THE GREEK WEDDING
OUTSIDE ATHENS AND SPARTA:
The Evidence from Ancient Texts

Résumé. — Cet article présente les informations fragmentaires fournies par les textes anciens sur les rites et coutumes de mariage des cités grecques en dehors d’Athènes et de Sparte. Bien que rares, ces informations peuvent éclairer le sujet et apporter une contribution utile, car nous en savons davantage sur les mariages athéniens et spartiates que sur les rituels de mariage dans les autres cités grecques. Comme on le verra, les sacrifices et les offrandes avant le mariage, l’institution de la dot, les bains nuptiaux, les processions nuptiales, les cadeaux et les repas de mariage étaient particulièrement populaires dans les cités grecques. À plusieurs reprises, des similitudes avec les rituels et les coutumes de mariage athéniens ont été identifiées.

Abstract. — This paper presents the fragmentary information provided by ancient texts on wedding rituals and customs of Greek cities other than Athens and Sparta. Although scanty, this information can shed some light on the subject – a helpful contribution, since we know more about Athenian and Spartan weddings than about wedding rituals in any other Greek cities. As will be seen, premarital sacrifices and offerings, the institution of dowry, nuptial baths, bridal processions, wedding gifts and meals were particularly popular among Greek cities. On several occasions, similarities with Athenian wedding rituals and customs have been identified.

Our knowledge of the ancient Greek wedding rituals and customs mostly derives from ancient texts and scenes of wedding vases. As is usually the case, we know more about the wedding in ancient Athens than in any other city 1. However, the Spartan wedding ritual is not unknown to us,

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as it is described in good detail by Plutarch 2. On the contrary, very little is known about the wedding rites and customs of the other Greek cities. In most cases, the information comes from short references in ancient texts. This evidence, scanty as it is, can shed some light on the subject of Greek wedding outside Athens and Sparta. It is with the hope that it may be useful to scholars working on the subject that this fragmentary, yet interesting information is presented in this paper.

We shall begin with a brief account of the Athenian and Spartan wedding rituals for the sake of comparison with the evidence from other Greek cities.

The wedding ceremony in Athens lasted for three days 3. It was a private ceremony that did not involve any priests or priestesses 4. Athenian weddings were normally conducted during the month Gamelion (“the month for weddings”), which was sacred to Hera, the goddess of marriage 5. In preparation for their wedding, Athenian brides and grooms bathed with water from the Enneakrounos spring 6. A festive procession was formed in order to fetch the water from the Enneakrounos 7. A child closely related to the bride or groom carried the λουτροφόρος (loutrophoros), the ritual vessel containing the water for the nuptial bath 8. The brides dedicated part of their hair, their childhood toys and items of clothing to Artemis, the goddess who watched over all young unmarried females helping them to complete their...
transition into adulthood and marriage. Premarital sacrifices were offered to a series of deities related to marriage and fertility by both the bride’s and the groom’s family. Of particular importance was the προτέλεια (proteleia), the sacrifice offered to Artemis by the bride’s father. The προτέλεια has been interpreted as a propitiatory sacrifice seeking to appease the goddess for the bride’s impending loss of virginity.

The bride’s and groom’s houses were decorated with wreaths, branches of plants and ταντιά (taeniae). Laurel and olive branches decorated the doors of both houses, thus stating to the community that a wedding was taking place. The bride and groom were wreathed and dressed in very fine clothes. The bride wore a saffron-colored veil, special shoes called νυμφίδες (nymphides), jewelry and a bridal diadem (πλανίς [planis]).


10. Sacrifices were offered to Teleios Zeus and Hera Teleia (Diod. Sic., V, 73, 2, 6-3, 1), Ouranos and Ge (Procl., In Ti., 3, 176, 26-28), the Eumenides (Aesch., Eum., 834-836; Scholia vetera in Aeschyllum Eumenides, 835) and the Tritopatres (Suda, T 1023; Phot., Lex., T 604, 4-17; Harp., 237, 4-6) – all of them related to marriage and / or fertility. See also, J. OAKLEY and R. SINOS, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 11-12.


14. Eur., IA, 905; Eur., Tro., 353; Philostr., Her., 733, 2-3; Men., Sam., 74; Suda, N 597, Y 107, 1-2; Poll., Onom., III, 43, 3; J. OAKLEY and R. SINOS, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 16.


19. Hsch., Π 2450; J. OAKLEY and R. SINOS, op. cit. (n. 1), figs. 28-30, 39, 72, 82, 121.
A woman called νυμφαγωγία (nymphaagogia) attended to the bride throughout the ceremony. Marriages were celebrated by wedding feasts with music, singing and dancing. The singing of the wedding song ύμεναιος (nymphaeaios) was central to the celebrations.

The ancient sources also mention the ἀπαύλια (apaulia), during which the groom slept with a little girl whose parents were still alive at the bride’s house. On that day, the bride sent a mantle as a gift to her groom (ἅπαυλιστρηρία χλανίς). The bride’s mother led the procession carrying lit torches. When the couple arrived, they were led to the hearth of the house by taking her from the wrist in a ritual gesture known as χεῖρ' ἐπὶ καρπῳ. The relatives and friends of the couple formed a festive procession that accompanied them to their new home with music and songs. The bride’s mother led the procession carrying lit torches. The groom’s mother awaited for the new couple in their home, also bearing lit torches. When the couple arrived, they were led to the hearth of the house by the groom’s mother. It was there that the ritual of the καταχύσματα (katachysmata) was performed: dried fruits, figs and nuts were poured over...
the bride and groom, ritually incorporating the new couple into the household. 30 According to the ancient sources, it was also customary for the bride to sleep with a little boy whose parents were still alive at the groom’s house, just like the groom had slept with a little girl at the bride’s house during the ἀπαύλια (epaulia) 31.

The ἀνακαλυπτήρια (anakalypteria, ritual unveiling of the bride) was the culminating moment of the Athenian wedding and must have taken place on the third and final day of the ceremony. 32 The bride unveiled herself, thus showing her face to the groom for the first time. The gifts she received from her new husband for the occasion were called ἀνακαλυπτήρια. 33 The consummation of the wedding marked the end of the ceremony. However, the bride’s transition to adulthood that begun with her marriage was not considered complete until the birth of her first child 34.

The ancient texts also refer to the celebration of the ἐπαύλια (epaulia), during which the bride and groom received gifts from her father. 35 The gifts were called ἐπαύλια and were carried in procession to the couple’s new


Various stages of the Athenian wedding ceremony are depicted on Athenian vases, thus supplementing the evidence from ancient texts.

We know far less about the Spartan wedding than we do about the Athenian wedding ceremony. According to Plutarch, the Spartans abducted the girls they wanted to marry. Herodotus on the other hand refers to both arranged marriages and bride abductions in Sparta. It has also been suggested that the Spartan wedding involved a ritual abduction of the bride by the groom, who had previously reached an agreement with the bride’s father. The only piece of information we have about the wedding preparations in Sparta is provided by Pausanias, who states that the bride’s mother sacrificed to Aphrodite Hera before her daughter’s wedding. The Spartan wedding ceremony as described by Plutarch began with the bride’s abduction (whether ritual or real). The groom carried the bride to his home, where the νυμφευτρία (nympheutria) cut her hair off close to the head and dressed her in male attire. The bride was then laid on a pallet and left in the dark to wait for her groom. When he arrived, he would carry his bride to the marriage bed in the dark, undo her belt and consummate the marriage.

The Spartan wedding ceremony was nothing like the Athenian one. It was a very private, brief and frugal ceremony of secretive and austere character, as befitted the Spartan way of life.

Mainland Greece

Argos. — In Argos, it was customary for a type of flat cake (πλακοῦς) called κρήιον (creïum) to be brought to the groom from the bride. It was served with honey and the friends of the groom were invited to eat it.

37. See J. OAKLEY and R. SINOS, op. cit. (n. 1).
39. Hdt., VI, 57, 22, VI, 65, 9 and VI, 72, 1.
44. Ath., XIV, 53, 33-36. In Athens, a mantle was brought to the groom from the bride (ἀπαυλιστηρία χλανίδα): Poll., Onom., III, 40, 1-2.
As P. Marchetti and K. Kolokotsas have proved, a nuptial rite took place in the Numphaeum of Argos. The rite consisted of the bride’s κατάβασις in an underground area of the Numphaeum where a river was flowing. This was where the bridal bath / purification of the bride took place.

Ermoni (Argolid). — All future brides, including any widows that were to be married again, had to offer a premarital sacrifice to the local temple of Aphrodite.

Troëzen. — Before marriage, every maiden has to dedicate a lock of her hair to the temple of Hippolytus and her girdle to the temple of Athena Apaturia.

Megara. — According to Pausanias, the future brides of Megara offered χοαί (funerary libations) at the tomb of maiden Iphinoe and dedicated to her some of their hair.

Boeotia. — After being veiled, the Boeotian brides were crowned with wreaths made of asparagus – a highly symbolic act, as explained by Plutarch: “for this plant yields the finest flavoured fruit from the roughest thorns, and so the bride will provide for him who does not run away or feel annoyed at her first display of peevishness and unpleasantness a docile and sweet life together”.

It was customary for every bride and groom to offer premarital sacrifices to the maiden Eukleia, who is associated with Artemis. An altar and a statue of her were set up in every market place of Boeotia, as well as Lokris.

Thebes. — In Thebes, water from the Ismenos river was invariably used for the nuptial bath.

46. Paus., II, 34, 12, 1-5.
47. Paus., II, 32, 1, 1-10.
**Haliartos.** — The brides of Haliartos offered a premarital sacrifice (προτέλεια, proteleia) to the Nymphs of Kissoessa Spring 53. The wedding was celebrated with a feast 54.

**Lokris.** — As was the case with Boeotia, the brides and grooms of Lokris sacrificed to the maiden Eukleia (or to Eukleia Artemis) before their wedding 55.

**Naupaktos.** — The widows of Naupaktos who wished to marry again had to offer prayers to Aphrodite 56.

**Thessaly.** — After the performance of the wedding sacrifice and the offering of libations, the Thessalian groom leads a harnessed horse dressed for battle to his bride, handing the reins to her 57. The Thessalians were famous horsemen and breeders of horses in antiquity 58. According to Maria Mili, it is very likely that the horse was a symbol of married life and reproduction for the Thessalians 59. Such an interpretation fully explains the meaning of this wedding ritual 60.

**Macedonia.** — Macedonian weddings were celebrated with feasts 61.

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**Islands**

**Delos.** — The Hyperborean maidens were the recipients of premarital offerings of hair by the males and females of Delos 62. The females cut off some of their hair and placed it on the tomb of the Hyperborean maidens

56. Paus., X, 38, 12, 5 - 13, 1.
57. Ael., *NA*, XII, 34, 17-23.
60. See also, M. MILI, *op. cit.* (n. 58), p. 83: “What is striking in the Thessalian ceremony […] is precisely the prominent role of the woman as the end recipient of the war horse, as well as the placing of marriage in the same conceptual sphere as warfare, that is to say in the competitive world of intercity connections.”
61. Ath., IV, 2, 1-3. As E. Voutiras points out, there is no evidence that polygamy was customary among common people in Macedonia, at least from the classical period onwards: E. VOUTIRAS, Διονυσοφώντος γάμοι: *Marital Life and Magic in Fourth Century Pella*, Amsterdam, 1998, p. 88-89.
wound around a spindle. The males did the same, only their hair was wound around a green stalk.  

*Kos.* — The bridegrooms of Kos were dressed in female attire for their wedding. In order to offer an explanation for this custom, Plutarch cited the myth of Heracles, who dressed up as a woman in order to save his life in the island of Kos. After the hero prevailed over his enemies, he married the king’s daughter dressed up as a woman for the occasion, in memory of the disguise that had saved his life.

*Rhodes.* — In Rhodes, it was customary for a herald to bring the bride to the groom. The bridal procession was called ἀγωγή (agoge). The Rhodian girls who had reached the age of marriage were called ἀνθεστρίδαι (anthestridai) or ἀνθεστηριάδαι (anthestiriadae).

*Thasos.* — The dowry in Thasos was called πενθέριον (pentherion).  

*Lesbos.* — The wedding gifts offered to the bride by her relatives were called ἀθρήματα (athremata).

*Chios.* — The bride travelled to her new home on a carriage or chariot, in a festive atmosphere.

*Samos.* — The coupling of the bride and groom “secretly” preceded the wedding ceremony in Samos. Thus, the Samian couples followed the divine example of Zeus and Hera, who slept together in Samos before they were married.

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63. According to J. Redfield, “this seems to show us that the male is the natural partner to the marriage, the female the cultural and acculturating partner”:

64. Plut., *Quaest. Graec.*, 304e, 3-4. For an explanation of the ritual, see E. J. AMENT, “Aspects of Androgyny in Classical Greece”, in M. DEFOREST (ed.), *Woman’s Power, Man’s Game: Essays on Classical Antiquity in Honour of Joy K. King*, Wauconda, Bolchazy-Carducci, 1993, p. 14-18. As it has been mentioned earlier in this paper (p. 324), the brides in Sparta had their hair cut off close to the head and were dressed in male attire.

65. Plut., *Quaest. Graec.*, 297c, 12 - 297d, 2. In Athens, when a groom was being married for the second time, he was not allowed to fetch the bride himself. In such cases, a friend of the groom was sent to fetch the bride, thus becoming the wedding’s νυμφαγωγός (nymphagogos, the one who leads the bride): Hsch., N 711-712; Eust., *Il.*, II, 351, 2-11; Poll., *Onom.*, III, 40, 4-41, 4; Phot., *Lex.*, N 304, 5.

66. Hsch., A 937. From the Greek verb ἀγω (“to lead”, ‘fetch’, ‘bring’).


68. Hsch., Π 1397.

69. Hsch., A 1621.

70. Scholia vetera in *Homerum Iliadem*, XIV, 296a, 10-13. Thus, the Samian custom separated the private from the public aspect of marriage. In contrast to Athens,
The second century AD sophist and rhetor Polemon of Laodicea describes the incident of a bride abduction in Samos. The abduction took place during the bridal procession and was witnessed by Polemon himself. Instead of reaching the house of the groom to whom her father had promised her, the bride was carried off to become the wife of the young man she loved. Besides the reference to the bridal procession which was brutally interrupted by the group of armed men who seized the bride killing everyone who attempted to stop them, the text provides no further information about the Samian wedding ceremony.

Crete. — The Cretan girls returned to their father's home after their wedding, and only went to live with their husbands when they were fully capable of assuming their responsibilities as married women and housewives. This leads us to the conclusion that the girls in Crete married at a very young age.

The dowry of the Cretan brides was half the size of their male siblings' share of the paternal property.

Phaistos. — According to a local myth, the Phaistian maiden Leukippe was turned into a youth (named Leukippos) by Leto. It was customary for the people of Phaistos to lay down beside the statue of this Leukippos before their marriage.

where the couple retired to the wedding chamber after the wedding ceremony was completed, the Samian wedding ceremony made the union of couple (that had already taken place) official and known to the community.


75. Thus, marriage did not mark the passage to adulthood for the Cretan girls. In Athens, females were generally considered to be ripe for marriage after entering puberty and they often got married around the age of fourteen or fifteen: Xen., Oec., 3, 13, 7, 5; Soph., fr. 583, 6-10; Arist., Ath. Pol., 56, 7, 4-6; W. K. Lacey, The Family in Classical Greece, Ithaca, 1968, p. 107, 162; L. Beaumont, op. cit. (n. 34), p. 87, 93; S. Blundell, Women in Ancient Greece, Cambridge, 1995, p. 119; P. Brule, Women of Ancient Greece, Edinburgh, University Press, 2003, p. 130. Marriage marked the transition to adulthood for females in Athens, but this transition was completed only after the birth of their first child (see n. 34). The age of marriage for the girls of Sparta is not known, but Plutarch states that the Spartan females married “in full bloom and wholly mature”: Plut., Lys., 15, 3, 1-3. See also, Xen., Lac. 1, 6; Plut., Apophth. Lac., 228a, 3-6; W. Den Boer, op. cit. (n. 2), p. 229-230.


77. Ant. Lib., Met., 17. The text does not specify whether it was only the bride that had to sleep beside the statue of Leukippos, or the custom also applied to the bridegroom. For an explanation of the custom, see W. Burkert, Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual, Berkeley, 1982, p. 29-30; E. J. Ament, op. cit. (n. 64),
Gortyn. — If there were no male siblings, the daughter(s) inherited the entire paternal property. A heiress was called πατρωιῶκος (patroiokos) and was obliged to marry her nearest male relative, so that the property would remain in the family.78

The widows of Gortyn were free to remarry, if they wished to do so.79

Asia Minor

Troad. — During their bridal bath in the river Scamander, the brides of Troad would exclaim: “Take my virginity, Scamander!”80

Magna Graecia

Sicily. — The matchmakers of Sicily were called προμυθικτριαι (promythiktriae)81.

Before they were married, the Sicilian girls had to become κανηφόροι (kanephoroi) in honour of Artemis82.

78. IC, IV, 72, 7, 15-29. The same practice was valid in Athens, where the heiress was called ἐπίκληρος (epikleros): A. Harrison, The Law of Athens. I, Oxford, 1968, p. 132-138; D. M. Schaps, The Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece, Edinburgh, 1979, p. 25-42. Heiresses also existed in Sparta, but we do not know whether they also had to marry their closest relative. On this, see Suda, Π 799; Phot., Lex., Π 402, 19-20; Hdt., VI, 57, 20-22.

79. IC, IV, 72, 3, 17-22.


Egypt

Naukratis. — Eggs and sweets with honey were excluded from the wedding feasts at Naukratis.

Discussion

Premarital sacrifices and offerings (especially of hair) are the most frequently mentioned practices in the texts mentioned above. Sacrifices were performed in Athens, Sparta, Ermioni, Boeotia, Lokris and Thessaly, libations and χοαί (funerary libations) in Athens, Thessaly and Megara respectively. Hair offerings were customary in Athens, Troezen, Megara and Delos, with the Troezenian maidens also dedicating their girdles before marriage. It is reasonable to assume that in every Greek city sacrifices and premarital offerings would precede the wedding ceremony.

The girdle is a symbol of maidenhood, its loosening signifying the loss of virginity and the consummation of marriage. Thus, the brides-to-be dedicate the symbol of the virginity they are about to lose to the virgin goddess Athena, in the hope that she will watch over them during their impending transition from maidenhood to adulthood, married life and motherhood.

The offering of hair is a common and highly symbolic premarital offering for the Greek maidens, since the hair is part of oneself. Therefore the

83. Ath., IV, 32, 30-32.
84. According to Diodorus, prenuptial sacrifices were offered to Teleios Zeus and Hera Teleia in every Greek city: Diod. Sic., V, 73, 2, 6-3, 1.
85. The brides of Athens dedicated to Artemis their childhood toys, items of clothing and part of their hair (see p. 320-321). The Athenian premarital offerings to the gods also included libations: Diod. Sic., V, 73, 2, 4-5.
86. Hom., Od., XI, 245-246; Eur., Alc., 177-178; Scholia in Aristotelem Rhetorica 184, 17-19; Anth. Pal., VII, 164, 3-4 and VII, 324. Women also loosen their girdles in order to give birth: Callim., Hymn 4, 209; Hyp., fr. 67, 1-13; Scholia vetera in Pindari Olympionicas, 6, 67; Scholia in Lycophronem (Isaac et Joannis Tzetzae), 1278, 6. In his description of the Spartan wedding ceremony, Plutarch specifically states that the groom loosens the bride’s girdle before consummating the marriage. For the girdle of Greek women, see H. KING, op. cit. (n. 34), p. 120-122.
87. For Athena as κουροτρόφος (kourotrophos), nurturer and protector of the young, see Th. HADZISTELIOU-PRICE, Kourotrphos: Cults and Representations of the Greek Nursing Deities, Leiden, 1978, p. 2-3, 8, 11, 52, 59-60, 66, 101-104, 138, 148, 168, 220, 222. As a κουροτρόφος deity and a maiden goddess, Athena is suitable to watch over the Troezenian girls’ transition from maidenhood to marriage.
88. Eur., IT, 820-821 (Iphigeniea cuts off part of her hair before she is led to the altar to be sacrificed and sends it to her mother so as to bury it instead of her body). See also, J. REDFIELD, op. cit. (n. 12), p. 190-191.
cutting and dedication of hair acquires the symbolic meaning of a propitiat-
ory sacrificial offering for the maiden’s impending loss of virginity through
marriage. The brides-to-be offer part of their virginal self to a virgin deity,
in the hope that such an offering will avert the deity’s anger for the girls’
loss of virginity 89. By doing so, the girls die symbolically, sacrificing their
virginal self so that through their successful transition to marriage they can
be “reborn” as adult women, wives and mothers 90. In Megara and Delos the
recipients of such offerings are dead maidens, whose death prevented them
from completing their transition to adulthood. In Troezen, the hair is offered
to the local hero Hippolytus, the youth who shuns the world of Aphrodite
and is loyal to the virgin goddess Artemis 91. It is his devotion to the latter
that provokes Aphrodite’s anger and brings about the tragic death of
Hippolytus. Thus, the eternally chaste young son of Theseus is an appropri-
ate recipient for the premarital offerings of the young brides. In Athens, the
brides dedicated part of their hair to Artemis, the goddess who watched over
all young unmarried females until they successfully crossed the threshold to
adulthood 92. It is in the hope that they will meet with a better fate and their
transition to adulthood and married life will be auspicious that the girls of
Megara, Delos, Athens and Troezen dedicate their most personal offering to
the maidens and the chaste youth who never crossed the threshold to adult-
hood.

As for the recipients of the premarital sacrifices mentioned in our texts,
these are Aphrodite, the maiden Eukleia who is associated with Artemis and
the Nymphs of Kissoessa Spring. In Athens, the προτέλεια (proteleia) was
offered to Artemis 93. In Sparta, the mother of the bride sacrificed to

death of women in labour was considered a result of their failure to propitiate the virgin
goddess for their loss of their virginity: Hom., Il., XXI, 483-484; Callim., Hymn, 3,
126-128; Est., Od., I, 127, 2-7; Etym. Magn., 150, 15-17; S. COLE, “Domesticating
Artemis”; in S. BLUNDELL and M. WILLIAMSON (ed.), The Sacred and the Feminine in
Gender, and Ritual Space: the Ancient Greek Experience, Berkeley, University of
and the Greek Man, Princeton, University Press, 2014, p. 30-31. See also, J. OAKLEY

90. P. VIDAL-NAQUET, The Black Hunter. Forms of Thought and Forms of Society
in the Greek World, Baltimore, 1986, p. 149.

91. Eur., Hipp.; J. E. FONTENROSE, Orion: the Myth of the Hunter and the
Aphrodite: Eros and the Boundaries of the Self in Hippolytus”, in P. BURIAN (ed.),
Directions in Euripidean Criticism. A Collection of Essays, Durham, Duke University
Press, 1985, p. 52-111.

92. See p. 320-321.

93. See p. 321.
Aphrodite Hera \(^{94}\). All of them are appropriate recipients of prenuptial sacrificial offerings: Aphrodite as the goddess of love and sexuality \(^{95}\), Artemis as the virgin goddess who protects all maidens watching over their transition from maidenhood to adulthood \(^{96}\), Hera as the goddess of marriage \(^{97}\), the Nymphs as youthful nature deities of fertility and mythical representatives of the Greek maiden \(^{98}\).

The ancient texts under consideration include references to the wedding feasts of Haliartos, Macedonia and Naukratis. It is reasonable to presume that wedding feasts were held in every Greek city, with the exception of Sparta \(^{99}\). Athenaeus informs us that eggs and honey were forbidden in the wedding feasts of Naukratis \(^{100}\). The prohibition of eggs could be due to their special connection with death and the dead, the eggs thus being considered too ominous for such occasions \(^{101}\).

Bridal baths and bridal processions \(^{102}\) must have been popular among the Greek cities, even though references to them in the texts studied here are limited. The prenuptial bath had a ritual and highly symbolic signific-
ance 103. It was a purification 104, as well as a fertility rite that was performed in the hope that the marriage would be fruitful 105. In this light, the phrase “Take my virginity, Scamander!” acquires a special meaning: by dedicating her virginity to the river, while at the same time coming into contact with its water, an element associated with the fertility powers of nature 106, the bride prepares herself for an auspicious fertile marriage. The ancient texts tell us that the water for the nuptial bath came from a specific river or spring in each city 107 – the Ismenos river in Thebes, the river Scamander in the Troad, the Enneakrounos / Kallirrhoe spring in Athens 108.

Providing the bride with a dowry was a well-established institution all across the Greek world 109. It was not obligatory for a father to provide a


105. Scholia vetera in Euripidis Phoenissas, 347, 4-7; Eust., Il., IV, 702, 9-10.

106. Scholia vetera in Euripidis Phoenissas, 347, 4-7; Scholia vetera in Homeri Iliadem, XXIII, 142a2, 1-2; Scholia vetera in Apollonii Rhodii Argonautica, 125, 3-5; Nonnus, Dion., III, 88-89; Porph., De antr. Nymph., 17, 5.


dowry for his daughter(s), but not doing so could result in these girls receiving no offers of marriage.

With the obvious exception of Sparta, wedding gifts must have also been customary among the Greeks. Of particular interest is the name of the wedding gifts offered to the bride in Lesbos: ἄθρηματα (athremata). The word comes from the Greek verb ἀθρέω: ‘to gaze at’, ‘observe’. This inevitably brings in mind the wedding gifts offered to the bride during the ἀνακαλυπτήρια of the Athenian wedding, when the bridal veil is removed to reveal the bride’s face. These gifts were called ἀνακαλυπτήρια, but also ὀπτήρια (opteria). The latter comes from the verb ὄραω, ὄρω: ‘to see’. A suitable name for the gifts offered after the bride’s veil has been removed and everyone can see her face. Could the ἄθρηματα of Lesbos have had a similar meaning? Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence to either support or refute this hypothesis, but the similarity to the Athenian ὀπτήρια is certainly noteworthy.

Conclusions

It is a sad fact that only brief references to certain wedding rituals and customs of the Greek cities besides Athens and Sparta have come down to us. Nonetheless, even this fragmentary information can lead us to certain conclusions facilitating our better understanding of wedding rituals and customs in ancient Greece. We have therefore identified specific rituals, customs and practices that seem to have been particularly popular among the Greek cities: premarital sacrifices and offerings (especially of hair) to deities associated with marriage and fertility, or to deceased παρθένοι, the institution of dowry, nuptial baths and bridal processions, wedding gifts and meals. On several cases, similarities with Athenian wedding rituals and customs have been noted. On the contrary, possible similarities with the

111. For the secretive and non-celebratory character of the Spartan wedding, see p. 324 above.
112. For the ἀνακαλυπτήρια, see p. 323.
113. See p. 323.
114. Hsch., O 1063; Poll., Onom., II, 59, 3-5.
115. Such as the bridal veil (Athens, Boeotia), the heiresses’ obligation to marry their nearest relative (Athens, Gortyn), the matchmakers and the κανηφόροι (Athens, Sicily), the wedding gifts (Athens, Argos, Lesbos), the premarital sacrifices and offerings (Athens, Erioni, Troezen, Megara, Delos, Boeotia, Lokris, Thessaly), the nuptial bath (Athens, Thebes, Troad), the wedding feast (Athens, Haliartos, Macedonia, Naukratis), the bridal procession (Athens, Rhodes, Chios), the dowry (Athens, Thasos, Crete).
Spartan wedding ritual are scarce. In conclusion, local variations of the same wedding customs and rituals have been identified in several Greek cities, even though the fragmentary nature of the evidence does not allow us to reconstruct the wedding ceremony in cities other than Athens and Sparta.

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116. The prenuptial sacrifice to Aphrodite Hera, the ‘dowry’ or inheritance of the Spartan girls and possibly also the Spartan heiresses, although we do not know whether they were obliged to marry their closest relative.

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