



WEAVING FOR ATHENA: THE *ARRHEPHROI* AND MUNDANE ACTS OF RELIGIOUS DEVOTION

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Résumé : Le présent article examine le cas des jeunes filles, âgées entre sept et onze ans, élues pour assurer des charges liées au culte d'Athéna Polias, divinité protectrice d'Athènes, à l'époque classique (vers le V^e siècle avant notre ère). Je me penche sur la fabrication du vêtement offert à Athéna lors de la fête annuelle des Panathénées, dont le tissage était l'activité principale du séjour annuel de ces filles sur l'Acropole. Je soutiens que, alors qu'elles participaient à la confection de ce vêtement, ces jeunes filles manifestaient une croyance perceptible en la déesse, et que la pratique de la préparation et de la confection signifie que nous pouvons aller plus loin vers une compréhension non seulement de la pratique haptique, mais également de la croyance haptique.

Abstract: This article examines the young girls aged between seven and eleven year old who are elected to serve in the cult of Athena Polias, patron deity of Athens, in the classical period (roughly 5th century, BC). I look at the creation of the dress given to Athena at the yearly Panathenaia festival, the creation of which is the main activity of their year-long tenure on the Acropolis. I argue that though the participation in the making of this dress, these young girls exhibit discernible belief in the goddess and in the practice of preparing and making the dress means we can move towards an understanding not just of haptic practice, but also of haptic belief.

One of the key difficulties in the study of ancient Greek religion is that 'civic'¹ and personal religious practices cannot be easily disentangled. There is, as both Katherine Rask and Julia Kindt have noted, an anxiety inherent here.² Of course, we should not privilege civic religion over personal practices, especially where those practices are not mediated through the public sphere. As scholars so far removed from this world, we often blindly suppose that civic religion is *not* personal, preferring to take a wholly etc

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approach to the study of ancient religion. But even at the largest civic festivals there *must* have been people who felt deep religious devotion and expressed it through their acts of civic worship. There is, simply, an endless multitude of ideas and experiences that could be expressed during most types of festivals,³ ranging from deep piety to uninterested boredom. In part, this must be true because of the avenues through which religion was learned in the ancient world, which tended to be both through formal religious education and through interpersonal relationships.⁴ That is to say, both through the specific teaching of steps and exposure to living religious practice in the home and communities.⁵ Adults may have had enough time to question the religious status quo in 5th century Athens, if they were so inclined. How often this may have happened is the topic of a different paper; here I am more interested in how this relates to children, who are still forming ideas about the divine based on the family and community context in which they live.⁶ Gordon Lynch argues that the materiality of religion – the play and experience of objects – ignite a child’s imagination and encourages them to form relationships with the divine through the practice of ‘correct’ religious behaviour. To quote Lynch at length:

Childhood relations with sacred others were not, then, simply an outworking of an instinct for a ‘God-object’ (or other sacred intermediaries), but produced in an institutional context in which children were disciplined into relationship with sacred others through the use of particular material objects, spaces, and bodily practices. In part, such disciplining took the form of training the imagination, the social construction of transitional phenomena identified by Winnicott,⁷ through encouragement by priests, nuns, and other teachers, enabling children to engage imaginatively with their own chosen patron saint, or their guardian angel. Such disciplining also made use of material objects through structured religious play such as building a Christmas crib or make-believe masses using props bought from specialist catholic suppliers, again designed to evoke a particular kind of sacred imagination. Such disciplining also took material form in children’s own bodies, through careful training for their participation in sacred ritual [...], itself supported by a range of material media such as magazines, posters, and cartoons that sought to encourage correct behaviour.⁸



For the modern Catholic child this practicing makes sense. By and large, children are kept from 'proper' individual religious practice until they are at an 'appropriate' age, defined through negotiation with their parents and church traditions. This is much the same in many modern religions, and often usually ends with a 'coming of age' service in which the child crosses over into religious adulthood. Catholic children are confirmed at around 14 years old, Anglican children are around the same, Jewish children becoming religious adults at 12 (for girls) and 13 (for boys).⁹ For children in classical Athens, there was no barrier to individual religious practices, and introduction to 'proper' participation began practically from birth.

For many children brought up in religious homes today, what happens in the years before 'religious adulthood' (usually between 12 and 14 years) is that participation in religious practices occurs on the periphery to their individual identities. Rather than undertaking their own private self-initiated practices they practice in communal and familial ways but in the same ways as the rest of their community or family is doing. As Lynch says, they are taught about the more individual aspects of religious practice though playing 'make believe',¹⁰ like pretending to go to mass, or building a nativity scene. But young Athenian children, and particularly young Athenian girls, do not play make believe. They are made central to the religious practices of their communities from a very young age – perhaps as young as five, when they might be chosen to play at being bears in honour of Artemis at the Brauronia. At this point they are taking on central individual roles within the context of community practice – their bodies are literally made into ritual objects, but perhaps more significantly their (limited) autonomy is being used within the act of worship. At a few years older than this they may be chosen to be the *arrhēphoroi*¹¹ and to serve in the cult of Athena Polias and living in a special building on the Acropolis for a year. Girls can be given this role at any time between the ages of seven and eleven,¹² and so it occurred during prepubescence.¹³ On one side of this divide, the girl was a very young child and on the other a pubescent girl who would be in the process of preparing herself for marriage and, ultimately, motherhood. This is a time of emotional and cognitive growth, when experiences and sensations become more important, and when a child is



starting to become more aware of the world around them and – perhaps more importantly – their place within it.

This is also a time – perhaps *the* time – in a girl’s life when she was given permission to shine on the public stage. A time when she and her peers acted as conduits between the city and the gods, before they retired into the relative obscurity of being good ‘un-discussed’ citizen wives. But for the time being, these young girls are free to be in the middle of a series of large-scale, civically-minded, religious festivals. Perhaps these girls would undertake one of the four main religious roles that prepubescent and pubescent girls could be selected for in 5th and 4th century Athens – and beyond. These are the roles that the chorus of old women in Aristophanes’s *Lysistrata* reminisce about:

οὐκ ἄρ’ εἰσιόντα σ’ οἴκαδ’ ἡ τεκοῦσα γινώσεται.
 ἀλλὰ θώμεσθ’ ὧ φίλοι γράες ταδί πρῶτον χαμαί.
 ἡμεῖς γὰρ ὧ πάντες ἄστοι λόγων κατάρχομεν
 τῇ πόλει χορησίμων:
 εἰκότως, ἐπεὶ χλιδῶσαν ἀγλαῶς ἔθρεψέ με. [640]
 ἐπτά μὲν ἔτη γεγῶσ’ εὐθύς ἡρρηφόρου:
 εἴτ’ ἀλετρις ἢ δεκέτις οὔσα τάρχηγέτι:
 κατ’ ἔχουσα τὸν κροκωτὸν ἄρκτος ἢ Βραυρωνίους: [645]
 κάκων φέρουσα ποτ’ οὔσα παῖς καλῆ χουσ’
 ἰσχάδων ὄρμαθόν:

Citizens of Athens, we begin
 By offering the city valuable advice
 And fittingly, for she raised me in splendid luxury.
 As soon as I turned seven I was an *arrhephoros*,
 Then when I was ten I was an *aletris* for the Foundress;
 And shedding my saffron robe I was an *arktos* and the Brauronia;
 And once, when I was a fair girl, I was a *kanephoros*, wearing
 A necklace of dried figs.¹⁴

This passage clearly articulates the young girl’s contribution to the city in a defined way – through direct participation in large-scale civic festivals. An *aletris* was a girl who ground up sacred grains, and the predominant requirement for preparation of sacred food was purity: here meaning virginity.¹⁵ At the Brauronia, a festival in honour of Artemis, girls between five and ten would ‘play’ *arktoi* – ‘bears’. Finally, after reaching puberty, girls could become *kanephoroi* and carry baskets of sacrificial implements and accoutrements in prominent positions in festival processions, including at the Panathenaia, which will be the major festival



I look at in this article. This role is perhaps more about showing off than any of the other roles Athenian girls might undertake. The *kanephoroi* are on the brink of womanhood, and (their fathers would be) looking for suitable and advantageous husbands for them. And, the *kanephoroi* might overlap with another group of girls who play a very prominent role in the Panathenaia: the *parthenoi* (literally the ‘virginal young women’) who form the bulk of the weaving party for Athena’s peplos. These girls, and the young *arrhephoroi*, will be the primary subjects of this paper. These positions would put the girls front and centre, allowing the entire citizen body to see them, but they are also about hiding the work of these girls away, as we will see. They are on show, and also hidden away, their lives – and roles as religious implements – are borne though a subtle interplay of hiding and revealing.

The way the elderly women of the *Lysistrata* frame their reminiscing it, itself, quite interesting. Athens – the *polis* itself¹⁶ – raised these women with all the luxury afforded to a proper Athenian girl. Their bodies are used as ritual tool, the things that they make – whether tangible objects like dresses, or intangible objects including dances or songs – become sacred through their bodily input. This is *the* way that their contribution to the state is recognised, a state in which they are supremely disenfranchised in all other ways and in which they are given both ritual autonomy but at the same time are reduced to the status of ritual objects. This is not only how they participate in religion, but how they participate in the *polis*-at-large. The festivals in which they participate, and the Panathenaia chief among them, are designed to feed into an annual cycle of affirmations between the citizen body and the gods.

In all other aspects girls are kept away from the civic and administrative functions of the city but here they take on the principal roles in one of the most important aspects of civic identity – the celebration of poliadic gods. But of course, not just any girls can fulfil this function. Only girls from the most elite Athenian families will be chosen, and even then, only two (or four) of these will be selected to undertake the particularly special role of *arrhephoros*. These girls have two major roles during their year-long service: weaving Athena’s peplos, and their role in the Arrhephoroia. This is where their title comes from, and involves – so Pausanias tell us – the girls carrying something, which is hidden from them,



from the Acropolis to the sanctuary of Aphrodite Kepois ('of the garden'), picking up another box of unknown contents and taking it back to the Acropolis.¹⁷ But the first thing they do, around a month into their tenure on the Acropolis, is participate in the most important Athenian festival of the year: the Panathenaia. So, let me introduce you to Panarista, an elite nine-year old Athenian girl. Panarista will be our model *arrhephoros* in this paper. She is modelled off an historical *arrhephoros* from the 1st century BC, who we know of because her family set up a kore statue to celebrate her tenure on the Acropolis.¹⁸

The first question that needs to be tackled is religiosity. The default position of the sociologist of religion in thinking about belief-related self-identity has been 'to emphasise the autonomous, reflexive individuals striving to construct their own religious belief-system and lifestyle which becomes the centre for their way of acting in the world'.¹⁹ Depending how you view the system of *polis*-based religious practices, this kind of definition could apply to an adult Athenian's approach to religious life. Nine-year olds (the median age of the *arrhephoroi*) tend to be unquestionably inculcated with their parent's beliefs at least until the point when they encounter a non-religious outside community.²⁰ Given the prevalence of community practice in Athens, and therefore the likelihood that the girls chosen for this role would have been raised completely immersed in that practice, we can comfortably say that the girls who serve as *arrhephoroi* believe in Athena as their patron goddess, and also believe that the acts they undertake in this role feed into the religious health of the city.

The Panathenaia and Athena's Peplos

As a festival, the Panathenaia needs very little introduction. It was, in many ways, constructed (and reconstructed) around the extravagance of Athenian piety. It is about reaffirming the ongoing, reciprocal bond between all Athenian people and Athena as their poliadic deity. This relationship was symbolised by the peplos – a dress that was the primary offering used to dress the olivewood statue of Athena Polias at the yearly Panathenaia.²¹ But the Panathenaia is much more than just a religious festival. It is



about Athenian self-identity on a communal level, and this does not only occur in the religious sphere but also (or perhaps predominantly) within the civic and political spheres. These non-religious aspects are also deeply tied to the presentation of Athena Polias – their strong, masculine, warrior goddess. This is because the festival is about cementing the religious and civic domination of the Athenians (over, at the very least, their allies) and also a way to reinforce the intricate bonds between the city's social and political institutions and its religious character.²² It is the embodiment of embedded religion in the classical Greek world.

The intersection of civic Athenian identity and religious Athenian identity, represented by and through the Panathenaic festival, would undoubtedly have been experienced very differently depending on where you place in society was, and where your place in the festival happened to be. This is why it is so interesting to look at (and for) women's roles in the Panathenaia, but why looking at the experience of young girls in the liminal phase between 'proper' childhood and 'real' adulthood is even more interesting. Even the most elite of these girls would have had a relatively low social status, yet they held paramount roles in the festival, and this particularly applies to the two (or four girls) who were chosen as *arrhēphoroi*. Many of the first waves of processors were women and girls,²³ and these included Athenians and *metics* ('resident foreigners').

It would be remiss of me not to briefly address the 'peplos scene' on the east face of the Ionic frieze of the Parthenon (henceforth 'the Frieze', see figure 1). The Frieze dates from the period of building between 447 and 432 BC, which followed the destruction of the former temple during the Persian occupation of the Acropolis. Scholars generally agree that the Frieze represents a version of the Panathenaia procession, and that section on the east front shows various kinds of people (including magistrates), the seated gods, and the peplos scene.²⁴ This is an image that would be ever-present in the lives of the young *arrhēphoroi* as they were living on the Acropolis. The scene is above the main entryway to the Parthenon, and (like the rest of the frieze), is tucked up at a neck-jarring angle.²⁵

In the centre of the image is the Priestess of Athena Polias. Standing to her left are two *arrhēphoroi*, carrying trays of something: perhaps a special kind of bread of even (but



more unlikely) the sacrificial knives and accoutrements traditionally carried by the *kanephoroi*. On the other side of the Priestess is a man who is probably either the Priest of Zeus Polieus or the priest of Poseidon Erechtheus. Both gods have a connection to Athena and the religious and civic identity of the Athenians, and both have a cult presence on the Acropolis.²⁶ To the Priest's side is an attendant, and together they are folding up last year's peplos. If the other two girls are *arrhephoroi*, then this attendant cannot also be an *arrhephoros* because they are dressed differently. If *this* figure is an *arrhephoros* – which is unlikely as we would expect to find at least two girls together – then the other girls might be *parthenoi* who helped to weave the peplos itself (I will return to these girls below). However, the main reason I am convinced that this child is not an *arrhephoros* is that her intimate involvement with the peplos is not what an *arrhephoros*'s relationship with the peplos would be at this stage in her tenure. This is not the garment that she will be involved in weaving – but that which was created by the last pair of *arrhephoroi*.

Given this, I suggest we read the peplos scene as a triptych. On the left the two *arrhephoroi* represent the future peplos, or, more accurately the kinetic potential for the future peplos, as they are the symbolic weavers of next year's offering. On the right, last year's peplos is being folded away for storage (or whatever it is that happened to past peploi in the aftermath of their year-on-the-statue). The Priestess of Athena, in the centre of the image, directly above the door leading into the Parthenon and to the monumental chryselephantine statue of Athena Parthenos, is representative of the peplos that is being dedicated on this day. This peplos has already been displayed in some way, either it has been put onto the olivewood statue of Athena Polias in the Erechtheion or, at the very least, it has been paraded during the procession. It does not matter that the Priestess does not 'point' into the temple at the statue that would receive the peplos. It is representational of the relationship between the city and Athena, mediated through the peplos. The iconographic link between the peplos at the statue of Athena Parthenos reinforces this: the gigantomachy appears on the inside of Athena's shield²⁷ and is used to decorate the peplos.²⁸ The base of the statue is decorated with the birth of Pandora,²⁹ linking the Athena to the act of weaving and clothing (among other things).³⁰

Let us return to Panarista, and what she might be



thinking, looking up at the peplos scene on this temple that looms over her temporary home. Perhaps she is considering the peplos that she will have to weave – she, like us, might not actually know how involved she is expected to be in its production. She may be thinking about setting up the loom, about how the yarn will feel in her fingers, about her relationship with Athena and what it means to weave this sacred garment. She might look up at this scene and read herself into one of the figures, as well as the Priestess who oversees her days and will certainly manage the weaving party. And she will recognise the goddess, Athena, sitting with her back turned away from last year's now-discarded peplos, relaxed. The Athena of the Frieze is not at all like the image of the goddess inside this temple. And, although the olivewood statue is lost to us now, it certainly would not have had the animated ease that this carved Athena exhibits. This is a figure that maybe looks a bit like Panarista's own mother, sitting, relaxed, overseeing weavers in her own home. This will be an intensely personal experience for this young girl, but one that has an overtly community-driven, civic goal: the renewal of the relationship between Athena and the city of Athens, and all the people who live within it. Of course, this is speculation. We cannot know how the young *arrhēphoroi* would have viewed this image, what they would have been told about its significance, nor even if they did take the time to look closely at it. At the point where Panarista began making the peplos that would be associated with her tenure, she would have only been living on the Acropolis for a few short weeks. She would probably have been scared, and awed, and overwhelmed.

There are few comparisons that we can make between the lives of modern little girls and those from classical Athens. The focus in the lives of seven-year old girls today is on learning to read and write, to work with numbers, physical activity and, perhaps most importantly, play. The focus for girls in classical Athens may have included some of these things, but this was also highly dependent on status. To begin with a simple difference: I report that the *arrhēphoroi* were girls between the ages of seven and eleven, but this is not entirely accurate. Ancient Greeks did not keep precise records of chronological age, so 'age' is determined by the context of a peer-group than by asking someone something akin to 'have you reached the minimum threshold of seven years of age?'. In this sense, the young girls who are selected to serve as



arrhephoroi represent all the girls in the peer-group(s). It makes sense that they are taken from the most elite families, not because girls in social groups below this did not deserve to be *arrhephoroi* or because they could not have undertaken the duties of an *arrhephoros*. In fact, less elite girls may have been more able to execute some of the tasks necessary than the girls who were chosen. Simply, the *arrhephoroi* are taken from the most elite families because these are the families who could afford for their daughters to live on the Acropolis for a year and, therefore, not be actively contributing to the household during that time. The duties that girls usually undertook during these religious events relate more-or-less directly to the duties they'd learn in the home anyway.³¹ Formal education began around the same age as the youngest *arrhephoroi*, but how comprehensive this would have been – especially for girls – was again directly dependent on the economic situation of the family. This would have been a two-pronged decision: could the family afford the tuition, and could they afford for the child to not contribute to the household during the time they were in education?³² So girls whose families could not afford to have their daughter away for a year would likely not consider putting their daughters forward for the role in the first place.

Panarista has only recently been appointed to the role after a vote by the assembly, perhaps followed by selection from the archon basileus.³³ We can easily imagine her father speaking up for her inclusion in the shortlist. It's a role that honours his daughter, and so himself and his whole family's devotion to the city's religion. It also puts him in a good position to negotiate a wealthy, elite, powerful husband for her when the time comes. The Panathenaia is the first public-facing thing that Panarista will do in her tenure on the Acropolis. In a few months, she'll undertake a task that is probably the most important duty of the *arrhephoroi*: set up the loom and warp at the Chalkeia,³⁴ a festival dedicated to Athena Ergane and Hephaistos, and from there she will start the process of weaving the peplos which will be dedicated to Athena Polias at the next Panathenaia. We do not know how involved these young girls were in the actual weaving, which I will discuss in more detail below. However, at this juncture I want to be clear that, partly following Mansfield and Sourvinou-Inwood,³⁵ I think there is a new peplos woven each year and that this is not just a 'special' thing which occurs in the years of the Greater Panathenaia. Unlike



Mansfield's interpretation, I do not think that there is sufficient evidence to show that a second, larger peplos was made for that statue of Athena Parthenos in the years of the Greater Panathenaia from the mid-fifth century.

Panarista would be familiar with weaving, and the associated preparation of yarn, even if she had not personally done it. So, weaving Athena's peplos – the principal object of devotion that the Athenian people will give to their poliadic deity during the year – may not only be her first big task as an *arrhephoros*, it may also be the first major weaving project she has been directly involved with. Weaving on an upright warp-weighted loom is extremely labour intensive. Garments were not cut and sewn from 'sheets' of material, but rather were woven in their entirety.³⁶ Garments, like the peplos, that required intricate patterning would have that woven into the fabric on the loom, rather than being embroidered in at a later time. This means that there would need to be significant pre-planning for both the actual design of the garment (involving relatively advanced numeracy skills), but also of the various weights of wool to be spun and dyed for each section.³⁷

Setting up the loom was even more laborious than weaving on it and required a detailed knowledge of the mechanics of weaving. It is the physical intensity of the experience that leads me to conclude that the *arrhephoroi* could not have set up the warp, nor could they have achieved the level of technical weaving required to make the peplos, which features intricately woven scenes of the Gigantomachy. There are scenes, like the fourth century votive relief from the Acropolis in figure 2, that shows an *arrhephoros* as a loom that is an appropriate size for a young girl. The loom is still big, requiring the girl to stretch above her head to pass the weft through the warp.³⁸ The loom might be fit-for-purpose for a girl, particularly one at the older end of the age-range for *arrhephoroi*, who was already used to the strenuous and repetitive actions of weaving. But Panarista – or any *arrhephoros* – is likely not such a girl because of her elite background. We can easily imagine that children in these families might have helped around the home, but they also would have grown up with enslaved women in the household to undertake the laborious or repetitive tasks. The point is the symbolic presence of these girls, and this is more important than their physical ability to complete any of the intricate weaving. It would not have



surprised me, for instance, to find evidence saying that they passed the first and last weft though and that was it; that is to say, they undertook a purely ceremonial role in the creation of the peplos.

The group who likely did most of the weaving was like another group of slightly older girls, also from elite families. These are *parthenoi* – maidens, in the peer-group above the oldest *arrhephoroi*. In later sources, they are called *ergastinai*.³⁹ These are girls whose marriage contracts would be being discussed around this age, so it is easy to see how a role showcasing a young woman's weaving skills, and (most likely) giving her an opportunity to parade in the Panathenaic festival, would be prized. The two *arrhephoroi* and the group of *parthenoi* were overseen by the Priestess of Athena Polias, a married woman who, likely, would have had experience of overseeing a weaving party in her own home. This means that the sacred weaving party is representative of the weaving party of a 'normal' Athenian household, and – taking this a step further – that *all* Athenian women are ritually represented in the group that weaves the peplos. As the chorus in Aristophanes's *Lysistrata* could not all have been *arrhephoroi*, but there is no distinction made in their speech between those who were and those who were not chosen. Weaving Athena's Peplos, then, symbolised not only the greatest work that these particular women could undertake, but represented women's contribution to the polis – embodying the most feminine aspect of their poliadic deity in celebration of the religio-civic relationship with her.

Weaving was an immensely important skill for women to have, and an excellent weaver would be prized as a wife, so this would have been a fantastic opportunity for the girls involved – both the *arrhephoroi* and the *parthenoi*, whose marriage contracts were probably being discussed around this time. At least, this is what I imagine is occurring to each girl's father as he's arguing for her inclusion in the weaving party.⁴⁰ And the real Panarista – who my imaginary *arrhephoros* is based on – does go back to join the weaving party some years later.⁴¹ Was this normal for past-*arrhephoroi*, or a double-coup for Panarista's marriage prospects?

The women in the weaving party are, all at once celebrating Athena as their poliadic goddess; their city; their own economic role in the city, as active producers of cloth; their role in creating and recreating Athens, with the





promise of marriages built on the girl's showcasing their skills at this festival and, then the (eventual) creation of the next generation of Athenian citizens.

Sensory Shockwaves

If weaving is a physically demanding activity, then weaving a sacred garment should be seen as both physically and spiritually demanding. But the weaving itself is an everyday, mundane task, that girls are exposed to from a young age. So, we must determine how this mundane task becomes a religious act. As Mary Lefkowitz points out: 'from a modern point of view, it is easy to dismiss wool working as a routine chore that limits women's freedom of movement. But to the ancient Athenians, to be selected to work the peplos was a significant civic honour'.⁴² How does it come to be one, to the young *arrhephoroi* who likely do not yet have the religious vocabulary to articulate the 'spiritualness' of the mundane act they are undertaking. The *arrhephoroi* and the Priestess of Athena set the warp for the peplos on the loom not long after the Panathenaic festival.⁴³ The festival occurred only six weeks after the *Arrhephoria*, the final act of any set of *arrhephoroi*, so the new girls, including our model Panarista, would have only been living on the Acropolis for between 6 and 4 weeks at this stage. This whole period must have been one of sensorial shock, as she leaves behind the familiar sounds and smells of their homes and – perhaps most importantly – of their family members.⁴⁴ Whether the timing was intentionally set or not, and this is something we shall probably never know, the likely result was that the sensorial onslaught, culminating in the Panathenaia, probably shocked the Acropolis's young inhabitants into sensorial 'normality'.

On the day of the Panathenaia, by the time she arrives atop the Acropolis, Panarista has processed from the Kerameikos, up the Sacred Way. Climbing up to the Acropolis's plateau, passing through the Propylaia, and joining the throng of activity bustling around the ritual heart of Athens. Today is, arguably, the most important day for this sacred space – a space that Panarista is slowly starting to come to terms with not just as a centre for civic ritual, but also as her home. The Panathenaia falls during the start of





summer, and it is hot.⁴⁵ The space is filled with the cacophonous sounds of people filtering in and milling about. If you are smaller than average, as Panarista would be, then the sun would flicker in and out of your face as taller people obscured and unobscured the light. You might bump into them, the sweat on your skin mingling with theirs; or you might brush against the cool marble of a temple. The thick, acrid smell of sacrifice would hang in the air: blood, burning fat, and the half-digested material being scooped out of the insides of 100 or more slaughtered animals. In Sophokles's *Oedipus Tyrannos*, Oedipus describes the city of Thebes as 'heavy with a mingled burden of sounds and smells, of groans and hymns and incense',⁴⁶ and Athens must have been similar – and on a day like the Panathenaia, even more burdened than usual. We can view the religious year in Athens (as any other Greek city) as something like a 'scented calendar', where the smells of sacrifice, and of incense and perfume that change as the naturally available ingredients change, punctuate the year to punctuate those particularly 'sacred' moments.⁴⁷

Weaving as Material Belief

The experience of the Panathenaia has almost faded from Panarista's memory – although the smell of blood would linger around,⁴⁸ she would likely be accustomed to it.⁴⁹ The next great task is setting the warp on the loom at the Chalkeia, a festival in honour of Hephaistos and Athena Ergane, on the last day of Pyanepsion (mid-November), around three and a half months after the Panathenaia. Setting up a warp-weighted loom was a difficult and lengthy task. Fastening the warp threads to the loom in the correct way creates a ribbed section at the top of the cloth – this section can be clearly seen on many of the figures on the Frieze, including on the left edge of the peplos (figure 1). It can also be seen on the votive relief (figure 2), at the top of the loom.⁵⁰

The loom itself would have been quite large. The widest loom recorded either archaeologically or ethnographically is 240 cm, which would accommodate making a cloth of, at most, 210 cm, although Elizabeth Barber suggests that a special loom may be built another 30 to 60 cm⁵¹ wider.⁵² She cites the average woman's peplos would have been, at most



152 by 182 cm, based 'upon the average height of Greek women at that time and upon the way we see the dress draped on ancient representations'.⁵³ This would require around 1,2 kg of wool (which roughly equates to the fleece from two sheep). Barber works out that to spin this into the 'requisitely fine, two-ply worsted yarn'⁵⁴ would take around seventy-two hours of spinning (or twelve, six-hour days). It would take around a week for two people to set up the warp, but these two activities could easily be done at the same time. A plain, un-patterned cloth could take two women a few days to complete. Weaving is usually depicted as a two-person task. However, Athena's peplos was intricately woven with scenes of the gods' defeat over the Giants, and though the precise details of the design may well have changed from year to year, would have include depictions of the gods and Giants, horses, chariots, weaponry, and scenery, in any conceivable configuration. Each of these figures would need to be woven into the cloth by hand and cannot be done by using a tapestry-like technique because the tension of a warp-weighted loom is not sufficient. Barber describes how it would likely have been achieved:

There is an old European method, inherited by the Greeks, of floating a coloured pattern weft across the top of a ground-weave. That is, one weaves a plain background cloth as usual, but between each row of ground-weft (one that goes all the way across and holds the cloth together) the weaver inserts an extra coloured weft-thread, bringing it to the top as needed to form the pattern, and otherwise leaving it to ride behind. Hence the technical term, supplementary weft-float pattern [...]. If the pattern thread is a bit thicker than the ground thread, it will cover the ground threads entirely, giving much the same illusion as tapestry [...]. Note that the basic cloth is thus used as a ready-made background for the figures being created by the pattern threads, a feature which can make a weft-float story-cloth quicker to weave than a tapestry one, and is therefore less costly.⁵⁵

So, the nine-months allotted to the weaving party to undertake this task may not have been a significant stretch. This is highly intricate work, but there is no suggestion that the young girls could not have had the technical ability to weave such an intricate pattern. However, it is also very physically demanding, and it may be that elite girls who are



not as used to physical activity of this kind may struggle to complete the task.⁵⁶

The acts of preparing the fleece, spinning it into yarn, and weaving the garment were mundane activities. They were not sacred in any way, and although weaving was a particular talent of Athena's, it was not a uniquely Athenian skill. Weaving was commonplace, it permeated every level of society and all classical Greek women participated in the weaving industry at some point in their lives. There would have been many women who were well known as good, or even exceptional, weavers. To be blunt: weaving is not special.

So, what makes weaving Athena's peplos so prized?⁵⁷ This is a physical activity that does not have any other function in the moment of participation. For instance, when men participate in athletic events, they do it for personal glory as well as for the glory of the gods. But these women are hidden atop the Acropolis, toiling away in service of Athena without instant recognition. And, as I discussed in the first part of this paper, they do so as representatives of *all* Athenian women. There may be an element of the 'make believe' that Lynch describes, but this cannot have any kind of common effect, given that there is a maximum of four *arrhephoroi* in each year, and that this is not making believe, but *doing belief* – an active and current act of religious devotion.

I want to suggest that what happens here, in the weaving room – something that we will never have enough evidence to fully understand – should be defined as haptic religion. Religious expression primarily guided by touch. Although the end product will be the visual focus of worship for all Athenians, at the next Panathenaia, for the women in this room, this experience is about their touch, and the touch of the wool, of the feeling of lanolin on their hands, and pulsing the weft through the weave. More than mere touch, haptics 'refers to the work of the hands—handling, caressing, grasping, manipulating, hitting, striking, and so on—as instruments of knowledge'.⁵⁸ Therefore, weaving Athena's peplos is not only about the relationship between the whole city and its gods, but there is another intricate relationship at play – between Athena, the goddess of women's work and weaving, and the women who use their hands and bodies as an ongoing, months long physical expression of their devotion to the goddess.



Notes

1. So-called *polis*-religion, defined chiefly in Sourvinou-Inwood, Christiane. 'Further Aspects of Polis Religion'. In Richard Buxton (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion*. Oxford: OUP, 2000a, pp. 38-55; Sourvinou-Inwood, C., 'What is Polis Religion?'. In Richard Buxton (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion*. Oxford: OUP, 2000b, pp. 1-37.

2. Kindt, Julia. 'Personal religion: a productive category for the study of ancient Greek religion?' *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 135, 2015, pp. 35-50; Rask, Katherine Ann. 'Devotionalism, Material Culture, and the Personal in Greek Religion'. *Kernos*, vol. 29, 2016, pp. 9-40.

3. I say most rather than all because individuals who did not feel moved by worship would simply not have participated in some of the more personal practices.

4. Lynch, Gordon. 'Object Theory: Toward an intersubjective, mediated, and dynamic theory of religion'. In David Morgan (ed.), *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*. London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 42, 52-54.

5. In a similar fashion to the teaching of Islamic prayers, involving specific movements to be taught and learned, and community exposure to both those specific prayer-movements and to more general faith-based ideas. This is borne out in, for example, the push to open Muslim schools in the Netherlands and the UK, and the importance of teaching staff setting a 'proper' example to students regarding prayers and other practical faith-based things, such as eating practices; see Küçükcan (1998: 36, 39).

6. This was discussed in a catholic context by Orsi, Robert A. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*. Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2006; cf. Lynch, 2010: 53.

7. Winnicott, Donald Woods. *Playing and Reality*. London: Routledge, 1971, pp. 7, 18.

8. Lynch, 2010: 53

9. This does not, of course, mean that children of this age would then fully participate in religious life. I myself was confirmed Anglican at 13, though I came from a non-religious household. I never went to church again and now identify more with *apatheism* (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apatheism>)

10. A phrase I choose completely knowingly – that this is literally 'making up belief'.

11. The sources for the *arrhephoroi* are chronologically disparate and predominantly these should be taken to form a picture of the



role of that these girls play in the Hellenistic period. Here ‘exceptional families’ mean, most likely, the most elite wealthy families.

12. *Lex. Rhet.* 202.5 Bekker (ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἔνδουκα).

13. Hippocrates tells us that there were three main stages of childhood, each lasting seven years: *παιδίον* (ages 0-7), *παῖς* (ages 7-14), and *μειροαίον* (ages 14-20/21) (Hippoc. in Philo. *On the Creation* 36.105). Solon described similar, but not entirely overlapping categories (Solon in Philo. *On the Creation* 35.104). These stages were likely used by physicians during the classical period, though there is no indication that they were used in a precise manner more widely, but the vocabulary is used in other classical period literature. These categories roughly line up with the categories I have described above as ‘very young’, ‘prepubescent’ and ‘pubescent’; cf. Demand, Nancy. *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994, pp. 142-45; Golden, Mark. *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015, pp. 11-12; Sommer, Dion, and Maria Sommer. *Care, Socialization and Play in Ancient Attica: A Developmental Childhood Archaeological Approach*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2015, p. 169 n. 57.

14. Aristoph. *Lys.* 636-644/5 (trans. Bierl with amendments). For a discussion of iconographic representations of these roles see Neils, Jenifer. ‘Children and Greek Religion’. In Jenifer Neils and John H Oakley (eds.), *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece: Images of Childhood from the Classical Past*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, pp. 151-153.

15. ‘Virginity’ in this context means having never had any conceptual sexual contact with a member of the opposite sex. Girls who had been raped were, legally (though perhaps not in practice) considered to retain their purity (see Mackin, 2018: 224). It is unclear whether that would have held for this case.

16. It is perhaps apposite to say the *polis herself* here, to invoke Athena as the direct embodiment of Athens the *polis*.

17. Paus. 1.27.3; cf. Stehle, Eva. ‘Arrhephoria’. In Roger S. Bagnall *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient History*. Wiley Online Library, 2012.

18. *IG II²* 3488:

Παναρίσταν Μαντίου Μαραθωνί[ου ὁ πατήρ]
καὶ ἡ μήτηρ Θεοδότῃ Δωσιθέου ἐ[γ Μυρρινούττης]
θυγάτηρ καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ Κλεομέν[ης καὶ — —]
[ἐ]ρρηγορήσασαν Ἀθηναῖ Πολιά[δι καὶ Πανδρόσωι]
ἀνέθηκαν.

Panarista daughter of Mantias of Marathon; her father and her mother, Theodote daughter of Dositheos [of Myrrhinoutta],



and her brothers, Kleomenes and -, dedicated (scil. a statue of her), when she had been arrhephoros for Athena Polias [and Pandrosos]. (trans. Dillon / Garland)

Many such dedications were set up by arrhephoroi or their families, particularly prevalent in the third century BC; for example, *IG II²* 3461, 3465-6, 3470-3, 3482, 3486, 3496-7, 3515-16, 3528, 3554-6, 3634.

19. Lynch, 2010: 42.

20. Kelley, Jonathan and Nan Dirk De Graaf. 'National Context, Parental Socialization, and Religious Belief: Results from 15 Nations', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 62 no. 4, 1997, p. 640.

21. I want to be clear that, partly following Mansfield (1985) and Sourvinou-Inwood (2011: 268) I think a peplos is dedicated at each Panathenaia, rather than only at the quadrennial Greater Panathenaia (cf. schol. Aristoph. *Eq.* 566). Some scholars, including Sourvinou-Inwood, suggest that there may be a more elaborate or bigger peplos dedicated at the Greater Panathenaia, or that there may be two in these years. There is no convincing ancient evidence to suggest this.

22. Cf. Maurizo, Lisa. 'The Panathenaic Procession: Athens' Participatory Democracy on Display?'. In Deborah Dickmann Boedeker and Kurt A. Raaflaub (eds.), *Democracy, empire, and the arts in fifth-century Athens*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998: 297-298; Neils, Jenifer. 'The Panathenaia: An Introduction'. In Jenifer Neils (ed.), *Goddess and the Polis: The Panathenaic Festival in Ancient Athens*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 27.

23. Although not entirely representative of the historical reality of the procession, the prominent place of women and girls in the procession can be seen on the Parthenon frieze itself – where women only appear on the front, east face of the building.

24. An excellent 'walk-around' of the whole Frieze can be found at the Media Centre for Art History at Columbia University: <http://www.mcah.columbia.edu/parthenon/flash/main.htm>

25. For an excellent discussion of the viewing angle of the Frieze see Osborne, Robin. 'The Viewing and Obscuring of the Parthenon Frieze'. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 107, 1987, pp. 98-105.

26. I am not convinced enough by arguments either way to make a judgement. I do not think it represents the Archon Basileus: his short sleeve chiton suggests he is a priest. The Archon Basileus would more rightly appear in conjunction with the other magistrates, and he has no reported part in the ritual aspects of the peplos.

27. Plin, *Nat. Hist.* 36.18-19; cf. discussion in Cullen Davidson, 2009: 115-17.



28. Pl. *Euth.* 6b-c.
29. Paus. 1.24.7; cf. Hes. *Th.* 560–612; cf. Cullen Davidson, 2009: 118–19; Hurwit, M. Jeffrey. ‘Beautiful Evil: Pandora and the Athena Parthenos’. *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 99 no. 2, 1995, pp. 171–86.
30. Kutbay, Bonnie. ‘Some Observations on the Female Weaver in Classical Greek Art’. *Mediterranean Studies*, vol. 11, 2002, pp. 21–23.
31. Beaumont, A. Lesley. *Childhood in Ancient Athens: Iconography and Social History*. London: Routledge, 2012, p. 122
32. Beaumont, 2012: 149
33. Harpokration, 57.1 Dindorf, ἐχειροτονοῦντο δι εὐγένειαν; *Syn. Lex. Chres.* 446.18 Bekker, τῶν εὐγενῶν; *Lex. Rhet.* 202.4 Bekker, κατ’ εὐγένειαν.
34. schol. Eur. *Hek.* 467.
35. Mansfield, 1985; Sourvinou-Inwood, 2011: 268; cf. schol. Aristoph. *Eq.* 566.
36. Harlow, 2017: 3.
37. Weaving is well known as an indicator of numeracy and applied mathematical skills and has been used as a way of teaching applied mathematics, for example see the extensive study in Cherinda, 2002.
38. ‘Warp’ refers to the vertical threads that are attached to the loom at the top and weighted at the bottom, the ‘weft’ (also called the ‘woof’), refers to the horizontal thread that is looped in-and-out of the warp, and beaten up so it is very compact, to form the fabric.
39. For example, Hesychius *s.v.* ἐργαστίνας· αἱ τὸν πέπλον ὑφαίνουσαι (‘*ergastinai*: women who weave [Athena’s] peplos’).
40. Cf. *IG* II² 1034 + 1943:
τῶν παρθένων vacat
[τῶν ἡργ]ασμένων τῇ Ἀθηνᾷ τὰ ἔρια τὰ [εἰς τὸ]ν πέπλον ἐμφανίζου-
[σιν παρ]ηκολουθηθέναι αὐτὰς τοῖς ὑπ[ὸ τοῦ] δήμου ἐφηρισμέ-
[νοις πε]ρὶ τούτων πᾶσι καὶ πεποιημένα[ι τὰ δί]καια καὶ πεπομπευ-
[χέναι κα]τὰ προστεταγμένα ὡς ὅτι κ[ἀλλισ]τα καὶ εὐσχημονέ-
the fathers of the maidens
who worked for Athena the wool for the peplos make clear
that the maidens have followed all the decrees of the People
about these matters and have done what is right and have made the procession
in accordance with the prescriptions in a most fine and seemly manner
(trans. Lambert / Schuddeboom)
41. *IG* II² 1943.
42. Lefkowitz, 1996: 80.
43. scholion. Eur. *Hec.* 467.
44. On smell and familial recognition see Classen et al. 1994: 2.
45. The average temperature in mid-August, around the end of Hekatombaion, when the Panathenaia was held, is 27°C with an average humidity of 50%.



46. Soph. *OT*. 4-5, trans. Grene and Lattimore.
47. For more on 'scented calendars' and how they work in other cultures, see Classen *et al.* 1994: 95-97.
48. Weddle, 2013: 146.
49. This is because of olfactory adaption, where the sense is dulled though ongoing exposure to a particular stimulus. The effect is temporary but can last until around 60 days after the ongoing exposure ceases. This means that any short trips away from the Acropolis would not cause the sensitivity to the stimulus (in this case the smell of blood) to return, see Köster and de Wijk 1991.
50. Cf. Barber, J. W. Elizabeth. 'The Peplos of Athena'. In Jenifer Neils (ed.), *Goddess and Polis: The Panathenaic Festival in Ancient Athens*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 109
51. Hesychius, *s.v. diazesthai*; Eur. *IT*. 222-4; Ar. *Lys* .641-7.
52. Barber, 1992: 110.
53. Barber, 1992: 110.
54. Barber, 1992: 110.
55. Barber, 1992: 111.
56. There is a suggestion that there may have been two *peploi* woven in the years of the Greater Panathenaia, one (as each year perhaps) by the *arrhephoroi* and their weaving party, and one by professional weavers (cf. [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 49.3; 60.1). Whether this is the case or not, it has no bearing on the present discussion. I am in the process of doing some reconstruction activities with my own six-year-old daughter, in which we are learning to treat fleece, spin, and weave together. Although this is predominantly for fun, I am hoping that it will help inform some of these preliminary conclusions.
57. Cf. Iphigeneia mourning that she will never weave Athena and the Titans like 'other women'; Eur. *IT*. 222-224.
58. Chidester, 2000: 62.

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Figures

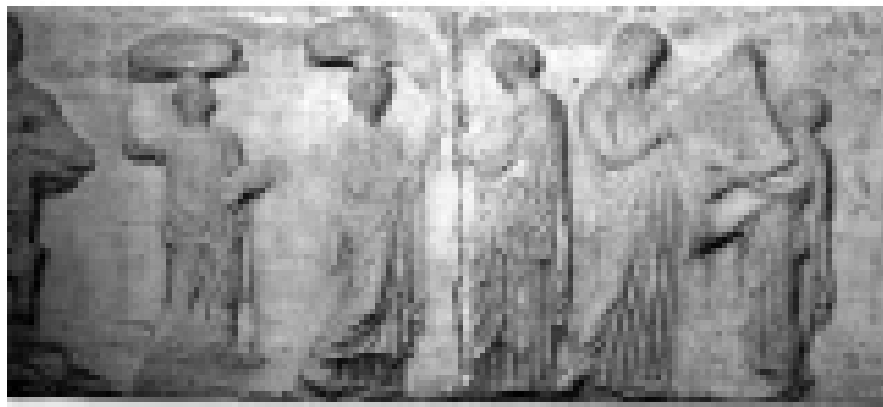


Fig. 1. Thepeplos scene, Slab V from the east face of the Parthenon's inner Ionic frieze. Relief sculpture designed by Phidias. © British Museum 1816,0610.19.



Fig. 2. Marble votive relief with an arrhephoros at the loom, from the Athenian Akropolis, fourth century BC. Akropolis Museum 2554. © Acropolis Museum, 2012. Photo by Socratis Mavrommatis.