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Female Rituals in Ancient Greece  
From the Viewpoint of Modern Interpretations

Ženské rituály v Řecku  
z pohledu moderních interpretací

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### *Prohlášení*

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a že jsem uvedla všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

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## SUMMARY

This thesis looks at two women's rituals practiced in Ancient Greece – the Thesmophoria and the Adonia – and their interpretations by Marcel Detienne, Hendrik S. Versnel, John J. Winkler and Barbara E. Goff. The aim of the thesis is to analyze their four methods of interpretation of the rituals and illuminate how they fit within the context of contemporary debates between structuralism and post-structuralism, and ideology and agency. The paper illustrates how the various methods of interpretation – if approached critically – may be found valuable for the analysis of ideology and suggests new approaches to studies of Greek women's rituals and of the process, in which gender ideology is produced in the rituals. The interpretations should also offer an insight into the manner in which the rituals addressed Greek women on the issues of their fertility, sexuality, and their position within the patriarchal society.

The thesis is divided into two parts: the first part deals with particular interpretations of the four scholars; the second one attempts to analyze their methodological approaches focusing on their assumptions and conclusions.

## INTRODUCTION

During the years of my studies of religions, I have often found myself overwhelmed by various manifestations of theoretical mastery of religious phenomena by many great scholars, but was also troubled by their methods quite a few times. Having felt, in a way, nostalgic about the exact methods of the natural sciences, which I had studied as a student of Biochemistry, I was delighted to learn about Lévi-Strauss' structuralism, which seemed like a great opportunity to once again exercise "hard" logics. Later, however, I became interested in feminism and post-structural thought, beginning to realize problems of the structuralist method and entering the debate between structuralism and post-structuralism. At this point, I considered the issue of methodology crucial to my academic interests, which were by that time focused on anthropological, sociological and philosophical analyses of institutions of power, ideology and human agency. My forthcoming analysis is an attempt to cope with strengths and weaknesses of both structural and post-structural methods with respect to ideological analysis of gender.

In my thesis, I am going to look at two women's rituals practiced in Ancient Greece - the Thesmophoria and the Adonia - and their interpretations by H. S. Versnel, M. Detienne, J. J. Winkler, and B. E. Goff. The aim of this thesis is to deal with methodological approaches of these interpretations, and to analyze how they lead to particular conclusions about workings of gender politics and ideology in Ancient Greece. My analysis is not historical and should not be read as a historical study of women's rituals.

Each scholar's interpretation will be dealt with in a separate chapter where I will try to describe and analyze their employment of particular approaches and their succeeding interpretations of the rituals. The order of the chapters itself should reveal a certain development of method often based on the scholars' deliberate inspiration by or criticism of scholars dealt with beforehand. The decipherment of various meanings corresponding to a particular level of interpretation will show how the four analyses complement each other and how they can all be valuable, if approached critically, for studies of women's rituals and the gender politics of Ancient Greece.

In the second part of my thesis, I will offer a wider context for these methodological issues illustrating the general debate between structuralism and post-structuralism. I would like to show how both structuralist and post-structuralist approaches might be found valuable in the context of contemporary ideological analysis. I will also suggest possibilities of further elaboration of the structural and post-structural method and their application to studies of the women's festivals.

The rituals of Thesmophoria and Adonia should provide an example, which is particularly suitable for ideological analysis of gender as they address women of a patriarchal society on the issues of their gender identity and are, therefore, full of meanings heavily loaded with ideology. Moreover, formation of gender identity has been of considerable importance to structuralism and post-structuralism, the former establishing the binary opposition of the sexes as a cultural universal, the latter drawing upon emancipation movements, including feminism. Although women's rituals are but a small area of ideological production, the problems of methodological approach of ideological analysis constitute a

quest ranging over all areas of human activity and, once resolved, may prove helpful in studying many areas of human phenomena.

In choosing the topic of my bachelor's thesis, I have been inspired by a seminar on "*The Category of Womanhood in Greek Rituals*", held by Radek Chlup in the academic year of 2004/2005. I would like to thank Dr. Chlup for supervising my thesis and for providing help not only with its contents but also with English grammar and vocabulary.

## THESMOPHORIA AND ADONIA

Once again, I would like to stress, that my thesis is focused on methodological approaches to interpretation of the women's rituals, not on their historical study. Primary sources for the rituals have not been the focus of my attention. Therefore, the following brief descriptions of the two rituals have been compounded of the secondary accounts offered by Detienne, Versnel, Winkler and Goff. I will deal with the rituals' specific elements and features in more detail in the four respective chapters below.

### *Thesmophoria*

The Thesmophoria was the most widespread festival in the Greek world. It was celebrated by married women in autumn, before the sowing season, in honour of Demeter (and Persephone). In Athens, where we are best informed about it, the festival lasted for a period of three days. On the first day, called Ascent (*Anhodos*), women probably gathered for a procession bringing food, sacrificial animals, tents, and deme offerings for the priestesses. They climbed up the hill to the sanctuary of Demeter at Acropolis where they set up tents, in which they camped for all three days, sleeping on beds made of *lugos* – chaste tree (*vitex agnus castus*). The festival was directed by two female magistrates (*Archousai*) who had been elected by the women of each deme. On the second day, Fast (*Nêsteia*), women mourned, sat on the ground and abstained from food, thus, perhaps, imitating Demeter mourning for her lost daughter, Persephone. On this day, prisoners were freed from their chains, and law courts and council meetings were suspended. The third day was known as the Beautiful Birth (*Kalligenia*) and referred to fertility and, probably, also to the reunion of mother and daughter.

On one of the days, women called Bailers, who had purified themselves prior to the festival by three-day abstinence from sex, recovered decayed remnants of piglets and models of snakes and male genitals made of dough. These had been thrown into chasms some time before the Thesmophoria. The remnants were then placed on the altars of Demeter and Persephone, and were mixed with seeds, later to be scattered in the fields in order to promote fertility of crops. During or at the end of the Thesmophoria, two sacrifices were offered: one was called Punishment/Penalty (*Zêmia*); and the other one was called the Chalcidian Pursuit (*Chalkidikon [apo]diôgma*), which had its mythical aition in a story of women praying for victory in a war who, by praying, achieved that the enemy fled and had been pursued to Chalkis.

What is commemorated in the Thesmophoria is mainly Demeter's grief for her lost daughter, who was abducted by Hades while gathering flowers. Unable to find her, Demeter mourned causing vegetation, animals and men to suffer as nothing would grow and germinate. It was necessary to appease Demeter by returning Persephone to her. However, while in the Underworld, Persephone tasted of the pomegranate and was thus bound to the world of the dead. She could therefore only spend two thirds of the year with her mother, having to return to the Underworld for the rest of the year.

## *Adonia*

The Adonia was a festival commemorating the death of Adonis. The myth of Adonis begins with the story of Myrrha, a daughter of Kinyras, King of Cyprus. Myrrha offended Aphrodite by her refusal to marry for which she was punished and made to fall in love with her own father. For several nights, she managed to make love with him in the dark without being recognized. But on one night, the father lit a lamp and discovered his mistress' identity. He then pursued Myrrha and tried to kill her when she was suddenly changed into a myrrh tree by gods who took pity on her. From this myrrh tree, Adonis was born and was so beautiful that Aphrodite jealously hid him in a box and entrusted him to Persephone. Persephone, however, opened the box and having beheld Adonis' beauty refused to give him back. The goddesses then appealed to Zeus who decided that Adonis should spend a third of the year with Aphrodite, a third with Persephone, and a third with whomever he wanted. Adonis chose to spend the last third of the year with Aphrodite. According to one version of the myth, Adonis was killed by a boar while hiding in a patch of lettuce, according to another one, it was Aphrodite who hid him there.

Unlike the Thesmophoria, which was organized publicly, the Adonia was organized privately by women in late July, in the hottest time of the year. Celebration commemorating Adonis' death included drinking and feasting, and took place on rooftops. Women also grew little gardens, in which they planted seeds of lettuce, wheat, barley and fennel. Soon after the seeds sprouted, women let them desiccate in the sun and later cast the gardens into the sea or into springs, lamenting the death of Adonis.



## PART ONE

### THE FOUR INTERPRETATIONS

#### 1. MARCEL DETIENNE

My quest for interpretation of the Thesmophoria and the Adonia starts with a very influential scholar, Marcel Detienne, who offers in his book *The Gardens of Adonis*<sup>1</sup> a detailed structuralist analysis of both of these rituals and corresponding myths.

First of all, it is probably useful to briefly explain the idea behind the structuralist approach to religion and show how it differs from the Frazerian type of interpretation. According to Lévi-Strauss, in religious thought, unlike in conceptual thought, meanings are derived from structural relationships, not from concepts themselves. Religious thought operates with particular things, animals, beings and deities that are too concrete to carry an abstract meaning; their meaning is defined by their position in a network of relationships of oppositions and similarities.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it becomes impossible for Detienne to simply accept Frazer's essentialist interpretation of Adonis according to which Adonis is to be seen as the "spirit of vegetation", comparable to other mythical figures of the same essence found in other cultural systems. Such a conclusion would assume that (1) a mythical figure is a separate entity which possesses a particular essence and has a meaning on its own; (2) that the essence corresponds to some reality of the natural world which is represented by analogous mythical figures in other cultures; and (3) that the relationship between the mythical figure and the reality which it represents is a symbolical one, i.e. one of metaphor or analogy.<sup>3</sup> Detienne, on the other hand, is ready to set Adonis within a framework of botanical symbols, related myths and rituals, social relationships, even astronomical intervals; and thus reveal its position and meaning in the Ancient Greek society. We are going to see that not only was Frazer's approach simplistic and naïve, but in the end, his conclusion itself seems to be quite wrong.

Detienne starts to analyze the myth of Adonis and Myrrha by distinguishing different codes, i.e. frameworks of meaningful relationships within particular domains: the botanical, the sociological, and the astronomical. He considers other myths, namely those of Phaon, Mintha, Ixion and the Lemnian women, which show important structural similarities (distinguishable at the level of the codes) to the story of Adonis and Myrrha and can therefore help him distinguish the particularly important structures. These myths allow him to decipher

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<sup>1</sup> M. Detienne, *The Gardens of Adonis: Spices in Greek Mythology*, tr. by J. Lloyd, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994 (Fr. orig. *Jardins d'Adonis*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1972) – later referred to as "Detienne".

<sup>2</sup> R. Chlup, *Structuralist photocomics*, (2005) <<http://religionistika.ff.cuni.cz/spolecnost/>> (May 9, 2007), (Cz. orig. *Věda konkrétního v pedagogické praxi - strukturalistický fotokomix*).

<sup>3</sup> J.-P. Vernant, "Introduction" to Detienne, viii.

a wider network of possible relations defined by (1) a limited number of oppositions, and (2) by their common subject matter of seduction or spices. Detienne's inquiry is thus set within a specific ethnographical context (unlike Frazer's global interpretation) with some aspects referring even to a particular historical context.

On the level of the botanical code, the myth of Myrrh and Adonis is a myth about spices: myrrh, being an aromatic tree, and Adonis, being born from the myrrh tree.<sup>4</sup> Detienne refers to a great body of evidence concerning the use of spices in Greece and concludes that the basic function of spices is to "bring together beings normally separated from each other."<sup>5</sup> In the myth, Myrrh seduces her father and Adonis seduces two goddesses – one from above, Aphrodite, and one from below, Persephone. Ethnographic evidence shows that, in Greece, spices were involved (1) in religious rituals: they were burnt at festivals and sacrifices; and (2) in cosmetics: they were processed into cosmetic products (oils and perfumes) and were used to enhance erotic attraction and desire. Therefore, it may be said that along the vertical axis, the power of spices is able to bring together and mediate between gods/goddesses<sup>6</sup> and humans; and, along the horizontal axis, the power of spices to arouse erotic desire brings together different human beings who are normally separated from each other. The way in which this "bringing-together" takes place along both axes, is seduction, which can further be seen as an antithesis to marriage: Myrrha refuses to marry and thus accept her female virtue, for which she is punished by Aphrodite and condemned to desire to make love with her father. This moment of Myrrha's rejection of marriage followed by her erotic desire for her own father is a crucial point, which reveals the sociological code of the story. At once, the whole structure of marital relationships and the ideology of the institution of marriage, are revealed: Myrrha refuses an institution that is bound to the divine domain of Aphrodite and thus violates the relationship between humans and gods; her sexual relationship with her father destroys the functional framework of relationships within a family – she becomes her father's mistress and her mother's rival. Therefore, the bringing-together by the means of spices and seduction is found in opposition to the institution of marriage. Furthermore, on the level of ritual, the Adonia is considered to be a festival of feminine licence and representation of disorder, which women are capable of creating. Here, we can already spot the importance of the second element of the opposition – marriage – to help us understand the meaning of Adonis.

However, it is not only seduction what the myth of Adonis and Myrrha is about. There is an important internal opposition within the character of Adonis, which again is well distinguishable within the botanical evidence. Two plants define the life history of Adonis: the myrrh tree and the lettuce. Adonis' life ends in the field of lettuce where he is either killed by a boar, or hidden by Aphrodite. Lettuce is characteristic of being cold and wet; it is bound to die and decay, and is therefore connected with death.<sup>7</sup> It was also regarded by Greeks to be capable of decreasing men's sexual potency. The meaning of lettuce as derived from its position within the framework of the myth of Adonis, is threefold: (1) The precocious lover

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<sup>4</sup> Myrrh is thought to be able to arouse desire even in an old man. Detienne also mentions a story of Myrrha, Little-Myrtle, who arouses desire in her husband by rubbing herself with a perfume only to escape and leave him unsatisfied. She does so due to an agreement not to make love with their husbands, made by Greek women in order to force their husbands to bring a war to a close. In one of the versions of the myth of Adonis, Adonis' mother is not changed into a myrrh tree but into a spring of myrtle. The name, Little-Myrtle, is said by Detienne to carry heavy erotic overtones; the plant is consecrated to Aphrodite; and is worn by marrying couples. Furthermore, "in Greek love terminology, Adonis is synonymous both with perfume and with lover." These should support the idea of connection of spices, perfumes and Myrrh (and consequently Adonis) that Detienne is establishing. (Detienne, 62-63.)

<sup>5</sup> Detienne, 61.

<sup>6</sup> Note also the bringing-together of the two goddesses, one from above, and the other one from below.

<sup>7</sup> "Lettuce is a food for corpses." (*Euboulos* in Detienne, 67.)

dies in the field of lettuce, his death and impotence coinciding; here, the lettuce stands in opposition to myrrh; impotence to sexual desire; death to life.<sup>8</sup> (2) Adonis' death in the lettuce field is an antithesis to the virtue of a man-warrior; he is attracted to the world of women, pleasure, and passion that stands in opposition to the world of men – the world of war and hunting.<sup>9</sup> (3) As becomes clear from the myth of Mintha explained below, lettuce is a member of the *spices–cereals–lettuce* triad within which it stands, together with *spices*, in opposition to *cereals*. This triad is analogous to Lévi-Strauss's *cooked–raw–rotten* triad – cereals standing for *the cooked* therefore *cultural* spices standing for *the raw*;<sup>10</sup> and lettuce standing for *the rotten*, the *uncultural*.

Interconnectedness between the botanical code and the sociological code can be clearly shown on the example of the myth of Mintha, or Mint. Mintha is a mistress of Hades and a rival of Persephone (therefore of Demeter, too) whose story has a tragic ending.<sup>11</sup> Again, the botanical features ascribed to the plant of mint can help us understand her position within the context of stories about spices. Mint is said to have power to “incite men to pleasures of love”, its seductive powers lying mainly in the pleasant smell which “sweetens the breath”. However, it is also a plant that cools the body and has chthonic connotations. Moreover, it is used as a contraceptive and is thought to be capable of procuring abortions; the plant bears only atrophied fruits and so it may seem to be “sterile”. Just as in myth Mintha is turned either into a “sweet-smelling” plant or into an “insignificant grass” (for the myth of Mintha see footnote 11), so too, the botanical characteristics of mint are of double status: it has characteristics of spices, but also of “wet and cold” grasses; it stimulates desire, but also procures abortion, i.e. prevents possible fruits of the desire. Mints sterility and fruitlessness, referred to in myth as well as in botanical evidence, make her stand in opposition to Demeter, “the goddess of the fruitful earth and protectress of fruits – of the ‘dry fruits’ of the cereals as well as of some of the fruits of trees.”<sup>12</sup> These differences within the status of mint correspond to the difference between myrrh and lettuce: mint is at once above the cereals (as a kind of spice) and below them (as an “insignificant grass”).

In the myth of Mintha, the role of Demeter and Persephone and the role of the institution of marriage as opposed to the relationship based on seduction, are clearly very important. Now, since the double status of mint has been found to correspond to the *myrrh–lettuce* dyad so precisely, Detienne can assume that correspondingly, Demeter stands in opposition to Adonis and Myrrha, as it does in the opposition to Mintha. It has already been suggested that seduction, as it takes place in the myth of Myrrha, is opposed to marriage. Detienne finds yet another evidence for the opposition between seduction and marriage, which should finally justify and make explicit that this opposition is parallel to the opposition between *Adonis and Demeter*.

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<sup>8</sup> This opposition becomes clear also from the myth of Phaon, an old boatman. Aphrodite took a form of an old woman and asked him to ferry her. He did not ask for money and she appreciated this so much that she turned him into a handsome youth. According to another version of the myth, Aphrodite gave Phaon a perfume, which made him the most attractive man in the world. According to yet another version, it was an ointment that caused him to attract women of all over the world. One of these versions tells that in the end, just like Adonis, Phaon is hidden in the field of lettuce by Aphrodite. (Detienne, 69-71.)

<sup>9</sup> Detienne, 66.

<sup>10</sup> Detienne, 60-61. The way perfumes and ointments are made does not require fire; in fact, they are protected from the heat and brightness of the sun. “... myrrh and spices are set in opposition to those plants whose own internal concoction has to be supplemented by their being cooked over a fire which is a substitute for the power of the Sun which is too far away.” (Detienne, 60.)

<sup>11</sup> Persephone is said to have torn Mintha limb from limb and Hades granted that she should become an aromatic plant. According to another version, Demeter tramples Mintha down reducing her to dust. Mintha rises again in the form of an “insignificant grass”. In a third version, Demeter notices a wild mint plant and is filled with hatred for it, therefore condemns it to sterility. (Detienne, 71-73.)

<sup>12</sup> Detienne, 75.

Be it his own contribution to the story of Myrrha or its authentic element,<sup>13</sup> Ovid tells us, that the incident of incestual intercourse of Myrrha and her father took place while Myrrha's mother (together with other married women) was celebrating a festival in honour of Ceres-Demeter<sup>14</sup> which "lays emphasis on the closeness of relations between mother and daughter and at the same time ruling out any complicity between father and daughter."<sup>15</sup> Thus, the opposition between the myth and, consequently, the ritual of Adonis and the myth and ritual of Demeter is explicitly suggested. Although the festival of Ceres does not directly correspond to that of the Thesmophoria,<sup>16</sup> it resembles it to a large extent. The two festivals "have a number of features in common that establish a ritual model which is the perfect antithesis of the Adonia."<sup>17</sup>

The following table shows the oppositions between the Thesmophoria and the Adonia.<sup>18</sup>

	<b>The Thesmophoria</b>	<b>The Adonia</b>
<b>Organization</b>	Organized by the <i>polis</i>	Organized privately
<b>Social status of the women*</b>	Legitimate wives of citizens	Courtesans and concubines
<b>Atmosphere</b>	Grave solemnity	Gaiety, noisy revelry
<b>Status of men*</b>	All excluded, even the husbands	Men were invited by the women
<b>Sexual behaviour*</b>	Continenence	Seduction
<b>Botanical code*</b>	<i>Vitex agnus castus</i> , also called the chaste tree <sup>19</sup>	Frankincense and myrrh
<b>Smells</b>	Slight smell of fasting, smell of garlic. "The bees", <i>melissai</i> , as women called themselves during the festival, have horror of perfumes and were regarded to remain virgins throughout their lives. <sup>20</sup>	Excessive use of perfumes
<b>Food*</b>	Fasting	Feasting, drinking
<b>Activity / Location</b>	Sitting on the ground	Dancing on rooftops

Not only is the seduction present in the ritual and myth of Adonis in opposition to the status of lawful wives of Demeter, it is also in opposition to their status of fertile mothers of legitimate children – this, indeed, is the core double opposition between the two festivals that

<sup>13</sup> According to Detienne, for our purposes, it does not matter whether this part was invented by Ovid or not "...for our type of study it is sufficient that this 'Demetrian' episode not only illustrates the sociological framework in which the seduction is set but also the importance of the opposition between the world of Demeter and that of the lovers. In this way it proves that the open hostility between Mintha and the couple formed by Demeter and Persephone is an essential element of the myth of Mint." (Detienne, 78.)

<sup>14</sup> *Sacrum Anniversarum Cereris* – Hellenized Roman festival – the most important ritual in hellenized cult devoted to Ceres-Demeter.

<sup>15</sup> Detienne, 77.

<sup>16</sup> For example, the Thesmophoria was celebrated in the autumn whereas the festival of Ceres took place in the summer. (Detienne, 78.)

<sup>17</sup> Detienne, 78.

<sup>18</sup> In the table, I have used parts of Detienne's table (Detienne, 82), and have added some other elements on my own, based on Detienne's interpretation. I have marked the original, unaltered (or just slightly altered) rows with an asterisk (\*).

<sup>19</sup> It is supposed to calm sexual appetite and have contraceptive effects.

<sup>20</sup> Detienne, 79-80.

is found within the sociological code. As seen in the story of Myrrha, seduction is an ultimate threat to family relationships (relationships between parents, and between parents and children), which fall under Demeter's instructions. The Thesmophoria provides instruction, or rather; the Thesmophoria *is* the instruction to ritually overcome the tension caused by apparent proximity of daughter and father simply by establishing closeness of mother and daughter during the festival, while excluding father from it.

After all that has been said, there is yet another level on which further deciphering the opposition between Adonis and Demeter is possible: the astronomical code. The festival of Adonis was celebrated during the hottest days of the year, called the dog-days.<sup>21</sup> This is particularly important in regard to the peculiar kind of gardening, which took place during the Adonia – cultivation of Adonis' gardens. Women sew cereals and vegetables into small broken clay pots, placed them in the heat of the sun, and watered them until the shoots appeared. Being deprived of water and left in the sun, the shoots soon became desiccated. Is this a reminder of the death of the god of vegetation? Detienne presents us with a few proverbs, which suggest that the gardens of Adonis were rather a synonym for something superficial, rootless, immature, sterile, etc.<sup>22</sup> It does not seem that these would attest some kind of magical practice to promote growth of vegetation. "On the contrary", says Detienne, "the negative character of all these epithets indicates that the gardening of Adonis stood for a negation of the true cultivation of plants and was an inverted form of the growing of cereals as represented, in a religious context, by the principal power responsible for cultivated plants, namely Demeter."<sup>23</sup> In Plato's *Phaedrus*, this opposition is made even clearer: not only is there a difference between *paideia* – serious agriculture that "educates" the plants, and *paidia* gardening turned into a game and amusement; there is an important difference between the time periods in which cultivation of plants takes place – eight months in the case of the Thesmophoria, and eight days in the case of the Adonia. This short time that is given to plants to spring up is in opposition to serious farming of Demeter, just like there is an opposition between timing of the gardening (hottest days vs. the sowing season), and between the spaces that are given to the plants to grow in (small pots vs. Mother Earth). According to Detienne, what was happening during the Adonia was a "systematic violation of the rules for correct agriculture."<sup>24</sup>

The astronomical code reveals to us a framework of opposite astronomical conditions for opposite kinds of farming: farming of Adonis and that of Demeter. However, Detienne attempts to show that there is, again, a double opposition, parallel to the double opposition within the *myrrh–cereals–lettuce* triad. He is able to decipher it from the central role that a ladder plays in vase painting illustrating the Adonia. The ladder is not just an instrument, used to put the gardens of Adonis on rooftops. In the pictorial terminology of the vases, it is "the symbol of an exceptional linking of the Earth below and the Sun above."<sup>25</sup> Before we make clear what the double opposition between the Adonia and the Thesmophoria within the astronomical code is, we must first decipher the symbolical role of the ladder.

The dog-days are a period of time when there is an imbalance between the dry and the wet – the sun burning and desiccating everything and making humans, animals and plants suffer. At the same time, however, it creates favourable conditions for harvesting of myrrh and other spices.<sup>26</sup> This can be seen from a group of vase paintings that depict a woman or an

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<sup>21</sup> This was a period of time around the 20<sup>th</sup> of July. (Detienne, 100.)

<sup>22</sup> Detienne, 102.

<sup>23</sup> Detienne, 103.

<sup>24</sup> Detienne, 105.

<sup>25</sup> Detienne, 106.

<sup>26</sup> Detienne reminds us, that this harvesting of myrrh was fictional. Nevertheless, Detienne considers it to be "fully adequate from the point of view of the myth." (Detienne, 115.)

Eros descending the rungs and placing an object into a bowl held by a young woman. Most probably, the objects placed into the bowl are grains of frankincense or loaves made of myrrh. That the paintings really depict some kind of harvesting of spices can be proved (1) by the relationships between the principal figures in the scene,<sup>27</sup> and (2) by the close relationship of Adonis and the spices. Thus, the ladder is a symbol of “positive coming-together of the Earth Below and the sun Above,”<sup>28</sup> which takes place in the second part of the festival. In the first part, women climb up the ladder and place their gardens in the heat of the sun. This first phase is negative and corresponds to death symbolized earlier by the lettuce; it is a negation of harvesting of cereals. The second, positive phase corresponds to life, and the “all-powerful nature of frankincense and myrrh.”<sup>29</sup> The double opposition that Detienne was able to decipher thanks to the opposition found between the specific astronomical conditions responsible for two kinds of agriculture is thus the following: (1) There is the opposition between the cultivation of Adonis’ gardens and harvesting of spices, which is parallel to that of myrrh and lettuce in the myth (or to the double status of Mintha). (2) The second opposition is between the two forms of anti-cultivation – one negative and one positive – and the regular form of agriculture of Demeter.

As we have seen above, the gardens of Adonis are sterile and bear no fruits. The seeds planted in them are desiccated before reaching maturity and are in contrast to the useful and fruit-bearing plants of Demeter. Demeter represents cultivated plants and implies that the cultivation is provided by the means of marriage. Detienne shows how the ritual of marriage operates with symbols of both the “thorny” uncultivated life and the cultivated “life of the milled corn”,<sup>30</sup> and how it mediates between them via symbolical objects of pan,<sup>31</sup> pestle, and sieve,<sup>32</sup> in order to provide a fluent passage from the uncultivated life into the cultivated life.<sup>33</sup> Adonis and his sterile seeds stand in opposition to this cultivated life of “milled corn”; and again, the opposition is double: both his excessive premature sexual potency and his actual sterility bear no fruits.

There is one last opposition within both the astronomical and the sociological code – that between women and men. The heat of the sun during the dog-days does not devastate women, who are of “wet nature”, as it devastates men, who are of “dry nature”.<sup>34</sup> During these days of imbalance, men lack sexual potency whereas women are full off excessive sexual desire. Since Adonis does not belong to the world of men (as I have shown in the beginning), there is no internal contradiction for Detienne to say that the Adonia is a festival of women while the Thesmophoria is a festival of men.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> One of the figures “is bringing the spices back from Above, the second one is receiving them and the third one is feeding the incense-burner.” (Detienne, 115.)

<sup>28</sup> Detienne, 115. See the relation between spices and bringing-together of terms normally set apart.

<sup>29</sup> Detienne, 116.

<sup>30</sup> The formula “I have fled from evil and found what is best” was pronounced on the wedding day by a child wearing a thorny crown and carrying loaves of bread. (Detienne, 117.)

<sup>31</sup> On the day of their marriage, Athenian women were obliged to carry a pan for roasting barley. (Detienne, 117.)

<sup>32</sup> There was a pestle hanging outside the marriage bedchamber. The sieve was carried in a procession by a young child. (Detienne, 117.)

<sup>33</sup> “... the various culinary instruments... can be seen as mediators between the two extreme terms reconciled in the figure of the child who is both crowned with thorny plants and loaded with bread. At one extreme we have the wild fruits and plants which represent the food of an age that preceded the cultivation of cereals; at the other, the loaves of bread ready to be eaten as a pledge for newly married couple’s impending participation in the life of the milled corn.” (Detienne, 117.)

<sup>34</sup> The nature of women and the heat of the sun form a balance whilst men are exhausted from the excessive heat.

<sup>35</sup> This may correspond to the fact that the traditional agents of Greek agriculture were men. In the Adonia, it is women who are the farmers.

Some scholars have regarded Adonis to be a foreign deity whose figure can best be understood by tracing his origins. Detienne, on the other hand, proves that the mythical figure of Adonis is so much interconnected with other elements of Greek religious system that, despite the fact that his origins, indeed, are foreign, his figure is an element within the system. The reason why the Greeks “needed” Adonis is (1a) that he had to “fill the role” of a seducer, lover, etc; and “it was necessary to find a deity whose features were sufficiently indistinct for them to merge in with the image the Greeks had created for themselves of the lands of the East.”<sup>36</sup> The figure of Adonis represented Oriental sensual manner of life as the Greeks imagined it. (1b) As a seducer, Adonis represented the Other, the “negation of the religious and political values represented by Demeter.”<sup>37</sup> Especially in his relation to Demeter, Adonis reveals himself as a part of the Greek religious system. (2) Most of the evidence about Adonis comes from the fifth or fourth century Athens when Adonis enjoyed great popularity.<sup>38</sup> This popularity was due the private manner in which the Adonia was celebrated (unlike the official public Thesmophoria) and which appealed to expanding bourgeoisie with their interested in private sector rather than in political life. “The political crisis which developed in the fourth century thus provides a historical context for the myth and ritual of Adonis – a context in which the tension within a more ancient pattern of behaviour comes to the fore.”<sup>39</sup>

After Detienne’s detailed treatment of the myth and ritual of Adonis, Frazer’s interpretation cannot be accepted any longer. Detienne’s sophisticated detection of various structures on various levels has placed Adonis into a particular position defined by specific relations from which meanings are derived. There are, however, serious problems with the structuralist method, which I will deal with in the second part of my thesis. Here, I would like to point at a more particular problem of Detienne’s interpretation: it is probably not the Thesmophoria “in general” that is in such precise opposition to the Adonia, but only one of the days during which it took place, apparently the *Nésteia*, the Fast. Indeed, we are informed of ribald laughter and obscene speech (*aischrologia*) taking place during the Thesmophoria, most probably on its third day. Ignored by Detienne, *aischrologia* will become an important riddle for the interpretations that follow.

One cannot refrain from suspecting Detienne of selecting evidence in order to fit his model. Detienne’s rigid establishment of the opposition between the two rituals will become a subject of critique to which I will get later on in this paper.

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<sup>36</sup> Detienne, 128.

<sup>37</sup> Detienne, 128-129.

<sup>38</sup> Detienne says that Adonis might have been popular throughout the Greek world, not only in Attica. (Detienne, 129.

<sup>39</sup> Detienne, 130.

## 2. HENDRIK S. VERSNEL

In his analysis of the Thesmophoria,<sup>40</sup> Versnel focuses on the paradoxical nature of the festival. The paradox is inherent in the structure of the ritual and in the myth of Demeter and Kore, revealing itself with every exposure of its particular elements, which refer one to another. Versnel strongly opposes any attempts to explain the ritual using one single paradigm only, as such an approach not only “tyrannizes” the evidence, but also disables a more complex view of the multivocal character of the ritual and of the way in which its participants and observers may perceive it. He uses Pradhan’s<sup>41</sup> analysis of Dutch obsession with weather to show how different approaches to understanding of human behaviour complement each other. Pradhan gives three explanations, which correspond to three major scholarly approaches to religion: 1/ the *substantive*, which sees ritual “as a form of communication with the higher beings the action is directed to, and focusing on the benefits that the participants wish to receive from them”;<sup>42</sup> 2/ the *functionalist*, seeing religion’s function in preserving society; and 3/ the *symbolic* or *cosmological* approach, in which the main focus is on the meaning that religion gives to reality. Since the symbolic-cosmological approach is also functionalist in that the religion is still viewed as an “instrument for constructing a cosmology ‘to live by’”<sup>43</sup>, Versnel suggests that the two latter schemes, the functionalist and the symbolic, can legitimately be “lumped together” as “an instrumental and a symbolic functionalist definition respectively” and can later be confronted with the substantivist-communicative definition. From the substantivist perspective, the Thesmophoria is seen as an essentially agrarian festival referring to fertility at all its levels, which Versnel finds plausible as “this feature is simply too obvious for doubt”<sup>44</sup>. However, in his attempt to answer, “what religion *says* about society”, this approach is insufficient.

Versnel starts his quest with a brief account of interpretations of several problematic elements of the Thesmophoria that have been suggested before. Among these elements are ritual objects (*lugos*, pine twigs) of ambivalent meaning, the phenomenon of *aischrologia*, liberation of prisoners and suspension of council meetings, and unclear meaning of sacrifices. According to Versnel, when trying to explain these features, many scholars have been blinded by their paradigms, unable to pay appropriate attention to the paradoxes and inconsistencies. He shows that the concept of a festival of reversal or exception offers a perspective from which it is possible to see all elements of the Thesmophoria and their role in the ritual, without modifying them to fit a monolithic concept:

The first account of reversal or exception is found in signs of primitivism present in the ritual: women stay in booths or shelters and sleep on beds made of *lugos* (*vitex agnus castus*). It is false, says Versnel, to think that these are arbitrary relics of ancient time for why then, would this habit be maintained in such a small number of rituals? He argues, “aspects of

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<sup>40</sup> H. S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion II. Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993 – later referred to as “Versnel”.

<sup>41</sup> R. Pradhan, “Mooi weer, meneer: Why do the Dutch speak so often about the weather?”, *Etnofoor* 2 (1989), 3-14. Rajendra Pradhan is an Indian anthropologist.

<sup>42</sup> R. Chlup, “The Semantics of Fertility: Levels of Meaning in the Thesmophoria”, *Kernos* 20 (2007), forthcoming.

<sup>43</sup> Versnel, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Versnel, 240.



‘primitivism’ in rituals of exception generally refer to the exceptional nature of the situation itself, signifying the reverse of normality, a temporary return to an a- or precultural way of life, ...”<sup>45</sup> Temporary liberation of prisoners and suspension of court sessions and council meetings<sup>46</sup> can be understood in the same way, and so can be the indecent speech and behaviour – *aischrologia*. Versnel’s interpretation of one of the sacrifices, the *zêmia* (punishment/penalty), stresses the exceptional and reverse character of the whole rite: Unlike Deubner, who thinks that the meaning of the sacrifice is to pay for things, which could have gone wrong during the festival,<sup>47</sup> Versnel says, that “the *whole* festival is manifestly (and necessarily) wrong (...).”<sup>48</sup> Meaning of the other sacrifice, the Chalcidian pursuit, is later revealed in the light of myth, which shows the tension between women and men – the latter being threatened by the former in usurping their sphere of power – and it again points to the exceptional character of the festival and to the fact that the festival is “essentially *wrong*”. What such an exceptional festival does for women is that it lets them lay off the burden of their everyday submission to male dominance and enjoy privileges unavailable to them in their normal lives under *phallogratia*.

So far, Versnel has shown that, on the level of ritual practice, we are confronted with several elements that do not fit the fertility paradigm but which can very well be explained functionally as signs of reversal and exceptional character of the ritual, which compensates women for their subordinate position in society. He now moves to the cosmological level of myth where he finds several paradoxes revealing one central inconsistency, which Versnel calls the “Thesmophoric Paradox”. The paradox is “between its [The Thesmophoria’s] focus on the fertility and sexuality of the married woman on one hand, and the emphatic suppression of any opportunity to consummate this, on the other.”<sup>49</sup> The structure of the paradox is inherent in various elements of the Thesmophoria: in the ritual’s reference to bees, *numphai*, and *choiros*, explained below:

The myth of Demeter revealing the secret rituals of the Thesmophoria to daughters of King Melisseus, “king of the bees”, explains how participants of the festival came to be called *melissai* – the “bees”. Versnel refers to Detienne’s explanation of the connotations of bees, according to which the bees were a symbol of female domestic virtue: bees are known for their abstinence in sexual matters and are believed to remain virgins throughout their lives<sup>50</sup>. Versnel says that “... we may conclude that the ritual name of ‘bees’ exactly symbolizes the expectations concerning the female behaviour during this festival of reversal: although everything may be messed up, and all sorts of extravagancies condoned, the *sexual codes* should be carefully maintained.”<sup>51</sup>

A myth of Demeter at Paros contains another paradox and another clue: the Thesmophoria refers to *numphai*, not the matrons.<sup>52</sup> *Numphê* is mainly a virginal girl just before marriage, in which her sexual and erotic powers are to be consummated; but *numphê* also means “clitoris” and “bride”.<sup>53</sup> These express the great tension between sexuality and erotics as only potential powers on one hand, and as a means of reproduction on the other. Although still a virginal “bee” not engaged in sexual activities, *numphê* refers to potential,

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<sup>45</sup> Versnel, 242.

<sup>46</sup> Versnel, 238. Versnel mentions Deubner’s explanation of liberation of prisoners: Deubner says that release of chains and knots was supposed to promote fertility (L. Deubner, *Attische Feste*, Berlin, 1932).

<sup>47</sup> Versnel, 239. Versnel refers to Deubner, *Attische Feste*.

<sup>48</sup> Versnel, 249.

<sup>49</sup> Versnel, 257.

<sup>50</sup> Versnel, 252-253.

<sup>51</sup> Versnel, 252.

<sup>52</sup> Versnel, 253.

<sup>53</sup> Versnel refers to J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece*, New York: Routledge, 1990, 181. (Versnel, 254.)

and relatively unlimited, sexual and erotic powers. According to Versnel, both, the notion of a “bee” and that of a *numphê*, “directly and emphatically refer to sexuality and the erotic, but *only* as a *potential* quality, not to be consummated for the time being”<sup>54</sup>; they reveal the same paradox: sexual matters are evoked but not practiced. *Numphê*, connoting at once clitoris and bride, is structurally the same as a matron participating at the festival as a *numphê* and a bee. There is yet another symbol, participating in the same structure: pomegranate, whose seeds were not supposed to be eaten if they had fallen on the ground.<sup>55</sup> Versnel argues that apart from pomegranate’s general relation to fertility, the fruit has a specific function as it refers to courtship and to “focusing attention on the sexually maturing maiden before marriage and to the wedding ceremony itself.”<sup>56</sup> The reference is, again, “to potentials and expectations rather than to fulfilment, ...”<sup>57</sup>, just like it is in the notion of *numphê*.

Another evidence to support the presented structure is the term *choiros*, which means “pig” and also “female sexual organ”. Versnel refers to M. Golden<sup>58</sup> who argued that “... [*choiros*]... stands for a potentially hostile natural force which can be tamed to benefit human society; that force is female sexuality”<sup>59</sup>, and goes on quoting Golden’s statement: “women’s sexuality, like the pig, could help or harm.”<sup>60</sup> Versnel explains that the term *choiros*, is “predominantly applied to *young* pigs and, accordingly, to (parts of) young girls”<sup>61</sup> and that it, again, refers to a young girl before marriage, the *numphê*.

During the festival, the status of matrons is reduced to that of virginal *numphai*, the sexual and erotic symbolics being imposed precisely on the status of the *numphai*, who, however, are symbols of virginity. Why is this so?

Essential ambivalence of female sexuality lies in its procreative powers on one hand, and in the possible danger to the social order that it represents, on the other. This ambivalence is present in the ceremonies of the Thesmophoria, which are “*beneficial and necessary* from a socio-biological point of view but *wrong and undesirable* from a socio-cultural point of view.”<sup>62</sup> Women’s licentious behaviour violated the family codes, while their usurpation of men’s sphere of power violated the codes of the community,<sup>63</sup> and the only way, in which this “cognitively unbearable”<sup>64</sup> anomalous behaviour could fit in the society without fatally attacking its principles and/of division of the sexes, was by reducing the matrons into the state of the nymphs. The “unbearable” paradox of shamefully behaving matrons was thus mediated by the element of chastity<sup>65</sup> intrinsic to the status of the *numphê*.

Versnel speaks of the “fatal ambiguity of the female race” and briefly describes the notion of women in Ancient Greek society. Women, like children and slaves, are thought to lack self-control because of which a dividing line between these categories of people and free male citizens is created. However, there is another dividing line, says Versnel, between those women who may “indulge in their natural passions and those, whose natural inclinations are restrained and subjugated to cultural control.”<sup>66</sup> The first is allowed to either mythical women

<sup>54</sup> Versnel, 254.

<sup>55</sup> Kore confirmed her marriage to Hades by eating from the pomegranate.

<sup>56</sup> Versnel, 255.

<sup>57</sup> Versnel, 255.

<sup>58</sup> M. Golden, “Male Chauvinists and Pigs”, *Echos du Monde Classique* 32 (1988), 1-12.

<sup>59</sup> Versnel, 256.

<sup>60</sup> Versnel, 256.

<sup>61</sup> Versnel, 257.

<sup>62</sup> Versnel, 275. Radek Chlup explains that the Greeks “found it healthy for the functioning of society that occasionally their women behave contrary to the norm, but at the same time saw such behaviour as violating some of the basic principles of Greek ideology.” (Chlup, “The Semantics of Fertility”.)

<sup>63</sup> Versnel, 275.

<sup>64</sup> Chlup, “The Semantics of Fertility”.

<sup>65</sup> Chlup, “The Semantics of Fertility”.

<sup>66</sup> Versnel, 277.

or to human *numphai*. Both are thought to be wild and to belong to the nature, however, only the former are not to be tamed. The latter, the human *numphai*, must be subjugated, “tamed”, “cultivated”, and “ploughed” in the marriage, but even after marriage, there is the threat of a woman going wild and creating disorder. “The result is a lasting ambiguity between women’s natural characteristics that are peripheral to the male dominated body politic – woman as outsider – and her vital significance for the existence of the state though her progeny – woman as insider. In other words, marriage retains a certain duality in that the sexual-erotic facet (especially attributed to the ‘female intruder’) belongs to nature and thus affects its character as a social and cultural institution.”<sup>67</sup> It follows that marriage is the institution that draws the boundaries and structures the society: it transforms wild girls into cultivated women and, at the same time, it “represents a definite stage in the evolution from barbarism to civilization”<sup>68</sup> - from barbarism engaged in promiscuity into Greek culture and monogamy. The festival reenacts the tension and ambiguity of female fate, which is materialized by marriage and justified by culture.

In a footnote, Versnel quotes Zeitlin: “As a human drama, the myth reenacts the necessary divergence between the lives of the mother and daughter, but, as divine drama, it promises the eventual reunion of their roles.”<sup>69</sup> Versnel agrees with her but does not really seem to recognize the importance of the idea: What he himself has shown is “the necessity and meaning” of an enactment<sup>70</sup> as if it was equally necessary and meaningful for all parts of the society. Zeitlin’s view, however, suggests a - structurally similar but essentially different – significance and meaning, which the festival might have had for its female participants. She also says (and Versnel seems to appreciate it), that what the ritual acts out is a “double bind”, which demands chaste behaviour from women on one hand, and their involvement in procreative matters on the other – an ideal of a virgin mother.<sup>71</sup> Of course, for Versnel, different interpretations and approaches do not necessarily disqualify one another, but instead, they may complement each other. And, as we have seen, he himself approaches the topic from different levels: He agrees with the substantive approach of Tylor and his fertility paradigm but moves to another level – the functionalistic one – which allows him to see the significance of the Thesmophoria in “its focus on aspects of social reversal”. Finally, on the third level, Versnel is able to recognize new meaning of several cultural elements. In the context of historical society, he finds the “paradoxical intertwining of the images of matrons and virgins.”<sup>72</sup>

In the title of his book *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion. Vol. 2, Transition and Re-versal in Myth and Ritual*, Versnel suggests a perspective from which he looks at the ritual and finds its meaning. He has been able to understand, how ritual can mediate between two different kinds of experience and two different kinds of reality. He claims that the mediation is necessary but what if it is the bi-polar reality and experience, which are necessarily created in a ritual? Versnel’s interpretation is quite ignorant of women’s own perspective and their possible agency, but being inclusive of multiple approaches to ritual, his concept does allow other interpretations as well.

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<sup>67</sup> Versnel, 281.

<sup>68</sup> Versnel, 283.

<sup>69</sup> F. Zeitlin, “Cultic Models of the Female: Rites of Dionysus and Demeter”, *Arethusa* 15 (1982), 149, in Versnel, 286-287.

<sup>70</sup> Versnel, 287.

<sup>71</sup> Versnel, 260.

<sup>72</sup> Versnel, 288.

### 3. JOHN J. WINKLER

It may seem obvious and trivial to say that one has to be very cautious when approaching texts that inform us of women's rites as these were written by men and are "likely to be colored by anxiety, suspicion, or contempt".<sup>73</sup> Still, how are we to distinguish between the facts and the additional masculinist attitudes, which may accompany these texts?

Many studies have already shown that though under constraints of male-dominated societies, women have had lives of their own, showing various forms of resistance or manners of accommodation to patriarchal systems. John Winkler has tried to investigate how Greek women might have dealt with their subordination, one of the areas of his investigation being the women's Demetrian rites of the Thesmophoria, Stenia, Haloa, and the ritual of Adonia. Based on other comparative studies as well as his own, Winkler finds it plausible to suppose that women might have been looking at their rites from a specific perspective, different from that of men, and that they might have had an "alternative consciousness" of their role within the rituals as well as within the society. In order to prove this and to suggest what the women's perspective might have been, Winkler approaches the rituals using a very interesting, though poorly articulated, method: He uses the limited textual sources on the women's rituals in quite a reserved way – mainly to show some problematic aspects of Detienne's argument and interpretation. After he has removed what he thought was a patriarchal bias in Detienne's concept and corrected some of Detienne's evidence, Winkler applies Detienne's structural analysis of the Thesmophoria and the Adonia to Sappho's narratives about great goddesses and their young lovers, as analyzed by Eva Stehle.<sup>74</sup> What he finds in the end is a "different figuration of the phallos, a different evaluation of both sex and gender in Greek society, one which was expressed and shared by women when they were freed from the oversight and imperative control of men."

The key to Winkler's study of women's perspective is the question: What were women laughing at during the Demetrian festivals? Laughter and *aischrologia* were notorious elements of these rituals and in order to decipher their meaning, Winkler gets a hint from a slightly confusing part of the scholia to Lucian describing the Haloa.<sup>75</sup> This text offers a partial explanation for the carrying of phallic symbols in a ritual procession of the Rural Dionysia<sup>76</sup>: for men, the images were a mark of gratitude for "deliverance from a state of permanent satyriasis".<sup>77</sup> There is no explanation for why, during the Haloa, women carried

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<sup>73</sup> Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire* – later referred to as "Winkler" – 188.

<sup>74</sup> E. Stehle, "Sappho and the Enclosing Goddess", forthcoming at the time Winkler's book was published. I have not been able to look the article up.

<sup>75</sup> The text is confusing because it is not clear whether or when the unknown author talks about the Haloa or the Rural Dionysia. The festivals were celebrated in the same month, Poseideion. (Winkler, 195.)

<sup>76</sup> Although he talks about the Haloa, it seems to be the Rural Dionysia that he is describing.

<sup>77</sup> "Shameful images of male genitals are prominently featured, about which they say that they are a token of human generation, since Dionysos gave us wine as a tonic drug that would promote intercourse. He had given it to Ikarios whom some shepherds actually killed because they did not realize how the drinking of wine would affect them. Then they went mad because they moved insolently against Dionysos himself. Driven thoroughly mad in connection with the very image of their shame, they received an oracle saying that they would recover their sanity when they made and erected clay genitals. Once this had been done, they were freed of their problem. This festival is a memorial of their experience." (Scholion to Lucian in Winkler, 194-195.)

images of genitals. However, it looks as though it was a time of sexual liberation for we are told that the women were free to say whatever they wanted to (even the “most shameful things”) while being given advice on adultery by priestesses.<sup>78</sup> Winkler imagines that bakery genitals, which were provided, might have been eaten, “and if so, we may wonder with what licking of lips, what nips and bites, what gestures...”<sup>79</sup>

For Winkler, it seems suggestive that the two festivals – the Rural Dionysia and the Haloa – were celebrated in the same month and were confused by the unknown author of the scholion. He notices that men and women separated from each other in order to conduct a rite representing themes of sex and gender. The connection between the two festivals and their common symbols and images suggests how differently men and women might have represented the roles of sex and gender. It seems that in the Rural Dionysia, the figuration of the phallos must have caused mixed feelings in men, since it showed their erection at once as something useful and shameful. On the other hand, women seem to have enjoyed rather different atmosphere – full of talk on adultery and laughter.

Another Demetrian rite, the Thesmophoria, can tell us more. Except for the laughter, what is important for Winkler about the Thesmophoria is a structured opposition of the sexes that can be deciphered from the way the festival was organized, from different representations of genitals, and procedures for handling them. The ritual was conducted by women themselves. Again, the women manipulated with phallic symbols made of dough as well as with piglets that stood for female genitals.<sup>80</sup> These two items seem to stand for the cooked and the raw, the cultural and the natural. When the remains of these objects were to be taken out of the *megara* by the Bailers,<sup>81</sup> women clapped their hands in order to keep serpents away – if we accept that the serpents symbolized maleness, the women were “thus keeping the boundary between female and male secure and well-defined.”<sup>82</sup> Although Winkler is applying Detienne’s structural analysis here, he is very critical of some of his conclusions. He disagrees with the opposition between the Thesmophoria and the Adonia “identified or constructed” by Detienne. He accuses Detienne of “trimming the evidence” and shows how problematic it is to claim that the Adonia stands for feast while the Thesmophoria stands for fast.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, the opposition between the participants who were thought by Detienne to be courtesans in the case of the Adonia and lawful wives in the Thesmophoria is unacceptable for Winkler,<sup>84</sup> as well as the distinction between “good male agriculture” and “bad female sexiness”.<sup>85</sup> What Winkler agrees with, is Detienne’s (or Plato’s) opposition between the short-lived pleasure celebrated in the Adonia and the long-term fruitful work celebrated in the Thesmophoria. We are going to see, however, that this distinction will receive an entirely new meaning in Winkler’s further treatment of the women’s rites.

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<sup>78</sup> “Women process there alone and are at liberty to say whatever they want to: and in fact they say the most shameful things to each other. The priestesses covertly sidle up to the women and whisper into their ear – as if it were a secret – recommendations for adultery.” (Scholion to Lucian in Winkler, 195.)

<sup>79</sup> Winkler, 196.

<sup>80</sup> As proven by Golden in Golden, “Male Chauvinists and Pigs”, 1-12.

<sup>81</sup> Bailers were women who were assigned to do this.

<sup>82</sup> Winkler, 198.

<sup>83</sup> Winkler shows that food consumption in the Adonia is not emphasized by any of the sources; and there *was* feasting in the Thesmophoria. (Winkler, 199.)

<sup>84</sup> Winkler, 199-202. Winkler shows that it is not clear who attended the Thesmophoria. Most probably, the festival was in the hands of citizen wives. However, there is evidence that there might *not* have been only the courtesans taking part in the Adonia but also legitimate wives. Winkler also uses comparative evidence from Unni Wikan and her “Shame and Honour: a Contestable Pair”, *Man*, New Series 19 (1984), 635-52. Wikan shows that women do not make such sharp distinctions between chaste and adulterous wives. Thus, Winkler says: “It may be doubted that Athenian women always felt as strongly about this social differentiation.” (Winkler, 201.)

<sup>85</sup> Winkler, 199.

So far, Winkler has sketched the connection between women's laughter and the figuration of the phallos in processions. He has also applied Detienne's ideas of contrasts and opposition of the sexes to the Demetrian rites. What he is about to do next is show how Eva Stehle's analysis of stories of great goddesses applies to the structure of the rites:

Stehle's idea that struck Winkler is that there is a "certain preference in Sappho for the tales of great goddesses carrying off young mortal lovers."<sup>86</sup> There are several stories, which share a common structure – a goddess falls in love with a young mortal man whom she carries away and puts him in a field, or a cave, or hides him somewhere in her house, after he has lost his virility. The examples that Winkler uses include the story of Dawn and her lovers,<sup>87</sup> the story of Selene and Endymion,<sup>88</sup> that of Aphrodite and Phaon,<sup>89</sup> and the story of Aphrodite and Adonis. All of these lovers are left somewhere outside of time and space, powerless and helpless. "That the goddess carries the man away to her own house is a reversal of the patrilocal or virilocal pattern prevalent (though not universal) in Greek towns. The implied permanence of the union makes it a quasi-marriage."<sup>90</sup> Tithonos permanently aging, Endymion permanently sleeping, Phaon and Adonis lying down in a lettuce (dead, impotent, or both) – all these share a common fate: "He whom a goddess loves ceases to be a phallic man ..."<sup>91</sup>

We may speculate about how men might have understood these tales. However, Winkler suggests that Stehle's analysis provides an interpretive context for deciphering the meaning of the Demetrian rituals and the Adonia. A key opposition here is Detienne's (or Plato's) contrast between the eight-day cultivation of the Adonia and the eight-month serious cultivation of Demeter. While men's role in reproduction of both the crops and humans is to "plough and plant the seed", Mother Earth and women do the hard eight-month/nine-month labour, process cereals, and take care of children. "If any contrast is to be drawn between the respective roles of the sexes in cultivating these natural processes, men must be placed squarely on the side of Adonis, Aphrodite's eager but not long enduring lover."<sup>92</sup> What the gardens of Adonis thus symbolize, says Winkler, is the marginal role that men play in human reproduction and in agriculture; the gardens of Adonis are a "sexual joke" of that kind for which the Demetrian festival were a primary location.<sup>93</sup>

As I said in the beginning, Winkler's method is poorly articulated. However, I will attempt to summarize all the basic steps that he made in order to come to his conclusion: (1) By pointing at the Rural Dionysia and Haloa, fused into one festival by the author of the scholion to Lucian, Winkler attempted to suggest that the common feature of these rituals' processions – the phallos – may not be a coincidence. The two festivals took place in the same month and they both seemed somehow to develop themes of gender and sex. While men were processing their mixed feelings about erection and its possible shame, women were talking about adultery and laughing about "shameful things". The connection of the phallos and women's laughter is made explicit in the case of Haloa but it may be acceptable to apply it to the other Demetrian festivals as well. (2) Winkler used the example of the Thesmophoria

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<sup>86</sup> Winkler, 202.

<sup>87</sup> Dawn carried off Orion, Kleitos, Kephalos, and Tithonos. Winkler mentions the story of Tithonos whom Dawn seized for his beauty. She asked Zeus to make him immortal but forgot to ask for eternal youth. Tithonos grew old and when he finally was not even able to move, Dawn hid him in a room and closed the door. Only his voice continued to live. (Winkler, 202-203.)

<sup>88</sup> We do not know much about Endymion; however, he might have been cast into an eternal sleep.

<sup>89</sup> Phaon, like Adonis was hidden in a lettuce path by Aphrodite, lettuce referring to impotency and death. See chapter on Detienne, footnote 8.

<sup>90</sup> Winkler, 203.

<sup>91</sup> Winkler, 204.

<sup>92</sup> Winkler, 205.

<sup>93</sup> Winkler, 205.

to show how the festival separated between the sphere of men and the sphere of women. Although it was an interest of both men and women to conduct the ritual, only women took part in it. (3) The stories of the great goddesses carrying of young mortal lovers suggest a difference between the powerful goddess and her soon-becoming-impotent lover. The contrast made between the Adonia and the Thesmophoria by Detienne is helpful here: it suggests that the short eight-day cultivation of seeds that wither away so soon, which was enacted at the Adonia, may represent men's contribution to reproduction and may be a kind of sexual joke. This is in contrast to the serious eight-month labour of women and the earth, referred to at the Thesmophoria.

Winkler managed to show the existence of alternative consciousness that Greek women might have had of themselves. In fact, by further reference to the abundant ethnographic material supporting his conclusion, he has made the existence of women's alternative view of themselves so plausible, even obvious, that in the light of his interpretations, the rigid structuralist schemes are found to be rather normative, than descriptive models of gender relations. However, we may still ask further questions on the nature of such an alternative consciousness and, importantly, on its relation to dominant ideology (is it subversive or complicit?). The following analysis is an attempt to answer such questions.

#### 4. BARBARA E. GOFF

In her interpretation of the Thesmophoria and Adonia,<sup>94</sup> Barbara E. Goff is taking into consideration the workings of ideology, which allow her to build an entirely new model for the women's rituals. The previous accounts of the rites mentioned before have raised questions – willingly or unwillingly – of the relationship between patriarchal ideology and women's own perception of their role in the society, but, unfortunately, these questions remained either absolutely ignored or answered only partially.

Goff offers the following model of ideology: Ideology attempts to justify inequalities and disadvantages, which are generated in situations of conflicts, by making them seem “natural”, and therefore inevitable. It thus creates a subordinated subjectivity and sanctions it with particular modes of behaviour. “At its most successful”, ideology produces “the kind of subjectivity that desires only the sanctioned forms of activity and actively rejects others, even when they are clearly more productive and prestigious.”<sup>95</sup> However, it is inherent in the nature of ideology that it also leaves for its subordinates a space where they can perform some kind of agency, and since there is always a threat that the “naturalized” subordination will come into conflict with “needs and desires generated elsewhere” or with alternative identities offered by non-dominant subcultures,<sup>96</sup> there is a need for constant renewal of ideology in the process of ideological production. To put it more clearly and apply it to our case of the women's rites: Gender ideology constructs the category of women by associating certain “natural” sexual characteristics with certain inequalities.<sup>97</sup> Based on these inequalities, women in patriarchal societies are denied independent agency in many areas of valued activity but they are also allotted a sphere in which they are required to “exercise an energetic practical agency”, namely the sphere of household management and childrearing. Thus, gender ideology restricts women and, at the same time, leaves a space for agency to them. Agency is therefore a part of gender ideology and is produced with it in the same process.<sup>98</sup> This model of ideology–agency relationships can be applied to the study of women's ritual practice, which is consequently found to be a site of ideological production as well as a site of individual and group agency.

Goff notices that, in Athens, there was a cycle of women's festivals, which addressed women on the issue of their identity, sexuality and reproduction and which repeated regularly. She claims that the festivals and, mainly, their repetitiveness should not be understood in

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<sup>94</sup> B. Goff, *Citizen Bacchae: Women's Ritual Practice in Ancient Greece*, Berkley: University of California Press, 2004 – later referred to as “Goff”.

<sup>95</sup> Goff, 10.

<sup>96</sup> Individual identity “arises only from the multiple identifications offered by the different subcultures that contribute to the formation of the subject participating in them... Crucially, identifications furnished by subcultures may conflict with those purveyed by the dominant ideology, and from such conflict can emerge the resistant intuitions and concepts that enable the individual subject to occupy a dissident position.” (Goff, 13.)

<sup>97</sup> Goff, 10.

<sup>98</sup> To support this claim, Goff draws on Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Berkley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984, 289, who claims that subjects actively reproduce constraints in their own daily routine and that “agency and constraint are thus produced and reproduced in the same gestures”. (Goff, 12.)



terms of instrumentality, i.e. as tools for promoting fertility of humans and crops,<sup>99</sup> but rather in terms of gender ideology: as a demonstration of constant necessity to produce and reproduce a certain kind of identity. Goff points out that “the necessity repeatedly to rehearse women in the terms of their proper identity tends to demonstrate that such an identity is not part of the natural biological order but is instead the product of a particular social organization. To the extent that ritual repeats its inculcation of female identity, it also underlies the fragility of that identity and its contradictions.”<sup>100</sup> Ideology, in its attempt to “naturalize” conflicts and inequalities, runs a risk that these conflicts and inequalities will become visible and so will the effort of ideology to make them seem “natural”. Because of this, ideology needs not just to renew itself in constant repetition and self-justification, but it also needs to “take account of what is not itself”, i.e. it must recognize other possibilities and alternatives and dialectically to process them into a broader synthesis. In our case of the women’s rituals, we have to keep in mind that the process of ideological production is a historical process and its participants are historical women who constantly develop tactics<sup>101</sup> with which they cope with the constant forces of subordination. Therefore, we may expect to observe a relationship of constant struggle between the aims of ideology and women’s development of tactics of agency. Women’s rituals constitute the historical arena in which the dialectic relationship between ideology and human agency is staged. Goff says that the multivocality of the rites is generated precisely by this dynamic relationship and gender politics and not only by “liminality” or by the play of symbols.<sup>102</sup>

According to Goff, the primary contradiction on which the gender ideology of the women’s rituals is built is that of a “chaste wife”. The rituals address women not only on the issue of fertility but also as “erotic subjects responsible for producing and reproducing certain parameters of female identity”.<sup>103</sup> In the rituals, much ideological effort is aimed at what Goff calls the *management of desire* in order to avoid the possibility of a conflict between women’s fertility and their sexual desire which is evoked within the codes of marriage. The issues of chastity and licence are not to be attributed to the Thesmophoria and Adonia respectively, as was suggested by Detienne, but, instead, “the ritual sphere as a whole divides women’s sexuality into chastity and licence, requiring women to act out different versions of themselves at different times.”<sup>104</sup>

Goff illustrates how both chastity and licence are acted out in the ritual of the Thesmophoria. Referring to her model of ideology–agency relationship, she also suggests various possible readings of several aspects of the ritual:

First of all, women act out chastity in that they leave their husbands to gather for the Thesmophoria where they fast and sleep on beds made of *vitex agnus castus*, and they call themselves “bees” (*melissai*) referring to the insects’ dislike of sexual matters. Furthermore, they chew garlic<sup>105</sup> and avoid attractive clothes to render themselves unattractive. Following Nancy Demand, Goff claims that, chastity is not to be understood only in terms of

<sup>99</sup> Goff offers two reasons for rejecting the “instrumentality” paradigm: (1) since there were so many rituals preoccupied with adult women and fertility, fertility might not, in fact, have been at issue; (2) the argument of a mimetic link between women and procreativity cannot be accepted because of the fact that it was the male who was thought to be the “primary source of generation”. (Goff, 122.)

<sup>100</sup> Goff, 123.

<sup>101</sup> Goff stresses that women do not “necessarily ‘rebel’ against their subordinate status or ‘subvert’ it...” (Goff, 124.)

<sup>102</sup> Goff, 125.

<sup>103</sup> Goff, 122.

<sup>104</sup> Goff, 128.

<sup>105</sup> Goff refers to Aristophanes’ *Women at the Thesmophoria* 493-94 where Euripides’ in-law mentions a custom of women chewing garlic in the morning after a night on the town in order to avert suspicions of their husbands. “Such a practice would help to site the Thesmophoric garlic directly on the cusp between chastity and licence.” (Goff, 127.)

management of women's own desire but also as their ability to manage and withstand the desire of potential adulterers.<sup>106</sup> However, in contradiction to chastity, women also indulge in shameful licentious speech, *aischrologia*, and thus represent themselves as erotic subjects. *Aischrologia* is thought to be derived from Iambe's joking with Demeter. Iambe made Demeter laugh and agree to stop mourning for her lost daughter and start eating and drinking again. According to another version, Demeter emerged from her mourning after Baubo amused her by lifting her skirts. Many interpretations claim that, in this manner, Demeter accepted female sexuality and her daughter's gendered destiny.<sup>107</sup> Goff offers several possible readings of *aischrologia*: (1) It might have promoted healthy interest in sexual pleasures, provided that these were confined to marital relations. (2) *Aischrologia* may also be read as a carnivalesque element of the Thesmophoria. By indulging in shameful speech, women challenged patriarchal authority and patterns of behaviour required from them. (3a) *Aischrologia* may also be interpreted as "speaking the body", which is particularly suggested by the event of Baubo's or Iambe's jesting with Demeter. Within the Greek context, speaking what should not be heard confirms the link between "the female and the unspeakable" and thus confirms women's assigned gender roles. (3b) However, "speaking the body" might have had its practical meaning. Greek women had knowledge about their reproductive capabilities and possibilities of controlling them<sup>108</sup> and might have shared the knowledge in practical conversations during the women's rituals. "Such conversations would not construct women as objects, identical with their physical bodies, but would construct those bodies as objects of women's knowledge."<sup>109</sup> Thus, women might have been exercising certain autonomy and agency.

The contradiction between chastity and shameful speech attempts to direct woman's desire so that it is managed in accordance to the codes of marriage, although within its constraints can be found areas for potentially and relatively autonomous behaviour. In the Thesmophoria, the female identity is not formed only by these ideologically constructed contradictions. The ritual, as well as ideology itself, also works with specifically feminine experience, which it at once sanctions and validates. Here, what becomes significant for Goff's account of the Thesmophoria is its third day, the Beautiful Birth, which, again, can be read in various ways: (1) Just as Demeter finally accepted the fate of her daughter and withdrew her devastating powers, in the Beautiful Birth, women seem to have accepted the limitations placed upon their sexual powers.<sup>110</sup> Women are moved from a "potentially antisocial condition of chastity, fasting, and mutual abuse" to the day of reunion of mother and daughter.<sup>111</sup> (2) The reunion of mother and daughter may have yet a more positive meaning than mere acceptance of a woman's subordinated position within the society. In the ritual, women are shown an endless cycle of female experience "in which daughters, separated from their mothers by marriage, become mothers themselves of marrying daughters..."<sup>112</sup> Moreover, Goff points out that women in the Thesmophoria resemble virgin girls that they once were, in that they are away from their domestic duties, husbands and

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<sup>106</sup> Goff, 127, refers to N. Demand, *Birth, Death and Motherhood in Classical Greece*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994, 118.

<sup>107</sup> Goff, 129.

<sup>108</sup> Goff refers to L. Nixon, "The cults of Demeter and Kore", in *Women in antiquity: New assessments*, edited by R. Hawley and B. Levick. London – New York: Routledge, 1995, 75-96, who suggested that the various herbs associated with rituals and myths of Demeter could have a function of fertility control. (Goff, 132.)

<sup>109</sup> Goff, 132.

<sup>110</sup> In this interpretation, Goff is following Zeitlin, *Cultic Models of the Female*, 129-57.

<sup>111</sup> Goff, 126, 132-133.

<sup>112</sup> Goff, 133. Again, Goff is referring to Demand, *Birth, Death and Motherhood in Classical Greece*, 119, and is further developing her reading of the reunion.

children.<sup>113</sup> Following this resemblance, women mourn the loss of the virgin daughter and celebrate her recovery. Goff says: “If the women participants may be identified with the virgin daughter as well as with the matron, then the divine reunion between the mother and child will also constitute a reunion between the women and their former, younger selves. The Thesmophoria would thus mediate every woman’s personal, gendered history, closing the gap introduced into it by marriage.”<sup>114</sup> The destiny of a married mother is, in this manner, inflicted on women and, at the same time, compensated for. Therefore, the ritual can be seen “to validate a specifically female model of experience without having to mobilize a full-fledged discourse of sex-role rebellion.”<sup>115</sup>

So far, we have seen how ideology attempts to manage woman’s desire, in this way, constructing a desired kind of subjectivity, and how it afterwards validates the experience of thus subjectivized personality while validating and justifying itself. There is yet another area, within which ideology needs to confirm itself: the area of spectators, the audience. Women are not constructed as the absolute “other”, as they would consequently become unacceptable to the society of dominant males. However, women *are* represented as a potential danger to the patriarchal order, which may best be illustrated on the accounts of (imaginary) female violence. There are several narratives<sup>116</sup> which offer a picture of women celebrating the Thesmophoria and attacking men who try to approach them while they are engaged in the ritual. Goff suggests that the fantasy of Thesmophoric violence may be derived from an account of the festival which claims that the festival was introduced to Greece from Egypt, by the Danaids<sup>117</sup> who murdered their husbands on their wedding nights. Zeitlin suggested that the Thesmophoria was established “as a compensation and consolation to the Danaids, and by implication to all women, for their enforced acquiescence in patriarchal marriage”.<sup>118</sup> This notion of the Thesmophoria might have reassured men of the possibility of female anger and violence, and the importance of their management in the ritual, in which they did not participate. Women, on the other hand, might have taken “secret satisfaction” from the narratives.<sup>119</sup>

Similar observation of such “conflicting reading” of the same ritual by different groups can be observed in the case of the Adonia. Here, Goff follows Detienne and Winkler but refuses to choose between their contradictory interpretations. Instead, she suggests that the principle of ritual polyvalence be retained to allow for female participants and male audience different possibilities of reading of the ritual. In the peculiar gardening of the Adonis’ gardens, Goff sees a parody for maternal nurturance. She claims that there is a “contradiction inherent in patriarchal organization, whereby women, entrusted with the responsibility for life, are necessarily also equipped with the power to bring death”.<sup>120</sup> The fantasy of homicidal mothers, which appears in Greek literature, expresses the danger of women having no possibility to publicly articulate their anxiety but to release it by killing their sons. The ritual sphere offers a space where such anxieties may be publicly released by dramatizing women’s

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<sup>113</sup> Reference to Versnel’s treatment of the Thesmophoria is particularly suggestive here.

<sup>114</sup> Goff, 133.

<sup>115</sup> Goff, 134.

<sup>116</sup> E.g. Aristophanes’ *Women at the Thesmophoria*.

<sup>117</sup> Goff refers to Herodotos 2.171, 137.

<sup>118</sup> Goff, 137 with reference to F. Zeitlin, “Patterns of gender in Aeschylan drama: *Seven Against Thebes* and the Danaid Trilogy”, in *The cabinet of the Muses: Essays in classical and comparative literature in honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*, edited by M. Griffith and D. J. Mastrorarde, Atlanta, 1990, 103-115.

<sup>119</sup> Goff also mentions an “obscure” element of the Thesmophoria – the Chalcidian Pursuit – that refers to a story according to which, on account of women’s prayer, the enemies were turned back and pursued to Chalkis. “May we not read here the trace of some heavily repressed account of female violence, conveniently deflected from the citizenry to the generic “enemy”?” (Goff, 138.)

<sup>120</sup> Goff, 143.

destructive powers. Goff concludes: “The ritual process can thus be seen to guard men from women’s deadly impulses and simultaneously to protect women from themselves. Women are taught the ever-present danger of their antisocial tendencies but are shown a symbolic form with which to satisfy them; men have confirmed their distrust of women but see that the all-powerful mother has already been reduced to the status of an incompetent gardener.”<sup>121</sup>

Not only does Goff’s model of ideology and agency enable multiple interpretations of the ritual practice, it also offers a very plausible explanation for how and why there is the multivocality of the rituals. Indeed, I find her account of the women’s rituals very inspiring and would like to further elaborate on it in the second part of my thesis.

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<sup>121</sup> Goff, 143.

## PART TWO

### IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

#### 5. STRUCTURALIST AND POST-STRUCTURALIST METHODS

As we have seen, the four views of the Thesmophoria and the Adonia vary in their interpretations and conclusions to a certain extent, and it is my goal now, to explain why this is so. In my analysis, I will focus on different methodological approaches employed by the scholars, and will attempt to illustrate how particular assumptions lead to certain conclusions. My analysis should be read as another venture into the debate between structuralism and post-structuralism, which is also a debate about ideology and agency. I will try to illustrate how contemporary ideological analysis draws upon this debate and valorizes the various approaches while being critical of them as well.

Women's rituals and their interpretations are particularly illustrative of the crucial points of the debate. This is because both structuralism and post-structuralism have something to do with women's issues: structuralism has revealed the place of exchange of women in kinship relations, and post-structuralism has been influenced by various liberation movements, including feminism. It was my intention to organize the previous four chapters according to a specific order so that their succession might reveal to the reader the evolution of method and the way it generates new meanings. Therefore, my analysis will follow the two lines – that of methodology and that of meaning – in order to show how particular approaches are capable of deciphering the context of marriage, the crucial institution of patriarchal societies.

Following theories of structural linguistics developed by Saussure and Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss attempts to show how cultural systems resemble language, in that the meanings that the systems mediate are derived from relationships within the systems. We may take kinship as an example: it appears to be a natural fact derived from biological reproduction but the meaning of its constitutive elements, e.g. sister and brother, is established “not by the natural contents of the terms themselves, *but by the relations between members of the family group*”.<sup>122</sup> Although structuralism recognizes that, like language, cultural system is a social construct, which may, as such, establish *arbitrary* relationships among its parts; it claims that there exists a *universal* structure along which all systems of kinship are organized, the structure being the exchange of women. Through this institution, communication with affinal groups is maintained, as well as reproduction within a group. In marriage, men are confirmed in their identities – through women, who are mere objects of the exchange with no identity of their own – by being symbolically differentiated from male members of affinal groups, and by

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<sup>122</sup> E. Csapo, *Theories of Mythology*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, 217.

consolidating the internal relationship within their own group.<sup>123</sup> The exchange of women is also supported by the similarly universal incest taboo, and together, they constitute the two primary areas, determined by immense ideological efforts. Structuralism reveals these efforts, which are, in principle, efforts to provide transition between cultural contradictions by establishing pseudo-logical relations between them. Contradictions are found to correspond to other contradictions, forming a totalized network of relations constantly referring one to another, as we have observed in Detienne's interpretation of the Thesmophoria and the Adonia.

Detienne's precise employment of the structuralist method perfectly reveals the way in which relations within structures work. In correspondence to Lévi-Strauss' analysis of kinship, Detienne finds marriage to be the central arena, in which various contradictions are implied. The aim of the institution of marriage is to produce legitimate children, not born of incestuous relations, but of a legitimate union between a man and a woman. The necessity of marriage is not self-evident, especially since women and men do not naturally belong together.<sup>124</sup> But, not only is the institution sanctioned by the gods, it is thought to represent a final stage in evolution from barbarism to culture.<sup>125</sup> Thus, marriage also provides a kind of collective identity, which differentiates the "cultural" Greeks from other societies as well as from their own "acultural" past (referred to in myths).<sup>126</sup> The position of a woman in a marriage is over-determined by cultural requirements derived from the necessity of marriage as a cultural institution *par excellence*, and justified by the framework of corresponding relations, which are "relentlessly replicated in myth and ritual, despite endless variations. They seem but a few strands of a vast and seamless web, whose fearful symmetries and haunting consistencies drum home a single ineluctable and incontrovertible message."<sup>127</sup>

Although Detienne's approach enables us to see the need for cognitive overcoming of inconsistencies, Versnel's analysis of the Thesmophoria goes a lot further. He reveals similar structure of contradictions associated with marriage as Detienne does, but since his analysis is focused more on the ritual performance (not to mention his exclusive interest in the Thesmophoria alone), he is able to offer a deeper insight into the way meanings are created and made to fit consistently into a particular system.

In the chapter devoted to Versnel's interpretation of the Thesmophoria, I explained his analysis of the "Thesmophoric Paradox", which is a paradox between the attention that the ritual gives to women's procreative powers, sexuality and erotics on one hand, and the way it stresses the impossibility to consummate these, on the other; and which reveals itself in various elements of the ritual context. Versnel does not show, as much as Detienne does, how the basic paradox corresponds to analogous paradoxes found within various codes, but instead, illustrates how it is cognitively mediated on the level of ritual practice: the "unbearable" situation of the matrons acting shamefully is mediated by them being reduced to the status of the *numphai* whereby sexuality and erotics can be evoked while chastity is maintained.

Detienne and Versnel have revealed to us two possibilities of ideological overcoming of contradictions: consistency between contradictions is provided either by constant reference to

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<sup>123</sup> J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 38-39. Judith Butler refers to C. Lévi-Strauss, "The Principles of Kinship", in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, 496.

<sup>124</sup> As, Detienne has shown, spices bring together beings who are normally separated from each other. They play a significant role on wedding day, when they are used in the form of oils and perfumes in order to promote attraction between husband and wife.

<sup>125</sup> Versnel, 283.

<sup>126</sup> Marriage is also associated with agriculture – another way to enforce its (constructed) inevitability.

<sup>127</sup> Csapo, *Theories of Mythology*, 268.

analogous contradictions, as Detienne has shown, or by cognitive and ritual (therefore performative) mediation of the paradoxes, as has been shown by Versnel.

There are, however, serious problems with the structuralist approach. Neither Detienne, nor Versnel shows a possibility of agency. Of course, possibility of agency is always questionable but in the case of such total, universal structures, which are only defined by themselves, refer to themselves, and are justified by themselves, possibility of agency becomes rather a theoretical question of falsifiability. This systematic totality, in fact, seems to deny an important point of Saussure's theory, according to which, the relation between signifier and signified is essentially arbitrary. The moment of arbitrariness, suppressed by the structuralist requirement of a total and universal structure, becomes the main point of departure of post-structuralist critiques and theories.<sup>128</sup> Together with the structuralists, the post-structuralists recognize that structure is a cultural construct, which gives order to "reality" and enables (and constructs) its intelligibility. But, while some structuralists refuse intelligibility beyond structure, some post-structuralists go as far as to claim that the arbitrariness of the relationship between signifier and signified enables unlimited displacement of meanings when signifier points at everything else but never accumulates a signified.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, it seems plausible to claim that structure acts rather as a normative ideal than as a descriptive feature of experience.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, Detienne seems to be so devoted to the ideal, that his analysis of the women's rituals becomes extremely rigid and unintuitive, adjusting the evidence to fit the ideal of a structure, as Winkler has shown. We have to keep in mind, that Detienne's analysis of the Thesmophoria ignores those features of the festival, which challenge Detienne's paradigm of the Thesmophoria being a "fast". Furthermore, both Detienne's and Versnel's interpretations ignore historical perspective and the possibility of historical change that it may reveal. Detienne mentions a link between historical conditions and meaning of the Adonia but that does not give us a reason to suppose that the basic structure might ever be challenged by any change of historical conditions.

Applying Detienne's method in a reserved way, Winkler manages to cross the boundaries given by the structure and reveal the fact of a different consciousness that women of Greece might have had of themselves. His analysis is particularly significant in that it offers evidence of this alternative consciousness, recovered with the use of Detienne's structuralist method applied to tracing of the corresponding relations (various relations of the phallos and laughter; stories of great goddesses and their incompetent lovers and their relationship to certain features of the Adonia; and the relation of the Adonia and the Thesmophoria).

Although Winkler is successful in achieving his goal, he does not seem to take much interest in the way in which the different consciousness might also relate to structure and ideology. This is recognized and theorized by Barbara Goff's exhaustive analysis, which I have described in the respective chapter. Her model of ideology–agency relationship is inclusive of both structuralist and post-structuralist methods and of the structuralist and humanist positions respectively. This is so mainly because the model recognizes the dialectics of ideology and agency: contradictions inherent in ideology necessarily create a possibility of dissent, which ideology later attempts to embrace and thus impose control over it. The model

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<sup>128</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 40. See also chapter on Barbara Goff.

<sup>129</sup> Csapo, *Theories of Mythology*, 284.

<sup>130</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 16. Butler actually speaks about identity, not structure, here, but her account of identity very much resembles our account of structure in that identity, like structure, attempts to create coherence and continuity of a person. Butler's account of the formation of gender identity assumes that "clean" categories of womanhood and manhood are cultural constructs of regulatory mechanisms of power. Human experience is, usually, not in absolute conformity with the categories.

also recognizes existence of multiple ideologies followed by possibility of conflicting reading<sup>131</sup> of rituals' significance, and importance of historical perspective (although Goff does not elaborate on this second point very much). According to Goff's interpretation, women participating in the rituals were neither "cultural dupes", nor subverting rebels; they were actively developing tactics with which they could cope with their subordination.

Goff's interpretation has its strongest points precisely in providing the model which, in fact, valorizes various other approaches to women's rituals and gender ideology; and proving this model to be effective. But it may be pointed out, that her application of historical and ethnographic material is rather superficial. She shows how many conflicting readings of rituals are possible and how these fit into the ideology–agency model but she fails to provide a deeper insight into the historical metamorphoses of the patriarchal institutions, so we may get the impression that her evidence proves her method rather than a historical process.

Departing from here, I would like to make a brief point about contemporary approaches to gender ideology, which may be read as an attempt further to support the account of ideology described by Goff and its valorization of several approaches to the issue, but also as an illustration of positive dialogue between the approaches, which represents "one of the main strengths of post-structural criticism: its methodological eclecticism."<sup>132</sup> Using the analyses of Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu as examples, I would like to show how methods of psychoanalysis and corporal sociology with historical perspective might prove helpful in further studies of women's rituals in ancient Greece.

The feminist philosopher Judith Butler offers a critique of identitarian practices. She shows that identity, particularly gender identity, is constructed by regulatory mechanisms of power to appear as a coherent system based on alleged biological predispositions. Her analysis of the regulatory mechanisms is based on Lacan's and Foucault's critical accounts of psychoanalysis and provides a deeper critique, or rather re-reading, of structuralist and psychoanalyst assumption of incest taboo, in order to show how a particular management of desire attempts to create a reality of two different sexes attracted to each other. First of all, the incest taboo is not at all a universal fact but a normative ideal, which manages to organize binary opposition of the sexes in the first place. It has been argued by Foucault that "law" is a means of creating a desire that it itself suppresses. That is also the case of the incest taboo – it creates a homosexual desire that it later suppresses. Together with Foucault, Butler denies Freud's idea of original bisexuality or homosexuality and, instead, considers it a manifestation of precisely this manner of creating and managing desire. Thus, with the help of psychoanalysis and structuralism, Butler illustrates how the power is capable of consolidating itself by creating laws, which are supported by obedience but also by disobedience, since the law articulates disobedience and is capable of punishing it. She suggests that agency and dissent are only possible within the categories established by the power, the agency taking form of parodic performances of meanings of gender and sex – one can only challenge the ideology by performing, thus proving, its necessarily contradictory nature.

Butler's analysis may raise an important question of how exactly women's desire was managed, in the case of the Greek women's rituals, in order to create their "coherent" gendered identity, which would result in their agreement to involve themselves in the patriarchal institution of heterosexual marriage. This also shows the necessity of studies of

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<sup>131</sup> Csapo explains that the main difference between structuralist approaches and contemporary post-structuralist ones (which may be thought of as a result of dialogue between post-modernism and Marxism) is the manner in which language and semiotic systems are regarded. While structuralism stresses the totalizing structure of language, post-structuralist ideological analysis regards language as "practical, not abstract, as social, not autonomous, and as conflicted, not homogenous" (Csapo, *Theories of Mythology*, 299).

<sup>132</sup> Csapo, *Theories of Mythology*, 297.



male gender identity and its constitution through the management of desire, for, as we have seen, gender ideology is not maintained by its over-determination of female gender only, but by the overall establishment of two opposed genders as well. I dare to say that exclusive interest in the subordination of women is complicit with the patriarchal binary arrangements of gendered reality. Attention should be drawn here to Winkler's interpretation, which makes particularly explicit that men, like women, were addressed on the issues of their gender in rituals, and that this was even taking place at the same time, thus making explicit the structural context.

Keeping in mind Butler's and Foucault's notion of a "law", we may be able to understand the management of women's desire even further: The imperative of chastity and prohibition of non-marital sexual unions should also be seen as practices that create, manage and direct women's desire. The aim of the prohibition of non-marital sex is not to make it non-existent, but to create a desire and suppress it afterwards, thus consolidating the power and gender ideology. Women's "contradictory nature" is just as constructed as the "necessity of marriage". Correctly managed desire enables to create a correctly gendered female willing to enter a monogamous heterosexual union, while society's constant reference to women's alleged suppressed antisocial tendencies justifies the masculine dominance over the women. However, despite the normative ideological model of the existence of the two sexes attracted to each other, personhood and its gendered existence are rather incoherent in regard to expected identity. Not only would it be interesting to study historical practices aimed at creating coherent gender identities but it would also be interesting to study any manifestations of queer phenomena (gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual), the existence of which is supposed by Butler and performance of which is regarded by her to be the only arena of gender agency.

Being critical of Butler's postmodern optimism and intellectualism, Pierre Bourdieu represents rather the Marxist side of the post-structural dialogue. In his *Masculine Domination*,<sup>133</sup> he stresses the importance of institutional distribution of power and its historical metamorphoses. Moreover, being a representative of corporal sociology, his analysis of the material basis of unequal distribution of power further accounts for the conditions and manifestations of the masculine domination. His concept of the habitus explains well the symbolic domination, which is symbolic precisely in that it behaves like structure, referring to itself and confirming itself, requiring all subjects to participate in it.<sup>134</sup> The symbolic domination is exerted on bodies on the basis of dispositions, which are constituted by "schemes of perception, appreciation and action... which, below the level of the decisions of consciousness and the controls of the will, set up a cognitive relationship that is profoundly obscure to itself".<sup>135</sup> Bourdieu uses ethnographical material from the Kabyle society as well as from contemporary western society to show how permanent the structures of domination and subordination are. He argues for importance of a historical perspective that

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<sup>133</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, tr. by Richard Nice, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001 (Fr. orig. *La Domination Masculine*, Paris: Editions du Seuil).

<sup>134</sup> While women are forced to participate in their subordination, men are reliant on *amor fati* – "love of one's social destiny" (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 37).

<sup>135</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 37-38. The symbolic domination manifests itself in the form of symbolic violence. "Symbolic violence is instituted through the adherence that the dominated cannot fail to grant to the dominant (and therefore to the domination) when, to shape her thought of him, and herself, or, rather, her thought of her relation with him, she has only cognitive instruments that she shares with him and which, being no more than the embodied form of the relation of domination, cause that relation to appear as natural; or, in other words, when the schemes she applies in order to perceive and appreciate herself, or to perceive and appreciate the dominant (high/low, male/female, white/black, etc.), are the product of the embodiment of the – thereby naturalized – classifications of which her social being is the product." (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 35.)

enables deciphering the transformation of the masculine domination,<sup>136</sup> and also for the need to be cautious in optimistic evaluation of feminist achievements, which could lead attention away from the everlasting domination transformed into other forms. The only possibility to overcome symbolic domination is radical change in social conditions and institution, capable of producing particular dispositions, these being mainly the educational system, family, state, and church.

Bourdieu's analysis shows the importance of critical studies of institutions, which are, indeed, materializations of hierarchical structures. He suggests that historical research should focus on deciphering the whole systems and mechanisms capable of reproducing the structures of dominance.<sup>137</sup> In our case of Greek women's rituals, he would thus, probably, suggest that we try to analyze historical changes in the rituals' performance, structural analysis of their very meaning being just a part of the quest. The historical changes of the rituals would enable us to understand metamorphoses of gender ideology, which constantly reacts to tactics of agency. Such historical study could also help us understand why power takes interest in particular gender configurations, for example, why is it that a particular institutionalization of marriage is supported while other ones are ignored? Detienne mentions that there was, in fact, no clear distinction between the "legal" wife and the concubine, and that the concubines varied between courtesans and companions, the latter sometimes assuming the role of wives. According to Detienne, the institutional omission was compensated by religious thought, which took it upon itself to make a distinction between the statuses.<sup>138</sup> What was the context of this particular historical situation that made it so important for religion to establish the differences while the "legal" system did not take much interest in it?

Bourdieu's notion of habitus might prove very helpful in analyzing the manner in which the structural relations of domination are exerted on bodies and further embodied. How exactly were women's bodies controlled, what was Greek body politics like and how did it exercise its powers in the women's rituals? Indeed, corporal sociology and its methods of investigation offer many new possibilities for studies of rituals and religion as a whole.

An important question ought to be asked at the end of our quest for methodology: *Where between ideology and agency should methodology itself be placed?* Though both the structuralist and the post-structuralist methods seem to be effective tools for analyzing ideology, they too attempt to organize reality into a coherent intelligible system and thus resemble precisely the workings of ideology. However, it may also be that, to a large extent, the methods are themselves products of certain ideologies, for as Csapo says, the "description of society offered by structuralism more nearly corresponds to the social reality of the late twentieth century: totalizing, autonomous, dehumanizing, abstract, and increasingly based upon self-referential and referentless signs. The vision offered by postmodernism connives in naturalizing, perpetuating, and libidinizing these totalizing structures."<sup>139</sup> By raising the

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<sup>136</sup> The historical perspective should also trace down the "historical labour of dehistoricization", which constantly creates and transforms the structures of domination in order for them to appear ahistorical and permanent, therefore inevitable.

<sup>137</sup> "Historical research," says Bourdieu, "cannot limit itself to describing the transformations over time of the condition of women, or even the relationship between the sexes in different epochs... The true object of a history of relations between the sexes is thus the history of successive combinations (...) of structural mechanisms (...) and strategies which, through institutions and individual agents, have perpetuated the structure of the relations of domination between the sexes, in the course of a very long history, and sometimes at the price of real or apparent changes." (Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 83-84.)

<sup>138</sup> Detienne, 129.

<sup>139</sup> Csapo, *Theories of Mythology*, 285-286.

question I do not want to suggest a particular answer, but rather wish to touch upon the limits of my inquiry into methodology that I have offered here.

## CONCLUSION

In my thesis, I have attempted to show the broadness of the spectrum of methodological approaches used in interpretations of Greek women's rituals.

In the first part of the paper, I have thoroughly reviewed (within the range and limits of the thesis) the interpretations of four scholars, ordering them so that they illustrated some kind of a dialogue of methodological approaches – some of the scholars referring to other ones directly, some less so. In the second part of the thesis, I placed this dialogue into a wider context, which allowed me to deal with the very assumptions of the structuralist and post-structuralist methods. The nature of these assumptions, particularly their linguistic context, further appeared to have a specific influence on the conclusions made, regarding structure and agency. Thus, structuralist interpretations, departing from the notion of language being a total system, focused on the totalizing structure of Greek gender ideology while ignoring a possibility of dissent. On the other hand, recognizing the arbitrariness of the relationship between language and reality enabled the post-structuralist scholars to focus their interpretations outside of the borders of the totalizing ideology. Finally, my ideological analysis, aimed at studying the workings of ideology as well as of human agency, has shown both approaches as valuable, provided that they are approached critically.

On the level of the meaning of marriage that the four interpretations have been able to decipher, we have been shown women as being over-determined by the means of maintenance of the institution of heterosexual marriage (Detienne); as being let to exercise reversed roles though still under the constraints of marital chastity (Versnel); as having their own consciousness of themselves, their position in the patriarchal society, as well as of men (Winkler); and as being caught in a constant process of developing tactics of agency that the ideology later tends to encompass and thus disqualifies them (Goff). Just as each of these findings, particularly that of Detienne, Versnel and Winkler, shows its limits in managing to describe the whole of reality but proves valuable if complemented by the other ones, so too do the methods work best if combined under the post-structural "methodological eclecticism". I have also suggested, at the end of the second part of my thesis, several possibilities of application of other methods and perspectives to further understand the workings of gender ideology in the rituals for women of the Ancient Greece.

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