at Argos, which celebrated an event (of doubtful historicity), at which the women took to arms and saved their city. In this and a few other instances the sources mention an Ares worshiped by women.

The transformation of the armed Aphrodite can (at the risk of considerable simplification, it is true) be seen as an instance of the process by which the Great goddess, who, as a goddess of love and fertility, Mistress of animals and protectress of kings, embraced a wide range of functions, was substituted by the Greek goddesses Aphrodite, Artemis and Athena. In terms of gender roles this would mean that the Greeks rejected a deity that involved an inversion of or mixing up of gender roles in favour of a 'division of labour' among the gods. It is notable in this connection that Athena and Artemis were (or became) virgin goddesses. In all this it is reasonable to see the effect of the more patriarchal, Indo-Europaeian Greek society. The contrast between the world of the Great Goddess and that of Zeus.

father of men and gods, is succinctly expressed in the words of Zeus to Aphrodite in the Iliad, quoted above: "Not unto thee, my child, are given the works of war..."

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PART III

CROSS DRESSING AND GENDER CONFUSION

TRANSVESTITE VIRGIN WITH A CAUSE

THE ACTA PAULI ET THECLA AND LATE ANTIQUE

PROTO-"FEMINISM"

John C. B. Petropoulos

*Piece by piece, I fed my wardrobe
to the night wind, and flutteringly,
like a loved one's ashes, the grey scraps
were ferried off.*

Sylvia Plath, *The bell jar* (1972)

I

In this essay I wish to engage in some cross-dressing - of an academic kind. A classicist arguably has a few things to note in connection with certain Apocryphal "novellas" like the *Acta Pauli et Theclae* preserved in the *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*. There is nothing presumptuous in this, for the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* are one of the earliest specimens of the hagiographical novel, a genre that imitated and vied with the ancient novel, and subsequently surpassed it as a form of reading entertainment (Hägg 1983. esp. 160-162; *CHCL*, pp. 123-139; Bowie and Harrison 1993. 159-178).

These *Acts* seem to have been the first section of a three part work - the so-called *Acts of Paul (Praxeis Paulou)* - which also comprised, in probable order of appearance, the Apostle's pastoral correspondence with the Corinthians (the purported "Third Epistle") and the narration of his martyrdom.

Theologically, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, my subject, are difficult to "pigeonhole". They are neither orthodox (in the doctrinal sense) not

heterodox; nor, *a fortiori*, are they overtly Gnostic or, with the exception of a single detail (which will be cited) Encratite in their orientation. Indeed it would be misleading and anachronistic to term the text heretical or heterodox precisely because it belongs to the inchoate Church's phase of doctrinal "fuzziness" and uncertainty. If anything, the text stresses continence (*enkrateia*) in what was soon to be its conventional ascetic mode, and in several passages (cc. 11, 12, 16) the ideal of chastity is more to do with the pre-baptismal rigours which early Christians observed in the late second century.

For reasons which will rapidly become obvious, Tertullian blacklisted the work in his *de baptismo* c. 17 (composed *ca.* 200); this explicit reference in fact both serves as a *terminus ante quem* and confirms the work's Asia Minor origins. Yet this Church Father also implies that the work was composed in order to fortify the faith of the community. Tertullian was not the only early church figure to cite the text. Jerome it was who first dismissed the so-called *periodi Pauli et Theclae* specifically as apocryphal (*de vir. ill.* 7); his negative position was soon followed by the Church. Even so, no-one (save Tertullian) really doubted Thecla's existence and the fact that she was a holy woman.

Thecla probably was a historical person, as Henri Leclercq has shown (MacDonald 1983, 107n.21). Moreover, she proved through her trials and transvestism to be more influential in the early church than the Virgin Mary. Athanasius (in the mid-fourth century) and pseudo-Chrysostom (in the fifth) both composed a life of Thecla. Even Jerome (in the fourth century) accepted her as a saint although, as has already been said, he regarded the tale of her travels as apocryphal. At roughly the same period, Methodius' *Symposium*, a work in praise of virginity, featured her as an exemplar. Her cult, based in Seleucia, was still in full flower by the late fourth century, when the nun Egeria took communion in the church in the precinct after reading the *Acta* (Wilkinson 1971. 29, 121-122, 288-292; also see Dagron 1978. 33 n.l. on literary evidence of the cult). The cult continued to appeal to women, especially virgins and apotactics, until well into the sixth century (on the archaeology of the cult's site, see Dagron 1978. 59-73; MacDonald 1983. 108 n. 28). Despite occasional disparaging references in certain Church Fathers to the uncanonical *Acta*, Thecla has remained a paragon of female chastity and asceticism in the Orthodox Church, which commemorates her on September 24th. The apocryphal version of her legend was progressively shorn of its more obvious (feminist) elements from the fifth century on; in the tenth century the *Great Menologion* incorporated a radically expurgated version of her *vita* (Dagron 1978. 34). Her feast and cult were officially suppressed by the Roman Catholic Church in 1969, though her cult continues in countries like Spain.

Before launching into the more literary aspects of the *Acta Pauli et Theclae*, I should like to hazard a few thoughts by way of cursory (and necessarily crude) anthropological analysis of the phenomenon of the transvestite saint: i) Female chastity, and especially virginity, removes the assumption that a woman is operatively female and therefore de-sexualises her. Furthermore, it assigns her to a “liminal”, or intermediate, state between masculine and feminine, with a pronounced bias towards the masculine (Galatarriotou 1984/85. 82-83) Thus de-sexualised, a virgin can in certain societies adopt the attire and manners of men and preserve this interstitial identity with impunity. M.E. Durham (cited *ibid.* 83-84n. 104) reported in 1928 that Albanian girls who renounced marriage in favour of perpetual virginity dressed as men, consorted with them as equals and even carried guns. ii) It is as well to remember what Lévi-Strauss, Leach and Mary Douglas have taught us about the “holy”: that whatever simultaneously partakes of two contradictory categories - the third, “betwixt-and-between” category-is abnormal because non-natural and rationally unintelligible, and in many societies is identified with the “holy”. This principle may explain why a transvestite androgyne like Thecla promised allure to early Christians, mainstream and non-mainstream alike: her membership of a third, anomalous category brought her very near to the holy angelic state - a sexless and bodiless condition which however remained closely aligned to the male sex, as may be inferred from the names and military interests of angels.

As for the composition of the *Acta* themselves, this will remain a mystery, like much else in ancient literary history. Tertullian identified the author as a priest from Asia Minor who was tried and defrocked for penning this *pia fraus*. The work may be classified as a short novel or perhaps more accurately as a *feuilleton à épisodes*, possibly emanating from the literary and religious fringe. Indeed, as will be noted, the *Acta* may well betray a number of conventional literary elements; conceivably, too, they incorporate much sub-literary and even popular (oral) material, notably local legends from Iconium or, as seems likelier, Seleucia, where Thecla’s cult was located. A few words, then, on the literary affinities of the “Apostolic” novels and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* in particular:

E. von Dobschütz, following in the wake of the second edition of Rohde’s *Der Griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer*, was the first to propose, in 1902, that the *Apocryphal Acts* as a genre were close adaptations of the Greek novel (Dobschütz 1902. 87-106). E.L. Bowie well summarises the ancient novel’s story-line: “Boy and girl of aristocratic birth fall in love, are separated before or shortly after marriage and subjected to melodramatic adventures which threaten their life and chastity and carry them around much of the eastern Mediterranean. Eventually love and fortune prove stronger than

storms, pirates and tyrants and the couple is reunited in marital bliss” (*CHCL*, p. 124). Dobschütz’s thesis has since been modified and even challenged. In a survey article published in 1981, Kaestli concluded that far from being wholesale adaptations of the ancient novel, the *Apocryphal Acts* and more particularly those featuring thinly disguised *erotica* were nonetheless indebted to the pagan genre, especially during its formative, pre-sophistic phase. (Typical products of this phase are the Ninus romance [i c. B.C.?], Chariton’s *Chaereas and Callirhoe* [i c. B.C./mid-ii c. A.D.] and Xenophon’s *Ephesiaka* [mid/late ii c. A.D.].) The *Acts*’ debt to the novel can, in Kaestli’s view, be surmised from consideration of the common ground between the two genres: (i) the simplicity of the plot, its melodramatic character and especially the predilection for high-ranking personalities (this last being a sign that both types of fiction self-consciously catered for a popular audience); and (ii) the focus on a heroine who maintains her chastity and in general evinces high-mindedness and fidelity. Apart from the novel, Christian miracle-tales are a prime ingredient of the *Apocryphal Acts*. This rather eclectic recipe—a novelistic substrate on which are superimposed various *thaumata*—serves to show the *sui generis* and composite nature of the *Acts*. Our narrative can be neatly divided into three episodes, as follows:

II

Episode I: Fair, recalcitrant virgin

The story begins in Iconium (in south-central Asia Minor), a city which St. Paul actually visited (*Acts* 13.51): it is clear from the start that the story, exactly like the typical novel, has historical and biographical pretensions. Thecla, a gorgeous and well-born maiden, is engaged to the leading local noble, Thamyris. (Her beauty, along with her aggressively guarded virginity, are the two remarkable features which define her from the start. Of course her virginity carried a host of connotations unfamiliar to pagans: see Brown 1988. esp. 8-9, 29-30.) But when Paul visits her town and she *hears* (but does not actually see) him preach a lengthy sermon on sexual renunciation and the resurrection, she is at once drawn to him:

“Blessed are the chaste (*enkrateis*), for God will speak to them... Blessed are those who have wives as though they have them not, for they will inherit God” (c.5).

The meaning of Paul's sermon is plain: for Christians, the aim of *enkrateia* was the elimination of desire, for pagans it was simply the subservience of the body to rational goals, and there never was such a thing as life-long chastity, whether among males or females (Brown 1988. 31-32). The Encratites, in particular, opposed *any* form of sex on the grounds that it severed men and women from the Spirit of God and linked them to animals; and in a radical move, they extended to women as well the responsibility of containing their sexual urges (Tissot, in Bovon 1981. esp. 118 n. 82). The continence preached in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is generally not of the Encratite type (see, e.g., cc. 11, 12, 16). But Paul's culminating *makarismoi* of the body of virgins (c. 5) arguably refer to the non-physical marriage which Tatian preached (*ibid*).

Transfixed in the web of his words, Thecla neither eats nor drinks for three days. Her lack of appetite, intense staring, "shamelessness", speechlessness and immobility are quite the correct symptoms, at least from a literary perspective, of instantaneous passion. Thamyris decries what he recognises as a *pathos ekplekton* ("insane passion") and complains that Paul has displaced him as the centre of his fiancée's attention: she so much loves the newcomer that I am now denied her hand in marriage (c. 13). Thamyris' jealousy is a novelistic motif (see also Morard, in Bovon 1981. 99). The *xenos* is soon arrested on charges of being *magos* (a colloquial term for "quack, wizard"), tried and gaoled. *Magos* as used here is almost an honorific title, which still preserved some of its sacerdotal associations; it connoted potentially deadly powers and in relation to Paul implied that the newcomer was regarded with great fear. This was an accusation frequently levelled at the Apostles in the *Apocryphal Acts*, especially in the earlier ones, and is a veritable *topos* in the canonical *Acts of Martyrs* (see Poupon, in Bovon 1981, 71f.). It correlates with the fact that from the 1st c. A.D. onwards official prosecution of magicians increased. There is at least one good reason why Paul should have been suspected of being a wizard. It should be remarked that in consequence of his sermon Thecla and other women at once renounced marriage: Thecla sat in a near-hypnotic state by the window, with nothing on her mind but Paul and his message. In actual life such a "wayward" reaction would easily have been interpreted as the result of an aphrodisiac spell (a *katadesmos*). The denunciation, moreover, of the Apostle as a *xenos* is not to be put down to the xenophobia of a pagan community but instead to the common supposition that magic was a foreign import - an exotic, unsettling evil force brought in perforce from the "outside" (see also Poupon above).

Thecla bribes her way into Paul's cell by offering the guard a silver mirror (a typical female accessory, c. 18). The Apostle preaches to her while - in a rare, exquisite gesture - she kisses his chains (c. 18). A

prisoner of love, the heroine is discovered by her family and fiancé in the Apostle's cell, bound not in chains but (a moving pun, this) in affection: c. 19 *heuron auten tropon tina syndedemenen te storge*. (Poupon reads this line as a subtle allusion to the near-magical effect which Paul exerted on her; cf. the technical term *katadesmos* and the magical *topos* of "tying down" the victim.) What is striking here is the fact that Thecla's passion, though described initially by her mother and fiancé in terms more appropriate to obsessional physical passion, by now emerges more clearly, but not exclusively, as a spiritual infatuation. Equally impressive is the fact that the girl assumes the initiative of going to Paul herself: upper-class women in Greek (and presumably Near Eastern) society rarely ventured outdoors, far less approached a man in whom they were interested.

Paul is dragged out of his cell. The girl rolls in the spot where he had sat. At length she and Paul are tried jointly. Litigation is in fact an ingredient of the ancient novel: cf., for instance, the legal battle over the custody of Callirhoe in Chariton. (The trial-motif, however, also had a firm basis in the New Testament and the subsequent prosecution of early Christians.) The *hegemon* asks Thecla, "Why do you not marry Thamyris according to the custom of the city?" (c. 20). When the girl simply stares in silence, her mother Theocleia, losing her patience, shouts: "Utterly burn the lawless one (*anomos*), burn utterly the unwed maiden (*anympfos*) in the middle of the arena ... so that all women might be frightened" (c. 20). In the name of marriage and maternity Theocleia alienates her own maternal instincts: her daughter, she declared, is *a-nomos* (lit., "against custom, norms or law", hence "abnormal") because she is *a-nymphos*; her chastity, one might say, is anti-social it leads the girl to reject the two major agents of socialisation for a woman, marriage and mothering. The appalling civic impact of Thecla's conduct can also be inferred from Thamyris' and the crowd's reaction to Paul: see c. 15. Long-term renunciation was not only unprecedented but in practical terms threatening to the fabric of pagan society, which, it was feared, would "crumble like a sand castle" if *enkrateia* became the norm (Brown 1988, 32, 38, 84, 89-90; cf. 54-57, *et passim*). The crowd, which includes young boys and virgins (c. 27), are Thecla's collective adversaries, opposing the compulsory ideal of marriage to her self-imposed anomic celibacy.

Paul is finally scourged and expelled from Iconium (c. 20). As might be expected of a "sacred soap opera", the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* are chary of admitting explicit erotic details. But here and in another four passages the maiden's nudity or semi-nudity is forthrightly mentioned. Compare cc. 22, 23 (Paul removes his upper garment); cc. 33, 34, 38. The *Life* of the Syrian saint Febronia (sources and bibliography in Ashbrook Harvey 1983, 296f.) shows a similar preoccupation with clothing and nudity. Febronia's clothing is torn to

tatters before she is stripped, a humiliation which she defiantly accepts since it will better allow her to endure torture, like an Olympic athlete who strips in order to compete better (23 A-B, 24B). The contrast between outward exposure and inner integrity which Thecla and Febronia uphold also occurs in Achilles Tatius (VI. 22.5 f.): “I am a defenceless woman, stripped naked and tortured, but I shall not surrender my soul”.

Thecla is now stripped naked and taken away to be burnt (c. 22). Her eyes search for Paul “like a lamb in the desert looking about for its shepherd” (c. 21); she sees Christ in the guise of Paul among the crowd and takes courage. Is it the Christian message that inflames her? Or is she “in love” with Paul or Christ? The author is again deliberately coy on these questions; but clearly he is playing with amatory associations familiar from the novel. This beautiful convert, like the typical heroine of the novel, is unswervingly faithful to her absent “beloved” Paul (cf. Heliodorus *Aethiopika* 7. 10-28, 8. 1-15, also cited by Morard, in Bovon 1981.98) Like Charikleia in the *Aethiopika* Thecla proves her love through her suffering. The pyre is prepared by *paides kai parthenoi* and lighted - but torrential rain and hail sent by God quench it and presumably cover the nude maiden. The motif of steadfast suffering and the associated folk motif of miraculous escape from mortal danger occur in the novels: in Xenophon’s *Ephesiaka* Habrocomes is sentenced to both crucifixion and burning but is wondrously saved on each occasion. (In the *Aethiopika* Charicleia is likewise condemned to be burnt alive-but endures to the end[8.6-9].) It is possible that in the novels two pagan ingredients have coalesced, and the tale of Thecla simply drew on these: first, the Stoic and generally philosophical motif of willing, almost triumphant acceptance of death (see Morard, in Bovon 1981.104f.); second, the well-worn motif of rescue *in extremis*, which may originally have been a folk-tale motif (e.g., Croesus at the pyre in Herodotus 1).

Paul, meanwhile, is hiding with others in a tomb outside Iconium and mourns Thecla as dead (c. 23). He is afraid to venture to the city. (From the moment of his public humiliation and expulsion the saint progressively becomes a passive and impuissant figure. By contrast, as Dagron also notes, the glory of martyrdom and the simultaneous mastery over the elements are reserved for the heroine.) Thecla meets Paul at his rural hide-out (could this detail be modelled on the reunion of the *Liebespaar* as featured later in the *Aethiopika*?); after a celebratory meal she offers to “shave her hair all round and follow him” (c. 25). He demurs on the grounds that “the moment is inopportune and you are beautiful (*eumorphos*) and you might fall into a temptation before which you may prove cowardly (*deilandreses*)”. When she asks him specifically to baptise her, again he demurs leaving this for the vague future. He enjoins her to be

patient (c. 25): "Thecla, be longsuffering and you will receive the water".

Paul's words may imply a degree of anxiety over Thecla's overt sexuality. It is notable that he does not however actually object to her joining him (because she joins him), or to her cutting off her hair, but rather to her premature, as he sees it, baptism. (The fifth-century *vita* of Thecla states even more clearly that the saint cut most of her hair at this point; cf. *vita*, c. 14 [Dagron].) His hesitancy is *prima facie* "doctrinal". In certain groups in the early Christian era deferment of baptism was standard; the faithful were not baptised until they could furnish signs of grace (*charismata*), and in some cases they received the sacrament only at the hour of death (Anson 1974; Lane Fox 1986. 337-339). Among Syrian sects celibacy, male and female, was the precondition of baptism (Ashbrook Harvey 1983. 295). The *Acta* seem to reflect the typical expectation that a man or woman should remain chaste before baptism (as a catechumen): "*makarioi hoi to baptisma teresantes* (c.6)".

Thecla offers to cut her hair - and the narrative's logic requires her to do so - because she can only travel with Paul disguised as a man; in the later *vita*, c. 14 (Dagron) this is stated outright. But her newly acquired mobility presupposes something more than physical disguise: she must also renounce her bonds to family and society and, above all, her sexuality if she is to travel with the Apostle. She achieves this "de-familiarisation" at a single symbolic stroke by cropping her hair (Brown 1988. esp. 89).

This gesture may appropriately be interpreted as another sign of the maiden's step-by-step surrender of the outward trappings of her obvious and highly vulnerable femininity. She gave away her jewels to her house guard and her goaler; now she cuts her hair. (From the action immediately ensuing it may be securely gathered that she has also donned male clothing.) Edmund Leach has viewed head hair as a ritual symbol with genital and anal connotations: precisely because of these associations, it plays a vital part in initiation rituals (Leach 1958. esp. 154). Short hair in a nubile woman may on this hypothesis even be symbolically equated with restricted sexuality; and Thecla's act makes excellent sense as an attempt at sexual renunciation. Paul's words are not only helpful on this score, but may bear out the nature of her incipient "initiation". He has warned her, we may recall, that her beauty may lead her to temptations worse than the trials of martyrdom, as a result of which she may (literally?) "prove to be a cowardly man" (*deilandreses*), a crucial compound. In other words, if she succumbs to her own sexuality she will be less of a "man". So long as she camouflages and combats her sexuality by remaining a virgin, Thecla will conform to an implied model of manly behaviour.

Episode II: Beauty and the beasts

Like a rather odd couple - he is short, bald, hook-nosed and bow-legged (c. 3), she is stunningly beautiful but has shaved her hair and donned male attire - Paul and Thecla travel to Antioch. Within moments of her arrival she is none the less betrayed by her female beauty. An influential Syrian named Alexander immediately falls in love with her; when he tries to bribe Paul to hand over his charge the Apostle pretends not to know the girl, nor even (according to the *vita*) whether she is male or female - an ambiguity which arouses the Syrian even more (c. 26; cf. *vita*, c. 15 [Dagron]). Then, when Alexander makes an attempt on Thecla, Paul runs away, leaving her alone - but undeterred. (*Ibid.* In Xenophon the beauty of the *Liebespaar* provokes approaches to both during their stay in Phoenicia. Alexander recalls the figure of the socially prominent, powerful rival to the hero's affections: cf. e.g., Chariton, Achilles Tatius.) She rips Alexander's cloak and knocks off his crown, so preserving her virginity and turning her antagonist into a laughing-stock (c. 26 *estesēn auton thriambon*). To feminists Alexander may exemplify the cultural "ideology of rape" according to which a woman needs a protector (here it *should* be Paul) who will also control her actions in society. By defending herself, Thecla subverts and demystifies the rape culture (on which cf. Brownmiller 1975. esp. 12-15, 32-33). The motif, incidentally, of the proud, chaste woman is also common in New Comedy and the ancient romance: cf., e.g. Timocleia, who killed her rapist (further, Trenkner 1958, 108-109).

Alexander retaliates by bringing her to trial, at which she is condemned to be thrown to the beasts. This is a plausible reaction for a frustrated male with lofty connections in late antiquity: see Achilles Tatius VI. 22. 4f. (cf. *ibid.* 20. 3f.). Also consider *Aethiopika* 5: a lecherous queen tortures the couple when they insist on remaining chaste (cf. the Freudian theory of displacement). Thecla's only request is that she be allowed to die a virgin. What would happen, it may be asked, if our heroine were to lose her virginity now? At a guess she would lose her sacred (interstitial) potency; compare *Acta*, p. 271 (G version): Thecla settled in a cave outside Seleucia, and in time attracted a following of female apotactics and patients whom she unfailingly healed. The local doctors as a consequence suffered huge financial losses and decided to hire a gang of men to rape her because they assumed that "she was a virgin holy to the great goddess Artemis and that if defiled she would lose her healing powers".

At her trial the women in the courtroom had denounced the verdict, shouting: "An evil judgement, an ungodly judgement" (c. 27). So great was the surge of female sympathy that Tryphaena, a wealthy widow distantly related to the Claudians, adopted Thecla as a daughter and took her under her wing until the appointed day (c. 28). (Tryphaena,

like Thecla, may too have been a historical person in origin; a queen of Pontus, who was contemporary of Paul, bore that name.). Presently Alexander tries to take the maiden by force, but Tryphaena prevents him. She personally conducts the girl to the arena, thus ensuring that her chastity is preserved (c. 31). Among the spectators the men (*demos*) curse her whilst the women again decry her sentence and now offer themselves to be executed with her: (c. 32) “Kill all of us... this is a bitter sight, an evil judgement”.

A beauty soon to brave the beasts (c. 29 *toiouton kallos eis theria ballomenon*), Thecla is undressed but this time she grabs a loin cloth which serves as a girdle (c. 33). As the narrator is once more making play with the sensual and symbolic potentialities of dress and undress, it might be as well to enquire into the possible meaning of the girdle here. This article of clothing is more than a “sop” to the Acta’s prudish readers; it surely must connote Thecla’s aggressive retention of her virginity and her status as a warrior pitted against the male legacy of cruelty. Atalanta, another militant virgin, had no intention of losing her girdle, for it shielded her virginity and concomitantly worked as (talisman(sacred to Ares. Their girdles intact, Atalanta - and the Amazons - were assured of victory in combat and competition against men - at least temporarily. (Of course, a female figure with only her torso revealed can in reality be as erotic as any nude - as, for instance, the second century B.C. Aphrodite from Melos; a fact which may have been appreciated by late antique readers of the *Acta*.)

Most of the animals are the would-be rapist’s substitutes; a lioness, however, merely rolls at her feet as women spectators for their approval. The narrative detail of rescue from the lion’s mouth is almost certainly a well-known popular ingredient and can be matched by similar motifs preserved, among other authors, in Apion’s *Aegyptiaka* (i.c. A.D.), 2 Timothy 4:16-17, Ignatius’ letter to the Romans (ca. 107), and in the mid-2nd century Aulus Gellius (the story of Androclus and the lion: see MacDonald 1983. 22-23). In the *Apocryphal Acts of Paul* the Apostle preaches to a ferocious lion and then baptises it! A lion belonging to Alexander is set loose but both it and the lioness grapple to their deaths. Animals, it should be noted, also appear in fairy tales as either friends or enemies. As friends they aid the hero or heroine in contrast to human society, which threatens him or her. Cinderella, for example, is forsaken by society but helped in one of her chores by birds. (A contrary example is the dragon, which always endangers the protagonist in fairy tales. Further in L(thi 1976 [1970]. 60-61, 78-80.) The women mourn the lioness, confirming that female solidarity now cuts across the human and animal kingdoms (Dagron 1978. 37). More beasts are set loose. Thecla prays and, noticing a pool nearby, cries out: “*Nun kairos lousasthai me* (“Now is

the right moment for me to bathe"). This is her answer to Paul's espousal of delay at Iconium. She takes the plunge, heedless of the ferocious (!) seals in the water and declares: "In the name of Jesus Christ I am being baptised on this my last day". The crowd shrieks in horror, even the governor weeps at the sight of such beauty among the hungry seals. But a flash of lightning strikes the pool, the seals are killed and a cloud of fire (conveniently but also symbolically) envelopes the near-naked maiden.

More animals, still more vicious now, are set upon Thecla (c. 35). The women - a veritable "support group" - cry out and toss various perfumes and unguents in order to mesmerise the beasts. At length Thecla's feet are tied to two bulls, which belong to the frustrated Alexander; their testicles inflamed by hot iron, they are apt symbols of male violence. But lo! the cloud of fire clothing her scorches the ropes (c. 35): Could this fire symbolise female or rather androgynous potency as distinct from male impotence? (so also Dagron 1978. 37-38) The governor undergoes a change of heart and summons Thecla. He asks: (Who are you? What are those things about you, for not even a single beast injured you? (c. 37). She replies that she is "the female slave (*doule*) of the living God on Whose account not even a single animal touched me (*hepsato mou*)". In early Christian sources *haptomai* in the sense of "injure" refers to evil or original sin as the agent. It is quite possible that the fire and beasts - both instruments of death in our story - represent the evil forces of sexual temptation, as has been remarked.

Thecla is dressed (at last!) and released. The women exult, emitting in unison a shout which shakes the entire city of Antioch (c. 38). The girl preaches the word of God to Tryphaena and her maidservants and soon departs - but only after effecting a sartorial change (c. 39; cf. c. 40).

Episode III: Thecla the gender blender

The heroine hears that Paul is in Myra on the south coast and duly sets out to find him. She no longer really needs him to define her values or goals. He had originally fired her religious passion but quickly proved to be a feckless, almost craven figure. (Like Chariton's Chaereas Paul cuts an anti-heroic figure, especially in relation to the heroine.) Thecla simply wishes now to register the change in her spiritual, social and conceivably psychosexual status.

At Antioch she showed herself to be dominant in the face of mounting male or male-sponsored aggression. For a brief spell she figured as the stereotypical passive and passionless object of male lust and violence; but she soon put Alexander to shame single-handed, braved the beasts (the sadistic Alexander's proxies), christened

herself and even preached, albeit in an all-woman environment. Such assertiveness surely hints at her transformation. At Iconium, it will be recalled, she was a maiden who placed herself outside the patriarchal control of her society while still deriving much psychological and spiritual security from Paul. (She even respected his hesitation to baptise her.) Her latent androgyny was already noticeable at Iconium, particularly in her hair style; it was confirmed at Antioch through her inverted role as a virgin warrior and preacher. Full-fledged androgyny will presently permit her to break the external and emotional barrier between the sexes.

She arrives in Myra accompanied with a troupe of boys and girls - a highly apposite peer group, for Thecla has refused all along to make the transition from the bisexual state of childhood to womanly puberty and has chosen instead to remain affectively a pre-adolescent male/female (*androgynos*). She takes Paul by surprise; she has refashioned her tunic (*khiton*) into a shorter one worn by men (*ependytes*, c. 40) and tells him *tout court*, "*elabon to loutron*" ("I have received the sacramental bath"), adding that she will return to her native Iconium to preach on her own - a decision which Paul approves at once: (Go forth and teach the word of God (c. 40)). Thecla will henceforth not only preach but also baptise.

In her new "combative" garb she can conduct her ministry without being ogled at as a female. Having vigorously repudiated the compulsory conjugal model and now treading a terrain where her image as boy or girl, man or woman is blurred or even blended, Thecla is an androgyne untrammelled by gender stereotyping. She has moved through what almost appear to be successive rites of passage, from (tonsure) at Iconium to physical ordeals, nudity and immersion in water at Antioch, and finally to a definite change of garb and the assumption of a new un-feminine role at Myra. The *Acta*, then, may on one level be read as a tale of a virgin's progress or initiation into a (sacred) androgyne. Such an interpretation does not in the least suggest that the narrative is a mystery text, a theory which Merkelbach advanced in relation to four of the ancient love romances. It none the less remains difficult to deny that chiefly by means of baptism, which is an initiatory rite *par excellence*, Thecla achieved a sweeping change of status and that the key characteristic of her new sacred status is precisely her androgyny. To the extent, moreover, that she has been transformed in a positive sense, our heroine's story resembles a fairy tale. Many specialists have argued that the discrete transitions and dangers which fairy tales feature customarily culminate in the protagonist's achievement of greater maturity and self-realisation (Lüthi 1976 [1970], 112-113, 138-140).

At the same time the tale may resemble a proto-"feminist" fantasy because of its woman-centred standpoint and especially because the

network of inversions enacted unmask (and upset), if only temporarily, the obvious sexual stereotypes of female inferiority and subordination. It is patent that Thecla's inverted role as a preacher is highly abnormal given that, with some exceptions, women in antiquity were very probably denied basic literacy and certainly rhetorical training, which was the mainstay of higher education. (Plato, of course, was the first to question the exclusion of women from education; women, he argued in *Republic* 5, were not fundamentally different from men and were thus susceptible of intellectual training which would equip them to become guardians of his ideal city-state.) From the early Christian era, too, women were not allowed to read, far less preach; only Gnostic circles departed from the unconditional silence enjoined upon the female sex by allowing women to attend "classes" as equal partners (Brown 1988. 118-120). In this respect mainstream Christianity also owed a sure debt to Judaism, which considered that female study of the Torah amounted to immersion in immorality. I Cor. 14:34-35 laid down the rule unambiguously: "As in all congregations of God's people, *women should not address the meeting. They have no licence to speak ...* If there is something they want to know, they can ask their own husbands at home. *It is a shocking thing that a woman should address the congregation*". One woman who tried to defy cultural subordination was the fifth-century nun Theodosia. St. Neilus, the abbot of a monastery near Ancyra, admonished her as follows: "It happens that your body makes you a woman, whether you like it or not. *So stop teaching men in church.* For the Apostle made it clear that this is shameful, even though you may say ten thousand times that you have transcended the female condition, and that you are more steadfast than men ..." (PG 79, 429 D, cited in Topping 1983. 113, further, Lane Fox 1986. 741n. 77). Even before St. Neilus, Tertullian (*ca.* A.D. 200) had specifically denounced as deviants females who wished to emulate Thecla; this preacher was to be dismissed without question, he said, as the literary concoction of a defrocked priest.

At least two female figures in ancient literature bear close resemblance to our heroine, the first being Agnodike. According to "Hyginus" (A.D. ii c.?), this virgin shaved her hair and dressed as a man in order to be able to study medicine and afterwards work as a "healer of women's diseases". Another impressive pagan parallel is Hipparchia, whose unconventional career, dating to *ca.* 300 B.C., is related in Diogenes Laertius 6. 96 f. She reportedly fell in love with the Cynic philosopher Crates after hearing him lecture. In fact she so admired his discourse and way of life that she refused the hand of many eligible suitors and at length married him. Henceforth she adopted the same attire of rags and accompanied him to symposia and engaged in philosophical discussions herself!

To sum up: As regards literary form and content, *the Acts of Paul and Thecla* seem to derive directly from the ancient novel, although it is admittedly difficult to positively test this strong first impression in the absence of a relative chronology of the *Acts* and the novels. Even so, considerable coincidences in general outline and in points of narrative detail are discernible and can be put down to a combination of two possibilities: i) the author of Thecla's story drew upon early (pre-sophistic) novels of the same type as Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*; and ii) the *Acts* and the novels alike drew from the rich "underground" of popular tales. It is impossible to describe here at length the traits and devices which Thecla's story shares with those which seem likelier to be found in oral tales (on which see Mac Donald 1983. esp. 7f., 26-33; Burrus 1987. esp. 31f), but a brief list of the more obvious traits and motifs will do:

- 1) the story's resemblance in broad outline to the well-known tale type of the "innocent persecuted heroine"
- 2) the tale's emphasis on the protagonist's progress towards self-realisation
- 3) the detail of the fawning lioness and the role, positive and negative, of animals in general
- 4) the pervasive polarisation between individual characters and groups of characters e.g. Paul vs. Thamyris, Thecla vs. Theocleia, Thecla vs. mixed crowd at Iconium, Thecla vs. male crowd at Antioch etc.

Finally, as regards Thecla's conduct and career: Her permanent transvestism, together with her unstereotypical behaviour, argue for a physical and even affective homogenisation of the sexes in the direction of the male gender. Thecla's transgression of the gender code may suggest, in the ultimate analysis, an admiring, almost envious and, to men of late antiquity, a comforting version of maleness. Did her spectacular career as a "cross-dresser" and preacher signal an abolition of sexual difference? Or did it rather spell a confirmation and approval of such difference? These questions may especially interest feminist theologians.

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“THE WOMAN MONK”

A THEME IN BYZANTINE HAGIOGRAPHY

Kari Vogt

When little girls played games in fourth-century Syria, the Greek author Theodoret tells us, they played monks and demons: one, dressed in rags, would put her little friends into stiches of laughter by exorcising them. This delightful glimpse into a Syrian childhood scene more than 1600 years ago, points to the prestige of the saintly monk and may serve as a vignette to what must appear to a 20th century public an unexpected and somewhat strange theme in the setting of Christian hagiography: the woman-transvestite saint.

That women disguised themselves as monks and lived as hermits, or as members of a male monastic community, is in fact, a recurrent theme in the first and oldest layers of Byzantine hagiography. There is an abundance of texts and we know at least 12 *vitae* in great detail. The Greek, Syriac and Coptic versions of their life-stories prove to what extent these stories have been widely popular, and also how great their diffusion was in the Graeco-Roman world from the 4th century on. Once this *topos* was created, it made its way into the stock of literary themes of the Medieval West. One example - the most famous - should suffice: The female pope Johanna, giving birth to a child during an ecclesiastical procession (9th century).

The “Woman-Monk” of Late Antiquity is not forgotten; until today she occupies a place in the Greek as well as the Coptic Synaxarion. The names, if not the complete stories of Hilaria, Marina, Pelagia, Eugenia, and Appolinaria - to name but a few - are well-known in the Orthodox world. In the Coptic Orthodox Church (Egypt), the relics of Saint Hilaria and Saint Marina still attract thousands of people every year. Saint Hilaria’s relics are venerated in the famous monastery of St. Macarios in the Wadi Natrun desert between Cairo and Alexandria. And in the heart of Cairo, in Haret al-Rum - the “Westerner’s Street” - in the crowded and dusty parts of the Muslim areas of the town - is hidden the church where the relics of Saint Marina can be seen, and where her cult is very much alive.

Texts and chronology

The historical *dossier* of our woman-monks is virtually unexplored. The classification of the Greek narratives have been preliminarily published and interpreted by E. Patlagean. The Coptic and Syriac dossiers have both remained untouched.

The first versions of these life-stories are regarded as belonging to the literary context of the Greek *Apophthegmata Patrum*. The subsequent stories from the *Synaxaria* and *Typika* show the diffusion and later survival in the Eastern Church.

The Latin versions are no older than the 7th century, and represent an Eastern spirituality which never took firm roots in the West. The Greek narratives seem to be constituted in the 6th and first decades of the 7th century.

Two *vitae* are most probably older than these Greek texts: the life of Pelagia, accepted as a 5th century narrative, and the life of Marina, supposed to be the first such story, later became a model for other narratives.

The whole cycle has to be situated in the Graeco-Oriental era in the first Byzantine period (the 4th to the 7th century). The Syriac and Coptic versions both suggest the first part of the 6th century and proved a success in monophysite circles.

The narratives

The saint was the most admired figure, the model for human existence, and the image of the true Christian. The saint's life summed up widespread ideals, common to Byzantine culture as a whole, and proved which qualities were the most valued. From this period of stylites and gyrovags, the woman-monk may serve as a mirror, to catch another glimpse from a surprising angle of an aspect of religious anthropology.

From the twelve women-saints whose lives are recorded in great detail, I have chosen the life of Saint Hilaria and the story of Saint Marina according to the Coptic Synaxarion. These narratives are considered the earliest, upon which the later ones have been modeled, and contain all the main elements of the life of the transvestite saint.

Hilaria

Hilaria is one of the most famous "woman-monks", and there are quite a number of instances of her in Coptic literature, especially in connection with Scetis - the monastic settlement in the North.

Hilaria is said to have been the elder daughter of the Byzantine emperor Zeno, and to have had a younger sister. Hilaria was profoundly influenced by the cult of the 49 fathers of Scetis, a cult

which the Coptic narrative describes as the Egyptian link to Constantinople. Thus influenced, she determined to adopt monastic life herself.

To this end she assumed the disguise of a courier and traveled secretly to Alexandria. There she met the deacon Theodore in the church of Saint Mark and asked him to guide her to Scetis. He consented, and Hilaria was again disguised as a courier in male attire. The deacon and the supposed courier went to the shrine of Abu Menas and from there to Scetis where they met the great abba Pambo. She asked to be admitted to monastic life here, but Pambo said that as she was obviously tenderly nurtured, she would find it too hard to submit to the rigorous life of the desert. She had better go to Ennaton outside Alexandria where the conditions were easier. Hilaria, however, persisted, and finally she was assigned a cell, the monks assuming her to be a man and calling her "Hilary the Eunuch" because she was beardless.

In the meantime her younger sister was taken ill and the Emperor determined to send her to Scetis in the hope that she might be healed by the prayers of the Fathers.

When the princess and her escort arrived, the monks were called together, and informed that the princess was possessed by a devil, and were asked if one of them would take her to his cell; but this they all refused to do. Then it was suggested that the eunuch Hilary might take her, and so she/he did.

After seven days sojourn in Hilary's cell the princess was completely cured, she returned home, and related to her father how for seven days she had shared a cell with one of the monks. At this news her father was highly astonished and resolved to make a fuller enquiry into this conduct so unlike that usually credited to the monks of Scetis. To this purpose he wrote to Scetis saying that he suffered from a weakness of the heart which prevented him from going all the way to Scetis, but asking that the monk Hilary be sent to him, as he had already been successful in treating his daughter. So Hilaria was sent to Constantinople and introduced to the Emperor, who asked why he had kissed the princess and shared his bed with her, and if he was not moved by carnal love. Not to give an unfavorable impression of the monks of Scetis, Hilaria felt compelled to disclose

that she was his daughter, and sister to the princess. She made her father and sister promise to keep her secret. The Emperor agreed, and in recognition of the healing of his younger daughter endowed the monastery of Scetis with a regular supply of bread and wine for the Holy Eucharist. Hilaria then returned to Scetis and lived there for a 12 more years, and on her death-bed she begged Abba Pambo to have her buried as she was, without washing or burial preparation, but to reveal her history and identity to the monks.

Marina

Saint Catherine's monastery at Sinai has a chapel consecrated to Saint Marina, and one of the famous icons of the monastery shows us Saint Catherine and Saint Marina together (12th Century). They were two of the most venerated female saints of the Middle Ages, both East and West

Marina's story is one of the most popular in the Coptic Church today, and her images are sold all over Christian Egypt. She is depicted with a child, and wearing the characteristic cowl of the Coptic monk.

The Coptic *vita* tells her story. She was the daughter of wealthy Christian parents. Her mother died, and the girl, who desired above all to enter a convent, was left with the father, whose mind was also set upon the ascetic life. Marina's father sold all his goods and entered a monastery intending to provide for his young daughter, but died before he could do so. Marina then assumed male attire and entered the monastery where she was known as Marinus.

On one occasion, when she was travelling with three other monks, all of them had to pass the night at an inn where soldiers also were lodging. One of the soldiers slept with the innkeeper's daughter, and advised her that if she became pregnant, she should name the young monk Marinus as the father. This she did, and the innkeeper turned up at the monastery and complained to the superior who censured Marinus severely and expelled him from the community. The innkeeper's daughter bore a son, and her father took the child to Marinus demanding that s/he support it.

For three years Marinus/Marina lived outside the monastery and cared for the infant. Then the monks appealed to the superior asking him to re-admit Marinus, as s/he had given so many signs of piety and penitence. Permission was granted and Marinus returned, but s/he was strictly admonished and had a number of restrictions laid upon him/her.

For forty years s/he remained in the monastery, setting an example of piety, and the child in his/her charge was taught devout practices and became a monk.

When finally Marinus died, it was only as her body was being made ready for the burial that the secret of her sex was discovered, and her innocence of the charge brought against her was revealed to the community.

Common narrative elements

These two narratives are - as all the others - preoccupied by the theme of transgressing gender roles, not only of transcending them. The problem of sexuality, the social and cultural interpretation of

sexuality, as well as the interaction between generations are constant elements in these narratives. The "women-monk" *vitae* are all centered around the following themes:

1. *Changing of name of the heroine.* This is, of course, a common procedure when leaving the world; in these narratives the name is transformed into the male form and in accordance with the *change of habit*.

In most cases, choosing the ascetic life does not represent an escape from an engagement or an undesired marriage, which is a common feature in other female saints *vitae*. Here, the woman leaves the world with the consent of her father. The theme is not the braving of the authority of the father, but, on the contrary, it is the fulfilment of the father's ascetic desires.

2. *The change of habit* constitutes the main element of the story, the focus of the narrative and the reason for dramatic developments. Thereafter the heroine has achieved a complete change, both of individual and social as well as sexual identity. Hilaria is no longer recognized by her own sister, or her father, and she is not recognized as a woman by the monks. In the life of Eugenia, another "woman-monk" saint, her father is even confessing to her for years without discovering her real identity. This theme has another variant which could be called: the destruction of femininity. We are told that at the burial of Pelagia, who was famous for her beauty, her sponsor, the deacon James, pronounces the elegical words: "Her breasts were not like the breasts of other women, on account of her ascetic practice, they were withered". Appolinaria became "like a turtle shell".

This destruction of positive sexual identification leads us to

3. *The saint is considered as a eunuch.* This element made the story probable in the Byzantine world where monks and hermits are bearded. In this way, the eunuch, as an image of transcended sexual categories, the spiritual promises of Matthew 19:12, "... and there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake". The woman who is no longer of the weaker sex has a potential to evince manly virtue, *andreia*.

4. *False accusations of sexual sin.* This motif is obvious in Marina's story, where she seems to be back in a female role. Her taking care of the baby deserves a lengthy commentary, but I shall just point to the fact that infant care was seen as the proper function of eunuchs as well as for women.

5. This theme of false accusation has as its opposite the theme of *aquisition of male authority*, otherwise inaccessible to women. This theme is developed in all the *vitae* subsequent to Marina and Hilaria: Pelagius/Pelagia - elected as higoumenos (abbot) of a male monastery, was hearing confessions, exactly as did Eugenia. Her *conscience*, it is true, followed the established norms:

"... admonishing her that she was a woman, and that it was not fitting that she should be the commander and governor to the men of God-.

6. *The denouement*: the higoumenos's discovery and recognition of the saint's identity at the last minute before death, or more frequently, as in the case of Marina: the discovery of sexual identity at the moment of death or of burial. In this way, the humble sufferings of the saint and the falsity of the charges against her are revealed.

The historical context

How and why was this theme of sexual disguise introduced as an hagiographic theme?

It is a well documented fact that in the early monastic period women ascetics were living as hermits in the desert, some dressing exactly like male hermits. In itself, this fact points to the very practical need of a woman living alone in the desert to protect herself. So the possibility of confusion was very much a reality. In *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, the story of Abba Bessarion - as told by his companion Doulas - clearly illustrates this point:

We walked on and a cave where we found a brother seated, engaged in plaiting a rope. He did not raise his eyes to us or greet us, since he did not want to enter into conversation with us.. On our return, we came again to the cave where we had seen the brother. Bessarion said to me, 'Let us go and see him, perhaps God has told him to speak to us. When we had entered we found him dead. The old man said to me, 'come, brother, let us take the body; it is for this reason that God has sent us here'. When we took the body to bury it, we perceived it was a woman. Filled with astonishment, the old man said, 'See how the women triumph over Satan while we still behave badly in the towns'.

This could probably serve as a point of departure for imagination and phantacies, and in this way develop into a literary motif concerning transgression of an interdiction relating to the opposite gender.

We also know positively of the presence of eunuchs in monastic life during the period of Late Antiquity. In some areas, the eunuchs had

their own monasteries, as in Bithynia (now Turkey). The unbearded eunuch made it possible, or at least likely, that a woman could be mistaken for a eunuch and become accepted in a male community. The Church in the Council of Nicaea (325) and Pope Leo I (c.395) anathemized self-mutilations of this kind, but the eunuch whose mutilation was not self-inflicted was a well-known and accepted figure in early monastic communities. The unbearded young man, on the other hand, was met with much more suspicion; he presented the danger of homosexual temptations.

A sect was established by Eustatius of Sebaste, in which women cut their hair and dressed as men. We know of their existence from the official anathema of the Council of Gangra in 345:

'If, because of presumed asceticism, any woman changes her clothing, and in place of the clothing customary for women adopts that of men, let her be anathema' (Canon 13) and: 'If, because of presumed asceticism, any woman cuts her hair, which God gave (her) as a reminder of her subjection, under the impression that this annuls the ordinance of subjection, let her be anathema' (Canon 17).

One century later, the Theodosian Code reiterated the prohibition against female tonsure. Thus it seems possible that the transvestite virgin saints had an historical existence as the female counterparts to those self-emasculated "eunuchs for heaven's sake" of whom Origen (3rd century) constitutes the most famous example. But how could what seems to be a marginal or heretical theme become a quite important motif in orthodox hagiography?

The theme of women disguised or dressed like men is evident in the earliest Christian literature: In the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, Thecla, a well-born and beautiful virgin, upon hearing Paul preaching, renounces her fiance to follow the apostle. In the course of her wanderings, she cut her hair and assumed temporarily a male garb. Thecla was one of the most admired female saints of the ancient Church, and her manly appearance is sometimes iconographically depicted.

Another famous scene of a woman appearing as a man is in the autobiography of the martyr Perpetua (edited before 225), where in a dream the night before her martyrdom, she is undressed in the arena and changed into a man in order to fight the devil in the shape of an Egyptian. Both Thecla's disguise and Perpetua's transformation can be seen as a symbol of sacred initiation, and as an interpretation of the New Testament passage of "becoming male as a metaphorical expression of salvation. The *literal interpretation* of the Scripture: Galatians 3:27-28, thus provides the biblical authority for the ritual

performance of the “putting on” of Christ related to baptism: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female...”

Thus New Testament metaphors may have served as a point of departure for the development of an hagiographic topos.

The narratives of disguised women monks also reflect the aspiration of the early Christian ascetical movements for creating a “new world”. For women this was translated into the idiom of acquiring male virtues - *andreaia* ; of achieving man-likeness.

Heretic groups, on their side, interpreted this anticipation of heavenly existence on earth in a literal sense: same dress - as in Eutyches group, or the same prerogatives - as in the Montanist group with woman prophets, preachers, and baptizers.

Orthodox metaphors may thus have developed into a romanesque narrative, an hagiographic genre determined by a social and ideological context.

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REVERSAL OF GENDER ROLES IN ANCIENT GREECE AND VENEZUELA

Voula Lambropoulou

The purpose of this paper is to list and compare instances of gender role-reversal, especially those in which men assume the role of women.

I. Ekdysia

We start with the *ekdysia*, a festival which was celebrated in antiquity at Phaistos in the southern part of Crete. The legend that goes with it explains that a mother, who was afraid lest her husband would expose their new born girl, dressed the girl as a boy and named her Leukippus (white horse). But, since she could not hide the child's real sexual identity for long, she prayed to the goddess Leto Phytia (Phytia refers to plants) to turn the girl into a boy. Leto listened to her prayer and the girl did indeed turn into a boy. 'The people of Phaistos still remember this transformation and offer sacrifices to Phytia Leto who brought male genitals to the girl. The festival is called *ekdysia* (the shedding of clothes) because the girl shed her mantle (Antonius Liver., *Metam.* 17).

The legend was thus connected to a festival during which men and women probably were dressed in clothes of the opposite sex. Strabo (X, 482) testifies that group weddings of an initiatory character took place in connection with this festival in which the bride was dressed like a man and the groom like a woman.

Further information is given by Plutarch (*Mulierum Virtutes*, IV, 245f.) who informs us that the first act of the group wedding of initiation involved transvestitism. This act was also common in the *Hybristica* (the outrageous), a festival celebrated in Argos. In addition one might mention festivals in honour of Dionysus, such as the *Oschoforia* to which we shall return later (Phot.Bibl. 322, 13; Bekker Luc. 145, 15).

It is testified also in Cos that the groom dressed as a woman to receive his bride (Plutarch, *Quaestiones Graecae*. 58, 304 e). In Sparta

the brides were dressed like men when they slept with their husbands after the wedding (Plutarch, *Mulier. Virt.* IV., 245 e, Polyainus, VIII, 33). This latter Spartan custom was interpreted by S.Pomeroy as having to do with homosexuality in Sparta. She misunderstood the fact that such customs were religious in nature and their meaning is to be sought in the symbolism of ritual rather than psychology.

The above festivals, which have reversal as a main characteristic, had an initiatory character. Weddings too are initiations of sorts. Reversal is a way of affirming identity as has been shown by many scholars recently, notably by V. Turner.

Slightly different are the cases where man and woman are combined in one. Macrobius (*Saturnalia* III. 8) discusses a special worship of Aphrodite in Cyprus.

'There is in Cyprus a bearded statue of the goddess with female clothing but male attributes, so that it would seem that the deity is both male and female'.

II. Dionysus

Dionysus has an aspect of androgyny. He appeared to his worshippers dressed as a woman wearing buskins, women's boots (*kothornoi*), a female saffron-coloured dress (*krokotos*) and a woman's head-dress (*mitra*). His epithet *vassareus* derives from the female dress *vassara* (Aeschylus, frgt. 59; Hesychius under *vassara*, Polyd. Onom. Z. 59). Aeschylus (Nauck 2 frgt. 61) asks the question 'Where does the womanish man come from?' and in Euripides' *Bacchae* (333), the god is an effeminate stranger. A lemma in Hesychius refers to 'Dionysus, the woman-like and effeminate' *'Dionys, ho gynaikias kai parathelys'*. Lucian was puzzled that Zeus had such an effeminate son (*Dialogues of the Gods*, 248, 18, 1). Eusebius (Evang. Protr. III, 10, 11) describes Dionysus as a 'woman-shaped god...' Nonnus (*Dionysiaca* XIV, 159-160) says that Dionysus 'would show himself like a young girl in saffron robes and take on the feigned shape of a woman'. Finally, according to the Christian Kosmas of Jerusalem (PG 38, 402 Migne), 'Dionysus was a male/female god'.

It could be that the leader of the maenadic groups was also effeminate or androgynous. Euripides refers to the leader of the *thiasos* as an incarnation of the god (*Bacchae*, 115). A later epithet of Dionysus, *kathegemon*, may have derived from the performance of the headman. It should be remembered that in the *Bacchae*, Dionysus dresses Pentheus like a woman so he can lead him to the maenadic revels.

An interesting parallel is offered by a Phrygian Christian heresy, the Cyntillians or Priscillians. Only women could become priests

whereas Christ assumed a feminine form and was dressed in female clothing.

Dionysus' androgyny could be interpreted as referring to fertility or a remnant of matriarchy. Recent studies, however, have pointed out that he incorporates antitheses in his cult. One of the characteristics of his worship is the carrying of a large phallus in procession. The 'phallic' element is also present in Dionysus' followers, satyrs and silenoi, as they appear in Archaic vases. As W. Burkert has pointed out, this is a feature of gods who exemplify *the reversal of normal order*. (see also A-B. Høiby in this volume).

III. Ancient Oschophoria and Role Reversal

Before we proceed, it is worth looking at one festival which Plutarch attributes to the worship of Dionysus. As we shall see this festival incorporates elements of role reversal and an initiatory character. Plutarch in his *Life of Theseus* says:

"It was Theseus who constituted also the Athenian festival of the *Oschophoria*. For it is said that he did not take away with him all the maidens on whom the lot fell at that time, but picked two young men of his acquaintance who had fresh and girlish faces, but eager and manly spirits and changed their outward appearance almost entirely by giving them warm baths and keeping them out of the sun, by arranging their hair and smoothing their skins and beautifying their complexion with unguents; he also taught them to imitate maidens as closely as possible in their speech, their dress and their gait and to leave no difference that could be observed and then enrolled them among the maidens... And when he came back, he himself and these two young men headed a procession, arrayed as those are now arrayed who carry the vine-branches. They carry these in honour of Dionysus and Ariadne because of their part in the story, or rather because they came back home at the time of vintage. And the women called *Deipnophoroi* or supper-carriers, take part in the procession and share in the sacrifice in imitation of the mothers of the young men and maidens on whom the lot fell, for these kept coming with bread and meat for their children." (23) Here the young men assume the guise of women, but having accomplished their task, can take part in the procession as men.

Role reversal can have another function. Men can pretend they are women and feign birth-pangs. Plutarch in his *Life of Theseus*, 20 writes that in Cyprus sacrifices were offered in commemoration of the pregnant Ariadne who was brought to Cyprus. She died before the child was born. "At the sacrifice in her honour one of the young men lies down and imitates the cries and gestures of women in travail." The phenomenon by which men pretend they are in labour, is called

couvade and has been discussed by M. Douglas. It has been observed in contemporary African cultures and Douglas suggests that couvade solidifies claims to paternity especially in cultures where the marriage ties may be weak.

IV. A Venezuelan Ritual

Let us now turn to a contemporary festival performed by Indians in Limon near Maracay, Venezuela. The harmonization of older customs with Christianity is indeed amazing.

In older times the rites to be discussed below were performed under a tree or by a river at the time of the full moon; today they are performed in front of the image of Christ or the Virgin Mary. The atmosphere of the celebration is one of joyful noise.

On the 15th of December, between 9 pm and 3 am of the following morning, a spectacular dance takes place in front of the manger of baby Jesus. The revel rout, consisting of about one hundred men, performs the Shepherd's dance (*Los Pastores*). The dancers are dressed like women. They arrive in a triumphant procession. The head-dancer wears or holds huge horns (*cotsiro*). The rest of the revel, dressed like priests or wise men, follow him in slow paces, wearing ribbons which hang from their waists. Alternatively they wear long dresses or huge masks and feathers on their head. They also hold Indian banners, so huge that they almost hide them. In the past the banners must have been made of long branches of trees or flowering bushes in the shape of a double cross decorated with multi-coloured feathers. Today coloured paper strips are used instead, being called *gachizio* or *sinikos*.

A group of musicians hold rattles (*maraca*). The rest play local instruments, such as the tetrachord (*tsaraka*), the *kein* (made of thick bamboo, and the *wiro* (made of hard shells of tropical fruit or of reed. They play it by striking it with a spoon, a small key or a coin). They also play the *furko*, a kind of drum which makes a very loud noise; perhaps this is to send away bad spirits.

The first men hold baby dolls, symbols of Christ, and approach the baby Jesus with slow ritual paces in order to leave the dolls in front of him and make their vows. They ask different favours from Jesus, promising him that they may be dancing for one, five or twenty years, or one hour or the whole night. The duration depends on the promise they have given him. These men are the 'mothers', the 'nurses', the 'pilgrims'. They take the holy infant in their arms, look after him and worship him.

The head-man who had been performing the dance for 20 years, told me that the leaders never explained why men were dressed like women. The emotionalism of the celebration was such that one was

reminded of Bacchae running about with torches in nocturnal ceremonies. The Indian dancers started by stretching out their right leg and beating it vigorously on the earth. This may symbolize invocation of mother earth who offers plants, fruit and food. After that they turned left and beat the earth with their left leg, bending their knee. The turnings, the vigorous movements, the joyful rhythm, the music, the hymns to dawn, love and Christ were really fascinating. After the end of each song, the dances rested and drank ron or water. The dance started then again and the music became so intense, that the dancers reached a level of ecstasy not knowing what they were saying or doing. They could even become dangerous. But the head-man with the horns reestablished order and protected the spectators from dangerous dancers. The dancers pulled up and down the banners decorated with coloured strips.

The similarities between maenadism and the ritual described above are indeed striking. Common to both are the ecstatic dances and the feeling of debauchery. The branches may symbolize vegetation and the return to nature. The horns of the head-man embody the 'raw' power of the animal world and are also a reference to pastoralism.

V. Conclusion

We have surveyed here a number of phenomena involving transvestitism and role inversion. We have seen that some rituals signify initiation, others reversal of normal order; others yet involve fertility and the return to nature. Role reversal and transvestitism are important since, by a change of clothing, one turns to the opposite sex and temporarily assumes the reverse identity. Reversal of identity and imitation of the powers of the opposite sex can have important healing effects (on both the social and individual level). Moreover, they reaffirm the social order.

Sober ethnologists, having got rid of drunkenness and ecstasy should come to the conclusion that certain habits are expressions of the human soul and existence.

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ON TRANSVESTISM

M.-G. Lily Stylianoudi

I first became interested in gender and gender transgression when I encountered the cult of the demons "Zar" while studying the legal history and society of Ethiopia. This cult requires its followers to be possessed by one of the demons, and during the period of the possession the person wears the attire of the demon, has the attitudes and habits specific to it and professes all the wrongdoings of individuals, or of the current social situation, however, the possessed one is well fed and taken care of by the whole community. This is mostly a feminine cult and it is taken up by women when they wish to publicly voice opinions which ordinarily, because of their role and status, they would not be allowed to. As can be easily understood, the demons are males and some of them are fierce warriors so that the possessed woman is allowed to carry weapons or any other "male" attributes characteristic of the demon.

In 1989 I was invited to see a show where all the female roles were played by very beautiful young men. I was mystified by the sight of the actors (or shall I say actresses?) where the boundaries between maleness and femaleness were very slight, and I became very interested in this phenomenon which in a way reminded me of the notion of the "androgynous" which I recall it from my Greek studies. My research started around that time in 1989 in Athens (Greece), and I am still gathering material by visiting bars, discos, etc., following some of the activities of the 'travestis' (a term designating the Greek transvestites) such as beauty contests, music festivals, etc. and by discussions with people. My first attempts to organize material which, by its nature, is very delicate and very disconcerting (although from another point of view very thrilling for an anthropologist) were guided by the material itself, the language (the Greek transvestite jargon possess an extended vocabulary of 3,000 words, Petropoulos 1993), expression (both verbal and non-verbal) and theatricality (Stylianoudi 1991). Now I am focusing on the body, the body not only being the mediator, the "boundary" between the inner and the outer self, but also the transcript of the signs of the social symptom.

In this paper I shall start by trying to give an overall view of the terms which are connected with the subject of transvestism; bearing in mind always that definitions may be the result of or may result in stereotypes. I shall continue with the case of the Greek "travestis" and try to give an interpretation within the context of the Greek culture.

Terms and definitions

The term transvestism (SMP 1962) refers to dressing as a member of the opposite sex. It derives from the latin trans = cross and vest=dressing. Thus, *cross -dressing* is the global neutral term for all wearing of clothes of the opposite sex, once or habitually. It may be done by a variety of people for a variety of reasons, with or without sexual stimulation resulting from doing so, and of whatever sexual orientation.

Transvestism is a sexual or emotional relief, or both, from dressing in the clothing of the opposite sex. The major factor is that the individual does not feel or believe he belongs to the opposite sex, nor does he have the desire to do so. Usually the person keeps a collection of women's clothes that he uses to cross-dress when alone. He is often or usually fetishistic, ranging from the male who will occasionally wear some female articles to the other extreme where he will dress completely as a female constantly.

Transsexualism has to be clearly distinguished from homosexuality and transvestism, with which it is often confused. Homosexuals and transvestites maintain their own sex-role identity and their only difference is that of the sexual orientation to the same sex for the homosexual, and that of the predilection for dressing as the opposite sex for the transvestite. Transsexualism is a gender identity disorientation in which the person feels he is of the opposite sex, and wants to be. Sometimes he/she undergoes a surgical procedure known as a sex reassignment or conversion to accomplish such a change. A transexual usually reports the feeling of being in the wrong body from earliest memory and wishes to be, or sincerely believes that he/she is, a member of the opposite sex. Some males say that they have always felt themselves to be women in male bodies and they trace these feelings to their early childhood. As Jan Morris (1975) writes: "To me gender is not physical at all, but is altogether insubstantial. It is soul perhaps... it is how one feels... it is more truly life and love than any other combination of genitals, ovaries and hormones. It is the essentialness of oneself, the psyche, the fragment of unity. Male and female are sex, masculine and feminine are gender..." Jan Morris was born and raised as a male, had got married and fathered children although she was convinced she was a girl from early childhood. She

began dressing and living as a woman when an adult and at the age of 46 she underwent a sex reassignment operation. As she reports, she has developed a close friendship with her former wife and a good "auntie" relationship with her children.

Transexualists usually complain of being uncomfortable in the clothes of their own anatomical sex, and this frequently leads to cross-dressing. They often engage in activities that in a given culture are associated with the other sex. Very often such individuals will deny that their behaviour is homosexual because of their conviction that they are "really" of the other sex. With cross-dressing, hormonal treatment and electrolysis, some males appear relatively indistinguishable from members of the other sex. It is interesting to note (Garber 1992) that till very recently transvestism or transsexualism were primarily attributed to the male population, a fact which may have its explanation in a male biased western culture.

Wearing drag refers to male (drag queens) and female (the "butch") homosexuals who like to wear the clothing of the opposite sex but do not depend on it for sexual excitement; often it is for exaggeration or spoofing. These practices are basically caricatures of masculinity and femininity.

Another aspect of cross-dressing is when transsexuals go through a stage of cross-dressing in the process of becoming women. Also included are female impersonators who are men dressed up as women (or vice versa), as part of their jobs as entertainers. And, finally, some - perhaps many - adolescent boys cross-dress usually once or a few times. This behaviour does not necessarily mean a life of transvestism: it may simply reflect the sexual drives, confusions and frustrations of adolescence.

Gender role inversion. Most cultures have clear expectations of what males and females should do, and these expectations begin at birth and continue through schooling. Inversion is the acting out of the opposite gender's role, which may entail wearing their clothes. Contrary to a transsexual, a gender role invert accepts his or her body but wishes to experience the other gender's social reality in a psychological-cultural sense. Men and women in Gondar (Ethiopia) for example, become possessed by female or male spirits respectively (or fake possession) and assume their clothing and attributes, and are able to act as women or men (Leiris 1958). Although in this case one might argue that this is a socially prescribed and accepted way of gender role inversion serving special purposes, nevertheless, the fact remains that it is often used individually and for individual purposes.

Homosexuality. As already mentioned transvestite phenomena range from occasional solitary wearing of female clothes to extensive

involvement in a transvestite subculture. Some men wear a single item of feminine clothing (e.g. underwear) under their masculine attire. When more than one article of women's clothing are involved, the man may wear makeup and dress entirely as a woman. The degree to which he appears to be a woman varies depending also on body mannerisms and skill. Although the basic preference is heterosexual, he may be engaged in occasional homosexual acts.

Thus we arrive at another term linked with the transvestite phenomenon, that of homosexuality, considered as deviant sexual behaviour which involves supportive social structures either for the purpose of entry into the system of behaviour or for the maintenance of the individual in that behaviour. This type of behaviour comprises prostitution as well. It has often been the case in my research that transvestism, homosexuality and prostitution intermingled. It is not my concern here to discuss the origins and causes of homosexuality. I shall consider though the conscious acceptance of one's homosexuality to be the turning point from which the search for sexual partners begins. This search usually requires entry into the world of homosexual bars, development of the slang of homosexual life and gradual learning about the modes of approach and retreat that are related to the satisfaction of sexual needs. It is the process of adult socialisation that is involved in the development of the homosexual commitment.

Research on homosexuality is of major significance for the light it throws on the relations between social structure and cultural norms, and the patterns of human sexuality, on normal and abnormal personality, in masculinity and femininity, as well as on social deviance and deviant subcultures. In questions of masculinity and femininity an aspect which has been studied is that of the active-passive roles in sex. Two new terms are now applied; the "insertee" and the "insertor" (SMP, 1962). These two terms are now also applied by social anthropologists as, for instance, by Herdt in his book *Hall of Mirrors: Ritualized Homosexuality in Melanesia*, which leads us to ethnographic accounts of homosexuality. I shall cite some examples, as reported by E. Hooker (1968) from a survey of studies of sexual behaviour in 190 societies (Ford et al., 1951). According to this report, there are societies where homosexuality is regarded as normal or socially acceptable and even encouraged for at least some classes of individuals. In some cultures, such as those of the Siberian Chukchee, the institutionalised role of shaman is provided for adult male homosexuals. These men adopt feminine dress, activities, mannerisms, become "wives" of other men and assume the "female" role in anal intercourse. Their social status may be high.

Male homosexuality in some societies, such as those of the Keraki, the Kiwai, the Iatmul, the Hua or the Fore of New Guinea is an institutionalized feature of puberty rites. Thus, all males must engage in homosexual practices, either as initiates in the insertee role in anal intercourse or as married or unmarried males who perform the insertor role. Such practices are believed to be essential for male growth and strength.

It has also been reported that all men and boys among the Siwans of northeast Africa engage in homosexual practices; married and unmarried males have homosexual and heterosexual liaisons.

In societies in which homosexuality was said to be rare, specific social pressure was directed against it. Condemnation and penalties ranged from ridicule to threat of death.

Some societies also report female homosexuality, but it seems that it is highly probable that females (Garber 1992) are less likely than males to engage in homosexual practices.

Homosexuality as a subculture. Whether or not a homosexual community forms a subculture is a debate in modern theories concerning culture and subcultures (Astrinakis, 1991). Thus the homosexual community is considered nowadays as an active social group (minority group), exercising influence and pressure, winning battles (legal acquisitions, social welfare, marital status, etc.). Within this group, different kinds of subcultures (from mild subcultures to very hard ones) may appear. It is debatable whether homosexual communities in modern urban centers are formed because of collective reactions to legal pressures or social stigma. One of the theories (Goffman 1963) is that deviant as well as conforming behaviour is learned in interaction with others, and it cannot be understood without reference to the societal reactions it invokes. Male homosexual communities develop on a sizeable scale only in modern industrialized societies. These communities are made up of constantly changing groups of persons who are loosely linked by friendship and sexual interests in an extended and overlapping series of networks.

Community gathering places are centers from which information is transmitted concerning social occasions for homosexuals, attitudes and organized activities. Some sectors of these networks, bars, taverns, or private clubs are informally institutionalized as homo-territory. These places provide opportunities for the initiation of sexual contact and for an in-group social life (McDonogh 1992). A standardized and essential feature of interaction in bars, baths, streets and parks is the expectation that sex can be had without obligation or commitment. Sexuality is separated from emotional and social life, but in other sectors sexuality is integrated in the emotional,

personal and social patterns of individuals who establish relatively stable and long-lasting relationships.

Ending this introduction, I would like to add that during the last twenty years, a new, radical interdisciplinary perspective on the meaning of sexual behaviour and sexual identity has emerged. Sociologists (sociology has played an important early role), anthropologists, historians, psychologists and, more recently, constructionists have contributed to this endeavour, but, unfortunately this article is not the place to list all these studies. In a recent article (Epstein 1991), an interesting approach is made to the subject of sexuality and identity by using a combination of sociological, psycho-analytical and constructionist theories. Terms such as homosexuals and heterosexuals, which were taken for granted, are now considered more or less as culturally constructed labels, and it is as such that they have to be understood in relation to other social institutions.

Transvestism and the Greek “travestis”

It is essential I think to stress once more the significance of interpreting a social phenomenon within the framework of and in interaction with the culture in which it has been produced. For our subject, although the act or the actors can be freely translated in English as transvestism or transvestites, these terms, nevertheless, convey on closer inspection a very specific meaning in Greek. So, although the Greek term “travesti” is derived from “transvestism”, Greek “travestis” are in fact transexualists. From the signification point of view, the stress is on the body, the body seen not only as a collection of organs and functions linked and functioning according to the laws of anatomy and physiology but also as a symbolic structure (Garber, 1992). The body is at the same time a map of pleasure and power where along with the passive/active dimension, there is also a configuration of sex/power that “renders certain organs and roles ‘active’, other body passages and roles ‘passive’, and assigns honour/shame and status/stigma accordingly.” (Lancaster, 1988: 123).

The body is socially and culturally imprinted within infinitely variable limits. From one culture to the other, it is a changing reality. In our societies based on the individual who is relatively autonomous with regard to his choices and interaction with the others, isolated from nature, well locked in his/her body, it is this body which is the “factor of individuation” (facteur d’individuation). This body which identifies the individual is an “interruptor “ (interrupteur), permits the affirmation of individual difference, and emphasizes this differ-

ence with an "I" (*je*). In our societies the individual is shut in his feeling of identity, delimited by his body (Le Breton 1991).

The image of his/her body a person has is influenced by a series of representations imposed on him/her in his/her life by all sorts of information which largely bypass his/her knowledge and which enforce him/her to form instead of an integrated and harmonious image a scattered, jigsaw image of the body. The efficiency of this image is that it permits the individual to be a part within a vision of the world collectively admitted.

In the case of the "travesti", the body is not only what she wants it to be, but also a vehicle of signification. We can seek this signification if we consider and try to read the body as a "text". As such, it portends, on another connotation level, the dichotomy detected in the Greek culture (or maybe splitting is a better term to describe this phenomenon), which appears in different situations: in language it appears as "diglossia" for instance (Frangoudaki 1992), or in gender ideology clearly opposing man and woman (Du Boulay 1986:140). Gender ideology may have some "complementary oppositions (especially honor/shame, men/women, public/domestic)" (Herzfeld 1986). The dichotomy may also appear as national culture vs local culture and so forth. I would agree with Herzfeld though (1986:218) that all these patterns (which are expressions of this dichotomy) in the Greek society must be addressed with the term of "disemia" rather than the term of dichotomy. It is under the term of disemia that I perceive the meaning and symbolism of the travesti's body in Greece, as a "facet of a more general rhetoric of concealment and display".

The body of the 'travesti' has two distinct features: male genitalia and female breasts (nothing new here compared with the rest of the world). Very few of them undergo sex reassignment surgery in order to become full women but many, if not all of them, dream of having female breasts and by aesthetic surgery and hormone therapy they acquire this symbol of femininity. The body of the 'travesti', this androgyne, is first of all the body of a hermaphrodite, the hermaphrodite par excellence (and where if not in Greece can we claim this attribute as an ideal of perfection and wholeness; Delcourt 1958), is the designator of what they say they are: a woman in a man's body, hence the embodiment of perfection.

The gender identity is defined by culture. Maleness and femaleness is but a series of characteristics, roles and attitudes channelled through family and education. The male and female individuals are two distinct and complementary entities well defined in and by their bodies and their role in society. A man or a woman is a man or a woman, he or she feels like one and acts according to the norms of the

society. He or she is “whole”, well defined and “complete” (all these prerogatives in the sense that he/she feels and behaves the way he/she is expected to). But a woman in a man’s body is a human “monstrosity” (‘teras, pedi mou, teras’ = a monster, my dear, a monster). It is worthwhile noting that the Greek word “teras” (meaning monster) was a divine sign prophesying the will of the gods, or their presence. It also meant someone born with or under a divine sign, not obligingly with a bodily deformity as the term is usually applied these days. In this “monstrosity” is there a feeling of “incompleteness”, of “unwholesomeness” or is it exactly the opposite? What is the meaning of this “monstrosity”? Should we understand this term as it is usually applied nowadays or should we understand it as some kind of ‘divineness’? There is a very strong contradiction: how can it be a woman in a man’s body? - a ‘mistake’ of the nature as the ‘travestis’ repeat. One of them characteristically said: “ego, chrysson mou, gennithica me tis goves” (= I, my dear, was born with my high heels on).

This “monstrous” (please, note the ambiguity of the way the term is applied) character has to be shown somehow. If you feel like a woman and you are in a man’s body, this contradiction –or should I say this complementarity– between the inner and the outer self, the in and the out of the body, must somehow manifest itself clearly. If you are androgynous, it has to be shown somehow. Hence the male genitalia and female breasts. Being androgynous is in fact being “complete”, being “perfect”, in the real sense of the word. Not only do they represent the perfect being (do not forget Plato’s *Symposium* and the presentation of the myth of the androgyne) but they also transcribe in their body, they express through their body, another type of the disemia cited above. But here also lies the contradiction with social norms and definitions regarding maleness and femaleness: the travesti wholeness, their “completeness” is something which cannot be assigned to the social norms; regarded from the point of view of the “others” it might be considered as a deformity (“monstrosity”) or even as “evil”, evil here defined as a physical deformity or a physical “incompleteness” (Parkin 1985). In the travesti’s context, this deformity by a reversal of meaning and symbolic representation becomes “whole” and “divine” (As I understand it and from my point of view there is ambiguity in the way they apply the terms and there is disemia in the meanings of the terms applied, which from an interpretative point of view enforces Herzfeld’s argument).

Another aspect of this complementarity (this wholeness) is the relation between their attire and their behaviour which expresses the relation between the inner and the outer part of the self. Their clothes are feminine clothes and very provocative ones: mini skirts, low

decolletages showing off their breasts, long hair (they usually grow their own hair), lots of jewellery, etc. The outcome is of something very shiny, lots of glitter, shiny material and tissue, golden tresses, etc. Although the clothes are very provocative and in some cases very "kitsch", their behaviour is very conservative and reserved. They do not gesture with their hands, they are well behaved and almost shy and their voices (usually husky and low) does not have the intonations one can in certain cases detect in homosexuals. So here again we are confronted with the same complementarity between the inner self, the female part, expressed in the outfit, (out of the body), and the outer self, the male part, expressed in behaviour (in the body).

It is apparent, I believe, that soul and body, inner self and outer self, in and out of the body, body expression and self expression, intermingle and co-exist giving meaning to this complementary bipolarity, male/female, which finds its full meaning in the body and the presentation of the body of the travesti.

As shown here the body of the Greek travesti is the designator, the transcript, of the main code of Greek culture which is characterized by "disemia": it is the embodiment of the synthesis of the two poles of the disemic contradiction.

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PERFORMANCE OF WOMANHOOD

WOMEN CONTESTING GENDER IDEAS IN MODERN GREECE

Marianne Grødum

In this paper my aim is to contribute to the current debate in women's studies by providing an ethnographic account of how a small group of young women in Athens speak about being a woman in contemporary Greece. These women are friends, gathered in a feminist group, discussing ideas about gender they want to challenge and change.

In this study the qualitative methods of participant observation are employed. I did my fieldwork in Social Anthropology in Athens 1990-1991. This essay is based on my cand.polit. thesis (Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo).

What is the content of a "new" women's role, or a "new" way of being female? Part of the answer to this is, I believe, that there are many ways of being female. What gender is, what men and women are, and the relationship between them is a matter of context, that is, to be a woman in Greece depends on which woman we are speaking about. Where she lives, if she is married, how wealthy she is and first of all - what choices and possibilities she has. It should be stressed that gender relations vary widely from region to region and that rapid social and cultural change makes generalizations very difficult. However, in my opinion, it's valuable to collect systematic ethnographic information to demonstrate the variety and complexity of Greece. Furthermore, recent gender studies have stressed exactly this point, that the pattern is variation (Loizos & Papataxiarchis 1991). These variations on ideas about maleness and femaleness is accounted for in terms of comparisons and contrasts between a plurality of contexts.

The feminist group I present in this paper has about ten members, from the age of twenty to thirty. These women are all, except for one, unmarried. They all live in Athens, but have a connection to a village where they grew up and where their parents now live (except for one who comes from a suburb outside Athens). Most of them are sharing a flat with somebody else; a sister or friends. One lives with her

parents. As they see it, it's the urban, cosmopolitan environment that gives refuge to their desire for autonomy. Through entering the university they escaped the highly judgemental community of the Greek village. One of them told me she had the choice either to marry or to study in order to get away from the family, parents and the village. It was not difficult to choose studies, because "one of the bad dreams is to get married".

These women are not representative of the women in Greece. However, they examine controversial gender questions that I believe exist among many Greek women (and maybe men) today, especially in the younger generation. By focusing on these areas, the Greek culture and the social life in general is made visible. I believe they express an emerging gender ideology that is situated in the urban context of Greece.

I want to call attention to construction of a gender model or discourse, that is "the set of ideas that informs the activity of each sex in a particular context" (Loizos & Papataxiarchis 1991). My intention is to show, through the voices of some Greek women, fragments of what I consider as "feminist discourse". This feminist gender model is not a fully institutionalized discourse, but contains ideas about maleness and femaleness contrasted with those of the mainstream model. I regard this as an "alternative gender discourse" compared to the "dominant model" or the "domestic model" of gender. According to Loizos and Papataxiarchis (1991), the domestic model of gender is a set of ideas about men and women in married life. It encapsulates the values of marriage and informs male and female conjugal and domestic roles. In the Greek context the domestic model of gender is the dominant one. Furthermore, the feminist group creates a discursive space, "set apart" from everyday life, in which dominant definitions of womanhood are made explicit and contested. Through verbal and bodily resistance, through talking and acting in the feminist gatherings, they challenge gender ideas and establish a morality and code of conduct of their own, at variance with that of the dominant society. This model of gender, created in the feminist group, through the sharing of experiences, storytelling and role-games, reflects their notions about what it means to realize oneself as a woman. These women friends are each others allies, but also each other's most severe judges. They regard sociability with female friends as the way to find answers to their questions. As one woman said: "How can I find my identity as a woman without help from my feminist group?"

One of the central themes in the feminist group is men's violence (via) towards women. In this paper I want to focus on the self-defence (*autoamina*) and the resistance (*antistasi*) strategies, enacted by the women towards what they consider as sexual harassment (*seksoaliki*

parenochlisi); that is encounters with known and unknown men who annoy women by staring, speaking and touching. I regard the social practices, created in the feminist group, as aspects of a feminist discourse. They are sites of resistance against established ideas about female gender identity, and inform how the women should react in a particular gender context. I want to demonstrate that the resistance-strategies constructed in the feminist group have a performative character, used consciously by the women for the purpose of redefinition of female identity. Finally, I want to show that this resistance has aspects of ambiguity when it is addressed to “significant others”; meaning family and friends. I present their ideas and strategies against marriage to illuminate this ambiguity.

Before I pursue some parts of the feminist discourse, I will briefly outline aspects of what is regarded as the “dominant” gender model. Subsequently I will focus on how this feminist discourse is acted out through negotiation of gender identity in interaction with men.

It should be mentioned that the elaboration of this Greek feminist discourse is part of a wider framework consisting of different feminist discourses. In this paper I choose to focus on one particular. However, literature on the women’s movement in Greece reveal that the picture is more complex. First, there exists a gap between the “autonomous feminist groups” and the women’s organizations, that is feminists within parties (it should be noted that these women are not considered feminists by many). This gap rests mostly on a different concept of autonomy (Georgiou & Stratigaki 1989), and might be considered as a clash between tradition and modernization (Vovou 1988). Second, opposing feminist discourses may occur within a feminist group (Papagaroufali 1990,1992) and outside the women’s movement (Cowan 1991). However, Cowan (ibid.) examines gender perceptions in a town in central Macedonia which she says resembles feminist discourse. The feminist group which I present in this essay belongs to the “autonomous feminist groups”, which are the modern part of what is described as the clash between tradition and modernization (Vovou 1988). However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on these distinctions. Hence when I describe the feminist discourse it is with this in mind.

“Aspects of a dominant gender model”

Hirschon (1978) elaborates on what she calls the inner logic underlying the definition of the woman’s role in Greek society. It is founded in the perceptions regarding her sexual nature and categories of symbolic space, like her access to the world around the house, her use of time and control of her speech. Hirschon claims that these are beliefs to which both men and women subscribe.

The woman's role in Greek society is founded upon perceptions regarding her physical nature. Two contrasting images, Eve and Mary (Panayia) are embedded in women, the one in conflict with the other. The image of Eve is characterized by weakness and temptation in contrast to the holy image of Mary which is the ideal womanhood consisting of self-sacrifice, love and devotion to the family. Furthermore, female sexuality has an explicitly procreative end. Through childbirth a woman can transcend the limitations of her own nature. This means, her sexuality can and must be controlled, because it is regarded as a danger for the honour of herself and the family.

For both men and women marriage is an imperative. Girls are taught that there is no acceptable alternative to marriage: "A woman's destiny is to marry and bear children, for in this state alone will she find true satisfaction and her only appropriate aspiration is to become the mistress of her own household." (ibid.)

Hirschon describes three areas of cultural concern related to the woman's nature. First there is the spatial dimension. There are clearly defined conventions regarding a woman's movements outside the home. Virtuous girls are described as being "of the house" (*tou spitiou*), and women who in some way or another have lost their reputation are called "of the road" (*tou dromou*).

Second, there are conventions which specify a woman's use of time. To be a good housewife is of paramount importance and an indicator of a married woman's prestige and reputation. Hirschon notes that a woman's domestic duties are extremely time-consuming, and this is a feature of great importance. "The logic of the dictates regarding a woman's time is clear: she should be fully occupied around the house to prevent the possibility of temptation." (ibid.) Third there is a woman's verbal capacity. Women have the capacity to create disruption and trouble through words. A sharp tongue indicates a lack of self-control and women are frequently told to be silent.

The main parts of this definition of womanhood are well-known representations and notions of what the women in the feminist group call the traditional woman's role. These are gender ideas which are discussed and challenged in various ways.

The gender ideology described as the "dominant model" is perhaps mostly restricted to provincial/rural areas. Women's mobility in the city, for instance, has increased and cannot easily be held in check. However, in Athens there are still middle-class women who are not permitted by their husbands to go out with women friends, but who succeed in doing so by saying, for example, they are going shopping (Papagaroufali 1990). In a city like Athens men's surveillance is perhaps less, but still experienced as aggressive and often violent, according to the women in the feminist group.

Contesting womanhood

In the following section I shall try to elaborate some of the ideas that form central parts of the Greek feminist discourse.

The feminist group considers men's violence (*bia*) towards women, and women's acceptance of this situation as crucial for maintaining societies social order which is governed by patriarchal (*patriarchikos*) and "falokratikos" principles. These two concepts are not entirely synonymous, but are used by these women to describe different power-relationships. "Patriarchia" describes men's power directly through the societies order, where as "falokratia" is connected to the relationship between men and women, where men's power is directed towards women in a more direct way. The feminists would, for instance, maintain that the streets of Athens are governed by "falokratikos" principles through sexual harassment (*sexoaliki parenochlisi*).

"*Piragma*" or "*parenochlisi*" are Greek words for harassment, annoying or teasing. However, the women involved most often describe this as "*andres pou sou tin pefton*", that is an expression meaning men who "fall on you". In this connection it means men who harass you, but it has a stronger connotation than the more formal *parenochlisi* or *piragma*.

Statements made by the feminist group reveal their view. I quote some parts:

"The everyday violence that is used against women has to do with all sides of women's lives (this includes both physical and psychological violence enacted upon women in "the house" and on "the road"). Men consider it as their indisputable right to annoy and violate the personal time and space of women....We have accepted a refusal of ourselves through our education, we are pathetic receivers of facts and situations. The weakness of women is a myth that has to be overthrown....We have to react dynamically if we want to change our role....It starts when women realize their right to defend their desire, their dignity and their sexual life. It is their right to say "no" to what they don't like, to what disturbs them."

These women struggle to construct and put into practice new definitions of womanhood, through an active, creative and reflective process. This perspective resonates with Herzfeld's (1985) discussion of the poetics of manhood, where poetics is about "doing" and "making" oneself ("as a man"). Cowan (1990) also focuses on the "doing" rather than the "thinking" of gender. But Herzfeld's depiction of "doing", however, portrays it as more entrepreneurial and innovative process than Cowan (*ibid.*) Cowan believes we must also keep in view the constrained nature and unchosen conditions of human beings "making" and "doing", and asks if the women have such scope for innovation as the men have. I believe the feminist project is about

creating a "poetics of womanhood"; that is, "making" oneself "as a woman". The women in the feminist group believe in a special innovation for women, and are determined to bring about a radical change in their lives. The feminist discourse is a way towards this end. I quote:

As she has learned to be frightened and weak, she can learn to be powerful and have sovereignty. She can learn how to stop violence by the way she stands against it: the way she moves, the way she looks at the one who provokes her and the way she answers to a provocation.

The way the act is performed is of ultimate importance for the result, or the impression they give. First of all, they emphasize the need to react to any kind of attack from men and to challenge men's view on women, either verbally or physically. To be silent or passive, means agreeing upon men's definition of womanhood. This definition, they believe, is that women are "silent, kind, calm, soft and polite, passive, pathetic and with no personality". When men try to give them this role, they must react dynamically and aggressively without showing any fear. I quote:

We must walk in the street with proud and straight bodies; show self-confidence and no fear by looking men straight into their eyes.

When they meet a man in the street who annoys them in some way or another (this happens every day), they believe for instance that how the words are said, how they speak and react is more important than actually what they say. The stories that are being told about different confrontations with men are an important aspect of the feminist discourse. "What did he do - what did she do - what could she have done different?" Strategies about how to "answer back" are discussed, judged and constructed through the stories. I quote a part from one of our discussions about "screaming":

A: "We must learn how to scream... I have problems with screaming, because when I scream I feel ridiculous."

Y: "Let us discuss what is the use of the scream, why we must scream or why we must not?"

A: "It's important to scream to show other people that we have rights, that they must see us like persons, not like nothing, like a zero, because women used to scream hysterically, not to scream for their rights."

Y: "Here in Greece when a woman is very hysterical, this is a different kind of scream, when she is complaining and screaming about things

to her husband, her children. And what I want to ask is what is the difference between our scream and this kind of scream?"

S: "You said it already, it's a hysterical way of screaming, it has nothing to do with expressing yourself. It is not a screaming to ask for something you want, it's a screaming out of control."

Y: "We have to answer with a strong voice, a voice that is steady and it comes from deeper, from inside."

S: "When something happens on the street or in the bus, for example a man says "oh, what big breasts", I feel angry and that I have to react but I cannot make myself ready to say what I have in my mind. I have in my mind to say "fuck off", at the same time I feel that it's nothing."

Y: "Yes, you are right."

S: "I say it more because I have to, because I have to say something. I cannot go without saying something."

Y: "That's why we have to practise on this."

S: "If I leave myself to feel this anger, do you know what I could ask back? I could say "what you say idiot?", but in a very angry way, not "ai gamisou" (fuck) with a weak voice. We say it so soft, "ai gamisou re malaka" (fuck you wanker; malakia is the Greek popular word for masturbation) It's something I have to do for myself.... to say strongly "ti ipes askimo fatsari" (what did you say ugly face) or "ti ipes ilithio plasma" (what did you say idiotic creature), something like that, I think it will express more what I really feel, this aggressiveness, because I think he is an idiot, something bad and I want to express it. To say "ai gamisou" is *cliche*.... It has to do with how you react, to say it clear and to mean it. One girlfriend of mine told me a story from the bus, she answered "go to hell", but the whole bus was laughing, can you imagine? If you really want to defend yourself it's how to say it, not what you say."

Herzfeld notices in his book *The poetics of manhood* (1985) that there is less focus on "being a good man" than on "being good at being a man". The attention is not on what men do, but how the act is performed.

This perspective is interesting when discussing this feminist discourse, because of the central position that performance is given. The women in the feminist group were actually avoiding the image of "being a good woman". It is, in their opinion, the traditional women's role they are challenging. Instead, "being good at being a woman", the performance of womanhood, that is what they consider as womanhood: a woman that is "strong, dynamic, successful, selfconfident, in control of her life and situation, active, doing things, a sexual human being that is able to combine being feminine, powerful and aggressive at the same time."

"Being good at being a woman", means challenging traditional ideas or what they consider as myths.

Especially the idea of women's silence is confronted and changed inside the feminist discourse. This idea is, in their opinion, created by men, fathers and husbands telling women "*mi milas*" (do not speak).

Herzfeld (1991) has argued that women's silence represents a problem for the study of the creation of meaning in the contexts of female interaction. He suggests that what women perform is maybe their lack of performance, because performance means you do something, and the dominant ideology seems to define women as those who do very little.

With this in mind, we must view the feminist discourse emphasis on performance. The women in the feminist group stress the opposite of "silent performance", namely the verbal and bodily performance, which often means risking an open confrontation on the definition of womanhood.

Papagaroufali (1992) stresses the performative aspect in an article on alcohol drinking as sites of resistance among feminists in the urban context of Greece." The women presented here engaged in specific forms of drinking in order consciously to resist, even subvert, Greek men's cultural power..." (ibid). She describes their drinking practices as performative strategies through which women exposed, to outsider-witnesses, demand for the acknowledgement of their own naturalness and legitimacy.

In order to become subjects and not objects in the eyes of men, these women believe confrontation is a means in achieving this. When they act strongly and dynamically towards men, they are able to "win this fight" that is about definitions of womanhood.

One of the women makes this statement:

How many times have I felt angry because of a man's disturbance? How many times have I felt his control of space by his presence in the streets, but also in my house and my job, with bad jokes which hide something about my body and my appearance. He takes my words and my voice. The men speak for us, they steal it and leave no voice for our own. How can we learn to resist? I don't want to tremble when I hear steps behind me or when they throw swear words at me. In the feminist group I learn to keep my body prepared. I learn to use my power and to have my body in discipline. Self-defence is a process to get to know yourself, our scared and hidden inner selves, and to demand something. We will walk in the streets together, empty streets or bad areas, and see the reactions of the men. We could enjoy it, maybe.

This woman emphasizes especially the bodily resistance used by entering space dominated by men. However, it is stressed as a necessity in order to challenge men's definition of women. They create their own expression, which can be viewed as a bodily counter-expression to the male mode of expressing. Another woman also points to this line of confrontation:

I walk into the forest when the wolf is not there. "Wolf, wolf are you here?" Is this maybe the question you whisper when you walk alone in empty streets? And when he was there, didn't you suddenly feel like the myths; the fear stuck your legs to the ground. All these myths make us feel the panic. Because you are a woman. This means object without decision, suspicious and not going straight but hiding. There is a time coming when you realize the power to make your body in rhythm, that is to control your movements. Your scream doesn't stimulate anybody, but creates a fear for the other. And then you defend yourself very steadily, rejecting all the myths one by one. With the self-defence practice I start to communicate with my body, and have the courage to answer when they verbally rape me every day in the streets. But you have to face the jokes and the laughs. They think you are "looking for trouble", and slowly become a man. My answer is that if the right I have to respect my personality and my body, to walk without fear in the night without male companion, if all this means that we are "looking for fights", then that is what I am doing.

Cowan (1991) examines perceptions on gender and space among people in Sohos, a town in northern Greece. The emergence of a new kafeteria, a place where women and men can meet (in contrast to the coffehouse, or kafenion which is unambiguously regarded as a male space), is an establishment that does not slip neatly into the familiar classification of gender and space. Cowan asked the Sohoians if it's a good thing or not for females to pass their time in the kafeteria. They disagree about the matter. "From the viewpoint of those men and women committed to the domestic model, "going out for a coffee" means entering a dangerous world where female vulnerability can be exploited, promoting the sensual side of womanhood.(...) A virtuous woman is expected to show no public interest in such a place. For the young enthusiasts of the new institution, having coffee in the kafeteria suggests equality between the sexes, female independence, relaxation and sociability, and an opportunity for a woman to associate with others, not in sexual terms, as an object of men's desires, but simply as a "human being."

Cowan claims that this emerging ideology of the woman as an autonomous being, in control of her body, resembles feminist discourse.

In an urban context, like Athens, I believe that womanhood is made explicit and contested in many different situations and places. However, women often avoid a confrontation with men by, for instance, crossing the street when they see a man coming towards them, or avoid any discussion about female-male roles or gender ideas. However, in the feminist group, these are questions of utmost importance and are always made explicit when possible.

Ambiguities of resistance

The struggles of the women in the feminist group to put into practice new definitions of womanhood reflect the contradictory dimensions of their everyday reality. To have an open confrontation with unknown men in the street is considered as less difficult than engaging in a confrontation with close friends. Furthermore, to oppose and resist their parents view on, for instance, marriage is something that most of the women are avoiding or postponing. Marriage is closely linked to what the women consider the traditional woman's role. As a consequence, not to marry is part of the feminist discourse. They view feminism and marriage as difficult or almost impossible to combine. However, marriage is a matter of great sensitivity because of the connection to their close family, and the reputation of their family in the village they come from. Unmarried girls often receive wishes "for your happiness and a good husband" (*stis hares sou ke me enan kalo andra*), when they lift a glass of wine to drink. One of the women, who is now twentyfour years old, told me that when she visited her village she couldn't even lift a glass of water before somebody expressed wishes for "a good husband". Two other women in the feminist group make these statements about marriage:

S: "My mother has already started to prepare me, to search for a man to marry.... because you know the time is running, and this must happen before I'm 25 years old. She has this limit. My mother will never accept it, me not to marry, because this is her world. She will never accept it inside, because it's out of her moral. She thinks that the most important thing in life is to be married, not educated, no, no, the most important thing in life is to have a good husband and be happy.... After some time I will choose to make her unhappy, but now I cannot face it. Because I have time."

N: "I think it's very, very difficult for a woman to have her own life, to realize herself and at the same time be married, because it has to do

with the style of the family, husband, wife, children. When I imagine myself thirty, forty, fifty years old, I imagine..., but it's not logical and therefore more true. I imagine myself with a child, but not with a man. I don't know what I will do, of course, I have the utopia to be with a man, to live with a man, but not to marry. I have also the hope that maybe if I get married because of pressure, the social pressure, for example, I will try to change the roles and the situation."

They are challenging a supreme value of the Greek society and this is difficult because of the social pressure from society and their families, and because women's role and identity are closely linked to the status of being a wife and a mother. "Since women's "destiny" is to give birth and bring up children (du Boulay 1986) it seems that women's only option is to marry and to identify with a household of procreation." (Loizos, Papataxiarchis 1991)

Marriage and the family is a dominant and important orientation in Greek life. "In Greece, marriage is of supreme value because it is regarded as a necessary condition of procreation and, therefore, of the continuation of life and, in a more metaphysical sense, of the self through the perpetuation of family names and the persons of the parents" (Loizos, Papataxiarchis 1991). Several ethnographers of Greece have stated the imperative status of marriage (Campbell 1964, du Boulay 1986, Hirschon 1989).

However, the development of what Loizos and Papataxiarchis (1991) call "a secular consciousness of womanhood" that is juxtaposed to the domestic model, leads to a public clash with gender orthodoxy. "The open contestation (of gender) can lead to a subversion from within, to new synthesis, and indeed can foreshadow significant transformations in the meaning of marriage toward a more "open" type."

The increase in urban divorce rates suggests important changes in the meaning of marriage. A story was told to me about a young woman who had been living with her boyfriend for two years in the second floor of her parents house. The relationship was in this way "official", it means that her parents accepted that they lived together because one day they would marry. However, their relationship was not working very well and the girl wanted to stop it. This was impossible since they had been living together in this "official" way. She decided to marry him, because, as she said, "the first possible step towards divorce is to marry." It was possible to accept a divorce from a married couple, but impossible when they were living together. The meaning of marriage for this woman was to use it as a transitional stage towards ending a relationship. Other women have expressed a similar view on marriage. Because of the social pressure and the imperative status of marriage they plan to marry, but at the same time they plan that after a few years they will divorce. In reality these strategies

created to handle the social pressure might not be widely practised, but I believe they are important aspects of construction of a gender model on the way to be institutionalized.

Conclusion

All the women in the feminist group express the strong influence feminism has had on their lives. They often speak about themselves with reference to “before I joined the feminist group” and “after”, and emphasize the importance of the feminist group for confirmation of their identity.

Research, carried out in Greece about twenty years ago, maintains that women today are facing more stressful situations due to the lack of role description suited to the new kind of relations in her life (Spinellis, Vassiliou & Vassiliou 1970). They characterize this as a culture conflict between old and new values that has led to serious role strain in the behaviour of men and women caught in the transition (ibid.)

The women presented in this paper view themselves as agents of change through negotiation of gender identity. However, they stress a notion of role strain and a need for new models and patterns. The feminist discourse created in the feminist group is believed to be a way to relieve this strain.

In this paper the performative aspect of this Greek feminist discourse is stressed as important. The social practices, the verbal and bodily resistance strategies created in the feminist group are viewed as sites in which gender ideas and relations are realized, comprehended and made real. To use Herzfeld's argument (1985), the ultimate focus is on “being good at being a woman”, contrasting “being a good woman”. This “new” way of being female is contested through negotiation of gender identity — to answer back — any kind of attack, where the ultimate value is put on the performative act, verbally and bodily. The ideal act is to show a dynamic and self confident attitude, to do things, to be active and able to show aggressiveness. All this is embedded in their feminine, sexual human bodies. This is a contradictory definition of womanhood according to the traditional Greek context.

This emerging ideology of womanhood, which I have described as a feminist discourse requires the verbal and bodily articulation of resistance. “To be good at being a woman” means to display, perform and be in control of their own womanhood.

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GREECE & GENDER: A SYNTHESIS

Nanno Marinatos

The approaches to gender roles that have been used in this volume have been quite diverse and reflect the specialties of the authors: ethnographers, classicists, art historians. Even though there is no unified method, one fact becomes manifest: gender roles have been perceived as important and have aroused controversy, not only in our day but also in the past. Although this volume deals with ancient and modern Greece only, the issues that are discussed are of general ethnographic interest. Moreover, it is hoped that the analysis of ancient art and iconography will be of some interest to anthropologists who deal with contemporary cultures.

Two important conclusions emerge from this collection of essays. Firstly, distinct roles for men and women are a feature of both ancient and modern Greece. When gender roles are transgressed, this signifies a situation of 'abnormality' which may indicate social rebellion. This 'abnormality' can also be a social strategy, however, for affirmation of traditions (see Lambropoulou, Hoibye, Berggreen).

Secondly, there is a 'battle of the sexes', an antagonism between males and females for dominance in different spheres.

The battle of sexes, gender roles and gender inversion as affirmation of social order

Already in the *Odyssey* of Homer men and women have distinct roles. As H. Whittaker shows, men are perceived as warriors, their identity being emphasized by similes which compare them to lions. Males are dominant also in the social sphere conducting the social relationships of their household. Women's social position, on the other hand, is socially passive, although they do play an active role in the household. Their sphere is one of domesticity (Whittaker, Marinatos). In the sexual sphere there is a 'battle of the sexes' in the *Odyssey* (Marinatos). Odysseus tries to conquer as many women as possible; in their turn, women try to entrap him into marriage or at least permanent co-habitation. Males and females use different weapons.

Men possess physical strength, women employ poisons and sexual charm. Helen and Circe both employ potions to achieve their goal. The issue is not one of superiority of one sex over the other but rather of different strategies of social survival.

In his *Thesmophoriazoussai* and *Ekklesiazoussai* Aristophanes also raises the issue of the 'battle of the sexes'. A.-B. Høiby discusses the various social transgressions that the two genders commit. Men transgress their boundaries by trying to gain admittance to an exclusively female festival, the *Thesmophoria*. Women transgress by trying to take over the political administration. As Høiby argues, the whole thing is a joke, but this joke can only be effective *if* gender roles are taken seriously. The ancient Greeks took the exclusive admission of women in the all female festival of the *Thesmophoria* as seriously as their exclusion from political assemblies. Men, on the other hand, were excluded from the Demeter festival and were punished severely if they watched the secret rites; transgressions are dramatically presented in myths and stories. Through the medium of comedy Aristophanes introduces rebellion but this rebellion is ultimately an affirmation of the normal order. There are certain spheres which are exclusively the property of the male or the female sex respectively.

Gender role inversion is manifested also in the divine sphere in the persona of the god Dionysus. V. Lambropoulou discusses how Dionysus dresses like a woman and has female followers. Festivals associated with him sometimes involve role inversion and, in the *Bacchae* of Euripides, the maenads assume the male role of hunters. Dionysus is the god of inversion and one of his roles was evidently to allow for aspects of social rebellion, which was controlled because it occurred only within the context of state festivals.

Ritualized gender role inversion apparently has beneficial social effects in 'repressive societies', namely those which have strictly regulated norms. It is thus found in Greece today in a ritual which takes place in several villages in the north. The festival of Monokklisia, being most well-known, is described and analyzed by B. Berggreen. This ritual is evocative of the *Thesmophoria*, but also of Bacchic celebrations. Men are assigned female tasks, being dressed in aprons and scarves and women who assume male tasks dress up as men, but especially men dress up as women and temporarily assume male roles. The women have their own society and administration; they exclude men from their rites. Just as in the ancient *Thesmophoria*, prominence is given to fertility and childbirth which is the exclusive and uncontested sphere of women. Thus the protagonist of the festival is the midwife (*bábo*). Berggreen raises doubt against continuity from antiquity and suggests a Slavonic

connection for the ritual. But obviously what is important here are the *structural* similarities with the ancient festivals. These similarities can be explained by the common goal that both the ancient and modern festival try to achieve: to articulate the importance of women's role in society. The emphasis on fertility and the midwife stress the traditional role whereas the role-inversion gives this role its proper place within the social hierarchy. Although this occurs only once a year, the point is made.

Role division is observed also in institutions such as the Olympic Games. S. de Bouvrie argues that the emphasis on male strength, expressed through the athletic games at Olympia, is counterbalanced by emphasis on female roles. Firstly, there were female athletic games, the *Heraia*, which were obviously conceived as structural counterparts to the male Olympic games. Although they may not have been quite as important as the male contests, the female games are a clear attempt on the part of society to balance the importance of the sexes. Moreover, female roles are emphasized in the iconography of the pediments of the temples of Zeus. Males are the protagonists in the contests between Pelops and Oinomaus as well as in the struggles between Lapiths and Centaurs. However, it is important to note that females are the focus of attention since they are the brides, the prizes of the contests. Marriage is a definite sub-theme in the iconographical program of the temple at least.

Fantasy: hermaphrodites and armed Aphrodite

Fantasy overcomes the boundaries of nature and creates gender composites, a combination of man and woman. Such a creature is the Hermaphrodite discussed by A. Ajoutian. As an artistic creation, *Hermaphroditos* flourishes from the 4th cent. BC into the Roman period. However, as Ajoutian shows, the concept of a bisexual being, capable of self-regeneration, is attested in mythology and literature much earlier both in Greece and the ancient Near East, even in Egyptian mythology the primeval god Atum is bisexual. That the Greek artistic form of *Hermaphroditos* refers to regeneration is made clear by the fact that he lifts his garments exposing his genitals (a reflection of a gesture common to earlier fertility goddesses) and that he nurses infants. By the 4th cent. BC. the evidence for a bisexual deity is supported also by votives. In Roman times the mythological articulation of *Hermaphroditos*, found in Ovid, takes a different form. No longer is the fertility and regenerative aspect of the creature stressed but rather its strange form, a case of an abnormal *metamorphosis*, a transformation into a *monstrum*.

The case of the 'Armed Aphrodite', a particular statue-type of the late Greek period, is treated by J. Flemberg. Here too fantasy created the impossible. How can a naked female possess weapons and be dangerous? Flemberg explores the antecedents. As in the case of *Hermaphroditos*, the armed goddess type has antecedents in earlier periods especially in the cultures of the Near East. The Mesopotamian goddesses Innana, Anat and Ishtar all had warrior aspects, although their main domain was sexuality and fertility. The significance of this gender transgression may lie in the fact that these goddesses were both nurturing and protective of their cities. Perhaps the model is derived from nature where the female animal, lioness or cat, become vicious when protecting her young. However, the late Classical and Hellenistic armed Aphrodite has hardly a cultic significance of the type described above. She is rather a product of artistic fantasy and play. As Flemberg observes, the goddess of love, appearing in this guise, is both self-contradictory and dangerous in that she has the power of a warrior. This may explain why in mythology she is associated with the war-god Ares.

Submission: Female saints

The values of gender roles are not always balanced. K. Vogt explores a theme in Byzantine literary tradition by which Christian values dictate that maleness is closer to holiness. Women thus need to assume a male identity to qualify as saints. Women disguising themselves as male monks and living a chaste life with other males is a recurrent theme in Byzantine hagiography. The starting point for the transvestite saints is, according to Vogt, the New Testament itself. Being one with Christ, 'putting on Christ' is an important metaphor of the Holy Scriptures, which was sometimes taken literally. Thus interpreted one has to assume a male identity to unite with Christ completely.

Mary Douglas has pointed out that a value system can be used to elevate or denigrate gender identity by connecting certain bodily functions with pollution. The fact that menstruating women are polluted can be utilized by religious authorities to impose restrictions on women. Some Christian sects have made use of that and transvestitism (including the rejection of female identity) is one of the consequences of that.

The narrative of the woman saint Thecla has been explored by J. Petropoulos. Thecla's desexualization leads to a liminal stage which results in her assuming a holy identity. At the same time her virginity, which she aggressively retains, turns her into an almost warrior

maiden, like Joan of Arc or Athena. She thus fights a Syrian male, Alexander, who has a sexual interest in her.

The narrative conforms, according to Petropoulos, to oral folktales and Greek romances, perhaps even reflects the structure of initiation rituals. But what is interesting in the renouncing of a female identity in favour of a sexless, male oriented existence, which is a precondition for the woman saint.

Rebellion: Women in modern Greece

In the era of feminism, women in modern Greece have started to rebel against the implicit assumption that women are passive members of society. Since they have started working outside the home, and earn their own income, they are taking a much more active role in public life. It should be noted that the contrast with the traditional female roles lies only in the sphere of the public versus private domain. Contrary to some assumptions, Greek women have always been a formidable force within the home. This theme of 'public' versus 'household' power is not treated explicitly by any of the authors in this volume. However, two papers touch upon this subject indirectly. Berggreen shows how in the formalized ritual at Monokklesia women assume 'male' public roles. Note that the ritual occurs in a rural setting where traditional values are still strong.

M. Grødum, on the other hand, has interviewed city-women who complain that men abuse them *linguistically* in public: they call them names, make vulgar comments and treat them as passive objects of sexual pursuit. Women react by stressing that they have to stand up to men instead of fleeing them when they get teased in the streets. They feel that they should talk back and even use language of similar vulgarity to make their point.

Cross-dressing as gender confusion

L. Stylianoudi deals with transvestites, their values, their psychological problems, their perception of identity. In this case there is a true gender confusion, not a deliberate role inversion which can be explained as a social strategy. Thus, her paper deals with an issue that is rooted in biology or psychology though it does have very important social implications. It is noteworthy that some traditional societies make allowances for the male homosexual/transvestite by assigning him special roles. Shamans, the Indian Bardaches, the castrated priests of Cybele in the Ancient Near East utilized their 'otherness' to qualify as priests who place themselves beyond the

normal gender and role division of society. In their wisdom some communities have exploited the 'otherness' and created niches for the third sex. Our society still has to face the issue. Some aspects of the social disturbance are discussed by L. Stylianoudi.

Conclusions

There are two basic directions we can follow. Either we accept that there are fundamental differences, emotional and psychological, between men and women or that there are none. It makes a big difference in which camp we lie. For if we accept the first alternative as a 'biological truth', then our job is to see how societies have utilized these differences to create role divisions. These role divisions would help society function in an efficient fashion since men and women would do what they are best suited to do by nature.

It is this kind of societal wisdom that is reflected in ancient literature and art.

If, on the other hand, we do not accept that gender roles have a biological base, then it follows that roles are social constructs which are as flimsy as a house of cards. A feminist would argue the case by demonstrating social injustice and the issue would not be one of understanding but of polemics. We have seen that some times social values are utilized to denigrate gender roles (see Vogt and Grødum).

In the final analysis, however, it seems to me that it is our job as researchers to understand gender roles as social strategies, and try to evaluate them in their own context. An historian has always to plead for understanding and tolerance.