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Comparison of Female Role in Ritual Cults to Ancient Greek Society

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The Archaeology of Ritual
December 20, 2021
Introduction

Ancient Greece from 2000 to 146 BCE maintained a gendered hierarchy, more specifically a patriarchy in which women were closer to the status of a slave than a citizen. In order to dive deeper into the philosophy behind the formation and importance of the patriarchy in the lives of women, three sites will be examined: the Sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron, the Sanctuary of Demeter at Corinth, and the complicated site of Andania. Each sanctuary houses an important cult that emphasizes the female role, whether that be through leadership or the complete exclusion of men. Each sanctuary provides architectural evidence that supports the connection between the formation of ritual and the built form, thus corroborating the essential role of women in antiquity despite their apparent invisibility. Women experienced forced subordination due to a pre-existing patriarchal hierarchy and yet their role in religion highlights their integral position within society. I will explore the foundations in ancient Greece that support this dichotomy between women’s roles in the religious and domestic spheres through societal institutions, architecture, and ritual.

The Paradox: Ancient Literature

The evidence used to analyze the social institutions of ancient Greece are themselves biased, creating a unique problem in exploring women’s roles. The biases of ancient authors created a fictitious shroud which clouds the reality of life as a woman and thus manipulates their roles in society. Literary sources are primarily written by male authors meaning that the study of women in antiquity is in fact the study of the male perspective of women. Ultimately, this relegates women to a passive role in a patriarchal society. There are a few reasons for these biases. One, men focused on the ideological view of women. Two, there are few sources documenting the different classes of women. Thus, when discussing women oftentimes the focus is Athenian
bourgeois women leading to an excessive concentration on the wealthy class. Furthermore, scholarly literature in most cases “treat women as an undifferentiated mass” without distinction between social or economic classes.\(^1\) Three, the authors failure to identify or mention the impact of the institutionalization of an engendered hierarchy; the reason being the redundancy of exploring anything other than the accepted norm of societal organization in Greek society. Fourth, the author’s works, both contemporary and in antiquity, often lack the recognition of disparity between separation and seclusion.\(^2\) Apart from these biases, the sources themselves can be interpreted in radically different ways. These aspects provide obstacles in analyzing women’s roles in ancient Greek society.

The impediments are present to a greater extent in works employing, more so misusing, the term “seclusion.” While there is little certainty how women’s social reality compares to the ideal of female seclusion, separation is much more likely. Male authors “because the complicated networks of women’s relations were not accessible to them (because of the very fact of separation), they often assumed that such networks did not exist and that separation meant virtual isolation.”\(^3\) This trend of seclusion as an Ionian practice was more widespread in Athens in the fifth century BCE and remained through the Hellenistic period until a foreign presence - the queen of Macedonian and Alexandrian realms - became a prominent figure. This brought about change in citizenship rights, education, and the freedom of unaccompanied travel for women.\(^4\) However, until that point, male authors manipulated a fantasy of the silent, meek, wife completely alone in her domestic sphere. Such sources of disparagement of women began in the Archaic period. In

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\(^3\) Cohen, 10.

\(^4\) Katz, 73.
Homer’s *Odyssey* there is a clear distinction between good and bad women. Penelope, the beautiful, silent wife of Odysseus, starkly contrasts that of Circe who is a lustrous, deceitful witch. Penelope upholds the institution of her marriage, remaining restricted to her house for the entirety of Odysseus’ journey. Thucydides continues this concept in his works describing Athenian matrons bound by their household duties and embracing the greatest virtue of silence. Euripides further provides evidence that the common view of women pictured them restricted to the house. In his work in *The Trojan Women* Andromache says:

> ἃ γὰρ γυναιξί σώφρον ἐσθ’ ἡμρημένα,  
> τοῦτ’ ἔξεμόχθουν Ἐκτορός κατὰ στέγας.  
> πρῶτον μὲν, ἑνθα — κἂν προσῆ κἂν μὴ προσῆ  
> ψόγος γυναιξίν — αὐτὸ τοῦτ’ ἐφέλκεται  
> κακὸς ἀκούειν, ἡτὶς οὐκ ἔνδον μένει,  
> τοῦτοι παρείσα πόθον ἐμίσυν ἐν δόμιοι.

Euripides practices conscious dramatic manipulation of this ideology in Andromache’s speech. Leaving the house brought upon women more reproach than any other action. Of the ancient authors, Aristophanes is the closest in presenting a realistic view and in stark contrast to the idealized world written by Euripides and Xenophon. In his works the *Θεσμοφοριάζουσες* and *Ἐκκλησιάζουσαι*, the husbands are in a silent understanding with their wives. Exiting the domestic domain of the house is allowed, but the wives should not be caught doing so. Consequently, Aristophanes’ humor derives itself from the contradiction between the cultural ideal and reality experienced by women. Contradicting this, Xenophon describes a completely secluded life for women. He states that the very nature of men is suited for the outdoors which therefore isolates

6 Katz, 74.

“I [who] in Hector’s house worked out all custom that brings discretion’s name to women. Blame them or blame them not, there is one act that swings the scandalous speech their way beyond all else: to leave the house and walk abroad. I longed to do it, but put the longing aside, and stayed always within the enclosure of my own house and court…”
8 Cohen, 12.
them from the women in the domestic, indoor realm. It is clear this view of women is not only manipulative but also unrealistic since “participation in their independent sphere of social, religious, and economic activities requires” movement outside of the house. This cultural ideal of invisibility results in the continued confinement of women to a subordinate position.

In antiquity, there exists little evidence concerning female education and life without the pretense of male ideology. Furthermore, any research and discussion pertaining to women were confined to the minutiae of their reality such as in Plato’s Republic (V.455c) which describes the extent of women’s education to be “weaving and watching over rising cakes and boiling pots.” Minimal focus and extreme bias stemmed from the authors’ dismissal of the importance of women. They felt women commanded a menial domestic role secluded from a more integral, male-dominated society. However, such confinement is a ridiculous concept when the broader view of women is applied. Women had the ability to become priestesses and even without a position of profound authority, there is little possibility women were raised as such meek beings and simultaneously required to command the domestic household. Therefore, a major aspect of the paradox surrounding the dichotomous roles of women derives from the way they are portrayed in literature by male authors.

**The Paradox: Physiology and Theology**

Apart from the prejudice of ancient authors, two additional main factors dictate the paradox of women’s position within ancient Greek society: physiological and theological reasons. As women, there is one defining characteristic that separates them from their male counterparts -
menstruation. Menstruation rendered women as impure due to the Greek emphasis on μίασμα or pollution resulting in their exclusion from many aspects of religion including the primary ritual of sacrifice.\(^{12}\) Thus, women did not conduct blood sacrifices because they themselves bleed. Blood sacrifice was central to Greek religion as it connected mortals with the gods and “renewed the bonds of human community.”\(^{13}\) In short, it was the foundation on which political life was based. The fact that women were excluded from this event supports their separation and exclusion from the civic sphere as well as their position within a patriarchal society. Another example is expressed by Aristotle in *Historia Animalium* (581a31-b2) which compares menstrual blood to *neosphakon* which is freshly spilled animal blood.\(^{14}\) As women were viewed as a lesser beings equivalent to that of a sacrificial animal, the reason for being denied participation in sacrifices is clear. Such division creates further separation between men and women and heightens the paradox of women’s role in ancient Greek society.

Theological causes for women’s conflicting roles in the religious and domestic sphere stem from a natural inferiority to men and marriage as an institution, which produces a deeply ingrained gendered hierarchy further solidifying women in subordinate positions. With little work exploring patriarchy and women’s status, due to the redundancy of discussing a natural phenomenon, modern sources can be looked to for applicable parallels. In contemporary Christian societies, as described in Calvin’s theory, the role of women in comparison to men suggests an innate inferiority. Calvin’s hierarchal understanding of the “true order of nature” as the submission of women to men proves his document, like many in antiquity, is a common misogynistic stereotype extending a


\(^{13}\) Osborne, 395.

\(^{14}\) Osborne, 396.
manipulated view of women into modern works. In using terms such as “innate” and “natural,” Calvin verbalizes the general understanding among ancient Greeks: women are just lesser and as such confined to menial tasks within the household. Women were greatly regarded by men as lower order beings not to step foot in the public realm, prone to an evil and seductive nature, and whose only role included producing children and “gratifying the sensual appetite of men.”

Women were forced to be not only subordinate, but invisible. In essence, patriarchy is founded on the principle that men upon birth possess natural political and economic rights thus providing them jurisdiction as authoritarians in every aspect of life. Women, by contrast, are expected to be subordinate by their natural inferiority. As such, Calvin corroborates this mindset stating that “by denying women access to positions of authority...he reminds them that their true calling is to motherhood.” By focusing on the house and children, women are conducting their born role in life. Yet, this is in direct opposition to religious cults which focus on fertility, birth, and also female power. In reality, the female role in religion directly contrasts idealized literary descriptions of a woman’s need for male permission to participate in religious activity. The blatant dichotomy and double standard of a woman’s status and roles in the two domains crafts a glaring paradox.

In addition, marriage is a simple custom in antiquity to maintain women’s subjection in society and is supported by theology. The general rule that women obey men due to men's right to rule derived from their physical and intellectual superiority reveals itself in the institution of marriage. A surviving fragment of Meander describes a husband admonishing his wife stating the limits of her life reside within the house and to speak beyond the boundaries of the house is

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16 Katz, 77.
17 Katz, 82.
18 Potter, 729.
customarily unacceptable.\textsuperscript{19} Marriage was seen as a necessity for procreation and a duty to the gods, polis and ancestors\textsuperscript{20} and as such the restriction of female freedom is supported by theology. There are continued parallels in contemporary Christians like Calvin whose “insistence of the inviolability of the natural order of the subordination of women to men [is] supported by his elevated theology of marriage.”\textsuperscript{21} The contradictions of the female role is due to gendered hierarchy, supported by societal institutions like marriage, and it ultimately secures women within a patriarchal prison and their escape are religious cults.

**Homology Between Women’s Dichotomous Roles**

The paradox concerning women’s role in Greek society becomes even more confounded when faced with the great variance in the religious sphere from differing cult laws of exclusion and female roles. Many corpus of sacred laws exclude women. This includes the hero cult of Herakles at Thasos,\textsuperscript{22} and the cult of (Zeus) Hypatos. The sacred laws from Lindos in the second half of the fourth century BCE, and the first half of the second century BCE excluded women from sacrifices to Athena Apotropaia, Zeus Apotropaios and Zeus Amalos. The sacred calendar at Mykonos excluded women from sacrificing to Poseidon Phukios. Elateia in the fifth century BCE did not allow women to sacrifice at the Anakeion.\textsuperscript{23} Many of these cults marginal to the city are the cases in which women are excluded - the cults of Athena Apotropaia and Zeus Apotropaios and Zeus Amalos on Lindos, the cult of Poseidon Phukios on Mykonos, of Zeus Hypatos on Paros, cults of Herakles, of the Anakoin, Egyptian cults. Not only are the locations of the cult important in determining women’s role in religion, but also the variation within the cults’ sacred laws.

\textsuperscript{19} Katz, 75.  
\textsuperscript{20} Katz, 77.  
\textsuperscript{21} Potter, 738.  
\textsuperscript{22} Osborne, 392.  
\textsuperscript{23} Osborne, 397.
However, there are cults where women are still included but restricted in participation.\textsuperscript{24} Many of these restrictions arise from misogyny similarly contained in literary sources of antiquity which view women as too ostentatious, loud, and present. To force further invisibility onto women and restrain them even in the religious sphere, ornate garments and jewelry were prohibited at the temple of Despoina in the third century BCE at Lykosoura, the cult of Demeter Thesmophoros in fifth century BCE Arkadia, and in the cult of Demeter in third century BCE Patras. Similarly, in the sacred laws of Andania (LSCG 65), a cash limit on price of clothing and jewelry was instituted.\textsuperscript{25} Most regulation seems to have been put in place in Demeter related cults. This may have been done in order to maintain a level of control over female dominated cults especially those specializing in fertility – a solely female characteristic.

Other restrictions concern purity and cleanliness. Menstruation, giving birth, and being pregnant or nursing all indicated a woman as being impure and unfit to participate in religious rituals in Delos and in fourth century Cyrene. Polluting factors beyond the physiological scope of a female in Delos also include sexual contact, and consuming fish or pork.\textsuperscript{26} Contact with the dead also contributed to impurity at Lindos (LSS 91) and Cyrene (LSS 115, SEG 9.72):

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

These regulations are not specific to women indicating that in Greek religion there still remained an equal importance of purity among all ritual participants. However, the majority are female-centric, stressing the patriarchal undertones even in religion where there was a greater focus on community and equality in the eyes of the gods.

\textsuperscript{24} Osborne, 398.  
\textsuperscript{25} Osborne, 397-398.  
\textsuperscript{26} Osborne, 398-399.  
\textsuperscript{27} Osborne, 398. Translation: “Apollo pronounced. You should practice the following purificatory practices and solemnities and cult activities and so inhabit Libya for ever.”
Similarly, limitations were placed on the role of priestess. At the temple of Artemis, the women of Pergea exercise authority in sacrificial matters only when political rights held by _prytaneis_ husbands are temporarily delegated to them.  

However, this was not common and as priestesses’ women were on an equal plane as the male priests, especially the priestesses of Demeter and Athena Polias. Indeed, not any woman had the qualifications to become priestess. Women bestowed this power came from a hereditary lineage often from the aristocratic class, like priests. For priestesses of Athena Polias, women reserved for this role belonged to the Eteobutadai _genos_ who claimed direct descendancy from the original Athenian dynasty. Likewise, priestesses of Demeter and Kore ascended from the same families for over seven hundred years until Cleisthenes’ reforms (IG 35) in 508 BCE opened the role to “all Athenian women.” Moreover, like priests the role of priestess arose in early Greek religion, indicating the possibility of gender equality in the religious sphere as early as the Archaic period in Homer’s _Iliad_. Hector’s mother makes an offering to Athena in the heat of battle and the priestess Theano performed a blood sacrifice to Apollo. As Trojan women, there remains a Greek ethnic identification and the evidence of essential female roles in early religion. Priestesses continued to be held in high regard, often sought for their wisdom and cult knowledge like in Herodotus’ (2.55) description of his visit to Dodona. They also upheld the sacred laws and the responsibility to teach them as also discussed by Herodotus. In addition, priestesses had a significant hand in the matters of the polis highlighting the homology between the political and religious spheres.

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28 Osborne, 402.
29 McClure, 2.
30 McClure, 2.
31 McClure, 2.
33 McClure, 2.
fragment of Lykourgos’ speech *On the Priestess* showcases this by describing a priestess’ seal. The fragment reads: “It has been laid down by decree that the priestess also must add her seal to the register.”

Seals were used to sign official documents meaning priestesses were able to conduct matters of the state much unlike their domestic counterparts. In addition, many priestesses were not required to have a *kyrios* or male guardian to act on behalf of their legal matters and received special privileges like their ability to sacrifice and even legally sue. One example of this is documented by a priestess of Demeter against the priest of Archias for performing a ritual appropriating her right to sacrifice at the Haloa. Furthermore, priestesses graced the Athenian council and Assembly (LSCG 102) speaking publicly - an unheard of act for women outside of this leadership role.

As authoritative heads, women in the religious domain were often seen as equals to men, deeply contrasting their forced invisibility and separation to men domestically. The dichotomy of their roles balances on the small number of women in charge contrasted to the majority repressed by a patriarchal society.

In rare cases, cults required the exclusion of men, which reflects more so the hidden importance of women. The female association with fertility and female goddesses made women “indispensable performers or rites connected with agriculture” and thus a necessary element of life. Not only were these cults integral to the function of the polis, but also for the formation of life as a woman in antiquity. A female-centric cult provided the space and time for women to build and strengthen female social networks and subvert social norms of “seclusion.” Women, through religion, were provided a significant presence and agency in the civic sphere, whether as participants in a cult ritual or as a priestess, they are not otherwise afforded in the mundane Greek...
world. However, it is clear that women more often than not were excluded from cults. Hence, I will focus on female-centric rituals, and the built forms in which they take place, to explore the bold dichotomy possible in women’s lives.

**Peripheral Architecture and Female Goddesses**

Marginal sanctuaries to the poleis are often associated with female-excluded cults, but peripheral extra-urban sanctuaries oftentimes not only allowed female participation but required it. Through these peripheral sanctuaries, ritual activity can also be analyzed as the built form aids in cult activity and the religious experience. Thus, conclusions can be drawn about the female role in religion based on their experiences within peripheral sanctuaries and associated cults.

Architecture, or the built form, changes the perspectives and function of a space. In addition, the location of the space itself is crucial in the construction of architecture and rituals conducted within it. Each of the three sites, Brauron, Corinth, and Andania, are found on the periphery, defined by de Polignac as situated “right on the threshold to the territory.”[^39] Two sites also contain remains of monumental temples, which serves as “protection for its fertility, which could be ensured by the feminine deities.”[^40] Alongside architecture and location, the environments also support the rituals conducted in the sanctuaries and the broader importance of women’s development within the religious sphere to be applied in the domestic sphere. The peripheral location of the sanctuaries placed them in more fertile areas near nutrient-rich soil moistened by adjacent water sources. The proximity to nature and its productive, purifying potentials is purposeful to environmental growth reflecting human development. The territory adds

[^40]: de Polignac, 105.
“significance to the succession of rituals…but also enhances the symbolic values relating to the history of an individual sanctuary and the space it occupies.”

Therefore as extra-urban, or nonurban sanctuaries, the sites examined in this paper are an essential part of religious life emphasizing the importance of female deities in relation to the polis and women’s roles within them but also connecting the periphery of the sanctuary with the periphery of women in society.

**Architecture and Ritual of the Sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron**

A prime example of a peripheral, female-centric, religious space is the Sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia. It stands at the pre-historic town of Brauron, which flourished from 3500-1300 BCE. The plain of Livadi, the river Erasinós, and the bordering sea a quarter mile from the acropolis create a peripheral and fertile area, which according to de Polignac is a prime indication of fertility goddess cults. Thus, the environment of the sanctuary coincides with Artemis as a goddess of procreation and fertility – both of which are major roles of women in the religious and in the domestic spheres. Moving downhill from the temple itself, near the retaining wall on the north and west sides, fallen marble steles were etched with inscriptions of offerings such as jewelry, rings, mirrors, and women’s clothing providing further evidence of female-centric activity. In addition, there were names of women who had successfully given birth and offered

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42 de Polignac, 126.
43 See Fig. 1.
45 Papadimitriou, 111.
46 de Polignac, 126.
47 See Fig. 2.
48 See Fig. 3.
49 See Fig. 4.
large votives to the goddess. Just below the northwest corner of the temple a spring flows into a pool. It is the holiest space of the sanctuary and contained thousands of objects relating to the private lives of women from bronze mirrors, rings, gems, statuettes and vases to precious wood objects preserved in the mud. Continuing along the north and west side, twelve foot columns made a great Doric stoa, a walled portico, ninety-six feet in length. Each room of the stoa contained beds, which Papadimitriou hypothesized was the residence of young noble girls during the Festival of Arkeia. The beds in the sacred stoa were built and placed for these young girls to accommodate their integral role in the ritual procession of the festival. Unlike in urban centers where women had no spaces of their own, Brauron’s sanctuary directly juxtaposes the female role in society through the peripheral architecture and subsequent cult rituals.

Two main festivals were conducted at the sanctuary: the Festival of Brauronia and the Festival of Arkeia. Both emphasize women’s developmental role in life, their importance, and their individual power which is ignored in mundane life due to their innate inferiority to men. The focus here will be on the ἀρκτοί, or young girls dressed as bears, in the Festival of Arkeia. This ritual of the cult of Artemis at Brauron was as a rite de passage or coming-of-age ceremony for Athenian girls. Young girls would travel in saffron robes and stay at the sanctuary. The saffron-colored garment cited in Aristophanes’ play Lysistrata represents a bear pelt and during the process, scholars speculate the robes were shed as a symbolic mark of female development:

εἶτ᾽ ἀλετρὶς ἢ δεκέτις οὕσα τάρχηγετι:
645κἂτ᾽ ἔχουσα τὸν κροκωτὸν ἀρκτος ἢ Βραυρωνίοις:
κάκανηφόρουν ποτ᾽ οὕσα παῖς καλὴ ἁχοὺς

50 Papadimitriou, 113.
51 See Fig. 5.
52 Papadimitriou, 115.
53 See Fig. 6.
55 Perlman, 119.
More literary evidence surrounding the young girls’ religious roles is preserved on the foundation of the scholia in the sanctuary itself. The inscription describes the ritual of the ἄρκτοι in the festival to be accomplished in anticipation of the maiden’s marriage - a significant moment in a woman’s development. The bears also serve as young priestesses to Artemis, sacrificing animals and leading the procession, which is highly unusual in antiquity where it was common for women to be excluded from any form of blood sacrifice. There is physical evidence to support other rituals conducted by the girls on miniature black figure kraters dating to the late sixth and early fifth centuries BCE. The art depicts girls running foot races or performing dances. The kraters may have been used by the ἄρκτοι in their honoration to Artemis, the bear goddess. Based on the actions of the maidens and literary descriptions, the purpose of the festival was not only a developmental marker but also a showcase of taming the wild nature of women. The juxtaposition between freedom and marriage directly applies to the dichotomy of women’s roles in the domestic and religious sphere. In the ritual context, females are powerful individuals capable of sacrifice and connecting with the gods. The ἄρκτοι occupied a “point between man and beast, tame and wild, culture and nature, and as such provided a suitable model for girls who were at the point of transition from maiden/parthenos (wild) and mother/gyne (tame).”

While the festival did serve a societal purpose as preparation for marriage and thus confinement within a patriarchal society, women were still able in the religious sphere to exert authority and will. The sanctuary housing

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“At the age of ten,/And clad in yellow robes, Soon after this, I was Little Bear to Brauronian Artemis; Then neckletted with figs, Grown tall and pretty, I was a Basket-bearer, And so it's obvious I should Give you advice that I think good, The very best I can.”

57 Perlman, 118.
58 Papadimitriou, 118.
59 Perlman, 119.
60 Perlman, 120.
the maidens supported their freedom as portraits of young girls, holding symbols of Artemis such as a hare, alludes to the individualization of females – an uncommon aspect in their ordinary lives. Not only were young girls given an immense role of leadership in the cult, but the cult excluded men further underscoring the integral connection between women and religion.

Architecture and Ritual of the Sanctuary of Demeter at Corinth

The Sanctuary of Demeter at Corinth contains architecture that enabled rituals and more specifically female centric actions. Corinth is another site like Brauron which underscores the female role in religion and subsequent thoughts regarding the dichotomy between the domestic and religious spheres. While there appears to be more destruction from Roman conquering in 146 BCE and thus less preservation, the site and multitude of artifacts, such as charred bones, terracotta works, coins, and jewelry, still provides evidence concerning the importance of Demeter and the female role. The immense dimensions, amount of architecture, and extraordinary numbers of votives at the site suggests it was an increasingly popular sanctuary able to house large cult activity. The sanctuary lies on the Acrocorinth – a rocky hilltop surrounded by plains. Within the sanctuary, a few built forms are important to note: the numerous sacrificial pits, dining hall, and theatrical area. Within the sacrificial pits, and other deposits, the votives themselves provide key evidence to identify Demeter and her daughter Kore as the goddesses worshiped for cults. Pottery,

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61 See Fig. 7.
62 See Fig. 8.
64 See Fig. 9.
66 See Fig. 10.
67 See Fig. 11.
terracotta figurines, miniature cakes and fruit, toys, large-scale terracotta sculpture, and assorted metal objects formed the staple votive repertoire within the pits and deposits. More specifically, the motif of pigs alludes to the cult of Demeter on the Acrocorinth for they are a common symbol of the goddess of the harvest. Among the terracotta figurines, standing female types depicted holding pigs and torches were common as well as terracotta pig figurines themselves. Sacrificial pits around the sanctuary contained charred pig bones also pointing to the presence of the cult of Demeter. Additionally, there are fragmentary Corinthian plates dating to the fifth century BCE depicting scenes associated with Demeter and Persephone. In a crude outline technique, according to Stroud, three plates show similar images of a goddess one brandishing a torch and a stalk of grain, and the other two with a goddess holding a poppy seed pod and flower. Each item is a symbol of Demeter and her accompanying mystery cult. More conclusively, shreds of graffiti and dipinti are inscribed with Demeter’s name in the dative case as the recipient of the offering providing further evidence of cultic rituals.

The built forms on the sanctuary too point toward cult rituals such as the theatrical area which has a limited number of seats carved directly into the bedrock. Even from the seats, a clear view is extremely limited. From this, Stroud interprets that a small group of initiates were gathered here to witness mystery rites near the small temple and the theatre allowed for a small intimate ceremony. He states, “The secrecy which was essential on such occasions may have been achieved by rigidly restricting admission to this part of the sanctuary, or even to the entire temenos, on the
appropriate days of the festival.”\textsuperscript{75} Another noted building is the dining hall, indicated both by position of the doorway and bench lining nearly the entire interior of the main room. The bench itself is made of earth and rubble and based on Stroud’s findings, does not seem to have been a platform for couches.\textsuperscript{76} Intriguingly, this indicates that the participants in the sanctuary dined directly on the earth, a parallel to the carved bedrock theatre seats. Thus, natural elements are directly incorporated into the architecture as a tangible connection to the goddess herself. The architecture crafts communication and connection to the goddess through ritual such as dining and sacrificing. Again, architecture is seen playing a constitutional role in the facilitation of cult rituals like mystery rites.

The Thesmophoria is an incredibly important festival celebrated at the Sanctuary of Demeter at Corinth and encompasses the integral female role in religion. One of the most widespread Greek festivals, the Thesmophoria was a three-day festival reserved for married women and led by two female priestesses called the Archousai.\textsuperscript{77} The first day (Anhodos) constituted a long procession to an assembly at the Acrocorinth. The second day (Nesteia) women sat on the bare ground or on a bed of twigs to fast. The third day (Kalligeneia) was called the ‘Day of Fair Offspring’ where women recovered previously thrown remains of pigs and phallic-shaped dough from the sacrificial pits. Only Antleriae, bailers, were allowed to retrieve the remains as they not only endured the abstinence of food but also sex for three days prior.\textsuperscript{78} Each step of the festival was used to purify and magnify the fertility of the female participants. Similarly, an accompanying festival to the cult of Demeter is the Bona Dea - another ritual where men were intentionally

\textsuperscript{75} Stroud, 306.  
\textsuperscript{76} Stroud, 316.  
\textsuperscript{77} Versnel, 34.  
\textsuperscript{78} Versnel, 33-34.
excluded.\textsuperscript{79} The Bona Dea, instead of utilizing beds of twigs and sitting on the ground to connect with the goddess and natural state, honey and milk are referenced. Both are characterized by pigs, bloody sacrifices, and the sole leadership of women.\textsuperscript{80} In both festivals, the theme of tame vs. wild women further exemplifies the dichotomous yet integral role of women. Similar to the rituals at Brauron, this festival emphasized development and fertility but by reverting already mature women into a premarital state of a virgin\textsuperscript{81} through abstinence and ritual fasting. The distinction between the two types of women, wild or tame, are based on those who enjoy and indulge in freedom presented in the religious sphere in comparison to those whose natural inclinations are “restrained and subjugated to cultural control.”\textsuperscript{82} The wild woman lacks self-control distinguishing her from the free male citizen and domesticated wife. The only way to incorporate women into society is to mold them from their natural wild form into a culturally acceptable being is through marriage. Thus, unmarried women are viewed as fields to be cultivated by men\textsuperscript{83} an important aspect of the gendered hierarchy in Greek patriarchal society. The Thesmophoria highlights the paradox that women are excluded and included based on which domain in life they are present. In the realm of the cult, women are independent of male dominance and are able to temporarily “recreate a liberty that was incompatible with the status of the matron”\textsuperscript{84} in the domestic realm of Greek society. Rituals like the Thesmophoria provided an avenue for women to return from patriarchal culture to the natural wildness of pre-cultural freedom.

\textsuperscript{79} Versnel, 43.
\textsuperscript{80} Versnel, 43.
\textsuperscript{81} Versnel, 53.
\textsuperscript{82} Versnel, 49.
\textsuperscript{83} Versnel, 50.
\textsuperscript{84} Versnel, 52.
Rituals and the Site of Andania

Andania, and the associated mystery cult, is a prime example of the variance in women’s roles within a cult and thus the religious sphere, which can be compared to their substantially less prominent status in the domestic sphere. Unlike the other sanctuaries, there is still discourse on whether Andania is the true site of the mystery cult, however, I believe there is enough literary and topographical evidence to support the presence of worship to the Great Gods. The source from which the identification is based most heavily is Pausanias, who describes the route between Messene and the area of Andania (4.33.3-6).85 He describes the Karnesian grove including a reference to the Mysteries (33.5-6)86 and the built fountain called Divari (Διβάπι) near the field.87 Both natural elements are found at Andania and so based on Pausanias’ work, the site of the cult should be found in the Stenyklaros plain, i.e., the upper Messenian plain, now called the plain of Meligalas.89 This site, like the other sanctuaries, is extra-urban and on the periphery of the territory, which supports the mystery rites involving Demeter.

References from the Mysteria in the diagramma, or sacred laws, are the only significant detailed source concerning the mystery cult at Andania. The diagramma was found inscribed in stone in the foundations of a modern church, but it is more administrative than cultic.91 Several terms and phrases are used to designate the celebration and its various parts in the sacred text: τὰ μυστήρια (lines 2, 140-141,178-179,188); αἱ θυσίαι καὶ τὰ μυστήρια (lines 39,74,85-86) and similarly ἐπιτελεῖν τὰ κατὰ τὰς θυσίας μηδὲ μετέχειν τῶν μυστηρίων (lines 9-10) and τῶν

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86 Gawlinski, 66.
87 Gawlinski, 67.
88 See Fig. 14.
89 Gawlinski, 66.
90 See Fig. 15.
91 Gawlinski, 7.
μυστηρίων καὶ τὰν θυσιὰν (lines 184-185); ἀ τελετὰ (line 3) ἀ πανάγθπις (line 112). The lines which do describe cultic activity separate the celebration into three parts: the mystery rites, sacrifices, and the festival; but the highlight was the initiation during which a procession may have taken place (line 30), a myth performed (lines 24-25), and a wreathing ceremony of the protomystai (lines 14-15). Additionally, the sacred law cites that the cult at Andania honored multiple deities unlike the cult of Artemis at Brauron and the cult of Demeter at Corinth. However, the primary deity may have been Demeter and Kore, although this interpretation of the sacred laws is highly debated. The potential focus on Demeter derives from the words of Pausania (4.1.5-9, 4.14.1, 4.15.7, 4.16.2, 4.26.6-8) and the cult's possible connection with Eleusis. In his inscriptions, he notes that only sheep and pigs were sacrificed - common victims to cults of Demeter - and Demeter was mentioned first on the list of honorations signifying her primary importance. The law also mentions priestess leading the procession calling them thoinarmostria, or priestess of Demeter. They walked alongside a priest as an equal. The rules state: ὅσας δεῖ διασκευάζεσθαι εἰς θεῶν διάθεσιν, ἐχοντω τὸν εἱματισμόν, καθ᾽ ὅ ἄν οἱ ἱεροὶ διατάξωντι (lines 24-25). The costumes are regulated by gynaikonomos (line 26) or men of authority to prevent excessive decoration and colour. This misogynistic stereotype of the expected ostentation of women is represented in this cult rather than at Brauron or Corinth likely due to its inclusivity and allowance of male initiates. However, the sacred women’s costumes are probably related to the mythical performance of Demeter and Kore indicating again Demeter’s primary importance. However, there is a prominent

92 Gawlinski, 7.
93 Gawlinski, 8.
94 Gawlinski, 8.
95 Gawlinski, 10.
96 Gawlinski, 18.
97 Gawlinski, 55. Translation: “Whichever women are to dress themselves in representation of the goddesses must wear the clothes which the sacred men order.”
98 Gawlinski, 18.
lack of connection between Kore and her mother suggesting further study of the Great Gods of the cult and primary significance among is necessary. The role of priestess continued beyond the procession to include attending the meal\textsuperscript{99} - like the sacrifice, an uncommon aspect of a woman’s role that only occurs in the religious sphere. Despite the cults' inclusivity and lack of resources describing the rituals, women remain center-place indicating their integral position in religion both in female-centric cults and communal cults.

**Overall Significance**

Each peripheral site and corresponding cult featured women as significant members to conduct rituals and uphold sacred law. However, with the introduction of male authority, problems arise for women as misogynistic features creep into the religious area - one domain in which women could express themselves most freely. This trend, where patriarchal institutions implement female restriction in society, is not unique to ancient Greece. It is crucial to extend the philosophical discourse of women’s roles and status into contemporary research in order to cause reformation. Women must no longer be sequestered to a lesser position in a gendered hierarchy. Women in antiquity provide the tools of change in examples of priestesses. Given an authoritative mantle, women can become equals and exercise power granted to men upon birth. As historians, we must delve into these topics and provide, as soundly as possible, voices ignored past and present.

**Conclusion**

Women in ancient Greek society lived in a paradox. One aspect of their life expected silent, obedient wives while the other required present, free caretakers of religious ritual and sacred law.

\textsuperscript{99} Gawlinski, 18.
Each sanctuary studied in this paper provides evidence that supports the connection between the formation of ritual and the built form, and the resulting development of women into their dichotomous roles. In the domestic domain, women experienced forced subordination due to a pre-existing patriarchal institution infused with misogyny and yet their role in religion highlights their integral position within society.
**Biography**


Comparison of Female Role in Ritual Cults to Ancient Greek Society

Georgia Thoms

Appendix of Figures
Fig. 1 **Map of the prehistoric town of Brauron.** A) Broad map. B) Detailed map. Papadimitriou, 1963, pp. 112.
Fig. 2 Ground plan of the Sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron.
Fig. 3 The columned portico and Temple of Artemis at Brauron. A) Images of the columned portico. B) remains of the temple foundations. http://rockpileproject.com/brauron/.
Fig. 4 **Bronze mirror.** Artifact dates to 500-480 BCE, has a wooden handle, and was found near the spring. Papadimitriou, 1963, pp. 115.
Fig. 5 Sacred spring. Found at the northwest corner of the temple of Artemis at Brauron. Papadimitriou, 1963, pp. 111.
Fig. 6 Reconstructed colonnade of the great Doric stoa. Papadimitriou, 1963, pp. 110.
Fig. 7 Statuette of a young girl. She represents the arktoi and is holding a hare, a symbol of Artemis. Papadimitriou, 1963, pp. 116.
Fig. 8 Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore. https://www.corinth-museum.gr/en/archaeological-site/sanctuary-of-demeter-and-kore/.
Fig. 9 Southwest view of the Acrocorinth. https://www.corinth-museum.gr/en/archaeological-site/acrocorinth/.
Fig. 10 Banquet hall and sacrificial pits at the Sanctuary of Demeter at Corinth. Stroud, 1965, plates 88, 90, 91.
Fig. 11 Theatral Area of the Sanctuary of Demeter at Corinth. Stroud, 1965, plate 89.
Fig. 12 Terracotta figurines and terracotta pot shards from the Sanctuary of Demeter at Corinth. Stroud, 1965, plates 93.
Fig. 13 Theatre seats at the Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore. https://www.corinth-museum.gr/en/archaeological-site/sanctuary-of-demeter-and-kore/.
Fig. 14 Site of Andania. A) View of the Stenyklaros plain (north) from Mt. Eva with the Kallirhoe (west) and Polichne (east) hills indicated with arrows. B) View of Stenyklaros plain from Ag. Taxiarchos hill with the Divari spring indicated. Gawlinski, 2006, pp. 246.
Fig. 15 Inscriptions of the sacred law of Andania or *diagramma*. A) Position of the inscription in the church of Ag. Konstantinoi. B) Inscriptions on the stones of the church. C) Close-up view of the text. Gawlinski, 2006, pp. 246.