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Analyzing the Role of Greek Women in Athenian Religious Festivals: Are the Conventional Roles of Women Reinforced or Offered an Alternative Reality?

A Thesis in Classical Studies

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Bachelor in Arts
With Specialized Honors in Classics

May 2022

ABSTRACT

In my thesis I explore how women were involved in Greek religious festivals. My research starts by identifying the responsibilities that Greek women and girls performed in society from childhood to adulthood. I discuss the daily lives of women and why it is believed that they were largely confined to the domestic sphere of society. Then, I will discuss a few different types of religious festivals that occurred in Athens, especially those festivals that were women-only. By comparing the daily duties of women to the duties they carried out during religious festivals, I examine how women had freedom to a certain extent in this culture. They were not completely confined to the household as sources may suggest, but they did manage the household as their main social role. I address the portrayals of dominant female characters in Aristophanes' plays, the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Lysistrata*. Then, I briefly discuss the concept of the utopian aspirations being expressed by rituals in religious festivals. My analysis will show how the social construct of women in Greek society has been reinforced and simultaneously seen as breaking that social construct. My thesis will conclude that religious festivals, no matter how much more value and freedom women were given, still reinforced their social roles in Greek culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I'd like to thank my thesis committee members, Professors John Lenz, John Muccigrosso, and Rita Keane. At the beginning of this process, I did not know where to start or what to talk about, but each of you guided me the whole way through. Your patience, knowledge, and words of encouragement helped in the completion of this thesis. I am extremely grateful to have selected a wonderful group of people to assist me in this process.

I'd personally like to thank Professors John Lenz and Shakti Jaising for continuously motivating me in my academic studies. Professor Lenz, you have been nothing but a joy to be around. In every interaction I've had with you, you have been positive, reassuring, and kind to me. It was an honor being under your guidance for these past four years. Professor Jaising, you sparked a love for film that I didn't even know I had, and I am very grateful for that. Your support and assistance outside of class meant a lot to me.

Thank you to my parents, Valencia Bagby-Young and Anthony Young for the abundance of love and support you continue to show me every day. You have always stood behind everything I do and I know you will continue to do so. You have prayed for my success countless times, and I can't thank you enough for that.

I want to thank the women in my life who have guided me through life and supported my own endeavors in this challenging world. Without role models like them to show me what is possible with my talent and resources, I would not be writing this thesis at all.

I'd like to individually thank everyone who has motivated me

Ama Asante, Kevin Andrade, Duggy (Dagmawe) Ayalew, Rouguietou Camara, Sekya Campbell, Fernando Cardoza Ochoa, Diamond Crawford-James, Mildred Douglas, Layla Daghastani, Gabrielle Felts, Joanna Ferrer, David Garcia, Kyle Gniazdowski, Ellen Goddard, Eliana Goncalves, Kavita Gordon, Paula Guzman, Brian Hirschberg, Noelani Jackson-Sherman, Amir Julien, Joy Kalua, Bryce Kennedy, Ta'Kwayjah Myles, Anisah Nelson, Starling Noboa Salobo, Fabrice Nozier, Meredith Palmer, Emerald Scott, Isabella Trinidad, Daniel Viera, Hannah Winter, Aleesha Young, Milo Young, Noni Young, Tayler Young, Tierney Young, Raina Young-Scott, and so many more!

Lastly, I want to thank God for showing me what I am capable of doing when I put my mind to it.

Introduction

When thinking about ancient Greece, people have often considered the well-known Athenian democratic system. This political system promoted a sense of real democracy in which every citizen was encouraged to participate and vote on political matters. This consideration, however, does not acknowledge the lack of female presence in the political setting of ancient Greece. Women were not thought about in either the political or civic spaces because their role in society did not include participating in political, military, or judicial proceedings. Athenian male citizens had the privilege of gathering as an assembly in these spaces multiple times a year, discussing both public and private matters of the city, and voting on decisions concerning the city.

In this thesis, I study the role women play in Greek religious festivals and how their participation in these festivals offers both a reflective view into Greek society (i.e. social roles, hierarchy, etc.), and an outlet into an alternative structuring of that society. In this paper, I will first establish a general sense of how women were perceived and treated in ancient Greece. I look at women in the political, civic, social, and domestic settings of society. After understanding the role women play in daily life, I explore the roles women take on during religious festivals. I analyze festivals that were limited to women only and festivals where both men and women shared participation. While examining a couple of Athenian festivals, I decipher whether the roles women served would be considered the norm in Greek society or if they demonstrate an inversion of the social gender structure in this society. It is important to identify the purpose of these festivals that women are involved in and compare that to the roles women play in society otherwise. The strict inclusion or exclusion of women or men in the religious

sector allows us to see if social values are primarily mirrored or if change is welcomed in this culture.

In chapter 3, I discuss examples of theatrical performances from the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Lysistrata*, both written by Aristophanes, a Greek comedy playwright. I explore how these plays may propose an alternative social construction of society based on the appearance of women in the religious and civic context. The characters in these Greek dramas introduce a more exaggerated perspective of women and men in ancient Greece. They introduce an inversion of social roles to an extent and demonstrate how men perceived women in the different roles that they occupied. By looking at art like this, we have to consider if or whether the change in social values is just theoretical or can it be real. If real, then how extensive or effective is this change? Through my analysis, I will show whether religious festivals in Greece offer traditional or untraditional roles for women in Greek society. My main research and conclusion on this topic will be based on the social and religious life of citizens in Athens. My focus is on the social roles of female citizens, and not the social roles of slaves, freedwomen, or hetaerae (prostitutes). The religious festivals and the plays that I will discuss reference Athenian men and women, and do not constitute as a broad generalization of the entire Greek world.

Chapter 1: Background of Athenian Women in Antiquity

Males dominated politics, legal proceedings, and militaristic endeavors in Athens. Prior to the law of Pericles of 451 B.C., the legitimated status of an Athenian woman citizen was defined only through the male lineage (father) or legal marriage status (husband). This law stated that a child was legally considered a citizen of Athens if and only if both the mother and father were Athenian.[1] Before this law was established, citizenship was granted to a child whose father was Athenian and mother was non-Athenian.[2] Thus, Pericles' law made citizenship more exclusive and limiting. I have pointed out the legal citizenship status in Athens because although women were seen as citizens under the law, they did not receive all of the privileges that came with that status. Athenian women were not given the same political citizenship advantages as men and their native status did not prevent them from being excluded from political and military discussions. Thus, as Daniel Ogden stated, women continued "suffering the political disadvantages of her gender."[3] Full citizenship (in addition to legal status) in Athens was constituted by an individual's full participation in political debates, court juries, lawmaking, and voting on laws.[4] Women did not have the right to take any part in making decisions, voting on laws, or anything that concerned political matters. It was most common for Athenian women to manage the household or take part in a religious rituals for the city.

In the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., regardless of class or age, a woman remained under the guardianship of a male figure called a *kyrios*, a guardian. Referring to this legal guardianship,

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[1] Miriam Valdés Guía, and Anne Stevens, 268.
[2] Thomas R. Martin, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0009%3Achapter%3D9%3Asection%3D3%3Asubsection%3D1.
[3] Daniel Ogden, 288.
[4] Guía, 268.

researcher John Gould mentions how in A.R.W. Harrison's *Law of Athens* i, the word 'disabilities' appears next to the index entry for 'women.'[5] Perhaps in this entry, Harrison implied that women were thought to have disabilities, which limited them in some capacity. Gould further explained that "a woman, whatever her status as daughter, sister, wife or mother, and whatever her age or social class, is in law a perpetual minor: that is, like a male minor, but throughout her life she was in the legal control of a male *kyrios* who represented her in law."[6] The duty of the *kyrios*, who was often the head male of the household, was to represent the female figure in legal court-cases. Regarding marital status, the right of guardianship transferred from the woman's father to her husband. In this way, women were not seen as full individuals who could act, think, or make practical decisions for themselves.

The Athenian assembly, called the ekklesia, was comprised of male citizens who gathered several times a year. Their meeting quarters were located on the hill of the Pnyx. This space allowed the men to address war and military efforts, laws, foreign policies, and elect officials. As stated previously, "Athenian women were not entitled to political citizenship."[7] Greek women generally worked in the domesticity of their household. Women learned and executed many skills within the house while simultaneously taking care of their families. As natural childbearers, society designated them as child-rearers as well. The responsibilities of nurturing and maintaining household duties always fell on the women while the men's duties took place primarily outside of the home. Most of the domestic skills that women performed involved the making and selling of textiles. Wool-working was the most common skill in this trade work; it included sewing, washing, dyeing, and weaving of cloths (figure 1a and 1b) and garments.

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[5] John Gould, 43.
[6] Gould, 43.
[7] Guía, 268.

Figure 1a. Terracotta lekythos (oil flask) attributed to the Amasis painter, ca. 550-530 B.C.[8] Front side showing women weaving. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1931.

Figure 1b. Terracotta lekythos (oil flask) attributed to the Amasis painter. ca. 550-530 B.C.[9] Entire panel around vase showing women weaving. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1931.

The scenes displayed on the terracotta vase in figure 1 show women working in various stages of textile production. Roger Brock claims that there were many opportunities for women to turn their skills into a profession either within their home or in the marketplace.[10] They were able to sell and trade their goods (including food) that they can "make themselves, or which they can

[8] "Attributed to the Amasis Painter, Terracotta Lekythos (Oil Flask), Greek, Attic, Archaic," https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/253348.
[9] "Attributed to the Amasis Painter, Terracotta Lekythos (Oil Flask), Greek, Attic, Archaic." https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/253348.
[10] Roger Brock, 338.

produce or acquire from nature, or both."[11] Women went to the marketplace to sell food they prepared. Food that they sold included bread, fruits, vegetables, and other food ingredients like garlic, salt, and honey.

Some duties that women tended to outside of their homes included taking care of others as a midwife or as a nurse. Brock mentions that there was "a refinement and specialization of medical activities common to many women."[12] He mentions that there may have been some contradiction in the attitude towards citizen women working as nurses because this occupation was a paying job that did not require a lot of skill or prestige. Some considered the job to be low-status work. This type of attitude can be seen in Demosthenes Oration 57, Euxitheus against Eubulides, in which Euxitheus, the client of Demosthenes, addresses his mother's job as a nurse while attempting to defend his own citizenship. Euxitheus says,

> We agree that we sell ribbons and that we do not live as we would prefer. … He has also said of my mother that she worked as a wet-nurse. We do not deny that this happened, at a time when the city was suffering misfortune, and everyone was in a bad way; but I will make clear to you the manner in which she worked as a nurse and the reasons why she did so. Let none of you interpret it unfavourably, men of Athens; for indeed, you will find that many citizen women work as nurses, and if you wish, I will mention them by name.[13]

The defensive tone in his speech suggests that there were preconceived ideas that nursing was dishonorable or degrading for citizen women. Euxitheus may have considered the idea of working for another person as being unrespectable, as another reason for his defensive demeanor. On the other hand, this prejudice against citizen women working as nurses was not a generalized opinion of everyone in Athens.

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[11] Brock, 340.
[12] Brock, 340.
[13] Brock, 336. (Demosthenes 57.31, 35)

Gender distinctions are witnessed in literary texts, where males are the protagonists, and they are in relationships with women. In these stories, the female characters embody characteristics of how "good" citizen wives should behave. The women who do not stay confined to their domestic space indoors are depicted as unnatural and deviants.[14] For example, the wife of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, is depicted as a bad wife and someone with whom Athenian women do not want to be associated. In Aeschylus' play, *Oresteia*, while Agamemnon is away in the Trojan war, Clytemnestra finds a lover. She and her lover murder Agamemnon on his return home from war. As revenge for the father, one of their children, Orestes, kills the mother. Clytemnestra is portrayed as a bad wife and mother. Her actions not only harm her relationship with Agamemnon, but also her relationship with the rest of her children. The leverage that Clytemnestra possessed proved to be threatening to everyone around her. This story, as Ogden states, is an example in which playwrights "create fearful images of female behavior and the perversion of normal familial ties.[15] Greek culture uses literature like this to link the good citizen wife to the home, called *domos* (house, the physical environment) or *oikos* (family).[16]

The idealized behavior for the female citizen and wife is shown within different art mediums other than literature and plays to enforce the association between women and domesticity. An Egyptian painting convention which was adapted in some Greek paintings portrayed men with darker skin and women with lighter skin. The different color association can be interpreted as an indication that Greek men spent time working outside, while the women worked inside the house. On gravestones, women are displayed performing domestic activities or with their

[14] Ogden, 299.
[15] Ogden, 303.
[16] Ogden, 301.

families in a domestic setting. For example, the gravestone of Hegeso (figure 3) conveys a woman examining her jewelry box containing a necklace with a female servant by her side.[17]

Figure 3. Grave stele of Hegeso,[18] ca. 400 B.C. Dipylon cemetery of Athens. Museum of Classical Archeology.

This display evokes a relationship between women and domesticity for everyone to see as they passed by. It serves as a reminder for how women in this society were expected to perform their duties and leisure time in the household. Artwork like these grave monuments, paintings, and vases, reinforces the idealization of how a woman is supposed to behave in the domestic sphere and where she is supposed to remain (indoors).

Xenophon's work *Oeconimicus* also discussed the division between indoor and outdoor labor spaces for social roles. Referring to God, Xenophon stated, "For he made the man's body and mind more capable of enduring cold and heat, and journeys and campaigns; and therefore, imposed on him the outdoor tasks. To the woman, since he has made her body less capable of

[17] Ogden, 300.
[18] *Grave Stele of Hegeso*, https://museum.classics.cam.ac.uk/collections/casts/grave-stele-hegeso.

such endurance, I take it God has assigned the indoor tasks."[19] After this passage, Xenophon continued to specify the tasks of women in the house as infant nurturers. Meanwhile the tasks of men involved courage to defend wrong doers.[20] His view of the female versus male labor separation maintains the structured space division between the genders and upholds the patriarchal system that has been built up in Athenian society. Xenophon went on to suggest that if a man remained inside the house, that individual would be associated with shame.[21] If a man's wife were to come in and out of the house as she pleased, her reputation would also become shameful. The absence of a woman fulfilling her role inside the house could indicate sexual advances towards others that are not her husband.[22]

In other studies of women in Greek society, scholars have examined the social status of Spartan women. Unlike women in other Greek city-states, these women were given more freedom of property and less limitations within the household. The type of autonomy that Spartan women were subject to differentiates their social status from that of women of other city-states like Athens. Athenian women were perceived as a lower status than women in Sparta based on the different privileges accorded to each group of women. In order to get a better understanding of women in Greece, we must acknowledge the way women were perceived in other city-states and how men viewed their contribution to the city. In Sparta, women contributed to the war ideology (defined by men) of reproducing healthy, warrior sons for their society. In other city-states, women may have been seen as symbols of protection and fertility for the city.

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[19] Xenophon. *Oikonomikos*, chapter 7, section 23.
[20] Xenophon, chapter 7, section 25.
[21] Xenophon, chapter 7, section 30.
[22] Ogden, 299.

In many of the sources I examined, there has been dispute over the difference between women in Greek society as being strictly confined to the domestic setting and excluded from the public sphere of daily life versus just being separated from male associated activities. Researchers have often used the Athenian public fountain to suggest that women were not restricted to their homes. The public fountain in Athens was known as a place for women to gather and talk to each other leisurely. Evidence of women at the fountain appears in depictions on vase paintings (figure 2) that show women in their daily lives.[23]

Figure 2. Black-figure water jar (hydria), ca. 520-500 B.C.[24] Scene showing women at the fountain house. London, British Museum.

Gathering at the fountain house was one way that women spent their time outside of their indoor duties. Dyfri Williams claimed that the women depicted on the vases were slaves and possibly prostitutes because respectable women were secluded in their homes, so they did not go

[23] David Cohen, 7.
[24] "Black-Figured Water-Jar (Hydria) with a Scene at a Fountain-House," https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/black-figured-water-jar-hydria-with-a-scene-at-a-fountain-house/LAH63K-pAzb5zw.

fetch water themselves. However, scholars such as David Cohen and Lauren Petersen have argued that respectable women could have gathered at the fountain house if they did not have slaves[25] or wanted to socialize outside their home.[26] This debate about whether Athenian women of respectable status attended the public fountain house provides a glimpse into the broader debate about women's seclusion in the house and how much freedom they really had. It concerns the gendered division of labor and public space. Women were associated with domestic work, indoors, private space, whereas men were associated with political work, outdoors, and public space. Some scholars claim that women did not suffer strict confinement to the home and that the separation amongst the genders did not classify as seclusion.

In my research, I am not attempting to settle this dispute of confinement and seclusion versus separation. I wish to show how this gender division structure took place in the religious sphere. For example, did Greek women have a certain responsibility in religious festivals? How did the duties of women change or not when men were involved in religious festivals with them? I also want to show how the larger social structure of society is reflected in these religious practices. Before discussing more intensely the of women in Greece, it is important to know that language such as "separation" is not interchangeable with "seclusion" or "exclusion." When I use the word "separated," I am referring to the act of Greek men and women not being physically together in one place or in performing an action. When I use the word "seclusion" or "exclusion," I am referring to the intentional act of prohibiting a certain group of people from a place or activity. These terms should not be used interchangeably.

[25] Cohen, 7.
[26] Lauren Hackworth Petersen, 39-42.

Chapter 2: Women in Religious Festivals

It is within the religious sphere and among ritual activities that women become more visible and step into principal roles in which this society. Why is that? Why are women seen more frequently in the religious sector of society? As previously stated, it is possible that women in ancient Greece were looked up to for fertility and/or prosperity of the state through religion.[27] The way women were considered important in organizing religious rites and ensuring that people carried out their roles as they are supposed to on religious days suggests a parallel to the roles men took on in the public and political setting of society.[28] Many scholars, such as Ogden, believed that these religious roles allowed women to "break free from domestic constraint."[29] Ultimately I want to know if that statement is true, so in this section I address the specific roles women and girls performed in religious festivals.

Generally, women and young girls served as basket bearers which consisted of them carrying baskets containing sacrificial objects on religious occasions. They carried objects that were going to be used for the sacrifice from one place to another (most likely the altar of a god or goddess). However, there were a few festivals in Greece where women were given more responsibilities in organizing the festival rites and overseeing the participants in the festival. Festivals like this tended to be more exclusive. In my research, the exclusive festivals either explicitly indicated that men were prohibited from participating or suggested that men were not present given that the activity being performed only benefitted women and girls. These more exclusive festivals included the Arkteia, Stenia, Thesmophoria, Skira, and Haloa.

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[27] Mary T. Boatwright, 111.
[28] Boatwright, 110.
[29] Ogden, 303.

The Arkteia at Brauron, a rural sanctuary on the east coast of Attica, was a festival in which Athenian girls honored the goddess Artemis and participated in a rite of passage before they reached the age of marriage. Every four years, pregnant women, new brides, and young girls were required to go to the sanctuary of Artemis and offer sacrifice to the goddess during this period of their transformation into marriageable age.[30] The attendance of young girls before marriage was crucial to the idea of maturing and transitioning into the next stage of their life, marriage. Marriage symbolized their move into womanhood and adulthood. During the festival, young girls were secluded from the rest of community and remained in the sanctuary of Artemis. The festival involved a mystery rite, a ritual dance often known as "acting the she-bear," and a sacred race. Girls in the festival were called *arktoi* (singular: *arktos*) meaning bears and dressed up in bear costumes. The first task in this ritual involved giving the priestess of Artemis, also referred to as the *arktos* "bear," the sacrificial objects which were the body parts (head, hide, and legs) of a goat. After the sacrifice, girls between the ages of 10 and 15 performed the most important feature of the festival which was "acting the she-bear." This action required the *arktoi* to dance around in a wild manner to honor of Artemis. Then, at some point during the festival, the girls participated in foot-races against each other.[31]

The girls in the Arkteia performed these ritual activities in celebration of Artemis, an Olympian Greek goddess. Artemis was the goddess of the hunt, wild animals and nature. She was known as Artemis Agrotera and Potnia Theron, both meaning goddess of the wilderness, mistress of wild animals,[32] the huntress, and protectress of wild animals.[33] She was known by

[30] Paula Perlman, 111.
[31] Perlman, 118-120.
[32] Perlman, 111.
[33] Jon D. Mikalson, 122.

many names indicating her protective nature over wild animals and children, especially young girls before they reach the marriageable age. As a protectress of children and a virgin goddess, she came to be associated with childbirth and chastity. In literature and visual representations, she is often depicted as a young maiden carrying a hunting bow and a quiver of arrows. Her protective nature over the wilderness and children connects her to the etiological myth of the Arkteia and provides the reason why bears are associated with her cult. The mythological story associated with the Arkteia involves a tamed female bear (referred to as a she-bear) who was brought to the sanctuary of Artemis. A young maiden was playing with the she-bear and the she-bear scratched the maiden's eyes. In grief for the girl, the maiden's brother killed the bear which resulted in a famine or plague taking place among the Athenians. When the people of Athens asked the Oracle of Delphi about the plague, the god Apollo told them that Artemis brought the epidemic upon them because they killed the she-bear. Thus, to satisfy the goddess and to serve as a punishment for the Athenians, every Athenian girl had to "act the bear" for Artemis before they were married.[34] For generations Athenian girls continued to participate in the Arkteia before they reached the age of marriage as an initiation into a new phase in their life.

In 1948, John Papadimitriou led archeological excavations at Brauron and recovered fragment of black-figure kraters with scenes depicting the ritual activities of this festival.[35] After Papadimitriou's death in 1963, researcher Lilly Kahil continued studying the archeological finds. She published the series of *krateriskoi* and interpreted their significance. The fragments from the kraters were dated to the late 6th and early 5th centuries B.C. The archeologists could not determine the exact use of the kraters; however, they were probably used during the festival by

[34] Mikalson, 121.
[35] Perlman, 119.

the *arktoi*.[36] The scenes on the kraters displayed young girls performing a dance or running foot-races. It is believed that these girls may have displayed nudity during this part of the festival because it is a recurring motif on vase paintings depicting the Arkteia. However, in one of Aristophanes' plays, he mentions a saffron-colored garment that was worn as a bear costume for the *arktoi*.[37]

This festival draws parallels between these maidens reaching the marriageable age, and the reproduction process a female bear experiences. In the bear's reproduction process, she goes into hibernation and undergoes a transformation from maiden to mother just like a human. The bear goes back into her cave as a maiden and gives birth to her cubs. She then emerges from her cave having completed her transformation into a mother.[38] In her explanation of the bear's reproduction, Paula Perlman suggests that the she-bear in the Arkteia symbolizes "female sexuality and procreative powers."[39] This suggestion coincides with the concept that Artemis also symbolizes human maternity since one of her names is Artemis Kourotrophos, "patron goddess of children and childbearing."[40] There is also another myth containing the transformation of a human into a bear that is associated with this festival. Kallisto, a companion of Artemis, had a love affair with the god Zeus. She birthed a son named Arkas. As a punishment for her actions or to hide her identity from Zeus' wife, Hera, Kallisto was turned into a bear.[41]

The description of the Arkteia festival emphasizes the seclusion of young girls in the sanctuary and does not include the presence of male figures in any of the ritual activity or

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[36] Perlman, 119.
[37] Perlman, 120.
[38] Perlman, 122-123.
[39] Perlman, 117.
[40] Perlman, 112.
[41] Perlman, 111.

organization of the event. The Brauron and the ritual activity performed by these young girls indicates how women at an early age were connected to nature, reproduction, and motherhood. The absence of males from this religious festival emphasizes how strongly these traits of reproduction are associated with women in this culture.

The Thesmophoria festival is one of the most famous Athenian religious festivals known that honors the goddess Demeter. This festival honored Demeter's gift of harvest and promoted the fertility of agriculture. This festival was known for its strict secrecy and exclusion of males because the only participants allowed were married Athenian women. The ritual occurred annually during the month of Pyanepsion, the autumn sowing season (late October/November) and lasted for three days (the 11th through the 13th). Day one of the festival was called the *Anodos*, the "coming up," in which a procession of women headed up to the Thesmophorion on the hill of the Pynx. Two selected women called Bailers descended into a chasm carrying pigs and sacred objects such as pinecones and dough shaped into snakes and genitalia. Once the pigs and sacred objects were thrown in, the Bailers collected the decayed remains of the pigs put down there from the previous festival. The decayed remains collected from the chasm were then placed onto the altars of Demeter and Persephone at their sanctuaries. Day two was called the *Nesteia*, the day of fasting. The women sat on the ground of the sanctuary with no chairs or tables to imitate a secluded environment. Sacrifices and a big feast commenced after the ritual fasting at night. On this day, the women were said to engage in indecent speech using obscenities towards each other. The third day of the festival was called the *Kalligeneia*, "fair-birth." On this day, the women mixed the decayed pig flesh with seeds and scattered it all over the fields. This action functioned like a renewal of their agricultural fertility. The Greeks believed that by doing this, they would receive a good harvest.

The Thesmophoria festival was limited to the married citizen women of Athens. Prior to and during the festival, these women remained sexually abstinent and maintained a state of purity while camping out in huts away from their homes and husbands. This women-only festival was significant because the women involved kept it a secret what occurred during their time away from their husbands. The mythological story recounting Hades' abduction of Persephone serves as the etiological story for the ritual activity conducted throughout all three days of the Thesmophoria. Hades, god of the Underworld, asked his brother Zeus if he could abduct Persephone, Demeter's daughter, and make her his queen, and Zeus approved of his plan. Hades acted immediately on his approval and took the opportunity while she was alone. While Persephone was picking flowers in the field by herself, the ground opened and the goddess was taken into the Underworld by Hades. Along with Persephone, the swine of Eubouleus were swallowed up by the opening in the ground. Therefore, Eubouleus' pigs are associated with the pigs placed in the chasm at the beginning of the festival. For nine days Demeter did not know what had happened to her daughter and she searched relentlessly. On the ninth day, the sun god revealed to the mother what happened to her daughter. In grief, the goddess withdrew herself from the gods and her divine duties. She allowed crops to fail and deprived both mortals and the gods of her agricultural gifts. Servants attempted to lift the goddess' spirits, but they were not successful. The festival's day of fasting connects to how Demeter secluded herself and fasted during her daughter's absence. Walter Burkert also mentioned that one of her servants, Iambe, attempted to make Demeter laugh in the midst of her grieving by exposing herself.[42] When the women speak obscenely towards each other, they mimicked Iambe's indecent behavior towards

[42] Walter Burkert. *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 1991), 242-243.

Demeter. Due to the goddess' actions, Zeus ordered Hades to return Persephone to the upperworld. However, before Persephone departed from the Underworld, Hades forced her to eat a pomegranate seed. By doing this, she bound herself to Hades and the Underworld for one-third of the year. The other two-thirds of the year (spring and summer) she was able to spend above ground with her mother. At last Demeter was reunited with her daughter, and the agricultural renewal on the last day of the festival celebrates their reunion.[43] Each day of the festival has paralleled the mythology story by representing the emotions and state of Demeter during the search of her daughter. Similar to the Arkteia and other religious festivals, each ritual activity conducted is paralleled by a story of the festival's origin.

Similar women-only festivals to the Thesmophoria that were celebrated among Athenian women were the Stenia, Skira, and Haloa. The Stenia occurred two days before the Thesmophoria on the 9th of the Pyanepsion (the Thesmophoria starts on the 11th Pyanepsion). On the night of this celebration, the women exchanged insults with each other as part of the ritual.[44] This festival is also connected with the return of Persephone to Demeter after her abduction by Hades. The Skira, celebrated on the 12th of the Skirophorion, around June or July, honored the Greek gods and goddesses Athena, Poseidon, Demeter and Persephone. The women walked in a procession leading away from the Acropolis to Skiron, a precinct near Eleusis, located near the sanctuaries of Athena and Poseidon. Walter Burkert notes that during the procession the priestess of Athena and the priests of Poseidon and Helios walk underneath a canopy.[45] The Skira is another festival that promoted the fertility of their crops. At the Haloa, held during the middle of winter, possibly December into January, the women celebrated Demeter and Persephone at

[43] Angeliki Tzanetou, 333.
[44] Parker. *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 272, 480.
[45] Burkert, 230.

Eleusis. Robert Parker suggested that this festival was attended by married women[46] in which they held indecent conversations with each other and handled sexual objects[47] such as imitation phalloi.[48] This festival, also referred to as the threshing floor[49] festival, included the sacrifice of a bull o the earth, a feast, and sport outside in the fields,[50] all carried out in the night. Freedom of speech was emphasized for the women during the rites.[51] It seems as if all of these festivals that were women-only or encouraged the participation of women most often honored Demeter as the goddess of fertility and agriculture and promoted those qualities within the community.

Outside of these exclusive festivals for women and girls in Athens, in other religious festivals including both sexes, women had more limited roles. With the exception of being a priestess for the deities, the presence of women revolved around carrying the sacrificial objects or leading a procession. Some of the evidence for women and girls in these roles comes from vases depicting women in their religious responsibilities. Since festivals normally took place in temples and in different locations around the city, researchers have suggested that their roles in festivals contradicts the idea that women were confined to the home.[52]

It was more common to see younger girls rather than adult women take on responsibilities in religious festivals when both of the sexes were involved. However, women of the adult age were still depended upon to help ensure that the girls carried out the religious duties for their community appropriately. Select women and girls were chosen to serve as priestesses in some cults. Other girls were chosen to act as *parthenoi* in sacrificial rituals. A *parthenos (*plural:

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[46] Parker. *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 167.
[47] Parker. *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 200.
[48] Burkert, 265.
[49] Burkert, 265.
[50] Burkert, 265.
[51] Guía, 271.
[52] Cohen, 8.

parthenoi), an unmarried maiden, took the role of carrying the basket or jug of sacred objects during the sacrificial procession. Sacred elements could include pinecones, shaped objects out of dough, or the animal to be sacrifice. From this selection of *parthenoi*, girls were chosen to be the *kanephoroi* "basket bearer" at other festivals throughout the year.[53] Before marriage, young girls were expected to serve in this position at religious festivals. As the *parthenos* and/or *kanephoros*, a young girl led the sacrificial procession to the divine altar while carrying the *kanoun*, a basket of the sacred elements, on her head.[54] This role was deemed important because it required a pure virgin girl to serve in this position. The girl's innocence ensured the purity of the sacred objects and kept the sacrifices favorable among the gods looking out for the community.[55] Artistic portrayals of the *kanephoroi* often show the ideal maiden as one who already entered puberty and is in the premarital stage (eleven to fifteen years old).[56] On vases, *kanephoroi* are recognized firstly by the basket that they carried on their heads and then by the distinctive mantle that they wore for the ritual occasion.[57] Otherwise, their participation in the festival might be questioned or unclear to the viewer in artistic displays.

A festival that gives an example of young girls serving as *kanephoroi* and *parthenoi* is the Panathenaia, an Athenian festival celebrated every four years and dedicated to honoring the goddess Athena and the city of Athens. This festival included a sacrificial ritual, feast, and competitive athletic events for citizens of the community to participate in. The *kanephoroi* did not participate in the sacrificial act, but only assisted in transporting the objects to the altar.

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[53] Parker. *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 224.
[54] Parker. *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, 223-224.
[55] Linda Jones Roccos, 642.
[56] Roccos, 643.
[57] Roccos, 641.

Mathew Dillon describes the sacred objects as being a sacrificial knife, barley (to pour over the head of the victim), and a fillet (to decorate the beast with).[58]

In reference to the social order of this culture, Burkert states that "all the members of the community have their place, the young horsemen and the venerable elders, and the young girls with the appurtenances of sacrifice, baskets and jugs; then there are the victims."[59] At the Panathenaia, the meat of the feast was distributed to all the members of the city at the marketplace.[60] Though the women at festivals like this one may have received a share of the sacrificial meat, this did not imply that they were present at the feast with the men.[61] Burton mentions that the *kanephoroi* received their share of the meat and there is a chance that they were not included in the actual public feast during the Panathenaia.[62] Typically the men managed the distribution and consumption of the feast. Sometimes the participants in the feast had to be physically present to receive their share of the meat. In these cases, if women were not there to feast on spot, their portion of the distribution would have been delivered to the men present at that moment.[63]

Another role that women took up at the Panathenaia was the purification and presentation of the Athena Polias statue with a *peplos*, a garment that Greek women wore like a full-length robe. Prior to the Panathenaia, the women and some of the girls of Athens came together to purify the statue in preparation for the new *peplos* at the public festival of the Plynteria. After several months of weaving this cloth for Athena Polias, the women bring the wooden statue to

[58] Matthew Dillon, 472-473.
[59] Burkert, 232.
[60] Burkert, 232.
[61] Joan Burton, 149-150.
[62] Burton, 150.
[63] Burton, 150.

the sea to cleanse her and then return the statue back to the temple for the Panathenaia.[64] After the preparation festival, the older women dress the statue in the new *peplos*. The priestess of Athena Polias was responsible for overseeing the removal and presentation of the new cloth for the goddess.

Prior to the age at which a girl could assume the role of *kanephoros*, young girls were also seen as *arktos* (as mentioned previously in the discussion of the Arkteia), *arrhephoros*, and *aletris*. The Arrhephoreia was a festival that occurred at night and was regarded as one of the mystery festivals. As *arrhephoroi*, young girls between the ages of five and eleven years old were selected to live on the Acropolis near the temple of Athena Polias or the Erechtheion. Usually only one or two girls from noble families were chosen for this role that lasted a year. The duty of the *arrhephoros* consisted of carrying unknown sacred objects in a closed basket on their heads to an area near the sanctuary of Aphrodite in the Gardens, and into an underground passage. The priestess of Athena gives the *arrhephoroi* the objects, but neither the priestess nor the young girls know what they carried because it was covered up. After they deliver the secret objects into the ground, the *arrhephoroi* carry back another unknown covered object and retreat to the Acropolis to be released of their position. A new selection of *arrhephoroi* were then selected and replaced the current girls at the Acropolis.[65] The duty of the *arrhephoroi* also included them assisting with weaving the new *peplos* that would be presented to Athena Polias at the Panathenaia. The etiological myth that corresponds with this ritual is the myth of the daughters of Cecrops.[66] In this story, Athena gave the three daughters (Aglauros, Herse, Pandrosos) a *kiste*, a sacred basket, and instructed them to never open it. However, after Athena

[64] Ogden, 308.
[65] Burkert, Raffan, 228-229.
[66] Burkert, Raffan, 229.

was gone at night, the curiosity of Aglauros and Herse got the best of them, and they opened the basket. When they did that, they saw Erichthonios, the mysterious child of Hephaistos, and simultaneously snakes came out of the basket. The two girls jumped out of fear and fell off the acropolis to their deaths. The sanctuary of Aglauros is located at the bottom of the Acropolis wall. The shrine of Pandrosos, who was not guilty of opening the basket or disobeying the goddess' instructions, is located in front of the Erechtheion.

Between ages of seven to ten years old, girls were eligible to serve as an *aletris* and/or *arktos*. The *arktos*, translated as "bear," involved young girls of the premarital age participating in a ritual of dance and races at the Arkteia of Brauron and/or Mounichia.[67] The *aletris*, related to grinding grain, was a mysterious role that does not have many sources explaining the ritual or festival conducted. It is known that the girls chosen for the *aletris* had to prepare ritual meat for the goddess Athena.[68] Roccos informed us that, similar to the *arrhephoros*, the aletris was thought to be associated with a small, secret ritual. Additional evidence of these religious roles as a young girl came from one of the female characters in Aristophanes' play, *Lysistrata*. A woman recounted her religious duties as a young girl, she said,

> Athenians! Let us begin our good work by giving our city some useful words. And it's good and proper that we should give her some good advice because she raised us in absolute luxury. I, for example, when I was but seven years old, I was made a temple attendant. Then, when I turned ten, I was given the duty of grinding the sacred barley at Artemis' temple and was also one of the participants at the festival, one of the little bears, as we call them. I used to have to take off my saffron robe and dance naked in the procession. Later on, of course, when I became a beautiful young woman, I used to carry the string of sacred dried figs at Athena's procession. That's the greatest honour that can be bestowed upon an Athenian girl![69]

[67] Roccos, 643.
[68] Roccos, 643.
[69] Aristophanes. *Lysistrata*, lines 636-647.

This account, though it belonged to a character in a play, has provided an idea of how these religious duties could be accomplished in one lifetime. The woman mentioned that these were all honorable obligations for any Athenian girl in her society to experience. When she said the city raised the Athenian women in luxury, she was referring to all these roles (temple attendant, grinder, participant in the Arkteia, and basket bearer) that she has served in since she was a child.

The public festivals discussed above were acknowledged and sponsored by the city. Even the women-only festivals like the Thesmophoria were recognized on the Greek calendar.[70] It is possible that other smaller religious rituals exclusive to women took on a more private function in Greek society. However, I will not discuss in this paper the more private religious activities that occurred. In the women-only religious festivals mentioned above, women were used to emphasize the purity of the ritual and the importance of fertility for the city and its agriculture. Even the regular presence of young girls in religious festivals as basket bearers demonstrates how society regarded women from childhood. As shown in this progression of their youth, girls became familiar with carrying out religious duties as early as five years old. At this time in their life, they were unmarried virgins and Greek culture viewed them as innocent and pure. Their status as a maiden was used as protection and assurance for the purity of the sacrificial ritual being conducted. By the time that these women were of adult age and/or married, they understood their role in society contributed a great amount to the religion of state. The way that females were taught and groomed as children, can be seen as reinforcing this conventional social role in the Greek world. The roles that women fulfill reflect how their presence was valued on religion occasions and show that the sacred welfare of the state and community was dependent

[70] Burton, 151.

upon them.[71] The Greeks valued their religion and needed their sacrifice to the gods to be pure and honest to receive blessings and prosperity from the gods in return.

Guía and Stevens, in their research, concluded that exclusive women's festivals did provide the opportunity for women to put themselves in uncommon roles. They said that the Thesmophoria "opened up a space for female debate, and especially, judicial decision making."[72] The festival prompted a temporary suspension of the political or judicial areas of the community and civic activity on that day. The women-only festivals allowed these Athenian women to perform their expected duties without being interrupted by the men. However, the men did have their suspicions[73] about the women conducting their own activities without their usual oversight. On the other hand, to say that Greek women had freedom in this context because of their valued roles in religious festivals may not be entirely accurate. Yes, women were regarded as virtuous compared to the men, but because they were viewed in this way does not mean they could do as they pleased. Burkert states that at normal sacrifices, every person has their proper place in society; the virgins carried the water jug and basket, young boys directed the animals along for sacrifice and roasted the meat, and a respected elder man poured the libation.[74] These community standards and expect behavior of females to be pure and virtuous wives has been defined by men.

It seems as if these conclusions may contradict each other. One person says that women and girls had their appropriate place in society, whereas another claimed that women got to have freedom within their roles. We can say for certain that Athenian women were not confined to

[71] Burkert, 245.
[72] Guía, 288.
[73] Burkert, 258.
[74] Burkert, 258.

their responsibilities within the household, they did have freedom in that capacity to socialize with other women and perform important responsibilities for religious occasions. From childhood to adulthood, young girls were taught that their place in society deals with upholding the sanctity of religious activities, promoting the fertility of women and agriculture, and skills such as weaving. In the festivals where men were excluded, women served in positions that they would not normally if it were a festival for everyone in the community. Their control over the organization of the ritual activities and oversight of the women gathering in one place was expected of them. Their religious duties could not be done within the walls of the house, so it is not completely unusual to see women outside of their house in this case. Women are often put in child nurturing roles starting from childbirth (which is natural). Due to women being put in this role often, I believe it connects to them being seen as nurturers of the community and agriculture. The freedom that they received in the religious context was for the benefit and virtue of the state. Similar to the divinity they worship in festivals, women symbolize childbirth, nurturing, and fertility not only for themselves, but for the state.

Chapter 3: Theatrical Performances – Portrayal of Women in Power

When discussing the social role of women in Greek society especially in relation to religious festivals, it is only fitting that we also address the portrayal of the female characters in two of Aristophanes' plays, the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Lysistrata*. Aristophanes, a famous playwright in ancient Greece, wrote many comedies during the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. He was known for writing comedies that criticized and poked fun at the political and social issues of Greek society. His works revealed many aspects about Athenian theatre and the civic matters during his time. Both of his plays, the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Lysistrata*, were written in 411 B.C. and display women in Athenian society. The *Thesmophoriazusae* took place in the religious context of the women-only festival in Athens, whereas *Lysistrata* allowed women to choose to be in the political and social sphere of their city. The themes I observed in Aristophanes have also been used in another one of his plays called the *Ecclesiazusae* (also known as the *Assemblywomen)*. This play was written around 392 B.C. and portrayed the women taking over the government of Athens and making property communal within the city.

The *Thesmophoriazusae* or *The Women at the Thesmophoria* have been centered around a Greek playwright, Euripides, who believed that the women at the Thesmophoria festival were making a judgement on his life because he kept slandering them in his tragedies. His plays allegedly presented women in a misogynistic way to the city as mad and sexually depraved, and even suggested that Athenian wives were guilty of adultery. He believed that the women who have become angry at his portrayals and accusations will use the Thesmophoria festival as an excuse to discuss whether he should be killed or not. Euripides visits his friend Agathon and attempts to get him to disguise himself as a woman in order to spy on the festival gathering. When Agathon refused the offer, Euripides then persuaded his father-in-law, Mnesilochus, to be

a spy for him instead. The women came together as required for the festival and gather as an assembly in preparation for addressing their issues with Euripides. After they prayed to the gods, the women began talking about how Euripides falsely depicted them and how they can punish Euripides for his actions. In the meeting, Mnesilochus spoke up several times against punishing Euripides and claimed that as a fictional woman "she" has cheated on her own husband with a boyfriend. During the back-and-forth dialogue, Kleisthenes, who is identified as a "cross-dresser"[75] and "pretty boy,"[76] warned the assemblywomen that Euripides sent a spy dressed as a woman into their meeting. Through an interrogation of each woman, they discovered Mnesilochus' presence and tied him to a plank. Euripides attempted to rescue Mnesilochus, but his plans failed every time.

This play has served as an example of how the male perspective is used to provide insight onto social aspects of Greek culture. The religious festival is not only the setting for the play, but the viewer is given details as to how the community functions during the Thesmophoria. Euripides has set the scene on the day of the festival by giving details of what types of political and social actions are taken on the day of fasting for the women at the Thesmophoria. The following passage from the play demonstrated Euripides expressing his suspicions and worries to Mnesilochus. Euripides said,

Euripides:	… A judgement will be made: "To kill or not kill Euripides?"
Mnesilochus:	A judgement? How can a judgement be delivered today? The courts are shut. No cases will be adjudicated today. The parliament isn't sitting either. It's the holy day of the Thesmophoria. Fasting Day. Mid-Festival day. Women's Day.
Euripides:	And that's exactly why I'm certain the judgement will be "Kill Euripides!" You see, mate, there's a plot schemed up against me by the women and today the two priestesses of the Festival are going to gather

[75] Aristophanes. *Thesmophoriazusae,* line 573.
[76] *Thesmophoriazusae,* line 235.

	together an assembly at the Temple of Demeter and bring down this judgement about my life…or about my death.
Mnesilochus:	Why would they want to do that, Euripides?
Euripides:	Why, Mnesilochus?
	Shrugs his shoulders as if he can't understand women.
	Because I write tragedies about them, mate.
	Because I say bad things about them.[77]

From this passage it is understood by the reader that the women were most likely on the second day of the festival, the day of fasting. Thus, while the women fasted with each other, all political, legal, and other government related proceedings were shut down for the day. Euripides emphasized the fact that this is a women's festivals when he said it's the "Women's Day," which implied that men did not participate in the festival activities, they remained outside observers. His description of the festival told the viewer that there are two priestesses that organize the gathering of women at the temple of Demeter. The women's behavior within the meeting is what others have claimed to resemble the meeting of assemblymen that occurs in Athens.

The dialogue between the women is performed in a way that the woman who would like to say something goes up to front of the meeting and delivers her speech in a civil manner. Aristophanes emphasized the way this type of interaction at the meeting compares to how politicians make speeches. At one point, the chorus of women said, "Quiet, please! Listen carefully. Mika is clearing her throat and, like a real politician, she's preparing to make a long speech!"[78] Aristophanes has stressed the behavior of these women especially during the women-only festival that men were not included in. He wants the plays' audience to see the similarities between the women gathering at the festival to the male citizens who convene as an assembly to

[77] *Thesmophoriazusae*, lines 78-86.
[78] *Thesmophoriazusae*, line 381.

discuss important matters. The organization of this day and the meeting among the women of Athens is also demonstrated in the following lines:

> Kritylla: *Clears her throat and then unfurls a document from which she reads.*
> In the Women's General Assembly, the Chairwoman of which Timocleia and the Secretary Lysilla, Sostrate has moved the following motion which was duly passed: "That a meeting be held at Dawn of the Middle Day of the Thesmophoria Festival, the day during which we have the most time to ourselves, during which meeting the main item of discussion shall be the proper punishment of the man we, women consider to be a criminal, namely, Euripides.[79]

This passage maintains the idea that the Thesmophoria festival was organized and secretive, and women did not discuss what they spoke about or did with anybody else. However, Aristophanes and Euripides, as men, craft their own ideas of what happened in the meeting. They imagine that the women carried out an organized agenda like the one described previously and simply criticize the words of the men and/or execute a plan to punish men who have wronged them. As the women in the play take turns voicing their own opinions about Euripides, they also condemn the way that their men interact with them at home after watching Euripides' plays. It is one thing for Euripides to be saying misogynistic things about these women and accusing them of unflattering, adulterous activities, but he also says these things to a mostly male crowd in the theater. Angrily one of the women on the stand says, "and our husbands listen to that crap in the theatre so the moment they get home, instead of saying 'hello,' they give us dirty and suspicious looks and they start searching every nook and cranny of the house looking for a hidden lover!"[80] This line has suggested that perhaps not all citizen women attended the theatre. Whether that was by choice or by prohibition is hard to tell. It it known that males played all of the acting parts on stage. Dillon explained that there seemed to be no formal prohibition against women attending

[79] *Thesmophoriazusae*, lines 372-377.
[80] *Thesmophoriazusae*, line 391.

the theatre in Athens.[81] The theatre was open to the all the male population, and women, if attendance was opened to them, did not always attend. To the male audience watching the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Aristophanes treats the festival as merely an opportunity for women to gossip and conspire against the tragic playwright, who in his opinion gave away their secrets and strategies.[82]

On the other hand, the women in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* were not in the religious context but have been put into a position (by Aristophanes) of managing political affairs for the men of Greece. The play portrayed the initiation of a sex strike led by Lysistrata, an Athenian woman. Lysistrata acted as a public figure for the women the entire time. She took initiative and crafted a plan that would force peace among the warring city-states (panhellenic goal) and bring men back home to their wives. She strongly believed that withholding sex from the men and husbands of Greece was the best strategy to pull their attention away from the Peloponnesian War. These women were tired of the neglect they received from their men because of the continued fighting against other Greek cities. Lysistrata, on the other hand, was not explicitly associated with a man or husband, and was tired of silently accepting the poor political and military decisions made by the Greek men. This accumulation of unfavorable decisions and behavior made the women execute this plan to get their message across to their men and other Greek cities involved.

Initially many of the women with the same concerns as Lysistrata were reluctant to participate in the sex strike, but after discussing the matter further, the women made an oath to commence their efforts. On the same day, Lysistrata initiated another plan with the older women

[81] Dillon, 459.
[82] Ogden, 202.

of Athens to seize the Acropolis, the location of the treasury, the place where military funds are stored. As a result of the women's actions, the Athenian men were not able to access funds to continue fighting in the war. When a magistrate attempted to obtain the military funds from the treasury, he was surprised by what he saw as the Acropolis had been seized by these women. He ordered guards to arrest Lysistrata and the other women, but this plan failed. At this point in the play, Lysistrata and the magistrate argued about the war, and she told him why it did not benefit the state or the women. She explained why this war is such a great concern and continued to criticize how Athenian men run the state. She advised the magistrate on how she could manage the state better than them.

As a result of the sex strike, many of the men suffered erections and were rendered helpless in war. The men began listening to Lysistrata's advice because of their sexual frustrations. Delegates from Athens and Sparta met to discuss a peace treaty which she helps to negotiate. At the end of the play, the peace treaty has been signed, the sex strike has ended, and the women have returned to their duties of cooking and weaving. The significance of the play touched upon how the women, who were not supposed to get involved in military politics, break this social barrier. Pasi Loman called the women's behavior transgressive because they took direct action and infringed on politics that fell under the male-dominated sector of society.[83] They successfully took possession of the Acropolis and persuaded the men unwillingly to listen to a woman's strategies and criticism of men. The criticism that Lysistrata gave to the displeased magistrate acknowledged many of the disadvantages and limitations that women experienced in this society when it came to voicing their opinions. Lysistrata said,

> LYSISTRATA: But of course! Now! Before the war, everything you men did, we suffered in silence and dignity because you wouldn't let us make a

[83] Loman, 36.

	sound. Not a peep. God, we hated you for that! And then, all the time, we'd hear about all those dreadful decisions you'd be making about some very important issue or other. But, we'd put on a smile to hide the pain and we'd come to you with, "how did parliament go today, darling? Any laws posted on the law pillars about peace?" Well, my own husband would answer with, "Grrrr… what's it to you?" and with "Grrrr… won't you ever shut up, woman?" So, I'd shut up.
STRATYLLIS:	Me? I'd never shut up!
MAGISTRATE:	You! By God, I'd have given you something to squawk about, you old crow!
LYSISTRATA:	And that's exactly why I did shut up! But then, other stupid decisions of yours would come up and again we'd ask, "husband, how could you do such stupid things?" And the dear hubby would take one frowny look at me and tell me to go back to my weaving or he'd give me something to really scream my head about. Then he'd say what Hektor said to his wife, Andromache, "war is men's business!" The fool's been reading too much Homer!
MAGISTRATE:	And he'd be right, too![84]

While she provided the female perspective on this social situation, the magistrate confirmed her experience from the male perspective. It is important to keep in mind that the content being said in the play is dramatized. There is truth to some extent to what Lysistrata said about the accepted social place of women. From her point of view, women were not permitted to voice their opinions at all, and they could not participate in the government or lawmaking conversations, not even in the privacy of their own homes. Aristophanes even used Homer, another Greek writer, as a reference to stress how women were not allowed to talk about war at any time. Based on the way Lysistrata has set the tone for how women were treated, the play shows how much her character goes against the expectations for an Athenian woman in this society.

By even speaking up to the magistrate, Lysistrata seemed to be breaking this boundary between accepted social behavior and politics. Prior to this scene, the women remained in their accepted social roles. The women, Lysistrata says, kept quiet and asked only little questions to

[84] Aristophanes. *Lysistrata*, lines 506-520.

their husbands about their daily matters. However, they believed these men who are supposed to be working for the benefit of the city-state were passing unwise policies.[85] The notion that Lysistrata challenges her social role corresponds with Michael Shaw's and Helene Foley's discussion on the female intruder theory. The female intruder theory stems from Shaw's idea that there is a contradiction between the way that women are viewed in literary sources and how they are viewed in Greek dramas. He claims that the former emphasizes the seclusion of women and their confined role outside of the political life, whereas Greek dramas often showed women in roles that are dominant and aggressive in the public settings.[86] Shaw argues that the female intruder is represented in Greek drama as women who "step out from the enclosed, private world of the oikos, in response to a previous failure of the male to respect the interests of the household in his own external sphere of the polis."[87] He makes this argument based on of the concept that Greek women were associated with private life and duties within household (oikos) and men associated with the public life and responsibilities outside the house. By these standards, the actions of the women in the outside world are referred to as the inversion of normal social roles. Foley claims that Greek dramas allow for these social inversions to happen and "allow the characters to criticize the way the relation between oikos and polis or male and female is organized in Greek society."[88] Lysistrata's whole character embodies the description of the female intruder. Her character traits were not seen as socially acceptable outside of her daily responsibilities. She was a leader amongst not only the women, but also the men who still had war efforts going on. She presented herself as a great speaker amongst both sexes, while devising

[85] *Lysistrata*, line 521.
[86] Foley, 1.
[87] Foley, 1.
[88] Foley, 5.

and executing multiple plans. Furthermore, she was able to round up followers in a timely manner and accomplish her ultimate goal of peace between the Greek city-states.

Aristophanes uses the female characters in this play to address poor political and financial decisions that the Athenian men have made. He makes very harsh criticisms of the men and states how women can solve these current issues that could turn into future problems. A woman said,

> And that's why I owe it to our city to give something useful back to it, in return. *To the men* Don't hold it against me for being born a woman or for knowing how to fix these awful problems we are facing at the moment. My contribution to the common cause will be real men! Because you lot, you old codgers and tax dodgers, you've contributed nothing. All you did was waste what your grandfathers put there. All that wealth they had brought from their victory in the Persian wars. You've wasted all that up and you're sending us headlong into bankruptcy![89]

The woman believed the men have contributed nothing beneficial to the society, yet it was their grandfathers that set up wealth for the city. The new men that she will bring, or birth will be capable of handling the financial business of the state while ensuring the city does not go into bankruptcy. Lysistrata agreed with the woman that as a whole, women were more responsible at managing financial affairs because the men were wasting money on war and other nonessential uses. Lysistrata said to the magistrate,

> LYSISTRATA: Yeah, I think you need money for war! And not only for war but you've also screwed up everything else with it, as well! This war of yours has given crooked leaders like Peisandros – to use but one example- the opportunity to steal money, so as to feed their constantly rumbling guts!
> So, my dear Magistrate, what we will do is this: we will let their guts go on rumbling. From now on they won't be able to do what they want with that money. That money will not come down out of there just to shut up the rumbling of their guts, not ever again!
> MAGISTRATE: O yeah? And what will you do with it?

[89] *Lysistrata*, lines 648-657.

LYSISTRATA: What do you mean, "what will we do with it?" We'll keep it safe, that's what we'll do with it!
MAGISTRATE: You? Keep it safe?
LYSISTRATA: What's so hard about that? We've kept the house purses safe for years!
MAGISTRATE: House purses? House purses? That's a totally different thing, you silly woman![90]

The female intruder theory is demonstrated in these lines, especially when both women outright tell the men where they screwed up and how they need the women to solve their problems. These female characters came off as assertive figures that insert themselves into public matters of war and finances. The women were tired allowing the city to suffer from the decisions that the men make and were not able to see the future outcome. Lysistrata complained that these decisions were not benefiting the children either because young boys would continuously be preparing to go off to war and the girls would have nobody to be with. She claimed that the suffering is bad for the women because "all these campaigns of yours, we all go to bed alone these days. And it's not only us who are suffering but our daughters, too, whose prime is passing them by even faster. They're in there, in their rooms, totally alone."[91] Their criticism of men in society also gave them the opportunity to give recognition and praise to the women.

Foley makes sure to point out that the women in *Lysistrata* utilized the approach as in their religious festivals (like the Thesmophoria) and rituals to achieve their end goal. They abandoned their domestic duties, implement a sexual segregation for a short amount of time, practice abstinence, and use indecent language to ultimately promote fertility and prosperity of the community.[92] In their own way, the women understood what needed to be done and took the

[90] *Lysistrata*, lines 486-490.
[91] *Lysistrata*, lines 591-593.
[92] Foley, 8.

initiative in order to get the Greek men onboard with Lysistrata's strategies. Lysistrata's advice to the men on how to run the city better consisted of three main points. First, men should not carry their weapons on them as they casually walk through the marketplace.[93] Whenever men did this, it frightened people in the marketplace. Second, each city should send out delegates to negotiate any issues they have among each other.[94] Third, only people (locals, allies, foreigners, and citizens from other colonies) that are good for the state should remain and given citizenship, while anyone not benefitting it should be removed.[95] This last piece of advice would help prevent the city from experiencing corruption by anyone.

At this point we must consider the satirical genre that Aristophanes intended for the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Lysistrata*. Aristophanes is known for his satirical dramas that poke fun at political criticism of the Athenian government. Given this context, it only provoked the question of whether it is a ridiculous thought that the Athenian women would ever take over Athens or if this is simply a theoretical idea showcasing an alternative way of society. Though the *Thesmophoriazusae* was written in a comical tone, it does not undermine the secrecy of the festival or the parallel between the assemblywomen in the festival and assemblymen in real life. As quoted previously, Aristophanes used Euripides' dialogue to describe how the festival would be set up in real time. He describes how the festival put a hold on other matters going on in the judicial courts and demonstrated how the women involved in it are the only ones who are knowledgeable about what the rituals that occurred on this day. The constant curiosity of men and their growing suspicions about what is conducted at the festival has emphasized the strict exclusivity and confidentiality kept among the women involved in the Thesmophoria festival.

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[93] *Lysistrata*, lines 552-560.
[94] *Lysistrata*, line 571.
[95] *Lysistrata*, lines 576-584.

This information that the audience received from the play does not change with the consideration of satire.

Tzanetou reveals that one perception of women in the play is that they act like men but in disguise.[96] Tzanetou used this wording to suggest the similarity of these women gathering like the male citizens do in the assembly. The environment of the play mimicked that of a political or civic meeting involving all male citizens. In Aristophanes' attempt to mock this comparison, he ended up making a strong connection between civic men and religious women who both act in these authoritative positions within the community. However, he quickly circled back around to mock the women in the meeting by making it seem as if they only discuss unimportant issues of the society. After speaking about Euripides' insults and the behavior of their husbands, one woman said, "That, ladies, is why I got up here on the box. That is what I want to announce today! There are other matters, of course, but I'll talk to the Secretary about them and record them in the minutes."[97] The whole duration of their meeting was spent addressing their tarnished reputation and they did not care to address any matters not related to Euripides' insults or their husbands' behaviors.

The comedic tone of *Lysistrata* spoke to the irony of the magistrate and delegates, men of high ranks, listening to a woman's advice in political matters, especially about war. The only reason these men were willing to stop their fighting was so that they could continue their sexual lives at home. From a male perspective, there was the absurdity of women believing that they can assist and conduct political matters. Referring to the earlier discussion of the female intruder, Foley pointed out that Lysistrata's character restores political balance by applying strategies that

[96] Tzanetou, 329.
[97] *Thesmophoriazusae*, line 431.

she learned in her domestic life.[98] She uses her knowledge of how to manage a household and applies it to the managing a city and its political affairs. For example, when the magistrate asked her how she would go about bringing peace and order among the warring cities, she responded,

> Lysistrata: We shall undo all this turbulence just like we undo the knots in a ball of wool. We simply pick up the spindles and we pull one thread this way, another that way, another this way, another…Simple! That's how we'll get rid of all the knots. We'll send out some embassies here, some embassies there…
> You simply wash the city just like you wash wool.
> First, you put the wool into the tub and get rid of all the daggy bits, all the crap around its bum. Then you put it on a bed, take a rod and scrutch and bonk all the burrs and spikes out it. All those burrs and spikes that have gathered themselves into tight knots and balls are tearing and tangling the wool of State, well, you just tease them out of there. Rip there heads off! Then, off for combing. You put all the wool together in one basket. All of it! Friends, foreign or local, allies – anyone who's good for the State. Drop them all in there. As well as put citizens from the colonies. Consider them, too, as part of the same ball of wool, only separated from each other. So, what with all those colonies joining the ball, you'll be able to weave a cloak big enough for the whole city.[99]

Lysistrata used the process of spinning wool as an analogy for conflict and her strategy to solve problems between cities. First, she suggested sending out ambassadors from each city and to each city to negotiate and talk about the issues going on rather than use violence. She continued her strategy by saying she would cleanse the city of all bad decisions or concerning issues that are not benefitting the state and leading to war. Lastly, she would ally with local and foreign cities, and outside populations who are beneficial to the state and promote the welfare of Athens. Her application of domestic skills did not sit well with the male figures in the play. Lysistrata even threw in a comment about women taking over military affairs, she said, "your sewing is in there. And some beans to chew on while you're working on it. From now on, sewing for you,

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[98] Foley, 4.
[99] *Lysistrata*, 565-586.

war for us!"[100] The fact that she instructed the magistrate to start weaving, a domestic skill performed by women, is comical and suggested role reversal. Aristophanes created satire out of both the idea of women domesticating the state as a whole and women thinking that they can handle war business instead of the men.

With the consideration of satire in both plays, Aristophanes' ideas could have been reflecting on the thought that Athenian women would never act in this way. It is one thing for women to criticize the decisions that the men make and believe they can manage the city better than the men. However, it is an entirely different situation if those women were to act on their beliefs and attempt to see their own decisions at play. Aristophanes posed theoretical situations in his work and it then presented a question about the role of art in life. How much of an effect did these plays have in real life? Ogden argued that the plays, which supported the idea that religious festivals allowed women to come out of the domestic sphere, reinforced the male ideology that a wife belongs at home."[101] In my opinion, it is interesting to discuss these two plays because they do seem to offer an alternate option for Greek women. They challenge and entertain the thought of women acting on their beliefs. They propose questions such as could Athenian women manage the state better than men? Or would Athenian women go through with something like this to challenge their social position in the domestic sphere.

The *Thesmophoriazusae* did have the potential to offer an alternative society for women. The women at the festival talked about the misfortunes in their marriages and how men treat them. Just like in *Lysistrata*, they believed they are not recognized or honored for their contributions to

[100] *Lysistrata*, line 538.
[101] Ogden, 303-304.

society. The women believed that they are much more capable of running Athens than the men. In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, the chorus of women spoke to the audience and said,

> Chorus: Women are far superior to men! Look around you! Search the streets! Will you find a woman running off with fifty talents of the State's money, splashing it about on splendid chariots and the like? … They talk about 'economy' all the time! They do that while they spend and waste the whole of their father's estate. Can't save a bloody thing! We, on the other hand, we know how to save, we know how to keep our baskets, our looms, our shuttles, our umbrellas! Whereas you, men! Some of our husbands have lost their spears –wood, iron, the lot! Can't find them anywhere in the house; and others, well, they just tossed the shields off their backs on the battlefield, anyhow! There's a lot of stuff that we women are angry about and justly, too! One of the worse things is that we just don't get recognized for our good work! I mean, if a woman gives birth to a man who serves the State well, let's say he becomes a Brigadier, or a General, then she should be honoured in some way! She should be given a seat at the Honours Row at the Stenia and the Scira, as well as the other women's festivals![102]

Once again, the female character used her domestic management skills to support the argument of women being superior to men. While women knew how to save money, men tended to spend their money on chariots and other things. In this aspect, the women's festival in the play gave Athenian women a platform to speak on these matters. However, since Aristophanes has written this as satire, the context forced the audience to see the efforts of these women as a mockery. The satirical nature of each plot both plants the idea and comforts the Athenian male audience because they know that these women will never get the chance to run the state or political matters ever. While the men attended the theatre, their wives were at home or performing other duties.

This genre seems almost like a slap in the face to women because it ensures the idea that this alternate social role could never be real for them. Its satirical intent reinforced where women

[102] *Thesmophoriazusae*, lines 808-835.

stood in Athenian society, which is low in comparison to the men. The play reminded men that the freedom their women have in religious festivals and on the fictional stage only lasts for a short amount of time. It reminds women that they are valued for religious rites, but they will resume their daily responsibilities in the house. Thus, any criticism that Aristophanes inputs into the story on behalf of the women may not be taken as serious. Perhaps if Lysistrata were not a comedy, it could have a real effect on the male audience. Loman mentioned that *Lysistrata* has been used in anti-war debates before.[103] If this play is significant in its current comedy genre, imagine the effect it might have on people to question the social roles of women and the potential of women speaking up in Athens. The light-heartedness that both of these Greek dramas carry reinforces the idea of women staying inside the house and not stepping into political affairs. Furthermore, at the end of *Lysistrata*, the women went home and returned to their usual duties within the household. After Lysistrata gave her advice and the men negotiated, the role of women did not change at all by the end.

[103] Loman, 35.

Chapter 4: An Alternative Structuring of Society?

The positions that Greek women and girls served in during religious festivals were very essential for the sanctity and welfare of the public. From one perspective, their roles in both the co-ed and exclusive festivals can suggest that women may possessed more freedom than what their usual duties included in the household. The domestic, indoor responsibilities were considered the conventional social roles in Greek society. Their religious roles could also be seen as conventional because they must promote fertility. However, sometimes their religious roles were considered breaking out of that convention. By breaking out of these conventional social roles, Greek women experience a different type of reality that opposes their normal roles in society. This opposition that gives them more freedom and control similar to the privileges that Athenian men receive, proposes the idea that religious festivals act as an improved reality for Greek women.

The word "utopia" as defined by Oxford Languages is "an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect." Bronislaw Baczko introduced the concept of festivals in utopia and utopia in festivals to understand the purpose some festivals serve for their respective society.[104] He combines the utopian vision of an imagined, alternative society with the acts carried out during a festival. He referred to the Revolutionary festival as a basis to describe how festivals can be representative of a new kind of reality. In the Revolutionary festival, the mere existence of a festival in society represents the utopian perspective of that reality. The alternate society under this utopian viewpoint promotes equality and perfect harmony among every citizen and person involved in this society. Thus, by merging the utopian vision and the religious

[104] Baczko, ix.

festivals of the Greek world, it proposed that these festivals create a utopian environment for Greek women.

Baczko constantly compared festivals to a "magic mirror."[105] In fantasy literature and films, a magic mirror symbolized an imagined reflection of what the owner of the mirror wished to see. It is an unrealistic yet powerful object that satisfied the personal beliefs and thoughts that the owner cannot attain. In some cases, the magic mirror produced an image of incomparable beauty, the outside world, or a faraway family member. In this context, the magic mirror referred to the imagined social life that women in Athens hoped to experience. The inversion of norms that occurs for the women during religious festivals exercised their utopian aspirations. Those festivals shifted the imagined society of Athenian women into a "lived experience"[106] and produced a new social reality through religious rites.

The Revolutionary festival described by Baczko embodied these same utopian values. There is a social inversion of the real world in which the people's hopes and desires are represented in the New City.[107] This type of festival is also referred to as a counter-festival because it displays the imagination of an alternate social world which is different from the actual social life of these people.[108] The exclusive women-only festivals of Athens can partially be viewed through this lens. The exclusion of males in the Thesmophoria festival for example could account for the exclusion of females in the all male Athenian Assembly. The women performing the sacrifice and feast themselves would also be considered an inversion in this festival. The women-only religious festivals and even the oversight that priestesses provided over the

[105] Baczko, 179.
[106] Baczko, 177.
[107] Baczko, 178.
[108] Baczko, 179.

organization of certain rites fits into the imagined reality that the Revolutionary festival demonstrated. The fact that these Athenian festivals were publicly recognized by the state upholds this alternate reality. The state recognized that during Thesmophoria, while the women are in control, men are excluded, and judicial matters–and other government related proceedings–are interrupted from convening during that time. This gave women the upper hand and allowed men to see them outside of the daily role of managing the household. In Guía and Stevens' explanation of the Thesmophoria as well as in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, it seemed that the authors used the utopian viewpoint to interpret the actions of the Athenian women. The secluded camping out ritual the women conducted in preparation for the festival, the suspension of political and judicial meetings, and the opportunity to debate all constitute as an inversion of the norms for Athenian women.[109] By doing this, the women have formed a "new city"[110] comprised only of them.

The themes and characters in Aristophanes' plays agreed with the utopian perspective of an alternate society. Though they were intended to be received as satire, the behavior of the women bring something new to society that the Greek world has not seen in real life. The women in these plays were more aggressive and took a direct approach to being in control. The act of Mnesilochus disguising himself as a woman and Euripides being so worried about what the women will decide about him allows the women to possess authority over these male figures. The women intervening in the war by leading a sex strike also has the same effect. Similar to Aristophanes' freedom to voice criticisms in the theater, a public art form and state-funded, Euripides has done the same in his play *Medea*. In a speech that Medea, a princess, gave in the

[109] Guía, 271.
[110] Guía, 288.

play, she complained about how unfortunate women have been treated in society. She said, "Of all creatures that have breath and sensation, we women are the most unfortunate. First at an exorbitant price we must buy a husband and master of our bodies."[111] Both Euripides and Aristophanes as males were able to insert women's voices and viewpoints in their work. By doing this, they have planted the idea in the minds of their audience. Using the theory of utopia in festivals that Baczko presents, we can consider the overarching correlation between women and religious festivals. Compared to the responsibilities that women handle mostly in the house, the festivals represent a desired alternative society for them.

[111] Euripides, *Medea*, lines 230-234.

Conclusion

From a brief glance, it seemed as if the frequent presence of Greek women and girls in the religious sphere of society contradicted the norm of women not being present in the public, political sphere of Greek society. The Thesmophoria and Arkteia, among other religious festivals for females in Athens, in part promoted this breaking of social norms. Religious duties such as preparing the feast and performing the sacrifice during those festivals were taken over by women. The mere exclusion of males in Athenian festivals, Aristophanes' plays, the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Lysistrata*, as well as Baczko's utopian vision portray women as wanting to liberate themselves from the confines of the typical household duties. However, this is not the case for Athenian women in Greece. Before tackling my original question of whether religious roles reinforce the social order or provide an alternate social role that challenges the norm, I want to clarify the position of religion in the Greek world. In Greek culture, religion is seen in the temples and sanctuaries that were constructed to commemorate many gods and goddesses. Religion is a crucial part of life in ancient Greece. It was common for military generals to pray to the gods before going into war. Though women were not seen frequently outside of their private, household duties, their presence was still valued and utilized in the religious sector of society. Women of all ages (youthful girls, adolescents, and adults) served as either a priestess for their divinity, a basket bearer, and/or an organizer of rituals. Sometimes these religious duties required women to take on leadership roles among each other and form an assembly absent of male figures.

Although the religious roles of women in Athenian festivals can be seen as offering an alternative society, the reality is that their social roles were being reinforced by these religious festivals. Women were seen more regularly in this aspect of society because, from one

perspective, their virginity associated them with being pure and uncorrupted. Thus, this association with purity and virtue made women favored in religion and they were utilized in rites for the advantage of the city. This view of women not only is part of the social convention, but it also shows how women were regarded by their male counterparts. Ogden called this position of Athenian women a paradox because they were seen as inferior to men and marginalized, yet their virtue and ability to reproduce situated them as essential characters in the household and polis (city).[112] Their participation in sacrifices, rituals and overall festivals that promoted fertility of agriculture and human reproduction reflect the multiple ways that women were viewed in Greece. In Robert Parker's discussion on the Athenian festivals, he mentioned that their duties were a part of being a good wife. The alternative reality enacted in Athenian festivals is not enough to cancel out how women's roles were being reinforced.

The women in *Lysistrata* and the *Thesmophoriazusae* were placed in positions of power due to religious reasons and the circumstances that arose around them. These plays were not composed as an alternative to seeing women indoors, managing their household. The religious festival already placed them in a collective space together and the secrecy of the rituals being conducted makes them dominant in this role. The way that women were able to manage their own household (duties, children, and trades), they were naturally able to think of ways to manage the community and state using different methods from the men. Though it might seem this way, these characters were not provided an outlet from their social roles. Neither are they trying to redefine their roles within society. They use their social roles within the community and their natural roles as women to contribute to the welfare of the society as a whole.

[112] Ogden, 309.

The fact that religion was significant to Greek culture and associated with women, especially virgins, was important for the performance of religious rites. However, this is not sufficient to argue that women were breaking barriers of their conventional social roles in Greek society. Burton stated that "their presence or absence signifies presence or absence in a venue where deals were made, political and social linkages established, ideas discussed."[113] By not directly saying it, Burton emphasized the significance of women being absent in a public space where political matters were addressed, and social associations were made. At the same time, their exclusion from these male-dominated spaces contradicted their presence in public religious festivals. To phrase this another way, the value and presence of women in these religious festivals did not make it okay that they were not present at all in the political assembly of men. I agree with Ogden when he said that the "religious acts of citizen wives constantly reinforce and reflect their ideological role in Athenian society."[114] Ultimately, I think that though women were given freedom to organize and play a bigger role in religious festivals, they were still confined to the social roles given to them in the Greek culture of Athens.

[113] Burton, 143.
[114] Ogden, 309.

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