

*Female Socialisation in the Greek Lyric Chorus: The Role of Myth
and Religion*

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In the recommended reading for this paper Claude Calame discusses the reasons why we should view the chorus as an appropriate arena for education. He concludes that the poetry of Sappho was designed to foster feminine 'charm and beauty' in preparation for marriage, whilst Spartan poetry 'taught myths establishing the history and the institutions of their city.'¹ In this paper I intend to look closer at the socialising role which such mythological content could have played. I intend to demonstrate that the deities whom the girls served in choral performance, were those whose characteristics best suited the girls own developmental status. In this way the chorus serves as a venue for the girl's ritual progression from childhood to adulthood.

Firstly let us look at the chorus as a place for education. Plato writes extensively on the subject, claiming that in an ideal society the educated man should be fully chorally trained stating that 'choral dancing constituted the entirety of education.'² He adds the disclaimer "provided he sings good songs and dances good dances" implying that it was the duty of the poet to provide poetic material which would be socially beneficial to its

¹ Calame, 1997, 234.

² Plato, *Laws*, 672e.

performers.³ The educational value of the chorus came through being immersed in the material which was being performed. The process of preparing for a dance which may have been performed publically would have required a great deal of rehearsal. Not only would the lyrics need to be learned by heart, but serious commitment would be needed to master all of the relevant steps to perform in harmony with one's peers. I intend to argue that by performing the choral poetry the girls demonstrate their progression towards adulthood. The mythological material contained within the lyrics could have informed the girls on their civic past, political ideology and social role.

Though little poetry composed specifically for choruses of young girls survives, there is considerable evidence that such choruses were common. Calame has collected numerous examples of girls performing in choruses to a wide variety of different cult deities.⁴ The phenomenon arises from the Greek religious system where the attributes of different divinities are well-suited to the various developmental stages of the human life-cycle. In her recent work on priestesses Joan Connelly commented:

'Like choruses, the age-tiered groupings of ritual service reflected the collective character of a family model at the core. Each group had a special relationship to the divinity, based on the goddesses own age, sexual status, and characteristics.'⁵

³ Plato, *Laws* 653e-654d

⁴ Calame, 1977, 91-191.

⁵ Connelly, 2007, 29.

At every stage of their development girls could find a divinity capable of serving as a role model for the phase of life which they currently traversed. The youthful and virginal Artemis was appropriate for young girls, whilst Hera provided a role model for women dealing with marriage. As girls went through the various stages of their lives there was always a sympathetic divinity who could act as a paradigm of how to behave. The choruses in which the girls participated followed this pattern, with the divinity involved bearing some relevance to the performers stage of life.

The deity most associated with the protection of young and adolescent girls was Artemis. The chastity of the goddess is highlighted by the *Hymn to Artemis* where we see that she rejects the charms of Aphrodite in order to hunt and take part in the chorus.⁶ It is her rejection of Aphrodite that places her in the sphere of perpetual virginity making her an appropriate role model for the young maidens. Her association with the chorus is made early in the Homeric *Hymn to Artemis* where she appears as the leader of a divine chorus of Graces and Muses, and in the book 6 of the *Odyssey* where we find a description of her leading a group of Nymphs.⁷ Pausanias gives the example of the festival at Caryae in Laconia, where both Artemis and the nymphs were annually worshipped by maiden dances.⁸

⁶ *Hymn to Aphrodite*, 5.16-21.

⁷ *Hymn to Artemis*, 27.15-18.

⁸ Pausanias, 3.10.7.

In reality it appears that choruses dedicated to her mirrored those divine choruses she led, being comprised of unmarried young girls. Herodotus and a fragment of Autocrates, known through Aelian, describe choral dances to Artemis at Ephesos and Samos, whilst Pausanias lists numerous cult sites of the deity throughout Laconia in which choruses may have featured.⁹ Artemis appears regularly as the leader of a chorus of girls in Euripidean tragedy and the girl's youth is always made clear.¹⁰ In *Iphigenia in Tauris* the chorus dedicated to Artemis describe the pleasure of serving the deity:

May I take my stand in the dances of glorious marriages, where I stood as a maiden, twirling about in the dancing bands of other girls, away from my dear mother;

Autocrates gives a fine description of a chorus in the service of Artemis, in the *Tympanistai*, a comedy quoted by Aelian:

As sweet maidens, daughters of Lydia, sport and lightly leap and clap their hands in the temple of Artemis the fair at Ephesus, now sinking down on their haunches and again springing up, like the hopping wagtail.¹¹

⁹ Apud Aelian, *NA*, 12.9, Herodotus, 3.48 & Pausanias, 3.10.7, 3.24.9, 4.4.2, 4.31.3 & 3.23.10.

¹⁰ Calame, 1977, 91-101. See Euripides, *Hecuba*, 462-466, *The Trojan Women*, 551-555, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 1143-1158, *Helen*, 375-386, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 1467-1470.

¹¹ Apud. Aelian, *NA*, 12.9. Trans, Schofield, 1958.

Unfortunately, despite the substantial body of evidence which links Artemis to these choruses, no lyrical content survives. However, by examining the mythology surrounding Artemis along with the cults over which she presides a conception of her social role can be developed. To this end, an examination of the Athenian temple of Brauron can prove revealing.

The temple at Brauron was a site on the outskirts of Athenian territory where young girls would have travelled to honour Artemis during the *Arkteia*, a ritual which saw maidens pretending to be bears as part of the ceremony.¹² That the ritual involved choral dances is attested by images found on sixth-century pottery fragments at the site, where we see three maidens holding hands and dancing to the music of an *aulos*.¹³ The bear appears to have been an important animal for Artemis and many of its characteristics are projected onto the goddess herself. When discussing the association between animal and divinity Ingvild Gilhus has commented:

When an animal was associated with a divinity as his or her attribute, it was because the animal was specially protected by the god, described the nature of the god or indicated the realm that was specific to the god.¹⁴

¹² Aristophanes, *Lys*, 641-647. For images of girls engaged in this activity see Kahil, 1963, pl6 & 1965, pls 7, 8 & 24.

¹³ Brauron Museum, 527 (A3)

¹⁴ Gilhus, 2006, 106.

The bear epitomises Artemis' wild and occasionally ferocious nature making it deserving of her protection. It is therefore unsurprising that the mythological tale which leads to the founding of the *arkteia* features a bear prominently. The creature was tamed and kept at Brauron, where a girl foolishly taunted it. In its anger the bear scratched the face of the child, whose brothers killed it in retaliation. Unfortunately this provoked the wrath of Artemis who sent a plague, which could only be expiated by the sacrifice of a citizen's daughter. Future generations would then play the bear at the festival to ensure that the wrath of Artemis was appeased. Interestingly, both Lysias and the Suda report that no girl would be allowed to marry before they 'played the bear for Artemis,' although most scholars agree that it would be impossible for all Athenian girls to participate in the ritual.¹⁵ Probably a select band of girls from elite families made up a representative sample. Lines 641-647 of the *Lysistrata* also demonstrate that it could be an important step on the path to adulthood for a young Athenian girl:

I bore the holy vessels at seven, then I pounded barley at the age of ten, and clad in yellow robes, soon after this, I was Little Bear to Brauronian Artemis; Then neckletted with figs, grown tall and pretty, I was a Basket-bearer, and so it's obvious I should give you advice that I think good, the very best I can.¹⁶

Taking part in such a rite was an important step in the life of the maiden. It acts as part of the ritual progression which the girls make from childhood through to adulthood.

¹⁵ Sudias, *s.v. Arktos e Brauroniois* & *s.v. Arkteusai*. Lysias, *Frg*, 82.

¹⁶ Aristophanes, *Lys*, 641-647. Trans Lindsay, 1936.

Artemis' role here is to help the girls through this stage – as a youthful virginal divinity it is her that they can most relate too.

There are obvious similarities between the *Arkteia* myth and that of Kallisto. Hesiod indicates that Kallisto was a maiden who chose the companionship of Artemis in the wilderness.¹⁷ However, she was unfortunate enough to attract the attention of Zeus who travelled to earth and impregnated her. This provokes the anger of Artemis and Kallisto is turned into a bear.¹⁸ Both of these myths demonstrate the goddesses' vengeful side. Whilst those who adhere to the chaste social values which Artemis champions will receive her support, those such as Kallisto, who fail in this regard must face her wrath. As Hera says in the *Iliad*:

Zeus has set you as a lion upon women and granted that you may kill whatever woman you wish.¹⁹

This depiction of the vengeful Artemis serves as a warning to the maidens who serve in her chorus. Failure to follow the goddess' chaste paradigmatic example will result in punishment.

¹⁷ Hesiod, *Ast Frg* 3,

¹⁸ Hesiod, *Ast Frg* 3, Pseudo-Apollodorus, 3.8.2. Pausanias, 1.25.1. & 8.3.6. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.409-507 & Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 155, 176 & 177. The sources are at odds as to whether Zeus (Apollodorus), Hera (Pausanias), or Artemis herself (Hesiod) transformed Kallisto into a bear.

¹⁹ Homer, *Il*, 21.483-484.

Another theme that appears regularly in Artemis' chorus is abduction. Indeed, several illustrious maidens were abducted, or at least claim to have been abducted, whilst singing and dancing for Artemis. The *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* provides a famous example, when Aphrodite claims that she is a maiden abducted from serving Artemis by Hermes, in order to lay with Anchises.²⁰ In the *Iliad* Polymele was taken by Hermes and Kore by Hades when in a similar situation.²¹ In all of these cases the loveliness of the participants is emphasised, and the watching male is extremely desirous of them. In book 21 of the *Iliad* we read:

The second was led by the warrior Eudoros, the child of an unmarried mother, born to a girl who was lovely in the dance, Polymele, daughter of Phylas. Strong Hermes, Slayer of Argos, fell in love with her when his eyes saw her among the chorus of girls dancing for Artemis of the golden distaff, goddess of the loud hunt.²²

This highlights the fact that the girls in the chorus are approaching a time of great physical beauty, and places them in the sphere where they may be seen by potential husbands. Indeed, taking up a place in a ritual, such as serving in a chorus or acting as a basket-carrier, could have allowed the girls to display their attractive qualities to the

²⁰ *Hymn to Aphrodite*, 69-72.

²¹ Homer, *Iliad*, 16.179-183, Euripides, *Helen*, 1301- 1317, Homer, *Hymn to Demeter*, 2.1-33 & 2.417-434.

²² Homer, *Iliad*, 16.179-183. Trans, Hammond ,1987.

community. Such a display sees the maidens demonstrate that they are growing into eligible young women who will soon be able to marry and produce children.

Yet myths such as that of Kallisto demonstrate Artemis' displeasure with maidens entering into sexual relations whilst in her charge. Such abductions, whilst emphasising the eligibility of the maidens in Artemis' care, present a great threat to the young maiden whose value is threatened by sexual contact before marriage. The dangers of pre-marriage sexual liaisons are potentially damaging to both the individual and the community.

A further abduction myth, this time concerning Artemis herself, demonstrates the high value placed upon chastity in her chorus. Pindar alludes to the myth, but we must rely on the 2nd century AD account of Pausanias for the details. He informs us that the river god Alpheios falls in love with Artemis and tries to seduce her. When he realises that she is unwilling to submit to his charms, he attempts to abduct her from her chorus of nymphs. She cunningly pre-empts his plan by smearing her face and the faces of all the nymphs present with mud, so that Alpheios is unable to distinguish which of the dancers is Artemis.²³ Through this stratagem Artemis is able to protect her virginity and thwart the attempts of the river god. In so doing she provides an excellent paradigm for young maidens familiar with the myth. Whilst the girls are young, and serving in Artemis' chorus, chastity is a necessity.

²³Pindar, *Nemean Ode*, 1.1, & Pausanias, 6.22.8-9.

As the girls approach marriage and become more concerned with their sexuality, the role of Aphrodite becomes greater. In epic Aphrodite is frequently associated with dance and song. She plays a prominent choral role in the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* and the *Hymn to Aphrodite*.²⁴ It is also common to see her as the leader of a group of females, with several other groups of divinities joining her in song. In both the *Odyssey* and the *Cypria* we see her associated with the Graces, either in dance or garlanded and singing.²⁵ Similarly in Aphrodite's' Homeric Hymn we see that the dances of the Nymphs are also a particular concern of Aphrodite.²⁶ Just like Artemis, it appears that Aphrodite was deeply involved in the chorus as leader in the dances of immortals.

The characteristics of the mythological choruses which she leads, give us more information about the role of the deity. It is the Graces who most frequently form Aphrodite's chorus. An extract from book 18 of the *Iliad*, describes the beauty of Aphrodite when she joins them:

With ambrosial balm she first made fair her beautiful face, such as that
wherewith Cytherea, of the fair crown, anoints herself when she goes into the
lovely dance of the Graces;²⁷

²⁴ *Hymn to Apollo*, 194-196 & *Hymn to Aphrodite*, 117-118.

²⁵ Homer, *Odyssey*, 192-194 & Athenaeus, 15.682F.

²⁶ *Hymn to Aphrodite*, 5.256-264.

²⁷ Homer, *Iliad*, 18.192-195. Trans, Murray, 1919.

The Graces embody charm and physical beauty making them the perfect companions for Aphrodite. In addition, they possess the attractive qualities which young women should aspire to. Indeed, their attractiveness comes across very strongly from epic where their beauty is attested in both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, whilst in the latter Hera is also keen to emphasise their youth.²⁸ Alcman also shows an awareness of this describing them as ‘the Graces with love in their eyes’ in line 20 of the *Louvre Partheneion*.

Such a chorus can serve as a paradigmatic example for the girls who participated in Aphrodite’s choruses. As the goddess associated with sexuality and sensuality Aphrodite is involved in an important phase of female development. Whilst Artemis cares for young girls and Hera is associated with married women, Aphrodite helps to bridge this divide. Girls who are becoming beautiful and preparing for the sexuality of marriage are involved in her chorus. Aphrodite’s chorus of Graces epitomise the attractive qualities ideal for a young girl seeking a marriage as they prepared to enter adulthood. A fragment of the *Kypria*, quoted by Athenaeus, describes the beautification of Aphrodite’s divine companions with garlands:

When the smiling Aphrodite with her train
Had woven fragrant garlands of the treasures
The flowery earth puts forth, the goddesses

²⁸ Homer, *Odyssey*, 6.18 & *Iliad*, 17.51 & 14.267.

All crowned their heads with their queen's precious work,
The Nymphs and Graces, and the golden Aphrodite, —
And raised a tuneful song round Ida's springs.²⁹

The girls in Aphrodite's mortal chorus are looking to project the same attractive qualities to potential suitors, in order to move into the sexual phase of their lives.

As we have seen choral dances which the girls performed existed within a framework of ritual progression. To consider how the surviving poetry corresponds to this view I will now examine the most prominent example. The largest surviving fragment of a poem composed for performance by girls is Alcman's *Louvre Partheneion*. The poet himself composed in late 7th century Sparta and the surviving fragment comprises 101 lines of badly damaged fragmentary poetry.

The ritual context of the poem has been the cause of much debate but recently scholars such as Diane Rayor and Eva Stehle have argued that the poem was written for performance for the community.³⁰ The content of lines 16-17 appears to be directed specifically at men, suggesting that they would have formed part of the audience.³¹ They read:

²⁹ Athenaeus, 15, 682F. Trans, Bohn, 1854.

³⁰ Rayor, 1987 & Stehle, 1997, 30-39.

³¹ Stehle, 1997, 30.

Let no man fly to heaven or attempt to marry Aphrodite.³²

Furthermore, although writing much later, Plutarch comments that within Sparta women were allowed 'at certain festivals to dance and sing when the young men were present as spectators,' lending credence to this argument.³³ The poem also emphasises the girl's attractiveness at regular intervals. Lines 51-58 read:

but the hair of my cousin Hagesichora has the bloom of undefiled gold, and her silver face – why do I tell you openly? This is Hagesichora here; and the second in beauty after Agido.....³⁴

It seems entirely plausible that the poem formed part of a ritual designed to celebrate the girl's ascendance to maturity and display them to the community. The girls open discussion of their beauty indicates a desire to show off their eligibility and readiness for marriage. When viewed in this light an examination of the goddess for whom the girls performed is crucial to our interpretation of the poem. Despite suggestions of Artemis and Helen, I intend to argue that Aphrodite is the goddess to whom the girls perform, as they approach the transition to adult sexuality.

³² Alcman, 1.16-17. Trans, Campbell, 1983.

³³ Plutarch, *Lyk*, 14.2.

³⁴ Alcman, 1.51-58. Trans, Campbell, 1983.

Two references to the goddess survive in the poem. The first appears in line 61 where the girls are carrying the ritual object to a certain Orthria, and the second on line 87 when the girls express a desire to 'please Aotis most of all.' There are no references to either of these epithets outside of the poem itself, leading to a great deal of speculation about the identity of the goddess. Both of the terms are clearly connected with the dawn with *aōs* the Doric form of the Greek word for dawn, and Orthria relating to daybreak.³⁵ However, this association does not lead to a definitive answer as to the identity of the deity.

In addition to this some scholars have gone further, denying that *ὀρθρία* refers to an individual of any kind. Rather, the term can be read as an adjective which agrees with *Πεληάδες*. The likes of Douglas Gerber reject the need for a deity in these lines, seeing the additional description of the Pleiades rising as a more likely translation.³⁶ To complicate matters still further a scholiast on the poem has recommended the emendation of *ὀρθρία* to *ὀρθία*. This would then see the ritual object dedicated to Artemis Orthia, a deity extensively worshipped across Laconia, and one who would provisionally look acceptable for a song performed by adolescent Spartan girls. However, as Calame has pointed out there are two major problems with adopting Artemis Orthia as the deity for this poem.³⁷ The first objection is that the long iota in *ὀρθία* at the start of line 61 means that the trochaic metre ceases to function properly.

³⁵ Liddell & Scott, 1925, 1250.

³⁶ Gerber, 1970, 92.

³⁷ Calame, 1977, 169.

Secondly, there is no 7th century inscriptional evidence for the form ὀρθίαι. It must also be considered that the scholiast commenting on the poem would have been influenced by the much changed Hellenistic Sparta, in which Artemis Orthia featured prominently. When the similarities between the epithets Ophthria and Aotis are taken into account it seems prudent to reject the emendation, and persevere with ὀρθρίαι.

The content of the poem does not lend much support to the theory that Artemis is the focus of the ritual. Pausanias tells us that when he travelled the region in the 2nd Century AD, there were many cult sites to Artemis at which young girls could have served. However, the deity has no known links to dawn and there is nothing else in the poem which alludes to her.³⁸ There are problems with other deities who have been posited to fit the role. The unspecified 'labours' of line 88 have tempted Burnett and Hooker to speculate that Eileithyia, goddess of childbirth, may be a likely candidate.³⁹ However, the youth of the girls is continually recognised, and before marriage they would know nothing of the pains of childbirth. To invoke Eileithyia's support before the girls are sexually active seems premature. Garvie notes that the close associations of Phoebe to the Dioscuri, who feature in the early section of the poem, make her a potential candidate, especially as there was a shrine to the Leucippides located within Sparta.⁴⁰ The girls who served here were described as 'foals' by Hesychias and it is

³⁸ Pausanias, 3.10.7, 3.24.9, 4.4.2, 4.31.3 & 3.23.10.

³⁹ Burnett, 1964, 32-33 & Hooker, 1979, 212-218.

⁴⁰ Garvie, 1965, 185-187.

tempting to link this to the descriptions of girls as horses which appear in the poem.⁴¹ However, the fact that there is no evidence to suggest choral dance formed part of the cult argues against her.⁴²

Helen is another deity with strong cult associations to Sparta, who shares a great deal in common with Aphrodite. Both are strongly associated with fertility and growth, whilst also acting as the embodiment of beauty which is so heavily emphasised in the poem.⁴³ Indeed, centuries later the two even become associated with one another. Ptolemaeus attests that Helen is Aphrodite's daughter, whilst a 1st Century AD inscription found in Egypt suggests that the pair were sisters.⁴⁴

Herodotus indicates Helen's importance, informing us that she protected all young Spartan girls at the temple of Therapne.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Isocrates, in his *Encomium of Helen*, claims to have witnessed the celebration of ancient rites dedicated to the deified Helen by the Spartans at Therapne.⁴⁶ She shared a shrine there with her brothers, the Dioscuri, and also had another cult site at Platanistas.⁴⁷ Aristophanes even provides us with a clear indication that she is associated with choruses of girls dancing in a context which seems entirely appropriate for Alcman's poem. In lines 1308-15 of the *Lysistrata* a Spartan sings:

⁴¹ Hesychias, s.v. *polia*. Alcman, 1.44-59.

⁴² Calame, 1977, 185-191.

⁴³ Alcman, 1.50-59 & 64-81 express the exceptional beauty of the girls.

⁴⁴ Photius, *Bibl*, 149 & SEG 8.500.

⁴⁵ Herodotus, 6.61.

⁴⁶ Isocrates, *Encomium of Helen*, 10.63-65

⁴⁷ Pausanais, 3.14.6 & 3.15.3.

When the young girls, like fillies, jump about near the Eurotas raising a cloud of dust with their feet, and shake their manes like bacchanals brandishing the thyrsus and frolicking around. Their leader is the daughter of Leda, that holy, comely chorus leader.⁴⁸

She appears in Sparta as a goddess associated with fertility, both sexual and vegetative, as is nicely demonstrated by an idyll of Theocritus concerning Helen's young companions.⁴⁹ As well as featuring garlands of flowers and beautiful meadows, the passage also draws special attention to her relation to the plane-tree, from where Platanistas got its name. Both Therapne and Platanistas are moist locations ideal for the growing of such plants, further strengthening the deified Helen's link to fertility.

With this in mind it appears very clear that dances in Helen's honour were held by choruses of pre-nuptial girls at cult sites located close to Sparta. She was mainly a deity of fertility and beauty, whose characteristics would have been ideal for the girls performing the *Louvre Partheneion*. The equine imagery provided by Aristophanes also provides a significant link to the numerous horses, mentioned from lines 44-59 in the poem.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 1308-1315. Theocritus 18.35-7 also gives a nice illustration of Helen's devotion to the chorus.

⁴⁹ Theocritus, 18.39-48.

⁵⁰ Alcman, 1.44-59.

Helen is most famous for her beauty, and it seems likely that women may have worshipped her in order to improve their looks. Herodotus relates a story of an ugly baby, whom a good-natured nurse took to the temple of Helen every day. One day a mysterious female stranger begged to look at the child and from that day forth it was transformed, growing into the most beautiful woman in Sparta.⁵¹ Helen's good looks make her an appropriate role model for Alcman's chorus, for whom beauty is a paramount concern. Her beauty and fecundity also lead to her being the subject of a great many sexual abduction attempts, often involving conflict between heroes.⁵² This emphasises her desirability as a potential bride – something for the girls to aspire to whilst still sounding a note of caution about the perils of abduction. It is also noteworthy that Helen is a successful mother, giving birth to the beautiful Hermione and Nikostratos by Menelaos.⁵³ Theocritus sees the production of beautiful children as her primary function.⁵⁴

It seems clear that Helen was worshipped by choruses of young girls who aspired to beauty and fertility, qualities viewed in the highest regard within Sparta. She had an important social role to play in encouraging the beautiful mothers which Sparta desired. However, whilst Helen seems an appropriate deity for Alcman's poem in this regard, a significant problem remains, namely that it is difficult to create any link between the

⁵¹ Herodotus, 6.61.

⁵² Calder, 1976, 63-81 has collected a great many examples of Helen abductions. Some prime examples can be found at Homer, *Iliad*, passim, Plutarch, *Theseus*, 31, & Pausanias, 3.19.11.

⁵³ Homer, *Odyssey*, 14, Hesiod, *frg*, 204,85-95 & 175 MW.

⁵⁴ Theocritus, 18.21.

divine persona of Helen and the dawn epithets in the poem. It is here that an examination of Aphrodite can prove more fruitful.

Earlier I argued that ritual performance can serve to present adolescent girls to the community as a display of their eligibility. In this regard the *Louvre Partheneion* is well suited to Aphrodite who had a cult presence in Sparta associated with the approach of marriage. Pausanias notes the temple of Aphrodite-Hera on the north side of the Spartan Acropolis, as well as a temple of bridal Aphrodite located in the Peloponnese.⁵⁵ Of the former temple Pausanias asserts that it is here that 'A mother is wont to sacrifice to the goddess when a daughter is married' indicating Aphrodite's link to marriage and sexual awakening.⁵⁶ As a goddess associated primarily with sensuality and beauty Aphrodite is well suited to young girls who are on the cusp of marriage, where reproduction is key to their success. Whilst Alcman's girls, who express such an awareness of their own comeliness and sexuality, do not seem appropriate for Artemis, they fit perfectly in the realm of Aphrodite.

The evidence from the poem supports this claim. Initially, it must be noted that Aphrodite is mentioned explicitly in the early fragmentary part of the poem, along with her perpetual assistants the Graces.⁵⁷ The attractive qualities of Alcman's chorus also

⁵⁵ Pausanias, 3.13.9 & 2.32.7. Plutarch, *Amatoria Narrations*, 23. Mentions cults of Aphrodite Harma at Delphi which served a similar function.

⁵⁶ Pausanias, 3.13.9 .

⁵⁷ Alcman, 1.16-20.

mirror the loveliness of the Graces in their dance. Agido, one of the pre-eminent, girls in the poem receives the following description:

And so I sing of the brightness of Agido; I see her like the sun, which Agido summons to shine on us as our witness; but our illustrious choir leader by no means allows me either to praise or to fault her;⁵⁸

The beauty of the chorus members echoes the beauty of Aphrodite's paradigmatic divine chorus. Moreover the bright and celestial imagery fits well with the image of the goddess. Hagesichora is also described as having 'a silver face' and hair with 'the bloom of undefiled gold.'⁵⁹ Images of brightness are commonly associated to Aphrodite in mythology and she is also the only goddess to receive the epithet golden.⁶⁰

It is therefore her link to the two troublesome epithets, Orthria and Aotis, which can prove the most illuminating. Gentili and Cyrino have both argued that the two epithets relate to Aphrodite.⁶¹ We see other epithets with celestial connotations used commonly with Aphrodite, Aeria and Ourania being the most common.⁶² Images on art, such as those detailed by Boedeker, accentuate the similarities between Aphrodite and Eos,

⁵⁸ Alcman, 1.39-45.

⁵⁹ Alcman, 1.51-55.

⁶⁰ Boedeker, 1974, 22.

⁶¹ Gentili, 1988, 75, & Cyrino, 2004, *passim*.

⁶² Herodotus, 1.105 & Pausanias, 1.14.7, discuss the possible origins of Ourania. Tacitus, *Hist*, 3.2 mentions the existence of a temple to Aeria at Paphos.

goddess of Dawn.⁶³ Her divine origins also support this contention. She is a goddess born from the foam of the sea just as the sun appears to be born from the waves at Dawn. The girls in the *Louvre Partheneion* project a radiant sexual attractiveness which immediately reminds one of Aphrodite. The association with dawn provides something of a symbolic rebirth for the girls, as the ritual sees them move into a new phase of their lives. In this way Aphrodite epitomises the qualities of beauty and fertility which all Spartan girls would have desired, acting as a sexual initiatrix to help the girls prepare for marriage.

With this established we must now assess the significance of the early mythological section of the poem. Lines 1-39 of the *Louvre Partheneion*, which comprises the most severely damaged section of the poem, focuses on mythology from which morals can be drawn. Calame argues that this section serves to teach the girls about their mythic past, and thus helps to instil them with Spartan values.⁶⁴ This is true at a reductive level, but I intend to argue that the myth expresses key political and constitutional ideas essential to the smooth running of the *polis*. By examining the mythological past of figures associated with this section, I plan to demonstrate their significance to a Spartan audience.

The *Louvre Partheneion* begins with a mythological tale mentioning Polydeuces, along with a list of other male characters. In Greek lyric poetry it is rare to find Polydeuces

⁶³ Boedeker, 1974, 14-15.

⁶⁴ Calame, 1977, 231-238.

mentioned without his brother, and it seems likely that Castor was originally present too. The Dioscuri were clearly important figures in Spartan mythological tradition, and they appear to have been viewed as an excellent poetic subject. Indeed, in many of Alcman's surviving poems the Dioscuri feature prominently and in Plato's *Laws* the Athenian stranger identifies them as being particularly important to Spartan choral poetry.⁶⁵

The nature of the Dioscuri's cult in Archaic Sparta is not well attested, owing to contradictory sources and a paucity of iconographic material.⁶⁶ The twins were born in Laconia and had their most significant shrine at Therapne. The *Iliad*, which states they were Leda's sons but makes no mention of their father, has them covered by the earth in Sparta suggesting a mortal death.⁶⁷ The *Odyssey* names them as the sons of Leda and the Spartan king Tyndareus, but goes on to say that they were honoured by Zeus to live one day and be dead the next.⁶⁸ However, the term 'Dioscuri' itself is not used in either the *Odyssey* or the *Iliad*. When it is used in Hesiod's *Ehoiai* and the *Homeric Hymns* 17 & 33, Castor and Polydeuces are explicitly described as the sons of Zeus and Leda, although Tyndareus is recognised as their stepfather.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Alcman, 2, 10, 12, 21, 23, 25, & 85. Plato, *Laws*, 796b 5.

⁶⁶ What iconographic material there survives is collected and discussed superbly by Maria Pipili, 1987, 54-58.

⁶⁷ Homer, *Iliad*, 3.237-244.

⁶⁸ Homer, *Odyssey*, 11.298-304.

⁶⁹ Hesiod, *Frg* 24MW & Homer, *Hymns*, 17 & 33.

Laconian votive offerings, dated to the sixth century, show one to be bearded whilst one retains his youthful hairless cheeks. This may relate to a tradition which saw Castor as the son of Tyndareus and Polydeuces as the son of Zeus. When Castor was killed his brother asked Zeus if he could share his immortality with him. Zeus acquiesced allowing them to spend one day living under the earth at Therapne and the next in the heavens. The votives may display one figure without a beard to suggest immortality, whilst the bearded figure is mortal, in an effort to distinguish between the pair. It seems that Alcman had an awareness of this tradition, as he mentions the existence of the pair under the ground at Therapne.⁷⁰ In Sparta it is likely that their relationship to Tyndareus would have been emphasised, although their immortality and connection to Zeus must also have been recognised.

Lines 2-13 then provide a description of a series of warriors, with whom the Dioscuri appear to be in combat. Pseudo-Apollodorus, Pausanias, and a scholiast on Clement of Alexandria all identify these warriors as the sons of Hippocoön and from the first century BC onwards, there are several surviving mythological accounts of Tyndareus, and his brother Hippocoön entering into combat.⁷¹ In these accounts we see Tyndareus, the king of Sparta, usurped and expelled from the city by his brother. During his exile he is married and his sons are born. Whilst he is absent Heracles, from whom the Spartans claim descent, develops a feud with the Hippocoontids, and eventually leads an army to

⁷⁰ Alcman, 7.

⁷¹ Strabo, 10.61. Apollodorus, 2.173-175 & 3.123-125. Plutarch, *Thes*, 31 & *Mor* 285e-f. Diodorus, 4.33. Pausanias 2.18.6-7, 3.1.4-5, 10.6, 14.6-7, 15.1-6, 9.19, 7. 20, 5. 21, 2, 8, 53, 9. This list along with a more detailed discussion can be found in Davison, 1968, 442-443.

defeat them.⁷² This done, he restores Tyndareus to the throne until the line of Herakles will return to Sparta. In so doing Heracles lays the foundations for his descendants to rule over Sparta, an association in which the Spartans take great pride. Furthermore, from the scholiast on Clement we read that the Dioscuri and the Hippocoontids were rival suitors, although the women for whom they competed are not mentioned.⁷³ Other myths involving the Tyndaridae pursuing women can be found with Pseudo-Apollodorus describing another significant event. Enraged in a dispute over cattle rustling the Tyndaridae decide to kidnap and rape the daughters of Leucippus before their marriage to the sons of Aphareus. Unsurprisingly, the episode ends in conflict and out of the four brothers Polydeuces is the only one to survive.⁷⁴

One of the difficulties of the surviving *Partheneion* is that there is no mention of Herakles. It is, of course, possible that he was mentioned in one of the sections of the poem which has been lost although the myth does not explicitly require his presence. Clement of Alexandria relates the words of the scholiast Sosibus, who informs us that Alcman did discuss the wounding of Herakles by the Hippocoontids in his first book of poems.⁷⁵ Whilst inconclusive, this does increase the chance that he was originally present in the poem. The mythology surrounding Herakles role in Hippocoön's ignoble struggles for the Spartan throne would certainly have been of particular interest to a

⁷² Heracles victory comes after two attempts. It appears in the first that he received a wound to one of his joints (Pausanias, 8.53), before he gathered an army to return victorious. Davison, 1968, 442 provides a description of all of the potential reasons for the feud that developed between Heracles and the Hippocoontids.

⁷³ Scholiast to Clem. Al. *Protr.* 36.

⁷⁴ Apollodorus, 3.11.2.

⁷⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Pro*, 36.11-12.

Spartan audience. Pausanias informs us that certain Hipocoontids, including Alcon mentioned early in the poem, were worshipped as heroes within Sparta and this strengthens the message being delivered.⁷⁶ As we shall see the fact that the dispute brought two well known groups of heroic figures into conflict demonstrates that the myth being described is of real civic importance.

The myth would have carried great political resonance to a Spartan audience, as it relates directly to the mythological founding of the Spartan constitution. Gloria Ferrari has noted that one of the key faults with Hippocoon's rise to power in Sparta is that he was not a legitimate successor to the throne.⁷⁷ Pseudo-Apollodorus acknowledges conflicting traditions around Hippocoon's lineage, suggesting that he was an illegitimate son born before Tyndareus. Pausanias, along with scholiasts on the *Iliad* and Euripides *Orestes* all agree that Hippocoon may have been a bastard, with the result that Tyndareus would have had the legitimate right to the Spartan crown.⁷⁸ In Sparta the king was the only one capable of passing on the royal line, and Plato informs us that the king's wife was guarded by the ephors, to ensure a legitimate heir came to power. Therefore, Hippocoon's accession to the throne as a bastard would have been viewed as a serious political issue, as demonstrated by the ejection of Spartan kings Demoratus and Leotychides, who were removed on the pretence of being bastards.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Pausanias, 3.14.6-7 & 15.1-3.

⁷⁷ Ferrari, 2008, 20-29.

⁷⁸ Pausanias, 3.1.1, 3.1.4 & 4.2.4, Homer, *Iliad*, Schol, 2.581 & Euripides, *Orestes*, Schol, 457.

⁷⁹ Herodotus, 6.63-70 & Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 3.3.2.

The myth serves to demonstrate an important lesson to those associated with the poetic performance. The bloodshed and conflict which arises between the heroes is instigated by an illegitimate son. Whilst initially displaying the need for political unity within the *polis*, the poem also reinforces the need for the production of legitimate children to keep civil discord to a minimum, especially amongst royalty. Strabo relates a story of Ephorus which reinforces this argument. During the second invasion of Messene, the Spartans, who had been away from home for many years, sent a group of youths back to Sparta to mate with the unmarried maidens, in order to produce children. However, when these children, known as the *Partheniai*, grew to maturity they were denied citizen rights as they had been born out of wedlock. They threatened to revolt and it was only by sending them to found the colony of Tarentum that the Spartans avoided conflict.⁸⁰ Girls were to produce legitimate heirs only once they were married.

By participating in the chorus the girls also learn about the history of their *polis* as well as the traditions which moulded their political systems. The mythological tales of the early struggles for the Spartan throne all serve to explain the relationship of Sparta to its heroic past. Once Herakles has defeated the Hippocoontids in the battle for the Spartan throne, he passes in on to Tyndareus so that he may rule until Heracles descendants return to take it back. Heracles wandering nature means that it is impossible for him to rule Sparta himself and thus Tyndareus rule is restored. The throne passes to the Atreid

⁸⁰ Ephorus, FrgH 70F, 216, Aristotle, *Politics*, 1306b, and Strabo 6.3.3

dynasty before the line of Heracles eventually return to reclaim it through Aristodemus.⁸¹ Tyrtaeus, writing shortly before Alcman, asserts that Zeus made a gift of Sparta to Herakles, so that his family would always rule there.⁸² The divine association between Sparta and Heracles appears again, with Pindar asserting the role of the Delphic oracle in ensuring the Heracleidai return to take what is rightfully theirs.⁸³ Naturally, these links to divinity and their heroic past was something of which the Spartans were extremely proud and by telling this myth at the start of the poem, Alcman instils this pride into his chorus of maidens. Tyrtaeus may very well do this in a similar way, evoking the memory of Heracles, in order to inspire the Spartans to greater deeds through his militaristic poetry.⁸⁴

The myth also has a bearing on the formation of the Spartan political life, and helps to explain the workings of their constitution, with the Dioscuri acting as a paradigm for the Spartan practice of dual kingship. These brothers are the perfect pair of heroes to illustrate this life as their success is a product of their unity. It is Polydeuces decision to share his divinity with his brother that leads to the pair becoming the revered deities worshipped across the Peloponnese. They achieve divine recognition and honour through their acceptance of shared power. For a Spartan audience no two deities could have been more appropriate to serve as an example of how the Spartan political system operated. Herodotus indicates that the Spartans had a strong awareness and sense of

⁸¹ Apollodorus, 2.7.3 & Diodorus, 4.33.5

⁸² Tyrtaios, Ia.

⁸³ Pindar, 5.68-72.

⁸⁴ Malkin, 1994, 33-34.

pride in their political past. He relates that Minyans arriving from Lemnos, were invited to stay in Spartan territory and given women to marry when they asserted their descent from Tyndareus.⁸⁵

In terms of dual kingship, Herodotus asserts the Spartan tale of the successors to Aristodemus, when the practice was first adopted. Unable to choose between her two sons as heir, his wife Argeia, claims she cannot remember which of her two sons, Eurysthenes and Procles, was born first. Once again the Delphic oracle is questioned and the system of dual kingship is put forward with Eurysthenes given special honours as the first born. He is the starting point for the Agiad dynasty whilst Procles begins the Eurypontid. Herodotus also notes the bitter rivalry which this caused between the two brothers, creating the potential for civic discord.⁸⁶ When seen in this light the political significance of Alcman's *Partheneion* myth is substantial. The violent struggle which is begun by the illegitimate Hippocoön serves as a stark warning against the perils of social uprising. Whilst the Dioscuri epitomise the symbiotic relationship which should exist between a pair of Spartan kings, the heroic violence of the story provides a demonstration of the perils of political discord. The need for social, political, and sexual conformity are thereby transmitted to both the singing girls and the audience.

But how does this myth relate to the second half of the poem? The mythological act is set in stark contrast to the behaviour of the *parthenoi* for whom piety is paramount. The

⁸⁵ Herodotus, 4.145

⁸⁶ Herodotus, 6.52-53.

girl's reverence for the goddess is expressed in lines 82-89, wherein they sing of a desire to 'please Aotis most of all.'⁸⁷ The perils of acting hubristically and going against the natural order of things, is well displayed by this myth. The conflict and disorder of the mythological section of the poem contrasts with the section which focuses on the chorus, which says that the girls piously 'trod the path to lovely peace.'⁸⁸ The qualities epitomised here are clearly far more desirable for a young girl than those which precede them. This contrast creates an excellent lesson for the maidens performing the poetry as well as the males who may have been watching. The mythological section of the poem serves as a warning against civic disorder, whilst the exemplary piety, beauty and order displayed by the chorus members serve as an example of how young Spartiates should behave.

In conclusion, I would suggest that there is strong evidence that mythology played an important role in the social education of maidens within the lyric chorus. The Greek religious system created an environment where the character attributes of female deities made them accessible to girls at various developmental stages of their lives. Artemis was the deity to whom young girls normally turned, whilst those approaching their sexual awakening could turn to Aphrodite. This was reflected in the choral system with the girls performing in choruses to deities which best suited their current stage of life. Within this framework the lyrical content of the poetry could convey mythological tales concerning various aspects on their social development. The mythological section

⁸⁷ Alcman, 1, 82-89.

⁸⁸ Alcman, 1, 90-91.

which begins the *Louvre Partheneion* contains strong messages of political order and unity. The girls learn about their civic history, taking morals from the destructive myths of the Hippocoontids, and taking pride in their association to the glorious heroes of the past.