Women, Death and the Body in some of Plutarch’s writings

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Abstract

This article focuses on some of Plutarch’s texts on women, death and the body, based on a comparison with material from modern Greece, where we find many of the same opinions about women, death and the body among men, and which are different from the women’s thinking about themselves. This article will also try to explain why we encounter many contradictions in Plutarch’s work on the topics: Women are assumed to be ruled by their men, to stay indoors without exposing themselves or talk in public, a habit which is considered extremely unmanly in connection with, for example, mourning. Simultaneously, women who act manly while saving their home and city by exposing not only their bodies, but even their private parts are considered to be brave women. How can we explain these contradictions, many of which Plutarch shares with other ancient male authors of sources?

Based on studies in ancient Greek sources, mainly produced by Plutarch, combined with results from fieldwork which the author has carried out in contemporary Greece, and other ethnographic writings, a comparison is made through an analysis of women, death and the body. This is a useful way to try to consider the female part of society from a new approach and try to explain the contradictions we encounter in Plutarch’s texts, which presents the

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official male value-system, from which the ancient society traditionally has been considered, and which is also very similar to the values found in the writings of modern, particularly male, ethnographers. The absence of the female value-system leaves previous analyses one-sided and incomplete. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis requires the female point of view to be included. Hence, the article argues for the importance of changing our approach when working with ancient Greek culture. Taking account of the female sphere, which still exists in Greece, provides us with a basis for considering the female part of society, but, by so doing, the official male perspective, which is similar to the Western male perspective generally applied within Greek studies, has to be deconstructed.

Keywords: Greek history, ancient and modern; Comparative approach; Women and gender-studies; Plutarch; Women; Death cult and Death-rituals; Body

Mourning is verily feminine, and weak, and ignoble, since women are more given to it than men, and barbarians more than Greeks, and inferior men more than better men, .... (Plut. Mor. 113a)

He (Solon) also subjected the public appearances of the women, their mourning and their festivals, to a law which did away with disorder and licence. ... Laceration of the flesh by mourners, ...., he forbade. ... Most of these practices are also forbidden by our laws, but ours contain the additional proviso that such offenders shall be punished by the board of censors for women, because they indulge in unmanly and effeminate extravagances of sorrow when they mourn. (Plut. Sol. 21.4 f.)

Theano, in putting her cloak about her, exposed her arm. Somebody exclaimed, “A lovely arm”. “But not for the public”, said she. Not only the arm of a virtuous woman, but her speech as well, ought not to be for the public, as she ought to be modest and guarded about saying anything in the hearing of outsiders, since it is an exposure of herself; ... (Mor. 142cd31)
... maidens need watching, and ... for married women staying at home silence is becoming. (Mor. 381ef)

Under the lead of Telesilla, they (the women) took up arms, and, taking their stand by the battlements, manned the walls all round, so that the enemy were amazed. (Mor. 245de)

... the enemy not far from forcing their way in along with the Persians, the women ran out to meet them before the city, and, lifting up their garments said, “Whither are you rushing so fast, you biggest cowards in the whole world? Surely you cannot, in your flight, slink in here whence you came forth.” (Mor. 246a)

1. Introduction

What did people in late-antique (1.-4. century CE) Greek pagan culture think about women, death and the body? This article focuses on some of the many texts which cover the three aspects from the philosopher, biographer, Delphian priest and famous moralist, Plutarch (about 50-120 CE). The article will also try to give an explanation to why we can find such striking contradictions in Plutarch’s work, as exemplified by the aforementioned quotes about women, death and the body: Women are assumed to be ruled completely by their men, to stay indoors without exposing themselves or talk in public, an habit which is considered extremely unmanly concerning, for example, mourning. Actually, Plutarch in banning laments, generally also draws on his predecessors: The archaic lawgiver Solon’s laws punished lamenting women for being barbaric and unmanly, an ideology which Solon shares with several ancient writers. At the same time the customs banned by the early lawgivers are still alive and the very laments are still performed in Plutarch’s own days. We learn this from his letter of consolidation to his wife when their daughter has died. In this letter, Plutarch is praising her calm behaviour during the burial which she arranged herself in his absence. Simultaneously, women who act manly while saving their home and city by exposing not only their bodies, but even their private parts are considered to be
brave women.

It should be stated that when we talk about people in the Greek pagan culture’s appreciation of women, death and the body, unfortunately, we must rely mainly on the opinion we find in the male part of the culture, written as well as visual, since most of our source material was produced by men, for example Plutarch. Almost all of the female individuals are presented through what others, i.e. the male authors of our sources say about them. This means that we possess only half of the story. Is it possible to amend this drawback and if so, how? Is it possible to learn something about women through men’s descriptions (cf. Håland 2007, 2008)?

In the Mediterranean area women, death and the body are interrelated. From antiquity to present-day’s society, woman is the most important performer of the death-rituals in this area of the world, and her body is a significant medium in the expression of grief and in the communication with the dead.

In Greece, women are connected with birth, nurturance and the care for the dead; they are feeding and nourishing mothers, and by these encompassing activities they manage and control the fundamental course of life. Women are the performers of the laments for the dead; they are tending the graves and conducting the memorials for the dead. The death cult (Håland 2008) is deeply connected with the domestic sphere, where women are the dominant power, but there are also public spaces where women dominate. One of these is the cemetery.

Women caring for the dead appear in Plutarch’s writings, but, as mentioned earlier, Plutarch criticizes their excesses of grief and prefers manly women. These women may show a courage which is “truly masculine” (andreion, Mor. 769bc); or they may express manly (andrōdeis, 110d) sentiments. The other, “ordinary women” - the performers of the death-rituals in the traditional way -, he shuns. According to Plutarch, the manly women exhibit restraint, calmness and modesty when they conduct death-rituals; the others are unmanly, effeminate and extravagant when conducting the same rituals, i.e. in a “female way”. Even if he criticizes the last group, they are nevertheless the normal representatives of the female sex in the Mediterranean area. The way Plutarch considers women’s behaviour is strikingly similar to modern Greek and Mediterranean ideology connected with honour and shame.
(cf. Peristiany 1966; Gilmore 1987 vs. Herzfeld 1992), which are conventional male values. According to these values, gender relations in society are spatially divided, and the most characteristic aspect of the code seems to be the association of these concepts with gender roles, power and sexuality.

In present-day Greece the code of honour and shame presents itself through the notions of *philotimo* (love of honour) and *dropi* (shame). A man must have honour, and love and respect masculinity and a woman must have *dropi* or shame; she must be chaste, modest and faithful towards her husband. On the other hand, this explanation of *philotimo* and *dropi* is the ideal of a patriarchal ideology. It is reproduced by fieldworkers who are represented by it from their own informants, most often males. In actual life, *philotimo* and *dropi* are not always gendered in the way earlier anthropologists have claimed, since a woman may have *philotimo*. *Philotimo* is also a general quality of being an *anthropos*, a “person” or “human being” doing the “right thing”, such as being hospitable and meeting the social expectations. Not doing the right thing, on the other hand, is considered “a shame”, a label which may be used both on women and men, today as in Plutarch’s time.\(^1\)

The analogy between the ancient and modern Greek values is not far-fetched. Several scholars have in fact argued for the value of using “Mediterranean anthropology” comparatively to try to present a more accurate picture of ancient society based on a broader understanding of the context

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\(^1\) As an historian (and not a classicist) using a comparative method to ancient Greek culture, my approach is *per se* not “classical”: Since 1983, I have had several periods of fieldwork in the Mediterranean, mainly in Greece and Italy where I have also been conducting research on religious festivals and life-cycle passages since 1987, cf. Håland 2007. Several of the topics discussed in the following are also examined in Håland 2004, 2008, 2010, 2012a (forthcoming). See particularly Håland 2007, where also the problems and fruitfulness of working with anthropological comparative approaches (such as using material from modern Mediterranean and particularly Greek civilization as models) to ancient society are discussed, cf. further Winkler 1990; Holst-Warhaft 1992; Petropoulos 1994 and Moxnes 1997. But, see Pomeroy 1998 for a more cautious view. In Plutarch, the social construction of manliness and femaleness is based upon biological facts, but this does not deny that we also find a mixing of the categories, cf. *Mor.* 751b. See 511d18 (510d) for men and shame, cf. 248b. Cf. Moxnes 1997, 281 for a fruitful discussion of masculinity and femininity in Plutarch (see also 280), and the masculine ideal which is a public virtue ibid. 268 ff., see also Håland 2007, ch. 6 for a longer discussion of honour and shame/*philotimo* and *dropi*, cf. 2009a and 2009b, 2010.
where the ancient sources were formulated. The main reasons for using anthropological results comparatively in reading ancient sources are the similarities of certain cultural patterns and social values found in the same geographical area. There are, of course, numerous local differences within the Mediterranean area, but the point is that certain cultural patterns, such as the aforementioned “honour and shame”, recur across the many nationalities, languages and religious groupings from Portugal in the west to Iraq in the east. Several of the same patterns may also be found in Africa, but particularly in the Mediterranean regions. The variations that occur are variations on a theme. One of the actual themes is the death cult. The differentiated spheres and roles of men and women are other important cultural themes. We find the prevalence of “honour” as a social value, and the ways people in the actual area solve their conflicts are very similar in Homer and in the vendetta cultures in the contemporary Balkans, as well as in other specific regions of the Mediterranean where people still practise blood feuds. Certain deep premises about social life, widely shared in the area, can be used to frame and illuminate ancient texts, bringing out their unspoken assumptions. This way of interpreting the material does not necessarily presuppose an organic continuity between ancient and modern Greece, and recognition of historical discontinuity in many areas (including changes both in the institutional and economic contexts) should not exclude comparative and genealogical analysis (cf. Seremetakis 1991, 11).

So, although the article focuses on Plutarch as a source when examining women, death and the body, the method employed to interpret his writings is comparative. Therefore, I focus on the gendered aspect from a methodological/theoretical approach to women and gender research in which fieldwork is important. In this way I also discuss gender bias. I include modern Greece concerning the field of reference. This is due to my contention that modern Greek society can, via a comparative approach, shed light on ancient Greek society. So, although the article focuses on an ancient Greek author, the research also draws on fieldwork which I have conducted on religious festivals and life-cycle passages in Greece and the Mediterranean 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. In a current
larger research project, I broaden the topic to also include ancient and modern Greek women’s role in death-rituals comparatively, and in this connection it is crucial to read Plutarch and other sources written by men from a new approach taking account of what we can learn if we include a female perspective on our texts from ancient Greece. So, in addition to the application of results from “Mediterranean anthropology” generally as classical scholarship has done, for example, when studying Plutarch’s sayings about women (Walcot 1999, cf. also Horden and Purcell 2000 re honour and shame), it is important to conduct fieldwork among women in contemporary Greece and compare the results with ancient material, as I have done for many years, arguing for the importance of changing our approach when working with ancient culture. Taking account of the female sphere in Greece provides us with a basis for considering the female part of society as a whole. In order to do so, however, the official male perspective, which is similar to the Western male perspective generally applied within Greek studies, has to be deconstructed. Since the death cult is connected with the domestic sphere, where women are the dominant power, presenting the “female sphere” in present-day Greece, from a female perspective will help us to deconstruct the ancient male sources, which present persistent male views about women, death and the body.

2. The plutarchean sources telling about the Mediterranean woman

Plutarch’s Moralia is a gold mine for ancient social history, and several texts from Moralia will be used in the following presentation. Four of the essays in Moralia are dedicated to women, and two of the texts are dedicated to the same woman, the priestess Clea. The most important essay in relation to our topic is the letter written in consolation to his own wife, Timoxena (Mor. 608b-612b), when their baby daughter died. It is a personal letter, praising the calm and constraint behaviour of Plutarch’s wife during the burial which she arranged in his absence. While depicting his wife’s discretion when struck by the deaths of her children, he presents the exemplary woman’s behaviour in front of death. Thereby, we learn, not only about her, but also about the
general importance of women and the female body in relation to death-rituals. Another useful essay is *Isis and Osiris* (*Mor.* 351c-384c), which along with *Bravery of women* (*Mor.* 242e-263c), is dedicated to one of his female friends Clea, a cultured and intelligent woman, priestess at Delphi. Compared to the aforementioned letter, the other main text, *Isis and Osiris* is a more ideal “reflection”. Also of relevance, is *Advice to bride and groom* (*Mor.* 138b-146a), where Plutarch’s guidelines are directed to the bride and future housewife, Eurydice; and lastly we also find some notes about the young, innocent and modest girl, Eumetis, in *Dinner of the seven wise men* (*Mor.* 146b-164d). Apart from the exemplaric women, women are generally not much appreciated by Plutarch. The *Letter written in consolation to Apollonius* (*Mor.* 101f-122a) when Apollonius’ son died is an example², because half of the letter is about women, death and mourning in general.

These main sources will be supplied with Plutarch’s sayings about women, death and the body in other contexts, especially in his *Lives*, which is an important source for Greek social history, Mediterranean ideals and values and for the persistence of those values throughout political upheaval, change and transformation.

As already stated in the introduction, one problem with the sources is Plutarch’s presentation of the traditional gender structures and values from a male point of view, i.e. he represents the androcentric ideology of “honour and shame”. One way to deconstruct this ancient male ideology is to employ modern female researchers’ (i.e. fieldworkers’) studies from the area, including my own (cf. Håland 2007), focusing on female values. Women’s ways of expression have often been given less attention, both by those dominant in the society, for example Plutarch as well as by modern scholars. By adopting a critical view on Plutarch, we discover that Greek women are not so inarticulate as some (e.g. Campbell 1966; Walcot 1999; du Boulay 2009, cf. Håland 2007, 2010 for discussion) have proposed.

² According to the ideology, sons are important to support their fathers and bury them *Mor.* 497a, so Apollonius’ fate is grave.
3. Plutarch on Women, Death and the Body

In Plutarch’s texts we meet two types of women, the female and the “manly”. The female women are criticized for being womanish, unruly, lamenting, using perfume, indulging in magic and being uneducated. They are always presented en masse, or by way of mythical women famous for being stupid or rather being out of control, such as Pandora and the most famous ancient representative of “la femme fatal”, Helen of Troy (Mor. 140f21-141a). In reality, Plutarch does not seem to understand these women. The same may be discerned in his presentation of Eumetis. Despite of all her learning and wisdom (Mor. 148ce), it seems that Eumetis should not be taken seriously, when “weaving her riddles” (154ab). It is interesting to note that Eumetis’ wisdom is most often expressed by way of riddles and compared to weaving (154b, cf. Håland 2006a). Weaving is a sort of “female speech” associated with girdles and hair-nets (154ab), typical female symbols, connected with both a female way of handling things and female cunning. In this connection Helen’s drugs or rather knowledge of pharmakon (Mor. 614bc, cf. Od. 4.219-234) should also be mentioned, since the handling of pharmakon is a typical female occupation. Plutarch also condemns well educated women, such as Cleopatra (Ant. 27.3 f.) and Aspasia. Aspasia was courted by Pericles for her wisdom and political skill (Per. 24.3). These skills are rejected by Plutarch, proclaiming that Pericles’ attachment was caused by erotic passion (Per. 24.4-6). Does he condemn certain women because they are “womanish”, i.e. act and talk a language he does not know or want to know, because he is a man?

The “manly” women are his friends and his wife (cf. Mor. 608b ff., 610cd). They are praised for being restrained. This may imply that they are educated after his own criteria, and submit to the aforementioned ideology of “honour and shame”, at least officially. However, he also admires other

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3 Mor.144d44, 145be, 143ef. Cf. 141bc23, 110c. Love potions are dismissed 139a5, but cf. 138cd,143d38. For “white” magic 138d1.
4 Virtue is the same for men and the educated women Mor.242f-243a. Cf. the presentation of his wife with Mor. 138b-146a and see 1097de for the opposite of a modest woman (cf. also Num. 10 for the punishment of those who break their vow of virginity). There should be no talk about women among men Mor.217f, 220d. A woman should have the same meanings, cf. 142d32,
brave women, who are acting in public as men. How can these apparent contradictions be explained?

In Plutarch’s texts, we may discern both conventional and non-conventional views about women, death and the body. Since the relevant female values may be termed anti-values from an “honour and shame” code, it follows that we have to search for other ways of explaining them. One solution is to try to grasp the female point of view. After having presented Plutarch’s conventional values, this female point of view, hidden in the texts, will be distinguished.

The *Consolatio ad Uxorem*, is the letter written by Plutarch to his wife on receiving news of the death of their daughter, who died at the age of two (Mor. 608b-612b). The portrait Plutarch gives of his wife is strong and affectionate. She is straightforward, self-controlled (609c), her own mistress, and loved by Plutarch who treats her as an “equal”. The way he depicts their relationship shows the perfect wife: they never quarrel; philosophers wandering in and out of their house are impressed by this learned woman. Her lifestyle is modest, clothing and make-up inextravagant (609a, cf. 145a). Quite differently from what was common among women according to classical representations, she joins him on public occasions. During rituals and in the theatre she is unaffected (609d).

Therefore, she also refrains from showing her emotions in public during mourning (608f-609a, 610c), and the picture he draws of her contrasts with his critical presentations of publically mourning women who are indulging in all the customs in which his wife does not participate (609ac, 610bc, 611ab).

friends 140d19, feelings 140a14 and interests as her husband, which she got by way of the education he chose 145ce (cf. 611a for Timoxena; Pomp. 55.1-2 for Cornelia. Cf. Mor. 405cd. See Blomqvist 1995, for a conventional view on women’s education in Plutarch, and cf. Håland 2007 and 1999 for discussion), which was free from magical knowledge, cf. n.3 supra (also for paradoxical statements), see also 166a, cf. infra. But an ordinary housewife, was probably closer to the one he presents with disdain in 145cd. See Mor. 950 f. for female knowledge/double consciousness.

5 Her appearance in public has been used to prove the freedom of hellenistic women compared to the secluded women in classical Athens, this may be questioned by Lys. 1.8, see also Plut. Thes. 19.3. Even if women were not secluded from symposia Mor. 150b, cf. 619d, 667ab, they had to be silent. See also 381ef, cf. 142d31 f., cf. Håland 2007, but also for a discussion of the term “mute”.
These women conform to his other presentations of women in mourning and their mourning customs. Solon wanted to abolish these customs by way of legislation several centuries before Plutarch, because they were extravagant and barbaric. It was for instance common practice in funerals to display the extravagance of one’s grief through the disfigurement of the body and appearance, such as shaving off hair, wearing black and adopting unrestrained and ugly postures. Such behaviour is criticized in many of Plutarch’s texts, and in the letter to his wife he comments on wailing and howling people, allowing floodgates of lamentation (609bc, cf. 114c, see also 507cd, 599b). In Plutarch’s writings, we are presented with the “honour and shame” code, as it should, conventionally, be according to male ideology and to which women, such as Timoxena, often adhere, but we are also presented to its opposite, the way most women really behave.

On coming to Athens he (Epimenides of Phaestus) made Solon his friend, assisted him in many ways, and paved the way for his legislation. For he made the Athenians decorous and careful in their religious services, and milder in their rites of mourning, by attaching certain sacrifices immediately to their funeral ceremonies, and by taking away the harsh and barbaric practices in which their women had usually indulged up to that time. Most important of all, by sundry rites of propitiation and purification, and by sacred foundations, he hallowed and consecrated the city, and brought it to be observant of justice and more easily inclined to unanimity. Plut. Sol. 12.5. He (Solon) also subjected the public appearances of the women, their mourning and their festivals, to a law which did away with disorder and licence. When they went out, they were not to wear more than three garments, they were not to carry more then an obol’s worth of food or drink, nor a pannier more than a cubit high, and they were not to travel about by night unless they rode in a waggon with a lamp to light their way. Laceration of the flesh by mourners, and the use of set lamentations, and the bewailing of any one at the funeral ceremonies of another, he forbade. The sacrifice of an ox at the grave was not permitted, nor the burial with the dead of more than three changes of raiment, nor the visiting of other tombs than those of their own family, except at the time of interment. Most of these practices are also forbidden by our laws, but ours contain the additional proviso that such offenders shall be punished by the board of censors for women, because they indulge in unmanly and effeminate extravagances of sorrow when they mourn. Sol. 21.4 f. Cf. SIG.1218; Aesch. Cho. 23-30, 66 f., 124 ff., Pers. 687 f., 1050-1056; Pl. Leg. 947 959 f., Resp. 3.398, cf. 3.387 ff.; Thuc. 2.46, see also Håland 2007 for the persistence of both rituals and condemnations. However, according to Sol. 23.1, Solon’s laws concerning women generally seem absurd. Solon seems to dislike the epicleros-institution 20.2, a natural reaction for a man who wanted to curb the power of revenging clans, see infra, cf. Mor. 141ab, for a statement which may hint to the power a woman - and thereby her family and kin - may have through her dowry, cf. Sol. 20.4.
In the picture he gives of his wife, Plutarch personalizes the ideology of a “honour and shame” code. Her modesty, her rejection of extravagant ostentation and her restraint at the funeral is recalled in personal detail (609de). At the actual death she was calm and composed and the burial was free from exaggerated and undignified outbursts of grief, with no fuss and superstitious nonsense, faults he knows are not hers (608f, 609ae, cf. 140d19, 166f).

The way the mourning period and burial rites were conducted, especially that she had not adopted mourning clothes, had shocked some of those present (Mor. 608f). According to her husband she had not made herself or her maidens follow any ugly or harrowing practices and the paraphernalia of an expensive celebration was absent from the funeral. Everything was conducted in discretion and in silence, and with only the essential accoutrements. Her behaviour was natural for her according to her husband, as she was immune from excesses in grief: It was the sign of a civilized woman to raise herself above her sex and refrain from the womanish cries of lament, outbursts also criticized by Plutarch in other contexts (cf. 608f4-609a, 609b, 609ef and 113a, but cf. 171cd). His wife was acting as the ideal woman when she responded to the death of her daughter in a “manly” way (cf. 110d for a parallel).

Plutarch’s love for and dependence of his wife is clearly demonstrated while asking that they both must try to control their emotions, because if he finds her distress excessive, he will be more discomposed than by the death of the little one (608c, cf. 608f). His writing is probably also for his own consolation, since he gives proof of his own grief (608cd) and of his love for his daughter (608ef). She came after four sons had been born, and the late girl was much desired by their mother (608c).

7 Her wish is in accordance with Plutarch’s ideology, but not necessarily reality, cf. Polyxenia-Hecuba, Kore-Demeter. See Thes. 19. 5 for Daedalus, the son of Merope. Cf. Håland 2007, ch. 6 also for a discussion of the problems concerning emotions. Cf. the depiction of the dead Panagiotis’ parents from my own fieldwork (Ibid. Both were suffering. The mother was crying both in public and private, holding her hand to her heart while saying ponō [I have pain/I suffer]; the father was calm in public, mourning in private [cf. Il. 22.33-90, 405 ff.] with Plutarch’s letter to his wife, where it nevertheless seems that she has to be strong, if not, he will succumb (i.e. to grief, since he asks her in her emotion “keep me as well as yourself within bonds”) Mor. 608c, and
It does not seem that most of contemporary women acted as Plutarch’s wife did. This fact is revealed in his presentation of what he labels “the invasion of malignant women”. In reality these women are acting according to normal custom when someone dies. According to Plutarch, himself, he is not the enemy of affection and love, but of mental indulgence. In the presentation of Timoxena’s brave behaviour during the death of her daughter, he also claims that the malignant women are envious of their children, home and way of life. From a male perspective, envy is a traditional female vice.

Plutarch is especially critical of ignoble people who punish their innocent bodies when mourning, customs he relates to women and barbarians (*Mor.* 112ef, cf. *Pl. Resp.* 604b). This takes us back to one of the quotations presented in the beginning, which is extracted from Plutarch’s tale about ... *the lawgiver of the Lycians who ordered his citizens, whenever they mourned, to clothe themselves first in women’s garments and then to mourn, wishing to make it ... clear that mourning is womanish and unbecoming to decorous men who lay claim to the education of the free-born* (112f-113a). His remarks are indicative of the rhetoric used to justify the suppression of female mourning, as well as his elitist way of thinking. They typify the sentiments of the male aristocracy of his day. Thus by lumping together mourning, women and barbarians, Plutarch reveals more about Greek chauvinism than about the essential nature of lament. Since laments were generally associated with emotions and not the stable state will crash. She is on guard against a seriously disagreeable affliction 610d, but is she too much on guard?

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8 In his critique of Epicurean philosophy *Mor.* 609b, he informs about the desire which makes us wail and howl. Is Plutarch included?

9 *Mor.* 611b (Plutarch is honest in asserting his use of Homer, but he picks the right quotations, while other people... pick out Homer’s headless and tapering lines...), cf. II. 24.602ff. See also *Mor.* 355d12. Cf. n.3 f. supra and n.10 infra for Plutarch’s ambiguous statements.

10 Cf. supra. Plutarch is not banning mourning as such 612ab, cf. *Per.* 38.4, but what he regards as excessive mourning. Further, his critique of wailing is not necessarily directed against women, but against uneducated people *Mor.* 117a, 119d, cf. 116e for people who boast (but cf. 352c, 355bd for his own boasting when advising Clea, who by way of her education 364e probably knows more than he) or is humbled and cast down to lamentation, cf. *Mor.* 164e-171f. for the superstitious person, see also 377e ff. Hesiod’s “days” which often are regarded as superstitious by modern researchers, is however approvingly quoted by Plutarch, *Mor.* 352e (cf. 385ef), cf. Hes. *Op.* 742 f. What has been labelled superstition was an integrated part of the official religious
related to manliness, it must be related to the unmanly, i.e. female women. Plutarch also informs us with disdain that some of the barbarians mutilated or even cut off parts of their bodies in order to gratify the dead (113ab).

From the honour of masculinity towards a poetics of womanhood?

It has been claimed that in androcentric Mediterranean societies, manhood must be culturally and publicly sustained. Its maintenance carries competitive overtones. Conversely, femininity depends more often on natural functions and is therefore less problematic. This is an androcentric view. It does not take account of the fact that even if they do not necessarily earn and create what is biologically given through their sexual organs, (i.e. the ability to carry, give birth to and feed children), women also have to sustain their femininity publicly, and often in a very competitive way. Since a biologically given factor also has to be sustained, first and foremost by giving birth to children, womanhood does not come passively to a woman. It is this competitive mood and official display of femininity - but on the women’s terms indeed - which is attacked by Plutarch (cf. Plut. Sol. 21.4 f. with Hes. Op. 70 ff., 699 ff.). Concepts of “honour and shame” have in fact often been seen framed with an androcentric focus that has kept some analysts from seeing women’s world-view even if often condemned by its spokesmen such as Plutarch (Per. 38.2. Cf. however Mor. 377b, 378b. Even reason can charm 138cd, as “female gods” 356b. For the contradictions, see also 384a, cf. Håland 2007 for his paradoxical belief in magical charms, etc. cf. 381ef), whose elitist view contrary to folk-beliefs nevertheless shows overlappings, even if it was convenient to relate the relevant topics to activities found in the female sphere, etc. cf. n.3 f. supra.

According to Homer and the tragedies, such customs were quite common in Greek tradition, a fact which is also affirmed by Plutarch’s extraction from The Iliad, when Priam mourns Hector both before and after his death (cf. Mor. 113f-114b, Il. 22.56-78, 408 ff.). Homer’s claim that “no good comes of cold laments” (Il. 24.524), is also repeated (Mor. 105c). But, in contrast to Homer who could perfectly well present the Greek hero Achilles lamenting Patroclus, tragedians as well as Plutarch’s presentation of the actual customs puts them into Persian or other eastern and barbaric environments. If performed in their own surroundings, they are conducted by unmanly women or inferior men.

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However, it does not seem that womanhood is at risk the way manhood is. Cf. their different roles in the reproduction process. Resulting from their different anatomy, women are inward, while men are more frangible, see Gilmore 1987, 9 f. Cf. Stigers 1981; Håland 2007, ch. 6.
expression of their own experience. This female experience may be called a *poetics of womanhood* (Dubisch 1995; Håland 2007, 2008, 2010). Even if Greek women may subscribe to the male ideological “honour and shame” model, they have their own values in addition to, or running contrary to the male view, depending on how the male view suits their own thinking. That women experience the world differently from men is difficult to discern from ancient male-produced sources. Women also have female knowledge. Based on the values of modern Greek women, it may be called a “poetics of womanhood”, the point of which is to show how to *be good at being a woman*, for example when performing death-rituals. For women, the essential thing is not to have shame, but to “be good at being a woman”. Women may draw on a range of cultural materials when performing their womanhood, such as meanings related to the female body, motherhood, sexuality and to women’s general activities in the religious sphere, for instance in carrying out the fertility-cult. This “poetics of womanhood”, or “being good at being a woman” denies the very context of “honour and shame”, since this idea confirms women to a passive life “behind the fence”. A “poetics of womanhood” where women can present public performances of “being good at being a woman”, is difficult to manifest in the context of “honour and shame”, since this code claims that women’s roles generally are domestic, “private” and unofficial; their identity is less problematic and not earned or actively demonstrated and they are not engaged in the sort of public struggles their menfolk are. The very idea of a public “performance” of women seems antithetical to the cultural rules for appropriate female behaviour.

From being reared by women, men then live most of their adult lives among men today, as in the ancient world (cf. Håland 2007, 2010). I say most, since men also live in their own house with their family, even if it is the male

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13 See Håland 2010 (cf. also n.4 supra) for “women having their own way”, which is probably the reason that Herzfeld 1991, in his effort to present what he calls a “poetics of womanhood”, continues in the androcentric as well as an ethnocentric manner, perhaps because as a male ethnographer he is used to spend his time in the “kafeneio”, and does not know what goes on in the women-dominated areas, public or not. Cf. Håland 2007, ch. 6 for a discussion of his (and Brumfield’s 1996 in his following) bad attempt to copy analysis of modern Greek men directly to Greek women.
sphere which counts. Adult men move around most easily among men, i.e. in the male and official sphere, while shunning the female sphere and cultivating virility as in Plutarch’s world (cf. Mor. 365f). This stress seems to belie a defensive or prophylactic strategy, since it is considered shameful for a man to be “effeminate”, “unmanly” or “emasculated” (cf. 755c), i.e. a man who carries the negation of masculine identity. This aspect is presented frequently in Plutarch’s writings. An example is his urging Apollonius not to be extravagantly affected in his grief for his newly dead son. Such behaviour is lax and effeminate (102e). Instead of running the risk of being womanish (cf. 252de), he has to provide himself with a virile and noble patience to endure it (103a). Men could also compose poems for their beloved dead, as Antimachus, who composed an elegy called Lyde for his dead wife. Yet this was by its very nature more constrained (cf. also Mor. 120cd, see also 363e), as are many of the grave-inscriptions which have come down to us. A poem for the dead was regarded as more “civilized” than the excesses of women’s laments, by way of its formality and in line with the Epitaphios Logos, the official classical male funeral oration which focused on praise of the dead. In opposition, women’s often more “spontaneous” laments focused on mourning and loss and were full of pain, frustration, violence, anger, grief and complaints against the established social order. These emotions are seen as posing a threat to society.

On the other hand, women may be praised and admired for performing men’s roles when circumstances so dictate, as when strong masculine women are admired and said to be like men. This is a picture found in Plutarch’s description of brave women. He (Lyc. 14.2 f.) also tells how Spartan women were freed from softness, delicacy and effeminacy, while Spartan men were freed from the empty and womanish passion of jealous possession. Even if Spartan society often was considered different from others, the mentioned
characteristics of femininity are criticized in many other contexts as well (cf. Mor. 113a). The unheroic significance of maternal concealment and pregnancy are underscored in the anecdote illustrating the role of Spartan women in reinforcing the martial ideals of that society: When a certain woman saw her sons retreating, she “shamed them” by raising her skirts to show them her genitals and proclaiming: “Where have you fled to, you slavish cowards. Do you think you can slink back in here where you came from?” (Mor. 241b4). Her act qualifies her as a brave and manly woman along with other women saving their cities and countries by displaying their very sexual organ to ward off enemies (cf. 246ab). This confrontation is neatly inverted in the transaction between Hector and Hecuba in Homer (Il. 22.79 ff.) where the lamenting mother is trying to prevent her son from going to war (Il. 6.251-285). The stories actually show the two sides of a woman, the first approved for her manly act, the second disapproved by Plutarch in conformity with the classical polis-ideology. Plutarch approved women performing actions normally connected with manhood.

On the other hand, women making public spectacles in front of strangers, either by wailing, which Plutarch condemns, or by saving the society from the enemy, which he approves, are challenging the “honour and shame” code. This code restricts Greek and other Mediterranean women to the domestic realm and excludes them from the public arena, places women under male control, and stresses the necessity of female modesty for the maintenance of male honour.

For Plutarch, a woman should maintain her discretion, modesty and submissiveness. Unruly intelligence in women should not reveal itself in action. A woman employing her skills in order to exercise influence upon her man in a manner disastrous to men, and ultimately also for the whole state, was for example Aspasia (Per. 24.3-6, cf. 30.3), as well as Cleopatra (Ant. 27.3 f.), who both employed their learning in order to show off. They were both too active in the political sphere for Plutarch. Learned women may be unruly and dangerous and therefore threatening to male society and rule. They are described quite differently from the brave woman, Aretaphila (Mor. 255e-257e), who after having freed the city, ... spent the rest of her life quietly at the loom in the company of her friends and family (Mor. 257e, cf. 245cf, see also Thes. 19.3, 19.7). According to Plutarch, she was not dangerous since she returned home to continue her main occupation: to be an affectionate
housewife (cf. 769bc). But, the city is completely emasculated, when handing the gymnasium and Council Chamber over to women. Women holding official power, is the same as violating “Laws of Nature”, according to male ideology (755bc). Aretaphila on the contrary, seemed to have had her own way (cf. 256c, ef, 257a,c), i.e. employed her skills in order to exercise influence upon men, in the right and proper way (cf. also 142b29). Plutarch’s treatment of bravery of women demonstrates that the female sphere is not so restricted as the “honour and shame” code implies. Since many of the women have philotimo (as conversely men may be shamed cf. Mor. 139b7-8), most of them resemble Plutarch’s ideal women as do both Timoxena and several Spartan women. These women are “manly”. It is important to note that women may perform men’s work or men’s roles and are valued “as males” in a positive way. When they take over normally male roles to secure the whole society, they become real male women for Plutarch. The other change of roles, i.e. men performing women’s roles are shamed (Mor. 139a6).17

Today, as in Plutarch’s ideal “honour and shame” world, women and men are considered incompetent in doing tasks related to the spheres of the other sex, i.e. man cannot do household chores and woman cannot do business. Underlying the continuing male ideology, we find a collective male anxiety about feminization. Men fear “entrapment” by dominant women who threaten their masculinity.18 They fear being placed in the passive role associated with women; they fear sex reversal. Such a reversal has nevertheless traditionally been very important to ensure fertility. A major aspect of modern carnival rituals of reversals at important periods during the agricultural year, is the

17 Cf. supra. For role reversals, cf. 749cd, 752ef7, 753a, 754f, where a widow hunts 755b11 a young man, and thereby violates “Laws of Nature” 755 bd. Cf. 754de for extreme age reversal (but, the most important is that both are able to procreate, cf. 754c, 750c), see also Håland 2007, ch. 6 for discussion of this topic. “Soft” men are never praised in Greece, they are ridiculed by both men and women. For Aretaphila and other “supportive” women in politics vis-à-vis the “dominant women” (such as Aspasia), see also Blomqvist 1997, even if she has another perspective than mine, cf. Håland 1999, for discussion.

18 According to Mor. 526f-527a (cf. 100e), wealth may overpower a man, like the woman in Hesiod, Op. 705. Cf. also Mor. 753de. Cf. Dubisch 1995, 225 f. for the role of a modern divorced father doing household chores, in fact he is trying to adapt to some of the cultural materials belonging to the “poetics of womanhood”.
masquerading of men dressed as women and women as men. These acts of cross-dressing have ancient predecessors (Mor. 245ef. but, cf. 112f-113a), and they are not psychological or cultural maladjustments, but rather expressions of power and authority are voiced. Men try to take over the role of the fertile woman, by appropriating her socially recognized power to reproduce. It is perhaps then that the contradiction between the recognized power of female reproduction and the so-called subordinate position of women lead ultimately to the comedy and the buffoonery of the cross-dressing men. Therefore, women also celebrated agricultural rites officially during the Thesmophoria to ensure the fertility of society, and male official political business must retreat, and they thereby again demonstrate their own ultimate inability to reproduce. Similar rituals are presented in other plutarchean sources, even if they are described with an ambivalent view (Mor. 372c, 378df69, 377bc65) resulting from Plutarch’s elitist ideology. For Plutarch, the female celebration of the Thesmophoria is nevertheless normal (378de69), but in accordance with his official religion, he is critical to rituals which are contrary to Olympian ideals. Festivals connected with the opposites of Olympian gods (i.e. chthonic forces) are for example celebrated on days of ill omen and beatings or lamentations or fasting or scurrilous language or ribald jests are associated with them (361ab). In other connections these are elements associated with female fertility-gods, such as Demeter, celebrated by women alone. That women are celebrating alone, may be an important reason for his critical comments on female rituals, since he, as a man, simply does not know what goes on. On the other hand, he does not deny the importance of mother goddesses, since he, at the same time, informs us about Isis who recovered and nurtured the rests after Typhon’s destructions (375c, cf. 356f for Anubis. See also 358a for Osiris’s dismemberment and the following happenings with his relics, etc. 358b,de, 375ab, 377bc). Further Plutarch tells that ... we all make the best of a life in the embrace of mother earth (954b20).

Plutarch’s essays on the bravery of women, present the importance of the female body for society both in a concrete and in an abstract sense. The importance of femininity for society in general, and particularly the female body has a long tradition in Greece, from Medusa on the shields warding off enemies, to Plutarch’s histories about women averting enemies by showing
their private parts, until present-day’s Panagia (the Virgin Mary, i.e. “the All-Holy One”: Pan: all/Agia: holy) hovering over the Athenian Akropolis on a poster announcing the “Dormition festival of the Panagia” at the Greek island of Tinos (Håland 2007, fig. p. 5, 2012b, fig. 6, cf. 2009a, fig. 8).

The significance of the female body is also demonstrated by the accounts of brave women saving the society. By their brave actions in public, these women are manly (cf. Mor. 761e for an interesting explanation), from an ideological point of view. But at the same time they are the bearers of the female sex organ, which they display to get the enemy to flee.

In reality, we meet the importance of the most female aspect of all, i.e. the female sex which is essential not only for the continuity of society, but also for coping with war as well as with other dangers. This aspect reveals one of the contradictions in Plutarch: the female sex is at the same time presented with disdain, and wonder or rather uncertainty. This ambiguity could be because men have curiosity but also fear in front of the female secret, her sexual organ which produces life, and which he therefore wants - but not necessarily manages -, to dominate.

4. Women, Death and the Body from the female sphere:
   A female perspective on Plutarch

After this presentation of Plutarch’s view of women based on the conventional values, which conform with the male ideology, the picture of present-day society and the female value-system is presented. In this way we may see Plutarch’s women from another perspective, and grasp further into why the female body is so important both in connection with death-rituals and in other rituals related to the “crises of life” as well as in every-day circumstances.

In the following analysis, we will, probably, also see to what degree femininity as a tentative female virtue is a male ideal for creating or

19 For the gesture known as anasyrmene (“exposure”) which emphasises women’s sexual and reproductive role, and has a strong apotropaic function, see Håland 2007, 2009a, cf. also 2010. A similar custom is found in modern Africa (Swaziland), discussed in Håland 2011a, ch. 2.
maintaining boundaries. We will also see if femininity, as a female virtue seen from the female sphere, may provide a different perspective.

Earlier ethnographers’ writings on the Mediterranean have emphasized negative aspects of women and the female body as completely shameful, because they based their analysis on the androcentric ideology of “honour and shame”. They talked with male informants, who presented their own desired ideal, which is very similar to the ideal found in male-produced sources from antiquity, from Hesiod via Plato to Aristotle and Plutarch and continued by John Chrysostom and others. Nevertheless, because of the traditional separation between the male and female spheres in this area, this means that the male (and often female) ethnographers as well as their predecessors, the ancient male sources, were not very well qualified to inform us about women. With few exceptions, they were not very interested in women’s tasks either, and what they eventually said was often coloured with uncertainty or disdain. Therefore, it is important to regard our case from another perspective to try to counteract this history of contempt.

A “poetics of womanhood”, such as presented by Jill Dubisch (1995, ch.10), is very similar to my own fieldwork experiences among women (cf. Håland 2007). I agree with her concept that a “poetics of womanhood” provides a more dynamic view of gender and gender roles than that embodied in “honour and shame”. This is also the case, if we want to obtain a more fulsome comprehension of Greek culture and society as a whole than is possible if we only study Greek history from a male perspective, i.e. a view in which also women’s views, values and interests are included. Women we meet

20 Cf. n.13 supra. Cf. the different quarters/spheres. For male vis-à-vis female quarters Mor. 755ef. For woman-quarters 257e, 527b, 750c, f, cf.751b, cf. 288de. Cf. also 954f. See also 502f, 504b, 505b, 508f-509a for the public, male sphere. Cf. Them. 29.4 f. vis-à-vis 29.1. According to Patterson 1992, 4710, Aristotle talks about oikos-polis as female-male (cf. Arist. Pol. 1.1260b), while Plutarch treats oikos, since polis has disappeared. Mor. 144c43 may nevertheless be a contradiction to this view. Walcot’s (1999) adaption of the “honour and shame” perspective on women in Plutarch, is in concert with the earlier ethnographers’ writings, cf. Campbell 1966. The same ideal is maintained in du Boulay 2009. Re generalizations between male informants and ancient authors of sources concerning Mediterranean cultural patterns such as death cult and gender roles (cf. also supra and infra). Space does not permit me to reproduce the whole presentation/discussion here, see therefore Håland 2007, ch. 6 for an extensive discussion, cf. 2008, 2010 for shorter versions.
in modern Greece are often strong personalities and active participants in social life, and far from the suppressed, downtrodden and reclusive creatures as presented by several ethnographers. They run their households with a firm hand, and exhibit self-confidence. They resist the male ideologies of their official society in various ways, a trait which is found in several of Plutarch’s texts, for example when women are mourning. By taking account of the “poetics of womanhood”, it may be possible to dissolve some of the paradoxes and ambiguities in the plutarchean texts.

**Being a Woman**

Women draw upon several kinds of cultural materials for the presentation of self in the performances that might be termed a “poetics of womanhood”. In these ways a woman shows that she is “good at being a woman”. The most important, which is also praised by Plutarch (*Mor*. 14bc), is motherhood. According to Plutarch (the female) “Nature” has implanted in mothers affection and care for their offspring (496b, cf. 769bc). Since a Greek woman’s most significant status is that of a mother, the social role of a mother is valued particularly positively. Plutarch shows that Timoxena nursing her son Charon was “good at being a woman” (cf. 609e, 608c). When Charon died (609de), Timoxena was calm while other mothers wallowed in empty, indecent grief. But her behaviour, on the other hand, strikes with normal practice, since traditional laments are part of “being good at being a woman”. In fact the mothers who give vent to outbursts of grief which are fierce, manic and unruly (609e), are more normal in Greek culture. Among women, they are regarded as showing how to “be good at being a woman” generally and a mother particularly. Today, the importance of motherhood is also clearly met through a pregnant woman, since she is not hiding her pregnancy, rather she demonstrates it. In myths, we often meet the male envy of women’s capacity to give birth, most clearly symbolized through the way Zeus became almighty, i.e. by swallowing Metis, and thereby giving birth to another goddess, as well

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21 He seems to contradict himself, first by stating that Timoxena brought up all her children with no one else’s help in the home 608c, but in 608d little Timoxena had a wet-nurse, while in 609e, his wife nursed her son. In 608f we learn that she had maidens to help her.
as in another context giving birth to a god (cf. Mor. 246b for the male view of pregnancy, see nevertheless also supra).

As in modern society, Plutarch’s wife “warms the house”. Contrary to the male ideology which says that man is the pillar of the house (cf. Aesch. Ag. 897 f.), it seems rather that Timoxena is the “pillar of the family”, since her behaviour assures that they remain in a stable state. Plutarch’s own distress depends on her calmness (Mor. 608, cf. n.7 supra), which is in accordance with other brave women.

The house is the seat of family life and a metaphor for family (for a discussion of the modern and ancient Greek family or household [οἶκος]: Håland 2007). The demonstration of the fulfilment of maternal and housewifely duties, i.e. proper keeping of the house, including handicrafts and food preparation, is a value recognized also by Plutarch. Eurydice is advised to maintain housewifely abilities, i.e. keeping the house clean and tidy (Mor. 142a28, cf. 242c28). Cooking abilities may also be displayed publicly, for example at the memorials at the cemetery. Plutarch approved this custom in principle (612a), though in a moderate way (cf. 114f-115a vis-à-vis 114d25). His own advices are repetitions of Solon’s sumptuary laws against women’s public competitive displays at burials, memorials, festivals, marriages (Sol. 20.4), etc. Plutarch does not like display and extravagance of household goods either (Mor. 145ab48, cf. 528ab for usual examples of display. Cf. nevertheless 525b). We learn that ... most women, if you take from them gold-embroidered shoes, bracelets, anklets, purple, and pearls, stay indoors (142c30 [cf. 527f, 141de26]. Cf. however 139de12), a place women normally should keep themselves22, but this was an ideal far from reality: Women not only went out (cf. Sappho. Fr.118a), but even travelled around at night (Sol. 21.4 f.).

Like modern women, Plutarch’s wife (Mor. 608bc, 609a ff.) is also responsible for the general well-being of her family, and as her modern counterpart, she was probably also guardian of her family’s health.23 Today, women are concerned with religious activities on behalf of others, and the Panagia is the model for women, as several mother goddesses were for ancient women. Women had their duties at the cemetery (612a) and were active in

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22 Mor. 381ef, cf. 90b., 175b, 189d, see also 465d, cf. supra. See also Luc. 11.2 f. for the result of a disastrous defeat.
Dionysian cult (611cf). Women going on pilgrimage (253f, 953cd), celebrating the Thesmophoria (378e69) and other festivals where women were the sole participants, teach us about customary female occupations. These are all legitimate ways for women to move through public spaces and to socialize with other women. Since two of Plutarch’s essays are dedicated to his friend, the priestess Clea, we also encounter the connection between religious activities and women in the official sphere (364e, cf. 138b, Num. 10), activities that usually both were related to men and women in the ancient world; also activities in ordinary religious life provided a “space” for women’s performances, for example when visiting the cemetery. Usually, this was not applauded by Plutarch, probably because of the dangers he connected with wailings among women. It did, however provide a counterpart to the male State and Forum in Plutarch’s world (Mor. 144c43). The “Kafeneio” is the contemporary equivalent.

According to Plutarch, ... it is much more likely that the sins of women rather than sins against women will go unnoticed by most people (144c43). This is in accordance with his remarks about women and gossip (Mor. 143f40, cf. Per. 13.9 f.). The importance of a female audience may indicate that his information is predominantly based on male gossip (cf. Mor. 508f-509a) about women. Women are the most interested and critical commentators to each others’ performances just as men most often provide the critical audience of other men. Since he was not one of the participants, Plutarch had problems in giving the accurate evaluation of women acting in public. When women were dedicating offerings at graves, paraded their clothes or other objects (cf. Sol. 21.4 f.), their intended public were not men, but other women sharing the same values. Therefore, Plutarch’s remarks reflect male values and imply that he has problems in understanding the “female language”.

A wife and mother’s caring role manifests itself in several ways, and, traditionally, women prepare the corpse for burial (Mor. 119b). Among the most important of women’s rituals in Modern Greece are those pertaining to the dead, including the singing of mourning laments, the tending of graves,

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23 This is not mentioned explicitly by Plutarch, but this is how I choose to analyze Mor. 609de, 142ac compared to our general knowledge about the tasks of ancient women, such as stated by Plutarch in other instances, even if not always approved by him 166a.
and the preparing of *kollyva*, the ritual food of sweetened boiled wheat offered at memorial services and on All Souls’ Days (cf. Håland 2002a for the Greek *psychosabbata*, i.e. *psychosabbato*, *psychē*=soul, *sabbato*=Saturday). We have ample evidence for similar rituals in ancient society.

The female body, especially as it represents family and social relationships, is important today, as it was in Plutarch’s time. On the one hand, the female body should be locked inside the house and not be seen in public, but on the other hand, the very presentation of its most private part was regarded as saving the society against intruding enemies (cf. the quotations supra, Håland 2010). How can this be explained?

**The importance of the Female Body**

The importance of the soul is stressed several times in Plutarch’s writings (*Mor.* 359d, cf. 611e). What about the body?24 According to Plutarch’s *Advice to bride and groom*, control is to be exercised by the man over the woman, as the soul controls the body (*Mor.* 142e33). We may ask why the female body has to be controlled by the male, and does this really mean that man controls the female body? Or does it mean that he wants to control it?

Gender and body, especially the gendered female body, is a controversial theme. Even if it has been denied, we have evidence for a “two-sex” model in antiquity, since women were distinguished from men on the basis of wombs and menstruation.25 According to Plutarch’s essay on affections for offspring, the female body is cleaned through menstruation (*Mor.* 495de). His sayings about exaggerated emotion and passion are in conformity with the negative

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24 Cf. *Mor.* 108bc, cf. 121b. See also 362ab, but cf. 362d for the relationship between soul and body. See also n.31 infra.

25 Arist. *GA.*727a2 ff.,728b23-31. Cf. Richlin 1997, for an historiographical review over body history from antiquity to our days. According to Richlin the claim that the ancient model was “one-sex” and the “two-sex” model is a new invention (18. century, see Laqueur 1990, cf. also Halperin and Winkler in the wake of Foucault), is wrong. Her contribution is important (cf. also supra for the importance of the female center/value-system as a counterweight to the male center/value-system), re a theoretical female- or gender perspective, since Foucault, etc. writes from a one-sided male perspective. However and unfortunately, Richlin follows the general scholarly tradition regarding ancient women as completely subordinated, cf. Håland 2007, 2010.
statements about the woman which associate her with the bodily part of the human being, while the man is associated with the soul and brain. This is presented in traditional Greek sources already in Hesiod, but particularly in Plato, Aristotle and Plutarch (cf. Mor. 370ef and Arist. Metaph. 1.5,986a23 ff., Pol.1.1254b). Plutarch is also picturing parallels in Greek and Egyptian religion, where the female aspect is the body and matter which must be fertilized by the male and generative aspect (Mor. 366a, 372ef, 373f). By reading and taking statements from Plato via Aristotle and Plutarch to the modern Mediterranean kabylean calendar (i.e. the annual calendar of the Kabyles of North-Africa), the “incarnation” of the ideology of “honour and shame”, as it is presented by Pierre Bourdieu literally, it has been stated that body history is a continual history about disdain. Therefore, it is important to analyse the female body from other perspectives, to see if the negative bias can be dissolved (cf. Mor. 507c11 ff., 525d). One alternative perspective is found in general folk-beliefs - more associated with the female sphere than with the official male dogma both in ancient (cf. n.10 supra) and modern times (cf. also Alexiou 2002). The thesis about the “poetics of womanhood” is also focal in this connection, and an important counterweight to the androcentric “honour and shame” model, which only reports negative aspects of the female body.

The female body plays an important role in the “poetics of womanhood”, because bodies have social meanings that may be used in public performances (cf. Håland 2007, 2008, 2010, also for the following). In Greece, as in other societies, the female body provides an important source for social symbolism. But as mentioned above, much of the ethnographic writing as well as modern and ancient male ideological sources, have emphasized negative aspects of the female body - its inherently polluting nature, its danger as a potential avenue for the loss of family honour, etc. To view the female body as shameful

26 Cf. Richlin 1997 (although she does not include modern material), see also Dubisch 1995, see Håland 2007 for discussion (also for Bourdieu 1998). According to the persistent official male view, the male sex is placed in the category “spiritual”, and the female in the category “physical”, cf. du Boulay 2009; Plut. Mor. 145e, 142e33. See also supra.
27 See supra particularly n.20. The ideology of “honour and shame” is similar in ancient and in present-day society: Earlier myths considering the fallen condition of womanhood, characterized by inherent weakness, susceptibility to temptation and propensity for sensuality, i.e. the evils and
tends to obscure the public aspects of body symbolism. From ancient time to modern Muslim societies, as well as in some rural societies of modern Greece (e.g. the village of Olympos), women veil in public (Mor. 245f [cf. Od. 1.333 f.] vis-à-vis Mor. 267a), because of their volatile sexuality, i.e. to the male perceiver. By being veiled in public, women indicate that they are not “open” to solicitation from men, since women are the living symbols of the “moral rigor” of their husbands and fathers (cf. Corrington-Streete 1993, 104 f.). A woman must marry to be open, and a man must marry to ensure continuity of his line (Hirschon 1993, 57). We learn about the male ideology, but we also learn that society depends on the female body. The female body both creates and represents the family and social relations in a variety of contexts. For example, by wearing black mourning clothes when a family member dies, women become highly visible symbols of mourning, hence of the kinship relations between the deceased and the living. In the past, a woman who “enjoyed all her kin alive” wore a red strip of cloth on the hem of her skirt (Seremetakis 1991, 213 f.). This importance of the women’s black mourning clothes is also stated in ancient traditional sources from Homer (Il. 24.93), but is criticized by Plutarch while praising his wife’s conduct when she did not put on mourning-clothes (Mor. 608f4). So, even if his wife adhered to the ordinary poetics of women by being a good mother in her caring for Charon (609d), she did not in other aspects of her conduct.

Complaints about suffering are especially expressed by women lamenting their dead. They also suffer in pilgrimage. Suffering as expressed through verbal complaint, the body, ritual actions, etc. is an expression of social identity among women. Plutarch opposes this type of identity building, since he is afraid of unruly women. That the female body is dangerous is demonstrated, for instance, when a woman can use her body to keep the enemies away.

slyness of mythical figures such as Pandora and Helen, is later put on other images in the archetypal image of Eve. Her contrast, the Panagia, reflects certain aspects of different mother goddesses such as Demeter, Artemis and Athena, or those we meet in the ideal woman, Timoxena.
A suffering Body

The idiom of suffering is particularly important in the context of women’s roles. For many women, the points of both tension and fulfilment centre around motherhood and familial responsibilities. For women, especially the body plays an important role in these expressions of suffering, whether it is through the wearing of black mourning clothes, or the numerous expressions of the ways women suffer in the process of bodily reproduction.

In modern Greece we meet the importance of ponō, suffering or feeling pain as one of the important ways of expressing the “poetics of womanhood”. In ancient society, ponoš described motherly suffering generally, and for Plutarch (Mor. 496de, 771b). The same word signifies a woman in labour.28

In contemporary Greece, a woman makes a public performance when crawling on her knees to the church with a sick child on her back in the hope of healing it, but the action takes validity through the sacrifice and suffering of the self on behalf of others. Through the maternal role, the mother’s own body is constantly offered as a sacrifice, and this sacrifice may be dramatized in women’s pilgrimage to the shrine dedicated to the Panagia on Tinos (cf. Håland 2007, 2012b [forthcoming]). Women suffer while giving birth, maintaining life (i.e. nurturing), and when life disappears, i.e. their connection with life and death.

By dressing in black, women signal their suffering by their own bodies. This is the way Plutarch presents the onset of Isis’ suffering over the dead Osiris (Mor. 356de) and this is the way other suffering women are presented (cf. 609b) with the exception of his own wife. Isis’ reaction when she heard about the death of her husband and brother, Osiris, is the same as that of all women getting the same bad news about the death of one of their beloved (356d, cf. 267a): she cuts off one of her tresses and puts on a garment of mourning. The city where this happened is called Koptō, which means to strike, to cut, but also mourn, i.e. to beat oneself as a sign of mourning.29 Isis’

28 Cf. Mor. 497a for a male way of feeling pain (but by using ὑπῆ). See also n.7 supra for ponō.
29 Koptō may also mean to “cut off” or “deprive” and in the actual connection (Isis’ lament, Mor. 356de), “deprive” is the only meaning Plutarch discusses. See for example 609ab,e-610bc for other instances of customary mourning.
mourning is very similar to ordinary custom (cf. Il. 24.710-712), as when she threw herself upon the coffin with such a dreadful wailing that a man died on the spot (Mor. 357d16). Further, ... she opened the chest and laid her face upon the face within and caressed it and wept (357d17). A similar practice can be found in modern Mani (Seremetakis 1991).

Women wailing while beating their breasts, is an important part of manifesting themselves as suffering women and mothers both in domestic and public actions. It is found in Greek tradition from the motifs of the Mycenaean and Geometric vases, via written sources such as Homer and Solon’s (and other archaic legislators’) laws, via Sappho’s poems, classical tragedies and Plutarch’s texts to our own days, even if criticized by several representatives for the official male ideology.30

The laments are a major way of female performance, created by women from traditional forms and their own painful experiences. They serve as vehicles for expressing their sufferings and those of others, and to protest against injustice on behalf of all the weak and downtrodden of the world (Caraveli 1986; Seremetakis 1991). Thus, being a woman in this case means identifying not only with other women but also with others who share many women’s experience of marginality. In this way, by comparing Isis’ laments and behaviour with the way other women behaved, we learn that laments were a major form of female performance also in Ancient societies.

We have already learnt that according to Plutarch mourning must be natural and moderate. Actually, ... no good man, after he is dead, is deserving of lamentations, but of hymns and songs of joy; not of mourning, but of an honourable memory; not of sorrowing tears, but of offerings of sacrifice, .... (Mor. 114d). It is worth commenting upon this last point, since it represents Plutarch’s ideological view proclaiming the immortality of the soul and a

30 Sol. 21.4 f., Mor. 114-115a. Cf. 356d with Hecuba and other women. Several references and an outline of the ritual is found in a book-project in progress, Greek Women and Death, ancient and modern: A Comparative Analysis (the research receives financial support from EU’s 7th framework programme, by a Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowship, and the final book is under contract for publishing at Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne), see also Håland 2006a, 2008.
happy afterlife.²¹ Accordingly, he tells Apollonius that ... to regard our mourning as unending is the mark of the most extreme foolishness, especially when we observe how those who have been in the deepest grief ... become most cheerful under the influence of time, and at the very tombs where they gave violent expression to their grief by wailing and beating their breast, they arrange most elaborate banquets with musicians, ... etc. It is accordingly the mark of a madman thus to assume that he shall keep his mourning permanently (Mor. 114f-115a, see also n.10 supra). However, Plutarch also disapproves men who ... reason that mourning will come to an end after some particular event ... (Mor. 115a). Nevertheless, this has been given as an explanation to why people perform memorials and laments for their dead (Danforth 1982), a statement which has also been criticized by female researchers for being a male way of thinking and without feeling for a grieving woman, whose grief will never end.³² When comparing Plutarch’s claims about a madman’s behaviour to his statements in Mor. 114d, we learn about people having different values and views connected with death, the afterlife and the related rituals and customs. The actual customs, banquets at the grave, hymns and laments accompanied by breast-beating were and are normal customs both in connection with burials and the customary memorials.

In modern society, personal narratives represent a focal category to manifest how to be “good at being a woman”. Women’s own stories about themselves can be seen as another type of female performance. Biography is one of the elements encapsulated within the ritual process of lament performance (Seremetakis 1991, 7). They are “about” being a woman.

³¹ Plutarch’s view is based on his faith in the Dionysian Mysteries, Mor. 611cf, 612ab. Accordingly, it is pointless to wail, 114e26, cf. supra. He represents ideas related to new and ideological developments in philosophy and religion (cf. 382ac, cf. See also 362c), but he also adheres to practice inherited from his ancestors (611de, 612a, see also 756b). We learn that Plutarch wants to change the belief of his contemporaries since death should be praised (114d25, cf. 108de, see also 120f-121b, 121f., 357f, 148ab), not lamented (118b, cf. 610ef), a practice connected to women’s dangerous rituals (cf. 110c).

³² Seremetakis 1991, cf. Håland 2007. This shall not be seen as a definite rule saying that men are free from emotions and women not, most often women show feelings more freely than men, but a father may miss his child more than the mother, i.e. no categories are without exceptions. But, cf. 118d-119f. See supra for Plutarch’s grief, (cf. n.7). Cf. Abu-Lughod 1988, for “songs of loss” vis-à-vis honour.
Unfortunately, our knowledge of the actual content in the laments Plutarch condemns is more than scanty (cf. *Mor.* 111e19).

The importance of suffering motherhood is presented in several ancient sources, and is both approved and disapproved. According to Plutarch, the Spartans allowed only the name of men who had died in battle and women who had died in childbirth to be inscribed on tombstones (*Lyc.* 27.2). Unlike manly women, such as Lampsace, these other women are more likely to be categorised under how to “be good at being a woman”.

Timoxena is nevertheless also a suffering mother, as is manifested by her bodily pain while nursing her sick boy, when she was ill herself (*Mor.* 609e). The suffering mother is also met on occasions not approved of by Plutarch, for example the “malignant women” who are not individualized, but presented in opposition to Timoxena, who simply threw some of these women out from a burial (610bc).

The lamenting mother has a very strong and lasting importance in Greek popular culture. The suffering Mary at the cross condemns those who murdered her son, and is presented as a furious lioness who struggled to save her child. We find an important parallel in Plutarch’s presentation of Isis’ reaction when she heard about Osiris’ death (*Mor.* 356de, 357d). Her wanderings in search for her husband is further a parallel to Demeter’s wanderings in her mourning for her daughter.

**Dangerous voices**

All the death-rituals are twofold: women, who dominate the domestic sphere, are the performers of the laments; men, the representatives of the official sphere, carry out the burial. This does not mean that the spheres never interact, for example during the public burials after the more domestic women-dominated laments have finished. But, women’s laments also constitute a public performance. The antagonism we encounter between the official

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33 Lampasce was one of the many heroines who had acted manly and saved their cities like heroes (cf. *Mor.* 761a). After her death she was offered sacrifice as to a goddess *Mor.* 255ce, cf. 245e, see also 753f for other examples.

34 Cf. *Mor.* 357ae (see also 360f., 378df) and *HHD.* 98 ff., cf. also Aphrodite-Adonis, see Håland 2007, also for the importance of the revenging aspect and female vis-à-vis male power. See Alexiou 1974, 62 ff. for Mary. Cf. Dubisch 1995,194.
male, androcentric ideology and women’s lamentation in Solon’s polis actually parallels classical and modern circumstances, and the way Plutarch reports about Solon’s laws given in the archaic society is similar to his descriptions of his own time. Since the avenging aspect is usual in connection with laments and mourning, it has generally been regarded as a reason to why Solon and other lawgivers wanted to curb female laments. The women’s laments were considered to be dangerous voices inciting revenge, as they still do in Mani and other places in the Mediterranean and Balkan world (cf. Holst-Warhaft 1992; Håland 2008).

In his presentation of Solon’s laws and the episodes leading up to them, in combination with modern and ancient laments, we meet many parallels. A few to mention are anger and revenge. They are expressed in ordinary public discourse, which is why Solon and other lawgivers reacted. Plutarch’s story about Solon’s banning lamenting women recalls the power other women may get through their public laments, since it is not unusual that emotional outbursts may be effective instruments. These public demonstrations could often stir up feuds and vengeance (also related to extravagancy as well as needless consumption of social energy, see Håland 2006a, 2007, ch. 6, 2012a [forthcoming]), cf. Sol. 12.1-5 for Kylon, see also Holst-Warhaft 1992, 118. Cf. Foley 1993, 2001; Loraux 1990).

When giving public performance of emotions, be that by way of laments and/or bodily mutilations, the performer has an audience. We learn from the ancient accounts that even if the main-audience during the first and domestic laments were women, during processions to the cemetery with deceased persons, males may be part of the public as they also were on other occasions when women went outside their domestic sphere to do various tasks (cf. Sol. 21.4 ff., Lys. 1.8). Contrary to the ideological “honour and shame” code, Timoxena had to see to all the funeral arrangements herself, when burying their daughter in her husband’s absence (Mor. 608b). Men’s absence is a normal situation also in other Mediterranean societies (cf. e.g. Gilmore 1987, discussed in Håland 2007, 2010), but perhaps not during funerals. Even today

35 Cf. supra and n.6. See also Caraveli 1986, 185, for the antagonism between the church, i.e. the official male and monotheist ideology vis-à-vis women’s lamentation. We meet the importance of burial in Mor. 371f.
the funeral is termed a male performance (Seremetakis 1991; Håland 2012a [forthcoming]), and may be seen as being in opposition to the female laments conducted in a female space, which is termed chaotic and uncontrolled by the official male religion.

For men, there is a close association between women and emotion, women and “disorder”, women and “anti-structure”. Women may use ritual to demarcate their own performative setting, and pain as expressed verbally through laments and bodily through the laceration of flesh may provide a language for construction of a self (cf. Seremetakis 1991, 5). These are powerful images of womanhood. Lamenting together may take on a kind of collective power, and in this way women create expressions of their own identity, a dangerous task according to Solon’s bans, since the occasions with heightened emotionalism produce chaos. Plutarch’s view of laments as emotionally, womanly and weak (cf. the initial quotations supra), actually express a fear for the inchoate, chaotic and, therefore, threatening. So these voices are considered to be dangerous.

A main danger with emotion, from a male and “rational” perspective, is that it is associated with the body, its communication may be nonverbal or by way of verbal complaints, accompanied by gestures, laments, cries, etc. (Mor. 609ab, ef. Cf. also 609a and 144e45, 389b). Plutarch’s disdain of people’s bodily mutilations while mourning (cf. supra and Mor. 112e, see also 166a, 168d), is not the only instance when he detaches himself from the normal behaviour in order to promote his own ideology. He also claims that conventional mourning neglects the body and physical needs and therefore transmits debilitating effects of pain and distress on the mind precisely when it needs strengthening through physical fitness and support, since ... purely mental suffering ought to be helped by physical fitness (Mor. 610b, cf. 454ce. Cf. Arist. Pol. 8). From other points of view, this very behaviour (gestures, physical movement) helps people to support their own grief (but cf. Mor. 610bc, 611ab and 114f-115a, 116e, 117a for his contempt for this) and is necessary for the health of both body and soul, a way of tackling the pain through actions, which Plutarch himself encourages people to do, by other accepted means (610b, cf. 121f). In another situation (383ac) we learn about the importance of pure and healthy bodies, especially in ritual. One may claim that Plutarch is, in reality, showing the male vis-à-vis the female way of
cleaning body and soul from pain and distress. In contrast to Plutarch who preferred other ways of cleaning the soul and body from grief (610ab), modern Greek women speak of the peace and satisfaction they experience while tending their graves and singing laments at the cemetery.

The power of woman for the maintenance of society

Even if Plutarch had an ambivalent relationship to the death cult (cf. Mor. 379c, but cf. Thes. 35 f., cf. also 378d vis-à-vis 378e, see also 378f-379a), most of the ancient Greek festivals were actually dedicated to one or another dead person, alone or together with a god (dess), for instance to Demeter (Mor. 378ef69), Isis (361de), Osiris (364ef), Dionysos (364f-365a, 527d) and Adonis (cf. Alc. 18.2 f., Nic. 13.7, but cf. Mor. 756c). The ideological festivals bear witness to the importance of popular beliefs (see also 477de). The performers of the rituals were women. The festivals follow a ritual calendar where celebrations were performed in connection with important phases during the agricultural year (cf. Mor. 366a38, 372c, 377bc,ef, 378df, 379ac and 757e). The cyclical calendar (cf. Mor. 104b, see also 106f, 110f-111a) was connected with women, and the celebrations of the actual festivals were an important way of showing how to “be good at being a woman”, since the collective performance of the rituals were important to ensure fertility for the community.

The belief in fertility-rituals is a long lasting mentality in Greek society, and women are the most competent performers of the rituals connected with the promotion of fertility. Their knowledge of fertility magic, even if condemned several times by Plutarch (cf. n.3 f., n.10 supra), means that they also have the power to prevent fertility, a power Plutarch along with other men were and are afraid of (although, of course, not saying it clearly it is easy to read between the lines, cf. Håland 2007: ch. 6 for discussion). In rituals connected with the life-cycle passages we meet the same relationship. Men are the performers of the official rituals, but the point is that these rituals cannot take place before the “women-dominated” rituals have finished: The official rituals where men are agents cannot be performed before women have done the preliminary work, be that a burial, a marriage, or a newborn’s admission to the male sphere.
With this in mind, let us go to the text dedicated to the priestess Clea, *Isis and Osiris*, where many aspects both related to women, death and the body can be found.

The main aspect which will be discussed in the rest of the article is the female body and its relation to the agricultural process, which was important in connection with the female womb. The womb is a focal aspect of the “poetics of womanhood” for modern Greek women. Its importance is also implicit in ancient male writings (cf. n. 45 infra).

The belief that a dry and a wet season during the agricultural year are related to the two sexes is found in Plutarch, especially in *Isis and Osiris* and represents a continuing theme from Hesiod, Alcaios, Plato and Aristotle as well as in Modern Mediterranean Society. Corresponding to older tradition, Plutarch (*Mor.* 369b ff.) also presents us with a female Nature (*physis*) encompassing opposed principles and antagonistic forces which have to be united by way of fusion or marriage to make something new.\(^36\)

In *Isis and Osiris*, we learn that many Greek and Egyptian ceremonies are similar and conducted at the same time of the year, particularly focal periods are the autumn, winter and early spring, connected to sowing, and important stages of the grain’s growth (*Mor.* 377bc,e, 372c, 378df). Although Egypt (contrary to Greece) is a country depending on the inundating of the Nile. Plutarch draws parallels between Egyptian gods and their Greek counterparts. Here (355bd) as in older metaphors (cf. Hes. *Th*. 15, 45, 133), the male god (Osiris, cf. Ouranos, Oceanus, Poseidon) is the sea, moisture (*Mor.* 365bc) or the celestial firmament and the chthonic female goddess (*Isis*, cf. Gaia 367c; Persephone 361e, Persephone 361e, for Athena see infra) is the earth (363d), the mother, and the water; in short she is the matter (366a [382cd for “matter” opposed to “form”),

\(^36\) Cf. *Mor.* 951de (cf. 374ab, 140ef). The female Nature is behind everything 495, while the male sun “hovers over”, cf. 381ac. Cf. Håland 2007, ch. 6 for references (cf. also 2009a and b, 2010), also for the *hieros gamos* and the connection between humans and nature. (The dark) Nature affects women *Mor.* 496ab (does also the male sun, etc. affect men?), and renders the womb fertile ground (cf. supra) for plowing and sowing 495de, cf. 144b42. See 493ef for the way Nature and her seasons affect both men and women, such as in relation to the best time for marriages and procreation. See also 382c and cf. 384bc. It is interesting to note that this Mediterranean mentality according to which different elements are complementary, affect each other and create something new, is different from the North-European “equality” or “likeness thought".
i.e. the male part of nature, cf. Arist. GA. 2.732a), ... the kindly nurse and provider for all things (Mor. 364d, 368cd, cf. 357b, 368e, 770ab see also 367a), the receptive (377ab), and female principle of Nature (372e). She receives all that is created (372ef, 373f, 374b, cf. 368bd) by the male heaven which rains (cf. 770a) but, nevertheless, also represents the dry and light or bright element in nature (since [the male] Osiris is sprung from the Sun, 356a, but cf. 364ab).

As already mentioned, Isis is associated with several mother goddesses, mostly Athena, but also Demeter (and later the Panagia), and Sirius is her star. The star is the bringer of the water in the Nile, which is regarded as the effusion of Osiris. The similarity between Isis and Athena is mentioned several times (354c, 376ab), they were both born in moist areas, usually connected with mother goddesses.

According to Plutarch, the female body is animated by the male soul, as it is fertilized by a male. It is the conventional male presentation of men’s importance in the process of impregnation, procreation and reproduction.

Plutarch comparing humans to nature (Mor. 364b) parallels Plato and Aristotle. As did his older counterparts, he considers the female aspect as the body and nourishing aspect (364d, 366ab) which has to be implanted by the male aspect. He echoes Aeschylus, Plato, Aristotle as well as later sources.

\[\text{Mor. 366a, 359f, 376a; her soul 359d (but cf. 372d), cf. Håland 2007 for the importance of Sirius, Dog-days, the start of the “female” period of the year and Athena’s aspect as a mother goddess, cf. also forthcoming 2012c. For discussion of mother goddesses, see also Håland 2006b, 2009a, 2009b, 2010.}\]

\[\text{Cf. Mor. 355f and Håland 2007, 2010 for Athena’s birth, i.e. not from Zeus (cf. Mor. 381f, but cf. 376ab), but from Lake Tritonis (this signifies that she is born from or in a meadow. A meadow, i.e. leimōn, symbolizes the female sex organ, and represents a parallel to the cult of the phallus. For meadow/marsh symbolizing the female sex organ, Motte 1973), cf. 366ab for the importance of marshes, ... the watery and saturated land best nurtures ... To call Isis Athena is expressive of “I came of myself” 376ab.}\]

\[\text{Cf. supra, Mor. 142e, 382c i.e. controlled. Plutarch, himself a priest of Apollo, objected to the prevailing Greek belief that Pythia’s prophecies were caused by Apollo’s “possession” of her (Mor. 414e, vis-à-vis Strabo 9.3.5 who says that the god was “entering” her, as if sexually). According to Plutarch, Apollo would not condescend to such an act, since he will not become entangled in men’s needs. Plutarch’s view of the relation (s) gods/humans is not in concert with what he claims to be the view of ordinary people, whom he thinks are foolish since they believe they can manipulate the gods Mor. 377ef. But cf. 389b and 364ef. Cf. IL 20.93.}\]
when stating that some say that women’s semen lacks power and force to initiate the creative process but only contains matter and nourishment, this is what we should firmly believe (374f, cf. 377ab). The female body is the earth which has to be ploughed and fertilized (366a, cf. 373f, 374b, 769c). This particular way of considering the connection between humans and nature is a lasting mentality we meet several times in his writings as in others (cf. also n.36 supra).

Ideologically, the tale about Isis is a hymn to the passive nature of a woman, who should depend upon her husband and cling to him (375a, cf. 140c18; 242c25). The wishful thinking of this hymn is firmly attested among men in present-day “honour and shame” society as well. In Plutarch’s already mentioned presentation of the importance of Timoxena’s handling of the death of their daughter, we may nevertheless ask who clings to whom?

Plutarch’s ideal world “is neither new nor old”. His ideology has its counterpart in modern society, and when reading the ancient male sources with this knowledge, we may better understand the contradictions. These contradictions about the relative importance of the female and male aspects, must be seen as indications of the importance of both man and woman. 40

After having discussed the opposed principles and antagonistic forces in Nature (Mor. 369 ff.), in following Plato (Ti. 50cd), he states that ... the name of idea, example, or father differs from ... the material, the name of mother or nurse, or the seat and place of generation, and to that which results from both the name of offspring or generation (Mor. 373f, cf. 140ef).

As he also does in other and more earthly contexts, Plutarch continues by

40 Osiris is ... the cause of generation and the substance of life-producing seed 364a, cf. 382c. But, cf. supra for Isis. See also 368cd for another of Plutarch’s contradictions. According to 375c60 The creative and conserving element of Nature moves towards (and is thereby not passive!) him ... . Cf. 369d, 494f, 495cd for the female Nature. The importance of the female aspect may lay behind the statement in 365a, in spite of the praising of the male member 365c, 371f-372a, see also 365f. Cf. further 368f with the discussion in Håland 2007. Of course, many of the contradictions might be due to textural tradition. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that many of the contradictions we meet in ancient male produced sources are also encountered among modern Greek men, who therefore might perhaps not be able to grasp the ancient contradictions.
stating the importance of marriage.\textsuperscript{41} When again following and citing Plato (\textit{Resp.} 546bc), we learn the importance of the male likened to the upright, the female and base and the child of both, the perfect result whereby all three elements together constitute a triangle (\textit{Mor.} 373f-374a, cf. also Campbell 1966 for modern Greece). According to Plutarch, the child may resemble his or her mother (cf. the two Timoxenas, \textit{Mor.} 608c), while earlier sources wanted male children who resemble their father.\textsuperscript{42}

Isis is associated with mother, the house ..., \textit{the place and receptacle of generation} ... and “full” (\textit{Mor.} 374b). Plutarch continues that this Goddess needs to participate with the first God and to be associated with him in love, etc. i.e. the importance of two principles to make a third (375a).\textsuperscript{43} So, even if women’s semen lacks power and force to initiate the creative process and only contains matter and nourishment, according to both Plutarch and his equals, the male semen is nothing without nourishment (375bc59, cf. 375ab59). In other words, there were two different or rather complementary hypotheses of impregnation/fertilization in ancient society.

In concert with ancient male-produced sources, most researchers confirm the notion that women are the vessels (for jar or terracotta vessels, see also Håland 2009b, 136, 2010) for the male’s seed. They also add that only in 1826

\textsuperscript{41} Cf. \textit{Mor.} 144c43, see also n.43 infra. See \textit{Mor.} 276d for what may happen if the wife of a priest dies.

\textsuperscript{42} Cf. Hes. \textit{Op.} 235. Cf. Håland 2007. See Arist. \textit{Pol.} 7.1335b17-20, cf. 2.1262a15ff. According to \textit{Lyk.} 15.8 married women in Sparta are not kept ... \textit{under lock and key, demanding that they have children by none but ...} their husbands, as among other peoples. The ideology of “honour and shame” seems to be disadvantageous when the welfare of the state is more important than the welfare of the single \textit{oikos}. Plutarch in the footsteps of Plato (cf. 15.1 and \textit{Resp.} 458d) seems to approve the institution, because it is in another society and long ago? Despite of all their manliness, however, Spartan women still wear the virgin zone to be loosened before consummation of the marriage \textit{Lyk.} 15.3.

\textsuperscript{43} See also \textit{Cat.Min.} 7.3, where Plutarch praises the good fortune of the man married to a single wife throughout life, a probable reflection of his own happy marriage, cf. \textit{Mor.} 768b. See 142f-143a for the importance of mutual love (cf. \textit{Sol.} 20.3, Plutarch values esteem and affection in marriage, even if the couple is childless). In matters of love men and women are similar \textit{Mor.} 767ab, cf. 766 ef and 767c. Cf. Euripides’ \textit{Alcestis-Admetor} with \textit{Mor.} 770f-771c. See also n.41 f. supra. For the following (i.e. the “Furrowed Field Theory” and the “Dual Seed Theory”), see also Håland 2007, ch. 6, 2010, cf. Boylan 1984.
did women learn that they were co-creators of a child. It has also been stated that we do not learn anything about the importance of the egg and the womb in the Mediterranean tradition (Delaney 1987). This is wrong, since for example according to Plutarch, in the following of Homer: ... *wretched ... man doth the earth support on its bosom* ... (*Mor.* 104d, cf. *Od.* 18.130). In another context ... *Isis and Osiris were enamoured of each other and consorted together in the darkness of the womb before their birth*. This mythical sexual union while still in the womb of Rhea, was actually very fruitful, since Apollo (for the Greeks, i.e. Horus) was born as a result (*Mor.* 356a, 373bc: the birth of Apollo from *Isis and Osiris*, while these gods were still in the womb of Rhea). Plutarch’s story about how the gods became intermingled in an egg (*Mor.* 370ab, cf. 381bc for the importance of eggs) is also relevant. As already mentioned, for our ancient male writers womb and menstruation are the factors which distinguish women from men, i.e. the way they indicate the female sex. The ancients were not only concerned with, but in reality haunted by, the importance of the womb and its relationship to the female body. In modern Greece, we have the possibility of discerning women’s sayings from men’s, and we learn that coming from the same womb, is as important among women as belonging to the same blood amongst men, a clear reference to the fact that only motherhood is publicly verifiable.

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44 A cave symbolizes the mother’s nourishing womb, cf. Håland 2007: ch. 6, 2011b. Osiris’ many tombs are like caves *Mor.* 359ab, as later burial places for saints.

45 The association between woman, jar, womb and the earth in the sources (for example Plutarch and later Christian authors) have been regarded as demonstrations of male dominance, particularly the assertions about the central role of man in the procreation process (cf. Håland 2007, ch. 6, 2010 for discussion). The same meanings as the ancient male-produced sources are presented, when focusing on: “*The man sows and the woman bears*”. Conversely there is a view that half-siblings related through the mother are closer than those who have the same father: A commonly used phrase is: “*Our parents (grandparents, etc.) were siblings, and from the same womb*” (du Boulay 1984). From this perspective, the actual sources get new actuality. In addition I would like to thank the anonymous reader of this article for the information about ancient Greek: “*a-delphos*” (‘brother’, cf. modern Greek *adelphos*), where “*a*” is copulative and “*delphos*” stands for ‘womb’ (attested are *delphys* and *dolphos*), i.e. the alpha copulativum, used to express unity: in *a-delphos* “brother”, literally “from the same womb”, cf. http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E1%BC%80-. This very important information however, does not refute the material provided by modern ethnographers re sayings among men vs. women (cf. also Alexakēs 2005),
5. Conclusions: Two opposing value-systems in Plutarch’s ancient society

The conclusion is that we encounter two contradictory views or two sorts of representations of both women, death and the female body in Plutarch’s writings. These views are also documented in other sources, both ancient and modern (cf. Håland 2007: ch. 6):

First, the ideal woman, according to the male “honour and shame” model, is modest like Plutarch’s own wife and Plutarch’s female friends. The female body is not to be exposed, though in extreme cases, brave women may expose their body to ward off enemies. These women are still modest, because they go home to their own sphere after their deeds. All women in this group are characterized by their manly (andrōdēs) behaviour. The same manly behaviour is also maintained during death-rituals.

Second, unruly female women do not fit into the “honour and shame” modesty-model: they are not tamed; they belong to another “race”. The body of the unruly woman is dangerous, because it is used to stir up vengeance during death-rituals in a way which is contrary to the official male ideology. The body is also dangerous when it is perfumed or uses other forms of “eastern extravagance”, because it drives men wild (Mor. 144c44-e45, cf. 609b). Two instances are presented: the occasion when men and the male society lose control, particularly when the female body is used in vengeance and when men are tempted and seduced.

Third, although women subscribe to the male model, they have their own but rather illustrates the importance of looking at ancient society from another (and additional) point of view, to try to get a more fulsome picture of the actual society in which both female and male values are presented, particularly since the latter (i.e. male-written sources - and - in agreement with modern sayings among men [cf. also the official ideology of the Orthodox church, cf. du Boulay 2009] in general, tend to focus more on blood, although the importance of the womb is found “between the lines”). Re the fact that we have the possibility to discern women’s sayings from men’s, cf. supra for the fact that most of what has been said and written about ancient women has been said and written by men, cf. Håland 2007 for discussion, and also discussion of the different interests we encounter in (our few) female and male-written sources in the ancient world. What we learn from ancient female authored texts is that modern and ancient women have the same symbolic categories, cf. Håland 2008, see also Alexiou 2002.
values in addition to, or running contrary to, the male view, depending of how the male view suits their own thinking. That women experience the world differently from men, is difficult to discern from ancient male sources. Women have a double consciousness, about their own existence and about men’s representations of it. They also have female knowledge. It may be called a “poetics of womanhood”, and the point is to show how to “be good at being a woman”. According to this view, women are first and foremost nursing mothers, but they are not only nursing babies; in a wider perspective, they are actually nursing both their menfolk and whole societies as well. In ancient times it was manifested through different mother goddesses. Today we meet the same aspect through the Panagia, the mother over all mothers who is the model for Greek women. From this perspective, death-rituals are also important, either when they copy the suffering Mother of God; or when women are tending the graves of their dead family-members in a similar way to how they cared for these members when they were alive. During the performance of death-rituals, women carry out a collective duty. In short, women, in a sense, enclose men’s lives: They bring them into being and through their performing of the death-rituals, they ultimately send them into the next world, and have, because of their double consciousness about their own existence and about men’s representations of it, a more comprehensive understanding of men than men have of women.

One reason that Plutarch and other ancient authors were afraid of unruly women, is their fear of women’s reproductive power. Men want to rule that power and have never managed to do so, simply because they belong to another sex and do not know “the female secrets”. Therefore, we find contradictions in Plutarch’s writings. Through these contradictions we also learn about the power and importance of women’s rituals and the female body for the maintenance of society.

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**Website:** [http://www.arch.uoa.gr/ejh.html](http://www.arch.uoa.gr/ejh.html) (Greek)/
http://en.arch.uoa.gr/ejh.html (English)
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to the project “Antikkprogrammet. Det kristne menneske” (The Construction of Christian Identity in Antiquity), supported by the Research Council of Norway, for giving me a grant to write this article.

A note on ancient sources


In addition, the following publication is employed: Dittenberger, Wilhelm (1960 [1915-1924]). Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum. Vol. 3. Hildesheim: Georg Olms.
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Date for submitting article: 2011.05.12
Date for final review: 2011.11.14
Date for confirming publication: 2011.11.22