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## The Ritual Year of Athena: The Agricultural Cycle of the Olive, Girls' Rites of Passage, and Official Ideology<sup>1</sup>

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Through the ritual year of ancient Athens, many festivals were dedicated to Athena. The *Panathenaia* was the most important festival. It has been regarded as a political festival, but the importance of agriculture is also illustrated through the offerings and rituals carried out during this main festival dedicated to the Goddess of the olive crop. All Athena's festivals were related to the olive, the third main crop of the Athenians, and protected by her, as her festivals were celebrated in the crucial period for the olive crop, from the flowering of the olive tree, growing period of the fruit, until the gathering in winter. The summer festivals, particularly, may be related to the importance of securing the dew for the growing fruit. Many rituals during the festivals reflect the daily activities of women, several rituals are also important to the rite of passage undergone by girls at puberty to prepare them for marriage.

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### Introduction

Throughout the ritual year of ancient Athens, many festivals were dedicated to the protecting city Goddess, Athena. The Panathenaia (i.e., "the Festival of all the Athenians") was the most important of these. It was celebrated in the middle of August, by the end of the first month (i.e., *Hekatombaion*, July–August) of the official political Athenian year. It celebrated the birth of the *polis* ("city-state,") but the importance of agriculture is also illustrated by this main festival dedicated to the Goddess of the olive crop. Many rituals during the festivals reflect the daily activities of women and several rituals are particularly important in connection with the rite of passage undergone by girls at puberty to prepare them for marriage.<sup>1</sup>

1. I would like to thank Dr Marie Wells for useful recommendations on conveying my thoughts and helping to clarify my English. I would also like to thank the two readers of the article for useful recommendations. All the remaining errors are, of course, my own. The transliteration of modern and ancient Greek follows the rules of the Nordic Library, Athens. Greek names are not Latinized with the letter c which does not exist in the Greek alphabet. The article is based on "The Ritual Year

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When visiting the Parthenon, most tourists learn that the “warrior” Goddess, Athena, was worshipped there. Few, however, would have any idea that women played significant roles in the rituals performed there. Similarly, traditional scholarship on Greek religion, with some notable exceptions, has not focused on women’s roles in the rituals for Goddesses and their relation to the agricultural year.<sup>2</sup> This article intends to focus on women’s roles in the rituals for Athena and to relate these rituals to the agricultural year, (i.e., the cultivation of the olive).

The first part of the article will give an outline of the ritual year of Athena, while particularly focusing on the most important festival, its preliminary rituals, and women’s roles in these rituals. The second part of the article will delve further into the agricultural year in general and the year of the olive in particular, while simultaneously focusing on the gendered aspect from a methodological/theoretical approach to women and gender research in which fieldwork is important. In this way I will also discuss gender bias. In the latter part of the article, I broaden the field of reference to include modern Greece to make my contention that modern Greek society can, by means of a comparative approach, shed light on ancient Greek society. Although the article focuses on ancient Greece, the research also draws on fieldwork that I have conducted on religious festivals and life-cycle passages in Greece since the beginning of the 1980s, combining fieldwork results with ancient sources, the most important findings being that fertility is crucial in the rituals and that women have an important role in carrying out the fertility cult.

The importance of the fertility aspect of the ritual year has also been emphasized by modern anthropologists and ethnologists working on agricultural societies, but this approach has been criticized by many classical scholars who seem to forget that ancient societies were critically dependent on the agricultural yield, and, in my opinion, festivals were primarily celebrated to

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of Athena: The agricultural cycle of the olive, girls’ passage rites, and official ideology,” (keynote address presented at the Third Conference of the SIEF Working Group on The Ritual Year, *The Ritual Year and History*, Stražnice, Czech Republic, 26 May 2007); and E. J. Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient: A Comparison of Female and Male Values* (Kristiansand: Norwegian Academic Press, 2007). An English version, translated by Dr Marie Wells and to be published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing is forthcoming, in which chapters 5–6 give a comprehensive presentation and discussion of the Panathenaia, primary sources and secondary literature. Space does not permit me to reproduce the whole discussion here. See also E. J. Håland, “The Ritual Year as a Woman’s Life: The Festivals of the Agricultural Cycle, Life-Cycle Passages of Mother Goddesses and Fertility-Cult,” in *First International Conference of the SIEF Working Group on The Ritual Year. In Association with The Department of Maltese, University of Malta, Junior College, Msida, Malta, 2005: Proceedings*, edited by G. Mifsud-Chircop (Malta: Publishers Enterprises Group Ltd, 2006), 303–26; E. J. Håland, “Athena’s Peplos: Weaving as a Core Female Activity in Ancient and Modern Greece,” *Cosmos: The Journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society* 20 (2006): 155–82.

2. The latter is represented by A. C. Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter and their Relation to the Agricultural Year* (Salem, NH: The Ayer Company, 1981), but her focus is on Demetrian festivals. On women’s roles in rituals to Goddesses, see J. E. Harrison, *Themis* (London and Cambridge: Merlin, 1977, or. 1912), J. E. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (London and Cambridge: Merlin, 1980, or. 1903) is an early exception, while contemporary studies are more frequent; see for example J. B. Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). See also n.1 supra and infra.

secure the food (i.e., fertility). By researching women's ritual activities in modern Greece where the fertility aspect is also important, and by relating these to ancient Greek ritual behaviour, we are allowed to reinterpret many of the classical sources. We learn that the religious festivals of Athena follow a ritual calendar where celebrations were performed in connection with important phases during the ritual year of the olive. Furthermore, the fertility cult is of focal importance in these festivals and also in life-cycle transitions, and women are the central performers of the fertility rituals. The multivalence of the rituals and their openness to several interpretations is also important to note, since rituals, ancient and modern, operate on several levels.<sup>3</sup>

### The Athenian Festivals of Athena

Athena *Polias* (i.e., "of the city"), as a Goddess, was entitled to expect to have a new dress (a *peplos*), annually. The peplos was woven by a team of maidens, the *Ergastinai* (i.e., workers), who were chosen from the aristocratic families of Athens. The warp was set on the loom on the last day of the month *Pyaneption* (i.e., October–November), around the time of sowing and the gathering of the olive crop, during the festival of the *Chalkeia*, which honoured Athena as Goddess of handicraft. The work of setting up the loom was done by the priestess of Athena together with the *Arrēphoroi*, girls between the ages of seven and ten or twelve. When the workers had finished the weaving, Athena was offered her new peplos during the yearly summer festival, the Panathenaia. Once the peplos was completed, it was borne to the Akropolis and presented to the Goddess by the *Praxiergidai*, an Athenian clan whose ancestral privileges included the washing of the cult statue and its garments.<sup>4</sup>

Two months before the Panathenaia festival, in the last week of *Thargelion* (i.e., May–June), the purification of the holiest of all the images of Athena,

3. The problems and fruitfulness of working with anthropological comparative approaches to ancient society (such as using material from modern Mediterranean and particularly Greek civilization as models) are examined further in Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*; cf. also J. J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990). For shorter presentations and discussions of my methodological/theoretical approach to women and gender research, see E. J. Håland, "Greek Women and Death, Ancient and Modern: A Comparative Analysis," in *Women, Pain and Death: Rituals and Everyday-Life on the Margins of Europe and Beyond*, edited by E. J. Håland (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 34–62; E. J. Håland, "Greek Women, Power and the Body: From Fieldwork on Cults Connected with the Female Sphere Towards a Deconstruction of Male Ideologies, Modern and Ancient," *Mediterranean Review* 3, no. 1 (2010): 31–57. In addition to Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 6; see also E. J. Håland, "Rituals of Magical Rain-Making in Modern and Ancient Greece: A Comparative Approach," *Cosmos: The Journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society* 17, no. 2 (2005): 197–251 for the importance of the agricultural aspect in Greek festivals. See further n. 64 infra and part two of this article.

4. E. J. W. Barber, "The Peplos of Athena," in *Goddess and Polis. The Panathenaic Festival in Ancient Athens*, edited by J. Neils (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 113. For a discussion of the age of the *Arrēphoroi*, see W. Burkert, "Kekropidensage und Arrhephoria," ["The myth about the Kekropidai and the Arrhephoria"] *Hermes* 94, no. 1 (1966): 3–6; cf. W. Burkert, *Homo Necans. The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1983), 150; J. Neils, "The Panathenaia: An Introduction," in Neils, *Goddess and Polis*, 17; F. I. Zeitlin, "Cultic Models of the Female: Rites of Dionysus and Demeter," *Arethusa* 15, no. 1, 2 (1982): 129–57.

Athena Polias, was celebrated. It was housed in the Erekhtheion temple.<sup>5</sup> According to Liddel, Scott and Jones (LSJ)<sup>6</sup> s.v. *Kallynteria*, this was a festival held on 19 *Thargelion* when the statue of Athena Polias was freshly adorned. Based on the lexica, earlier scholars have generally agreed that the *Kallynteria* (i.e., “adorning festival”) preceded the festival of the *Plynteria* (i.e., “washing festival”). I follow Robertson, who has argued convincingly that the *Plynteria* preceded the *Kallynteria*, as it is normal to wash the statue before it is adorned.<sup>7</sup> Women from the *Praxiergidai* clan removed the ornaments from this ancient cult image of Athena Polias, veiled it, and performed secret rites.<sup>8</sup> The adornment of her statue of olive wood, believed to have fallen from heaven, was a practice said to have started with Aglauros, the daughter of the mythical Athenian king, Kekrops, when she was made priestess of Athena. On her death, the sacred garments of the image were not washed for one year; neither did the women of Athens wash their clothes. After their year-long grief for Aglauros ended, the festival of the *Plynteria* was established to clean Athena’s robe and their own clothes. On 25 *Thargelion* the statue was disrobed and wrapped in a shroud, as a sign of mourning for Aglauros. Two noble girls, the *loutrides* (“washers,” cf. *louō*, “washing a person”) or *plyntrides* (cf. *plynō*, “washing clothes”), washed the Goddess’s robes, and later the statue itself. The order of everyday life was interrupted. The Goddess was veiled with a cloth and it was, therefore, regarded as an unlucky day; the sanctuaries were closed and no sacrifices were offered. On the following day, the 26 *Thargelion*, the statue was unveiled, probably sponged off or bathed. It might also have been carried in procession to a nearby well to be bathed. Afterwards it was dressed again with the cleaned garments. The end of the period of grieving and the cleaning of the statue indicate that it was a time of revival and renewal of hope. The Goddess was participating in the general renewal characteristic of the season, and by her participation, involving her citizens too.<sup>9</sup> This ancient wooden statue of Athena

5. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, vols 1–2, translated by W. H. S. Jones (London: Heinemann, 1939–1954, or. 1918, 1926) (hereafter cited as Paus.), 1.26.6.

6. Liddel, H. G./Scott, R./Jones, H. S., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, or. 1883). N. Robertson, “Athena’s Shrines and Festivals,” in *Worshipping Athena: Panathenaia and Parthenon*, edited by J. Neils (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 48–52.

7. N. Robertson, Athena’s Shrines and Festivals. In J. Neils, ed., *Worshipping Athena: Panathenaia and Parthenon* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 48–52.

8. Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 4, translated by B. Perrin (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1950, or. 1916) (hereafter cited as *Plut. Vit. Alc.*), 34.1.

9. E. Simon, *Festivals of Attica: An Archaeological Commentary* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 46–48; W. Burkert, *Greek Religion. Archaic and Classical* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell and Harvard University Press, 1985), 228; R. Parker, *Miasma. Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 26–28; B. S. Ridgway, “Images of Athena on the Acropolis,” in Neils, *Goddess and Polis*, 124, cf. 120–27 for the following. For another focus, see the androcentric description of statues given by R. Osborne, “Looking on Greek style: Does the Sculpted Girl Speak to Women too?” in *Classical Greece: Ancient Histories and Modern Archaeologies*, edited by I. Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 81–96, who nevertheless does not mention the most holy statue of Athena. For Athena, see also Connelly, *Portrait of a Priestess*, although she has different focus to mine, discussed in Håland, “Greek Women and Death, Ancient and Modern”; and “Greek Women, Power and the Body.” Connelly’s focus is also found in B. E. Goff, *Citizen Bacchae: Women’s Ritual Practice in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), who has a traditional feminist perspective

might have been seated, looking like a “woman’s Goddess.” Due to its garments, and the rituals surrounding it, the statue was probably life-sized.<sup>10</sup>

Women also played a major role during the other festivals dedicated to Athena, particularly during parts of the Panathenaia and its preliminary rituals. Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*<sup>11</sup> tells how the Athenian girls moved up from behind-the-scenes preparation for the Panathenaic festival to actual participation in the procession. “When I was seven, I was *Arrēphoros*. At ten I was *Aletris*” (i.e., ground grain for the sacred cakes for Athena.<sup>12</sup> “Next, as a fair young girl, I was *Kanephoros*” (i.e., bearer of a basket). The *Arrēphoroi* were two or four little girls, selected from aristocratic families by the *Archon Basileus* (king archon/magistrate) to live on the Akropolis in a house in, or rather in the neighbourhood of<sup>13</sup> the Erekhtheion temple, and to serve Athena for a year. They got their name, “bearers,”<sup>14</sup> or “maidens who carried the symbols of Athena Polias in procession,” from the fact that they carried closed baskets (*kistai*) with secret objects.

Some days after the “washing festival,” on 3 *Skirophorion* (i.e., June–July), around 18 June, the mysterious nocturnal festival, the *Arrephoria*, took place. According to Pausanias<sup>15</sup>:

“For a certain time the *Arrēphoroi* have their living from the Goddess: and when the festival comes round they have to perform certain ceremonies during the night. They carry on their heads what Athena’s priestess gives them to carry, and neither she who gives it nor they who carry it know what it is she gives them. In the city not far from Aphrodite-in-the-Gardens is an enclosed place with a natural entrance to an underground descent; this is where the virgin girls go down. They leave down

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(i.e., using a traditional Western model, which is lacking in ancient Greece and generally also in modern; cf. M. Alexiou, *After Antiquity: Greek Language, Myth, and Metaphor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

10. Concerning iconography, although S. Lewis has claimed (*The Athenian Woman: An Iconographic Handbook* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002)) that most Athenian vases were made for export, and are difficult to use to reconstruct Athenian gender ideology, the pictures are similar to those found on vases not made for export, and might illustrate similar ancient values.

11. Aristophanes, vol. 1: *The Acharnians, The Knights (Eq.), The Clouds, The Wasps (Vesp.)*, vol. 2: *The Peace, The Birds (Av.), The Frogs*, vol. 3: *The Lysistrata (Lys.)*, *The Thesmophoriazousae, The Ecclesiazusae (Ecll.)*, *The Plutus*, translated by B. B. Rogers (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1946, 1950, or. 1924) (hereafter cited as *Lys.*), 641–48.

12. Cf. Fr. Dübner, *Scholia Graeca in Aristophanem* (Paris: Ambrosio Firmin Didot, 1855) (hereafter cited as *Schol. Ar. Lys.*), 643. Some scholars don’t take the lines in *Lysistrata* literally, others do, for example Neils, “The Panathenaia: An Introduction”. The same source (*Ar. Lys.* 642–647) constitutes the point of departure for N. Kaltsas and A. Shapiro, “Introduction,” in *Worshipping Women: Ritual and Reality in Classical Athens*, edited by N. Kaltsas and A. Shapiro (New York: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, 2008), 13. I have compared the actual lines with other available sources, such as dedicatory inscriptions from the Akropolis, Lysias, Menander, Pausanias, Plutarch, references in lexicographers (particularly Harpokratio), and have given a longer discussion of the available material in Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 5; cf. also Burkert, “Kekropidensage und Arrhephoria.” Although there is not space to detail the whole discussion here, I hope that this article will also illustrate that it should not be a problem to use, for example, Aristophanes and Pausanias as sources although they were far from each other in time. In my opinion their usefulness is confirmed by the intermediary sources.

13. Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. 10, translated by H. N. Fowler (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1936.) (hereafter, *Plut. Mor.*), 839c.

14. Cf. Paus. 1.27,3.

15. Paus. 1.27,3.

there what they were carrying, and take another thing and bring it back covered up. They are then sent away, and other virgin girls are brought to the Akropolis instead of them.”<sup>16</sup>

There was an underground enclosure under the Akropolis that was the setting for a nocturnal ritual during the annual summer ceremony, and it was to this enclosure the two young Arrēphoroi went during the festival dedicated to Athena. With Athena, they carried out secret ceremonies during the night; from the top of the Akropolis they descended a steep stairway which led down to a spring, and afterwards to a shrine of Eros and Aphrodite (i.e. the “enclosure” (*peribolos*) of Aphrodite in her sanctuary dedicated to Aphrodite-in-the-Gardens (*en Kēpois*)). The ritual concluded the year the Arrēphoroi lived on the Akropolis.

Pausanias<sup>17</sup> discusses the ritual after he has described the temple dedicated to Athena Polias and the shrine of the Dew Goddess, Pandrosos, or “all dew” (*drosos*, dew), adding that “Pandrosos was the only one of the sisters not to break her trust.” The daughters of King Kekrops were Pandrosos, Aglauros, and Hersē, the latter also meaning “dew.” They correspond to the Arrēphoroi in the Akropolis ritual, because the ritual performed by the Arrēphoroi is connected with the myth which is explained by Apollodoros.<sup>18</sup> The three “Kekropidai,” also called “Aglauridai” after their mother, were entrusted by Athena with the carrying of a sacred basket (i.e., *kistē*), which they were forbidden to open. Aglauros and Hersē could not restrain their curiosity and one night, by the light of Athena’s lamp, they opened the holy basket. Inside they saw the mysterious child, Erichthonios, and a snake. In horror, they leapt to their deaths, down the steep northern slope of the Akropolis. Erichthonios was begotten by Hephaestos, who while chasing after Athena, discharged his seed on the virgin Goddess’s thigh. After Athena had wiped off the seed with wool, she flung the wool to the earth, which gave birth to the earth child, the phallic snake God, Erichthonios, who was fostered by Athena, though she probably was his actual mother.<sup>19</sup>

16. Cf. n.1 and 4 supra, also for the following. See further, A. Motte, *Prairies et Jardins de la Grèce Antique: De la Religion à la Philosophie* (Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1973), 130, 133 n. 224 for Paus. 1.27,3; and cf. the translation by P. Levi, Volume 1: Central Greece (London: Penguin, 1984); J. Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 228–32. These and other references are discussed in Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 5, n. 261. Arrephoria was dedicated to both Athena and Aphrodite, cf. Simon, *Festivals of Attica*, 43.

17. Paus. 1.27,2 f.

18. Apollodoros, *The Library*, vol. 2, translated by J. G. Frazer (London: Heinemann, 1939, 1946, or. 1921) (hereafter cited as Apollod. *Bibl.*), 3.14,6; cf. Paus. 1.18,2. See Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 151; Zeitlin, “Cultic Models of the Female,” 150 f.; N. Robertson, *Festivals and Legends: The Formation of Greek Cities in the Light of Public Ritual* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 109 and n.74 for the connection. For the Dew Goddess, see Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 50; cf. Simon, *Festivals of Attica*, 45, the “dew-sisters.” For dew in ancient Greek religion in general, see D. D. Boedeker, *Descent from Heaven: Images of Dew in Greek Poetry and Religion* (Chico, CA: California Scholars Press, 1984) with a particular focus on dew and Athenian Autochthony: ch. 5.

19. I have discussed Athena as mother in several other contexts, see for example, Håland, “The Ritual Year as a Woman’s Life,” *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 6; and “Greek Women, Power and the Body”; see also discussion of N. Loraux, *Les enfants d’Athéna. Idées athéniennes sur la citoyenneté et la division des sexes [The children of Athena: Athenian ideas about citizenship and the division between the sexes]* (Paris: La Découverte, 1984), who has another approach.

The death of the “Kekropidai”/“Aglauridai,” may reflect the ending of the Arrēphoroi’s duties and their journey underground. The young girls’ way of life had to end, and at the conclusion of their term of priestly service for the virgin Goddess, the priestess sent them away to Eros and Aphrodite beneath the earth. The encounter with death, ending the sheltered life of the “virgin,” may be interpreted as an initiation ritual, the consecration of a maiden in the heart of the *polis*.

The crossing of frontiers and thresholds is always hedged about with ritual, so also is the transition from one social stage to another. In all human societies, the great majority of ceremonial occasions are “rites of transition,” which mark the crossing of boundaries between one social category to another.<sup>20</sup> A “rite of passage” or “passage rite” is the symbolic transition from one position to another; a public announcement that someone is not what he/she was before the ritual.<sup>21</sup> Rites of passage are significant for relating religious beliefs to social life, and many rituals follow the conceptual pattern of initiation. Initiates are ritually separated from everyday life into an excluded, separate realm. After this separation, they are ritually reincorporated into everyday life, in an altered state. Symbolically, they are reborn. Such rites of passage occur in puberty, through puberty ceremonies, or other initiations into adult status. Later these will be followed by weddings, funerals, and other initiation rites.<sup>22</sup> A rite of passage occurs when people take a deliberate step towards a critical and irreversible act, such as having sexual intercourse, baptizing a child, starting a new year, planting and sowing.

The Arrēphoroi were aged seven to twelve, and from Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*,<sup>23</sup> we learn about the four ritual roles that young Athenian girls performed, starting as the “bearers of secret things,” (i.e., being Arrēphoroi). Along with other sources, several dedicatory inscriptions on the Akropolis from the third century BCE until the second century CE mention the ritual carried out by the Arrēphoroi, which was an established institution in Athenian society, based on the mythical model and the ritual which was re-enacted annually. Public celebrations connected with the rites of passage of girls were probably long-lasting and did not easily change as the average age of menarche, as well as a woman’s first marriage, was fourteen;<sup>24</sup> the rites of passage, therefore, followed biology. Before their marriages, they also went through other stages, or phases.

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K. Kerényi, *Athens: Virgin and Mother: A Study of Pallas Athena* (Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, 1978), also focuses on Athena as virgin and mother, but his view concerning matriarchy is, in my opinion, outdated, see Häland *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, 340 f., 438 f., for discussion. See also *infra* for Athena as mother.

20. E. Leach, *Culture and Communication: The Logic by which Symbols are Connected: An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 35.

21. J. P. Spradley and D. W. McCurdy, *Anthropology: The Cultural Perspective* (New York: Wiley, 1980), 385. On women’s initiation rites, see also B. Lincoln, *Emerging from the Chrysalis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

22. R. M. Keesing, *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective* (Fort Worth, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), 334.

23. *Ar. Lys.* 641–48.

24. S. B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York and London: Schocken Books, 1995), 68; cf. Parker, *Miasma. Pollution and Purification*, 79 f.

At ten they were “corn-grinders for Athena the leader.” Then, they “wore the saffron to be a bear for Artemis of Brauron”.<sup>25</sup> Being “a bear at Brauron” means that they “tended the shrine” of Artemis for a certain period, concluding their duties by playing the bear at the festival dedicated to Artemis at Brauron. At the festival, they wore yellow robes in place of the ancient bearskin, and displayed their racing and dancing skills.<sup>26</sup> Their other ritual roles, including the post of “basket-bearer,” were connected with the Panathenaia. The ritual at Brauron and the Arrephoria were particular examples of little girls seeking ritual protection and preparation before the onset of womanhood, thus representing stages in a young girl’s initiation.

How can I interpret the rituals involving the Arrēphoroi as puberty rites when so few girls were involved? One might assume that they were meant to represent all Athenian girls of that age, although they were from aristocratic families. The fact, however, that these little girls were honoured in a public forum and large civic ceremony indicates that their roles in the festival represent those of all the girls of Athens. The rituals in honour of Artemis at Brauron seem different, as more girls were involved. Moreover, the civic importance of the rituals at Brauron was not emphasized in this context, while this was crucial in the rituals honouring Athena. According to Aristophanes,<sup>27</sup> Athenian women had important roles at all life stages.

In Greek culture animal metamorphosis was commonly connected with initiation rituals; girls might be bears, deer, or cows; and boys, bulls. Of these, the bear and the deer are significant as they illustrate the “wilderness” status of the initiates (i.e., while undergoing a rite of passage they are in the “wilderness,” and caught between two states). “Hippo”, a “horse” name, is typical for initiatory girls and boys.<sup>28</sup>

Marriage was conceived of as a rite of initiation. In antiquity marriage was a prime target for girls’ initiations, but was almost an accessory for boys’ initiations. Marriage, however, led to a more important target — the birth of a child. In the case of boys and girls, therefore, the real target of marriage was the perpetuation of the household. The most important ideological goal for women was glorious motherhood, and the caves dedicated to Artemis were important at marriage and birth. Before marriage, a woman had to descend into the cave and make sacrifice to Artemis. A woman’s ritual obligations were threefold: pre-marital, as a new bride, and as the expectant or new mother. According to the Cyrene cathartic law from approximately 340 CE, “A bride must go down to the bride-room to Artemis before marriage,” and a pregnant woman shall go down and sacrifice to Artemis in the same way as a bride.<sup>29</sup> An important part

25. Ar. *Lys.* 645.

26. K. Dowden, *Death and the Maiden. Girls’ Initiation Rites in Greek Mythology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 31 f., see also Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 6 and *infra*.

27. Ar. *Lys.* 641–48.

28. Dowden, *Death and the Maiden*, 62.

29. F. Sokolowski, *Lois Sacrées des Cités Grecques. Supplement, [Holy (sacred) laws of the Greek city-states]* École Française d’Athènes. Fasc. XI (Paris: Boccard, 1962) (hereafter cited as *LSS.*), 115.B.1–8, 9–14, 15–23; cf. Parker, *Miasma. Pollution and Purification*, 344 f.; Dowden, *Death and the Maiden*, 113 f.

of the ritual was also to go to a *Nympheion* (sanctuary of the Nymphs) in the precinct of Artemis to make sacrifice to the nymphs.

The life-giving cave is linked to a mother's womb, manifested by the cult that takes place in the caves. The womb-shaped caves were particularly important in girls' rites of passage, such as the caves at Brauron, where girls went to prepare for marriage. Boys also had to undergo rituals in a cave, for example, the cave of Cheiron where select Thessalian youths performed an annual ceremony.<sup>30</sup> For everyone, "rebirth" takes place in the life-giving womb.

The duty of the little prepubescent Arrēphoroi, however, was performed before their first menstruation and pregnancy. All the details of the rite of the Arrēphoroi find parallels in initiatory rites: the separation from the parents, the nocturnal journey, the violation of a taboo, the leap from the cliff. The rite, therefore, introduces adolescence. Pausanias does not say what they carry, but according to a commentary to Aristophanes,<sup>31</sup> they carry holy, secret objects in baskets (*arrēta en kistais*), while another source claims that the *arrēta hiera* of the Arrēphoroi — the holy, secret objects — are made from wheat and are representations of snakes and of male shapes.<sup>32</sup> It has also been claimed that there was a confusion in terminology between "Arrēphoroi" and "Hersēphoroi" (the latter meaning, "dew-carriers," based on the fact that the semen of Hephaestus is equivalent to *hersē*, or dew<sup>33</sup>), and that they in fact carried "dew," (symbolizing the semen of Hephaestus) down to the precinct of Aphrodite-in-the-Gardens and brought back up a wrapped bundle which represented a baby.<sup>34</sup> Dew symbolizes impregnation and new offspring.

Whether the girls carried wheat cakes formed as snakes and the male sex organs, or dew on the trip down and a baby on the way back up, the aim of the procession of the Arrēphoroi where they carried the symbols dedicated to Athena Polias, was to ensure the growth of the fruits of the earth and the begetting of children. This was a privilege reserved for young virgins after a preliminary period. The rite of passage aspect is very obvious — girls are put through a ritual at about eight to ten years of age so that they will be fertile.<sup>35</sup> Different researchers have considered the ritual to be "the *Thesmophoria* of the unmarried girl," or "a preparation for adult sexuality and the scenario of

30. Cf. Dowden, *Death and the Maiden*, 50. "The Cave: The Maternal Womb, the Location for the Performance of Initiation Rituals," is discussed at length in Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 6.

31. Schol. Ar. *Lys.* 641.

32. *Scholia in Lucianum, [Scholia (commentaries) to Lucian]* edited by H. Rabe (Leipzig: In aedibus Teubneri, 1906) (hereafter cited as Schol. Luc. *Dial. Meret.*), 2.1, Rabe: 276.13–18.

33. Cf. Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, vol. 3, translated by W. H. D. Rouse (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1940) (hereafter cited as Nonnus, *Dion.*) 41.64.

34. Zeitlin, "Cultic Models of the Female," 152; cf. Burkert, "Kekropidensage und Arrhēphoria" and *Homo Necans*, 150.

35. E. Ardener, "Belief and the Problem of Women," in *Perceiving Women*, edited by S. Ardener (London: Malaby Press, 1975), 10. See also Schol. Luc. *Dial. Meret.* 2.1, Rabe: 276.21f. and 13–15; cf. S. Eitrem, "Eleusinia, les mystères et l'agriculture," *Symbolae Osloenses* 20 (1940), 144; see also Motte, *Prairies et Jardins de la Grèce Antique*, 134 f., discussed in Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 5. Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists, [The Banquet of the Learned]* vols 1–25, translated by C. B. Gulick (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1927–1955) (hereafter cited as Ath.) 3.114a–b tells of a particular bread baked for the Arrēphoroi. Does this indicate a link to the grain harvest?

initiation as the emblem for the renewal of the society at the year's end," or, alternatively, "the exploitation of the cultic value of the little girls and their ritual for the ideology of the city's foundation."<sup>36</sup> Despite the fact that the *Thesmophoria* was dedicated to the Mother Goddess Demeter and Kore, her daughter, while the ritual of the Arrēphoroi appears to be a preliminary ritual to the Panathenaia, because of the place where the ritual took place, the priestess involved, and the Arrēphoroi's connection with the weaving of Athena's peplos, none of the analyses excludes the others.

Several ritual roles preceded marriage, and many sources<sup>37</sup> tell of the importance of serving as basket-bearer (*Kanephoros*) in the Panathenaic procession, chastity being integral to the role. The most prestigious position an Athenian woman could obtain was that of the priestess of Athena Polias, an office held for life and passed down through the female line of the aristocratic clan known as the *Eteoboutadai*. The girls and women involved with the weaving of the peplos, as well as the *Aletrides*, the girls who from the age of ten prepared the offering cakes for the sacrifice to Athena Polias, were all of noble birth. Although only virgin Athenian women were allowed to be *Kanephoroi*, metics (*Metoikoi*, resident non-Athenians) could carry water jars in the ceremony. Stool and parasol bearers, *Diphrophoroi* and *Skiaphoroi*,<sup>38</sup> daughters of metics, participated in the Panathenaic procession, and accompanied the *Kanephoroi*, who had their faces powdered with flour to keep off the sun. The emphasis here is on citizenship in addition to the roles of women in the Panathenaia, and the importance of this ethnic and political element parallels with women's primary role in Greek religion.<sup>39</sup>

Several summer-festivals were dedicated to Athena, and she also had a role in the *Skira* festival celebrated on 12 *Skirophorion*. This is the height of the summer's heat and of the solstice and threshing and thus the festival is generally associated with the grain Goddesses. During the festival, the Athenian clan of the *Eteoboutadai* organized an official procession. Among the participants were the priestess of Athena, the priest of Poseidon, and the priest of the Sun. The procession went from the Athenian Akropolis to Skiron, thus re-enacting the march of the mythical king, Erekhtheus, toward Eleusis, where he was killed.<sup>40</sup> According to a comment cited by Athenaeus,<sup>41</sup> during the festival

36. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 131; Burkert, "Kekropidensage und Arrhephoria"; cf. *Homo Necans*, 150–54; Zeitlin, "Cultic Models of the Female," 150–53.

37. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, vols 1 and 3, translated by C. F. Smith (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1952, or. 1921–1928) (hereafter cited as Thuc.), 6.56–57; Aristotle, *The Athenian Constitution, the Eudemian Ethics, On Virtues and Vices* translated by H. Rackham (London: Heinemann, 1952, or. 1935) (hereafter cited as Arist. *Ath. Pol.*) 18.2; Paus. 1.29.1.

38. Ar. *Av.* 1550, *Eccl.* 732–34.

39. Cf. M. Lefkowitz, "Women in the Panathenaic and Other Festivals," in Neils, *Worshipping Athena*, 78–105; C. Vlassopoulou, "113 Cast of Slab V of the East Frieze of the Parthenon," in Kaltsas and Shapiro, *Worshipping Women*, 251; O. Palagia, "Athena: Women in the Cult of Athena," in Kaltsas and Shapiro, *Worshipping Women*, 32.

40. Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 149; H. W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 157. See also Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 5 for a discussion of the sources. Robertson, "Athena's Shrines and Festivals," 52 ff. has an interesting analysis.

41. Ath. 11.495f–496a.

young men bearing vine branches raced from the sanctuary of Dionysos to the temple of Athena Skiras at Phaleron. The winner was given a drink made of five ingredients as a prize: wine, honey, cheese, corn, and olive oil. It was probably a libation of all the fruits that the Goddess, Athena Skiras, was asked to bless.<sup>42</sup>

On 16 *Hekatombaion*, the *Synoikia* (or *Synoikesia*) celebrated the *Synoikism* — the “combining into one community of the people of Attika”.<sup>43</sup> The main festival, however, was the Panathenaia — the age-old annual, or “lesser Panathenaia,” as well as the quadrennial eight-day-long festival of an historical date, the “greater Panathenaia,” which goes back to approximately 566 BCE.

At the annual Panathenaia, young men were enrolled as citizens at the city centre. On the night before, during the *pannychis* (“all-night festival”), they swore “the *ephebic*” (military) oath of loyalty in the sanctuary of Aglauros, then raised the paean on the Akropolis. When the great quadrennial Panathenaia came round, they bore arms with other citizens. During the *pannychis*, youths and maidens danced and sang hymns of joy.<sup>44</sup> The priestess of Aglauros was responsible for food offerings connected with “mysteries” or secret rituals for Aglauros and Pandrosos.<sup>45</sup>

The role of the women, however, is particularly connected with the most important ritual of the festival that was carried out on 28 *Hekatombaion*, the day which represented the original version of the festival and therefore presented its core elements: the procession with the new peplos of the Goddess and the following sacrifice. The procession day, which also was Athena’s birthday,<sup>46</sup> was called the presentation of the peplos.<sup>47</sup>

The procession is shown on the Parthenon frieze, an important source for the Panathenaic procession (Fig. 1a,b).<sup>48</sup> The *Ergastinai* lead it. Now that their work is completed, they are empty handed and are given the place of honour at the head of the procession when the peplos is presented to Athena. Other participants in the procession carried different offerings, for example green branches<sup>49</sup> probably from Athena’s sacred olive trees. Neils has recently suggested that the

42. Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 5 f. versus S. Scullion, “Festivals,” in *A Companion to Greek Religion*, edited by D. Ogden (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 196, who is not, however, convincing. Paus. 1.1.4 tells about the sanctuaries dedicated to Athena Skiras and Demeter at Phaleron, cf. 1.36.4.

43. Cf. Thuc. 2.15.2.

44. Cf. Euripides, vol. 1: *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Rhesus*, *Hecuba* (*Hec.*), *The Daughters of Troy*, *Helen*, vol. 2: *Electra*, *Orestes*, *Iphigenia in Taurica* (*IT*), *Andromache*, *Cyclops*, vol. 3: *Bacchicals*, *Madness of Hercules*, *Children of Hercules* (*Heracl.*), *Phoenician Maidens*, *Suppliants*, vol. 4: *Ion*, *Hippolytus*, *Medea*, *Alcestis* translated by A. S. Way (London: Heinemann, 1946–1953, or. 1912) (hereafter cited as Eur. *Heracl.*), 782.

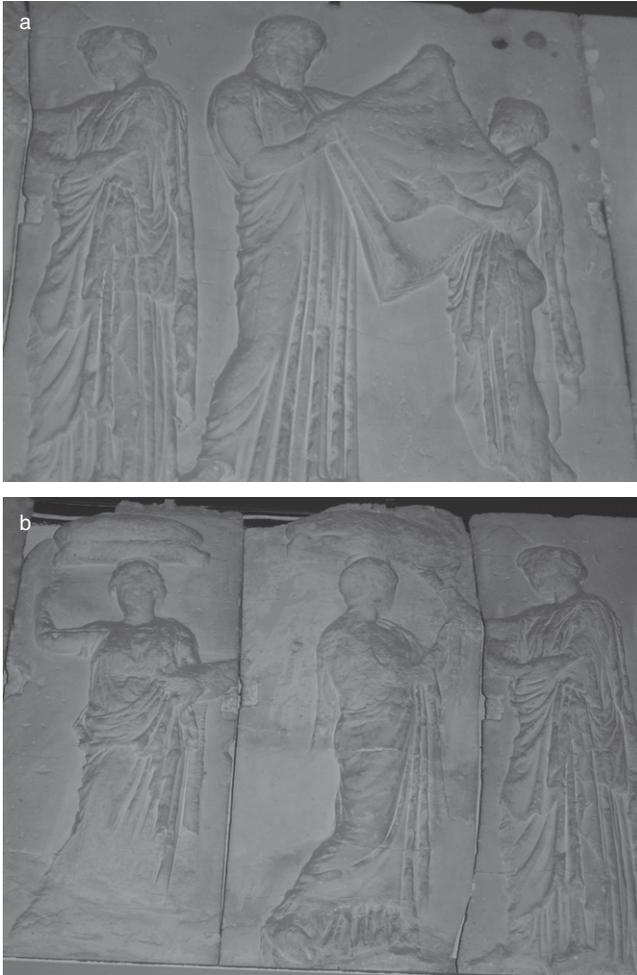
45. Robertson, *Festivals and Legends*, ch. 3.

46. Cf. Ath. 3.98b; see Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, 207–19 for discussion of this and other sources.

47. Cf. W. C. Green, ed., *Scholia Platonica [Scholia (commentaries) to Plato]* (Haverford PA: American Philological Association, 1958) (hereafter, *Schol. Pl. Resp.*) 327a.

48. Cf. Håland, “Athena’s Peplos”; Vlassopoulou, “113 Cast of Slab V.” J. B. Connelly, “Parthenon and Parthenoi: A Mythological Interpretation of the Parthenon Frieze,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 100 (1996): 53–80, states (not, however, convincingly), that the Parthenon frieze depicts the sacrifice of the daughters of king Erekhtheus.

49. Cf. Ar. *Vesp.* 544; Xenophon, vol. 4: *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus* (*Oec.*), translated by E. C. Marchant (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1938, or. 1923) (hereafter cited as Xen. *Symp.*), 4.17.



**Figure 1** (a–b) Copies of the peplos ceremony from the Parthenon frieze (the originals, ca. 432 BCE are in the British Museum, London), central group showing the receiving of the peplos. The new Akropolis Museum, Athens; Photograph by Evy Johanne Håland, August 2005.

matronly women depicted on the frieze could perhaps represent the *eponymai*, the wives of the eponymous heroes.<sup>50</sup> When the procession came up to the Akropolis, it culminated in the presentation of the peplos (the rectangular cloth that is illustrated on the frieze) to the life-sized cult statue. One of the Arrēphoroi

50. J. Neils, “Festivals: Adonia to Thesmophoria: Women and Athenian Festivals,” in Kaltsas and Shapiro, *Worshipping Women*, 248. Palagia, “Athena,” 32–36 also gives an alternative and very interesting analysis of the *Ergastinai/Partenoi* in the frieze. She argues that the *Ergastinai* are not leading the procession, on the other hand, the peplos scene (i.e., the two girls approaching the priestess of Athena Polias, carrying objects on their head) are leading the procession (Fig. 1b). She argues that these girls are basket-bearers leading the Panathenaic procession. But could they perhaps carry the peplos?

is actually depicted on the frieze, assisting the *Archon Basileus* with handling the peplos of Athena (Fig. 1a). The Goddess was dressed in her new peplos. The deposition of the peplos, which was the final event in the procession of the Panathenaia, was especially important for the Athenians, as attested by Aristophanes<sup>51</sup> who stated that a good citizen was considered worthy “of their native country and of the peplos.” During the greater Panathenaia different contests and competitions were also important, and the athletic and musical victors received jars of olive oil.<sup>52</sup> The trees that produced it were — among others — the twelve sacred olive trees found in the Academy, symbolizing the twelve *phratries* (i.e., brotherhoods) that made up the whole of Athens territory.<sup>53</sup> The trees were all supposed to be descended directly from the first olive tree, created by Athena in her contest with Poseidon for the sovereignty of Attika.<sup>54</sup>

Different researchers have emphasized different aspects of the Panathenaia: an annual celebration of the divine child, Erekhtheus, the Attic king after whom the classical temple of Athena Polias, the Erekhtheion, is named; or a harvest or new year festival; or the enrolment of Athenian citizens and the bringing of new fire.<sup>55</sup> As all these aspects are found in the festival, none of the different interpretations excludes the others.

Athena’s primary festival, the Panathenaia, touched the lives of every Athenian, female and male; it demonstrated the community of the *polis*, appealed to all levels of society, and involved as many as possible in the worship of the city’s chief deity. The festival represented several identity-creating elements. Both sexes underwent rites of passage in connection with the festival — the Arrēphoroi and the young men who were enrolled. In addition to the core element, the dedication of the peplos, different rulers enlarged and made more elaborate the original popular festival, exploiting it for political uses. By building the *Odeion* (concert hall), and encouraging the musical contests during the Panathenaia, Perikles could satisfy great parts of the voting populace with rich gifts, paralleling the way later Roman emperors made use of “bread and circus.”<sup>56</sup> The Battle of the Gods and Giants, where the Olympian

51. Ar. *Eq.* 566.

52. Pindarus, *The Odes of Pindar*, translated by J. Sandys (London: Heinemann, 1919, or. 1915) (hereafter cited as *Pind. Nem.*) 10.35 f.; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 60.2–3.

53. Robertson, *Festivals and Legends*, 108, discussed in Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 5; see also Arist. *Ath. Pol. Fr.* 5; Aristotle, *Politics* translated by H. Rackham (London: Heinemann, 1944, 1950, or. 1932) (hereafter, *Pol.*), 6.1319b; *Ath. Pol.* 21; C. W. Hedrick Jr., “Phratry Shrines of Attica and Athens,” *Hesperia* 60 (1991): 241–68. In fact, we know from Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 60.2–3 and Lysias, *Orationes [Orations]* translated by W. R. M. Lamb (London: Heinemann, 1957, or. 1930) (hereafter cited as *Lys.*), 7, that there were many hundreds of these trees on private land all over Attica and that over the four-year cycle of the Greater Panathenaia they produced very large quantities of oil, (cf. L. J. Shear, “Prizes from Athens: The list of Panathenaic Prizes and the Sacred Oil,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 142 (2003): 96 ff.), much more than twelve trees could possibly have done. Olives produce a full crop only in alternate years.

54. Paus. 1.24,3; cf. Herodotus, vols 3–4, translated by A. D. Godley (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1946, 1950, or. 1922, 1924) (hereafter cited as *Hdt.*), 8.55.

55. J. D. Mikalson, “Erechtheus and the Panathenaia,” *American Journal of Philology* 97 (1976): 141–53; A. Mommsen, *Feste der Stadt Athen im Altertum, geordnet nach Attischem Kalender [Festivals of the Ancient city-state of Athens organized after the calendar of Attica]* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1898); Burkert, *Homo Necans*; Robertson, *Festivals and Legends*.

56. Cf. P. Veyne, *Le Pain et le Cirque: Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique [Bread and circuses: historical sociology and political pluralism]* (Paris: Seuil, 1976).

Gods conquered the Giants,<sup>57</sup> was one of the motivations for the Panathenaic festival. The topic had been represented on the pediment of the temple destroyed by the Persians and was a popular subject on Attic vases, particularly after the Persian wars had ended victoriously for Athens; but the subject was also woven into Athena's peplos.<sup>58</sup> The representation thus also became an Athenian victory over "wild" nature, as illustrated by the union of *polis* and the victory over the Persians. If, however, we deconstruct these political manifestations, as well as the "ideological entirety" that officially constitutes a festival and which therefore a festival is often perceived as, we find more nuanced perspectives, such as the annual victorious fight against the weather Gods, but also the relationship between the male *polis* and the importance of women's tasks and participation in the festival. Although knights, charioteers, or other heroes are depicted on the Parthenon frieze, the aim of the procession was to dedicate the peplos to the virgin Goddess. The procession was led by the female weavers, and the dedication was the climax of the festival. In other words, we see the female-dominated nature of these activities through the weaving of the peplos, and the fact that the completed cloth, which is also a wedding dress, is dedicated to a female divinity.<sup>59</sup>

The Panathenaia dedicated to Athena Polias was the most important ideological festival in Athens (Fig. 2). The protecting city Goddess was also a virginal mother, since she was the foster mother of the mythical king of Athens, Erichthonios, a variant of Erekhtheus,<sup>60</sup> son of the divine nature.

Death cults both in the *Agora* (market place) and the Akropolis were of major importance to the cult of the Goddess.<sup>61</sup> Traditional scholarship has particularly

57. Cf. Schol. Pl. *Resp.* 327a.

58. Eur. *Hec.* 465–74; *IT.* 222–24.

59. Håland, "Athena's Peplos"; *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 5 f.; cf. for example Homer, *The Odyssey*, vol. 2, translated by A. T. Murray (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1919) (hereafter cited as *Od.*), 15.104–10, 123–29; see also J. Scheid and J. Svenbro, *Le métier de Zeus: Mythe du tissage et du tissu dans le monde gréco-romain [The craft of Zeus: myths of weaving and fabric in the Greco-Roman world]* (Paris: Errance, 2003), but from another approach. For the importance of the weather Gods, see also Robertson, "Athena's Shrines and Festivals."

60. When the child Erichthonios grew up, he became known as Erekhtheus. Cf. Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 156. Cf. also Eur. *Ion.* 469, 1008 for Erekhtheus, and 269 f., 999 f. for Erichthonios born from the earth. Concerning figure 2, there are several interpretations of "The Olive Tree Pediment" from the Akropolis museum of Athens: A. Shapiro, "Heroines: Cults of Heroines in Ancient Athens," in Kaltsas and Shapiro, *Worshipping Women*, 167, figure 6 suggests that "The Olive Tree Pediment" illustrates the Pandroseion on the Akropolis and that the figures of young women could themselves be the daughters of Kekrops. According to J. M. Hurwit, *The Athenian Acropolis. History, Mythology and Archaeology from the Neolithic Era to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 113–15, it is perhaps a generalized image of the Panathenaic procession nearing its conclusion at the temple of the Goddess. The female figure may, in that case, perhaps be one of the Arrēphoroi, perhaps even bearing the sacred peplos itself on her head. Since the Arrēphoroi were little girls, and this seems to be a woman, I would rather suggest that it may be an earlier representation of one of the *Ergastinai* than the one given at the Parthenon frieze from ca. 432 BCE, or, for example, the priestess of Athena Polias, the most prestigious religious function an Athenian aristocratic woman could obtain. One may also suggest that this is the Goddess in her temple waiting for the procession.

61. Cf. Paus. 1.26,5 (sacrifices dedicated to Erekhtheus at the altars of Poseidon) and Euripides, *Nova Fragmenta Euripidea. [New fragments of Euripides] In Papyris Reperta* edited by C. Austin (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co, 1968) (hereafter cited as Eur. *Erech. Fr.*), 65.92–94; see also Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 149; Mikalson, "Erechtheus and the Panathenaia," 143, 147. Cf. H. A. Thompson, "The Panathenaic Festival," *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 76 (1961): 227–31; Neils, "The



**Figure 2** “The Olive Tree Pediment,” ca. 550 BCE. Athena Polias in her temple. The old Akropolis Museum, Athens, cat. no. 52; Photograph by Evy Johanne Håland, August 2005.

focused on the cult dedicated to the earth-born hero, Erichthonios/Erechtheus.<sup>62</sup> Several heroines, nevertheless, were also important to the festival, such as Pandrosos and Aglauros. Concerning the heroine cult for the “Kekropidai”/“Aglauridai” on the Akropolis, one may mention the shrine of Pandrosos which might have been focal in connection with the Arrēphoroi, as Pausanias<sup>63</sup> brings up their ritual when coming to Pandrosos’s temple. The sanctuary of Aglauros, whose cave has also been identified, was crucial in connection with the enrolling of the new citizens of Athens.<sup>64</sup> She also had a special priestess and the two heroines, Aglauros and Pandrosos, were dedicated “mysteries” or secret rituals at the festival (as already mentioned), hence underscoring the importance of living women and mythical heroines in the cult of Athena.

Rituals performed by women were important in the festival, and women’s relationship with fertility<sup>65</sup> is illustrated by the roles played by women: they

Panathenaia: An Introduction”, 20, discussed in Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 5 f. For the relation between death and hero cults, see E. J. Håland, “An Historical Analysis of the Relationship between Greek Death Cult, Today and in the Ancient World,” *Historisk Tidsskrift* 4, no. 83 (2004): 559–91; cf. “Greek Women and Death, Ancient and Modern,” 42 n. 20; versus G. Ekroth, “The Sacrificial Rituals of Greek Hero-Cults in the Archaic to the Early Hellenistic Periods,” (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 1999).

62. Robertson, *Festivals and Legends*, ch. 8. Robertson, “Athena’s Shrines and Festivals,” 43, has also argued that Erekhtheion is a shrine to Athena alone, but must then invent a second olive tree at Erekhtheus’s “new” shrine.

63. Paus. 1.27,2 f.

64. Cf. Demosthenes, *Orationes, [Orations]* vol. 1, translated by J. H. Vince (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1930) (hereafter cited as Dem.) 19.303 f.

65. M. Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), gives a good account of women’s importance within Greek religion, but has a restricted view of fertility rituals. The same view is found in Goff, *Citizen Bacchae*; A. Tzanetou, “Introduction. Ritual and Gender: Critical Perspectives,” in *Finding Persephone: Women’s Rituals in the Ancient Mediterranean* edited by M. Parca and A. Tzanetou (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University

were basket-bearers and grinders of the grain for the offering cakes. The preliminary ritual of the little Arrēphoroi and the symbolism of the central ritual when the peplos is dedicated, highlight the importance of marriage in the festival. The divine child, the ritual descent into an underground cavern dedicated to a Goddess, and the ascent with sacred symbols, as parts of the initial ritual to the festival, are important ceremonies in festivals dedicated to Mother Goddesses during the ritual year of Athens.<sup>66</sup>

### The Relation of Athena's Festivals to the Ritual Year in General

The ritual year, considered as a whole, comprises a multifaceted ritual history, a popular social and economic calendar with a great focus on the fertility of crops, animals, and women, plus a close attachment to periods of time related to agricultural work and divinities.<sup>67</sup>

The popular calendar was a social representation of the order of nature, that is, of the "natural" year: the perceived order of hot and cold, rain and drought, germination, fruiting, shedding of leaves, migrations of birds, and so on. The annual production cycles of agricultural work (sowing, harvesting, pruning, vintage, gathering of fruits) and stockbreeding activities (shearing, breeding, milking, pasturing) composed an economic calendar developed from these perceptions of the natural order. This socio-economic content is integrated with the narratives of the Gods and Goddesses.

Agriculture was the key element in the ancient economy, and the Greeks believed that humans had to serve the Gods "for the sake of the produce of the

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Press, 2007), 3–26, cf. Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 6, for a more comprehensive view and definition based on modern cultural anthropological theories. Cf. for example, A. Jacobson-Widding and W. van Beek, eds., *The Creative Communion: African Folk Models of Fertility and the Regeneration of Life* (Uppsala: Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology, 1990). See particularly Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, 332–52 for a discussion of the topic, "From Death to Fertility: Agricultural Cycle, Life-Cycle Passages of Goddesses and Fertility-Cult," and n. 144 also for references discussing the connection between the agricultural cycle and women, for example Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter*; Zeitlin, "Cultic Models of the Female," 140; H. P. Foley, Preface and Acknowledgments. Part 1. The Text and Translation, Commentary, and Background. Part 2. Interpretive Essay on the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. In *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* edited by H. P. Foley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), xi–xvi, 1–178. Contrary to these, L. Foxhall, "Women's Ritual and Men's Work in Ancient Athens," in *Women in Antiquity: New Assessments*, edited by R. Hawley and B. Levick (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 97, argues that although the connection between agriculture, seasonality, fertility, and women may constitute a significant matrix, their integration, and hence the precise meaning of the matrix, is seriously problematic. Therefore, she asserts that it is difficult to say anything sensible about what the significance of the relationships between these elements might be. The same sceptical view is found in the polemical study of N. J. Lowe, "Thesmophoria and Haloa: Myth, Physics and Mysteries," in *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*, edited by S. Blundell and M. Williamson (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 149–73. For more up-to-date views more relevant to the Greek reality, see Alexiou, *After Antiquity*; E. Psychogiou, "Maurēgē" kai Elenē: Teletourgies Thanatou kai Anagennēsēs [“Maurēgē” and Elenē: Chthonic Mythology, Ceremonies of Death and Rebirth in Contemporary Greece]. *Dēmosieumata tou Kentrou Ereunēs tēs Ellēnikēs Laographias*, 24 (Athens: Academy of Athens, 2008). The importance of fertility rituals in rural communities in general and ancient societies in particular, will also be underscored in the next section of this article.

66. Cf. Håland, "The Ritual Year as a Woman's Life"; *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*. Athena as a motherly figure is also mentioned by S. Deacy, "Famous Athens, Divine Polis," in Ogden, *A Companion to Greek Religion*, 226, see also n.18 supra.

67. This is similar to the modern reality, cf. Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*; see also "Rituals of Magical Rain-Making in Modern and Ancient Greece," 197–251, cf. n.3 supra.

earth, both solid and liquid, and for the sake of their cattle, horses and sheep".<sup>68</sup> All festivals were concerned with good offspring generally: animal, vegetable or human.<sup>69</sup>

People celebrate particularly before important passages of the agricultural year in order to secure these passages. The festivals celebrate late summer, autumn, the middle or end of winter, spring, the end of spring, and summer, or ploughing, sowing, "greening" of the fields, harvest, threshing, vintage and pressing, tasting of the wine, and so on. Festivals are celebrated before critical periods during the agricultural year, particularly before sowing and during spring, the most decisive periods of the year's passage. Festivals celebrated at the end of winter and during spring symbolize the passage from winter to the part of the agricultural year when the food will ripen and be harvested. This scheme relates to the grain and wine festivals, but I will argue that festivals might also be of importance for another essential crop, the olive. In the Mediterranean it is traditional to speak of the "trinity" of cereals, vines, and olives as forming the basis of all subsistence agriculture in the region. The olive and its oil are still staples of the Greek diet and its major source of fat.

It does not seem, however, that the growing of olives had a special festival of its own in connection with the actual work involved in the production of the olives, which mainly takes place in the winter period from the end of October or beginning of November until early spring. The olive is well suited to a dry climate, having deep roots and thin leaves which lose little moisture, and in contrast to the vine, the olive needs little care.<sup>70</sup> Quoting Androtion, Theophrastus<sup>71</sup> states that the olive tree should be fertilized and watered. According to Isager and Skydsgaard, however, it is not known whether this was typical.<sup>72</sup> According to Foxhall young trees should ideally be watered a few times over the dry and rainless summer months, between June and September, otherwise, the farmer runs the risk that they will die. Once the trees are several years old and well established, they do not need to be watered in the summer.<sup>73</sup> Greek water courses, however, tend to dwindle in the hot summer when artificial irrigation is needed.<sup>74</sup> In the case of mature olive trees, the moisture available in the soil (dependent on the level of winter rains and cultivation practices) is

68. Xen. *Oec.* 5.19–20.

69. Cf. Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, chs. 5 f; and "Rituals of Magical Rain-Making in Modern and Ancient Greece," also the following paragraph.

70. Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter*, 17, cf. 28, 32–34.

71. Theophrastus, *Enquiry into Plants and Minor Works on Odours and Weather Signs*, vol. 1, translated by A. Hort (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1948, or. 1916) (hereafter cited as Theophr. *Hist. Pl.*), 2.7.3.

72. S. Isager and J. E. Skydsgaard, *Ancient Greek Agriculture. An introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 39 f. Trees were already watered in Homer, *The Iliad*, vols 1–2, translated by A. T. Murray (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1946–1947, or. 1924–1925) (hereafter cited as *Il.*), 21.257 ff.

73. L. Foxhall, email message to author, 15 March 2004; see also Foxhall, "Women's Ritual and Men's Work in Ancient Athens," 97–110; and L. Foxhall, *Olive Cultivation in Ancient Greece: Seeking the Ancient Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 127, for an overview of agricultural jobs and festivals in Attica.

74. Isager and Skydsgaard, *Ancient Greek Agriculture*, 112.

critical. In addition, dew falls mostly in late summer and early autumn.<sup>75</sup> Summer, therefore, seems to be an important period within the agricultural cycle of the olive, and the olive and olive tree, the most Attic of all the crops, have a central place at Athena's festivals. Burkert claims that the oil in the eternally burning lamp of Athena (Paus. 1.26,6 f.)<sup>76</sup> was renewed at the end of the year, when the new oil stands ready (i.e., during the Arrephoria).<sup>77</sup> Simon has argued that as the months following *Skirophorion* are crucial for the olive crop, which is gathered in the later part of the autumn and in winter, the Arrephoria in midsummer was a festival to secure the dew that was necessary during the months from then until the time of harvest if the fruit was to grow to an adequate size.<sup>78</sup> In fact it may be argued that all the festivals dedicated to Athena were related to the olive, the third main crop of the Athenians, and that they were protected by her, as her festivals were celebrated in the crucial period for the olive crop, from the flowering of the olive tree (*Thargelion*), to the growing period of the fruit, until the harvest, when the *Chalkeia* was celebrated. The festivals celebrated from *Skirophorion* were particularly important, because of the summer heat and dryness. It was no coincidence that Athena's sacred olive tree enclosed on the Akropolis, grew in front of the Erekhtheion (Fig. 3a,b) in the Pandrosion, the open-air sanctuary of the Dew Goddess, Pandrosos, who was named for dew.<sup>79</sup>

75. My thanks to Professor C. I. Moutzouris, Director of the laboratory of Harbour Works of the Civil Engineering Department, National Technical University of Athens (NTUA). Also, my thanks to V. K. Tsoukala, Dr Civil Engineer, Laboratory of Harbour Works, School of Civil Engineering, National Technical University of Athens for the information about dew in Greece ("Vicky Tsoukala, email messages to author, April 5 and 6, 2004"). My thanks also to Endre Skaar, Researcher, Geophysical Institute, University of Bergen for calculations about dew fall. We had longer discussions via emails (during spring 2004 when finalizing my PhD-dissertation on which my book from 2007 is based), and he based his estimations from the following sources: <http://gogreece.about.com/> (weather/Detailed weather links/Athens weather – Charts, The New York Times Company, i.e. in 2011, last accessed 21 December 2011; <http://www.sailingissues.com/climate.html> Greek climate/Weather stations, copyright 2000–2011 Diederik Willemsen, last accessed 21 December 2011; <http://www.crystalinks.com/greekclimate.htm> (site discontinued). I then checked with the aforementioned Greek researchers, formerly published material and ancient sources. One may, for example, also find further information online at <http://hoa.ntua.gr/>, i.e. The Hydrological Observatory of Athens, National Technical University of Athens, i.e. NTUA, last accessed 21 December 2011. When writing my dissertation I also had access to other websites which I don't find today (for example I found figures giving exact information about dew fall) which is very useful to compare with information from earlier periods (both ancient and later), see Håland 2007, ch.6 and particularly n.23–25 for available ancient and modern (published) sources and discussion. cf. also infra. See Harrison 1977, 174 for an invocation of dew on the island of Imbros.

76. Burkert 1983, 151. L. Deubner, *Attische Feste [Festivals of Attica]* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1932), 20 argues that the ritual occur during the *Kallynteria/Plynteria*, by the end of *Thargelion*, cf. supra. See Paus. 1.26,6 f. for the lamp.

77. Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 151. L. Deubner, *Attische Feste [Festivals of Attica]* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1932), 20, argues that the ritual occurs during the *Kallynteria/Plynteria*, by the end of *Thargelion*, cf. supra. See Paus. 1.26,6 f. for the lamp.

78. Simon, *Festivals of Attica*, 45. Following Deubner, *Attische Feste*, 14; cf. Isager and Skjoldsgaard, *Ancient Greek Agriculture*, 166.

79. Several scholars mention the olive tree on the Athenian Akropolis (for example Burkert, *Greek Religion*; Boedeker, *Descent from Heaven*) which has its mythical background in the contest between Athena and Poseidon (cf. supra). When they were quarreling for ownership of the land of Attika, Athena caused this tree to grow and so won Athens for herself, Hdt. 8.55. This strife was the subject of the west pediment of the Parthenon. According to Hdt. 8.55, the olive tree on the



**Figure 3** (a–b) Athena’s sacred olive tree in front of the Erechtheion in the Pandrosion. Photograph by Evy Johanne Håland, August 2006.

A vase painting illustrates Athena *Promachos*, “the warrior” (literally “fighting in the front” and being in full armour), receiving votive gifts (i.e., olive branches).<sup>80</sup> Another vase painting depicts her receiving the same gift as well as an animal sacrifice.<sup>81</sup> The vase paintings probably illustrate actual rituals during one of her festivals, most likely the Panathenaia, as the olive was particularly significant at this festival. As Athena’s special tree, the olive played an important part at the Panathenaia, where it was a central offering: the branches carried in the procession were gifts to the Goddess, and the prizes given to the victors of the contests consisted of oil from Athena’s sacred olive trees. Although it has been claimed that the Panathenaia had no specific relationship with agriculture, that it was a sort of national festival taking place at a time when patriotic sentiments ran high, and that it celebrated the *synoikism* of Athens,<sup>82</sup> it was nevertheless celebrated in a period which was crucial for the ensuing olive harvest.

Therefore, one may argue that the importance of the olive, the olive tree, and the connection with Athena was neither a political excuse to secure Athena a role at this period of the agricultural year, nor was Athena’s participation at the festival celebrated during midsummer a political adjustment to the ancient agricultural ritual dedicated to the grain Goddess, Demeter, as some research-

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Acropolis broke into leaf again after the Persian fire. I am unsure as to whether there is scholarly treatment of the tree (per se) at the “time of writing,” while Robertson, “Athena’s Shrines and Festivals,” invents a second tree, cf. n.61 supra.

80. J. D. Beazley, *Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters*, vols. 1–2. 2nd Ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), hereafter, Beazley, *ARV<sup>2</sup>* 240,42. Concerning offerings, the Gerolanos amphora in the Piraeus Museum (cat. no. 7341) shows olive oil being poured in the presence of Athena.

81. J. D. Beazley, *Attic Black-figure Vase-Painters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), hereafter, Beazley, *ABV* 296,4.

82. Isager and Skydsgaard, *Ancient Greek Agriculture*, 166. On the other hand, they seem to agree with Simon, *Festivals of Attica*, 45 concerning the importance of the period. See also Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 50.

ers have claimed.<sup>83</sup> Regarding the relationship between olive cultivation and the production of other crops, such as grain, which is also tied to the festivals of Athena especially the *Skira*, one might mention that numerous threshing floors have been unearthed around the Athenian Akropolis, paralleling those in other places where Athena was worshipped.<sup>84</sup> The *Skira* was celebrated in honour of both Goddesses. If Athena was attached to other central rituals of the annual calendar, the importance of agriculture is highlighted, and although the main period for the agricultural jobs associated with olive production falls at another time of the year, it is important to remember that the olive tree blossoms in May/June, and that the growing period of the fruit follows, which means that the trees need moisture. In other words, the course of the summer is of greatest importance to the result. The importance of securing moisture (i.e., dew) for the olive trees, might be the reason that a cycle of festivals dedicated to Athena was celebrated in the dry and rainless middle of summer.<sup>85</sup> The dates of the festivals might point towards this explanation, although with the two exceptions of the Arrephoria and the Panathenaia, the rituals in the other festivals dedicated to Athena do not seem to be explicitly related to olive growing. The connection between grain and the Demetrian festivals, however, is clear and easy to see.<sup>86</sup> Although it has been claimed that the Panathenaia was essentially an ideological festival, a political institution in the proper sense of the word,<sup>87</sup> the festival belongs to the cycle of nature, even if this is not so apparent in the elaborate ritual which was celebrated in classical Athens. The point is that the festival has several levels of meaning.

When seen in relation to the ritual of the Arrephoria, it appears that the Panathenaia may have included elements of rain-magic to secure the crop protected by the Goddess to whom the festival was dedicated. The green branches and the water jars carried in the procession might, for example, signify the importance of securing enough moisture for the fruit during the rest of the summer. Nature is, therefore, assisted by some kind of “sympathetic magic,” (i.e., magic that depends on a resemblance or perceived similarity between the object, substance, or action used in performing the magic, and the desired effect). It was customary to conduct rain-making rituals at midsummer.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, Athena’s sacred olive from the Athenian Akropolis was famous for

83. Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter*, 156. Robertson, “Athena’s Shrines and Festivals,” 28, connects Athena’s festivals with the grain cycle (cf. 36, 52 ff. and see the procession to *Skira* as a ritual to avoid rain, 52), but I argue that the olive is more central.

84. I want to thank Elenē Psychogiou, for giving me this information.

85. Cf. Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 5 f.; Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*, 26 f.; Simon, *Festivals of Attica*, ch. 3.

86. Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter*; cf. Håland, “The Ritual Year as a Woman’s Life”; and *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*. Concerning the difference between the year of the grain and the agricultural year, other crops are included in the latter.

87. L. Gernet, *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins, 1981), 17.

88. Cf. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 266; D.S. Loukatos, *Ta Phthinopōrina [The autumn (customs/festivals)]*. Laographia — Paradosē 4 (Athens: Ekd. Philippotē, 1982), 87 ff. for rain-making rituals at this period; see also Håland, “Rituals of Magical Rain-Making in Modern and Ancient Greece.” The water jars might, of course, also be connected with other factors, such as washing the hands, sprinkling the sacrificial victims, cf. F. van Straten, *Hiera kalá: Images of Animal Sacrifice in Archaic and Classical Greece* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

its apotropaic effect when the crops failed.<sup>89</sup> If there is not enough dew the fruit remains small, and as the dewfall generally does not increase until late summer, the magic might also be used to ensure that this does indeed happen, or it might be a thanks offering that the dew did come in sufficient quantities in the period after the Arrephoria. After all, the three months from June to August have the least relative humidity and the period between the end of July and the middle of August is the most precarious, with the smallest amount of dew.<sup>90</sup>

The rite performed by the little Arrēphoroi was a fertility charm. Its purpose was the magic strengthening of the olive trees, and at the same time, the life force of Athens and her people, miraculously represented in the sacred olive on the Akropolis. Several ceremonies during religious festivals demonstrate rites of propitiation to different spirits in rituals linked to life-cycle passages, such as girls entering womanhood and marriage. To guarantee that the transitional periods will pass properly, communication is necessary, manifested by prayers and offerings to the relevant divinities in order to secure their help. The gift-giving is accomplished by way of magic, and at the level of macro-society, this is demonstrated by seasonal festivals and all their ingredients.<sup>91</sup>

The festival is an important means of communication, an offering or a gift, most often dedicated to a deceased guardian of society, alone, or together with a God(dess); for instance, Athena. According to Homer there existed an annual sacrifice of rams and bulls to her earth-born son, Erekhtheus,<sup>92</sup> which might have been carried out during the Panathenaia. In this and the other festivals, we find the fertility cult and death cult as well as healing.

The analysis of the fertility cult demonstrates how fertility is still connected to the deceased and the powers in the subterranean world where life begins, according to the cyclical symbolism that is central in Greek culture. The deceased mediator receives a blood sacrifice, the ritual slaughter of an animal (e.g., an ox or a lamb) which afterwards is consumed as a communal meal by the participants of the festival. The communication is presented on several levels. The dead receives the offering in order to provide for the fertility of the society through the communication with stronger powers, first and foremost, Mother Earth. Blood, water, and wine offerings to the earth during festivals dedicated to other divinities remind us that it is not only important to treat the living participants who, for example, are given wine and meat during the ritual passages of the festivals connected with the seasonal calendar, with its emphasis on the cycle of natural increase. The dead and the earth also require their

89. Hdt. 5.82–86.

90. Generally, very little dew falls by the end of July and the first part of August. In addition to the average values, the direction of the wind is important, and this might be changing — northerly winds from land give dry air, bright weather with strong heating during the day and little dew fall. For the ancient Etesian winds and the modern Meltemi, cf. J. C. B. Petropoulos, *Heat and Lust: Hesiod's Midsummer Festival Scene Revisited* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994). Cf. n. 74 supra. Conversely, too much humidity can in fact harm olives, making them more susceptible to fungal infection and encouraging the destructive olive fly to thrive.

91. Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 6, also for the following paragraph, see "Rituals of Magical Rain-Making in Modern and Ancient Greece"; "The Ritual Year as a Woman's Life"; "Greek Women, Power and the Body." One may, of course, assume that this is also relevant for all societies and not only ancient and modern Greece.

92. *Il.* 2.546–551.

share. Fertility ceremonies maintain the connection with the year's passage through festive engagements that still speak out on behalf of fertility. As modern anthropology has shown (cf. n. 64), fertility rituals have to do with all the creative powers in the universe.

Death cult, fertility cult, and healing are connected with important passages in the cycle of nature and the life of humans. The festivals are, for example, celebrated in connection with the death of winter and the birth of spring. The festivals might celebrate the first fruits, the start of the official year and month, and generally the official ideological rituals are adapted to the agricultural calendar. Transitional periods are uncertain and "dangerous," both in the life of a person and in social life, because we do not know how the transition will turn out. During festivities, fertility rituals are performed to conciliate the supernatural beings and persuade them to be favourable. The actual rituals are also purifying or healing as purification is fundamental to ensure fertility, and the purification is particularly manifested through various apotropaic symbols.<sup>93</sup> In this way the vitality of nature is renewed and increased, and the same is true of people generally. Confidence in the power and care of the God(s) and Goddess(es) is re-established. For humans this occurs at the rituals surrounding birth, puberty, marriage, and death.

In ancient Greek the same word covers birth, generation and coming into being, but it never implies "out of nothing." Hence, a birth is the same as a transition from one state to another, and the child must die before the adult can be born. Thus, a person must die so another might be born. The winter dies when spring is born, and a person is born as a hero or heroine upon her or his death.<sup>94</sup>

In Greece, the year cycle parallels the life cycle as the transitional periods in a human's life cycle parallel those in nature. Ceremonies that accompany each successive stage of life are *rites de passage*, ceremonies of transition, of going out from the old and going into the new. The same is true of nature, its birth, death, and rebirth, and the seasonal changes in weather and wind, and in the life of animals and plants, as annual transitions are periods of transition and the seasons are based on the food supply. The periods of transition from one state to another occur in all natural phenomena, as illustrated in the different levels of the festivals. Dangerous magic is particularly active in the transitional periods of the life cycle and, hence, these periods are surrounded by taboos, and fertility rituals are crucial. Dangerous periods also coincide with divisions of time, the most critical periods being midnight and noon, and the passage from one season to the next, depending on how many seasons the society might divide the year into: two as shepherds, fishermen, and sailors; alternatively, three or four as

93. Cf. Robertson, "Athena's Shrines and Festivals," 29, which identifies the striding Athena Promachos represented on Panathenaic amphoras as Athena Hygieia. A similar logic is found in Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, 438 and n. 886.

94. Cf. H. M. Bower, *The Elevation and Procession of The Ceri at Gubbio. An Account of the Ceremonies* (London: The Folk-Lore Society, 1896), 41; Leach, *Culture and Communication*, 79; Harrison, *Themis*, ch. 8; and Plato, vol. 1, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, translated by H. N. Fowler (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990, 1966, or 1914) (hereafter cited as *Pl. Phd.*), 70c–d, 102c. Cf. Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates. Euthyphro, The Apology, Crito, Phaedo*, translated by H. Tredennick (London: Penguin, 1987), 195 n. 12.

peasants.<sup>95</sup> Dangerous magic is assumed to be particularly active during the twelve-day period from Christmas to Epiphany, which is also a period of transition, both in the year cycle and in the lead up to the baptism of Christ on 6 January. A particularly important transitional period during the agricultural year occurs around the spring equinox. In the ancient world, the period of spring germination was also an auspicious time for marriage, because life was about to come with the spring, and marriage and conception could suitably be linked to it. On the human level it was the favourite season for weddings, because the divine model, the sacred marriage of Zeus and Hera in the *Theogamia* (the wedding of the Gods), secured a prosperous result for everyone. In popular custom, marriages continue to take place by preference during a particular time of the year,<sup>96</sup> such as after harvest, and the same concerns other life-cycle passages. The reason for this is probably the belief that through some sort of “sympathetic magic,” the two rituals influence or assist each other. Seasonal festivals symbolize important passages of the agricultural year, and are connected with agricultural fecundity, with fertility, and increase. All the festivals are connected with important passages in the cycle of nature, important phases during the agricultural cycle, and important life-cycle passages of divine persons, such as Athena’s birthday in the ancient world, and, for example, *Panagia’s* (the Virgin Mary’s) Dormition in the modern world. As with the little *Arrēphoroi*, in Athens as elsewhere in the Greek world, many ritual functions fell to those who because of their age were necessarily pure. In post-classical medical and agricultural writing, the virgin and the “uncorrupted boy” are credited with magical powers that are obviously conceived as deriving from purity.<sup>97</sup>

When examining the roles of women and girls in rituals to Athena, one might ask what power, if any, did women gain? I have discussed these and related questions in several contexts<sup>98</sup> where I emphasize that given the division of ancient Athenian society — like later Greek society — into a female (domestic) sphere and a male (official) sphere and the way in which labour is therefore

95. In the Orthodox calendar, the birth celebrations of Christ and St John are at opposite points of the calendrical compass, as are the celebrations of their conceptions, so that together, the four feasts mark the beginnings of the four seasons: L. K. Hart, *Time, Religion, and Social Experience in Rural Greece* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992), 231.

96. See for example, A. Kyriakidou-Nestoros, *Oi 12 Mēnes: Ta Laographika [The 12 months: the folklore]* (Athens: Malliarēs-Paideia, 1986), 113, cf. Arist. *Pol.* 7.1335a36 ff.; Strabo, *Geography*, vol. 7, translated by H. L. Jones (London: Heinemann, 1930) (hereafter cited as Strab.), 15.733, 17. Modern and ancient sources in connection with marriage and wedding are discussed in depth in Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 6.

97. Parker, *Miasma. Pollution and Purification*, 79. For Panagia, see E. J. Håland, “The Dormition of the Virgin Mary, on the Island of Tinos: A Performance of Gendered Values in Greece,” *Journal of Religious History* 36 (Forthcoming 2012).

98. E. J. Håland, “Take Skamandros, My Virginity: ‘The Ideas of Water’ in Connection with Rituals Linked to Life-Cycle Passages in Greece, Modern and Ancient” (paper delivered at the Third International Water History Association Conference, The History of Water and Civilization: “The Ideas of Water,” Alexandria, Egypt, 11–14 December 2003). For a recent version, “Take Skamandros, My Virginity: Ideas of Water in Connection with Rites of Passage in Greece, Modern and Ancient,” in *The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing, and Hygiene from Antiquity through the Renaissance*, edited by C. Kosso and A. Scott (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 109–48; Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*; “Greek Women and Death, Ancient and Modern”; “Greek Women, Power and the Body.”

divided between the two sexes, women might originally have created these rituals to reflect their daily life.

Several aspects of a woman's life generally were performed in the festivals of Athena, such as washing the temple and the statue when the olive tree was flowering; carrying down and up sacred, secret objects, like dew; the dedication of the wedding dress when the fruit was growing and also when the race run by young men in honour of the virgin took place; and the warping of the peplos when the fruit was harvested. Apart from the race, the main actors in the rituals were little girls and women.

The race, however, was also central in other festivals, such as the Panathenaia, where horse and chariot races were important. A torch race also took place on the night before the procession. The significance of the torch race was the ritual transfer of new fire.<sup>99</sup> It was run by young men from the altar of Eros in the Academy to another dedicated to Opposite Eros at the foot of the Akropolis, and may thus be linked to the ritual of the Arrēphoroi where the sanctuary of Eros and Aphrodite was central. As with the *Skira* race in honour of the virgin, these races signified fertility rituals, paralleling other contests associated with marriages. We have numerous mythical illustrations of fathers holding races for their daughters' lovers, the race being an important prenuptial ritual in the process of wooing and marriage;<sup>100</sup> for instance, the marriage of Pelops and Hippodameia,<sup>101</sup> the marriage of Odysseus and Penelope,<sup>102</sup> and the daughters of Danaos, the Danaids.<sup>103</sup> In the Greek context, these notorious men murderers, the Danaids, were also the prime initiators of marriage, and are further seen as water-carrying well nymphs, irrigating the earth with their leaky sieves, a well-known fertility symbol. The myth about the Danaids being on the threshold of marriage, symbolizes an initiation ritual performed by girls before marriage.<sup>104</sup> The fifty Danaids pursued by the fifty "Egyptians" represent the pre-adult cult dances of two *choroi* — one of maidens, the other of youths — and might also parallel the song and dances performed during the Panathenaic *panmychis*. The prenuptial dance groups comprised one chorus of the male youths (the *kouretes*) preparing for war, and one of maidens (the *kouroi*) preparing for marriage. The girls' dances are particularly linked to the cult of Artemis. Though initiations leading into the different adult roles of men and women must treat maidens and youths separately, the youths will be the husbands of the maidens and, therefore, come into sight not infrequently. Boys' rites and girls' rites were likely to follow the same calendrical pattern, also bringing them into association. In Athens the *Apatouria* festival — held to incorporate boys into the phratry — was celebrated at the same time as the *Thesmophoria*, the principal rite of women's society celebrated around the

99. It is worth mentioning that fire is an important purification (cf. healing) remedy in several cultures.

100. We also have rites of girls racing, such as in connection with Hera's Games, when a running match between virgin girls took place, Paus. 5.16,2.

101. Paus. 5.13,7, 5.14,6, 5.17,7.

102. Paus. 3.12,1.

103. Paus. 3.12,2.

104. Dowden, *Death and the Maiden*.

time of sowing, and an offering called *Gamelia* at the *Apatouria*, concerned marriage. As with the rites of passage of the two sexes at the Panathenaia, themes such as chase, war, and killing versus love, life, care, and nutrition were prominent. During Perses' first sexual experience, he beheads ("castrates") the pregnant woman, Medusa.<sup>105</sup> From the decapitation, which is associated with blood sacrifice, killing, and the male power of reproduction, new life burst from the blood of her genitalized head.<sup>106</sup> In many myths we learn about girls, for instance the Proitids, the daughters of Proitos, who were chased by a set of boys before marriages were arranged. This might also parallel the contest between Athena and Hephaestus, although this did not end with a marriage, at least not officially. Hephaestus also had a share in the *Chalkeia*. The *agōn* or contest is also found in later carnival rituals, and is related to sowing. The concept of the *agōn* or contest, this time applied to the seasons, was also illustrated in the Panathenaia where the meteorological imbalance of dry and wet can be seen as a contest between the dry and wet in the height of summer.<sup>107</sup>

The cyclical perspective is central to the festivals of the agricultural year, and the mid-August festival marks the beginning of the passage to the new agricultural season. After the dog days, by the end of August, this transition towards the "female," wet and fertile period in the agricultural year's cycle starts to replace the "male" and dry period, because the woman is looked upon as the productive partner in a relationship in the Mediterranean area.<sup>108</sup>

Bourdieu created a "synoptic diagram of pertinent oppositions" as a model to help him understand the Kabyles of North Africa. This Mediterranean cultural pattern may be used on Greek material as well. The male–female division, which he presented in an earlier study, is a structured system of gendered classification, where the elements of the male–female division, such as male/dry, female/wet, are inserted in layers.<sup>109</sup> The calendar presents the agricultural year and the relations between humans and nature. It has importance for understanding the male ideal gendered dichotomy vis-à-vis the actual gendered relations in society. The model embodies the human and agricultural life cycles related to gender, the very cosmos. The material on which Bourdieu has based his presentation, parallels many of the scattered sources we have from ancient Greek men who mention the agricultural calendar, festivals, and the two sexes in the ancient world. Hesiod's<sup>110</sup> presentation of the agricultural calendar tells, in its own way, when the year starts and ends, and the most important aspect of the cyclical calendar is what people do during the year and when they do it; of particular

105. Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, translated by H. G. Evelyn-White (London: Heinemann, 1950, or. 1914) (hereafter cited as *Hes. Th.*), 276–83.

106. E. H. C. Haspels, *Attic Black-Figured Lekythoi*, vol. 1 (Paris: École Française d'Athènes, 1936), hereafter, *ABL* 235,71.

107. Petropoulos, *Heat and Lust*; D. S. Loukatos, *Ta Kalokairina* (Athens: Ekd. Philippotē, 1981). See also supra for the fight against the weather Gods.

108. P. Bourdieu, *Le Sens Pratique [The practical reason]* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980).

109. P. Bourdieu, "The Sentiment of Honour in Kabyle Society," in *Honour and Shame. The Values of Mediterranean Society*, edited by J. G. Peristiany (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 191–241; Bourdieu, *Le Sens Pratique*, ch. 3.

110. *Hes. Op.* 383–617.

importance are sowing and harvest, and while other sources are more explicit,<sup>111</sup> he also indicates that the wet<sup>112</sup> woman tackles the warm and dry season better than men.<sup>113</sup> Aristotle tells when people celebrate festivals.<sup>114</sup> He connects the wet, earthly, or physical part of the human couple, the woman, with the nature and the wet, and men with thought, mind, light, fire, and the dry.<sup>115</sup> We meet the same polar conception of the female and male association with the wet and dry, inside and outside, body/womb/earth/darkness, and atmosphere/fire/light/heaven as Bourdieu presented from his research on the Kabyles.

Bourdieu as a man, presents a man's analysis of men's historical paths, and his approach is similar to the presentations given by the ancient male writers. If, however, we study the calendar in combination with focal features in the ancient Athenian and modern Greek festival calendars from a non-androcentric perspective, the result will differ. There is only a male dominance, as he claims, if we read the calendar from a male perspective. This will automatically be reproduced if we only base our research on the male ideological sphere and value system. Many scholars working with ancient Greek society present similar values.<sup>116</sup> On the other hand we can learn that what seemed peripheral from the male sphere becomes the central, if we look from the female sphere.<sup>117</sup> We also find new, or female, values. How do we look from the female sphere? We do this by conducting fieldwork in modern female and male spheres and comparing our findings with ancient sources, while simultaneously trying to view the material from the perspective of Greek women, which is similar to that of ancient women (as indicated by the few sources we possess and also from what can be read between the lines or distorted in ancient male statements, for example those of Hesiod, Aeschylus, and Plutarch).<sup>118</sup> By taking account of both spheres, we realize that they are complementary to each other and that we can create a fuller picture of human experience. Accordingly, the

111. Hippocrates, vol. 4, translated by W. H. S. Jones (1931; repr. London: Heinemann, 1953) (London: Heinemann, 1953, or. 1931), 27.1–6; Aristotle, *Problems*, vol. 1, translated by W. S. Hett (London: Heinemann, 1953, or. 1926) (hereafter cited as *Arist. Pr.*) 4.879a26–35.

112. Cf. Hes. *Op.* 519–25.

113. Hes. *Op.* 582–96, cf. *Sc.* 393–400 for the season.

114. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by H. Rackham (London: Heinemann, 1962, or. 1926) (hereafter cited as *Eth. Nic.*), 8.1160a19–30.

115. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, translation by A. L. Peck (London: Heinemann, 1963, or. 1942) (hereafter cited as *Arist. Gen. An.*), 765a35–765b26, see also 716a2–24, 728a19–22, 766a17–30, 783b26–784a12; Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, vol. 1: books 1–9, translated by H. Tredennick (London: Heinemann, 1961, or. 1933) (hereafter cited as *Metaph.*), 1.5.986a23 ff.; cf. Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. 5, translated by F. C. Babbitt (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1936) (hereafter cited as *Plut. Mor.*) 370e–f. For more sources and a comprehensive discussion, see Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 6; cf. also “The Ritual Year as a Woman's Life”; “Greek Women, Power and the Body.”

116. M. Detienne, *Les Jardins d'Adonis. La mythologie des aromates en Grèce* [The gardens of Adonis : Spices in Greek mythology] (Paris: Gallimard, 1989); F. I. Zeitlin, “The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the Orestia,” in *Women in the Ancient World. The Arethusa Papers*, edited by J. Peradotto and J. P. Sullivan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 159–94. Cf. also Boedeker, *Descent from Heaven*.

117. Cf. Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*; “Greek Women and Death, Ancient and Modern”; “Greek Women, Power and the Body” for presentation and discussion.

118. That is why their view is ambiguous; for example, when Plutarch severely criticizes women at the cemetery. We might understand what was going on, and what the women thought about the process, since similar situations have occurred until modern times, see Håland, “Athena's Peplos”; “Greek Women and Death, Ancient and Modern”; “Greek Women, Power and the Body.”

one-sided analysis Bourdieu presents of the diagram must be read from another approach, from a *chthonic* perspective (i.e., from the bottom, from below, or from the inside), thus emphasizing the importance of the wet and “female” part of the agricultural year — the gestation period — which is also when the women weave the peplos of Athena.

The period from the *Chalkeia* (the day on which the priestesses and the Arrēphoroi warp the peplos) around the time of sowing and the gathering of the olive crop, until the completed robe is cut in the middle of the summer, is a parallel to the yearly calendar of the Kabyles in North Africa, as illustrated by Bourdieu.<sup>119</sup> Among the Kabyles, the “calendar” of the women’s work complements the farming “calendar,” as the assembly of the loom is followed by the start of weaving at the time of ploughing and sowing, and the woven cloth is unfastened, cut, and removed around the time of the grain harvest. Weaving is the winter activity, which ends with the wet season in May. This women’s work is completed when the mistress of the house unfastens the woven cloth at the time of harvest, an activity which has to be completed around the summer solstice, at the highest point of the “male period.” When the cloth has been removed, the loom is dismantled and put away for the duration of “the death of the field,” (i.e., the period lasting from the completion of the grain harvest until the start of ploughing and sowing). The work, or the production, however, is done in the wet and “female” part of the agricultural year — the gestation period. Bourdieu emphasizes that the result of the production is reaped in the “male period,” but the work of production, which is necessary to complete the woven cloth as well as to ensure the crop, is mainly carried out in the period associated with the “female,” “productive part” of the agricultural cycle. To complement Bourdieu’s male account, it is worth noting that the olive crop is gathered in the “female period,” after the central growing period in the “male period” has ended, and this is when most of Athena’s festivals are also celebrated. Further, the most important crops, grain, vines, and olives were associated with female divinities,<sup>120</sup> thus, paralleling women’s nurturing role.

There is a female world view and language that differs from men’s. Traditionally women have used weaving to tell stories. The rituals surrounding the loom parallel those of the sexual act (marriage), birth, childrearing, and death, as the life cycle is represented. We meet a world frame constituted by women within an ostensibly male-dominated society. I have already explored this female language in connection with the rituals of weaving and the making of story clothes for Goddesses of which the peplos of Athena was only one.<sup>121</sup>

Women’s roles in the olive cycle include tending the olive trees. In modern Greece, if the men have begun ploughing, contemporary women pick the

119. Bourdieu, *Le Sens Pratique*, ch. 3.

120. Apollon’s son Anios’s daughters provide wine (*oino*), grain (*spermo*) and oil (*elaiis*). The divinity most closely associated with the vine was Dionysus. This chthonic God, however, also has female traits, Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 6; “Athena’s Peplos.”

121. Håland, “Athena’s Peplos.”

olives.<sup>122</sup> In classical Athens, as today, physically hard work was most likely done by men while other tasks were done by women.

The importance of agriculture is illustrated through the offerings in the festival and rituals carried out as part of Athena's main festival, but her entire festival cycle related to securing her crop, the olive, as illustrated by the period when most of her festivals were celebrated.

The ritual of making the peplos had strong connections with women's rites of passages, as was generally the case during the festivals of Athena. It is not accidental that it took nine months to weave the peplos for the virgin Goddess, and that young girls played a role in this. Prior to the Panathenaia a ritual was also carried out that was central in connection with Mother Goddesses, such as Demeter, Persephone, and Aphrodite. Little girls were the main performers during the Arrephoria, and the aim of the ritual was to promote the fertility of both women and agriculture. The relationship between women and agriculture is also illustrated in the subsequent *Skira* festival. This was dedicated to the grain Goddesses, but the olive Goddess also played an important role, and the main purpose of the festival was to stimulate the fertility of the earth and humanity. Accordingly, the festivals devoted to Athena and Demeter took place at the same time because their aims were the same — to promote fertility. Since the *Skira* was mainly a women's festival and was celebrated at the height of summer, it may, like the preceding Arrephoria, also be recognized as a preliminary ritual to the Panathenaia, which in itself also pointed towards the *Chalkeia*, when the olive crop was gathered. Simultaneously, the warp was set on the loom and the young girls started to weave the new peplos for the Goddess, which was offered to her on the next Panathenaia. Through the ritual ploughing and sowing, which was performed during the *Skira*, the festival also prepared the new agricultural year. The central act of the secret rituals performed by women during the *Skira*, *Thesmophoria*, and Arrephoria, which were all dedicated to Mother Goddesses, was the descent of certain female participants into underground caverns, symbolizing the womb of the earth. These women were carrying down sacred symbolic offerings — fertility charms symbolizing female and male genitals, dew, and corn. When these fertility symbols had absorbed the power of fertility from the womb of the earth, they were brought up and were mixed on the altar with the seed corn to ensure an abundant crop. The act of carrying down and up indicates sowing and reaping, thus aiming to promote good offspring — human, animal and vegetable. In official festivals, fertility rituals performed by the female part of society are of focal importance.<sup>123</sup>

Women are also the practical performers of the rituals that are of significance in the life-cycle passages, particularly birth, marriage, and death, when they lament their dead, during and after the washing, anointing, and dressing of

122. Hart, *Time, Religion, and Social Experience*, 243, cf. 102, 181. In contemporary Mani in the Peloponnese, urbanized Maniat women return to their natal villages for two events: olive harvesting and mortuary ceremonies, C. N. Seremetakis, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

123. Cf. Håland, "The Ritual Year as a Woman's Life"; and "Greek Women, Power and the Body."

the corpse in clean robes. Men are the performers of most public rituals, but the point is that these rituals cannot take place before the female-dominated rituals have finished. The official rituals where men are agents cannot be performed before women have done the preliminary work. Women, like Goddesses, have primary control of the processes of production and reproduction, the basic life processes.<sup>124</sup>

In the fifth century, Athena's Parthenon was transformed into a church dedicated to the Panagia, after the termination of the age-old Panathenaia in 410 CE.<sup>125</sup>

### Conclusion

This article has described the ritual year of the Virgin Goddess, Athena, has explored the relationship between girls' rites of passage, the agricultural cycle of the olive, and the official ideology of the ancient Athenian *polis*, which is also important when considering the incorporation of historical events in the recurring cycle of the ritual year. We learn that although political arrangements may affect ritual, political explanations can never entirely account for cultic arrangements. Political arrangements might obviously affect ritual, but my purpose has been to give an alternative and more comprehensive presentation of the festival than, for example, Gernet. My aim has also been to focus on the agricultural and female aspects, instead of seeing everything from a male political view, which only presents a part of the society which, nevertheless, depended on the olive crop for its survival.<sup>126</sup>

The fertility cult, in fact, plays an important role within the official male value system. Taking account of the female sphere in Greece provides us with the basis for considering the female part of society, and reconsidering the male view while simultaneously achieving a more complete analysis of the society, in which the female point of view is included.

124. According to R. S. Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among the Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 22 Goddesses played a more central role in the religious lives of ancient Greek women than male deities; cf. Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 6, also for modern Greek women who are more devoted to the Panagia than God.

125. Håland, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient*, ch. 5, discusses the festival from its obscure origins in c. 566 BCE. There is no special saint in the Orthodox church related to the olive tree and its oil; however, Panagia has an epithet, *Elaibrytissa* (i.e., the one from whom flows/springs the oil). This particular Panagia is illustrated on an icon in the monastery of Batopedion at Mount Athos, see T. Koumarianos, "Elaion: ē chrēsē tou stēn orthodoxē Ekklesiā," [Oil: its use in the Orthodox church]. In A. Polymerou-Kamilaki, ed., *Ē elia kai to ladi apo tēn archaiotēta eōs sēmera [The Olives and the oil from the ancient time until today]*. Praktika Diethnous Synedriou. Dēmosiēmata Kentrou Ereunēs tēs Ellēnikēs Laographias 19 (Athens: Akadēmia Athēnōn, 2003), 113–120, 440, fig. 1.

126. My point, then, has been to go deeper than, for example, Gernet, *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece*, 17, and also see the ancient world from a perspective other than that seen in Robertson, *Festivals and Legends*, where the emphasis is on the male ideological use of the rituals in ancient society, which, in my opinion, should be reconsidered. This can be done by a new investigation into the role of women and a consideration of the real importance of folk beliefs.