

# Girls Playing Persephone (in Marriage and Death)

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## Abstract

Arguably, the most famous myth told about Persephone is her abduction and marriage to Hades. The story clearly articulates the strong connection between marriage and death, and this episode became significant in both literature and religious practice in the wider classical Greek world. Reference to the story of Persephone's abduction came to be used as a shorthand for evoking this connection, particularly in myth. This paper discusses two particular ways in which Persephone's narrative was used in marriage and death. I examine the pre-marriage offerings to Persephone at Lokroi Epizephyrioi, in southern Italy, and the tradition of Athenian girls who died unmarried being buried as brides. These cultic instances frame a discussion of Brides of Hades, particularly in tragedy. Overall, I conclude that these girls do not attempt to replace Persephone, but rather to imitate her: they 'play the role' of Persephone at various stages of her own abduction and marriage story.

## Keywords

Persephone – Brides-of-Hades – marriage – death – rites-of-passage

The moment that Persephone eats Hades's pomegranate seed and becomes his wife is the moment that death and marriage become inextricably linked together.<sup>1</sup> Naming Persephone becomes a way of evoking the connection

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1 The earliest and most complete version of the story occurs in the beginning and end of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Her abduction is narrated at lines 2–40, and the resolution and Persephone's return, beginning with Hermes being sent to fetch her, at lines 341–471;

between marriage and death. Evadne, in Euripides's *Suppliant Women*, declares that she will arrive at Persephone's bridal chamber (Φερσεφονείας ἡΰω θαλάμους)<sup>2</sup> as she flings herself onto her husband's burning funeral pyre. Evadne uses this phrase to illuminate the story that she wants to compose about herself,<sup>3</sup> the story in which she stays with her husband irrespective of the cost to herself: her life. We understand the point she is trying to convey even though her situation is so very different from Persephone's. Evadne uses Persephone as a metonymy for her actual meaning—the enduring connection between marriage and death. Evadne's case shows one way in which women in tragedy can identify with the story of Persephone. It is part of a wider pattern of identification with Persephone that we find reflected both in ritual practice and in the representation of women in Attic drama.

In this paper I will explore two examples of how girls in Greek communities were written into the story of Persephone, either at the point of their marriage, or at their deaths. In one case, girls on the brink of marriage dedicate terracotta *pinakes* showing themselves and their grooms playing the parts of Persephone and Hades. In the second case I consider the representation of prematurely deceased girls as 'brides of Hades', and examine how this representation is embodied in Athenian burial ritual.

## 1 Persephone's Abduction

Mock abduction forms a part of some marriage rituals and abduction-as-marriage (so called 'bridal theft') was common in myth.<sup>4</sup> The most obvious example is Persephone, and she is used as a positive model for girls in the ancient world, despite the violence of the story, and its depiction of a woman subjected by force. This practice is particularly evident in the southern Italian settlement of Lokroi Epizephyrioi. Somewhat unusually, Persephone here is characterised as both the victim of 'bridal theft' and the Queen of the Underworld.<sup>5</sup> That is,

cf. ps-Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.4.5. For discussions about the hymn see Arthur 1997, Clinton 1986, Foley 1994, Parker 1991, Richardson 1974, Richardson 2011.

2 E. *Supp.* 1022.

3 Cf. Rehm 1994, 112–115.

4 In Sparta, for example, where Plutarch relates: ἐγάμουν δὲ δι' ἀρπαγῆς, οὐ μικράς οὐδὲ ἄωρους πρὸς γάμον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀχμαζούσας καὶ πεπείρους ('for their marriages the women were carried off by force, not when they were small and unfit for wedlock, but when they were in full bloom and wholly ripe', *Lyc.* 15.3.). Cf. Avagianou 1991, 116.

5 Both personae are well attested in the Greek world, but they do not usually appear together. For instance, in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Persephone is integrated into the Underworld

Lokrian Persephone is both the archetypal abducted maiden and the ruler of the Underworld.<sup>6</sup> Both aspects are strongly related to fertility through the link between agriculture and the Underworld. This is intimated in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* in, for instance, the connection between Persephone going into the Underworld and the burial of seeds.<sup>7</sup> It is also brought out at Lokroi by the use of fertility-related iconography (like grain stalks) alongside Underworld-related iconography (like pomegranates), particularly in the homage and 'still life' *pinakes*, discussed below. Persephone's cult was a major religious focus for the polis. It was located in an extra-mural shrine, just outside a gate on the northwest side of the city, in a low ravine typical of Lokrian topography. The site was excavated in 1908-1909 by Paolo Orsi, who found a small rectangular building and a large ritual pit that contained thousands of fragments of offerings.<sup>8</sup> Dedications in the cult included the terracotta *pinakes* which I will discuss in detail below, terracotta pomegranates, and figurines showing Persephone as a fertility or mother goddess (not unlike a young Demeter).<sup>9</sup> The *pinakes* were produced from the end of the sixth century BC, to around 470 BC, although the material found in the pit ranges from the late seventh to the fourth centuries BC. Jennifer Larson indicates that Persephone might have been identified with an indigenous Underworld goddess,<sup>10</sup> although John Boardman suggests that the native population was entirely displaced from the city when the mainland Lokrians arrived.<sup>11</sup> It is not improbable that the Lokrians established a syncretic cult of Persephone, and while Herodotos

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as Hades's wife but does not take on a role as Underworld Queen, whereas in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* she is presented as a ruler of the Underworld with no reference to the story of the rape. In Hesiod her abduction is briefly treated (*Th.* 914-915), but her victimisation is not played up, and her role as an Underworld ruler is the dominant one.

6 Cf. Redfield 2003, 349; Sourvinou-Inwood 1978, 101.

7 H.Hom. *Dem.* 353, cf. 305-311, 332-333.

8 Zuntz 1971, 159-169; Orsi 1909.

9 Demeter and Persephone (or Kore) were well suited to the Southern Italian and Sicilian colonies, including Lokroi, due in part to the fertility of the land. But in these areas we also find instances—like at Lokroi—where Persephone is worshipped without her mother, which is unusual in the 'normal' Greek religious landscape. For more general discussion on the cultic landscape of Lokroi see Antonetti 1995; Currie 2002; Graf 2000; Hinz 1998, 203-209; Lissi Caronna, Sabbione and Vlad Borrelli 1999; 2000-2003; 2004-2007; Prückner 1968; Quagliati 1908; Redfield 2003; Sourvinou-Inwood 1973; 1974; 1978.

10 Larson 2007, 81.

11 Boardman 1999, 185.

mentions a cult of Demeter,<sup>12</sup> there is no particular reason why Persephone should be imported into the colony with the importance she has.

The *pinakes* are small, roughly square, terracotta plaques. They do not exceed thirty centimetres on any side and range from half a centimetre to two centimetres in thickness. Their uniform size probably indicates that they were purposefully standardised,<sup>13</sup> otherwise we would expect to find different sizes catering to different socio-economic classes. The *pinakes* show Persephone's 'divine' abduction, 'imitation' abductions of young girls by their own beardless groom,<sup>14</sup> scenes of Persephone (alone or with Hades) receiving nuptial offerings,<sup>15</sup> images of Aphrodite, and 'still life' images of nuptial offerings.<sup>16</sup> They are predominantly dedicated to Persephone, although some may have been dedicated to Aphrodite, who was a subordinate divinity of the cult,<sup>17</sup> and a figure of worship elsewhere in the city.<sup>18</sup>

Aphrodite's presence in the cult is not accidental. Together, Persephone and Aphrodite, along with their consorts, represent the spectrum of love (and lust) appropriate to a marriage-related cult partly concerned with fertility. Persephone, legitimately united with Hades, protects and nourishes marriage, fertility, and the safe production of children. Aphrodite, with her lover Hermes, embodies the totality of love and sex, even when that might be deemed perverted.<sup>19</sup> So, Aphrodite's main function in the cult was to ensure that the physical act that the new marriage required was performed. That is to say, she induced the newlyweds to lust after one another. This was important because Persephone, whose own marriage was consummated with the oral ingestion of six pomegranate seeds, was not necessarily an ideal model for girls to imitate. The pomegranate seeds may have ended Persephone's maidenhood, yet the seeds themselves contribute to her enduring childlessness. Pomegranates were used as a way to control fertility in the ancient world,<sup>20</sup> so Persephone had (perhaps inadvertently) artificially prevented herself from

12 Hdt. 7.200.2.

13 Cf. Redfield 2003, 352.

14 Orsi 1909, figs. 30-37. Beardlessness is typical of wedding-related iconography and does not indicate that Lokrian men were married younger than elsewhere in the Greek world.

15 Orsi 1909, figs. 5-12.

16 Orsi 1909, figs. 21-24.

17 Sourvinou-Inwood 1991, 151.

18 Schindler 2007.

19 Cf. Schindler 2007, 'Aphrodite and Hermes', Sourvinou-Inwood 1978, 120. This might be connected to the apparent erotic tendencies of Lokrian poetry (see Zuntz 1971, 159), but the link is probably a stretch.

20 Riddle 1992, 25-26, Ruis 2015, 22.

becoming pregnant.<sup>21</sup> This is directly against the purpose of marriage in the ancient world: the production of legitimate children. And Persephone and Hades's (hypothetical) children would have been legitimate, irrespective of the violence that initiated their union, because of Zeus's express permission. Iconographically, too, Lokrian Persephone is not entirely suitable for direct imitation. She is abducted, wed, given gifts and dedications, but she does not go into her husband's home and physically consummate her marriage. She is trapped in the moment just before the physical manifestation of this life-and-status-changing experience can occur.

The *pinakes* were most likely dedications made by young girls in the lead-up to their weddings. In this sense, it is understandable that the chosen god does not completely undergo the transition process. The dedications served the function of seeking Persephone's blessing and protection for their marriages,<sup>22</sup> and they were dedicated before the marriage had taken place. So the image of the goddess that was being invoked and imitated in the abduction scenes was the goddess in the same state as the dedicating girls: the state immediately before marriage.<sup>23</sup> Persephone as a protector of marriage appears to be local to Lokroi, and there is no evidence that people came from outside the city to make marriage-related dedications to Lokrian Persephone.

The most common *pinax* types are the 'divine' and 'imitation' scenes. In both cases, these range from unambiguous abductions where the maiden clearly struggles against her captor to images in which it appears the girl is complicit in her own kidnapping—sometimes even taking charge of the chariot herself. The range can be accounted for because, as James Redfield points out, "no doubt some brides felt more abducted than others."<sup>24</sup> This is echoed on some

21 Persephone does have a child, Dionysos Zagreus, in the so-called 'Orphic' tradition. But his father is Zeus, not Hades. For detailed discussion see Graf and Johnston 2013, 66–93.

22 Sourvinou-Inwood 1973, 18. For the *pinakes* being predominantly dedicated by girls, also see Redfield 2003, 252–253.

23 We might draw a parallel with Apollo, the 'arch-ephebe' who never himself becomes truly 'adult', for instance see Bierl 1994.

24 Redfield 2003, 357. This position, of course, supposes that the girls themselves were responsible for picking out the particular image for their *pinax*. This may well have been the case, and I tend to think (partly following Redfield's intimation) that the image chosen reflected the feelings of each girl, and probably also her mother, about the upcoming marriage. There are many examples of women dedicating objects in the Greek world (see Dillon 2002, 9–36 for detailed discussion on women dedicating), so it is certainly not implausible to suggest that a female (either the girl, or her mother in consultation with her daughter) would have chosen the image. If the girl's *kyrios* is selecting the image there may be fewer that show the bride's dissatisfaction, worry, or fear at the impending

southern Italian vases, showing Persephone leaning back, stretching out for Demeter and a final attempt for help.<sup>25</sup> But, unlike this dramatic scene, the majority of the *pinakes* show a middle ground, where the girl is neither totally cooperative nor being forcibly torn away from her family: she is a captive, but her abductor is soft and adoring. Persephone was torn between acceptance and horror in her own abduction, and although Zeus had permitted the marriage Persephone screamed when Hades snatched her and the hymn describes her as being ἀέκουσα, ‘constrained’ or ‘unwilling’.<sup>26</sup> But, her victimisation is not necessarily that clear. Consent in the ancient world was problematic anyway,<sup>27</sup> but it is likely that a genuinely assaulted girl would have had legal recourse against her attacker.<sup>28</sup> The *Hymn* challenges Persephone’s victimhood by having her *self*-identification change from aggrieved victim to accepting wife. Hades had a genuine desire to marry her and was not just attempting to rob her of her chastity—just like the abductors who imitate him in Lokroi. Persephone’s agreement to her marriage is represented in the homage *pinakes*, where she calmly sits by her husband, receiving dedications.

The content of the imitation scenes has been greatly contested in the past, with identification ranging from prematurely dead girls,<sup>29</sup> being taken into the Underworld by Thanatos,<sup>30</sup> a youthful Hades,<sup>31</sup> or Hermes;<sup>32</sup> or one of the Dioskouroi snatching Persephone on Hades’s behalf;<sup>33</sup> or an indigenous local hero who was amalgamated into the Persephone-and-Hades abduction story

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marriage, given the role they would play in selecting the groom to begin with, though this does not discount a father or brother being sensitive to his daughter or sister’s feelings. In the context of Lokroi, this does relate to the apparently matrilineal transference of religious practice, cf. Larson 2007, 83; Greco 2006, 173.

25 Jenkins 1983, 142, pl. 18b, cf. Beazley 1942, 647.

26 H.Hom. *Dem.* 19. Zeus’s permission—representing the ἐγγύη (‘betrothal’)—is vital for the legitimisation not of the marriage but any resulting children (of which we know there are none) (see Ferrari 2003, 27). The ἐγγύη is a pledge made by a father, brother, or grandfather and is attested in several places, including Athens (D. 46.18) and Sparta (Hdt. 6.57.5). This point is important regarding the use of Persephone as a figure for emulation, which I will discuss below.

27 For discussion see Cohen 1993, Omitowoju 2002, 26–28.

28 Carey 1995, 414; Harris 2013, 286–289, 290–291, 298–300; Harris 2015, 300.

29 That is, girls who have died before marriage, and were therefore considered ‘special’ in death; for further discussion of ‘special dead’ see Garland 1985, 77–103.

30 Quagliati 1908, 158–159; cf. Bianchi 1976, 12.

31 Scheurleer 1932, 334.

32 Richter 1949, 184–185.

33 Zancani Montuoro 1955, 9–10.

due to similarities with the pair.<sup>34</sup> It has also been suggested that the divine abduction scenes could show Persephone being kidnapped by Eubouleus,<sup>35</sup> rather than Hades. This is unlikely: the abductor(s) are iconographically different from Eleusinian Eubouleus,<sup>36</sup> and there is no reason for him to appear in southern Italy, especially in a cult not connected to Eleusis or to mystery rites. The case for the young-abductor and his bride imitating Persephone and Hades was made convincingly by Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood.<sup>37</sup> She argued that these must represent an idealised form of actual bridal couples because of the quantity and variety of depictions, and because they primarily relied on marriage-related iconography (rather than non-marriage related abduction iconography<sup>38</sup>), and due to the relationship between mock abduction and marriage rituals.

There is no evidence that mock abductions occurred in marriage rituals at Lokroi, although whether they did or not is irrelevant.<sup>39</sup> Rites-of-passage were, in myth, often conceived of as death-and-rebirth, and in religious practice this was symbolised as a kind of death of the person's former status. In the context of marriage rites, which are essentially coming-of-age rites for girls,<sup>40</sup> Persephone's narrative is a perfect model. When Persephone is married she is literally snatched up and taken into the Underworld, and when she returns is no longer a girl, but a woman with all the connotations that go with that change in status. This change happens while she is in the Underworld—at the moment she swallows the pomegranate seeds—not during her return or when she is back on the earth. So, when young Lokrian girls on the precipice of wifehood dedicated images of themselves looking and acting like Persephone, they were writing themselves into that narrative, and appropriating Persephone's experience to their own. These do not need to be illustrations of an actual

34 Prückner 1968, 73-74.

35 Bonnechere 2003, 181.

36 Clinton 1992, 73.

37 Sourvinou-Inwood 1973.

38 There is a loose connection with other types of abduction scenes found throughout the Greek world, the so-called 'erotic pursuit' scenes (identified primarily by Sourvinou-Inwood 1991, 59). The main difference between the Lokrian abduction scenes and 'erotic pursuit' scenes are the protagonists. In many other examples the main abductor is Theseus (Sourvinou-Inwood 1991, 60; cf. 29-51), although they are also unidentified youths similar to those found in the Lokrian examples. These youths often carry spears, which are never present in the Lokrian examples. The prominent 'grabbing motif', which carries a strong connotation of violence or forceful marriage, is also not found in the Lokrian scenes.

39 Contra Sourvinou-Inwood 1973, 17.

40 Ferrari 2003, 36.



ritual to give them meaning. They are images of girls (metaphorically) dressing up as Persephone and acting out her story, being taken into the Underworld by their own groom-to-be, in order to undergo the change from girl to woman. So, it is important that Persephone is always shown before the conclusion of the marriage rite. The girls dedicating these images are preparing to enter the Underworld—that is, for their ‘old’ status to die—but they cannot yet envision the ‘other side’ of this change. In this way, Persephone is the perfect figure for emulation. There is the promise of a safe return to the ‘known-ness’ of their present lives. After marriage, these girls would still, in some ways, be under the control of their familial homes, just as Persephone is still in the control of her mother. A woman can always be retrieved, a marriage nullified. She does not completely integrate into her husband’s home.<sup>41</sup>

The prominent role played by Hades in this cult, or at least in its iconography, is significant. In other cults that might be aetiologically linked to Persephone’s abduction narrative (like the Eleusinian Mysteries or the Thesmophoria), the main narrative elements relate to Demeter’s loss and Persephone’s recovery. There is little (if any) reference to Persephone’s abduction or marriage. These cults are predominantly agrarian-themed, and represent Demeter’s grief at the loss of her daughter, and the joy she exhibits upon her recovery, which plays out the cycle of barrenness and plenty that covers the earth. To achieve this Persephone could have gone *anywhere*; for the narrative, however, the Underworld is the best place, because it cannot be easily entered, even by the gods. There is no indication that fertility aspects of these cults might be represented by the marriage of Persephone and Hades, perhaps because the couple is extraordinarily barren. But at Lokroi the abduction and marriage are the central aspects of the cult. This marriage cannot occur without Hades—perhaps an obvious observation, but nonetheless an important one in the context of a marriage-related dedication.

It is not just this point, though. Persephone is also presented here as Queen of the Underworld, not just a girl on the precipice of marriage. This symbolises what happens after the abduction, when the young girl leaves her familial homes for that of her new husband, and in doing so takes over the duties of running her own household. The homage *pinakes*, in particular, feature death-related iconography, and Persephone is given the prominent position—at the front of the scene, with Hades seated behind her. But, the girls do not depict themselves in this guise—they are still on the other side of the transition.

41 Cf. Ferrari 2003, 29.



## 2 Persephone the Bride

The idea of girls playing Persephone is not unique to Lokroi. There are several examples of young girls imitating the goddess in her guise as Hades's wife.<sup>42</sup> This is, therefore, a flexible identification: where the girls at Lokroi present themselves as Persephone being taken into the Underworld these girls are instead dressing up as brides to forgo the direct experience of premature death. Following premature, and often horrible or violent, deaths, many girls become 'Brides of Hades', and their deaths are described as marriages. All these girls are being written into Persephone's abduction and marriage narrative to tell us something about their present context, in much the same way as Evadne inserts herself into the story. There is a significant contextual difference between the cultic dedications at Lokroi and the tragedy of 5th century Athens.<sup>43</sup> This is an idea that appears in both contexts, and as I will discuss below, is also translated into Athenian funerary rituals. While the 'Persephone' that is being invoked in each case is slightly different, it is her more widely 'panhellenic' attribution that colours each interpretation.

Death and marriage rites were similar in many ways,<sup>44</sup> and they are connected by the typological motif of separation and reunion.<sup>45</sup> Funerary epitaphs of young unmarried girls often comment that they had not experienced married life, and sometimes they include references to abduction by Hades. Their tombs are likened to bridal chambers, and images often depict the dead girl as a bride being unveiled.<sup>46</sup> Iphigeneia is probably considered to be the archetypical 'Bride of Hades', although there are many other examples in classical literature. Iphigeneia, according to Euripides, is called to meet the combined Greek army waiting at Aulis under the pretence of marriage to the hero

42 The examples of Iphigeneia, Antigone, and Polyxena will be discussed in this section, but see also *Kassandra* (*E. Tr.* 444), and *Medea* relating this notion to Glauke (*E. Med.* 985). For greater detail and links with other Indo-European mythologies see Janakieva 2005; cf. Ferrari 2003, 35; Jenkins 1983, 142.

43 Debate about the extent to which tragedy itself was a religious phenomenon is ongoing. Certainly, tragedy was presented during a religious festival but we cannot automatically assume that it was a 'religious act'. For further discussion see Scullion 2008.

44 For a full discussion of marriage and funeral rites see Rehm 1994, 11-29.

45 This is actually a tripartite schema, with a period of liminality in between the two phases mentioned here. This middle period is where status change actually occurs, and in a death-and-rebirth style rite would be the period that represented being in the Underworld. This is following van Gennep 1960.

46 Ferrari 2003, 35.

Achilleus,<sup>47</sup> but—we later learn—instead finds her husband in Hades.<sup>48</sup> The marriage ruse ensures that Iphigeneia undergoes the normal ritual preparations carried out by any young girl readying herself for marriage. But, this only serves to highlight her impending death to the all-too-knowing audience. Her mock marriage, and death, is a mythic exemplar for the rite-of-passage that each young Greek girl undergoes. Like Persephone, Iphigeneia dies and is transformed into a bride in the Underworld. She therefore embodies each possible outcome for young girls: marriage, or premature death. Young brides must prepare themselves for the end of childhood and to take up the responsibility of adulthood—that is, the metaphorical death of their former selves in order that they may be ‘reborn’ as wives. Iphigeneia’s story draws out the mental preparation required of young girls about to undergo this status shift and the physical preparation for death that informs the mythic death-and-rebirth of this moment, reinforcing Persephone’s double-edged marriage narrative.<sup>49</sup> This is the role of the rite-of-passage, and the reason this idea embodies the motif of separation and reunion required in coming-of-age rites.

Antigone also prepares for her marriage only to find herself wed in Hades. She is betrothed to Haimon, son of her uncle Kreon. But instead she is entombed alive by her would-be father-in-law as punishment for attempting to bury her brother, Polyneikes.<sup>50</sup> Her burial-related punishment foreshadows her own imminent live burial, and her obsession with her brother’s burial keeps her from the normal preparations for a young girl about to be wed. This is particularly pronounced given that her first burial attempt would have been ritually successful in the eyes of the gods.<sup>51</sup> But Kreon does think of Antigone’s marriage to his son when he uncovers her plan. Or rather he considers that Antigone will no longer become his son’s wife—commenting that “Αἰδης ὁ παύσων τούσδε τοὺς γάμους ἔφω” (‘Hades will bring an end to this wedding for me’).<sup>52</sup> And it does, but not in the way that Kreon initially intends. Because,

47 E. *IA* 100.

48 E. *IA* 460-462; cf. *IT* 369.

49 I would also like to flag the possibility that an ongoing mental preparation for marriage has the potential to fill-in for the physical preparation for death—presuming that at least some deaths of a young teenagers would be fairly sudden and therefore give no time for physical or mental preparation. However, this idea is purely speculative on my part.

50 S. *Ant.* 883-890. It is important that Kreon does not directly kill Antigone, but by burying her alive he sentences her to a ‘living death’. See Butler 2000, 27.

51 S. *Ant.* 245-247. See discussions in Held 1983, 193; Rose 1952, 219. For a more general overview of the issues here see Margon 1972. This is important because Antigone’s insistence on burying her brother rests in the fact that she believes it is her familial duty and not undertaking it would contravene the laws of the gods, see *Ant.* 450-470.

52 S. *Ant.* 575.

protesting his fiancée's condemnation, Haimon kills himself. Antigone—now a bride without a mortal bridegroom—declares that Ἀχέροντι νυμφεύσω ('I will marry Acheron'),<sup>53</sup> and calls her own tomb a νυμφεῖον ('bridal chamber').<sup>54</sup> Through this explicit series of references, Sophokles writes Antigone into Persephone's narrative, exploiting the deep-rooted connection between marriage and death. Although, unlike Persephone, we know that Antigone will not return to the upper world and therefore has no choice but to make her marriage in the Underworld. This is possible even though Antigone has not yet even mentioned Persephone. Repeated references to marriage in, and to, Hades is enough to place her in this narrative context.

Several characters clearly struggle with the idea that Antigone will be unwed, but Antigone is the one who drives this connection home. When she is led into her living tomb, she cries out—finally invoking Persephone:

ὦ τύμβος, ὦ νυμφεῖον, ὦ κατασκαφῆς  
οἴκησις ἀείφρουρος, οἷ πορεύομαι  
πρὸς τοὺς ἔμαυτῆς, ὧν ἀριθμὸν ἐν νεκροῖς  
πλείστον δέδεκται Φερσέφασσ' ὀλωλότων·

O Tomb, bridal-chamber, ever-lasting deep-dug home, where I go to join my own, who have been destroyed in the greatest numbers, and Persephone has received among the dead! (*S. Ant.* 891-894)

Judith Butler suggests the first lines of this speech indicate that Antigone marries one of her close family members, either Polyneikes or her father-brother Oidipous.<sup>55</sup> This follows her family's (mythic) heritage, but does not necessarily fit into the concept that is being invoked by Antigone; namely, marriage in death. Haimon's mother, Eurydike, believes her son still marries Antigone in the Underworld, saying:

κεῖται δὲ νεκρὸς περὶ νεκρῶ, τὰ νυμφικὰ  
τέλη λαχὼν δειλαιοσ εἰν Ἄιδου δόμοις

He [Haimon] lay, corpse enfolding corpse, having won his marriage rites, poor boy, not here, but in the house of Hades. (*S. Ant.* 1240-1241)

53 *S. Ant.* 815.

54 *S. Ant.* 891.

55 Butler 2000, 23-24.

Kreon also refers to Antigone finding her husband in Hades, but does not say directly that she will marry the god (or, indeed, anyone else).<sup>56</sup> Even taking these references alongside Antigone's own explicit reference to her marriage *to Hades* we must acknowledge that her marriage is still made in the Underworld. This demonstrates that the idea of a young woman of marriageable age dying, without undergoing the experience of marriage, still needs to undergo this status change. That is to say, every character with a stake in Antigone's outcome determines that she will marry in the Underworld. Young women who die without marrying in the mortal world get married in the Underworld. This is the effect of Persephone's narrative being used as a way to discuss girls like Antigone. None of the girls—Antigone included, despite her direct reference—attempt to subvert Persephone's position in the Underworld. They are not claiming rulership, or divine status, or consortship. They are attempting to undergo the normal status change that their adolescence has been building towards.

Because of this, the honour of taking up the mantle of 'Hades's Bride' can be extended to Polyxena. She is sacrificed over the grave of Achilles, to be his wife in the Underworld.<sup>57</sup> Unlike Iphigeneia and Antigone, Polyxena is never represented as *Hades's* bride, but her sacrifice takes the form of the 'reversed wedding' apparent in other Brides of Hades.<sup>58</sup> The sole reason for her death is marriage. For Polyxena, marriage is not a pretence that 'softens the blow' of a more horrific reality. Antigone finds marriage in the Underworld only because she disobeys a public edict and is punished with entombment. Otherwise, she would have married Haimon and, presumably, helped provide the next generation of Thebans. Likewise, Iphigeneia would have grown and married (perhaps even Achilles), and lived a normal life if Agamemnon had not been required to sacrifice her in order to wage war against the Trojans. Although marriage is used to entice Iphigeneia to the camp, by the time she is killed there is no marriage charade. In comparison, Polyxena's death is blunt and brutal. Marriage in the Underworld is not the consolation she wins for her untimely death: it is suddenly the prize. Polyxena's intended husband is already dead and she cannot claim her position as his wife without following him.<sup>59</sup>

56 S. *Ant.* 654; cf. Ferrari 2003, 37.

57 E. *Hec.* 40–44, 189–190.

58 Loraux 1987, 37.

59 There is an obvious parallel between Iphigeneia's false groom and Polyxena's intended husband, Achilles. As Dowden 1989, 68 eruditely points out: "marriage to Achilles is a dangerously genuine motif for Iphigeneia and for Polyxena".

Euripides's *Hekabe* tells us that Polyxena entered the Underworld a virgin,<sup>60</sup> and was not united with Achilles in death,<sup>61</sup> but she was, nevertheless, no longer a virgin. And even Polyxena herself recognises the inevitability of her union in Hades when she says she was being sacrificed *for* the god.<sup>62</sup> The firmer ground in Polyxena's case is provided by the distinct wedding-like motifs found in her sacrifice. She is, for instance, led to her grave by the wrist,<sup>63</sup> a gesture used in marriage rituals as a symbol of possession. This is a distinct feature of wedding iconography in vase paintings from the archaic and classical periods, and usually shows the groom leading the bride. John Oakley and Rebecca Sinos comment that "early classical vases tend to portray a fairly realistic scene from one moment in the wedding... The groom seizes either the hand or the wrist of his bride to lead her away."<sup>64</sup> But Polyxena's groom is already dead. So she is pulled along by his son, Neoptolemos, like a bride to her bridal chamber which is—like Antigone's—actually a tomb. Polyxena bravely offers her own neck, willing no man to touch her,<sup>65</sup> although the custom is for sacrificial victims to be held aloft by ephebes.<sup>66</sup> This is how Polyxena is more normally shown in visual representations,<sup>67</sup> and how Iphigeneia's sacrifice is described in Aischylos's *Agamemnon*.<sup>68</sup> The clear parallel between Polyxena and Persephone is their figurative loss of virginity. Polyxena can, therefore, be seen as a bridge between the mythic 'Brides of Hades' and the ritual custom of treating girls who have died prematurely as though they were brides. Although we cannot lay out a claim that these prematurely dead girls lost their virginity when entering the Underworld, they are afforded the opportunity to undergo the process of becoming a wife. The mythic examples can achieve this in full,

60 E. *Hec.* 416.

61 E. *Hec.* 612; cf. Loraux 1987, 39, 40-41.

62 E. *Hec.* 207-210.

63 E. *Hec.* 523.

64 Oakley and Sinos 1993, 45, and figs. 86, 87. An excellent example is Oakley and Sinos's figure 86 (= Boston, Museum of Fine Art 13.186), an Attic red-figure *skyphos* by Makron that shows Paris leading Helen by the wrist. Cf. Bremmer 2007, 62.

65 E. *Hec.* 548-549.

66 Bremmer 2007, 63-64.

67 For example, the c. 570-560 BC black-figure amphora showing Polyxena held in the air by a group of warriors while Neoptolemos pushes a sword into her outstretched neck, her blood spurting out over the altar below (British Museum GR 1897.7-27.2), or the sarcophagus of Polyxena at Gümüşçay from c. 520-500 BC, again showing Polyxena being held up by ephebes, this time upside down, while her throat is slit, see Sevinç 1996, 255-258, figs. 256, 259, 510b.

68 A. *Ag.* 231-237.

particularly as virginity-loss was an important physical marker of the transition: on one side she was a girl and on the other, a woman. But mythic heroines can achieve something that real girls cannot—in death, they ‘live’ the experience of being wed, but not fully. This takes us back to the choice of Persephone for imitation at Lokroi. There, as her final scenes were prior to the point the bride was taken into her new husband’s home, she also is a bride who has not (yet) undergone this physical process.

In Athens, prematurely dead girls were buried wearing wedding clothing and given grave goods that resembled wedding gifts.<sup>69</sup> A brief examination of some examples of grave markers also shows that they play on the idea of girls being wed in (or to) Hades. One of the most famous examples is Phrasikleia, whose grave marker was a kore statue bearing an epigram, from around 540 BC. The epigram makes it clear that Phrasikleia died unmarried, and that she had a special status in the Underworld because of this:

σῆμα Φρασικλείας·  
 κόρε κεκλέσομαι  
 αἰεὶ, ἀντὶ γάμο  
 παρὰ θεῶν τοῦτο  
 λαχῶσ’ ὄνομα

The tomb of Phrasikleia, I shall be called maiden forever,  
 Because I won this name from the gods instead of marriage. (*IG I<sup>3</sup> 1261*,  
 trans. Dillon)

Phrasikleia, and other girls like her, are not portrayed as ‘Brides of Hades’—there is no notion that she will marry Hades in the Underworld. They are, in a way, being presented as a metaphorical image of the maiden Persephone.<sup>70</sup> But they are ‘incomplete Persephones’ because they can only undergo half of her journey. Phrasikleia’s tomb makes it explicitly clear that she is a κόρη and that she will remain so forever. She does not lose her virginity, like Polyxena. She does not find a husband in Hades, like Iphigeneia or Antigone. And this is the special status that she attains. In playing at being Persephone the young maiden in some ways falls short, but her specialness is retained because she is perpetually in the state of being wed. She lives in the Underworld in her wedding attire, always on the precipice of marriage. Like Persephone, she does not actually undergo consummation: she never has sex and never becomes

69 Garland 1985, 87.

70 Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, 249-252.

a fully-fledged wife. Like Persephone herself, she is infertile. She cannot bear children, so her 'marriage' in death is a failure in practically every sense.

These prematurely dead girl brides, like those presented on the Lokrian *pinakes*, are imitating a specific part of Persephone's mythic heritage. The Lokrian girls imitate the moment of her abduction; they briefly become the powerful Queen of the Underworld who is shown on the homage *pinakes* at Lokroi. And the dead Athenian girls imitate Persephone in another way, they are the helpless Kore, snatched away by death, present in the Underworld. They are not granted Persephone's honours. That is to say that these girls—all of these girls, even the mythic girls who do marry Hades or lose their virginities—imitate Persephone but they cannot take her place.<sup>71</sup> The girls who were buried with bridal objects and iconography were not being offered to Hades as brides by their parents—that is, their death rituals were not a 'substitute' for marriage rituals—rather the form of burial can be read as a way of giving these girls the opportunity to undergo an experience that defines the life of a woman.<sup>72</sup> Mythic variants of ritual practices often present protagonists in ways that do not reflect actual practice, particularly related to their social status.<sup>73</sup> The difference here is not the girls' position in life, but their perceived position in the Underworld, after death. They are not Hades's bride in the same way as mythic or literary figures, because they cannot (much like the girls of myth) replace Persephone's position in the Underworld, whether as a ruler or simply as a wife.

71 This is partly because Hades is, in this period, perpetually faithful to Persephone. The figurative connection between marriage and death might be more understandable if this was not the case. This is an attribute of Hades that remains constant throughout many different representations, or more accurately perhaps, there is no strong evidence that he was thought to have taken lovers—at least in the archaic and classical periods. That (many) other gods do so provides enough evidence that divine infidelity is not unusual and that the Greeks (whichever Greeks that might be) had no fundamental problem with the philandering ways of their gods.

72 Cf. Vermeule 1979, 55-56. A parallel might be drawn between this practice and the advent of the 'Solo Wedding' in modern Japan, which allows single women to have a 'wedding package' without the marriage that normally accompanies it; see Japan Today Lifestyle 2014.

73 Mythic *pharmakoi*, for example, are often kings or beautiful women—they are always individuals of high standing in society, which obviously gives their death significantly more meaning and weight in relation to the dispelling of pollution. In real life, however, those chosen to be *pharmakoi* are often criminals, or other people with particularly low standing in society. Their deaths have very little impact on the day-to-day life of the city. For further discussion, see Bremmer 1983, 301-307, Bremmer 2007, 88-89, Versnel 1990, 53.



### 3 Concluding Notes

Persephone's own marriage is a failure. She spends a significant portion of her time away from her husband, and she does not have a child.<sup>74</sup> This is partly because the Underworld is a place where no life can grow, but this cannot be the only factor. Persephone spends two-thirds of the year on the fertile earth,<sup>75</sup> and her return from the Underworld induces the earth's fertility—when she is in the Underworld the seeds are buried in the ground, seemingly lifeless, and when she returns to the earth they bloom in growth. Her never-ending journey brings the earth's alternate fertility and infertility, but she remains infertile. Persephone had, inadvertently or not, caused her own infertility by swallowing Hades's pomegranate seeds.<sup>76</sup> The moment Persephone takes the pomegranate seeds from Hades,<sup>77</sup> she assents to her marriage.<sup>78</sup> This is the moment that she has sex and is no longer a chaste girl; when she emerges from the transgressive period in between 'girl' and 'woman'. Her liminal status ends and she begins to be reintegrated into society as 'wife'. This takes place in the Underworld, so her new status is predicated on her position in the Underworld. Her marriage, an archetype held up for girls to mimic, is a failure. This might be part of the reason she is a prime candidate for imitation by these precariously positioned young girls, either in marriage or death.

One location where the blending of these two aspects was emphasised is in the Lokrian cult, where she was presented as an Underworld ruler, and with Underworld iconography, but the scene from her story that was celebrated and imitated was her abduction and marriage. It is also evident in the ways that young girls were presented as brides, both in literature where they become 'Hades's brides', and in cult where prematurely dead girls are given wedding-like

74 See n. 17 above.

75 H.Hom. *Dem.* 446.

76 See n. 16 above.

77 H.Hom. *Dem.* 372.

78 There is much to say about whether or not Hades had forced or tricked Persephone into eating the pomegranate seeds, but before she leaves the Underworld she does agree to the marriage, this is evident though the use of words like ἀκοίτης ('husband' h.Hom. *Dem.* 363). The ingestion of the pomegranate seeds marks the moment of consummation in Persephone and Hades's marriage, if this were forced the union would be regarded as rape. Rape victims, at least in classical Athens, were not shamed or punished for wrongdoing like women who had been seduced (and were therefore consenting partners), so if she felt truly violated she would have recourse to deny the union with Hades, rather than consenting to the marriage. For further discussion on consent and rape see Carey 1995; Harris 2013, 90, 98-300; Harris 2015.

funerals. None of these girls—the mythic Brides of Hades, the Lokrian girls preparing for marriage, nor the prematurely dead girls—are attempting to overthrow Persephone and take her place, but they are tapping into a fundamental part of what Persephone represents as a god: an acknowledgement of the (potential) trauma of marriage, and leaving behind the ‘old self’ to take up a new role. The idea at Lokroi is that girls temporarily play at being Persephone in order to form a relationship with her, and to win her blessings in their marriages. Building a relationship with the gods is important in all cult settings (and all religious practice feeds into the common goal of relationship-building). Creating an association between yourself (or your deceased child) and the goddess is a way of strengthening that relationship. Worshipers playing at being Persephone for a while give themselves access to all aspects of the goddess. By undergoing her experiences, these girls put themselves in a position to receive the goddess’s favour.

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