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WATER, MOISTURE, KOUROTROPHIC DEITIES, AND RITUAL HAIR-CUTTING AMONG THE GREEKS

Résumé. — En s'appuyant sur des preuves littéraires, la première partie de l'article explore le lien conceptuel qui unit étroitement l'eau, la croissance des cheveux et les rites de tonte des adolescents dans la Grèce antique. Elle montre que les cheveux, qui, en raison de leur renouvellement continu, sont par eux-mêmes un puissant symbole de croissance, sont régulièrement associés à l'humidité et à la moiteur, conditions préalables nécessaires à toute forme de croissance. Les cheveux constituent dès lors une offrande appropriée aux divinités kourotrophiques, telles qu'Apollon, Artémis et les dieux des rivières, qui se préoccupent de la croissance et de la maturation des enfants et des adolescents. La deuxième partie examine deux offrandes votives : la célèbre plaque en bois peint de la grotte de Pitsa et un petit relief en marbre trouvé dans la Thèbes phthiotique. Un lien est établi entre ces offrandes et les rites de coupe de cheveux des adolescents associés respectivement aux cultes des Nymphes et à celui de Poséidon.

Abstract. — Drawing on literary evidence, the first section of the paper explores the close conceptual link between water, hair growth and adolescent hair-cutting rites in ancient Greece. It is argued that hair, which, due to its continuous renewal, is itself a powerful symbol of growth, is regularly associated with wetness and moisture, the necessary preconditions for any sort of growth. This makes hair an appropriate offering to kourotrophic deities, such as Apollo, Artemis, and the river gods, who are concerned with the growth and maturation of children and adolescents. In the second part of the paper, two votive offerings, the well-known painted wooden plaque from the Pitsa cave and a small marble relief found at Phthiotic Thebes, are discussed. A link is established between these votives and adolescent hair-cutting rites in the cults of the Nymphs and Poseidon respectively.

As a physical feature of the human body, hair – in particular the highly visible head hair – can easily be manipulated by cutting, dressing, dyeing, or shaving. Hair manipulation is, exceptional cases aside, not only painless, but also non-permanent due to the continuous process of hair growth. These characteristics markedly differentiate hair manipulation from other, more enduring forms of body modification such as, for example, tattooing [1]. In ef-

1. For body modification in ancient Greece, see M. M. Lee (2009).

fect, it is the unique manipulative potential of hair that makes it a suitable focus of ritual practices [2].

A great deal of the symbolic meaning ascribed to bodily, facial and head hair probably emerges from the equation of hair growth with the growth of plants. The parallels are indeed striking: both hair and plants grow continuously, and just like hair, many plants grow back when they are cut. A connection between hair and vegetation can indeed be detected in various cultures. In Vedic literature, for instance, hair is repeatedly associated with plants, in particular with grass [3]. A similar concept is current in ancient Greece. As early as in Homer, the same word, κόμη, is used for both hair and the foliage of trees [4]. At the funeral of Patroklos, Achilles makes an offering of his "blooming hair" (χαίτη τηλεθόωσα) [5].

In the Hippocratic treatise Περὶ φύσιος παιδίου originating from the late 5th century BCE, the growth of cephalic hair is closely linked to the presence of moisture (ἰκμάς) in the head [6]. According to the author, hair grows most densely in those parts of the head where the skin is most porous and the right amount of moisture is available for its nourishment (τροφή). On the chin and in the pubic area, where the skin only subsequently becomes more porous, hair growth would equally start belatedly.

Aristotle compares the baldness of humans with the shedding of leaves in plants and argues that the cause of both conditions is a lack of "hot moisture" (ὑγρότης θερμή) [7]. Similarly, in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*, the human head is regarded as a fountain, πηγή, of liquid, ὑγρόν, linking the growth of head hair to the abundance of moisture in this part of the body [8]. As we have seen, beyond the equation of hair with plants, hair growth – and thus hair itself – is closely associated with wetness. More specifically, moisture appears as the necessary precondition for both plant growth and the growth of hair. This is consistent with the general contrast between wet and dry in Greek thought, persistently conceiving the living as "wet" and the dead as "dry" [9].

At puberty, when axillary, pubic and, among males, facial hair begins to grow, the human body reaches sexual maturity and acquires the ability to

2. C. R. HALLPIKE (1969), p. 257.
3. P. OLIVELLE (1998), p. 29-30.
4. e.g. *Il.*, XXII, 405-406; *Od.*, XXIII, 195.
5. *Il.*, XXIII, 141-142.
6. [Hippokr.], *nat. Puer.*, 20, 1. Cf. M. LONIE (1981), p. 199-200, 201-202; P. BRULÉ (2015), p. 32-44.
7. *Gen. an.*, 783b, 8-20. Cf. J. ALTHOFF (1992), p. 246.
8. [Aristot.], *Pr.*, 867a, 23-27. Cf. R. B. ONIANS (1954), p. 231.
9. R. B. ONIANS (1954), p. 254-256; G. E. R. LLOYD (1966), p. 45.

procreate. Aristotle explicitly asserts that in male individuals the first production of semen is concomitant with the beginning of body hair growth. Citing Alkmaion of Croton, Aristotle once more compares hair growth to the growth of vegetation: pubic hair appears with the semen "in the same manner as plants first blossom and then bear seed" [10]. In addition, semen being a liquid, hair growth is again associated with wetness. Among male adolescents, additional moisture in the form of semen results in further hair growth. Obviously, the connection between adolescent hair growth and sexual maturation is likely to be noticed by any careful observer, and precisely herein lies the origin of hair as a symbol of sexuality.

Ethnological evidence indeed indicates that the sexual symbolism of hair is widespread, almost ubiquitous. Due to the connection between additional hair growth and sexual maturation, hair is eminently suited to expressing concerns about human sexuality in a symbolic way. Just to be clear, this is *not* to say that rites involving hair manipulation are always symbolically related to sexuality. Instead, it is essential to discern both the different sources of hair symbolism and the corresponding layers of meaning. In ancient Greece, hair is first and foremost associated with moisture as the precondition for any sort of growth. Even more importantly, hair itself, due to its permanent renewal, is a powerful symbol of growth. This makes hair an appropriate offering to kourotrophic deities, such as Apollo, Artemis, and the river gods who are concerned with the growth and maturation of children and adolescents. River gods, personifications of the nourishing and generative powers of their waters, receive hair offerings already in the *Iliad* [11], and it seems reasonable to assume that the custom spread from here to other kourotrophic deities. The sexual symbolism of hair is, as we have seen, secondary inasmuch as it is ultimately rooted in the close association of body hair growth with wetness in form of semen.

Previous research on Greek hair-cutting rites has consistently failed to make a proper distinction between the symbolism of hair itself and the symbolic meaning of the various ways of its ritual manipulation [12]. The prevalent methods, cutting and shaving, have in common that the hair is detached using a sharp implement such as a razor, a knife, or a sword. As a result, the symbolism of separation, or even rupture, is already inherent in the very act of cutting. Or, as Pierre Bourdieu has put it more generally,

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10. *Hist. an*., 581a, 12-16.

11. See above, n. 5.

12. Generally on Greek hair-cutting rites, see W. H. D. ROUSE (1902), p. 240-245; L. SOMMER (1912); S. EITREM (1915), p. 344-372; M. P. NILSSON (1967), p. 136-138, 180-181, 238, 381, 493; D. D. LEITAO (2003).

> Despite variations in detail, there are clear analogies between all the separation rites, because they apply the same scheme of cutting and separating, and use a set of objects capable of symbolizing these operations (knife, dagger, ploughshare etc.) [13]

The ritual logic, which is always a logic of practice, "exploits" these different layers of symbolic meaning in manifold ways. By emphasizing these sets of meaning to a different degree, ritual hair-cutting naturally adapts itself to a variety of occasions. In the case of parents offering the hair of an infant to a deity, the aspect of growth and maturation is obviously most prominent, while both the moment of separation and the sexual symbolism of hair are rather insignificant. All three sets of meaning are equally pronounced in hair offerings performed by female and male adolescents. Finally, the symbolism of separation clearly prevails with hair-cutting in a funerary context.

With all that in mind, I shall now engage in two case studies providing further evidence for the close conceptual link between water, hair growth and adolescent hair-cutting rites. The first case study involves a well-known testimony of Archaic Greek painting. In 1934, during excavations in the Saphtoulis Cave, also known as Pitsa Cave, situated some twenty kilometers west of ancient Sikyon, one almost complete and three more fragmentary painted wooden plaques came to light [14]. The small votive tablets, or pinakes, had been preserved due to the constant temperature and damp conditions in the cave. In fact, stalactites and stalagmites point to the abundance of water in the cave in earlier times [15].

The best-preserved plaque, dated to 540/530 BCE, depicts a sacrificial procession directed to the altar on the right edge of the scene (**fig. 1**) [16]. At the other end of the plaque, we see a partially preserved figure fully clad in a blue himation and holding a branch. Matthew Dillon has suggested that this figure is a pregnant woman, but there is simply no reason for arriving at that conclusion [17]. Apart from the fact that we cannot determine whether this is a male or a female figure, the protrusion at the abdomen is the right arm of the figure underneath the garment rather than a pregnant belly [18]. Next to the partially preserved figure on the left edge there are two smaller females,

13. P. BOURDIEU (1990), p. 230.

14. For the cave and the finds, see A. K. ORLANDOS (1965), p. 200-206; G. DAUX (1967), p. 642-644.

15. F. MUTHMANN (1975), p. 95.

16. Athens, National Museum inv. 16464. Lenght 31 cm. A. K. ORLANDOS (1965), p. 201-204, pl. opposite p. 202; F. T. VAN STRATEN (1995), p. 57-58, fig. 56; A. D. RIZAKIS (2008), p. 249-251, no. 185 A, pl. 51.

17. M. DILLON (2002), p. 228, 250.

18. A. K. ORLANDOS (1965), p. 201.

likewise wearing a blue peplos and a red-brown himation. Both carry a ribbon and branches in their right hands. The two young musicians, an αὐλός and a lyre player, are considerably smaller than the girls who follow them. Even smaller is the boy leading the sacrificial animal, a sheep. The procession is led by a girl carrying a sacrificial basket, a κανοῦν, on her head and a jug in her right hand. Notably, unlike the other two girls or young women, the κανηφόρος has short hair. Since basket-bearers usually have long hair [19], this hairstyle must bear a specific meaning – I shall return to this point presently.

Fig. 1. Painted wooden plaque from Pitsa Cave, 540/530 BCE
(© Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports / Archaeological Receipts Fund)

The painted inscriptions in Corinthian script include at least two female names as well as a partially preserved signature by a Corinthian painter [20]. The names Euthydika and Eukolis clearly label the two maidens with long hair. Rather than continuing the dedication formula, the letters ΕΘΕΛΟΝΧΕ right above the sacrificial basket probably identify the κανηφόρος with the otherwise unattested name Ethelonche, as already conjectured by Anastasios Orlandos. A further inscription designates the pinax as a dedication to the Nymphs. The inscriptions indicate that the plaque was commissioned and dedicated in order to commemorate what appears to be a family sacrifice.

19. See, for example, a fragment of a Corinthian krater by the Klyka Painter showing a long-haired κανηφόρος with the name-label Καλ(λ)ιό[πα?]: D. A. Amyx (1988), p. 200, no. B-1, 563, no. 26, pl. 83, 2; I. Krauskopf (2005), p. 272, no. 776, pl. 48; for the inscription, see R. Wachter (2001), p. 55, no. COR 26, 325, n. 1200.

20. F. Lorber (1979), p. 93-94, no. 154, pl. 46; R. Wachter (2001), p. 156-157, no. COP App. 1A; A. D. Rizakis (2008), p. 250-251, no. 185 A.

Even though frequently honored with bloodless offerings, the Nymphs also received sacrificial animals, including lambs and sheep. [21]

Because of her smaller stature and short hair, the κανηφόρος has repeatedly been interpreted as a slave girl in previous scholarship [22]. This is unlikely for several reasons. First, the slightly smaller stature of the κανηφόρος might be due to her younger age or the fact that the painter needed to fit in the sacrificial basket. Secondly, she is dressed identically to the other two girls, who are presumably her sisters. Finally and most importantly, literary sources indicate that the κανηφόρος is, so to speak, the prototype of the demure citizen daughter of nubile age [23]. Therefore, even in the context of a family sacrifice, it is improbable that such a prestigious duty would have been carried out by a servant. In effect, during the Dionysiac procession staged by Dikaiopolis in Aristophanes's *Acharnians*, Dikaiopolis's daughter carries the sacrificial basket [24].

But if the basket-bearer is not a slave, another explanation must be offered to account for her cropped hair, a very unusual hairstyle for a free girl or woman. In the part of my doctoral dissertation which has remained unpublished, I have suggested that the animal sacrifice commemorated by the plaque was actually connected with a hair-cutting rite [25]. In other words, the sheep was sacrificed on the occasion of the κανηφόρος cutting her hair for the nymphs. Girls typically offered their hair to Artemis, Hera, a heroine or, occasionally, a hero prior to marriage [26]. Hair offerings to the Nymphs, on the other hand, are scarcely documented in the written sources. An inscription found on Thasos testifies to an otherwise unknown cult of the *Nymphai Kōrades Patrōiai* [27]. Based on the epiclesis *Kōrades*, which would derive from κείρω or the Indo-European root **kers*- "to cut", a connection with hair offerings has been suggested for this cult [28]. In a Hellenistic epigram, a mother dedicates her son's hair, along with a cicada pin and an ox, to the Amarynthian maidens [29]. These maidens, certainly Nymphs, were presumably associated with the cult of Artemis Amarynthia near the city of

21. *Od*., XVII, 240-242; *LSCG* 18 A, l. 12-16; Theoc., *Id.,* V, 139-140, 148-149.

22. N. HIMMELMANN (1997), p. 20; J. LARSON (2001), p. 232.

23. P. BRULÉ (1987), p. 300-323; L. J. ROCCOS (1995), p. 641-646; A. KOSSATZ-DEISSMANN (2011), p. 34-36.

24. Ar., *Ach.*, 241-279. Cf. C. A. FARAONE (2008), p. 214-216.

25. O. PILZ (2008), p. 15-16. Only after the completion of my thesis, did I notice that U. KREILINGER (2007), p. 156, had shortly before proposed a quite similar interpretation in passing. See also E. STASINOPOULOU-KAKAROUGA (2008).

26. L. SOMMER (1912), p. 34-44; A.-M. VÉRILHAC, C. VIAL (1998), p. 287-289; P. BRULÉ (2015), p. 296-306, 314-319, 342-344.

27. C. ROLLEY (1965), p. 449, no. 9: Νυνφέον Κωράδον Πατρώιον | Ἀμφωτεριδέον.

28. F. GRAF (1985), p. 104, n. 11; J. LARSON (2001), p. 171.

29. *Anth. Pal.*, VI, 156. Cf. P. BRULÉ (2015), p. 282-285, 294-295.

Amarynthos on Euboea [30]. Note that the hair offering is accompanied by an animal sacrifice, though here the sacrificial animal is not a sheep, but an ox.

Despite the scarcity of literary evidence, a stronger case for hair offerings to the Nymphs can be made. Due to their recurrent connection with springs and streams, Nymphs, like river gods, are kourotrophic deities par excellence and even nursed divine children [31]. Premarital offerings, προτέλια, to the Nymphs were made at the spring Kissousa near Haliartos in Boeotia, though the specific character of the rite remains unknown [32]. Elsewhere, in any case, προτέλια explicitly included hair offerings. [33] The fact that the word νύμφη also means "young, marriageable woman" or, more specifically, "bride", closely connects the Nymphs with adolescent girls [34]. Finally, other finds from the Pitsa Cave, in particular several terracotta figurines of pregnant women, indicate a concern with human procreation which is, in turn, inextricably linked to the institution of marriage [35].

It has become clear that hair-cutting rites involving adolescent girls would be more than appropriate in the cult of the Nymphs. This further strengthens the interpretation of the sacrifice depicted on the Pitsa plaque as associated with ritual hair-cutting. As a bride-to-be, the κανηφόρος has offered her hair to the Nymphs in a family ceremony overseen by the adult male or female figure on the left margin of the scene. It was presumably the individual depicted here who dedicated the plaque on behalf of the κανηφόρος, most likely his or her daughter, to the Nymphs.

The second case study is again concerned with ritual-hair cutting in the cult of a deity intimately connected with water. A small marble votive relief, now in London, depicting two carefully plaited braids presumably commemorated an actual hair offering (**fig. 2**) [36]. The relief was found by William Martin Leake "somewhat below" the acropolis of Phthiotic Thebes and arrived at the British Museum as a donation in 1839 [37]. An inscription on the

30. J. LARSON (2001), p. 144. *Contra* P. BRULÉ (2015), p. 283, n. 117 ; p. 368, n. 265: "hypostases d'Artémis."

31. H. HERTER (1937), col. 1550-1551.

32. Plut., *mor.*, 772b. Cf. P. ROESCH (1988), p. 212-213.

33. Poll., III, 38. Cf. P. BRULÉ (2015), p. 342-344.

34. V. ANDÒ (1996).

35. A. K. ORLANDOS (1965), p. 201, fig. 229. For the Nymphs as birth-goddesses, see M. P. NILSSON (1967), p. 248-249.

36. London, British Museum inv. 798. Height 34,3 cm. F. T. VAN STRATEN (1981), p. 90, fig. 29; M. GUARDUCCI (1987), p. 271-272, fig. 89; M. HEINZ (1998), p. 192-193, no. 41, fig. 255; G. SCHÖRNER (2003), p. 39, 171, 577, no. R 98, pl. 11, 3.

37. W. M. LEAKE (1835), p. 361.

architrave points not only to those having dedicated the relief, Philombrotos and Aphthonetos, sons of Deinomachos, but also the recipient, Poseidon [38]. Based on the letter forms of the inscription, the votive relief has been dated to the 2nd century BCE [39]. Unfortunately, the cult of Poseidon is scarcely attested in Phthiotic Thebes, and the dedication of the two brothers is virtually the only indication for a cult of Poseidon on the acropolis of the town [40].

Fig. 2: Votive relief from Phthiotic Thebes, 2nd century BCE
(© The Trustees of the British Museum)

Samson Eitrem associated the relief with a Hellenistic epigram that names the rescue from distress at sea as reason for a ritual hair-cutting: a

38. *IG* IX 2, 146: Φιλόμβροτος Ἀφθόνητος Δεινομάχου Ποσειδῶν[ι].
39. M. HEINZ (1998), p. 193.
40. The only other indication is a votive inscription to Poseidon (2nd/1st century BCE?) originating from Nea Anchialos that might have been brought there from Thebes: A. S. ARVANITOPOULLOS (1911), p. 293-294, no. 42; M. HEINZ (1998), p. 194, no. 44.

certain Lukillios shaves off his hair for Glaukos, the Nereids, Melikertes, βύθιος Κρονίδης (i.e. Poseidon) and the Samothracian gods [41]. Others, among them David Leitao, commenting only briefly on the relief, argued for a link to rites of passage from adolescence to the age of maturity [42]. In the following, specific evidence is provided for the latter interpretation. It is important to note that the votive relief from Thebes and Loukillios' epigram are virtually the only testimonies for ritual hair-cutting in the cult of Poseidon.

To begin with, it would be simplistic to perceive Poseidon solely as a god of the seas. His connection to sources and rivers, that is to inland waters, is just as strong as the one to the sea [43]. Direct evidence for a *cultic* connection of Poseidon with sources and water courses can be found in Thessaly, the region adjacent to Phthiotic Achaia. A votive inscription found near ancient Kierion in Thessaliotis and dated to the 3rd or 2nd century BCE attests the epiclesis Κουέριος for Poseidon, which no doubt derives from the river name Kouarios (today Sofaditikos), at the course of which lay Kierion [44].

A stele from Larissa bears a votive inscription from the late 5th or early 4th centuries BCE to Poseidon Κραναῖος Πύλαιος [45]. The excavator linked the epiclesis Kranaios to the Aeolian κράννα, that is Attic κρήνη, and assumed a connection to a source or a well [46]. Poseidon's affinity with inland waters that he as the ruler of the depths of the earth can bring forth in the form of sources and rivers, yet may also allow to run dry motivates his role in relation to agriculture. The fact that deities associated with the earth were in a special way a guarantor for growth and prosperousness of the corn is already apparent with Hesiod, who recommends praying not only to Demeter, but also to Zeus Chthonios ("of the earth") [47]. Plutarch names Zeus Ombrios, Demeter Proerosia and Poseidon Phytalmios as deities connected

41. *Anth. Pal.*, VI, 164. S. EITREM (1915), p. 369. See also P. BRULÉ (2015), p. 308-309, 354.

42. W. H. D. ROUSE (1902), p. 243; D. D. LEITAO (2003), p. 115; J. MYLONOPOULOS (2003), p. 300; P. BRULÉ (2015), p. 353-355.

43. E. WÜST (1953), col. 491-492; M. P. NILSSON (1967), p. 450-451; J. MYLONOPOULOS (2003), p. 280-281, 397-398; C. DOYEN (2011), p. 298-299. F. Kafka's short prose piece *Poseidon* begins "*Poseidon saß an seinem Arbeitstisch und rechnete. Die Verwaltung aller Gewässer gab ihm unendliche Arbeit*."

44. *IG* IX 2, 265; J.-C. DECOURT (1995), p. 26-28, no. 20; M. HEINZ (1998), p. 41 with n. 333, 394, no. A 22.

45. E. VANDERPOOL (1956), p. 272, pl. 98, 6 (*SEG* 15, 377); N. M. VERDELIS (1958), p. 29-38; M. HEINZ (1998), p. 44, 197-198, no. 51, fig. 2.

46. N. M. VERDELIS (1958), p. 33-36, followed by M. HEINZ (1998), p. 44 and K. RAKATSANIS and A. TZIAFALIAS (1997), p. 56.

47. Hes., *erg.*, 465-466. Cf. S. GEORGOUDI (2010), p. 104, n. 42.

to plant growth[48]. The well-known *aition* for the cult of Poseidon Phytalmios in Troizen[49] has recognizably been drawn from folk etymology according to which the epiclesis derives from a combination of φύτα "plants" and ἅλμη "salt water." This is hardly correct, since φυτάλμιος is composed of *φυταλ- and the suffix -μιος and the root φῡ- in *φῡ-ταλ- related to the verb φύομαι, "to grow"[50]. Therefore, Poseidon Phytalmios is first and foremost a deity that makes field plants grow[51]. Pointing to the use of the adjective φυτάλμιος in the language of the tragedies, Fritz Graf has suggested that Poseidon Phytalmios was related to paternity rather than concerned with plant growth[52]. This would indeed be in line with other epithets of Poseidon, such as Γενέθλιος, Γενέσιος, etc., indicating his function as a protector of the male lineage. Moreover, in particular in Thessaly, Poseidon appears with the epicleses Πατρώιος and Πατραγενής, presumably as a protecting deity of civic subgroups, including families and phratries[53]. Certain myths, such as the birth of Orion addressing Poseidon's ability to procreate asexually underscore his close concern with male descent[54]. Given the fact that human growth and maturation are frequently equated with plant growth in ancient Greek thought, the above-mentioned interpretations are by no means mutually exclusive, but rather complementary.

As we have seen, Poseidon's agricultural aspect results from his affinity with inland waters and is not inconsistent with his role as a protector of male offspring. Seen from this perspective, Poseidon's involvement in certain initiatory myths comes as no surprise[55]. Unfortunately, the dedicatory inscription of Philombrotos' and Aphthonetos' votive relief does not mention any epiclesis that could clarify the character of Poseidon's cult on the acropolis of Phthiotic Thebes. It is rather unlikely that the presumed sanctuary of Poseidon on the acropolis hill was related to a spring or stream, and so he is not exactly a "kourotrophic river god", as recently referred to by

48. Plut., *mor.*, 158e. For cults of Poseidon Phytalmios, see F. GRAF (1985), p. 207, n. 3; add *SEG* 47, 330.

49. Paus., II, 32, 8. Cf. J. MYLONOPOULOS (2003), p. 92-93. Note also that the sanctuary of Poseidon Phytalmios was, according to Pausanias, located near the temple of Demeter Thesmophoros.

50. F. BADER (1974), p. 54.

51. *Pace* J. MYLONOPOULOS (2003), p. 93, 383, who interprets Poseidon Phytalmios as protector of the crops from salt water.

52. F. GRAF (1985), p. 207-208. See also N. ROBERTSON (1984), p. 13-14.

53. M. HEINZ (1998), p. 44-45, 198-200, nos. 52-56; p. 395, no. A 23; M. MILI (2015), p. 91, n. 173. Generally on πατρῷοι θεοί , see R. PARKER (2008).

54. K. WALDNER (2003), p. 68-69.

55. E.g. the myth of Kainis / Kaineus, for which, see K. WALDNER (2000), p. 51-73.

Maria Mili [56]. Nevertheless, both Poseidon's fundamental connection with water and his protective role with regard to lineage groups such as phratries make his cult suitable for hair-cutting rituals performed by children and adolescents. The specific focus on paternity and thus male descent might be the explanation for the fact that the votive relief from Phthiotic Thebes was dedicated by male worshippers, possibly at the age of reaching maturity [57]. Significantly, the presumed hair-cutting in the cult of the Nymphai Korades Patroiai is likewise associated with a civic subgroup, the Amphoteridai.

To sum up, in both cases examined above, the ritual hair-cutting occurred in the cult of deities, the Nymphs and Poseidon respectively, which are closely linked to inland waters, namely springs, streams and rivers [58]. It has become clear that the nexus between kourotrophic deities in a wider sense and hair-cutting rites performed by children and adolescents is ultimately rooted in the connection of these deities with water as the precondition for the growth of both plants and human offspring. In effect, the growth of plants, hair and children is conceptualized as a homologous process necessitating sufficiently wet conditions – either in the actual sense of water and moisture or metaphorically through protection by deities closely related to water.

PD Dr. Oliver PILZ
Institut für Altertumswissenschaften – Klassische Archäologie
Johannes Gutenberg-Universität
55099 Mainz
GERMANY
opilz@uni-mainz.de

56. M. MILI (2015), p. 42, n. 133.

57. Though more tentatively, P. BRULÉ (2015), p. 354-355 comes to a similar conclusion.

58. The association of the Nymphs with water and moisture goes well beyond their actual connection with springs, see V. ANDÒ (1996), p. 66-67.

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