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S. Blundell and M. Williamson (eds). *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*. NY: Routledge, 1998. Pp. 202. \$20.99 (paper).

[1] This book is a collection of papers that were originally presented at the Institute of Classical Studies in London in 1993. Its purpose is to examine some of the links connecting the feminine and divine spheres of life and thought.

[2] The divisions, essays, and contributors are as follows:

1: Introduction

Part I: Deities and their worshippers

2: The Gamos of Hera: Myth and Ritual (I. Clark)

3: Domesticating Artemis (S.G. Cole)

Part II: Objects of Worship

4: Marriage and the Maiden: Narratives on the Parthenon (S. Blundell)

5: Born Old or Never Young? Femininity, Childhood and the Goddesses of Ancient Greece (L. Beaumont)

6: The Nature of Heroines (E. Kearns)

Part III: Ritual and Gender

7: Death Becomes Her: Gender and Athenian Death Ritual (K. Stears)

8: In the Mirror of Dionysos (R. Seaford)

Part IV: Sources and interpreters

9: Thesmophoria and Haloa: Myth, Physics and Mysteries (N.J. Lowe)

Bibliography and Index

[3] The introduction begins with the basics concerning Greek religion and the woman's role in religion in Archaic and Classical Greece (c. 750-330 BCE). Although women could not

participate in public duties such as law-making and political processes, they participated in religious rituals and their participation was important to the city-state. In fact, the correct performance of cult by women was integrally linked to the health of both the *oikos* and the *polis*. While the introduction addresses a general audience, the essays themselves speak to an audience knowledgeable about Greek myths, art, literature, and cult practices.

[4] The collection leads off with a well-documented, well-argued study of Hera's role as a marriage deity. After a brief introduction concerning Greek women and marriage, Clark examines the evidence for three festivals and Hera's roles in cult and myth in general: the *hieros gamos* festival in Attica, the Heraia at Olympia, and the Daidala at Plataia. These three festivals are all associated with marriage, but as the author states, "the theme is articulated in different ways" in them (25). Clark scrupulously examines literary and epigraphical sources for information concerning both the cult practices and the myths associated with them, and attempts to reconcile their often seemingly incongruous relationship.

[5] Cole, relying on literary and epigraphical evidence, ably discusses the importance of women in the *polis* through their celebration of Artemis. She first examines the relationship of the worship of Artemis, whose sanctuaries were often located near territorial frontiers, and the *polis*, and concludes that one could judge the safety of the *polis* at large by the successful celebrations of unprotected female celebrations on the border. Cole carefully examines patterns found in myths involving Artemis' anger and associates cult practices with these stories. The importance of women in the *polis* through the celebration of Artemis is repeatedly emphasized by Cole: successful service to Artemis spelled success for the community in terms of the "reproductive capacity of its women" and the health of its children (32), because the interest of the *polis* was the "reproduction of the family, the basic unit of the *polis* itself" (39).

[6] Blundell presents compelling arguments that while the Parthenon is dedicated to Athena Parthenos, the virgin goddess, on the temple itself "marriage was being presented as the paradigm of an ordered civilization" (47). She then analyzes the sculptures as a visitor would view them upon ascending the Akropolis from the west. Not only are the three sets of sculpture on the external side (pediments, metopes, frieze) and the large cult statue inside discussed separately and in conjunction with each other, but also examined are social legislation, cultural interests at the time of the building of the Parthenon, and myths associated with the sculptures. Her arguments associating all four sets of sculpture with a united theme are convincing and add much to an understanding of the Athenian view of the city's achievements and values.

[7] Beaumont examines the odd juxtaposition of the prominence in myth and art of the divine male infant with the corresponding lack of attention to the divine female infant. Only the births of Athena and Aphrodite, who were born as adults, and the childhood of Artemis receive attention in art or myth. By looking at Greek attitudes toward children and females, Beaumont concludes that a female divine child would require a double transformation to achieve the incorporation into the divine sphere (89) and therefore, the female child and the divine were irreconcilable.

[8] Kearns, while attempting to define the nature of heroines, also discusses the differences among mortals, heroes/heroines, and divinities, as well as their affinities with each other.

While her definition of a hero/heroine is conventional, her characterization of the heroine stresses that, while the heroine has affinities with goddesses and women as well as her counterpart, the hero, she may not be equidistant among these three in terms of function. Cult practices and myths are examined to determine if the heroine is more closely kin to the mortal or to the divine, if she has all of the same functions as the hero, and if the "meaning" of heroine was more relevant to men or women.

[9] In one of the best chapters in this book, Stears commendably states at the outset of this chapter that she intends to focus on issues that are not just gender-related; she wants also to include in this study other aspects of social identity and relationships, which may have been more important than gender in determining the roles of women in the funeral. The author then carefully examines the disparate evidence (vase-paintings, tragedies, speeches, laws) for Athenian funerals, focusing mainly on paintings, and concludes that the roles and tasks of the funerary practice mostly divided along gender lines: women handled the corpse more during the *prothesis* and grieved more openly; men at the *prothesis* attended guests; men were central to the *ekphora* ceremony; and Solonian legislation limited the number of women attending funerals. She argues that the woman's participation in funerals constructed and displayed a woman's power in both domestic and political arenas. The women's lamentations at funerals may have served a number of social functions. Her correct behavior at funerals may have enhanced her status and that of her kin. It may have helped legitimate the claim to the estate. It may have secured a household's ritual health, and it may have served as a vehicle to construct and promote the family history. Therefore, the women's roles during the funeral were significant for the health of the *oikos* and hence, for the *polis* as a whole.

[10] Chapter eight is the most problematic in the book and does not fit well with the themes and content of the other chapters. Seaford analyzes a small passage from Euripides' *Bacchae* and applies psychoanalysis to explicate this scene in which Pentheus sees double just before he is led off to the mountains by Dionysos. Seaford's concern is not with women, as he admits, but rather, with "gender, in particular with the inversion of gender" (128). He goes on to discuss mirror images that confuse boundaries between a) human (or god) and animal b) living and dead c) male and female d) adult and infant. Seaford cites much evidence to support his interpretations of debatable material and although he claims that the evidence is "overwhelming" in support of his view, it simply is not. After discussing mirrors and reflections in vase-paintings, citing Lacan's theories at length, and looking at Paul's letters to the Corinthians and Neoplatonism, the author breaks off his discussion without tying together the loose ends.

[11] The final chapter is a well-presented, brilliantly argued study of four passages of literary evidence concerning two women's festivals, which is tangential to the rest of the book. Lowe makes sound arguments and re-examines the traditional readings and interpretations of the texts, taking to task scholars who interpreted the passages too loosely. Lowe presents the faulty interpretations of these passages in the past as evidence for fertility rites, the significance of these passages in establishing the 19th century paradigm of the "fertility rites", and then raises questions about the nature of these religious sources, their reading, the author, and its interpretation both ancient and modern. Although many questions remain unanswered, the reader is better off by becoming acquainted with the questions that should be asked concerning these texts.

[12] *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece* is a welcome and useful sourcebook for the study of women's roles in ancient cult in Archaic and Classical Greece. The importance of women to the health of both the *oikos* and the *polis* is repeatedly stressed, hence underlining the woman's status in both the private and political spheres.

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