"TAKE, SKAMANDROS, MY VIRGINITY": IDEAS OF WATER IN CONNECTION WITH RITES OF PASSAGE IN GREECE, MODERN AND ANCIENT

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Introduction: From the Well of Water to Women and the Female Sphere

In modern Greece, several religious rituals are performed to ensure a person’s health. They may also mark, and thus secure, the transitions from one state of life to another. Therefore, pilgrims still come to the many springs found all over the country, which are now dedicated to Panagia, the Virgin Mary, to get life-giving holy water (agiasma). Caves with life-giving water are found in most of the churches dedicated to Panagia, such as the one on the Aegean island of Tinos. Here, people fetch earth and holy water, both seen as very powerful fertility and healing remedies, particularly on the festivals dedicated to the Panagia. In comparison, water was also an important fertility-symbol in ancient Greece. Among the images of water in religion and myths are the river-gods, nymphs of springs, gods, and later saints of water.

Several ancient ceremonies demonstrate the rites of propitiation to the nymph-spirits of springs. In many ceremonies, marriageable girls go down to a river and assimilate the life-giving waters by smearing themselves with mud, and girls in the Troad waded into the river Skamandros to wash off their virgin ‘wildness’ with the words: “Take, Skamandros, my virginity”.1 This essay will compare the importance of water in religious rituals linked to life-cycle passages in modern and ancient Greece. In particular, the focus here will be on girls entering their womanhood and marriage.2

2 The term, ‘Ancient Greece’ suggests that this article is not centered on a particular time and place, since the central theme is the role of water in belief/rituals, etc. in ancient Greek society. Because of the similarity with later rituals as well, I have reason to believe the time periods can be merged. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 3rd IWHA (International Water History Association) Conference, Alexandria,
With very few exceptions, the ancient sources we possess are written by men. These male writers present cultural patterns and values that are very similar to the values found among men in present-day Greece and the Mediterranean society. In general, Greek women and their lives have been analysed from a Western, male standard. Both ancient and modern Greek women have thus been categorized as unfree, dependent, secluded, and not living a worthy life. Accounts of women written by men, and many academic women, may portray them as passive or subservient. But if a goal is to conduct research from the ‘female sphere’ which still exists in the Mediterranean society generally and in Greece particularly, the picture may change. Greek women have other values and interests than men and academic women from the North of Europe and the U.S., and it is important to try to search these out if this was the reality in ancient society as well. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct fieldwork among women and men in modern Greece when working with ancient and modern sources, since the ancient sources mostly are written by men, and we thereby might find a possible answer to the fourth dimension, i.e., the values and experiences of ancient Greek women, or to be more explicit: we have the opinion of modern and ancient men (i.e., the first and second dimension), which are similar; we also have the opinion of modern women (i.e., the third dimension); but, with very few exceptions, we do not have the opinion of ancient women (the fourth dimension).

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2003. The paper is included in the conference CD-Rom, distributed by the IWHA secretariat post@iwha.net. Since 1985, 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 since 1987; cf. Evy Johanne Håland, Greske fester, Moderne og Antikke: En sammenlignende undersøkelse av kvinnelige og mannlige verdier [Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient: A Comparison of Female and Male Values] (Kristiansand, 2007), chapter 4. There, the topics discussed in the following are examined. The problems and fruitfulness of working with anthropological comparative approaches (such as using material from Modern Greece as models) are also discussed; cf. John J. Winkler, The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece (New York, 1990), particularly pp. 1–13. Several of the aspects just mentioned in the following are discussed further in E.J. Håland, “Rituals of Magical Rain-Making in Modern and Ancient Greece: A Comparative Approach,” Cosmos: The Journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society 17, 2 (2005), 197–251 (the article is based on a paper presented at the IWHA 2nd conference Bergen 2001), focusing on water, religion and agriculture, and also festivals and rainmaking rituals in Greece.

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In the modern and ancient ‘patriarchal’ Mediterranean society, women are associated with practical religion, where fertility-, healing- and death-cults are focal. These cults are connected with the domestic sphere, where women are the dominating power. ‘The female sphere’ is crucial when studying religion, gendered and social values, and popular beliefs. We discover that the ‘macro-’ and ‘micro-society’, i.e., the ‘public’ or ‘male’ and ‘domestic’ or ‘female spheres’, in fact have different meanings to what is generally assumed. In Greece, we do not find the ‘little’ society or ‘only the family’ at home; rather, this is where we meet the ‘great’ society. For instance, many decisions that are made in the public sphere in the modern Western world are still made in the domestic sphere in Greece, and this was certainly also the case in the ancient world. Therefore, it is important to search out to what extent the official male ideology is dependent on these cults, and thereby the female sphere to manifest itself.

The ‘male sphere’ is usually connected with the official (dogmatic religious and political) world, and the female with the domestic world, but this does not imply that the female sphere is marginal as some researchers have claimed. Marginalization is a spatial metaphor and depends on where you are standing. This means that the center in a Greek village can be the central village square, ‘the man’s world’, and the kitchen hearth or courtyard, focal spaces that women control. When studying Greek village life, anthropologists have considered the two spheres of male and female importance in terms of ‘public’ and ‘private’, outside home and home, i.e., equivalents to the ancient polis (city-state) and oikos (household). There are, however, public spaces where women dominate, and one of these is the cemetery, while another is the public oven, a parallel to the fountain. So, when working with the gendered spaces, one realizes that the division in a male and female sphere in Greek society may be blurred. In reality, the world of the domestic and familial or the world of women, the female sphere, covers a more extended area and has greater power than generally assumed.

Thus, the point of the following article is twofold: first, to show continuity or rather parallels in Greek rituals associated with water, ancient and modern; and second, to reconsider sources and ideas of male/female or public/domestic in ancient and modern Greece.

4 For example, see Sarah B. Pomeroy, Families in Classical and Hellenistic Greece: Representations and Realities (Oxford, 1998), p. 16.

5 I have already discussed the problems by using the word ‘private,’ connected with a modern society (and covering a more limited space as in the ‘nuclear family’),
August 15th marks the end of the fifteen-day fast in honor of the Panagia. August and particularly August 1st are usually considered the beginning of a new season in Greece, and since the cyclical perspective was and is central in connection with the festivals of the agricultural year, the modern festival dedicated to the Dormition of the Panagia marks the beginning of the passage to the new agricultural season. By the end of August, this transition towards the ‘female’, i.e., wet and fertile period in the agricultural year’s cycle, starts to replace the ‘male’, i.e., dry period, because the woman is looked upon as the productive partner in a relationship in the Mediterranean area.6 Concerning the agricultural year, the conditions of both weather and soil were the same in ancient Greece as they are today,7 and in August, the harvest and the threshing of the grain are finished. The earth is going to conceive again, when the transitional period towards the new agricultural year ends by the sowing season in October-November. For the modern Greeks, the transition to the fertile and healing period starts when Panagia descends into the underworld, and consequently ensures the future fertility in agreement with the divine underworld.8

August 15th is celebrated with special reverence all over Greece, and on this day pilgrimages are made to the greatest shrine of Greek Orthodoxy, the island of Tinos. A ritual connected with water is important at this shrine and particularly during the festival when people visit the ‘Life-giving Spring’.

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7 This is discussed at length in Håland, “Rituals of Magical,” particularly pp. 202–204.

The church of Panagia, *Euangelistrias* (the Annunciation) at Tinos owes its fame to a miraculous icon of the Annunciation, which was unearthed in a field in 1821 following a mystical vision seen by one of the islanders, a pious nun.\(^9\) Below the main church at Tinos are several cave-shaped chapels. In the first is a holy spring where the pilgrims fetch water, which has fertile power and cures sickness (figure 1). According to the tradition, the well was found during the excavations made in search of the icon. The well was dry. As there did not exist any well near the building site, on the day of the laying of the corner-stone of the church, the bishop sent a boy to bring water from the town for the celebration of the hallowing of the waters. Shortly afterwards the child returned to say that the well next to the foundation was full of water. The bishop and the notables went on the spot and saw with great surprise that the dry well was filled up to the brink with water. They made the sign of the cross for this miracle and took from the well the water necessary for the celebration of the hallowing. Since then, the water of the well has been used by the pilgrims as a sacred water and everybody takes it along in special vials and keeps it at home as a talisman. The source is seen as a miracle and the chapel of holy water is called *Zoodochos Pigi*, i.e., the Life-giving Spring (figure 2).\(^{10}\)

All year, pilgrims come to Tinos, but the crowd is enormous during the days around the August-festival, particularly after August 1st. People, mostly women, make their way up to the church barefoot, on their bare knees, or on their stomachs, and they bring with them various offerings sometimes tied on their backs, such as tall candles, icons, and wax. They may also bring incense, silver candlesticks, censers, bread, wine, or sheep. The most common offering is a silver- or gold-plated *ex-voto* (in Greek, *tama*) representing the person who has been miraculously cured by the icon, or the cured limb, or the person or limb wanting to be cured, or a ship. The street, leading directly from the harbor to the church, is named *Megalocharēs* (*megalo*, great; *charē*, grace; i.e., the Blessed Virgin). *Megalocharēs* is a wide avenue about a kilometer in length, lined with shops and booths, particularly at its lower end. As

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\(^9\) Håland, *Greske fester*, p. 98.

soon as the pilgrims disembark from the ships, and begin to make their way up the hill, they are assailed with the cries of the shopkeepers who stand outside their stores, hawking the items necessary for a successful pilgrimage: “Lampades! Tamata! Mpoukalakia gia agiasma!”
Edō Lampades!” (“Large candles! Tamata! Little bottles for holy water! Here [are] large candles!”)\(^{11}\)

At the top of the hill, at the doorway of the church, the pilgrims offer their large candles. Afterwards, they line up on the steps at the Church of the Annunciation, waiting their turn to enter the main chapel, to \textit{proskynēma}, i.e., to perform the required set of devotions, the most important being to kiss the icon itself. Most pilgrims confine their attentions to the main sanctuary and to the chapel of holy water below the church, asking: “Where do we go for holy water?”—and they are directed downstairs, to the chapel beneath the main church. The pilgrims drop some money in a carved wooden counter with a slot, pick up candles to be lighted, and inside the first chapel they kiss the icons, after which they take some earth from the hole where the miraculous icon was found. Next, they line up to obtain holy water in small bottles or they drink directly from the tap. Many pilgrims only carry out the most essential rituals and obtain the holy symbols before they return to the harbor.

The water is thought to be particularly powerful during the festival, which starts on the eve of August 15th. Now, the church is nicely decorated and the icon is placed on a blue and golden embroidered carpet. Both the earth and the water are considered to be more holy now, when Panagia is so near. Accordingly, they are more powerful, and during her \textit{panēgyrikos} on August 15th, the Dormition of the Panagia, many children are baptised in the chapel of holy water, in the Life-giving Spring (figure 2). Particularly marriageable girls or newly married girls fetch earth and holy water, to assure their own fertility and health.

\textit{Panagia, Agia Paraskeuē, and Their Sacred Springs}

Holy water, \textit{agiasma}, is found in all modern Greek sanctuaries, but some sanctuaries offer particularly wondrous water and these have their own legend attached to it. Caves with springs, which were dedicated to ancient gods and goddesses, particularly nymphs, are often transformed

\(^{11}\) Håland, \textit{Greske fester}, p. 102, see also Jill Dubisch, \textit{In a Different Place: Pilgrimage, Gender, and Politics at a Greek Island Shrine} (Princeton, 1995), p. 22.
to chapels dedicated to Panagia. Similarly a cult dedicated to *Agia* (Saint) Paraskeuē is found several places in Greece, as in the Vale of Tempe in Northern Greece, where we also find the Spring of Aphrodite (Venus) and the Spring of Daphne. *Agia* Paraskeuē is celebrated on July 26th, and the holy water in her caves is especially good at curing eye diseases. Hundreds of silver ex-votos representing a human eye can be seen adorning her icons.

On the island of Mytilini in the village named after this saint, *Agia* Paraskeuē is worshipped in a cave where cult activity is documented from antiquity.\(^\text{12}\) The wonder-working nature of the sacred spring inside

12 Kōsta Makistou, *Ė Sellada tōs Agias Paraneskeus Lesbou* (Athens, 1970), pp. 11–14, 81–90, and pp. 110–111. See also K. Makistou, *Ena Panarchaio Mnēmeio stēn Agia Paraneskeus Lesbou. “T’ Tyousiou e Mana”* [An Ancient Monument in Agia Paraneskeus Lesbou. “Foetus or Mother”] (Athens, 1978) for the underground construction at Agia Parasekeuē, which is shaped as a cervix of the womb and womb. According to the local tradition it is called ‘Foetus’ or ‘Mum’ (or ‘Source’). It has also been called the foetus in the womb, and connected with Dionysos in his mother’s womb. The main reservoir of the village has its source in the cave. The cave may have been dedicated to the nymph Brisa (cf. *Brysa* i.e., spring, source) who nursed Dionysos, according to the local mythology. The cult connected with the spring of *Agios* Charalamplos in the vicinity may be a modern
the cave continues, and the ancient spring house is now a chapel dedicated to Agia Paraskeue. Panagia is the main goddess in connection with the festival dedicated to the Life-giving Spring, which is also celebrated in connection with the cave because of its spring with healing water. The significance of water is demonstrated through this festival, which is celebrated on New Friday after the Resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday, in the first Week after Easter (or White Week). It is dedicated to Panagia under her attribute of Ζῶοδοχος Πηγή, the Life-giving Spring. This festival is also found other places, for example in Athens.\textsuperscript{13} During this festival, the Athenians come to her chapel inside a circular spring house hewn in the rock on the Southern slope of the Acropolis to fetch life-giving water in the cave which is dedicated to her; accordingly, the water scoop is often used during the festival (figure 3). The Sacred Spring is situated inside a cave over which is constructed a church. Through antiquity the cave was dedicated to different deities: the spring house and its surroundings were sacred to the Water Nymphs from the sixth century B.C.; later, the sanctuary of Asklepios was built here. Subsequently, the cave was dedicated to Agioi Anargyroi, the patron saints of healing, and today it is dedicated to the Panagia. Thus, she has replaced the ancient Water Nymphs (cf. figure 4). From these short accounts of the modern shrines with healing water connected with female divinities, particularly the Life-giving Spring in the Acropolis cave, the following section will explore the cult of the water-deities in Ancient Greece, and their healing and thus life-giving capacities.

\textit{From Modern Shrines with Healing Water to Ancient Greek Water-Deities}\

Among the myths about water are the rivers of death and the regeneration of life. In ancient Greece, Lethe was the River of Forgetfulness, whose water no pitcher could hold,\textsuperscript{14} and among the nine rivers of the underworld was the river Styx. The gods of Homer and the


Figure 3. The water scoop in the cave dedicated to the Panagia, the ‘Life-giving Spring’, Athens. (Author’s photograph).
Arkadians took oath by it. The Well of Memory, Mnemosyne, was also a Well of Life. Hence, water was also an essential fertility symbol in ancient Greece.

Pliny tells about classes of water. According to Plutarch fire is masculine and water feminine. In his description of the moist and cold winter season, Hesiod associates the interior of the house with women and femaleness. Water may, nevertheless, figure as both a female and male symbol. Among the images of water in religion and myths are the river-gods, nymphs of springs, gods, and later saints, of water. The gods of the sea or ocean, Pontos, Okeanos and Poseidon, are male. So are rivers. Pausanias discusses the river called Arsen, which means ‘male’, and the river named Ladon. The goddess of love and fertility, Aphrodite, was born from the foam that gathered about the genitals of Uranos, when Cronos threw them into the sea. Springs are Nymphs and therefore female, such as the nymph Thelpousa. So, the fertility aspect of water is particularly related to the nymphs.

The nymphs were closely connected with the land and the various aspects of its nature, like mountains and caves, water, and vegetation.

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19 Bruce Lincoln, *Death, War and Sacrifice* (Chicago, 1991), also discusses water, water of memory and forgetfulness included. According to his presentation of the gender politics in Indian religion (pp. 223–224), water, earth, plants, and fish came into being as female. As in ancient Greek religion (such as in Hes. *Th.* and Plut. *Mor.*, cf. infra), the very cosmos is classified according to gender.
21 Paus. 8.25.1.
22 Paus. 8.25.2–13.
25 Paus. 8.25.2.
They were deities providing not only the water of springs, but also rivers and pools; hence, they presided in general over the granting of water. All kinds of waters are in fact inhabited by nymphs, such as the Naiads, the Potameids (cf. potamos, river, stream), the Creneids, and the Hydriads (cf. hydria, water-pot). The nymphs were believed to give water through springs, and prayers and offerings of thanks were made to them in this connection, such as a votive relief with nymphs, found south of the Acropolis (figure 4). They were asked to send forth springs from the earth. The nymph or nymphs of a particular place caused fountains and springs of water to gush forth, warm water included, often to please goddesses as Artemis. The water belonging to the spring of the Sithnid nymphs flows into the fountain built by Theagenes, and it is called the water of the Sithnid nymphs, according to Pausanias. The nymphs were often given drinking cups, were associated with bathing establishments, and were also connected with the water of aqueducts and irrigation ditches.

Local springs were often associated with a divine nymph, both a goddess of marriage and birth, and several authors preserving ceremonies that reflect very ancient usage describe the rites of propitiation to the nymph-spirits of springs. Pausanias explains as you go on from Epidauros Limera about two stades, on the right is the Water of Ino, about as large as a small lake, but going deeper into the earth. They throw barley-cakes into this water on the festival of Ino. If the water keeps them submerged, it is auspicious for the person who threw them.

References:

26 Od. 6.123–124.
29 Plin. HN. 31.10.
33 Plin. HN. 31.10.
34 3.23.8.
in; but if it returns them to the surface, it is judged bad omen. The story that Ino nursed Dionysos is widespread, and according to Athenaios36 “the Nymphs were called nurses of Dionysos, because water increases the wine when mixed with it,” just as nurses help the growth of their children. The nymphs were believed to have the power of averting barrenness, to promote and protect offspring. Springs and brooks, which they personified, also were held to possess this power. According to Pliny, the spring at Thespiae causes women to conceive, and the spring Linus guards the embryo and prevents miscarriage. The nymphs were worshipped as deities of water, of marriage, and of birth, and were connected with all sources of water; thus, water gives fertility and

Figure 4. Votive relief with nymphs (National Museum, Athens 1966, see Travlos 1971: fig. 193).


36 11.465a.

37 Pliny HN. 31.4.

38 HN. 31.7.10.

life to everything that grows. Accordingly, they were believed to give fertility to the soil and to assist growth of everything coming from the ground and to animals and man. The water where they were worshiped had healing and thus fertilizing power.

Through the custom of offering a lock of hair to Artemis or Hera, and later to Panagia before marriage, we meet the ancient Olympian religion and later the Christian church’s adoption of the cult of nature. Water and hair symbolize life: water is a chthonic symbol, and a living individual’s vitality is in her or his hair. Therefore, childhood is offered in exchange for the status as adult. Usually, girls offered a lock of their hair to the Nymph or Neraida on the eve of their marriage.

The role of the springs in the wedding-rituals is illustrated by maiden’s preliminary sacrifice to the nymphs. Before marriage it was customary for girls to go to the nearest river or spring to bathe, probably to honour the nymphs of the spring that they might make the marriage fruitful in the begetting of children, since they also presided over birth. In the fifth century B.C., the historian Thucydides writes that close to the Ilissus river

there is the spring of water which is now called Enneakrounos [The Nine Fountains], since the tyrants had the fountain made, but used to be called Kallirhoē or ‘Fair Stream’, when the water came straight out of the earth.

The people [...] used to use this spring for all purposes since is was so close to them, and, from this ancient habit of theirs is derived the cus-

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41 Cf. the water of Peirene (a human who by her weeping became a water-spring), Paus. 2.3.2–3. The spring was ornamented with white stone and chambers constructed like grottoes, from which the water ran out to the basin in the open air.


43 Plut. Mor. 772.1.


45 Pind. Pyth. 11.2–3.
The spring of water Kallirhoë owes its name to the fact that it was dedicated to the Nymph Kallirhoë. On their wedding day, the Athenian bride and groom were given separate ritual baths with water brought from the Kallirhoë spring.\textsuperscript{47} The special vessel used for this purpose came to be known as a \textit{loutrophoros}, and on several vases girls are represented as carrying water for this purpose. Because a \textit{loutrophoros} was used for the nuptial bath, the vase-shape itself evokes and commemorates the wedding, such as the wedding procession, with the marriage torches (figure 5). It was also common to place on the grave of those who died unmarried (\textit{agamos}) a \textit{loutrophoros},\textsuperscript{48} in token that the dead had died unbathed, unmarried, and without offspring. Thus, at the time of marriage the nymphs were honored in different ways, by ritual bathing of the bride and groom and by dedicating votive offerings of vases and hair so that they might bless the union with children. In sum, the nymphs were believed to have the power of giving fruitfulness in marriage and of lessening the pain of birth, as their equivalents in modern Greece, the Nymphs, Nereida or saints, such as Agia Marina.\textsuperscript{49} The next section will explore the relation between water, haircutting, and rites of passage more closely. In this connection the healing and purifying aspects of water are central.

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\item[\textsuperscript{49}] Håland, \textit{Greske fester}, chapter 6.
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Figure 5. A *loutrophoros*, the vessel used for the nuptial bath: wedding procession (=ARV 1031,51, see Boardman 1989: fig. 134).
Healing and Purifying Waters and Their Divinities

In mythology, rivers were part of the land before the arrival of men, and rivers may figure as ancestors. Because moisture is necessary for growth, rivers and springs are also associated with those growing up: they are *kourotrophoi* (youth rearing). There was also the custom to offer, to rivers and springs, animals that were *enorchus* (with testicles). Accordingly, just as initiation is about the allocation of civic identity and the perpetuation of the community, rivers and springs frequently figure in the rites and mythology that mark rites of passage for maidens and youths.50

Offering locks of hair to the youth-nourishing rivers was a rite marking a person’s emergence from childhood.51 A marble relief illustrates such a hair offering (figure 6). The cutting of hair, ‘the crown of childhood’, admits boys and girls to society, announcing their passage to adulthood and marriage. By offering the *aparchai*, first fruits or primal offerings, to the life-giving waters, boys who were initiated as warriors and girls ensured their fertility in their married lives. Haircutting symbolizes the transition to another stage in life. This practice is found in ancient and later periods of Greece, where the fountains were decorated with maidenhair until modern times.52 In this connection the theme of death and rebirth is important, since the initiates are reborn into a new life. Moments of transition from one state of life to another are high points of danger, and the person is especially vulnerable to spirits, agencies, influences, or invisible mischief. At such crisis points, rituals instigated as safeguards usually include purification measures to wash off the past and assimilate new strength for the future. Baths are standard, in these measures.53

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53 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*
In antiquity, marriage was a prime target for girls' initiations but almost an accessory for boys' initiations. But marriage leads to a more crucial aim, the birth of a child. So in both cases the real goal of initiation was the perpetuation of the household. The most significant ideological goal for women was glorious motherhood, and the caves dedicated to Artemis were important at marriage and birth. Before marriage, a woman must descend into the cave and make sacrifice to Artemis. A woman’s ritual obligations were as a pre-marital person, as a new bride, and later as the expectant or new mother, and according to the Cyrene Cathartic Law from approximately 340 A.D., “A bride must go down to the bride-room to Artemis before marriage,” and a pregnant woman shall go down and sacrifice to Artemis in the same way as a

A vital part of the ritual was a woman’s journey to a Nymphaion (sanctuary of the Nymphs) in the precinct of Artemis in order to make sacrifice to the nymphae. The first bath of mother and child was also an important occasion. The story of a god’s birth was scarcely complete without mention of it: “There is a river flowing through Gortys that the people who live around its spring call the Wash (Lousios), because it was used for washing at the birth of Zeus. […]” Kallimachos also mentions the washing in his hymn to Zeus. The washing and purification after the birth of the ruler of the Olympian gods were evidently quite essential in Arkadia, since Pausanias brings back the theme when he reaches the river Lymax which flows past Phigalia and discharges into the Neda, telling that “they say it got its name from Rhea’s purification. When she had given birth to Zeus and the Nymphs cleaned her up, they flung the water they used into this river.” Even for mortals, the water might be fetched from a special spring, and the bath occurred immediately afterwards.

Water is crucial not only in connection with washing and purification after a delivery and other life-cycle passages, but also in connection with sickness and disease. Thus, healing springs were often sacred to the nymphae, and “[…] on the banks of the river Kytheros; there is a water-spring that runs into the river with a sanctuary of the nymphae at the spring. […] If you wash in the spring you can be cured of all kinds of aches and pains,” according to Pausanias. A cave (containing healing sulphur springs) not far from the river Samikon belongs to Anigros’s daughters, the nymphae:

[...] anyone who enters it with any kind of leprosy, first prays to the nymphae and promises whatever sacrifice [...], and then wipes the diseased parts of his body, and when he swims across the river he leaves his disgrace in its water, and comes out healthy and clear-skinned.
Healing and purifying waters are powerful waters, in a positive sense. The ancients, however, thought that all rivers were not healing, and these water sources could be polluted. Pausanias is “convinced that the peculiar smell of the Anigros comes from the earth in which the water rises, just as the breath of certain waters beyond Ionia is fatal to human beings for the same reason. [...]”60 Different explanations were given for this smell, and some believed that the river was polluted at the purification of Proitos’s daughters, when the items infected at their purification were thrown in the river.61 Accordingly, the next two sections will examine some myths about virgins related to the rite of passage undergone by girls at puberty. The first story is about Proitos’s daughters where purifying waters sacred to the goddess Artemis, presiding over initiation, are central.

The Proitids

Purifying waters are important on the divine level, and after the marriage with Zeus, followed the bath of Hera, the goddess of marriage, when she renewed her virginity every year by washing in the spring Kanathos in Nauplia.62 Many myths relay tales of purification, such as the story about the daughters of Proitos, the Proitids. The daughters were beautiful and had many suitors, but they rendered the jealous goddess Hera angry by their devaluation of her. Accordingly they lost their beauty and became cows. Moreover, Hera poured down a dreadful skin-disease, *alphos*, over them.63 This hair loss mythically depicts the ritual shearing before marriage. Following a period of wandering across the boundless earth, they came to a cave and the waters of Lousoi, and their sickness was healed at Lousoi Artemis shrine. The cave probably housed a spring where the madness, or ritual dislocation,
of the girls was purged, leaving the spring with their sickness. This is a typical wilderness rite: time spent in a cave, the wild counterpart of the civilized precinct. Water and washing recurred at Lousoi (the very name Lousoi refers to ‘washing’). In its vicinity there were numerous springs flowing into the River Aroanios.

The temple of Artemis Hemerasia at Lousoi was equipped with a bathing pool in its precincts obviously for sacred use: it purified the maidens before marriage. A parallel may be the ritual performed at the stream called Eleutherios (Freedom or Liberation), which runs not far from the Argive Heraion, a sanctuary dedicated to Hera. The women of the place use it for purifications and sacrifices, which are not spoken of, according to Pausanias, which means that they were secret rituals performed by women, and since men were excluded from the ceremony, they did not know what was going on. A kanephoros (basket-bearer in religious procession), a girl pure of marriage, performed the initial rites of the sacrifices at the Heraion; other maidens were also present, and since the stream was called Eleutherios, it has been suggested that this stream, like the waters of Lousoi, purified the maiden and released her from her bovine condition. Moist, lush sites display natural sympathy with maidens’ initiation rites and are often associated with them, such as the waters of Lousoi, the mouth of the Alpheios, or the marsh of Lerna related to the Danaids.

The Danaids as Well-Nymphs

This section will examine the myth about the Danaids, being on the threshold of marriage and will illustrate an initiation ritual performed by girls before marriage, in a watery context.

In Arkadia, Demeter had a temple and a sacred grove in the Marsh. Many sanctuaries dedicated to goddesses are situated in places where spring-water rises abundantly. At the sanctuary dedicated to Demeter at Phigalia, there was a sacred grove of oaks around the cave, where

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64 2.17.1.
66 Paus. 8.36.6.
67 Paus. 7.27.9–10.
cold water flows out of the ground.⁶⁸ Water also came up from the spring right beside the statue of Demeter’s daughter.⁶⁹ We also learn about fertile sacred areas, such as in swampy marshes around fertile plains. Demeter was worshiped in the Eleusinian marsh and in the marshes at Lerna.⁷⁰ Although mystery cults were important at both places, particularly the mysteries of Eleusis dedicated to Demeter, the goddess of the corn crop, and the marriage of her daughter ‘the Maiden’, Kore, are relevant in this connection.

In ancient popular religion the typical uninitiated (amyētos) at Eleusis were made water-carriers in Hades, being engaged in pouring water into a leaky pithos (i.e., a large wine-jar) out of an equally leaky sieve (kaskinon) as punishment.⁷¹ As part of the mythological tradition later, the Danaids, the daughters of Danaos, were selected as mythical prototypes, carrying water in sieves, trying to do the rather impossible task of filling a great well-pithos.⁷²

The loutrophoria carrying of the bath was a special rite of purification common to marriage and mysteries, and according to the tradition the Danaids, were condemned in Hades for killing their husbands to carry in vain the water for their bridal bath. From this perspective, after the murder of their husbands, they can never obtain from another man the grace of the living water of marriage. So the symbolism of marriage and living water gather about the figures of the Danaids. Nevertheless, according to several vase-paintings the people carrying water in the underworld did not carry loutrophoroi, but, as already indicated, pithoi pierced at the bottom. In this way, their task presents the perpetual repetition of a nymph’s gestures assuring the fertility of her own marriage by making the water flow continually. In other words, their task is a fertility-charm.

The sieve is a sacred ancient utensil and has always been connected with fertility-goddesses and fertility-rituals in Greece. The sources do not mention whether the loutrophoroi at the cemeteries and in weddings

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⁶⁸ Paus. 8.42.12.
⁶⁹ Paus. 4.33.4.
⁷⁰ Paus. 2.37.1–3.
⁷² Cf. Jane E. Harrison, Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion (1903; reprint London, 1980), pp. 613–623. Dowden, Death, chapter 7. However, I do not agree with his opinion that the underworld-sequence serves to disrupt the logic of the Danaids-legend.
were pierced at the bottom, but for the archaeological reports sieve and *pithos* were one and the same. Certainly, *pithoi* for storage are not pierced; on the other hand, a *pithos* pierced at the bottom is a watering instrument, and the ritual illustrates the cult of the forces of vegetation, since the signification of a pierced *pithos* first and foremost was to irrigate the earth to make the crops grow. Accordingly, to pour water into a *pithos* pierced at the bottom so that the water poured in flows into the ground is a rain charm.\(^\text{73}\) The Danaids also discovered the springs of Argos. In this version of the myth, their water-carrying is fruitful, since they are represented as carrying water because they were well-nymphs, watering and thus fertilizing Argos. Strabo says that: “Argos, waterless once, the Danai made well-watered.”\(^\text{74}\)

**Girls, Virgins, Wells and Water**

The myths about the Proitids and Danaids lead us to girls, wells and, water in general, three aspects that, for practical reasons, have been connected from ancient times in the Greek environment. The rite of ‘descending to the water’ was common in several places in antiquity. Its purpose was to revive the water-sources and bring rain.\(^\text{75}\) Several sources describe boys descending to the rivers to dedicate a lock of hair to their native stream, such as Achilles vowing his hair to the River Spercheios upon returning from Troy.\(^\text{76}\) Nevertheless, girls are more often connected with water. In practical life, many girls had daily descents to rivers or streams, and several vase-paintings illustrate them drawing water from the fountain.\(^\text{77}\) The Athenians used to send their daughters to draw water. According to a myth, the Pelasgians came after the Athenian girls when they went to fetch water from the Nine Springs and raped

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\(^{76}\) Il. 23.141–147.

them. The Athenians gave this as their ideological reason for expelling these former inhabitants of the area. Like meadows, wells were, in antiquity, often a scene of abduction or molestation of women, the myths probably reflecting real life. The ancient stories about invading forces abducting the former inhabitants’ women leads to the fear of rape and other transgressions at the fountains and at other places, such as the brooks or the rivers where women have always gone.

Legends frequently associate virginity with a river, spring, or well. Indeed, in Homer we learn about the Parthenios river. The word Parthenios however, is also connected with springs or wells, for example at Eleusis: At the Spring Parthenion at Eleusis, the maidens came to draw water and carry it in bronze vessels to their father’s house, they filled their jugs with water and carried them proudly back to the house. When Demeter came to Eleusis on her search for her daughter, she sat down by the side of the Spring Parthenion. The marriageable daughters of Metaneira and Keleus, the queen and king, found her there when coming to the Maiden Well to fetch water. The name of the well also suggests that virgins drew the water for their nuptial baths from the site. Given the suggestive setting, it is not surprising that their age and resemblance to goddesses (particularly, Kore, Demeter’s daughter) is underlined in the text. In Eleusis, there is also a well, “called Kallichoron [Well of Fair Dances], where the Eleusinian women first danced and came to the goddess,” according to Pausanias.

Nymphs were the regular companions of the most important Maiden, the goddess Artemis, and at the spring called Pēgē (spring/source) the nymphs used to hold their dances and sing the praise of Artemis by night. All the cult sites of Artemis are complete with spring and plane tree, such as at her shrine in Aulis.

A nymph is not only a divine being. The ancient Greek word nymphē has in fact many meanings, such as ‘young girl’ or ‘marriageable maiden’. Nymphē names a young woman at the moment of her transition from maiden (parthenos) to wife (gynē). Still, the bride is called nymphē on the marriage-day. Not only the goddesses or nymphs of springs, but

78 Hdt. 6.137.3.
79 Il. 2.854.
80 h.Cec. 98–110.
81 1.38.6.
also their human counterparts, girls, used to play close to rivers and at the fountains when going for water. A vase-painting shows a girl playing ball at the fountain house (figure 7).

“Take, Skamandros, my virginity”

Rivers have a central role in wedding rituals. A Cretan hieros gamos (sacred marriage) of Zeus and Hera takes place near the river Theren, where a temple stands and the natives of the place annually offer holy sacrifices and imitate the ceremony of the marriage. Hera Parthenos, after losing her virginity in the hieros gamos periodically recovers it in the aforementioned spring. Aeschines reports on the nuptial custom of Troy: “In the Troad, it is the custom for girls who are getting married to go to the Skamandros and bathe there.” They waded into the river Skamandros to wash off their wildness, while intoning the following ritual formula: “Take, Skamandros, my virginity.” The words addressed to the river clearly refer to the consummation of marriage. Four days after the bathing rite, in honor of Aphrodite there is a procession of newly married women.

The ‘wildness’ of women and ‘madness’ of pubescent girls jumping into wells are notions found in several ancient sources written by men, such as early medical writings. They recommended marriage as the context wherein a female may transform savagery into a fruitful life. Thus, the wedding ceremony dramatizes the shedding of virgin ‘wildness’ and transition to civilized wifehood. The bride completes her preliminary rites by dedicating the first fruits of her hair to Artemis or another water nymph, to symbolize her transition to another stage in life. The bride then takes her nuptial bath, such as in the Skamandros. The bath is a crucial moment in her transition from girlhood to wifehood.

85 Diod. 5.72.4.
86 Paus. 2.38.2.
87 Ep. 10.3.
89 Håland, Greske fester, chapter 6; Dowden, Death, chapter 4.
Figure 7. Girls at the fountain (ABV 334.3, see Keuls 1993: fig. 210).
African folk models of fertility and the regeneration of life can be compared with modern and ancient Greek sources. According to a myth from East Africa, the young woman on her way to her marriage stops at a river in the wilderness. There, she gets pregnant all by herself, or with the collaboration of a python in the river. This wild, procreative power of the unmarried woman seems to represent the threat of a female capacity for regeneration of life without male control. It carries connotations of ‘auto-fertilization’ and becomes untenable for a male ideology that claims that female fertility must be conquered and domesticated by men, in order to be of any use for the regeneration of life (i.e., social life). Once domesticated, female procreative power is considered a life-giving source of blessing. Thus, domestication by marriage may transform dangerous female sexuality into beneficial fertility. A similar way of thinking may be found in several Greek myths, such as the different aspects of Demeter, who at the same time personified domesticated earth or ‘culture’, but who also incarnated the ‘wild’ nature. It is also illustrated by the ambivalent Pandora, the first woman who was made of water and earth, thus personifying fertility, but who also was seen as responsible for the destruction of man, according to male ideology. In addition, Peleus conquers the sea-nymph Thetis. During Perses’ first sexual experience, he beheads (castrates) the pregnant woman, Medusa. From the decapitation, connected with blood-sacrifice, killing, and male power over reproduction, new life bursts from the blood of her genitalized head, since the Greeks considered the woman to be captured between two mouths, between two necks, as the female body was captured between the upper and lower mouth, or the neck and the vulva. Their cult representations can be found in most places where hot springs exist.

91 Jacobson-Widding and van Beek, “Introduction,” p. 29.
94 ARV 115.2.
95 Hes. Th. 276–283.
Most female researchers, such as Nicole Loraux, Froma I. Zeitlin, and Marilyn Arthur, have regarded the association between woman, wildness, wetness, clay pot or jar, womb, and the earth in ancient sources written by men as demonstrations of male dominance. The perception of women, presented by the sources written by men, is seen from the male sphere and therefore is based upon a male point of view. Simultaneously, we must recall that whereas ancient male authors were reared by their mothers in the Greek domestic context, where social identity had its first influences, modern Western researchers do not have the same context. Thus, the result, i.e., that the sources very often become ambiguous and paradoxical to the modern eye, and must now therefore be seen from a new perspective. Modern scholars must take into consideration the importance of the womb, nourishment, water, and springs in Greek culture as a whole and across time. Through such analysis, I have already located two contradictory views in ancient and modern male-produced sources. By comparing them with the few sources we possess from ancient women and the values found in present-day society’s female sphere, I have realized that the actual contradictory views present one value-system connected with the female sphere and another connected with the male sphere. Therefore, I argue that we should re-evaluate the traditional association by comparing the ancient male statements with the values found in the female sphere in Greece.


100 Håland, Greske fester, chapter 6.
The female body symbolizes everything connected with conception, nourishment, and birth. It can be thought to be a container, but also a microcosm. The aforementioned female researchers, particularly Loraux, have criticized the discrepancy between what she calls the “standard Greek representation of fertility,” and the actual disdainful presentation of women given by male-produced sources. She follows this by criticizing later analyses of the statement, i.e., those she calls “the supporters of the Earth Mother,” i.e., the “standard Greek representation of fertility,” until André Motte. In fact, the standard Greek representation of fertility puts fertility in the hands of woman or in her womb, according to the logic behind the Life-giving Spring, also one of Panagia’s attributes. Cults dedicated to female healing, fertility-deities in womb-shaped caves containing water-springs, have always been crucial, and in antiquity, the term pēgē was connected with nourishing nymphs, but also used for goddesses as Hera and Magna Mater. Male writers needed the female body to explain very fundamental facts: Space is female connected with a nourishing receptacle, container, reservoir, or womb. Women are connected with wetness and water. The sieve of the Danaids is also a utensil connected with the female, since women are not only wet, but also leak, according to the sources. The goddess Rhea’s name is derived from the verb reō, meaning ‘to flow, run, stream, gush, pour.’ As Gaia, the chthonic goddess Isis, is also the earth, the mother, she is also the matter, “the kindly nurse and

101 See Plato’s statement in Menex. 238a, about the importance of the mother.
103 Pl. Ti. 52, 50d.
107 Plut. Mor. 363d.
108 Plut. Mor. 366a (382cd for ‘matter’ opposed to ‘form,’ i.e., the male part of nature; see Arist. Gd. 732a).
provider for all things,” the receptive and female principle of Nature. She receives all that is created by the male heaven, which rains but nevertheless also represents the dry and light or bright element in nature, since Osiris is sprung from the Sun.\textsuperscript{109} The Dog-star (Sirius) is the star of Isis, because it is the bringer of water (in the Nile).\textsuperscript{110} The Dog-star’s summer rising marks the beginning of the overflowing of the Nile, which is regarded as the effusion of Osiris. Sirius was also connected with Athena, and the similarity between Isis and Athena is mentioned several times by Plutarch, when drawing parallels between Egyptian gods and their Greek counterparts.\textsuperscript{111} They were both born in moist areas, which are usually connected with mother goddesses.\textsuperscript{112} The ambiguous perception of women, presented by the sources written by men, lay in the unique physical functions of the mature female body: menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation. In Graeco-Roman-Egyptian culture, menstruation was likened to the Nile flood in heralding the fecundity of new life, growth and nourishment.\textsuperscript{113}

\textit{From the Honor of Masculinity Toward a Poetics of Womanhood: From the Dry to the Wet}

Pierre Bourdieu created a “synoptic diagram of pertinent oppositions” as a model to help him understand the Kabyles of North-Africa.\textsuperscript{114} This general Mediterranean cultural pattern may be used as well specifically on Greek material. The male-female division, which he presented in an earlier study, is a structured system of gendered classification, where the elements of the male-female division, such as male and dry, female

\begin{footnotesize}
\bibitem{109} Plut. \textit{Mor.} 355f, but cf. 364ab; 770a; 373f, 374b; 372e; 377ab; 364d, cf. 357b.
\bibitem{110} Plut. \textit{Mor.} 366a38.
\bibitem{111} \textit{Mor.} 354c, 376ab, cf. 359d,f.
\end{footnotesize}
and wet, are inserted in layers. The calendar presents the agricultural year and the relations between humans and nature. It has importance for understanding the male ideal gendered dichotomy vis-à-vis the actual gendered relations in society. The model embodies the human and agricultural life-cycles related to gender, the very cosmos.

Bourdieu as a man presents a man’s analysis of men’s historical paths, and his approach is similar to the presentations given by the ancient male writers. However, if we study the calendar in combination with focal features in the ancient Athenian and the modern Greek festival calendars from a non-androcentric perspective, the result will differ from Bourdieu’s. There is only a male dominance, as he claims, if we read the calendar from a dominant male focus. This will automatically be reproduced, only if we base our research on the male ideological sphere and value-system. On the other hand we can learn that what seemed peripheral from the male sphere becomes the center, if we look from the female sphere. We also find new, or female, values. And how do we look from the female sphere? What is the process? By conducting fieldwork in the modern female and male spheres and compare our findings with ancient sources, when simultaneously trying to see the material from the values of Greek women, which are similar to the few sources we possess from ancient women and also often found between the lines or distorted in the male statements, for example Hesiod, Aeschylus and Plutarch. So, by taking account of both spheres, we realize that they are complementary to each other and we can create a fuller picture of human experience. Accordingly, the one-sided analysis Bourdieu presents of the diagram must be read from another approach, from a chthonic perspective, i.e., from the bottom, below, or


117 That is why their view is ambiguous. For example, when Plutarch severely criticizes women at the cemetery, etc. we might understand what was going on, and what the women thought about the process, since similar situations have gone on until modern times; see E.J. Håland, “Athena’s Peplos: Weaving as a Core Female Activity in Ancient and Modern Greece,” Cosmos: The journal of the Traditional Cosmology Society 20 (2006), 155–182, and eadem, “Greek women and religion,” in press.
inside, thus emphasizing the importance of the wet and ‘female’ part of the agricultural year—the gestation period (figure 8).

Many Western scholars describe ancient Greek women as downtrodden and reclusive female creatures. In addition, in earlier ethnographers’ writings on the Mediterranean negative aspects of women were emphasized because they based their analyses on the conventional male values of honor and shame. Modern Greek male informants, however, presented them to their own ideal of the gender relations in society, which is strikingly similar to the ideal found in male-produced sources from antiquity. According to these male values of honor and shame, 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. This male dichotomy of the gendered relations in society is a social construction of manliness and femaleness based upon biological facts, where everything positive is male and negative female, according to men. Women are dangerous creatures connected with the wild nature, while men represent culture. A woman is the possessor of harmful and impure powers, sexuality and magic, illustrated by, for example the aforementioned ancient Pandora, but also Medea or the Christian Eve, contrary to male positive associations. An ideal woman should stay inside the house, be modest and dominated by her husband, as Plutarch’s wife, the ‘male’ Timoxena who along with her husband was critical to ‘female’ women. This male ideology seems to reflect that men fear the power of women in connection with the realities of life related to death, birth and healing, and this knowledge makes her subordinate to man according to the official male ideology of honor and shame.

119 Cf. the statements of archaic legislators, the authors of the tragedies, authors such as Homer, Hesiod, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch and late-antique Christian writers, such as John Chrysostom with the works of ethnographers such as John K. Campbell, Honour, Family and Patronage: A Study of Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community (Oxford, 1964); Machin, “St. George and the Virgin,” pp. 107–126. They have been used by several scholars working with ancient women, such as Peter Walcot, Greek Peasants, Ancient and Modern: A comparison of Social and Moral Values (New York, 1970), particularly chapter 4, Walcot, “Plutarch on Women,” 163–183. But, by combining ancient and modern male ideological statements presenting negative bias, the result becomes one-sided.
120 Plut. Mor. 608b–612b, 113a. See Håland, Greske fester, chapter 5 and 6 for discussion.
That women may experience the world differently from men is difficult to discern from ancient male sources, and a modern perspective may help us here. Ancient and modern women have female knowledge, which I call a poetics of womanhood. How do women present public performances of being good at being a woman,\textsuperscript{121} for example when performing fertility-rituals in agricultural or procreation contexts, using magic as in healing contexts, nursing children, performing death-rituals, baking bread at the public oven, the latter being a parallel to their former water-drawing at the fountain?\textsuperscript{122} Women we meet in modern Greece are often strong personalities and active participants in social life, far from the suppressed, downtrodden and reclusive creatures presented by ethnographers; they run their households with a firm hand, and exhibit self-confidence.\textsuperscript{123} Interestingly, the few primary sources we possess from ancient women authors\textsuperscript{124} present goals and values, which are very similar to the values found among modern Greek women.

To be good at being a woman means that women are good cooks, perform the necessary rituals to protect the spiritual and physical health of their family, keep their homes in order, and especially show cleanliness through washing and water. As an example, in modern Greece, a mother suffering the loss or disease of a child may present public performances in ‘being good at being a woman’. Her ‘public’ audiences are largely women who share her female, ritual space, interests; and values, and therefore are interested in competing with her performance in ‘being good at being a woman’. They also display their skills at home or publicly on their tombs at the memorials at the cemetery, when washing the tombs and displaying their cooking abilities through the sumptuous cakes offered. We may compare these modern women with the selected women who baked the offering cakes in the ancient festivals. At the Plynteria-festival dedicated to Athena, two noble girls, the *loutrides* (washers), washed the goddess’s robes and the statue.

\textsuperscript{121} Dubisch, *In a Different*, chapter 10. Her presentation is similar to my own and other female researchers,’ such as C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani* (Chicago, 1991); Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honour and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (1986, reprint Berkeley, 1988); and fieldwork experiences among women.

\textsuperscript{122} Since water normally is piped to Greek homes today, I also draw on my experiences from other Mediterranean countries, such as Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt.

\textsuperscript{123} Håland, *Greske fester*, chapter 1, 4 and 6; Dubisch, *In a Different*, chapter 10; Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*, p. 81 and chapter 4 for example p. 129.

\textsuperscript{124} Sappho *Fr.* 103; *AP.* 7.486, 7.649.
In modern Greece, many aspects of a woman’s housewifely abilities may be publicly displayed, such as keeping the street in front of their houses clean. Their cleaning-abilities are also shown when they wash their tombs at the cemetery every Saturday morning. Women seek to outdo each other in ‘being good at being a woman’. Their audience, competitors and most critical commentators are other women who share the same value-system and interests. We see and read about women in ancient society dedicating offerings on tombs. They displayed their clothes and other objects competitively and publicly. Their desired audience may not have been men, but other women who shared their values. Ancient women going on pilgrimage, celebrating the Thesmophoria and other female festivals, such as the Adônia parallel modern women going to Tinos during the Dormition of the Panagia or celebrating the midwife, Babo (Agia Domenika), in the village of Monokklēsia in Northern Greece. At this festival, each woman pours out some water for the midwife to wash her hands, thus anticipating the day when the midwife will assist her in childbirth (figure 9).

Similarly when women sprinkle Babo with water, they pay her great veneration, as if she was a reincarnation of Genetyllis, the ancient Greek goddess of childbirth. Today, the women lead the midwife on a carriage through the streets of the village as if she was a bride. Formerly, she was taken to the public fountain, where she was sprinkled with water. A similar ritual is also performed for newly married girls. When a bride is sprinkled they wish her: “May you have many children.” Accordingly, concerning the similarities in values between the modern and ancient worlds, several rituals might help us trying to get a new reading of ancient society, in connection to women, washing and water.

Along with my attempt to alter our analytical perspective, our category of ‘public’ must be reconsidered and broadened, since there are female, male as well as mixed public spaces, although women most often

125 Plut. Sol. 21.4–5, Mor. 142c30.
127 Plut. Mor. 253f, 953cd.
128 Plut. Mor. 378e69.
130 Cf. Luc. Am. 42.
Figure 9. The women wash the hands of the midwife, Babo (Agia Domenika), Monoklēsia. (Author’s photograph).
gather in what is not conventionally designated as ‘public’ space,\textsuperscript{132} such as the cemetery, or other similar places where women met in the ancient times as well. Women might dominate a ritual space such as the church on modern Tinos even if men are present. In some situations, however, women may also turn what is generally designed as male public space, into a feminised or female, ritual space. This happens in the church in the village of Olympos on the island of Karpathos, on Good Friday afternoon, when women perform their own ritual to be healthy or fertile and no man dares to be present. The ritual is a modern parallel to the ritual during the ancient women’s Haloa-festival when the \textit{archons} (the magistrates) stayed outside of the sanctuary, discoursing on their original discovery and dissemination of Demeter’s gift, the domesticated foods, to the populace, while the women were within, securing the very food by their magical rituals. Male-dominated rituals are connected with the official male sphere and in ancient Athens the relationship between them was demonstrated with the Thesmophoria, a gathering of women to ensure fertility: If an Assembly was to be held, during the days this female festival was celebrated, it was held not in Pnyx, its normal setting, but in the theatre.\textsuperscript{133} So, the men’s political business was displayed by the women’s higher duties to Demeter and her grain, to ensure the food. At the fountain, the counterpart of the male \textit{kafeneion} (coffee-shop), the women have until recently exchanged news and carried on their gossip. The modern church, cemetery and former fountain, present spatially and temporally bounded multimedia performances for women,\textsuperscript{134} and one can argue that their ancient counterparts shared the same values in similar spaces. In these instances women may provide the public audience for other women’s performances, and at these arenas, the modern counterparts of the former villages fountains the women’s talk becomes quiet if a man would dare to enter, which he generally would not do.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{132} Cf. Dubisch, \textit{In a Different}, p. 212.
\textsuperscript{134} Cf. Seremetakis, \textit{The Last Word}, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{135} See also supra for Paus. 2.17.1. In other words, I do not agree that men always are present, and have demonstrated this in Håland, \textit{Greske fester}, chapter 4–6, see also eadem, “Greek women and religion,” in press.
Conclusion

Rivers and springs are often connected with rites of passage, and this article has particularly concentrated on their connection with female rites of passage for several reasons. First and foremost, I’ve argued that water is most often associated with women in ancient society. Potable water is particularly female, connected with nymphs of springs and fountains. Springs were sacred. This may be, as our male sources say, because women are connected with fertility, birth, nurturance, and wetness. In practical life, water and sources are also connected with women, or rather girls, since maidens draw water and the fountain has always been one of the meeting-places for the female.

Ancient male writers are preoccupied by the connection between water-sources and springs, girls, women, marriage, birth, fertility and healing. To what extent were the male values representative for the ancient society? By using comparative material from modern Greece, first and foremost because of the similarity of values found in the societies, I have tried to give some indications about how we may try to approach the ancient sources. Accordingly, I have based this study on the fact that today Panagia is the most important Saint in the Orthodox Church. She is at the head of the entire church because she was the vessel of Christ (*Theotokos*, i.e., the Mother or Bearer of God, see figure 10). Modern Greek women are very proud of their motherhood, because it gives them a clear connection with Panagia, the primary mother, the Life-giving Spring. And evidence suggests that ancient women were similarly proud. This instance of the ‘poetics of womanhood’ accords more with Greek women’s experiences of ‘being good at being a woman’ than many analyses made from a male point of view, and may agree more with ancient women’s experiences too. Just as the divine Hera could renew her virginity by bathing in a spring, so also was this an initiation place related to losing virginity for girls in connection with their marriages and future motherhood. Thus, through the rituals associated with water, they became brides, feeding and nourishing mothers, new copies of the Life-giving Spring and valued members of the female-, male—and mixed spheres (see figure 11).

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137 Figure 9 illustrates the Annunciation taking place next to the fountain, cf. also the Spinning Panagia in the popular iconography of the Eastern-European tradition.
Figure 10. The Panagia, Mother of God (i.e. Theotokou), at the entrance to the chapel dedicated to the ‘Life-giving Spring’, Tinos. (Author’s photograph).
Figure 11. The Annunciation taking place next to a fountain, picture found in the chapel dedicated to the ‘Life-giving Spring’, Tinos. (Author’s photograph).