

From Girl to Woman:  
the Role of the *Parthenos* in Ancient Attic Religious Ritual

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## **Introduction**

Ancient Athenian femininity was rife with contradiction. Women were idealized for their chastity, but ultimately it was sexual activity which ushered the Athenian female into full womanhood, through giving birth to legitimate children. Abstinence from sexual excess was expected of women at all levels of Athenian society, however sexual abstinence taken to the extreme was viewed as disturbing and wrong. Two groups of women who exemplified this excessive abstinence were spinsters and women who engaged in lesbian relationships. Spinsters were essentially a tragic sight, women who were unable to find husbands and thus remained in an eerie extended adolescence, never fully reaching legitimate adulthood. There, of course, was little to no room for women to maneuver within the strict expectations laid out for them in Attic society, and the idea that a woman may have merely elected to abstain from marriage and childbirth was practically unheard of (Connelly 2-10). Further, though sources such as the works of Sappho and various vase paintings attest the existence and general Greek familiarity with lesbianism as a concept, it was almost unilaterally viewed as unacceptable for Athenian women to engage in sexual relationships with other women (Blundell, Women 120-130). The tendency toward demonizing both lesbians and spinsters is clearly in following with the Athenian desire to create more citizens—anything that provided more legitimate, citizen children for the state (i.e. procreation within marriage) was a good thing, and anything that prevented otherwise good women from providing the state with more citizens (i.e. lesbianism, spinsterhood) was a bad thing. In this same way, male homosexuality was only an acceptable phenomenon until it ceased helping the state train more politically responsible men and started distracting husbands from their procreative duties within marriage.

If excess in abstinence was considered a major flaw in citizen women, excess in sexuality was fatal. In other words, though a citizen woman who refused to get married or engage in procreative intercourse with her husband was viewed as an anomaly, a woman who was promiscuous, adulterous or who engaged in prostitution risked losing her citizenship altogether, or worse, her life. The nuances of Athenian laws relating to the sexual transgressions of wives and virgins will be discussed in more detail later, but it is important to note here that a strict level of chastity was expected of each of these groups. Indeed, engaging in prostitution automatically nullified a woman's citizenship in Athenian society, and furthermore a husband could kill his adulterous wife for her transgression. Excessive promiscuity, like excessive chastity, was to be avoided for preservation of status and reputation, however excessive promiscuity carried with it penalties in addition to outsider status. This distinction is perhaps tied to the fact that, while a spinster or a lesbian merely fails to accomplish her duty to the state by failing to provide citizen children, a promiscuous maiden or an adulterous wife puts the entire system in danger by bearing children of questionable legitimacy. That is, when a wife is carrying on affairs as well as sleeping with her husband, if she becomes pregnant, she draws into question not only the legitimacy of the child she bears, but all children that she bore in the past and all that she will bear in the future. Her reputation is ruined, but along with it she also ruins the reputation and legitimacy of her entire family. Conversely, as before, the rules for men were markedly different, with citizen husbands conducting affairs and frequenting prostitutes with few repercussions (Cohen 106-112 and Blundell Women 133-143).

The purpose of what follows is to explore the contradictions of femininity in ancient Attica by specifically focusing in on some religious and ritual functions of *parthenoi* (peri- and post-pubescent unmarried citizen females) in Attica. For young women in Ancient Athens and its

environs, *parthenia* was a phase of life equally celebrated and reviled. The period of a young woman's life when she was on the verge of physical and reproductive maturity was a frightening time when she was constantly at risk, and her very maidenhood was to be protected at all costs. However, in order to complete her transition into womanhood, it was first necessary for a maiden to be seen by her prospective suitors. Thus the period of maidenhood in a young woman's life was a constant back and forth between the public and private realms. *Parthenoi* were relegated to the private realm, that is the protection and concealment of their natal households primarily in order to protect their virginity, and thus their desirability as future brides. However, this time within the privacy of the home was also used to train maidens as future wives and domestic workers, which only further increased their marriageability. Indeed, the very ritual which ushered the citizen born girls of Attica into their time as *parthenoi* was essentially a private ritual, shrouded in secrecy and accomplished entirely separate from men in a sanctuary of Artemis. The focus of the ritual, which will be examined more closely later, is utterly ensconced in the private realm, with a focus not simply on the individual girl's body, but on its inner-workings and its relationship to the goddess in a very personal sense with regard to the girl's entrance into a dangerous period of transition to reproductive viability and womanhood. Not surprisingly, the rituals during which a maiden exits her period of *parthenia*, the pre-nuptial rituals and the wedding ceremony itself, were also strongly associated with the private realm. This celebration of the end of maidenhood was celebrated primarily within *oikoi*, first the natal *oikos* of the maiden, where she was bathed and adorned for the ceremony, and where the nuptial feast was held, then with the bride's entrance into her new home, the *oikos* of her husband. The wedding itself was a celebration of the private realm, and specifically a wife's place in it. Much has been written about the confinement and oppression of women within the domestic realm in ancient

Athens, and it is not the purpose of this paper to argue that classical Attica was any less hostile toward women than it apparently was, but it can safely be argued that the domestic focus of the wedding ceremony actually celebrated the role and duty of the Athenian wife, within the strict paradigm laid out for her.

Thus, a private ritual began a girl's journey into *parthenia*, and another privately focused ritual ended it, ushering her into her life as a wife and mother. However, for the period of time in between these two highly inclusive rites of passage, which typically lasted up to four years or more, certain maiden daughters of prominent Athenian families were chosen to participate in rituals that were both very public and very exclusive. These rituals, more initiation rites than rites of passage, allowed the most beautiful and well-born daughters of the Athenians exposure to the male gaze at public municipal events. Further, the selection of these maidens to participate in these events also attested to their desirability and marriageability, which gave their *kyrioi* an edge in betrothal negotiations. Interestingly, the origins of the roles of *parthenoi* in public festival were frequently rooted in myth, with the maidens essentially reenacting stories of prominent maidens in the foundation myths of the city. In the case of these maidens, their purity and chastity were stressed by several accounts. First, in roles such as *arrhephoroi* and *kanephoroi*, the maidens were essentially playing the roles of mythological figures who were understood to be *parthenoi*, and were thus celebrated for their own virginity. Even further, these mortal Athenian maidens played the role of priestesses to Athena during the festival of the Panathenaia, which celebrated the goddess as well as the origins of the city for which she served as patroness. Athena herself was celebrated for her virginity, and it is indeed a very short leap to understand that her priestesses would be chosen, at least in part, on their devotion to youthful chastity. Additionally, besides the mythological motivations for stressing the virginity and purity

of these maidens, there were practical reasons as well. In the most basic terms, Athenian maidens were more valuable to society if they remained virgins (at least as far as public knowledge was concerned) until marriage. Thus, unmarried adolescent females, especially those eligible to participate in ritual roles during festivals such as the Panathenaia, had social currency or prestige equal to the extent and verifiability of their chastity, in addition to their physical beauty and the power associated with their family names.

In all, *parthenia* was viewed as a necessary period through which adolescent Athenian maidens were required to pass. As will be discussed in further detail a bit later, it was an extremely dangerous time in a young woman's life, for anatomical as well as social reasons, and if she was lucky, a maiden could rely on goddesses such as Athena and especially Artemis, both virgin goddesses themselves, to protect her. What follows will first define and describe the state of *parthenia*, and next follow chronologically the religious and ritual roles which were available to maidens in classical Attica, stressing the significance of these rituals and the events during which they took place.

### ***Parthenia***

The journey of a girl toward womanhood was characterized by the ancient Greeks as one similar to the act of taming a wild filly<sup>1</sup> (symbolizing the forceful imposition of marital relations) or, alternately, as a process reminiscent of fruit ripening on a tree<sup>2</sup>. Children were considered wild by nature (King 76-77), and that wildness was only compounded in females who, throughout history, were thought to be inherently closer to nature because of their procreative

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<sup>1</sup> Πωλε Θρηκιη... (Thracian Filly...) (Anacreon 4:84, Loeb *Lyra Graeca II* 180-181)

<sup>2</sup> αι τ' ορααι στεφαναπλοκην ("And the ripe maids wove wreaths") (Sappho 2:67, Loeb *Lyra Graeca I* 230-231)

οιον το γλυκυμαλον ερευθεται ακρω επ' υσδω ακρον... ("Like the sweet apple blushing high on the top branch...") (Sappho 10:150, Loeb *Lyra Graeca I* 286-287)

abilities and thus responsibilities. Girls, however, must undergo a transition from the unchecked wildness of childhood to the woman's life of quiet responsibility. The beginning of a young Athenian girl's transition into ripeness was the onset of puberty, characterized by the appearance of outward signs such as development of breasts and hips, and ultimately menarche. Once a girl experienced these changes, she was no longer a *kore*, or *teknon* (child), but became a *parthenos* (maiden). A *parthenos*, then, was physically mature, and 'ripe' for marriage, but yet unmarried, and thus untouched by men. For many reasons, to be discussed later, it was dangerous for young women to remain in this stage, and the goal of Classical Athenian society was ultimately that "ripeness would be only a fleeting instant between reaching physical maturity and first sexual experience" in a legitimate marriage, of course (King 77).

It was assumed that a *parthenos* was a virgin in the strict sense of sexual purity ("intactness") as evidenced by references to divination rituals performed in order to attest to a *parthenos*' virginity. This also suggests that there was a taboo associated with *parthenoi* engaging in sexual behavior, just as there was for any girl or woman engaging in intercourse or other sexual behavior outside of marriage. Thus, the definition of *parthenos* is a complex one; while it was simply a chronological way to separate and categorize young Athenian women between puberty and marriage, it still seems to presuppose virginity. Thus, a *parthenos* who was proven to have engaged in sexual intercourse, while still technically labeled as a *parthenos*, has violated the very definition of her identity, and is therefore matter out of place, an anomaly—a Greek female who is post-pubescent, pre-nuptial and yet sexually active, even violated. In fact, the case of a *parthenos* actually caught in the act of premarital intercourse is one of such impropriety and shame that she may have lost not only her identity as a *parthenos*, but she may have also been completely displaced from her position in society: "In Athens a law promulgated

by Solon stipulated that a girl whose father discovered that she was pregnant or even that she had been seduced ceased to be a member of the family, indeed ceased to exist as a free woman” (Sissa 87).

Of course, it appears that when a citizen woman or maiden was discovered in a sexual relationship with a man who was not her husband, the responsibility fell primarily on the man; “The woman was of course disgraced, but the man was sometimes subject to death” (Sissa 97). The man who violated the wife, sister or daughter of a citizen could legally be killed by the guardian of the woman or girl who he violated. In contrast, the wife, sister or daughter in the situation was typically not considered culpable in the situation, as she was viewed as a passive object, defiled by her contact with the seducer or adulterer. Athenian law, interestingly, did not differentiate between types of sexual transgressions that occurred between men and women or *parthenoi*. Indeed, adultery, seduction (that is, sexual initiation of the unmarried virgin daughters or sisters of a citizen man) and even rape fell equally under the category of *moicheia*, and Athenian law “demonstrates that such offenders, whether they raped a woman or seduced a virgin, could be killed with impunity, as could the *moichoi* who engaged in consensual intercourse with married women” (Cohen 106). It is important to note here that, under Athenian law, the state did not have the right to punish *moicheia*, but rather it protected the right of the offended *kyrios* to murder the man who had intercourse (whether consensual or not) with a girl or woman under his guardianship (Cohen 100-110).

Of course, women could not remain unpunished in this situation either. In fact the taboo attached to a girl or woman who was discovered to have engaged in sex outside of marriage was so great that she could legally be completely abandoned, or even sold into slavery by her father, or in the absence of a father, by her *kyrios*. Giulia Sissa mentions the story of one archon of

Athens whose *parthenos* daughter was caught in a sexual relationship with a man. Rather than merely selling his daughter, the archon chose to punish her—as well as to rid himself and his family of the shame of her promiscuity—by feeding her to a hunger-crazed horse. This, of course, was not the typical response to a daughter’s sexual misdeed, but the fact that it was allowed is perhaps evidence of the extreme shame the family felt when a daughter lost her virginal purity outside the social constraints of marriage. In fact, the language of the ancient Greeks presents a strong parallel between the father’s act of removing a promiscuous daughter from his home and the act of a woman evacuating a fetus from her womb by means of abortion—the same word, *διαφθερω*, is used for both (Sissa 89-90).

Of course, in their presupposition of virginity as the natural state of a *parthenos*, the Athenians appear to follow a sort of “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. That is, if a *parthenos* was able to engage in sexual behavior that was never discovered by her *kyrios*—or anyone else for that matter—then she was able to continue to be a *parthenos*, in spite of the “violation” of her virginal body, as “*parthenia* was an invisible condition that could be detected only by mantic vision or ordeal,” (Sissa 83). This attitude was so inherent to Athenian beliefs and practices that when *parthenoi* became pregnant from secret affairs, their children were often not referred to as bastards, but in fact as *parthenioi* (or *partheniai*): virgin-born. This term, *parthenios*, is often used to describe the heroes born of maidens after an encounter with Zeus, or another male god in the Greek pantheon. The stories make it clear that most of these women were impregnated by physical acts of sexual intercourse with a god, rather than by mystical means, and yet these young women were still referred to as *parthenoi* and their children did not appear to be considered bastards in the traditional sense. The same was often true of *parthenoi* impregnated as the result of affairs with mortal men; “making love outside the marriage bed, before marriage has

taken place [...] did not result in any change in the name by which a young girl was called. The Greek word γυνή served double duty, meaning both ‘woman’ and ‘wife.’ Thus, a *parthenos* became a woman (*gyne*) only in matrimony, as the *gyne* of her husband,” (Sissa 78). This of course is in contrast to the previously mentioned *parthenoi* who were discovered engaging in premarital sex and were thus disowned by their families—or otherwise disposed of—in order to remedy the shame consequently visited upon them. However, there do exist tales in which the fathers of maidens bearing heroic offspring plot to kill their unchaste daughters to expiate shame brought upon the family by their daughters' indiscretion (Sissa 80-85). This of course in no way reflects the legal rights or typical actions of an Athenian father or *kyrios* when placed in this position.

This policy of applying the blanket label of *parthenos* to any young woman in Athenian society after puberty and until marriage—as well as the practically institutionalized policy of ignoring the premarital promiscuity of these young women as long as it remained sufficiently concealed—was aided by the apparent absence in the Athenian medical corpus of any reference to or knowledge of the hymen. "Neither the eyes nor the hands of Greek practitioners told them that a membrane initially seals a woman's vagina. Anatomy, as it can be reconstructed on the basis of Hippocratic therapies, was unaware of a hymen specific to the *parthenos*," (Sissa 110). On the contrary, Hippocratic physicians<sup>3</sup> believed that the human body was full of hymens: membranes that enclosed all of the internal organs and kept them in their proper places.

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<sup>3</sup> The Hippocratic corpus is a collection of about 60 medical texts mostly written between 430 and 330 BCE. The corpus is most likely made up of works by many different authors, though all are anonymous, so it would be nearly impossible to identify individual authors among the many treatises. There most likely did exist a man named Hippocrates, but it is impossible to determine which of the texts, if any, he authored. Hippocrates himself was born around 460 BCE, making him an approximate contemporary of Socrates. He was born in Cos and became a famous doctor during his lifetime, teaching medicine for a fee. The various treatises of the Hippocratic corpus were probably compiled during the third century BCE in Alexandria, where they became associated with the famous doctor, who at that point was long deceased and apparently had little direct influence upon the body of work which bears his name (Lloyd 5-11).

Interestingly, practically the only part of the human body not thought to include a hymen was the vagina: "the hymen is everywhere except in the virgin's genitals," (Sissa 112). Because the Greeks did not envision the existence of a physical barrier--the hymen, in the modern sense--sealing the genitals of virgins, marking the transition into sexual maturity as "a definite, recognizable wound" (Sissa 2), the transition from *parthenos* to wife was a symbolic one much more than a matter of loss of physical intactness. In contemporary Western culture, a girl remains a virgin until the hymen is broken in sexual intercourse. This explanation necessarily treats the issue in the most abbreviated sense, ignoring the issue of lesbianism where the loss of virginity may be associated with activities that do not compromise the hymen, as well as the fact that the hymen may be ruptured by activities that do not fall under the category of sexual intercourse and would not result in a loss of virginity by any contemporary standards.

Women's bodies were understood and conceptualized in a completely different way by the Hippocratic physicians, and indeed by Athenians in general. An Athenian woman's sexuality existed on a sort of sliding scale, with chastity at both extremes, and wife- and motherhood in the middle; "women's bodies were represented in terms of constant alternation between the closed and the open, void and plenitude," (Sissa 5). A virgin's body was considered closed, in the absence of sexual activity, and the expectation was that a woman's body would again become closed when her period of sexual activity and childbirth ceased. Marriage usually occurred for Athenian women around the age of 14 or 15, while men were typically married around the age of 30. Since a man's life expectancy was somewhere around 45 years, most women were widowed well before they reached menopause, with plenty of time to remarry and give birth to more children with a new husband—both of which were entirely acceptable in Athenian society (Pomeroy 27). Perhaps as a result of encouraging young virgins and widows of childbearing age

to marry or remarry, as well as the importance of providing legitimate heirs, the notion of an unmarried woman's (or girl's) body being closed appealed to the Athenian public, and indeed represented the feminine ideal.

The female body was envisioned by Hippocratic physicians as having a sort of path, or *hodos*, down the middle, connected to a mouth, or *stoma*, at either end. In fact, Hippocratic physicians wrote of the practice of testing a woman's fertility by placing strongly scented substances at the lower end of the *hodos* and smelling the woman's breath, at the upper end of the *hodos* in order to determine whether there was an obstruction preventing the free flow of the scent from one end of the reproductive tract to the other (King 31). This perception of female anatomy creates a sort of parallelism between the upper and lower halves of the body, which can be seen even in our modern terminology for aspects of the female anatomy, such as labia, meaning 'lips' and cervix, meaning 'neck' (King 28)<sup>4</sup>. Thus, a *parthenos* (or likewise an older woman abstaining from sexual intercourse) was seen not only as chaste and controlled in terms of her genital *stoma*, but also in terms of her mouth, in that she could be trusted to keep secrets. For example, the *pythiai* of Apollo were required at first to be *parthenoi*, and then later to be older women, past the age of childbirth who remained chaste while in service to the god. Mandatory chastity is relatively rare for female priesthoods in service to Greek cults, according to Joan Breton Connelly who argues that sexual abstinence was only expected of Athenian priestesses for a few days before entering the sanctuary, if it was expected of them at all (45). The *pythia*, however, had a duty to protect the details of the highly secretive rituals surrounding the oracle, and chastity as it related to the genitals was symbolic of a capability for the self-control it took to protect the secrets of Apollo. Even in the lives of the general public, "the

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<sup>4</sup> These terms entered English medical vocabulary in 1634 (Simpson & Weiner 8: 558) and 1741 (Simpson & Weiner 2: 1056), respectively.

female mouth was an object requiring explicit legislation. A married woman was supposed to speak only to her husband and through her husband," (Sissa 53-54). Likewise, a woman's fidelity was absolutely required of her, though a man was permitted to engage in sex with prostitutes and slaves even after marriage. Sissa elucidates this phenomenon further: "discretion in speech and privacy of conversation were the 'upper body' counterparts and guarantors of an absolute fidelity that began with the genitals" (54).

The lives of young girls and young boys in Athenian society would have been quite similar until about the age of six, when the free intermingling of boys and girls ceased, and boys were sent off to school while the girls remained at home with their mothers. At this point the official beginning of the split between the domestic (feminine) and public (masculine) spheres can be seen. Mothers taught their daughters household tasks, such as cooking and weaving, and the boys attended small private schools where they learned to read and write, and gymnasia where they engaged in athletics with their peers. Even at this young age the opportunities for boys to interact with other boys were much greater than the opportunities for same-sex interaction seen by girls. Boys continued attending school until about the age of fourteen, when most of their female counterparts were being prepared for marriage (Pomeroy 30). Of the famously literate women in the Greek tradition (poets such as Corinna and Sappho, and Perikles' courtesan Aspasia) none was Athenian. In fact, there is little to no evidence that Athenian girls received any education outside the home, though there does exist a small amount of pottery depicting Athenian women holding scrolls, which may suggest that some women of the upper classes may have been literate, though they were surely few and far between (Blundell, Women 132).

Besides the obvious restrictions to her sexuality, the status of a *parthenos* was not

drastically different from that of a married woman, as "women were the equivalent of legal minors," according to Roger Just (29). Women and girls of all ages were typically segregated within the home, and confined to women's quarters. Even small homes, with as few as two rooms, were divided with women and girls generally in interior or second floor rooms and men on the ground floor or exterior rooms, ensuring that nobody went in or out of the house without the knowledge of the *kyrios*. In the *Oeconomicus* 9.5 Xenophon describes the need for women's quarters (*gynaikonitis*) through the words of his narrator: εδειξα δε και την γυναικωνιτιν αυτη, θυρα βαλαντωτη ωρισμενην απο της ανδρωνιτιδος, ινα μητε εκφερηται ενδοθεν ο τι μη δει<sup>5</sup>. The girls and women of this household, as apparently in every Athenian household, were under the guardianship of the senior-most male. The Classical Athenian ideal, based on artistic depictions of an older age, where men were shown with dark, suntanned skin, and women with drastically paler skin, dictates that women should remain inside the home, or in the very least shaded from direct sunlight, while men were free to work and socialize outdoors. However, it appears that antiquated cultural ideals and Classical reality diverged as women's presence outside the home was increasingly accepted by the men in charge. Drama, prose and poetry all provide evidence as to the participation of women of all classes in chores and other activities that regularly took them out of the home. Perhaps the most prominent example is the task of fetching the family's daily water from the fountain house in the agora. Families wealthy enough to have slaves would typically send a female slave, while less well off families would often send a female member of the *oikos*, or household (Pomeroy 120), though according to Euripides, "it is not good for maidens to creep about in the crowd" (εσ οξλον ερπειν παρθενοισιν ου καλον, *Orestes* line 108). This was most likely related to the importance, mentioned

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<sup>5</sup> *Xen. Oec.* 9.5 "I showed her the women's quarters, separated from the men's quarters by a bolted door, so that nothing is removed from within which should not be."

previously, of maintaining the reputation of virginity, perhaps more than virginity itself. Regardless, it appears that in households not wealthy enough to own slaves, younger girls and more likely married women were often elected to run errands outside of the home, such as fetching water. Women from less wealthy families indeed seem to have had more opportunities to engage in activities, and even careers, outside of the home. Just tells of many examples from literature in which lower class women were identified as merchants, grocers, bakers and barmaids. He also notes that "the peasant farmer's wife appears to have occupied herself with domestic rather than agricultural tasks. Nevertheless, those tasks took her regularly outside the house," (108). Blundell adds that midwives, by the very nature of their occupation, would have been required to leave the house on quite a regular basis in order to assist with childbirth (Women 137).

Furthermore, in Athens proper, the wives and daughters of citizens also appear to have attended religious festivals, funerals and weddings. In *On the Murder of Eratosthenes*, Lysias argues that his wife first met her adulterer at the funeral of her mother-in-law<sup>6</sup> which suggests that it was not uncommon for women to attend funerals, though if the story of Lysias is any indicator of the general feelings of the times, women's appearance at these public events may have been viewed as somewhat of a risk. Furthermore, Ann Carson (160-164) describes the Athenian wedding ceremony (which will be covered in more detail later) with women participating in every step. In spite of the reality of life in Classical Athens, with women frequently venturing outside the seclusion of their *oikoi* in order to fulfill the needs of their families and the duties of religious and social activities, and even sometimes, as Just suggests,

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<sup>6</sup> επειδη δη μοι η μητηρ ετελευτησε, παντων των κακων αποθανουσα αιτια μοι γεγενηται. επ' εκφορον γαρ αυτη ακολουθησασα η εμη γυνη υπο τουτου του ανθρωπου οφθεισα, χρονω διαφθειρεται. (*Lysias* 1.7-1.8) "But when my mother died, her death became the cause of all my troubles. For attending her funeral, my wife was seen by this man, and in time she was ruined."

simply sneaking out to socialize with neighbors, women were still expected to maintain the ghostly pale complexion with which their female ancestors of generations past were depicted. Thus, Classical Athenian women wore pale makeup and often carried parasols with them when venturing out into the sun. Clearly, though "the conventions of Athenian female beauty related to an ideal of female seclusion" (Just 122), it also appears that the realities of life at the time did not allow for the ultimate seclusion that is suggested in art. Ultimately, however, the existence of this ideal of seclusion suggests that even though it may have been difficult, or even impossible for an Athenian woman, maiden or girl to spend her entire life indoors, she clearly was not able to move with complete freedom through the public sphere, for "a morality which required women to avoid familiarity with men and which posited the home as woman's proper place clearly meant that women were at least supposed to spend the better part of their time indoors" (Just 122).

## **Arktoi**

In the late 1940s CE, John Papadimitriou and his crew began to excavate the site of a considerable sanctuary at Brauron, near the eastern coast of the Attic peninsula. Over the subsequent decades they unearthed what they determined to be the Classical Sanctuary of Artemis *Brauronia*, built between the 6th and 5th centuries BCE and used in worship of Artemis in her role as patron of childbirth, marriage and the transition of girls into womanhood. Today Brauron is located about a quarter of a mile from the coast, but in antiquity the sea came right up to the natural promontory next to the site. Thus it is not surprising that Brauron was the home to a fishing community as early as 3500 BCE. This community was most prosperous in the Mycenaean era, between 2000 and 1600 BCE, but their prosperity began to fade and the population began to decline around 1300 BCE as Brauron's aristocratic citizens migrated to the

nearby cultural hub of Athens, and the less wealthy citizens followed them to the small villages surrounding the famous city. By the time Brauron became the home of the sanctuary of Artemis, it was no longer the home to any sort of permanent settlement and had not been for quite some time (Papadimitriou 111-112).

Artemis herself is a virgin goddess, associated with nature and the hunt as *potnia theron*, mistress of the beasts. Throughout the mythological tales of the Greeks, Artemis defends her virginity fervently. In one myth Actaeon, a hunter, accidentally stumbles upon the goddess bathing in the woods. The modest goddess punishes the man by turning him into a stag. He is then ripped to shreds by his own hunting dogs (Blundell, Women 31). Further, Artemis was often referred to with the epithet *Apanchomene* (“strangled”). Susan Guettel Cole, citing King, argues that “Strangled Artemis” does not refer to the image of strangulation by hanging that it is typically thought to invoke. Rather, Cole asserts, hearkening back to the Hippocratic notion of the *hodos*, that *Apanchomene* refers to a strangulation of the genital neck and *stoma* of the female body (Cole Domesticating 31-32). That is, Artemis *Apanchomene* is so named because the lower *stoma* of her *hodos* is permanently closed off, as she will never menstruate or engage in sexual intercourse or childbirth. Furthermore, Artemis is, strikingly, the only goddess ever represented in art as a child (Beaumont 84). It seems fitting, then, that the sanctuary built in the goddess' honor was home to a ritual which heralded young girls on the verge of menarche into the age of *parthenia*. However, perhaps paradoxically, the sanctuary was also the site of worship for Artemis in her incarnation as goddess of childbirth. Mothers often dedicated small items associated with femininity, such as jewelry, mirrors, weaving tools and other like items, small statues of children and baby animals, and even their own birthing sheets and clothing, to thank the goddess for protecting them through childbirth. Families of mothers who died in childbirth,

or mothers of babies who died also often dedicated their birthing clothes to the goddess (Papadimitriou 111-112). It is perhaps unexpected that a goddess who protects her virginity with such violent passion was associated with childbirth, the apparent antithesis of chastity. However, Blundell argues, quite eloquently, that the responsibilities of Artemis are actually uniform and even dependent on her virginity to a rather significant extent: "The stages in a woman's life which [Artemis] supervises--menstruation, loss of virginity on marriage, childbirth—all involve bleeding. Her task can thus be identified with that of the male, whose job it is to bring about bloodshed, whether in war, in hunting and sacrifice, or in their relationships with women" (Women 44-45). The goddess is in fact the twin of Apollo, which supports her identity as transgressor of the bounds of gender identity, the mostly-female half of an inextricably linked, sexually ambiguous dyad. It is this very association with the masculine nature of existence which necessitates her virginity. If the essence of womanhood is childbirth, then the antithesis of that--chastity--is consequently the essence of feminine-masculinity, of which Artemis is a prime example. Beyond the symbolic significance of Artemis' gender-bending identity, it makes sense on a much more basic level that the goddess, herself perpetually at a crossroads of feminine development, would preside over all boundaries that girls must cross on their way to becoming women. It makes quite a bit of practical sense that a maiden who sufficiently honored Artemis after crossing one boundary could look forward to enlisting the goddess' help and support as she neared the next. Indeed, "the little girls who took part in rituals like the *Arkteia* were protecting their own productive lives ahead" (Cole Domesticating 34).

In many ways, space is just as important as time in interpreting the significance of the rituals which took place at the sanctuary in Brauron. Artemis was frequently worshipped at the physical edges or borders of a polis. Brauron itself was easily accessible by sea, and was a sort of

stepping-off point to Delos and Ionia. This is important because of the symbolic relationship between geographical liminal zones and the temporal liminal zones of the female body (puberty, pregnancy, etc.). Equally as important, however, is the practical reality that girls and women in isolation at the fringes of the polis were quite vulnerable. However, “the risks of unprotected ritual were a necessary feature of the worship of Artemis” (Cole *Domesticating* 29). For the Greeks, sending unaccompanied maidens to the very edges of the polis was a way to test—and, in the ideal scenario, to affirm—territorial security, integrity and even superiority. A successful festival pleased the goddess, and, conversely, an unsuccessful festival angered her. Herodotus tells of the fate of the Lemnians who, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE stormed the sanctuary of Artemis during a festival and kidnapped Attic women and girls. The Lemnians returned home with the women and were said to have kept them as slaves and prostitutes. According to Herodotus (6.137-140), the Lemnians consequently suffered “blight on their crops, disease in their herds, and decline in their birthrate” brought against them by an angry Artemis.

The sanctuary of Brauron finds its etiology in the myths of Iphigenia and her brother Orestes. In Euripides’ *Iphigeneia at Tauris*, Orestes, son of Agamemnon, travels to Scythian Tauris, north of Asia Minor, in order to steal a wooden statue of the goddess Artemis, who was widely worshiped in Scythia. Before he is able to complete this task, he is captured by the Scythians and brought to the temple of Artemis. As he enters the temple, he recognizes his sister, Iphigenia, as the chief priestess. The two attempt to escape together, but they are discovered by the Scythians and ultimately Athena intervenes to return the siblings safely to their home. However, in return for this act of kindness, Athena asks that the Greeks worship two personifications of Artemis, known later as Artemis Tauropolis and Artemis Brauronia (cited in Papadimitriou 111). It appears that Euripides’ audience at the time would have associated this

story with the shrine of Artemis Tauropolos at Halae Araphinides, 23 miles east of Athens, and the sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia four miles south of that.

The myth of Iphigenia's sacrifice, or perhaps more accurately, the lack thereof, provides further evidence of the mythological origins of the cult at Brauron. Agamemnon planned to sacrifice his daughter in order to attract the favor of the gods in the Trojan war, but--according to some traditions—Artemis whisked the maiden away moments before her inevitable death, and replaced her body with that of a deer. An alternate tradition developed later in Attica, in which the sacrifice took place in Brauron rather than the home of Agamemnon and his family, and Artemis replaced Iphigenia's body not with a deer, but with a bear. Both animals were sacred to Artemis, but the bear had great significance at Brauron (Papadimitriou 112).

The coming of age ritual to ease the transition between girlhood and *parthenia* was known as the *arkteia*. In the ritual, the girls—pinpointed at about 10 years of age by Christine Sourvinou-Inwood in 1971, T.C.W Stinton in 1976 and Michael Walbank in 1981, but placed somewhere between the ages of 5 and 10 by Connelly in 2007—dressed in saffron robes and played the bear for Artemis. The symbolic significance of this action, and the other components of the ritual, will be discussed further, but it is important here to mention the mythological etiology of this rite. Artemis was identified earlier as a protector of animals, and a legend states that a bear of which the goddess was quite fond scratched a young girl. The girl complained to her brother, who then rallied his youthful friends to slaughter the bear. Artemis, in her furious anger, sent a plague upon the people, which, according to the Delphic Oracle, would only be stopped if young Athenian girls “played the bear” for the goddess every five years at the festival of Artemis Brauronia (Connelly 31-33; Blundell, Women 30 and Papadimitriou 116).

The site itself includes what Papadimitriou and others have determined to be a bridge,

stables, a portico, a colonnade, and a *stoa* with a long hall along the west side made up of smaller rooms containing what were probably couches or beds. Papadimitriou believed that the latter were bedrooms for the young girls (who were referred to as *arktoi*, in reference to the ritual). He thus surmises that references to a *parthenon* in inscriptions at Brauron should be interpreted as referring to the *stoa*, as a sort of chamber or hall which housed the *parthenoi*. This is debatable given the age of the *arktoi*, who would have been pre-pubescent and not yet physically mature enough to be considered ready for marriage, and thus *parthenoi*. Rather, it seems likely that the *stoa*, or *parthenon* at Brauron, much like the Parthenon in Athens, was named not for its mortal inhabitants or visitors, but for the goddess to whom it was dedicated. Of course, there is also the possibility (which Papadimitriou flatly rejects) that the *parthenon* mentioned in the inscriptions at Brauron is the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens. This may make sense, because the *parthenon* mentioned in Brauronian inscription was described as the storage location for the dedications and offerings made in honor of Artemis, and it appears from later treasury lists that the Athenian Parthenon served as storage for many items from various Delian League poleis during the peak of Perikles' reign (Stevenson 46). However, later discovery of an Athenian decree discussing repairs necessary at Brauron sometime between 400 and 300 BCE lists a *parthenon* as one of the buildings present at the sanctuary in Brauron at that time (Papadimitriou 120).

In terms of the ritual itself, it appears that the girls who participated were all daughters of Athenian citizens and they were typically from aristocratic or wealthy families. Girls were selected from each Athenian tribe and placed under the care of Artemis, as well as a priestess of Artemis who lived on the premises of the sanctuary. The girls were all pre-menstrual and pubescent or pre-pubescent (Connelly 32-33). Sue Blundell refers to the process as “a ritual of

segregation” as the girls are taken away from their natal homes in order to prepare them for their impending marriage when they would be transported from the homes in which they grew up to the homes of their new husbands, an event which would have undoubtedly been very traumatic (Women 134). Blundell further postulates that these *arktoi* “in the pre-menstrual phase may have been acting out a period of non-human existence preceding their socialisation as fully adult wives and mothers” (Women 134). The Greek perception of children--especially little girls--as wild and animalistic has already been mentioned above, and this conceptualization of the rite serves to highlight this even more. It is important to mention here the distinction between initiation rites and rites of passage. Initiation is selective and exclusive, and sets initiates apart from the outside world ("non-initiates"), whereas rites of passage are necessary steps in moving from one stage of life to another. Rites of passage are present in all societies and include everyone, while initiation rites are not a necessary part of a society, and are therefore not universally present. Greek society seems to have been heavier on initiation rites, and remarkably light on rites of passage. That is, besides the most basic rites associated with birth, marriage and death, the vast majority of rites in ancient Greece (specifically, though not exclusively, Athens) were rites of initiation, which were only accessible to citizens and often required some measure of wealth. This, of course, includes the festivals at Brauron, which initiated girls into *parthenia*, the public loss of which automatically negated citizenship (Hamilton 459).

Fragments of pottery (called *krateriskoi*), discovered at the site and published in 1963 and 1965 by Lilly Kahil, show the girls who completed the rite of the *arkteia* at the festival of the *Brauronia* participating in athletic events, such as foot races. Girls of various ages in the range laid out by the aforementioned scholars are depicted in these representations, and some of the older girls are depicted in the nude. Blundell suggests that this may be evidence of a ceremony or

rite performed shortly before the end of a girl's stay at the sanctuary, when she is ready to complete her transformation into a *parthenos*, ready and eligible for marriage. Attic brides typically wore saffron colored gowns,<sup>7</sup> thus, “the shedding of the bears' yellow gowns symbolised the approaching bridal night and the imminent transition to womanhood” (Blundell, *Women* 133). These fragments are in fact the only surviving depictions on Athenian pottery of real-life (that is, mortal and non-mythical) girls or women engaging in running contests. Boys were expected engage in such athletics at festivals and in gymnasia as early as age six, but girls were uniformly prohibited from these events (Blundell, *Women* 132-134). The sanctuary of Artemis *Brauronia*, it may then be surmised, was perhaps the only place in Attica where young girls were encouraged and allowed to participate in public athletic activity. Furthermore, this period at the symbolic end of childhood was likewise the last time in a girl's life when she was allowed to play freely in the lighthearted manner of a child. In the following years she was expected to adopt the meek and dedicated demeanor of a *parthenos*, and shortly thereafter a wife and mother.

Richard Hamilton argues that the images visible on the extant fragments can be studied to help shed more light upon the ritual of the *arkteia*. According to his interpretation of the data gleaned from images on the *krateriskoi*, in which he compares those images to the writings of Alkman and others about the *Partheneion*,<sup>8</sup> Hamilton concludes that “women and girls tended in their rituals to process to altars, to race, and to perform chorally, probably in that order” (Hamilton 470-471). A few things can be said for certain about the *Arkteia*, assuming that the *krateriskoi* accurately depict the events which took place at the festival. First, running is the most

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<sup>7</sup> The precise coloring of the bridal gown is somewhat unclear, with Oakley and Sinos (11-12) describing them as reddish or even purple, and Blundell (132) suggesting a truer yellow hue.

<sup>8</sup> Alkman was, of course, writing about the festivals and traditions of Spartan maidens, and the *Partheneion* was a Lacedaemonian festival. Thus, any comparison with Attic traditions should be made with caution.

common activity engaged in by the figures depicted on the surviving *krateriskoi*. This was likely an activity that took place at the sanctuary, most likely during the festival. The running girls on the vase are all depicted either in the nude, or dressed in gowns that extend to either the hip or thigh, but which are never full length. This makes sense, because a long dress would have inhibited the long strides necessary to run in a comfortable way. Also, all figures on the surviving *krateriskoi* fragments are female, with the possible exception of one figure which may be male, as well as a bear whose gender is indeterminable. Though almost all of the figures are uniformly feminine, their ages are far less uniform. The figures on the fragments vary in size, which suggests differences in ages ranging from quite young (placed at five years old by most interpretations) to fully adult. The adult figures are fewer, and they are most likely priestesses who presided over the events. Perhaps less definite, but still worth considering is the assertion that the events depicted on the *krateriskoi* occurred at night. Some figures on the fragments carry torches, which may suggest that the festival depicted was a nocturnal one, or perhaps that it lasted through the daylight hours and stretched into night (Hamilton 470-471). If these few things are certain, or perhaps even likely, many more aspects of the festivities are highly dubious. For example, many uncertainties exist surrounding the frequency with which the festival was celebrated, as well as the level of secrecy that surrounded the included events. In the scholion to *Lysistrata*, it is unclear whether all girls (παρθενον πασαν) or only selected girls (επιλεγομεναι παρθενοι) participated in the rites at Brauron. In *Lysistrata* 641-647, Aristophanes further refers to the *arktoi* wearing τον κροκωτον,<sup>9</sup> suggesting that the girls who participated in the rites sported saffron colored gowns, but none of the garments depicted on

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<sup>9</sup> Christine Sourvinou-Inwood (339-340) argues that the phrase κατ' εχουσα paired with τον κροκωτον actually refers to the girls letting the saffron colored dresses fall, rather than simply wearing in them, but either way the passage states that the gowns themselves were κροκωτον, "saffron colored"

*krateriskoi* show any color other than white. Much of the confusion can be cleared up by distinguishing between a public, penteteric festival, hereafter referred to as the Brauronia, and an annual, private ritual known as the Arkteia. Hamilton, in support of this argument, posits that the activities appearing on *krateriskoi* depict components of the Arkteia. This is the more likely designation for these, as they were originally dedicated by the girls and women who have participated in the rites, and would thus have had a more intimate knowledge of the secretive events of the ritual. However, the details mentioned in *Lysistrata*, for example, are more likely to be associated with the Brauronia, as Aristophanes, having never been present to witness the mysterious rites of the Arkteia, would have known nothing of them firsthand. Thus, activities such as running in races, processing to an altar, and singing or dancing (all of which appear on *krateriskoi*, as was previously established) took place in private at the Arkteia, while the donning of saffron robes and exclusiveness (in terms of those invited to participate) were more likely characteristic of the Brauronia. Of course, there is no way to know for sure that there did not exist fragments of *krateriskoi* depicting girls in saffron robes which have been lost over time. Moreover, though athletic competition is not mentioned in *Lysistrata*, this does not prove beyond a doubt that it was not present at the Brauronia. Likewise, it seems quite probable from the evidence that we have, that girls "played the bear" at both the public and private festival, as it is mentioned in the oft referenced passage in *Lysistrata* (641-647), and it quite possibly comprised the choral portion of the events at Arkteia mentioned by Hamilton and depicted on *krateriskoi*. In short, we know very little about the realities of ritual at the Sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron, but the evidence supports the existence of two distinct versions of the festival, and one must differentiate between the two in order to effectively understand the significance of each. According to Cole, who explains the distinction quite succinctly, "the little girls who took part in

rituals like the Arkteia were protecting their own productive lives ahead, but the little girls who took part in the arkteia of the Athenian penteteric (quadrennial) Brauronia, a select few chosen from the best families, were representing the young female community of the entire city" (Domesticating 40).

## **Panathenaia**

Ancient Greek religion was rich not only in deities and myth, but also in festival days. Roughly one third of the calendar year was devoted to religious and cult festivals, and thus it appears that festivals were among the most important features of classical Greek religion (Neils 13). The Panathenaia was a festival honoring the history of Athens, as well as its patron deity Athena. The festival was celebrated in the month of Hekatombaion, which roughly approximates our month of July. The exact date of the celebration is unclear, though two sources from ancient commentaries place the festival three days from the end of the month. Following this statement, the Panathenaia would have begun on the 28th of Hekatombaion, which was believed to be Athena's birthday. Neils, however, acknowledges that this placement of the festival at the end of the month may be doubtful, because the birthdays of all of the other Olympian deities were celebrated within the first ten days of the month in which they fell, so it appears rather more likely that Athena's birthday fell three days from the beginning of the month instead of three days from the end of the month. Likewise, a scholiast to Euripides describes the festival as lasting for three to four days. The exact duration, however, remains unknown, and recent examination of the Athenian calendar suggests that the *Ekklesia* and *Boule* suspended their sessions during the last eight days of the month of Hekatombaion. This, of course, suggests that the celebration of the Panathenaia may have actually lasted for up to eight days or more. A festival this long is not unheard of in Athens, however, as the celebration of the city Dionysia

lasted over a week (Neils 15).

Based on this notion of an eight day long Panathenaia, and referring to evidence from inscriptions, Jenifer Neils has reconstructed a likely schedule of a typical Panathenaic celebration. Day one of the festival consisted of Musical contests, first introduced by Perikles in the fifth century BCE, and Rhapsodic contests, introduced by the tyrant Peisistratos' son Hipparchos in the late fourth century, in which passages from Homeric poetry were memorized and recited. On the second day, boys and *epebes* participated in athletic contests, with adult males competing in athletics on the following day. Activities of the fourth day consisted of equestrian contests, and the fifth day was for tribal contests. The *pannychis*, a celebration which lasted throughout the night culminating in a torch race occurred on the sixth day, as well as the grand procession, which itself culminated in a sacrifice. Chariot races known as the *apobates*, as well as a boat race took place on the seventh day. The final day was likely reserved for awarding of prizes, feasting and general celebration (Neils 15).

Here it is necessary to look at a few of these events a little more closely. The Panathenaia, after all, saw various changes throughout the centuries, and in fact can be separated into two distinct phases. Certain Athenian foundation myths<sup>10</sup> attribute the founding of the annual Panathenaic festival to their local hero Theseus, while others<sup>11</sup> credit Erechtheus or Erichthonios. These mythological explanations of the origin of the Panathenaia suggest that it likely existed in some simple incarnation as far back as the Athenian consciousness stretched when these texts were being written in the late centuries BCE and early Common Era. However, the second major phase of the Panathenaia began in 566 BCE. A scholiast to Aelius Aristides (cited in Neils 20-21) credits the tyrant Peisistratos with establishing the later incarnation of the Panathenaia, however

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<sup>10</sup> Plutarch's *Life of Theseus* (24.3-4) for example, as cited in Neils 20-22

<sup>11</sup> Apollodoros, *Hellanicus* and Androtion, as cited in Neils 20-22

he did not come to power in Athens until 561/60 BCE, so this version of events is somewhat dubious. At any rate, the historical founder of the festival was not as important to Athenians as its mythical founder, and even more important yet was Athena, the patron deity to whom the events of the festival were dedicated.

The goddess Athena is inextricably linked with the polis of Athens, as is attested by the similarity in the two names. Whether the city was named for the goddess or the goddess for the city is a matter of great mystery, as well as great dispute. Walter Burkert suggests a possible explanation, based on typical uses of the suffix *-ene*,<sup>12</sup> that Athena was named for the polis, her name perhaps originating as *Pallas Athenaie* (Pallas<sup>13</sup> of Athens) and later being shortened or adapted to merely Athena. Athena, in spite of her somewhat dubious origins, strongly held her place as the patron deity of Athens. In addition to this association with the polis, which in itself could explain the importance of the festival of the Panathenaia as a celebration of the divine protector of Athens, Athena was also associated with practically every form of livelihood with which Athenians, both male and female, were involved. In the masculine realm, the goddess was patron of warfare and intellectual pursuits, while in the feminine realm she was strongly associated with crafts, such as weaving. In addition, she was generally viewed as goddess of arts and crafts, which could encompass aspects of the activities of both sexes (Burkert 139). Thus, given Athena's connection to not only the political and military aspects of the polis, but also the livelihood of every resident of Athens—men and women, citizen and slave alike—it is quite evident why the festival of the Panathenaia was such a widespread phenomenon, celebrated with such pomp by every demographic in Athens.

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<sup>12</sup> Seen in place names Mykene, Pallene, Troizen(e), Messene, Cyrene as well as Hera's epithet *Hera Argeie*, "Hera of Argos" (Burkert 139).

<sup>13</sup> The origin of the epithet Pallas is likewise obscure (Burkert 139).

In spite of its apparent longstanding history in Athens, certain elements of the festival appear to be later additions, reflecting political developments of the polis as well as other events taking place throughout the Mediterranean. For instance, the Kleisthenic reforms of 510 BCE brought the institution of tribal politics within the Attic political sphere. The Athenian citizenry was divided into ten tribes, determined by their geography rather than by their wealth. Not surprisingly, this political change was the catalyst for the inclusion of tribal contests within the Panathenaia (Neils 21-22). Additionally, given the distinction between the early incarnation of the Panathenaia, and the later version, Neils addresses the differing influences which likely dictated what the Athenians chose to include in the festivities. For example, she argues that the equestrian contests were a feature of the simpler version of the festivities that pre-dated Peisistratos and the later incarnation of the festival. She notes the differences between these equestrian activities, which focused on the wealthy aristocratic class and required participants to be financially capable of buying expensive equipment and maintaining a horse, and the more democratic athletic competitions which were a feature of the festival in the mid-sixth century and onward. These later athletic competitions were considered more democratic because participants did not need any expensive equipment in order to be eligible. In fact, the new events of the Panathenaia followed a similar trend as the restructuring of the military which was occurring at roughly the same time, transitioning from individual chariot warfare such as is seen in Homeric epic, which required much of the same gear needed for the equestrian activities of the Panathenaia, to phalanx warfare for which soldiers needed minimal equipment. Because of these changes, more men could afford to be soldiers and thus become enfranchised in Athenian society, and perhaps the new athletic competitions were a direct result of this, allowing men with more meager financial means to participate in the city's religious festivities (Neils 21-22).

Administration of the festival fell to a committee of citizen men, chosen from each of the ten tribes. This committee was known as the *athlothetai*. These men served a term of four years, planning and overseeing the annual festival. Another committee of citizens, known as the *hieropoioi* presided over the sacrifices offered at Athenian festivals, though certain sources specifically exclude the administration of the Panathenaia from their responsibilities. Nevertheless, the administration of the festival was overseen entirely by citizen males. Likewise, inscriptions and victory records from Athens show that most athletic competitors in the Panathenaic games were young men from aristocratic families, although there is evidence that elderly men, metics, freed slaves, children, and even maidens participated in certain aspects of the festival (Neils 22). The following sections will examine the roles in the Panathenaia which were filled by *parthenoi*. It should be kept in mind, throughout the following discussion, that these maidens were all idealized to some extent, based on their sexual purity and beauty, though the ultimate goal of their participation in the rituals of the festival, in spite of a tendency toward aligning them with heroines and goddesses from myth, was primarily to expose the maidens to the public eye, and thus perhaps to attract suitors ultimately to transition them into the realm of wife- and motherhood.

### *Arrhephoroi*

The Arrhephoria was another initiatory ritual in which Athenian maidens participated throughout the Classical era. However, the Arrhephoria appears to have been much more selective than rituals such as the Brauronia, as significantly fewer girls participated in the actual ceremony. Each year two maidens served as *arrhephoroi* in a nocturnal rite which included the carrying of secret objects on their heads in a procession on the Acropolis. Walter Burkert first proposed that the ritual was based in the myth of the daughters of Kekrops, also known as the *kekropidai*, and

that remains the dominant theory today (cited in Shapiro 41). These mythological maidens serve a pivotal role in the charter myths of the city of Athens and occupy a place of honor between the famous early snake-kings of Athens. Kekrops himself was the mythological first king of Athens, a man from the waist up, with the rest of his body consisting of a long snaky tail. This representation of the king as half-snake reflects the Athenians' claim to autochthony—that is, the claim that their ancestry came from the very land on which they lived—as snakes have an obvious tie to the earth, being able to slither in and out of it at will. Furthermore, Kekrops' parentage is unnamed, and thus his ties are solely to Athens, as he is the ultimate beginning of his line (Shapiro 40). According to myth, Kekrops ruled Athens in its very infancy, even judging the famous contest between Athena and Poseidon to decide the patron of the city. Kekrops had four children: three daughters (Herse, Pandrosos, and Aglauros) and one son (Erysichthon). Relatively little information is provided as to the life of Erysichthon, as he does not end up succeeding his father to the throne. Instead, Erechtheus, another snake-man, becomes the second king of Athens.

The story of Erechtheus (known in some sources as Erichthonius when he was a baby) is equally complex and compelling. His name appears as early as the ninth century BCE in Homeric epic (Mikalson 141)<sup>14</sup> but it was not until the fifth—or even, according to some sources, the fourth—century BCE that the story was fully realized. In the final version, Athena is pursued by an amorous Hephaestus until he finally ejaculates on her leg in his state of excitement. The maiden goddess wipes off her leg with a piece of wool, and casts the soiled fabric upon the earth in disgust. Within moments, baby Erechtheus springs from the earth. This story is a very clever maneuver by the pious Athenians, who were able to associate their second great king with their

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<sup>14</sup> Αθηνας...δημον Ερεχθηος μεγαλητορος (Il. 2.546-7)

patroness without defiling her sexual purity. Noel Robertson, in fact, goes so far as to speculate as to the political realities which inspired this late addition to the myth of the origins of Athens. Robertson argues that Hephaestus himself entered the Athenian religious sensibility relatively late, pinpointing the date to about 450 BCE when the Athenians conquered Lemnos. Hephaestus, a native god of the Lemnians (alternately known as the Pelasgians or the Sintians) entered the Athenian religious consciousness as a sort of enemy of the state. This may symbolically explain his actions in the story of the birth of Erechtheus—his entrance into religious sensibility of Athens may have been unwelcome (hence the attempted rape of Athena), but he was ultimately whipped into shape in one sense or another and became revered by the Athenians for his connection to the trade of metal work, which was important to the economy of Athens (“Riddle” 288).

With or without the presence of Hephaestus, the story of the snake-baby Erechtheus provides the mythical origin for the actions of the *arrhephoroi*. The maidens themselves served as a symbolic representation of the daughters of Kekrops, charged by Athena to care for the baby. Athena brought the baby to the maidens concealed within a basket, and instructed them to avoid looking in the vessel at all costs. As one would expect, the sisters disobeyed the goddess almost immediately, and were driven mad by the sight of the snaky baby inside. In their madness, they jumped off the Acropolis to their death. Though their role as *kourotrophoi* (caretakers) was brief, it was essential for establishing a place for Erechtheus within their household, and thus providing his claim to the throne (Shapiro 40).

At this point it is important to acknowledge the existence of quite a bit of variation on the basic story, depending upon which source is telling it. For example, though the most standard version of the story has all three of the sisters jumping to their death, in the fourth century BCE

an alternate version arose in which Aglauros willingly sacrificed herself for the city. Shapiro notes that this “sounds like a belated attempt to make at least one of these heroines conform to a pattern of voluntary maiden sacrifice” (40). Maiden sacrifice is crucial to cult activity in Attica, as we have seen already in the discussion of Iphigeneia’s importance to the cult activity at Brauron. However, it seems that the story of the *kekropidai* may conform to this pattern even without the later insertion of the sacrifice of Aglauros. Shapiro argues that the Athenians may have actually viewed ritual suicide as a form of self-sacrifice,<sup>15</sup> and Jennifer Larson describes the “mythic pattern of self-sacrifice” in which the death of a *parthenos* or a group of maiden sisters is required to save a city, though this pattern seems to be confined to Attica and Boiotia. According to Larson, the myth of the sacrifice of maiden sisters is used to demonstrate to both males and females the sacrifice that will be expected of them for the good of the polis. Thus, as Iphigeneia served as a model for women who may have died in childbirth, the *kekropidai* served as a model for young men who may have died in battle (Larson 41). Most Greek heroines<sup>16</sup> are connected to male heroes in some way, often based on familial relationships, such as a mother or wife.<sup>17</sup> There are, of course, many heroine cults based on the stories of brides of death (maidens who died before they had a chance to marry). These heroines were typically worshiped alone, because they did not live long enough to marry or give birth to children. The *kekropidai* fall into this category, because, even though they are connected to both Kekrops and Erechtheus, both of these male figures had their own cults nearby. This was common of the cults of virgin daughters throughout Greece.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Sophocles’ version of the myth of Ajax (Shapiro 41).

<sup>16</sup> The term “heroine” is used in the sense of a female cult hero, rather than the sense of the female protagonist of drama or literature.

<sup>17</sup> Ex: Helen and Menelaos at Sparta; Pelops and Hippodameia at Olympia.

Though the story differs from one teller to another, the standard version involves the three sisters as a cohesive entity receiving the baby from Athena. At this point the various sources diverge. In some versions only one of the maidens looks in the basket and the other two remain faithful to the goddess. If this was the version of the myth subscribed to by the Athenians at large<sup>18</sup> then the two *arrhephoroi* likely represent the two faithful sisters, and thus symbolize a reconstruction of what the story would have looked like if the good sisters had been able to follow Athena's orders properly. However, in Pausanias' brief reference to the myth, he states that Pandrosos was the only one of the sisters to remain faithful to Athena's orders.<sup>19</sup> In this case, the two *arrhephoroi* likely represent Herse and Aglauros, the two errant sisters. This makes just as much sense in terms of the ritual, as Pandrosos, the good sister in this version, has already completed her duty to Athena, and can thus be worshiped separately, while the duties of the bad sisters must be corrected and reenacted each year to right the wrong done by their transgression.

Both of these explanations seem plausible in light of the differing versions of the myth ascribed to different sources, and, because both sources referenced here are relatively late, it is difficult to pinpoint which version—if either—is more accurate, based solely in literature. For this reason, it is necessary to explore, briefly, two of the depictions of this story that appear in Attic vase painting during the mid-fifth century BCE. In a column *krater* attributed to the Orchard Painter (Shapiro 43-44, fig. 11) Athena is depicted (identifiable because of her ornate helmet and *aegis*) reprimanding two of the sisters, who stand to the left of the goddess on the face of the *krater*, each holding what Shapiro refers to as a “tendrill”. A third sister stands to the right of the goddess with her arms tucked modestly inside of her mantle. The second depiction is on a *rhyton* modeled by Sotades (Shapiro 45, figs. 14-18). In this depiction, Kekrops stands in

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<sup>18</sup> Which it may or may not have been, as the main source quoted in this case is Ovid, who was writing quite late.

<sup>19</sup> και εστι Πανδροσος ες την παρα καταθηκεν αναιτιος των αδελφων μονη (Paus.1.27.3).

the middle of the scene, about to receive wine from Nike. Two of his daughters run into the scene from the right, and a third daughter (along with his son, Erysichthon, seated) stands serenely, with one arm under her mantle. None of the figures are explicitly labeled in either of these vases, but Shapiro labels the modest, good sister in both as Pandrosos (Shapiro 43-45). Though it is unclear exactly which of the three daughters of Kekrops are represented by the *arrhephoroi*—or if the *arrhephoroi* even represented the daughters of Kekrops individually as opposed to representing them as a symbolic unit—the standard interpretation remains, based on the assertions of Burkert and many other scholars, that the *arrhephoroi* represented the *kekropidai* in their ritual procession (Burkert 139-141).

The term *arrhephoroi* is troublesome in itself. It appears in Athenian oratory most commonly in the form ἀρρηφοροι, though it appears in many inscriptions as ερρηφορησασαν or ερρηφορον. The scholia for *Lysistrata* include variations on both spellings, as well as suggesting the alternate term ερσεφορια, related either to Herse, or dew itself (ερση in Greek), while the scholiast Lucian uses the otherwise unknown term ἀρρητοφορια (cited in Robertson “Riddle” 243). All of these variations and possibilities may boggle the mind, and indeed scholars have been muddling through the mess of possible etymologies for decades. This ritual is essentially unheard of anywhere else in the ancient Mediterranean or Near East (and indeed probably anywhere else), so any hypotheses on the origins of the terms associated with the ritual must be based primarily on the etymological derivation of the word itself, and not on any pre-existing rituals upon which the ceremony in question may have been based. Typically, scholars disagree on the derivation of the term *arrhephoroi* though the arguments are limited to

two main possibilities. The suffix -φορος refers to the carrying of an object<sup>20</sup>, and thus αρρηφορια is either the carrying of αρρητα (secret objects) or ερση (dew). However, though Robertson himself even asserts that “etymology is an Aladdin’s lamp that conjures up a creature serviceable to its master but fearful and repellent to everyone else” (“Riddle” 245) he attempts to put forth a third argument. According to Robertson, the suffix -φορος refers not merely to the carrying of an object, but to the carrying of a *visible* object.<sup>21</sup> Thus, he claims that the term *arrhephoros* must be derived not from the items in the basket, which were not visible during the procession, but from the basket itself. Though there are various terms related to wicker upon which Robertson bases his argument<sup>22</sup> there does not seem to be any epigraphic or etymological evidence supporting his assertion. Indeed, Robertson himself references quotes in which the baskets are referred to not with any of the terms he suggests may have been used, but with the common term κισται (Robertson “Riddle” 245). The connection of the term *arrhephoroi* to dew seems just as unlikely as Robertson’s wicker theory. Indeed, it seems most likely that the term *arrhephoroi* is derived from a term meaning “bearers of secret things” not only because the word αρρητα takes the least manipulation to become αρρηφοροι, but also because it is most directly connected to the mythological tale upon which the ritual is based.

With the derivation of *arrhephoroi* as well determined as it may ever be, the next step is to establish what these secret objects were that the maidens carried. This information is not explicitly spelled out in the majority of ancient sources, as the significance of the ritual resides in the mystery of the objects. Over the years many scholars have developed their own hypotheses of what the girls carried in the baskets, which include honey cakes, phallic objects, pine boughs, a

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<sup>20</sup>For example, δαφνηφορος (bearer of laurel), ανθεςφορος (bearer of flowers), στεμματοφορος (bearer of garlands), and so on (Robertson 245).

<sup>21</sup> See fn. 20, all of which refer to the carrying of objects visible during the ritual.

<sup>22</sup> αρριχος, αρριχτις, αρσιχος (Robertson 245).

large stone, live snakes, human babies, and figurines of both of the latter. Robertson (perhaps rightly) supports the theory that the *arrhephoroi* carried food products (cakes, whether phallic or snake shaped) in their baskets, probably for the purpose of feeding the Acropolis snake. He bases this argument in the existence of other rituals, such as the monthly ritual of feeding the Acropolis snake, a task assigned to young Athenian lads, as well as the festival of Juno at Lanuvium, where a city-protecting goddess was honored by a procession in which maidens fed barley cakes to the goddess's sacred snake once a year (Robertson "Riddle" 245). The festival of Juno, and the *arrhephoria* (if the snake-feeding theory is correct) are both connected not only to honoring the patroness of the city, but also, in so doing, to ensuring a good harvest for the year by appeasing not only the goddess, but her snake as well. With respect to the *arrhephoria*, it seems that—if Robertson's theory is correct—this would also reinforce the role of the *arrhephoroi* as players in a symbolic reenactment of the lives of the *kekropidai*, who were charged with caring for the second snake-king of Athens as a baby. According to Pausanias, after arriving with the first burden at their destination (which will be defined later), the *arrhephoroi* left the items that they carried below, and received another mysterious bundle, which they brought back up to the Acropolis<sup>23</sup>. Robertson argues that this second burden was a stone swaddled like a baby. However, he also refers to other (unnamed) scholars who put forth the theory that this item was actually a human baby, and others who suggest that it may have been one or more live snakes (Robertson "Riddle" 257). All of these theories seem plausible not only in terms of the ritual as we know it, but in terms of the myth upon which it is based.

Many scholars<sup>24</sup> identify the *arrhephoroi* as being between the ages of 7 and 11 years old. Robertson, however, also suggests that it was the maidens' ritual duty to mimic the act of nursing

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<sup>23</sup> κατω μεν δη τα φερομενα λειπουσιν, λαβουσαι δε αλλο τι κομιζουσιν εγκεκαλυμμενον (Paus.1.27.3).

<sup>24</sup> Kearns, Larson, Robertson, and Shapiro.

the swaddled stone, which he believes they carried up to the Parthenon in the second part of the procession. This symbolically represented Athena's nursing of baby Erechtheus after the death of the *kekropidai*. This may well have been a part of the ritual, as it would be yet another example of the maidens symbolically accomplishing the duties that the *kekropidai* were unable to accomplish because of their inability to follow the orders of the goddess. However, if the girls were as young as these scholars claim, it would seem quite out of place for them to simulate nursing the stone. If this was truly part of the ritual at any point, the girls would likely not have been younger than 11 years old, to maintain a semblance of realism. And even if this symbolic act was not part of the ritual, Pausanias refers to the *arrhephoroi* as *parthenoi* several times within his short passage on the ritual (Paus. 1.27.3-5), and *parthenoi* have been established in previous sections to be post- or peri-pubescent young women from the point of physical maturity until marriage. Thus, based on this evidence it is likely that the maidens chosen to be *arrhephoroi* were between the ages of 11 and 14, though they were more likely to be at the younger end of this range. It is interesting, then, that the majority of scholars seem satisfied to place the ages of the girls between seven and 11 years old, which would without a doubt be before the onset of puberty and the beginnings of physical maturity. This placement of the ages of the *arrhephoroi* is most likely based on the passage from the *Lysistrata* (641-647) which is also often used to identify the age range of the *arktoi*. The passage seems to specifically state that girls become *arrhephoroi* at seven years old<sup>25</sup>. However, Walbank (278) criticizes what has become the standard interpretation of these lines, suggesting that the reference to *ἡρρηφορῶν* in line 641 does not in fact refer to the *arrhephoroi* of Athena (bearers of secret items) but in fact refers more likely to the dew-bearers (*ερσεφοροι*) of Eileithyia, identified with Artemis in

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<sup>25</sup> *επτα μὲν ἐτὴ γέγονε* εὐθὺς ἡρρηφορῶν (Aristophanes 641-642).

Boiotia, and thus of Artemis herself at Brauron. Walbank argues that there is no evidence to eliminate the possibility that *hersephoroi* served Artemis at Brauron, "particularly if it be borne in mind that these are seven-year-old girls, not maidens on the threshold of marriage, as most of these others [...] seem to be" (Walbank 278). Drawing support from the scholia of the *Lysistrata*, Walbank indeed goes on to argue, that the title of *Archegetis*, most often seen referring to Athena as patroness of Athens may, in line 642, in fact refer to Artemis, as she herself is the patroness of Brauron.<sup>26</sup>

The procession itself is yet another matter of contention among scholars. Pausanias states that the *arrhephoroi* walked from the *Pandrosion* (which was apparently attached to the temple of Athena Polias) down to a point not far from the site of a temple to Aphrodite<sup>27</sup>. It seems that as a result of this passage, many scholars throughout the years have mistakenly assumed that the ritual of the Arrhephoria is somehow connected to Aphrodite. Edward Kadletz, however, argues that the mere fact that Pausanias mentions the temple of Aphrodite does not in itself suggest that the goddess was somehow incorporated into the ritual. Aphrodite, after all, is not mentioned in the myth of the *kekropidai*, nor does it suggest any aspect of Aphrodite's domain. Rather, Pausanias seems merely to be providing a reference point to aid in his description of the path of the procession. Besides the relevance of the temple of Aphrodite in Pausanias' description, the specific temple of Aphrodite to which he refers is the subject of disagreement among scholars. Many scholars, in interpreting Pausanias' lines describing the procession have assumed that the temple in question is the temple of Aphrodite in Ilissus, quite some distance from the starting point of the procession. However, Kadletz and others maintain that the temple in question was in fact a different, smaller temple of Aphrodite located on the North slope of the Acropolis. This

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<sup>26</sup> Walbank mentions that Zeus was frequently referred to as *archegetis* of Sounion in the 6th century BCE (278).

<sup>27</sup> τῷ ναῷ δε τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς Πανδρόσου ναοσ...εν τῇ πόλει τῆς καλουμένης ἐν Κηποῖς Ἀφροδίτης οὐ πορρῶ (Pausanias 1.27.3).

now seems to be a more reasonable explanation, though Robertson goes to great lengths to disprove it. The phrase *εν τη πολει* is a particular matter of contention for Robertson. He argues that the phrase refers to the temple of Aphrodite in Ilissus, "in the lower town" (Robertson "Riddle" 254). Kadletz, however, takes the phrase as proof that Pausanias refers to the temple on the north slope of the Acropolis, and the phrase *εν τη πολει* in fact serves to differentiate between the temple of Aphrodite inside Athens proper, and the one in Ilissus (446).

Robertson, however, further argues against Kadletz's interpretation of the lines in Pausanias. Robertson's primary argument is twofold: that the path in question (specifically the stairway extending through a cleft in the Acropolis, leading to the site of the Mycenaean well) would not have been kept up in a state of "constant repair" over the 1500 years it was allegedly in use, and that regardless of their state of repair, the stairs would have been unsafe for the maidens to traverse in the dark of night, while carrying baskets on their heads. However, both of these statements appear to be based on assumptions that suggest a modern bias. Robertson suggests that it would have been preposterous for the Athenians to keep up this path solely to use it once every year ("Riddle" 254). However, it is reasonable to assume that this ritual was important to the Athenians, given its basis in the very charter myth of Athens and its association with Athena, patron deity of the polis. Thus, it would have been more than worthwhile to keep up the path of the *arrhephoroi* from year to year, just as it was deemed worthwhile to maintain a giant ship on wheels which was used only every four years at the Panathenaia (Neils 22), and just as, in a modern context, it is deemed worthwhile by American Christians to plant and raise pine trees for the better part of a decade just to cut them down and keep them in their living rooms, strung with lights, for a few weeks before leaving them out of the curb to be disposed of. Clearly, it is common practice throughout time and in many different societies to devote time, money and

labor to things in the name of religion that may seem preposterous to onlookers from a different time and place. Further, on the subject of the plausibility of the girls traversing a hazardous path in the dark, balancing baskets on their heads, it is reasonable to assume that this danger may have even been an important part of the ritual. The daughters of Kekrops did, after all, fall to their death from the Acropolis, and Robertson mentions that ancient sources treat the ritual as "grim and furtive, even perilous" ("Riddle" 259). Indeed, setting aside the risks of the procession, the very act of processing along a path that is essentially underground, through a cleft in the rock of the Acropolis, invokes the autochthonous imagery of the Kekrops and Erechtheus myths. The *kekropidai* were descended from a snake-king, and they were charged with caring for another snake-king. Thus, they were inherently tied to the autochthonous origins of Athens, and this was reflected in the cult ritual, in essence a reenactment of their lives.

Besides bearing the secret burden of Athena during the yearly procession, the *arrhephoroi* were also charged with beginning the ceremonial weaving of the *peplos* which was dedicated to Athena every four years at the Greater Panathenaia. According to various lexical notices (Robertson "Riddle" 276) the Assembly chose four *arrhephoroi* from good families—that is, wealthy, prominent, citizen families—and two of these maidens were appointed by the Archon Basileus to begin the weaving. Most likely, on the years when the Panathenaia occurred, there were indeed four *arrhephoroi* appointed by the assembly, but only two of them participated in the procession while the other two were responsible for beginning the weaving. Of course, it is important to note that the Panathenaia only occurred every four years, so the evidence can be interpreted to suggest that on the years in which the Panathenaia occurred, four *arrhephoroi* were chosen, which in the intervening years the assembly appointed only two for the annual task of the procession.

### *Kanephoroi*

There were somewhere between 120 and 144 festival days in the Athenian calendar, and each of these certainly included a sacrifice (Neils 20). Ancient Greek sacrifice typically included a procession, a priest, the animal or animals to be sacrificed, and *kanephoroi*, among many other possible participants. *Kanephoroi*, literally "basket-bearers," could be male or female, and indeed it appears that a large number of private sacrifices employed the services of adolescent male *kanephoroi*. However, the *kanephoroi* we are concerned with here—and indeed the majority of those participating in public sacrifices—were female. The most significant festival in which *kanephoroi* participated was the Panathenaia, so the following will deal with these *kanephoroi* in particular.

The *kanephoroi*, like the *arrhephoroi*, were selected from the maiden daughters of aristocratic Athenian families. The *kanephoroi* were slightly older than the *arrhephoroi*, however, said to be just on the verge of marriage (Dillon 37). These young women were chosen on the basis of their beauty and virtue, because their purity guaranteed the purity of the consecrated items they carried in their baskets. In fact, the purity of a *kanephoros* was so crucial that when Hippias and Hipparchos, the Peisistratid tyrants, wanted to insult Harmodius, they refused to allow his sister to serve as a *kanephoros* in the Panathenaic procession. This, of course, was the ultimate insult to Harmodius and his family, not only because it affronted the dignity of the family, but also because it called his maiden sister's chastity into question (Dillon 81). According to Linda Jones Rocco, the *kanephoros* was a female equivalent of the *ephebe* in Classical Athenian art and iconography, representing the ideal maiden, just as the *kore* had done in Archaic Greek art. Based on inscriptions on statue bases found on the Acropolis as well as

Parthenon inventory lists, it appears that many statues of *kanephoroi* existed in Athens, including some by the famous sculptors Praxiteles and Polykleitos. There may in fact be even more depictions of *kanephoroi* that remain unidentified as such, according to Roccas (646-650), who argues that the image of the *kanephoros* was in fact so recognizable by Classical Athenians that artists no longer needed to depict her with her basket and could instead evoke the same recognition in audiences merely by presenting her wearing her festival mantle.

The duties of the *kanephoroi* included leading the procession while carrying a basket, called the *kanoun*, upon her head. The *kanoun* contained consecrated grain which was sprinkled over the sacrificial animal's head to make it nod. Also, hidden amid the grain was the sacrificial knife which was used by the priest to cut the animal's throat. As previously mentioned, the purity of the maidens bearing the baskets directly reflected the purity of the sacrificial items contained within the baskets, and thus the purity of the sacrifice itself. Thus, if an unchaste *kanephoros* contaminated the sacrificial knife, the sacrifice itself would be futile and Athena would be improperly honored. This is quite a bit of power to entrust to an adolescent girl, with virtually no other explicit power in Athenian society. One may question the Athenian choice of *parthenoi*—no matter how well born or beautiful—to fill such a high profile role in the procession. However, like the *arrhephoroi*, the role of the *kanephoroi* is rooted in tales of the early mythological kings of Athens. Erechtheus<sup>28</sup> established the first Panathenaic procession through Athens. The king made his beautiful maiden daughter Oreithyia the *kanephoros* in his procession, but as they traveled in procession, Boreas, the god of the north wind, abducted Oreithyia and carried her off to Thrace where she bore him several children (Athena 58) The successive generations of aristocratic maidens who took on the role of *kanephoros* in the

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<sup>28</sup> Erechtheus is here considered by scholars like Dillon and Lefkowitz to be separate from Erichthonios, with whom he is conflated by others (Shapiro, for example) in stories of the *kekropidai*.

Panathenaia, as well as other festivals, reenacted this story, perhaps to honor Oreithyia as consort of Boreas, or perhaps to honor Erechtheus for the loss of his daughter. Robertson puts forth yet another explanation of the significance of this ritual. The Panathenaia was a mid-summer festival, celebrated under the heat of the summer sun. In light of the blisteringly uncomfortable weather the participants must have endured, and the inevitable wish by the populace for the return of a cooling wind, Robertson argues that the *kanephoroi* are a symbolic lure for Boreas to return, and to bring with him respite from the sweltering summer heat. This is a compelling argument, but it perhaps only partially explains the motivations of the Athenians. The *kanephoroi* may have taken on this significance in the Panathenaic procession, but *kanephoroi* are attested participating in many other festivals, including the Dionysia, the Eleusinia and the Epidauria (Robertson Athena 58-60), all of which occur at differing points in the festival calendar, and thus could not all represent a wish for a cooling wind.

The role of *kanephoroi* differs from other ritual duties of well-born *parthenoi*, such as the *arktoi* and *arrhephoroi* mentioned earlier. Mary Lefkowitz argues that the purpose of the duties completed by the *kanephoroi* in the Panathenaia was not personal fulfillment, devotion or initiation, as at the Brauronia, but was instead one of civic duty and pride. The most chaste and beautiful daughters of aristocratic Athenian families participated in the Panathenaia as *kanephoroi* to honor the history of Athens, for the benefit of the polis, as well as to distinguish themselves as autochthonous Athenian women. Though there are no accounts written by *parthenoi* who acted as *kanephoroi* in the Panathenaic procession, Lefkowitz suggests that their feelings about the ritual may have mirrored those recorded in writing by their fathers, brothers, and other countrymen. That is, that they considered their participation in the festival to be a civic and religious service, important in thanking Athena for her continued protection of the polis as a

whole and crucial to maintaining their close relationship with the goddess

### Other Roles of *parthenoi* in the Panathenaia

There existed in the Panathenaia many other roles and duties for *parthenoi*, whose age and identity must remain unspecified in absence of adequate records. In immediate proximity to a sacrifice—either right before or during the act—young, usually unmarried women made the *ololyge*, the “sacrificial cry.”<sup>29</sup> This act has alternately been viewed by scholars as fearful, triumphant or joyful. Dillon argues in favor of a joyful cry, as the maidens were seen to be summoning the gods to a sacrificial feast. There is no indication of the social class of the young women participating in this ritual, or the necessity of their virginity, though they do seem to be placed around the same age as the *arrhephoroi* and the *kanephoroi* (243).

*Parthenoi* were also responsible for weaving the sacred *peplos* dedicated to Athena every four years at the Greater Panathenaia. These maidens were known as *ergastinai*, and they were chosen from aristocratic Athenian families, just like the *arrhephoroi* and the *kanephoroi*. Dillon even notes that it was sometimes possible for them to do double duty, acting as both *ergastinai* and *kanephoroi* in the festival of the Panathenaia (243). The *ergastinai* worked at the loom on the Acropolis, set up by the *arrhephoroi* every four years to begin the weaving of the *peplos*. According to ancient descriptions of the sacred *peplos* of Athena, the *ergastinai* wove into it a depiction of Athena’s victorious battles with either Enkelados, Aster or the Gorgon in the battle between the gods and the Giants (Robertson “Riddle” 56-57).

The final group of *parthenoi* involved in the festival and ritual of the Panathenaia were the *aletrides*, or grinders of grain. Extremely little is know about these maidens, but they were

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<sup>29</sup> Εχ: ὡς εἶπουσ’ ὀλολυξε, θεὰ δὲ οἱ ἐκλυεν ἀρης. (Homer, *Odyssey* 4.767); καὶ γυναικειῷ νομῷ ὀλολυγμον ἄλλος ἄλλοθεν κατὰ πτολιν. (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 594-595).

presumably chosen from the daughters of aristocratic Athenian families, and they were most likely between the ages of about ten and fourteen. These maidens ground the grain that was used in various cult and religious capacities, namely, here, the grain used to make the cakes which the *arrhephoroi* fed to the Acropolis snakes during the *arrhephoria*. This role appears to be less prestigious than the duties previously mentioned, as there are considerably fewer references to the *aletrides* in art and literature than there are to the *arrhephoroi* and *kanephoroi*, among others, though the *aletrides* are mentioned alongside the other duties in the passage of Lysistrata quoted earlier (641-7).

## Marriage Rites

For young women in classical Attica, *parthenia* began around the onset of puberty, and lasted until marriage. As noted previously, this period was considered both socially and physiologically dangerous for many reasons, and therefore was ideally kept as short as possible. An Athenian *kyrios* likely aimed to have his daughter married off as soon as she became fully reproductively viable around the age of fourteen. Additionally, the custom of marrying adolescent maidens to men roughly twice their age must have perpetuated this cycle, as a father would be nearing the end of his life as his daughter reached reproductive viability, and thus it was in his and his daughter's best interest to find her a husband to continue guardianship of her into her adult years.

In classical Attica, the process of marriage was comprised of two separate events. The first of these events was the *engue*, the betrothal contract between a suitor and a girl's *kyrios*. The first evidence of such a contract appears in Herodotus' description of the betrothal of

Megacles and Agariste (43): τῷ δε Ἀλκμεωνοῦ Μεγακλεῖ ἐγγυῶ παιδὰ τὴν ἐμὴν

Ἀγαριστὴν νομοῖσι τοῖσι Ἀθηναίων<sup>30</sup>. Here, ἐγγυῶ is the verbal form of the noun ἐγγυή, meaning a pledge or betrothal, or literally “something placed in the hand.” John Oakley and Rebecca Sinos take this as a reference to the handshake that likely sealed the agreement between a suitor and a *kyrios* (15). With this handshake, and not with any sort of legally binding or physically verifiable contract, a maiden’s *kyrios* had the power to betroth her to any suitor he saw fit. Marriages within an extended family—that is, between cousins, uncles and nieces or half-siblings—were favored because they expressed a loyalty among one’s kin (Blundell, Women 120). A *kyrios* may likewise have been able to treat his daughter (and her dowry) as a favor or gift which he could bestow upon an acquaintance, who may then have provided him with important political ties. However, it seems more likely that guardians used marriage ties as a declaration of pre-existing political allegiance, rather than a means of establishing new ties. From the middle of the 5th century, with the introduction of Perikles’ law stipulating that an individual must have Athenian parentage on both sides to be considered an Athenian citizen, Athenian society became officially endogamous. That is, it was marriage within the community that produced the citizen body. This simplified the network of kinship relations that would have previously stretched across poleis, but was henceforth contained within Attica. Regardless of the specific motivations that drove a father to promise his daughter to one individual over another, it remains clear that a man had the power to make the *engue* with a suitor without his daughter’s permission, and she did not even have to be present when the agreement was made (Oakley & Sinos 11-12). In fact, because the maiden’s participation was not required, the betrothal could precede the actual wedding by several years. Interestingly, due

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<sup>30</sup> “And to Megacles, son of Alcmeon, I betroth my child Agariste by the laws of the Athenians.”

to the *engue* being a verbal agreement sealed with a handshake, rather than a signed contract, Blundell asserts that it was not in fact a legally binding contract, and that the suitor could withdraw himself from the agreement at any point prior to cohabitation, as long as he returned the girl's dowry to her father (Women 122).

Thus, the first part of the marriage process was a semi-legally-binding agreement entered into by a prospective groom and the prospective bride's father at some point prior the marriage. The second part, the *gamos*, was not much more clearly defined. The *gamos* is often referred to as the wedding ceremony. In contrast to the *engue* which was an event centered on men and men's interests, the *gamos* was, in the words of Isabelle Clark, "an entirely female concern" (13). It is the celebration of rites which, after the legal agreement between *kyrios* and suitor, officially rendered the bride and groom married, and officially passed the bride from guardianship of her father to guardianship of her new husband (Patterson 49). Yet, at exactly what point this shift in status occurred is up to interpretation. As previously discussed, a young woman's *parthenia* depended, with some stipulations, upon her sexual purity. Thus, she remained a *parthenos* in some sense until becoming sexually initiated within the confines of legitimate marriage. However, through the course of the *gamos* celebration, she transitions from *parthenos* to *nymphe*, which has been defined as "bride" but also, in a way, as "newlywed" because a young woman did not become a full-fledged *gyne* (defined as both "wife" and "adult woman") until the birth of her first legitimate child.

The exact order of events is unclear, because no complete description of a wedding survives, but the *gamos* likely began with preparatory rituals, known as the *proteleia*. This, first of all, included sacrifices to the gods. Both the bride's and the groom's families contributed to the sacrifice, which took place in a public area, usually a sanctuary. The sacrifices were typically

dedicated to the gods most associated with the institution of marriage, Hera Teleios (“Married Hera”), Zeus Teleios (“Married Zeus”), Artemis and Aphrodite. There is also evidence from various inscriptions that in Athens sacrifices were occasionally dedicated to Athena, Ouranos and Gaia as well. These sacrifices were offered to solicit the protection of the gods for the bride and groom during a rite of passage that was considered particularly dangerous for them. The bride was especially vulnerable, indeed, because she not only moved from one household to another, but from the sphere of childhood to that of adulthood (Oakley and Sinos 11-12; Hague 33).

In her transition from childhood, or more accurately *parthenia*, to marriage and adulthood, a bride typically dedicated the symbols of her childhood to the goddess Artemis, whose role in transitions and boundary crossings such as this has already been discussed at length. Evidence for this ritual of dedication can be seen in an inscription from a terra cotta votary statue from Athens: *τας τε κορας, Λιμνατι, κορα κορα υσ επιεικες*<sup>31</sup> (cited in Elderkin 455). Timarete has dedicated her doll to the goddess, parting with the frivolity of her youth. Ann Carson further mentions the customary shearing and dedication of a lock of hair. This ceremonial cutting of the hair was a typical sign of transition to adulthood throughout the ancient Greek world. In fact, Athenian males participated in this rite at the time of their initiation to manhood as well, though it is not included in the pre-nuptial ceremonies, because men were already well into adulthood at the time of marriage. Thus, brides cut a lock of their hair, effectively bidding farewell to the wild days of their youth, when their hair could flow freely. Upon her marriage on a woman was expected to bind and cover her hair in public, and consequently free flowing hair on an adult woman was a sign that she was a bacchante or a prostitute (Carson 152). These items were

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<sup>31</sup> “To Artemis Limnatis, the maid gives maids to a maiden.”

dedicated to Artemis not only to elicit her protection in a bride's dangerous transition to marriage, and further in her even more dangerous journey toward pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood, but also to atone for the bride's upcoming exit from Artemis' realm (the realm of the *parthenos*) with the loss of her virginity.

Following the bride's dedication of symbols of her childhood, both bride and groom were given a ritual bath. Baths were proscribed by Greek religion before many rituals, but nuptial baths were especially elaborate, as the water was drawn from a specifically designated spring (the spring Kallirrhoe in Athens) and carried home in a vase, known as a *loutrophoros*, which was designated solely for this purpose. *Loutrophoroi* are, not surprisingly, decorated with scenes of pre-nuptial bathing, though the bride is a more common subject than the groom. However, it is clear that both bride and groom received the ritual bath, since it was thought to enhance the fecundity of the couple. Athenians believed that water was infused with fertility, and water from rivers was especially rich in procreative power. Indeed, rivers were sometimes associated with the virility of bulls in art. While, the fertility of the water merely enhanced the fertility of the nuptial couple, the bride's virginity remained for the groom alone. The nuptial bath brought not only reproductive fruitfulness, but also purity, cleansing the bride and groom and marking a departure from their previous lives (Hague 33).

The next step in the *proteleia* was the adornment of the bride and groom. After his ritual bath, the groom was anointed and perfumed with myrrh, or some other fragrant oil, and dressed in a very finely woven *himation*. He also wore a crown, likely made from plants like sesame, poppy, cress, myrtle, and mint<sup>32</sup> (Hague 33). While the groom was certainly adorned in finery, the bride was ultimately the main focus of the ceremony, as shown by artists' tendency to depict her in wedding scenes, rather than her husband-to-be, and by the comparative elaborateness of

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<sup>32</sup> Mint was considered to be an aphrodisiac (Hague 33).

her adornment. The bride was attended by a sort of lady's maid, the *nympheutria*, who helped her with what Oakley and Sinos call the most extravagant adornment of her life (16). She, like her groom, was perfumed with myrrh, and she wore a bright gown, which has been alternately described in accounts of the ancient Athenian wedding as purple, or reddish, as well as a bridal belt, a veil which covered her face, a crown made of either plants or metal in the shape of leaves, and special bridal sandals, called *nymphides*. All of this elaborate adornment of the bride mimics (or is mimicked) by Hesiod's image of Pandora in his *Works and Days*. Zeus orders the adornment of the maiden with all of the bridal accessories just mentioned in an effort to make her irresistible to men.<sup>33</sup> According to Oakley and Sinos, Hesiod's Pandora is the original bride, with all subsequent maidens following in her footsteps (16). There is an obvious connection between the scene of Pandora bedecked in such finery, as described in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, and our generic 5th century Athenian bride preparing for her wedding in her extravagant adornment, but it is unclear whether Athenian contemporaries of our bride would have considered the story of Pandora the etion of their nuptial practices, or if Hesiod, centuries earlier, was merely writing Pandora as a reflection of the nuptial practices of his own contemporary society, which apparently remained fairly constant throughout the subsequent years.

Significant, perhaps, as well, is the Athenian tendency to depict bride-like mythological figures and goddesses as brides in art. "Bride-like" is perhaps a problematic term, and here it is indeed taking on several roles. In one sense, it merely suggests the idealized female in the Athenian consciousness. Thus, a goddess such as Leto, mother of Apollo and Artemis, who is celebrated primarily for bearing and nurturing these prominent gods, is often celebrated in the

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<sup>33</sup> αυτικα δ εκ γαιης πλασσε κλυτος Αμφιγυηεις παρτηενω αιδοιη ικελον Κρονιδεω δια βουλας. ζωσε δε και κοσμησε θεα γλαυκωπις Αθηνη. αμφι δε οι Χαριτες τε θεαι και ποτνια Πειθω ορμους χρυσειους εθεσαν χροι, αμφι δε την γε Ωραι καλλικομοι στεφον ανθесιν ειαρινοισιν. παντα δε οι χροι κοσμον εφηρμοσε Παλλας Αθηνη. (Hesiod 69-75).

idealized form of the bride, with a veil and a *stephane* (a crown).<sup>34</sup> Hera is similarly depicted, on occasion, in bridal attire, recalling her role as the divine archetype of wife. This, interestingly, even occurs, for example, on a cup by Aristophanes and Erginos from 410 BCE where she is, quite inappropriately one might say, depicted wearing a bridal crown and veil while fighting in a Gigantomachy (Oakley 71). Besides these goddesses, serving as idealized wives and mothers, mythological figures like Oreithyia and Briseis are often depicted as bride-like in art. Neither of these figures is married in the scenes in which she is often depicted, yet both frequently appear wearing the bridal veil.<sup>35</sup> These bride-like figures are a bit more difficult to explain than the archetypal wives mentioned previously, though their bridal attire seems to suggest the sexual relationship (whether rape, seduction or consensual extra-marital intercourse) in which they are about to engage with the male figure who is depicted with them--Boreas in the case of Oreithyia and Agamemnon in the case of Briseis (Oakley 68-69).

The adornment of bride and groom was clearly a highly significant aspect of the pre-nuptial rites in which the couple engaged. Once the couple was adequately adorned, it was time for the wedding feast. The feast typically took place in the home of the bride's father, and both bride and groom's families attended. This was, notably, the one feast that women, as well as men, were allowed to attend. The men and women, of course, sat in separate sections of the room, with the bride on one side with her female relatives and friends, and the groom on the other side with his. The feast was a highly important part of the marriage festivities, and it is indeed argued by some scholars to be the moment when the pre-nuptial rites ended and the actual marriage ceremony began (Hague 35 and Blundell Women 116). The meat from both families' sacrifices was eaten at the feast, along with cakes made from honey and sesame seeds (believed to promote

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<sup>34</sup>See the volute krater from 460 BCE, referenced in Oakley 69

<sup>35</sup>For example, Oreithyia and Boreas on vase from 460 BCE and Agamemnon leading Briseis away on a skyphos from 490 BCE by Makron, both cited in Oakley 68-69

fertility) and a great variety of other foods. In fact, the extravagance of these feasts features prominently in literary descriptions of weddings, and some wealthy families' wedding feasts were so extravagant that they became the target of Athenian sumptuary laws by the end of the fourth century BCE (Hague 33). However, in spite of limits on the acceptable expenditure, wedding feasts nevertheless retained their crucial function within the tradition of Athenian marriage ceremonies. Because Athenian law and custom lacked a written marriage contract, a large wedding feast provided witnesses to the marriage, and could be utilized in court to defend the legitimacy of children produced in the marriage, if it were ever called into question (Hague 33-34). The significance of the Athenian wedding feast is further supported by Arnold Van Gennep, who argues that, in society in general, the communal meal is the rite that has the greatest significance in a celebration of marriage, effectively ending the negotiation of betrothal and binding the two families together (Van Gennep 131-132).

After the communal meal occurred the *anakalypteria* (the unveiling of the bride) and the procession from the bride's childhood home to the home of her new husband. However, the order in which these events occurred is an issue of much contention among scholars. Anne Carson argues that the *anakalypteria* occurred at the end of the feast, with the bride rising from her seat, turning toward her groom and removing the veil from her face (163). In Carson's view, this is the official moment of transfer of the bride from her father's guardianship to her husband's. On the other hand, Hague, calling on evidence from various depictions of the marriage ceremony on vases, places the *anakalypteria* either during or at the end of the bridal procession, or else later, privately, between the bride and groom in the bridal chamber (35). All of these explanations are quite plausible, but for the sake of argument let us continue with Carson's view of the events of the *anakalypteria*. According to Carson, the bride unveiled herself

at the end of the communal feast, attended by her own family and friends, as well as the family and friends of her groom. This means that her unveiling was witnessed by her groom as well as the entire male side of the room. Carson notes that “at the moment of unveiling, for the first time, the intact boundary of her person is violated by contact: the contact of vision” (Carson 183). This, along with Carson’s ideas about the Athenian wedding ceremony not only taming maidens, but also reinforcing and clarifying female boundaries, is quite compelling. However, where the latter concepts seem to be strengthened by her notes on the rituals themselves, her portrayal of the bride, violated and initiated by visual contact is somewhat problematic when taken with her placement of the *anakalypteria* at the end of the feast. In Carson’s view, perhaps, it may be important that the *anakalypteria* occur among many witnesses, yet, when combined with Hague’s assertion that the unveiling may have in fact occurred during, or at the end of the procession from the bride’s former home to her new one, it becomes much more compelling.

Now we must first explore the procession itself, before delving deeper into its significance. Carson notes the emphasis on doorways and thresholds in the Athenian marriage ceremony and the procession is perhaps the strongest example of this (162). After the meal, at nightfall, the male and female contingents of feasters engaged in a contest of songs, competing to win the bride. Eventually the groom’s side had to win, and the groom took his bride, in the ritual gesture of holding her by the wrist. He then led her outside, and the two either rode on a cart, or walked in procession from the bride’s home, to the groom’s home, led by the bride’s mother, who carried torches. This procession is the portion of the Athenian wedding ceremony most often depicted on black figure pottery (Hague 34-35). According to Hague’s analysis of procession scenes on pottery, she argues that the *anakalypteria* took place either during, or at the end of the procession to the groom’s home. This not only seems likely in light of Hague’s

depiction of the rituals, but also in light of Carson's evaluation of the events. If, as Carson argues, the unveiling of the bride was a symbolic transgression of boundaries, which challenged the strictures of chastity and gender separation under which she had previously lived by violating them, then the *anakalypteria* fits just as well—if not better—in the moment right before the bride officially enters her new home for the first time. According to all sources the bride's entrance into her new home is a significant event. She began the marriage celebration as a child, the ward of her father, and a member of his household. However, by nightfall she has entered the household of her husband, where she will be welcomed and incorporated as a member, and where she will, ideally, bear children and fulfill her destiny as an Athenian woman. In fact, her incorporation into the home was enacted as well, following the same ritual through which new slaves were welcomed into the *oikos*, the *katachysmata*. During the *katachysmata*, the newlyweds were led to the hearth and showered with dried fruit, nuts, and coins, ensuring their prosperity (Hague 35).

In the final rituals before the bride officially parted with the last remnants of her former status as *parthenos*, she was given a quince (or an apple) to eat in accordance with the myth of Persephone, in which the divine maiden eats a small number of pomegranate seeds and thus seals her fate as the queen of the underworld, the bride of Hades. By eating the fruit of her new family, the bride accepted her husband and was bound to his home. This, however, is not meant to suggest that the bride had a choice in the matter. Her refusal to eat the fruit would surely not have negated the marriage, it was merely a symbolic acceptance of her new situation, in accordance with myth. And, finally, the groom presented the bride with gifts. These gifts were generally called the *anakalypteria* (the “unveiling gifts”), but Carson refers to Pollux's text which cites the gifts by the alternate title of *ta diaparthenia*, “gifts given in exchange for taking

away the virginity of the bride” (Carson 163). This is a valid interpretation of the situation, though there is a bit more nuance involved. For example, the gifts can be understood, in a similar vein, to be a sort of bribe for the bride, still in early adolescence by modern standards, who may not have been interested in consummating a marriage to a man twice her age. Similarly, the gifts could have been a sign of the empathy or even pity which may have been felt for a newlywed maiden on the verge of the traumatic loss of her virginity on her wedding night.

At this point it is important to pay some attention to the status of the young woman during this ceremony of marriage. While she is technically a virgin throughout the entire sequence of pre-nuptial rituals, all the way up to her entrance to the bridal chamber with her new husband, she does not seem to be identified as a *parthenos* through all of this. Rather, she becomes a *nymphē* at some point, and effectively remains as such until the birth of her first child within the marriage. But when does this transition occur? This is a question which is virtually impossible to answer, because of the ambiguity of the rituals, the lack of literary record, and the simple fact that the transition itself may have spanned the entire event. That is, the young woman in question may have eased gradually from *parthenos* to *nymphē* over the course of the entire *gamos* which may have taken as long as three days to complete. In this case, she could have been at one time both *parthenos* and *nymphē*, with the former tapering off and the latter growing throughout the various rituals until she finally achieved the full status of *nymphē*, perhaps when the marriage was consummated, and ultimately the ideal female status of *gune* when she bore her first child.

## **Conclusion**

To a modern eye, the ritual hoops set up in classical Athenian society for citizen maidens to jump through may seem excessive, and even, to some extent, strange or confusing. However, these ritual steps toward womanhood were laid out with a distinct purpose in mind, to be sure. And indeed, it is the intent of this project not only to examine this ritual sequence, but also to explore the possible motivations behind its creation. Why were these specific roles accomplished by young Athenian women after the onset of puberty, and before marriage and loss of virginity? More specifically, why women? Why virgins? And, why adolescents?

Through the course of an Athenian woman's life, it is clear that she perpetually toed the line between the public and private realms. Children were considered to be wild and essentially useless, aside from their future potential, while with the onset of puberty and thus physical maturity a young woman became a dangerous being, threatening her own well-being as well as that of the state and any who came in contact with her. Thus, to be sure, the structure of *parthenia* was quite purposeful, requiring maidens to properly honor Artemis and Athena, the goddesses responsible for ushering them safely through their transition into legitimate wife- and motherhood. Clearly, our first set of rituals, the rituals of the Brauronia and the Arkteia, were primarily personal rituals which elicited the protection of the goddess for girls at a vulnerable age. In this case, the femaleness of the participants was inherent to the importance of the ritual. Girls on the verge of puberty, and thus nearing sexual maturity and an end to childhood, were represented by Artemis herself, and this association with the *arktoi* explained the goddess's protection of them through a vulnerable time. Further, in myth, the etion of the rituals at Brauron include not only the unnamed girl whose brother killed the bear of Artemis, but also Iphigenia, who was herself a *parthenos* who died before her time, in some versions of the myth. These mythological reasons additionally explain the roles of *parthenoi* in the rituals.

In the public municipal festival of the Panathenaia, *parthenoi* played highly important roles, tied directly to the viability and efficacy of the ritual animal sacrifice at the climax of the festivities, as well as to the ritualized reenactment of the city's foundation myths. Why *parthenoi* in these cases? It seems that the official explanation was that these young women were ritually pure. However, as discussed at great lengths previously, motherhood was a much more revered state for a woman than virginity. However, once married and the mother of legitimate children, a woman's duty was much more strongly tied to the private, domestic sphere and it seems that few husbands desired to put their wives on display, especially at such a prominent public event. Furthermore, these *parthenoi*, especially those daughters of affluent and influential families who participated in the rituals of the Panathenaia, had few responsibilities and could afford to leave their homes for the few days or even weeks during which they would have participated in the events of the Panathenaic celebration. A wife and mother, first of all, would have been far too busy running her household or caring for her young children to be expected to live in a temple on the Acropolis for a month while preparing for the festival. Additionally, though the *parthenoi* who participated in these rituals were, of course, at risk during the time spent away from the protection of their *kyrioi*, participants in the rituals of the Panathenaia were chosen based on their chastity and thus the risk was significantly diminished. Wives, however, were already initiated into the sexual realm, and given the Athenians' views on the sexual appetites of initiated women, it is understandable that a husband would not willingly allow his wife to live away from him for any significant amount of time unless he deemed it completely necessary.

Why, then, weren't these ritual roles accomplished by widows, themselves considered necessarily "closed" and chaste after the death of a husband? The Athenian love of physical beauty and perfection, of course, eliminated widows, typically elderly and thus no longer

possessing the qualification of physical beauty the Athenians required of these ritual participants. This assertion can be extended, even, into an explanation of why these etiological myths themselves all included *parthenoi*. If for no other reason, *parthenoi* were the main figures in these stories, so that artists could depict their idealized beauty in mythological scenes. Next, maidens were the main actors in these rituals, rather than wives, children or widows because they were the only group of female Athenians who required access to the public eye, and whose appearance there was considered legitimate. The ultimate purpose of a reproductively viable Athenian maiden was to get married and give birth to legitimate children. Little girls were not yet ready to be presented in public this way, married women had no reason to expose themselves to the male gaze in this way, and widows, especially those beyond their childbearing years, were not desirable enough marriage candidates to warrant parading them around at a public festival in order to show them off to eligible bachelors.

Why, indeed, were women significant players not only in these public religious rituals, but also in the myths from which the rituals originated? As previously mentioned, roles quite similar to those of the *arrhephoroi* (if feeding the Acropolis snake was indeed among their ritual responsibilities), for example, were accomplished elsewhere by male youths. The answer to the question of the significance of women in Athenian etiological mythology resides, perhaps, in the fact that the Panathenaia itself celebrated a female deity. That is, because Athena was so strongly associated with the city of Athens, women—and not only women, but young, virgin women—figure prominently in the myths associated with both the goddess and the polis over which she serves as patroness.

Nuptial ritual is another entity entirely, however. An ancient Athenian wedding necessarily included both a male and a female element. Clearly, given the pro-reproductive social mindset of the time, the necessity of a woman's participation in the wedding, and thus in the institution of marriage itself, is easily understood. Indeed, the female element—the bride—was overwhelmingly the focus of the ritual and festivity associated with the event. The wedding, it can be argued, was a much more significant event for the bride, as it officially ended her childhood. A bride left behind her transitional identity as a *parthenos* and entered into marriage which would ultimately, after she proved her reproductive capabilities, allow her to become a full-fledged woman in the only way possible in that time and place. The lure of full-fledged womanhood, however, may not have been a particularly enticing draw for young Athenian women. Men of Attica, especially citizens who owned property, were understandably drawn to marriage because of their necessity to create heirs for the continuation of family name and estate, and their inability to accomplish this without the help of a woman. However, it does not seem that women—especially women as young as Athenian brides—felt such a strong push toward matrimony. Yes, they were more likely than not acculturated to feel a necessity to marry in order to achieve full status as a woman, and likewise a *kyrios* surely contributed to this feeling as a result of his own drive to pass guardianship, and all of the responsibility which this entailed, onto another before the end of his life. However, perhaps allowing a bit of modern interpretation to seep in, it seems clear that none of this would have been on the mind of a maiden of fourteen years, only recently having reached menarche and physical maturity. Assuming the preceding to be true, the overwhelmingly bride-oriented wedding celebration appears to be, in some ways, a method of bribing or luring maidens into marriage. That is, just as the dowry lured a suitor to take on the responsibility of a bride, the pomp and grandeur of the bridal preparations and

wedding ceremony, as well as the bridal gifts themselves may have convinced *parthenoi* to leave behind their carefree childhood and enter the new realm of intercourse, childbirth, and the constant work and responsibility of managing a household, all of which must have been virtually incomprehensible to a young maiden.

At the risk of ending on a cynical note, it is clear that much, if not all of the acculturation of females in classical Attica revolved around convincing them of the necessity of marriage and childbirth. Yes, certain aspects of the religious ritual of Athens can be interpreted unequivocally as celebrating femaleness as a state of piety, utility and beauty in and of itself, and especially in light of the femaleness of Athena, the patron deity of the polis. However, it can also be said that ancient Athenian practices excluding girls and women from all formal education, and most careers and other activities outside the home forcefully emphasized and buttressed women's roles as wife, mother and housekeeper with little opportunity otherwise. As much as the rituals discussed here provided positive outlets and public participation for *parthenoi*, they ultimately served merely to support this acculturation of young woman as wife and mother, funneling her toward this ultimate end.

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