Female piety

A study on inscribed dedications by women in Classical and Hellenistic Greece



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This thesis is dedicated to my mum and dad

for always supporting me in ways both seen and unseen.

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates female religious experience in Classical and Hellenistic Greece through the study of votive dedications associated with women, with particular emphasis on inscribed offerings. By analysing dedications made by women in sanctuaries across the Greek world, the thesis explores how women expressed religious agency and represented themselves within sacred spaces, arguing that they were active participants in religious life, using votive offerings to articulate relationships and assert their presence within both personal and communal frameworks. The core evidence is supplemented by archaeological context and literary sources, especially dedicatory epigrams, examined to assess how women's piety was perceived and constructed in cultural discourse. Chronologically, the dissertation concentrates on the Classical and Hellenistic periods, with occasional reference to earlier and later material for comparative purposes, and draws on evidence from a wide range of geographical contexts to assess regional variation in cult practice and dedicatory behaviour. The thesis is structured thematically. Chapter 1 examines women's dedications to Athena, with a focus on the Athenian Acropolis to tackle issues of civic visibility and female self-representation within a major polis cult. Chapter 2 explores dedications to Artemis, with particular attention to female life-cycle transitions. Chapter 3 focuses on offerings to goddesses closely associated with women's social roles and experiences – such as Hera, Aphrodite, Demeter and Kore, and Eileithyia – considering how these cults shaped women's religious agency. Chapter 4 examines women's participation in healing cults, highlighting contexts of illness and bodily vulnerability. Chapter 5 compares dedicatory epigrams with epigraphic evidence in order to contrast literary representations of female piety with lived ritual practice. The final chapter investigates dedications made by men for women, analysing how familial relationships and gender norms shaped the public representation of women in votive contexts.

Abbreviations

AIUK 1 = *Attic Inscriptions in UK Collections.* Vol. 1. The British School at Athens 2018.

AIUK 2 = *Attic Inscriptions in UK Collections.* Vol. 2. The British School at Athens 2018.

BCH = Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique. Paris.

CHIOS = Chios Inscriptions. Texts and List. Princeton 1986.

CGRN = Collection of Greek Ritual Norms.

CIG = Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum. 4 vols. Berlin 1828-1877.

CIRB = Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosporani. Moscow 1965.

EM = Epigraphical Museum, Athens.

IC I = *Inscriptiones Creticae,* ed. Margherita Guarducci. 4 vols. Rome 1935-1950. Vol. 1, *Tituli Cretae mediae praeter Gortynios.* 1935.

ID = Inscriptions de Délos, 7 vols. Paris 1926-1972.

IDidyma = Didyma, II. Die Inschriften. Berlin 1958.

IErythrai = Die Inschriften von Erythrai und Klazomenai. Bonn 1972-1973.

IG I³ = *Inscriptiones Graecae I. Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno anteriores.* Berlin 1981-1998.

IG II² = *Inscriptiones Graecae II and III. Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno posteriores.* 2nd edition. Berlin 1913-2008.

IG II/III³ = *Inscriptiones Graecae, II and III. Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno posteriores.* 3rd edition. Berlin 2012.

IG IV² = *Inscriptiones Graecae IV*. *Inscriptiones Argolidis*, 2nd ed. Fasc. 1: *Inscriptiones Epidauri.* Berlin 1929.

IG VII = *Inscriptiones Graecae,* VII: *Inscriptiones Megaridis, Oropiae, Boeotiae.* Berlin 1892.

IG IX.2 = *Inscriptiones Graecae* IX, fasc. 2: *Inscriptiones Thessaliae.* Berlin 1908.

IG XII = *Inscriptiones Graecae,* vol. XII: *Inscriptiones Insularum Maris Aegaei praeter Delum*. Berlin 1985.

IGUR I = *Inscriptiones Graecae urbis Romae.* Ed. L. Moretti. Rome, 1968-1990

IHistriae = Inscripţiile din Scythia Minor. I: Histria şi împrejurimile. Bucharest 1983.

IKnidos = Die Inschriften von Knidos I. "Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien", 41. Bonn 1992.

IOSPE I² = *Inscriptiones antiquae orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini.* 2nd edition. St. Petersburg 1916.

IOSPE I³ = *Ancient Inscriptions from the Northern Black Sea*. 2015.

IStratonikeia = Die Inschriften von Stratonikeia. Bonn 1982-2010.

IvP III = *Die Inschriften des Asklepieions. Mit einem Beitrag von Michael Wörrle. "Altertümer von Pergamon",* 8,3. Berlin 1969.

LSCG = Sokolowski, Franciszek. *Lois sacrées des cités grecques*. Paris 1969.

MDAI(A) = Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung.

Att. Grabschr. II = Peek, Werner. *Attische Grabschriften II: Unedierte Grabinschriften aus Athen und Attika*. Berlin 1957.

SEG = Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum.

SGDI = Sammlung der griechischen Dialekt-Inschriften, 5 vols., Göttingen 1884-1910.

Introduction

In a world where women's voices were muffled by the polis, their most resonant declarations survive in votive inscriptions. The study of votive offerings in ancient Greek religion has long been an invaluable source of information for understanding ritual practices, personal devotion and broader cultural dynamics. Among the most revealing forms of evidence are inscriptions, which provide unique insights into individual acts of worship and the social contexts that shaped them: for instance, important elements are the specific wording of dedications and the identities of the dedicants. By examining the language, materials and circumstances of dedications, scholars have been able to reconstruct how both men and women interacted with the divine, moved through religious spaces, and represented their identities.[1] Recent work has highlighted how even small linguistic choices in dedicatory texts can encode significant information about the relationships between dedicants and recipients. This emphasis on individual initiative finds a close parallel in recent scholarship on privately founded cults, which has demonstrated that personal piety in Classical Greece could be articulated not only within, but also alongside and beyond, the structures of polis religion, through acts of religious innovation, funding, and long-term responsibility undertaken by single dedicants.[2] While scholars have widely studied votive offerings, the role of women as dedicants and how their piety is expressed through inscriptions has been less explored. This research seeks to contribute to this area by enhancing our understanding of how dedicatory practices varied across different deities and sanctuaries, illuminating the choices women made in their religious offerings. This dissertation focuses specifically on inscribed votive dedications made by women during the Classical and Hellenistic periods, exploring their religious experiences, social roles, and the personal, familial, and communal aspects of their offerings. Reference to the Archaic and Roman periods will be made where

[1] A foundational point of departure is provided by Lazzarini's systematic analysis of the formulaic language of archaic votive inscriptions, which demonstrates how even highly conventionalised expressions encode meaningful information about dedicatory intent and the positioning of the dedicant: Lazzarini (1976). More recently, Jim's analysis of the polyvalent uses of the preposition ὑπέρ demonstrates how formulaic language in dedications can articulate benefaction, mediation, or fulfilment of obligation in ways that are often underappreciated in broader studies of Greek religion: Jim (2014b).

[2] Purvis (2003).

relevant, particularly when continuity or shifts in dedicatory practices can be observed. In this study, key questions are explored, such as: how did women's dedications differ from those of men? Did they employ different kinds of language, materials, or circumstances when making offerings? How did these dedications reflect their roles within the family – whether as daughters, wives, mothers, or even as members of broader familial or ancestral networks? Furthermore, the study will examine how women's social and financial standing may have influenced their ability to make offerings. By addressing these questions, the thesis aims to provide a nuanced and detailed account of women's religious agency and self-representation through the medium of inscribed dedications.

The role of women in ancient Greek religion has been a topic of increasing scholarly interest, particularly with the rise of feminist historiography and gender studies in the field of classical antiquity. A turning point in this discourse was Sarah B. Pomeroy's *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (1975), which challenged traditional narratives and brought to the forefront women's experiences in the ancient world. Since then, numerous studies have expanded on this foundation, exploring the religious agency of women through epigraphic, literary, and archaeological evidence.[3] These studies have shown that women were integral participants in various religious activities, from domestic rituals to public festivals and temple service. However, the participation of women as dedicants in formal religious spaces has often received less scholarly attention, perhaps because the focus has tended to be on other aspects of religious engagement, without fully considering the direct role women may have played in these acts of devotion. More recent scholarship, however, has demonstrated that women frequently took an active role in religious offerings and dedications.[4] By examining inscribed votive offerings, this dissertation sets out to uncover not only the extent of women's religious agency but also the ways in which they used these dedications to express personal devotion and construct their identities. Unlike other forms of participation that may have been restricted by societal norms, votive dedications allowed women a degree of autonomy in shaping their

[3] For instance, King (1983); Blundell and Williamson (1998); Brulé (2003), particularly Ch. 1; Goff (2004); Connelly (2007); Kaltsas, Shapiro (2008); Cole (2004); Dillon, Eidinow, Maurizio (2017).
[4] Dillon (2002), ch. 1; several contributions on the theme in Prêtre (2009); on women as donors, see also Aneziri (2020).

own religious experiences.[5] Inscriptions also offer a rare glimpse into the personal motivations behind these acts of piety. Some women dedicated objects in fulfilment of vows, often following successful childbirth or recovery from illness, while others may have made offerings on behalf of their families or to ensure divine favour in the future. The reasons behind these dedications, as well as the language used to describe them, are a central focus of this study.

One of the main research questions addressed in this dissertation is whether women's dedications were fundamentally different in kind from those made by men. Previous studies have suggested that male dedications were more likely to emphasise public or civic achievements, while women's offerings may have been more closely tied to personal or familial concerns. For instance, men often dedicated trophies or statues celebrating athletic victories, military triumphs, or political appointments. In contrast, women's dedications frequently focused on fertility, health, childbirth, and familial continuity, reflecting their roles within the household and as caretakers of the *oikos*. The religious practices of the Greek household have increasingly been recognised as a central component of ancient religious life rather than a marginal or purely 'private' sphere. Faraone has shown that domestic cults, centred on the *oikos* rather than the polis, structured everyday religious practice and frequently addressed concerns and areas in which women played a prominent role.[6] Viewed from this perspective, women's inscribed votive dedications represent not a departure from domestic religion but its extension into sanctuary space. Inscriptions also reveal potential differences in the language and tone used by male and female dedicants. A comparative analysis of these inscriptions will provide insight into how gender influenced the way individuals presented themselves in relation to the divine.

Beyond the nuclear family, the concept of family for ancient Greek women – just as for men – extended to ancestors and descendants, with dedications often serving as acts of remembrance or appeals for the future well-being of the family line. A notable example comes from Sardis, where an inscription records a family's dedication following an earthquake: "Sokrates Pardalas, son of

[5] Day (2016) examines female religious agency through epigrams and inscriptions, illustrating how women used votive dedications to assert their religious and social identities, often bypassing patriarchal structures of authority in the process.
[6] Faraone (2008).

Polemaios, built the temple and erected the (statue of) Hera. Iulia Lydia, his granddaughter, restored it after the earthquake."[7] This inscription, although later than the primary chronological remit of this dissertation, is nonetheless illustrative of the broader patterns of multigenerational engagement of families in religious dedication, showing that women, too, played prominent roles in maintaining and restoring sanctuaries. Dedications can thus be used by individuals as a means of engaging with both their past and future in religious terms, asserting their place within a broader familial network that included not only their immediate relatives but also those who came before and those yet to come.

This dissertation also considers the specific circumstances under which women made their dedications and the deities to whom they directed their offerings.[8] A central question concerns whether women's votive activity was directed primarily towards female deities or whether it extended more broadly across the pantheon. Earlier scholarship has often assumed that women predominantly venerated goddesses, an interpretation supported by epigraphic studies that identify only a limited number of securely attested female dedications to male deities.[9] While this quantitative imbalance is undeniable, an exclusive focus on female deities risks naturalising a rigid gendered model of religious practice that may not fully account for the diversity of women's cultic behaviour, and may instead reflect modern expectations rather than the complexities of ancient religious practice. More recently, scholars have urged greater caution in interpreting these patterns. Jacquemin has shown that women did dedicate offerings to male deities, though such cases are less frequent than male dedications, emphasising the methodological difficulties involved in identifying female dedicants: epigraphic evidence may underrepresent women because of ambiguous names and editorial choices, while archaeological approaches may overcorrect by systematically attributing objects of personal adornment to female donors.[10] The evidence suggests that women's religious agency could extend beyond the worship of female deities, participating actively even in ostensibly male cults. Examples

[7] *SEG* 28.928. See Ch. 4 for discussion.
[8] For a discussion on how the context of the sanctuary influenced the form and nature of the offerings, see Van Straten (1992).
[9] Lazzarini (1976) for Archaic material.
[10] Jacquemin (2009).

of women dedicating to male deities, largely drawn from the dossiers assembled by Lazzarini and Jacquemin and supplemented by a survey of Hellenistic corpora, are therefore presented in an appendix. Because this material is highly disparate in terms of deity, region, chronology, and dedicatory form, it is treated there in documentary form rather than as a separate thematic chapter.

To what extent did women's religious choices align with their social roles, and to what extent did they transcend them? Did women turn to certain gods and goddesses because of their official cultic functions, or were other factors – such as family traditions, local religious customs, or personal experiences – equally significant in shaping their devotional patterns? It is well documented that women made offerings to female deities such as Artemis and Hera, particularly in connection with rites of passage like marriage and childbirth: Artemis, as a liminal figure presiding over the transitions from childhood to adulthood and from pregnancy to safe delivery, and Hera, whose cult often emphasised marital status and wifely duties, were natural recipients of dedications tied to these key moments in women's lives.[11] Asklepios, the god of healing, was also a frequent recipient of offerings from women seeking divine intervention for themselves or their family members, demonstrating that women's religious agency extended beyond rites of passage to concerns of health, protection, and well-being. By examining the range of deities to whom women dedicated offerings, this study will explore how gender, social roles, and personal circumstances intersected in shaping female religious practice. The analysis will consider how the context of the sanctuary, the nature of the deity, and the dedicants' individual motivations influenced not only the choice of recipient but also the types of offerings made and the language of the accompanying inscriptions.

This study also investigates the financial capability of female dedicants, as inscriptions often reflect their social and economic standing. Wealthier women could commission more elaborate offerings, such as statues or finely crafted objects, while those of more modest means typically presented simpler items like terracotta figurines or loom weights – objects that were often uninscribed

[11] See Senkova (2016) on Artemis' and Hera's role in women's biological and social maturation through healing dedications.

and sometimes perishable, leaving scant traces in the archaeological record.[12] The materials chosen thus offer insights into the dedicants' socio-economic status and their autonomy over financial resources. Through an intersectional lens, this research examines how gender intersects with class, status, and regional context to shape women's dedicatory practices, revealing the diversity of their religious experiences.[13] The study further explores how access to resources may have shifted between the Classical and Hellenistic periods and varied across the Greek world. For instance, the relative prosperity of some Hellenistic cities may have provided women with greater opportunities to make public displays of their piety through more elaborate dedications, while women in less affluent areas may have been constrained by limited means.

Finally, this study will address the temporal and regional variations in women's dedicatory practices. By comparing evidence from the Classical and Hellenistic periods, the study will assess whether shifts in political, social, and religious structures affected the nature of female dedications. Did the increased prominence of royal women in the Hellenistic period, for example, influence how ordinary women engaged in religious activities and made their dedications? Similarly, regional differences will be explored, particularly between urban and rural sanctuaries. Did women in major religious centres like Athens or Corinth make different types of dedications compared to those in smaller, less prominent sanctuaries? Beyond variations in wealth and access to sanctuaries, it is also necessary to consider whether different regions presented distinct models of female religious participation. Were women more prominent as dedicants in certain areas? Did local concepts of particular deities shape the nature of their dedications? For example, the worship of Artemis in Attica may have encouraged different dedicatory practices than those associated with Artemis in the Peloponnese, reflecting regional cultic traditions. Similar forms of local inflection are traced

[12] The correlation between wealth and the sophistication of offerings, especially in the Hellenistic period, is well-documented. See Migeotte (1998) for a discussion of socio-economic status in inscriptions. On loom weights, Foxhall (1995), Sofroniew (2011), Quercia and Foxhall (2014).

[13] Richlin (2014) 11, provides an intersectional methodological framework for studying marginalised groups (such as women) in antiquity: "think about the co-implications of gender, class, and ethnicity, and never forget that in the ancient Mediterranean there was no place outside the slave system". Surtees and Dyer (2020) is a collection of essays that apply intersectionality to examine gender diversity in Greek and Roman contexts,

throughout the dissertation in relation to other deities and sanctuary contexts. By investigating these regional variations, the study aims to show how local traditions and broader societal changes shaped women's religious expression. Rather than treating regional difference as a single comparative problem, the thesis approaches it as a contextual factor that intersects with deity, material practice, and historical period throughout the analysis.

Methodology

Although much dedicatory activity in Greek sanctuaries involved perishable offerings that have left little archaeological trace, inscribed dedications offer a particular kind of evidence that is not simply reducible to material survival. They record deliberate acts of inscription through which dedicants chose to articulate identity, relationships, or motivations in durable form. This study therefore approaches inscribed votives not as a comprehensive sample of women's religious practice, but as a selective medium through which women could render certain aspects of their piety visible, communicable, and enduring within the sacred landscape. The inscriptions, which record acts of devotion and offerings made by women, provide a rich corpus for understanding how women participated in religious life, expressed their piety, and presented their social identities.[14] However, inscriptions alone do not tell the full story. To construct a comprehensive understanding of female religious agency, this research incorporates archaeological, literary, and contextual evidence, allowing for a broader and more integrated interpretation of the material.[15] This dissertation's core methodological commitment is to treat inscribed votive dedications not merely as textual artefacts, but as embodied ritual acts whose form, materiality, and deployment within sacred spaces are inseparable from their social and religious meaning. While epigraphy has long been recognised as a foundational source for reconstructing ancient Greek religion, insights from recent scholarship emphasise that inscriptions are products of active engagement with performance, space, and social

[14] The methodological utility of dedicatory inscriptions is analysed in Dillon (2002) ch.1, which examines how female dedicatory practices reflect broader societal norms.

[15] While recognising that inscribed and uninscribed offerings formed part of the same ritual continuum, this study reads epigraphic evidence in dialogue with archaeological and iconographic material, treating inscriptions not as a separate category of practice but as one mode of expression within broader dedicatory behaviour.

agency.[16] Inscriptions are not merely records of events or textual snapshots of cult activity; they are objects with materiality, spatial presence, and performative impact, commemorating selective aspects of ritual and mediating interactions between humans and gods. They encode choices about what to record and display, for whom, and in what location, creating a network of social connectivity that extends beyond the immediate ritual context. Recent work on the concept of 'epigraphic mode' further refines this perspective by attending not only to the content of inscriptions but also to the ways in which their layout, material support, script, and visual presentation shape their reception.[17]

For instance, while inscriptions can confirm the names of dedicants and the specific gods to whom offerings were made, archaeological evidence, such as the spatial distribution of votives within sanctuaries, can provide insight into the prominence and visibility of women's dedications. Similarly, literary sources (such as dedicatory epigrams) can offer additional perspectives on how female acts of devotion were perceived and represented within broader cultural narratives. A key example is the sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron, where inscribed dedications of clothing are complemented by archaeological finds of textile tools (e.g., loom weights) and literary references to rituals like the *arkteia*, reinforcing the cult's association with women's life transitions and textile production.

Votive inscriptions were embedded in ritual sequences of action – dedicants approached a deity, engaged in sacrifice or offering, and then sponsored a durable marker of that transaction. The inscription therefore is not an isolated text but the culminating act of a votive performance. It reflects choices that were made at specific moments of need or gratitude and stamped into the physical and social landscape of the sanctuary. Recognising this material dimension also allows us to distinguish between different registers of agency. For instance, a votive dedication inscribed on luxurious material signifies not only religious intent but also economic capacity and social positioning. By

[16] As Taylor (2015) has emphasised, the diversity of epigraphic evidence reflects not only the variety of religious practice, but also the range of people involved in it. Taylor's analysis highlights that dedications were deeply implicated in processes of commemoration, visibility, and negotiation of social relationships, demonstrating that epigraphic evidence must be approached as both textual and material evidence for understanding lived religion.

[17] Bodel (2023) 14-34; as the contribution demonstrates, inscriptions engage audiences through a combination of spatial arrangement, scaling, punctuation, and other visual cues, creating a heightened self-consciousness in how the text is presented. In this sense, epigraphic mode can be understood as the deliberate orchestration of form and medium to convey meaning to a particular audience, whether literate or not, and to guide interpretive engagement.

contrast, a modest inscribed dedication on terracotta reflects other forms of participation that are nevertheless recognisable within the epigraphic habit of a sanctuary. In both cases, the act of inscription mediates between the individual's lived experience and the communal religious environment. By foregrounding inscriptions as practices embedded in ritual life, this dissertation also advocates for a reconceptualisation of agency appropriate to the ancient Greek religious and social world. Instead of defining agency in terms of formal legal autonomy or political power, I understand agency in terms of ritual capacity, negotiated visibility, and repeated inscriptional presence.[18]

This section outlines the key sources, methodologies, and analytical frameworks employed, detailing how these elements are combined to address the research questions outlined in the introduction.

a. Epigraphic evidence: inscriptions and sanctuary inventories

The primary sources for this dissertation are inscribed votive dedications found in sanctuaries across the Greek world. Engraved on offerings such as statues, reliefs, plaques, and other objects, these inscriptions provide direct evidence of women's religious activity. By analysing their language, content, and physical form, this research seeks to reconstruct the experiences and motivations of female dedicants, their relationships with deities, and their self-representation in religious contexts. Key questions include: What types of objects did women dedicate? To which deities were these offerings directed? How did women describe themselves in relation to family and social roles? What language expressed their gratitude or petitions? These inscriptions not only document individual acts of devotion but also reflect broader societal norms and religious practices, offering insights into gender dynamics within the religious sphere. Sanctuary inventories, inscribed on stone or bronze tablet, supplement this evidence by listing offerings – sometimes including dedicant details – that may not survive archaeologically. These records reveal patterns in dedicatory practices over time and

[18] This approach is consistent with recent reappraisals of household religion as a communal yet non-civic sphere of religious action, in which women exercised meaningful ritual authority without occupying formal political roles: Faraone (2008).

across regions, as well as the scale and variety of women's offerings, even when preservation biases limit the material record.

b. Archaeological evidence: material context and spatial analysis

While inscriptions provide direct textual evidence, they are inseparable from their archaeological context, which includes the sanctuary's physical layout, the types of dedicated objects, and their placement. This material culture provides crucial information about the religious significance of offerings. For example, the location of a votive within a sanctuary may suggest the degree of accessibility or prominence the dedicant sought for her offering. Offerings placed near the altar or central temple may have been intended for public display, emphasising the social or familial status of the dedicant. However, smaller objects found in peripheral areas may not necessarily indicate more private or intimate acts of devotion but could also reflect later rearrangement by sanctuary officials. In an inscription from Athens dated to the second century BCE, a priest is granted authority to reposition dedications and plaques to ensure an unobstructed view of a statue, while future dedicants are required to seek his approval before making offerings, reflecting administrative control over the sanctuary's spatial organisation rather than prescribing specific rituals.[19] This occurrence illustrates how sanctuary officials could influence the arrangement of votives, meaning the final location of an object does not always correspond to its original placement by the dedicant. Such evidence highlights that even in antiquity the placement of votives was subject to regulation and changes.[20] Since many sanctuaries underwent periodic clearing, reorganisation, or deposition of older dedications, these shifts further complicate our understanding of an offering's intended significance.[21] Moreover, the later history of sanctuaries introduces further complications: portable stone objects were often removed or reused once a sanctuary fell into disuse. Thus, archaeological findspots may reflect secondary contexts. This study accounts for these factors when analysing the spatial distribution of

[19] *IG* II² 995; see also Sokolowski (1969) no. 43.
[20] On the regulation and supervision of dedicatory practices in Greek sanctuaries – including restrictions on where votives could be set up and the authority of priests or civic officials to control, relocate, or prohibit dedications – see Carbon and Harris (2025) 46.
[21] Tarditi (2021); Moroo (2022).

women's offerings, assessing how female dedicants engaged with sacred spaces and what these choices tell about their religious priorities and social identities.[22] By examining these patterns across different sanctuaries, the research evaluates the interplay between gender, space and religious involvement.

c. Reconstructing the ephemeral: uninscribed objects and perishable offerings

One of the central challenges in studying ancient dedicatory practices is the difficulty of interpreting uninscribed offerings. Many objects found in sanctuaries – such as loom weights, miniature vessels, and figurines – were likely votive dedications; yet, in the absence of inscriptions, it is often unclear whether they represent personal offerings, ritual paraphernalia, or items with a more functional purpose. Sanctuary inventories, which list votive objects without inscriptions, provide valuable insight into the range of dedications deposited in a sanctuary. However, they do not always clarify the identity of the dedicants or the specific motivations behind the offerings, and in some cases may only record the object itself without preserving any accompanying text. This raises the possibility of a gap between what an inventory preserves and what an inscribed dedication originally expressed, an issue particularly relevant for objects such as loom weights, which may have once carried painted or lightly incised inscriptions that have since disappeared. In addition to uninscribed dedications, the survival bias in the material record poses further challenges. Many offerings made of perishable materials have not endured over time, limiting our ability to reconstruct the full range of women's votive practices. Textiles, for instance, were frequently dedicated to female deities like Hera and Artemis, yet due to their fragile nature, they are rarely preserved archaeologically. Similarly, objects such as ribbons or wreaths, which are well-documented in literary sources, are often absent from the surviving material record, despite their probable ubiquity in cult.

To address these gaps, this research draws on indirect evidence, such as literary descriptions of offerings, visual depictions, and comparative material from sanctuaries where similar types of dedications were found. For example, in Herodas' *Mime* IV, women sacrificing to Asklepios offer a

[22] On the archaeological context of women's offerings and their integration into the sacred space, see Cole (2004).

cock as a vowed sacrifice, lamenting their inability to afford a more expensive victim such as an ox or sow, thereby illustrating the economic constraints shaping participation in healing cults. Alongside the animal sacrifice, the women dedicate a pinax. The scene highlights women's active participation in votive rituals, with offerings ranging from animals to baked goods. Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* provides a clear reference to textiles: Psyche observes "precious offerings and pieces of cloth embroidered with gold hanging from the branches of trees and affixed to the posts," dedicated to Ceres, inscribed with the goddess' name as tokens of gratitude.[23] These examples suggest that perishable dedications, including textiles, were common in women's religious practices, even if they are underrepresented in the archaeological record due to their fragility. By integrating these sources with surviving material – such as terracotta figurines or loom weights found in sanctuaries – this study aims to reconstruct a more complete picture of women's dedicatory practices, encompassing both the inscribed and the ephemeral offerings that have not endured.

d. Literary evidence: epigrams, narratives and cultural perception

Among the literary sources, dedicatory epigrams are particularly useful to explore how women's religious activities were perceived and represented in ancient literature. Dedicatory epigrams, often composed in poetic form, provide a lens through which the cultural imagination of female piety and religious participation can be explored. While some epigrams are based on real dedications, others are fictional or highly stylised, offering insight into the ideals and expectations surrounding women's religious roles. A key methodological consideration in this study is the comparison between the real women behind the inscriptions and the often fictional or exaggerated representations of female dedicants found in literary sources. Since the majority of surviving dedicatory epigrams were composed by male authors, they inevitably reflect external perspectives on women's piety rather than female-authored expressions of devotion. How do these two bodies of evidence intersect, and where do they diverge? For example, literary epigrams might emphasise a woman's beauty, modesty, or virtue in ways that reflect societal ideals rather than actual practices. By contrasting these literary

[23] Apul. *Met*. 6.3.

depictions with the more factual evidence of inscriptions, the research will highlight the intersection between religious practice and literary construction, clarifying how women's piety was both enacted and imagined in ancient Greece.

Life cycle, crisis and office-holding: motivations for dedication

In analysing women's dedicatory practices, this study pays special attention to the life-cycle events that frequently motivated these offerings. Marriage, childbirth, and transitions to adulthood were major moments in a woman's life, and sanctuaries devoted to goddesses like Hera, Artemis, and Eileithyia were often the sites of dedications made in connection with these events.[24] These offerings can unveil much about the social and religious expectations placed on women at different stages of their lives, as well as their personal responses to these milestones. In addition to life-cycle events, women's dedications were often made in response to unpredictable circumstances, such as illness, injury, or other crises. The practice of making votive offerings in thanks for divine intervention or in the hope of securing divine favour in the face of uncertain outcomes was a common feature of women's religious practices. These spontaneous dedications reflect the dynamic and personal nature of religious life in ancient Greece, where women (and men) sought divine assistance not only in predictable rites of passage but also during times of crisis or hardship.[25] In cases of illness, both personal and familial, people often dedicated offerings to healing deities like Asklepios, seeking relief from suffering or expressing gratitude for recovery. These dedications, particularly those that include references to specific diseases or ailments, uncover the types of concerns that occupied women's lives, as well as the ways in which they used religious practice to respond to health-related challenges. Similarly, dedications made in times of war, political turmoil, or natural disasters can offer a window into the broader socio-political context in which women lived and the ways in which they turned to the divine for protection, strength, or guidance. Furthermore, these unpredictable dedications reflect the broader themes of divine favour and reciprocity that underpinned Greek religious thought. Women's

[24] See Senkova (2016).
[25] On gender roles in religious practices and the participation of women in ancient Greek cults, see Pomeroy (1975) ch.4, Osborne (1993), Dillon (2002; Dillon, Eidinow, Maurizio (2017).

offerings were not only acts of devotion but also transactions with the divine, where the hope of receiving divine assistance in times of crisis was met with an offering as a sign of gratitude or petition.[26] In addition to dedications prompted by life-cycle transitions or moments of crisis, a further motivation for women's offerings was the holding of religious office. Dedications made by priestesses, often at the beginning or completion of their term, parallel those made by male priests and by men demitting other civic offices, functioning both as markers of service and as acts expected within the framework of office-holding. For priestesses, these dedications may have combined elements of public self-presentation and the formal completion of ritual duties, showing that women's dedicatory practices were not confined to domestic or familial concerns but were also embedded within the institutional structures of religion.

Temporal comparison: Classical vs Hellenistic practices

The temporal scope of this dissertation spans the Classical and Hellenistic periods, allowing for a comparative analysis of how women's dedicatory practices evolved over time. While the core practices of dedicating votive offerings to deities remained largely consistent, significant social, political, and religious changes between these two periods likely influenced the ways in which women expressed their piety and religious agency. In the Classical period, religious practices were often centred around the polis and its communal needs, with women playing a key role in domestic and family-oriented rituals. In this period, women's offerings frequently reflected their roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers, and they often focused on deities associated with fertility, childbirth, and marriage – patterns that remain prominent in the Hellenistic period, even as the range of cults and dedicatory contexts expands. Inscriptions from this period tend to emphasise familial connections and personal devotion, with many dedications made in the name of family members or for the well-being of the household.[27] However, this should not obscure the fact that dedications in the Classical period

[26] Jim (2014a) has explored in detail the relationship between dedicants and deities, focusing on the offerings of "first fruits".
[27] The correlation between female dedications and family-oriented worship is explored in McClees (1920) and, more recently, by Avramidou (2015).

were already diverse, including offerings to healing and chthonic deities, which suggests a broader and more varied engagement with religious practice than is sometimes assumed.

In the Hellenistic period, significant political and cultural changes – including the rise of Macedonian influence and the expansion of Greek culture throughout the eastern Mediterranean – altered aspects of religious life. The increased diversity in deities honoured alongside traditional gods is reflected in the epigraphical evidence: women's dedications from this period include a wider range of deities. The influence of royal patronage and the increasing prominence of ruler cults contributed to shifts in religious expression, while the growing mobility of individuals across the Hellenistic world may have encouraged more diverse dedicatory practices. A greater number of surviving Hellenistic inscriptions is also attested. Instead of viewing this period as marking a sudden expansion in female religious agency, this study approaches it as a continuation of existing trends, in which women's dedications remained deeply linked with both personal and communal religious concerns. Rather than treating the Classical and Hellenistic periods as rigidly distinct, this study considers how shifts in religious, social, and political contexts affected dedicatory choices while acknowledging that many patterns persisted across both eras.

This methodology combines a careful analysis of epigraphic, archaeological, and literary sources to reconstruct the religious lives of women in ancient Greece. While inscriptions form the core of the evidence, supplementary sources like literary epigrams, archaeological context, and non-inscribed material allow for a more nuanced interpretation of the evidence and help fill in the gaps left by the survival bias of ancient material culture. By examining both life-cycle events and the more unpredictable moments of crisis that prompted women's religious engagement, this research sheds light on the diverse ways in which women confronted the complexities of their lives through acts of devotion. Furthermore, the study of regional and temporal variations will show how women's roles as dedicants evolved in response to changing social, political, and religious contexts.

Structure of the thesis

The structure of this dissertation follows a thematic approach. By examining these offerings across different cults and deities, this research aims to illuminate not only the religious agency of women but also the broader societal and cultural significance of their dedications. Each chapter addresses a different aspect of female religious experience, focusing on the types of deities to whom women dedicated offerings and the contexts in which these dedications were made, while also considering the socio-political implications of these acts.

The first chapter is centred on the analysis of Athena, exploring evidence of cults and dedications for the goddess on the Athenian Acropolis. Athena's importance in Athens extended beyond her role as the protector of the city to encompass a wide array of associations with war, wisdom, and civic identity. Women's dedications to Athena, such as those made during festivals like the Panathenaia, reflect their civic and familial roles. This chapter highlights how women represented themselves in their offerings to Athena, emphasising their roles as mothers, daughters, and wives within Athenian society. The dedications also reflect broader political and ideological concerns, as Athena's cult played a key role in shaping Athenian identity, especially during times of civic turmoil and military conflict.

In the second chapter, the focus shifts to Artemis and her special connection to rites of passage for young girls. Artemis' role as protector of young girls and childbirth made her a particularly important deity for women. The sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia, for instance, was known for its association with the initiation of young girls into adulthood. These rites, often centred around physical and social transformations, were marked through dedications to the goddess. Objects such as garments, dolls, and personal items were often dedicated, symbolising the transition from childhood to adulthood. By examining the various types of offerings made to Artemis, this chapter demonstrates how female dedications were not merely personal but deeply embedded in social and cultural practices surrounding the life cycle.

The next chapter examines women's votive offerings to deities intimately tied to female experiences, exploring how these cults shaped and reflected women's religious lives. Dedications to Hera emphasised marriage, family, and domestic stability, with offerings like loom weights and garments underscoring her role as a protector of the household. Aphrodite, linked to love, beauty, and marital transitions, received votives that expressed personal identity and social status, often extending into civic contexts. Demeter and Kore, particularly through the Thesmophoria, connected women's piety to agricultural fertility and eschatological concerns, while Eileithyia, goddess of childbirth, inspired dedications from parents and grandparents that highlight familial devotion. Focusing on these goddesses as 'guardians' of women's lives, this section analyses how inscribed dedications articulated female agency, bridging personal milestones with broader social and sacred roles in the Greek world.

The fourth chapter explores how women participated in healing cults, particularly through their dedications to gods such as Asklepios, the god of healing. These cults were particularly important in times of personal crisis, especially concerning illness, childbirth, and other bodily concerns, where divine intervention was sought. Healing sanctuaries provided a space where women sought divine intervention for themselves and their families. By comparing the types of offerings made by women to those made by men, this section also aims to assess whether female dedicants engaged with healing cults in distinct ways.

The fifth chapter examines how women were portrayed in dedicatory epigrams, contrasting literary idealisations and satires with the practical realities of votive inscriptions. Literary sources, particularly epigrams, often constructed idealised images of female piety, while the epigraphic evidence reveals the everyday reality of women's religious practices. This comparison illustrates the tensions between literary representation and actual female religious agency, emphasising the complex dynamics of gender in ancient Greek religious life.

The final chapter builds directly upon the previous one, which examined how female dedicants were represented – often selectively – through male-authored epigrams. Shifting from literary to epigraphic evidence, this chapter investigates the phenomenon of men acting as dedicators on behalf

of women. It focuses on the roles played by fathers, husbands, brothers, and other male kin when they fulfilled vows, made offerings, or set up statues and material dedications in the names of wives, daughters, mothers, and sisters. These inscriptions reveal how familial relationships were articulated through ritual action, how women's religious involvement could be mediated or publicly expressed by male relatives, and how such dedications functioned to commemorate female family members within local cults. The chapter also explores the spectrum of agency involved: from dedications explicitly performed for women, to more ambiguous cases where male involvement may reflect financial responsibility, social convention, or the practicalities of inscription rather than the woman's absence from ritual practice. By analysing the language and contexts of these dedications, the chapter offers a nuanced account of how women's religious presence could be simultaneously visible and constrained, shaping our broader understanding of gender, family dynamics, and ritual representation in the ancient Greek world.

Ultimately, this dissertation intends to show that women's religious practices in ancient Greece were not merely passive or subordinated to male religious authority. Instead, women actively shaped their religious world through votive offerings, often negotiating their roles within the family, society, and the divine. By examining the types of deities to whom women dedicated offerings, the objects they chose, and the contexts in which these dedications occurred, this research offers an interpretation of female piety and the broader cultural significance of women's religious practices, highlighting the ways in which women used religious devotion to assert their presence in both personal and public spheres.[28]

[28] Goff (2004) 44: "The primary communication is between women and the divine, but the act of making the dedication brings women into the partial publicity of the ritual sphere, where that communication is visible to others".

Chapter 1. Unveiling the diverse dimensions of women's engagement with Athena

Athena occupies a distinctive place in Greek religious life, attracting worshippers of all genders and social backgrounds. In the specific context of Athens and Attica – on which this chapter focuses – her cult assumes an even more exceptional position. As the city's patron deity, Athena permeated civic, domestic, and ritual spheres to an extent unmatched by most other gods, offering an ideal case study for examining the range and subtlety of women's religious engagement. This regional focus is therefore not a limitation but a strength: Attic material allows us to observe women's interactions with a goddess embedded deeply in the political, social, and ideological fabric of the polis. Unlike the cults of deities whose worship exhibited clearly differentiated patterns of practice or emphasis between the sexes,[29] Athena's rituals and sanctuaries were remarkably inclusive. Female dedicatory inscriptions to Athena – whether inscribed on inventories, statue bases, or small votive objects – form a uniquely varied and nuanced corpus for reconstructing women's religious agency, economic activity, and civic visibility within the Athenian landscape. By placing these inscriptions in dialogue with broader debates on women's status and civic invisibility, I propose that dedications to Athena reveal women negotiating, rather than merely reflecting, the boundaries of *oikos*, polis, and personal identity. A central aim of this chapter is to clarify what different types of inscribed evidence can and cannot tell us about their dedicants. Temple inventories, for instance, are mediated administrative documents; they record objects but rarely voices. Personal dedications on statue bases or small bronzes, by contrast, preserve women's chosen forms of self-representation, sometimes even in the first person. Other categories of objects, such as inscribed loom weights – often dismissed as "low-status" – provide unexpectedly rich information about work, skill, ownership, and ritual practice. Differentiating these genres is essential, not only to avoid conflating administrative and personal inscriptions but also to

[29] The gender of the dedicant could influence the way the deity was approached – ritual practices, expectations, and forms of devotion. This makes it difficult to speak of strictly "male" versus "female" cults, but it does justify distinguishing between male and female modes of worship directed to the same deity, shaped by context, intention, language, and function.

identify the distinct interpretative possibilities each category offers. Some votive offerings can serve as a valuable tool for gaining insights into women's agency and societal roles, while others can be used for a quantitative analysis of votive offerings. Furthermore, archaeological evidence can successfully be incorporated alongside epigraphic finds. The methodological approaches required to understand the significance of these dedications include the determination of dedicants, the differentiation of inscription types and the evaluation of contextual factors. By examining topics such as self-representation and female ritual involvement we can discern patterns and explore the various facets of women's identities expressed through their dedications. Moreover, votive offerings can be considered a valuable tool for understanding the cult of Athena, allowing us to explore the circumstances in which women's dedications reflect concepts of the goddess and the extent to which dedicants are simultaneously communicating something about themselves through their offerings.

Recent work on Athenian citizenship has offered a further interpretative framework for understanding women's dedications. In her influential re-evaluation of Classical Athenian citizenship, Blok argues that the traditional, Aristotelian model – centred on participation in political office and male military service – has unduly restricted modern conceptions of civic belonging.[30] Instead, she proposes that citizenship in Athens was fundamentally grounded in bilateral descent and in the shared performance of *hiera kai hosia*, the complex of sacred rites and divinely sanctioned norms that structured Athenian communal life. Within this descent-based and cultic model, women were not marginal to the polis but constituted full members of the citizen body, even if excluded from holding *archai*. From this perspective, female dedications on the Acropolis are not merely expressions of personal piety but acts embedded in the civic fabric: offerings made by citizens whose ritual participation contributed to the maintenance of the city's relationship with its gods. Blok's argument compels a reading of women's votives as interventions situated within a broader civic framework rather than as isolated gestures of private devotion. Within this framework, women's religious labour becomes a crucial element of civic functioning.

[30] Blok (2017).

The Athenian Acropolis offers an ideal case study for such an approach: the density and diversity of inscriptions, the prominence of Athena's cult, and the survival of archaeological context together allow us to examine dedications within a well-defined ritual landscape. Athena's cult, especially on the Acropolis, depended on female service at every level: the *arrephoroi* who tended the *peplos*, the *ergastinai* who wove the Panathenaic robe, the *kanephoroi* who led processions, and the priestesses who oversaw ritual procedure. These roles were not symbolic concessions but constituted formal, institutionalised positions, often reserved for elite families whose daughters thereby enacted part of the family's civic prestige. In this context, female dedications – whether marble bases, loom weights, phialai, or small bronze objects – should be understood not simply as private acts of piety but as public affirmations of a woman's position within the civic-religious system. Dedications allowed women to mark their ritual labour as both personally meaningful and publicly visible. Evidence from the Acropolis attests several manifestations of Athena – above all Athena Polias, guardian of the city, and Athena Ergane, patroness of craftsmanship. The temple of Athena Polias was of crucial importance for the Athenians in the Archaic phase, and it was known to host the cult statue of the goddess; it was destroyed during the Persian invasion and then reconstructed, known as the 'Old Temple', in contrast to the newly constructed Parthenon.[31] While the Polias cult formed the civic and symbolic centre of Athenian identity, the growth of dedications to Athena Ergane from the fourth century onwards suggests an increasingly explicit acknowledgement of Athena's association with women's work and technical expertise. In one of the inscriptions Athena is referred to as Polias-Ergane, using both her epithets together; this corroborates the hypothesis that the cult of Athena Ergane, first mentioned by Pausanias (1.24.3), might initially have been linked to that of Athena Polias, as the evidence seems to suggest a firmer establishment of the cult starting from the fourth century.[32] These overlapping cultic identities are crucial for understanding why women might emphasise different aspects of their own identities – maternal, professional, ritual – when dedicating to the goddess. Throughout this chapter, these cultic dimensions will serve as the interpretative frame

[31] Giovagnorio (2015) 25-26.
[32] Giovagnorio (2015) 16; Langdon (2008) 72.

for analysing how female dedicants positioned themselves in relation to Athena's heterogeneous character.

1.1 Temple inventories: attesting ritual involvement

Surviving fragments of stelae recording annual inventories of Athena's treasures offer invaluable, if impersonal, insight into the religious activity of Athenian dedicants. These inventories – inscribed by temple administrators, not the dedicants themselves – belong to a distinct genre of epigraphic evidence, differing significantly from personal votive inscriptions. Their administrative, mediated nature means they cannot convey the dedicant's voice or intent directly. They privilege institutional control over individual expression: objects are listed according to storage location, material, weight, or value, and dedicants' names appear only insofar as they served administrative identification. The inventories therefore document patterns of participation and accumulation rather than acts of self-representation. However, they still serve as a crucial source for understanding the typology, quantity, and temporal distribution of offerings made by both women and men. Importantly, inventories collapse the distinction between public and private space: dedications originally set up by individuals become part of a state-controlled textual corpus. This process grants women – elite or non-elite – a degree of public visibility otherwise denied to them in surviving political documents. Spanning from 434/3 BCE until the end of the fourth century BCE, these inventories document the contents of the Parthenon, Erechtheion, Chalkotheke, and Opisthodomos, offering insights into the dedications accumulated during the Classical period. Harris' compilation of this material remains the most comprehensive, listing objects by their storage location and identifying named dedicants where possible; furthermore, Harris' also provides quantitative data on the dedicants, stating, for instance, the number of mothers, daughters and wives of Athenian citizens recorded in the inscriptions, as well as women identified by their first name only.[33]

[33] Harris (1995), who notes the irregularity when it comes to recording the name of the dedicant in the inventory, as in many cases we only find the offering without a name.

In the Parthenon and Erechtheion lists, eighteen male citizens are named as dedicants. Among the women, a total of twenty-nine can be securely identified across the two inventories. In the Erechtheion, thirteen women appear: five wives of citizens, two daughters of citizens, and six women listed under their first name only. In the Parthenon, sixteen women are attested: one mother of a citizen, three wives of citizens, four daughters of citizens, six women identified only by a single name, one metic woman, and one foreign woman. A small number of additional entries in both inventories preserve only fragmentary names (two in the Erechtheion and three in the Parthenon), whose gender cannot be determined with certainty.[34] Women identified only by their first name – twelve individuals in total across both lists, amounting to roughly 41% of the securely identifiable female dedicants – have been interpreted by Dillon as likely metics or of non-elite status, since the absence of a patronymic or demotic is taken to imply lower civic visibility.[35] While this hypothesis has merit, it risks over-interpreting the meaning of omission. No firm epigraphic rule correlates naming style with status in a consistent way. Moreover, as the data shows, women regardless of how they are named dedicate similar types of objects. It remains to be established whether the appearance of their name alone on the inscription has something to do with their status or their self-representation, both in Archaic and later periods. Crucially, this evidence must be interpreted in light of the Periclean Citizenship Law of 451/0 BCE, which made bilateral descent (from two citizen parents) the condition of citizenship. As Josine Blok has emphasised, this measure enhanced the civic significance of Athenian women, whose status now became legally indispensable for the reproduction of the citizen body.[36] Rather than marginal figures outside political life, citizen women constituted a necessary component of the polis' continuity, and their position within the *oikos* acquired a heightened public dimension. This legal context sharpens our reading of dedicatory inscriptions. The inventories' careful attention to familial identifiers – daughters, wives, mothers – reflects this civic logic. Even when dedicatory intent is not specified, these inventories offer a civic mapping of women's presence

[34] Harris (1995) 225-228.
[35] Dillon (2002) 18.
[36] Blok (2017), ch. 3 reconstructs the descent-based criteria established by the Periclean Citizenship Law and their implications for civic membership; the implications for women's citizenship are examined in particular at pp. 127-138.

in cult. Dedications by women on the Acropolis can therefore be understood not only as religious acts but also as implicit markers of civic identity, situating the female dedicator within or outside the citizen community defined by Pericles' law.

A particularly instructive example of how women could operate within this civic framework is provided by the well-known dedication of Xenokrateia, a late fifth-century BCE marble relief from the sanctuary of Kephisos at Echelidai, depicting the dedicator with her son and accompanied by an inscribed sacrificial regulation.[37] Though outside the Acropolis context, this example illustrates women's ability to act publicly within cult. Blok interprets Xenokrateia's act as an unusually ambitious intervention in local cult, involving the financing of a poros altar, a marble relief depicting her and her son in a ritual scene, and an inscribed sacrificial regulation that outlines a structured pantheon and order of offerings.[38] On this reading, the scale and cost of the dedication – likely amounting to several hundred drachmas – demonstrate a level of economic autonomy far exceeding the "three-drachma rule" mentioned by Isaeus and often assumed to restrict women's financial competence.[39] Equally significant, for Blok, is Xenokrateia's epigraphic self-presentation: she names herself with patronymic and demotic, employs formulae characteristic of civic documents (such as τῷ βουλομένῳ), and appears to organise the ritual hierarchy of the cult, thereby positioning herself as a fully competent participant in the civic religious sphere.[40] Parker, however, has challenged the view that Xenokrateia acted as the founder of the sanctuary, arguing on philological grounds that the inscription records only the dedication of the relief, not the establishment of the cult site itself. In his reading, the verbs ἱδρύσατο and ἀνέθηκεν form a single clause describing one act of dedication, rather than two distinct actions (foundation and dedication), and the particle τε links the gods who share Kephisos' altar to the initial phrase, ruling out the two-clause interpretation required to support a

[37] Inscription: *IG* I^3 987 (*IG* II ^{2} 4548): Ξενοκράτεια Κηφισο ἱερ-|ὸν ἱδρύσατο καὶ ἀνέθηκεν | ξυμβώμοις τε θεοῖς Διδασκαλ-|ίας τόδε δῶρον, Ξενιάδο θυγάτ-|ηρ καὶ μήτηρ ἐκ Χολλειδῶν | θύεν τῶι βουλομένωι ἐπὶ | τελεστῶν ἀγαθῶν. Relief: National Archaeological Museum of Athens, inv. no. 2756.
[38] Blok (2018).
[39] Isaeus 10.10: ὁ γὰρ νόμος διαρρήδην κωλύει παιδὶ μὴ ἐξεῖναι συμβάλλειν μηδὲ γυναικὶ πέρα μεδίμνου κριθῶν.
[40] Blok (2018).

foundation claim.[41] Even if the inscription does not support a claim to foundation, as Parker suggests, Xenokrateia's dedication retains its evidentiary value for this study: the magnitude of the monument, the elaboration of its iconography and sacrificial regulation, and the explicit civic framing of her identity all attest to a level of religious, economic, and epigraphic agency that aligns closely with the patterns observed in Acropolis dedications. Her case therefore still illuminates how Athenian women could operate within – and publicly inscribe themselves into – the civic religious sphere.

Dillon maintains that Archaic dedicators more frequently omit male kin than their Classical counterparts, suggesting a loss of female autonomy over time.[42] These binary claims need refining. Inventories do not exist for the Archaic period; instead, dedications from this era survive mostly as isolated inscribed objects. Dillon's claim is based on the many dedications on the Acropolis made by women before the Persian Wars not stating the name of their husbands, sons or fathers, and which could not all have been metics – the number of these dedications is too high compared to the number of metics and citizens at the time.[43] Raubitschek and Jeffery catalogue fifteen certain female dedications from the sixth and early fifth centuries BCE.[44] Of these, eight record only the woman's name,[45] while seven include a male kinship reference.[46] Among the latter, four date to 500-480 BCE, suggesting that even in the Archaic period, both naming styles coexisted. The Classical period, too, preserves dedications that omit male relatives entirely.[47] Thus, the shift is not as categorical as Dillon proposes.

The inventories also reveal recurring patterns in the types of objects offered by women. Unlike inscribed monuments erected within the sanctuary, many of these objects would have been stored within the temple buildings after dedication and are known to us primarily through the inventories rather than through their original visual display. In the Parthenon and Erechtheion lists, female

[41] Parker (2020).
[42] Dillon (2002) 17.
[43] Dillon (2002) 16-18. See also Jacqmin (2015), who studied 14 dedications from the Archaic period not mentioning male parents seen as an expression of freedom and status.
[44] Raubitschek and Jeffery (1949).
[45] Raubitschek and Jeffrey (1949) nos. 3, 25, 81, 232, 258, 298, 348, 380.
[46] Raubitschek and Jeffrey (1949) nos. 93, 191, 194, 201,
297, 369, 378.
[47] *IG* II^2 4326; *IG* II^2 4334.

dedicants frequently present items of personal adornment – rings, phialai, tiaras, bracelets, wreaths, earrings, and small figurines – often made of gold, silver, or ivory. A particularly revealing assemblage appears in the Opisthodomos subsection of the Hekatompedon inventories, where a series of boxes (κιβώτια) stored together contain jewellery, seals, and other precious objects dedicated by multiple individuals, both women and men.[48] One decorated box (κιβώτιον ποικίλον), dedicated by Kleito, wife of Aristokrates, contains an extensive collection of gold necklaces, seal-rings, glass and semi-precious stone seals, and other valuables, alongside items attributed to another female dedicant, Dexilla. While such entries demonstrate the prominence of jewellery and portable wealth in women's votive activity, the same inventories also attest to male dedicants offering items of adornment, indicating that jewellery formed part of a shared dedicatory repertoire rather than an exclusively female one. Harris highlights phialai in particular: in the Erechtheion inventories, eight out of ten silver phialai were dedicated by women.[49] A priestess also donates a silver phiale inscribed "Sacred to Athena Polias".[50] Dillon links phialai to women's ritual roles, noting that while men poured the libation, women often held the phiale and poured wine into it first – this is reflected in the Parthenon frieze, where maidens are shown carrying such vessels.[51] In contrast, male dedicants dominate in objects associated with civic or agonistic life, such as gold wreaths: of the five gold wreaths attributed to individuals in the Parthenon inventories, four were offered by men. This gendered pattern is echoed in the Asklepieion dedications, where women typically dedicated small vases and jewellery, while men offered coins and cult equipment.[52] Not all the dedications found in the Erectheion and Parthenon inventories were addressed to Athena. At least two dedications recorded in the Parthenon catalogue specify Artemis Brauronia as the recipient,[53] indicating that some items originated from other shrines on the Acropolis. It is likely that, over time, offerings from various cult sites, including the sanctuary

[48] *IG* II² 1400 (390/389 BCE), 61-70.
[49] Harris (1995) 236-237.
[50] Harris (1995) VI 40.
[51] Dillon (2002) 18. Dillon also observes a possible link in the architecture, recognisable in the phialai which are being carried by the six maidens in the porch of the Erechtheion.
[52] Aleshire (1989) 44-45.
[53] Harris (1995) V151, a gold ring dedicated by Kleinomache to Artemis Brauronia; V138, a gold chain dedicated to Artemis Brauronia.

of Artemis Brauronia, were mixed and compiled into composite inventories without strict differentiation by deity.

Although the dedications span multiple cult contexts, there is no clear pattern of object type corresponding to the deity. However, there is an observable (though not absolute) divergence in the types of objects dedicated by men and women. Wreaths, for example, held public significance in male-dominated domains such as athletics, civic performance, and ritual commemoration. Their predominance among male dedications aligns with their function as symbols of elite distinction. Conversely, women's offerings – including phialai, jewellery, and toiletry items – reflect domains of adornment and domestic religiosity. That said, none of these categories is exclusive: women could dedicate wreaths, and men did dedicate jewellery. The distinction is therefore statistical, not categorical, and reflects gendered tendencies rather than rigid boundaries.

The inventories of the Treasure of Athena also included some notable dedicants and well-known personalities.[54] Among female dedicators, one prominent example is Rhoxane, wife of Alexander the Great: her name is recorded in one of the later inventories, dated to 305/304 BCE, in a fragmentary dedication to Athena Polias; she offered a gold vessel, a gold rhyton (a drinking horn) and several gold necklaces.[55] The date of her dedication is debated among scholars: if it is certain that it occurred between 327 and 316 BCE, it remains disputed whether Rhoxane made the dedication when her husband was still alive or, as Harris suggested, in 319-318 BCE, when she visited Athens with Alexander IV. If the latter interpretation holds, the offering may have served a symbolic and political purpose: asserting her son's legitimacy as successor to Alexander.[56] As such, it stands apart from typical citizen dedications and highlights how in the Hellenistic period elite women could intervene in the religious landscape through monumentality and prestige.

The inventories also preserve evidence of textile dedications. These appear in many sanctuaries across the Greek world, particularly those dedicated to female deities such as Hera and

[54] Harris (1995) 228-236.
[55] *IG* II^2 1492. For discussion and identification of the objects, which is debated, given the fragmentary nature of the inscription, see Kosmetatou (2004).
[56] See Kosmetatou (2004) 78-80 on the debate. Cf. also Dillon (2002) 18-19.

Artemis, but they are also attested on the Acropolis.[57] In Homer's *Iliad*, the earliest known example of a textile offering is made to Athena: Hecuba dedicates a richly embroidered *peplos* at her shrine.[58] In Classical Athens, the Panathenaic *peplos*, woven every four years and reaching the Acropolis during the Great Panathenaia, likely inspired further textile dedications, both personal and communal.[59] Textile offerings can be read on multiple levels. First, they offered women a medium of individual piety, often aligned with domestic or ritual expertise. Second, they reinforced Athena's gendered identity: unlike male gods whose cult images were often nude, Athena's statue was clothed, and textile dedications played a visible role in sustaining that iconographic norm. Third, textile dedications resonated with Athena's mythological and cultic persona as patroness of weaving, most prominently represented in the Arrhephoria, a festival in which young girls participated in sacred weaving rituals.[60] Thus, textile dedications were not merely practical or decorative but symbolically saturated acts aligning personal identity, cult function and divine myth.

1.2 Dedications as means of self-representation

Textile dedications are also related to one particularly revealing dimension of women's dedications: their self-representation as skilled workers. Rather than being confined to purely domestic or symbolic functions, many of these offerings reflect a broader economic and artisanal identity. The offering of utilitarian objects such as loom weights reveal that women were not only engaged in the act of weaving but were actively inserting their identities into cultic and material landscapes. Women dedicated objects to Athena that simultaneously honoured her and reflected their productive roles within the *oikos* and beyond. The goddess was particularly associated with weaving and recognised as the patron deity of textile workers. Several clay loom weights have been found in many sanctuaries of Athena and other female deities, attesting to their connection with wool workers.[61] Known by the Greeks as ἀγνῦθες or λεῖαι, loom weights were found in great quantities in many locations and were

[57] Brøns (2017) ch.2.
[58] Hom. *Il*. 6.287-304.
[59] Russo (1990).
[60] On the Arrhephoria and weaving, see Brøns (2017) 137-144; Dillon (2002) 50-55.
[61] Russo (1990) nos. 325-335.

commonly used as votives. As integral tools in textile production, these objects served practical purposes but also carried inscriptions that spoke to the identities and social structures of those engaged in weaving. The earliest inscribed examples date to the fifth century BCE, and their meaning has provoked scholarly debate. They can bear words, letters or symbols, and Guarducci initially interpreted these inscriptions as signatures of the artisans who fabricated the weights, while others have suggested they more likely marked ownership.[62] Given that the names often appear in feminine form and that many of these loom weights were deposited in sanctuaries, it is plausible that they belonged to female owners dedicating their tools of trade. The debate over interpretation – ownership versus fabrication – echoes a broader issue in assessing women's economic autonomy. While it is unlikely that most women fabricated the weights themselves, the presence of names may reflect either practical household differentiation (i.e., distinguishing one woman's weights from another's) or ritual self-identification in a sacred context.

A clearer sense of this diversity emerges when we turn to specific inscribed examples. One of the earliest and most explicit cases is a loom weight from Siris in Magna Graecia, inscribed Ἰσοδίκης εἰμί ("I belong to Isodikê"), a formulation that proves personal ownership and highlights how women named themselves on textile tools used within the *oikos*.[63] A Hellenistic loom weight from Lappa in Crete bears the genitive Νέας ("of Nea"), again marking the object as the property of a woman and showing female control over weaving equipment.[64] By contrast, the loom weights from the sanctuary of Persephone at Locri Epizephyrii rarely include personal names and instead feature decorative or symbolic motifs.[65] While these may reflect a more overtly ritual function within a cultic assemblage, some symbols could also have operated as marks of ownership or identification analogous to personal signs or workshop emblems. Furthermore, in addition to personal names, some loom weights bear the names or iconographic attributes of deities,[66] and the archaeological contexts strongly suggest that

[62] Guarducci (1974) 540-541. On loom weights in Southern Italy, see Quercia and Foxhall (2014).
[63] Guarducci (1974) 351, fig. 121. Jeffery and Johnston (1990) 288 no. 1.
[64] Gavrilaki and Bowsky (2010) fig. 2, cat. no.10.
[65] Dotta (1989) 149.
[66] Sofroniew (2011) 200, listing many examples.

they were offered as votives, even though in most cases the absence of the dative case or an explicit dedicatory verb makes it difficult to determine whether they were actually inscribed *as* dedications. Another interpretative avenue is that some decorative motifs may have carried a functional purpose. The distinction between inscriptions related to practical use and those recording a dedicatory act is not always clear-cut, and while inscriptions such as Ἰσοδίκης εἰμί likely functioned primarily to assert ownership, other loom weights may have carried dual significance, serving as both utilitarian tools and markers of ritual engagement. Certain decorative motifs, for example, may have functioned as practical cues for the weaver – indicating where to introduce an additional weft or floating thread – while simultaneously conveying symbolic meaning within a sanctified context.[67] If so, these loom weights would preserve not only the names or identities of the women who used or dedicated them, but also material traces of the technical knowledge and procedural skill that underpinned their daily work. These examples, though geographically dispersed, illustrate that inscribed loom weights could operate both as markers of female ownership and as media of self-representation, revealing the variety of ways in which women inscribed their identities into domestic and sacred landscapes; utilitarian objects bearing the imprint of domestic labour and symbolic tokens of ritual agency.

Recent scholarship has emphasised this dual role. Sofroniew, in her analysis of loom weights dedicated in the sanctuary of Mefitis at Valle d'Ansanto in Southern Italy, argues that these should not be dismissed as merely low-status or incidental offerings; instead, she suggests that loom weights inscribed and deposited by women were meaningful cultic acts, closely tied to the sanctity of weaving as a religious practice.[68] These dedications might in fact indicate ritual weaving activities taking place in the shrine and involving the dedication of cloth to the deity, as occurred in several sanctuaries to Hera in mainland Greece.[69] The possibility of similar rituals happening in this site is definitely intriguing, but is not confirmed by the evidence. The site of Francavilla Marittima, near ancient Sybaris, has also yielded loom weights as well as clay figurines depicting women holding pieces of

[67] Enegren (2015).
[68] Sofroniew (2011). On the debate around the significance of loom weights, cf. Gleba (2009) and Dotta (1989).
[69] As attested in Pausanias 3.16.2; 5.16.2; 6.24.10. Cf. Sofroniew (2011). See ch. 3 of this dissertation for further discussion on textile dedications linked with Hera.

cloth; furthermore, an inscription from the sixth century BCE specifically mentions the cult of Athena.[70] Notably, these ritual weaving traditions predate Greek colonisation and reflect long-standing Italic models of feminine ritual activity,[71] and we cannot exclude that the site was then associated with Athena on the basis of similar cult practices that have then persisted throughout the centuries. Because of this and of similar evidence of pre-existing native cults connected to weaving taking place at the Heraion at Foce del Sele, another indication of Italic cultural models rather than Greek influences, Sofroniew concluded that "the dedication of woven fabric or textile tools in southern Italic sanctuaries should not be seen as necessarily deriving from Greek ritual customs. Instead, these two cases provide evidence for an Italic tradition of venerating 'women's work' and incorporating wool working and weaving into ritual activities that pre-dates and co-exists with Greek practices".[72] The interpretative value of loom weights thus lies in their multivalence. They are tools of production, symbols of ritual labour, indicators of gendered religious participation, and potential evidence of women's economic and social visibility. Whether one emphasises their practical function, their devotional role, or their epigraphic testimony, these objects demand to be read not as marginal but as central to understanding how women presented themselves (and were presented) in sacred space.

Female dedicatory inscriptions on the Athenian Acropolis provide an important window into how women used votives to articulate identity, status, and agency within the polis. Women appear as dedicants on the Acropolis from at least the seventh century onward, both alone and in conjunction with family members, and their presence is consistently attested across the epigraphic record.[73] Several inscribed statue bases and columnar monuments bear only female names, indicating autonomous dedications by women acting in their own right, without male relatives named alongside

[70] Kleibrink et al. (2004).
[71] Sofroniew (2011).
[72] Sofroniew (2011) 203.
[73] See Raubitschek and Jeffery (1949) for 6th and 5th centuries inscriptions; see also Wagner (1997) for a complete study on dedicatory practices on the Acropolis between 8th and 4th centuries BCE. Giovagnorio (2015) focused on private votive dedications in Athens in the 4th century BCE.

them.[74] In some cases, women dedicate jointly, as in the early fifth-century BCE statue base offered by two women and a third person whose name is lost.[75] The connection between these dedicants remains unclear, but the act of joint offering reveals social networks of women engaging together in ritual display. A similar pattern appears in fourth-century evidence, where Myrtia and an unnamed woman dedicate together, "having made a vow" (εὐξαμένη ἀνέθηκε).[76] It is unclear why these two women are on the same inscription, whether they were related, or whether they were making a joint dedication. The absence of explicit relational terminology – no patronymic, no demotic, no reference to husbands or sons – raises questions about how women chose (or were permitted) to identify themselves epigraphically. Such examples suggest that, even within the constraints of Athenian social norms, dedicatory practice offered women a space to assert themselves as ritual actors, sometimes independent of male guardians.

Some of these dedications even bear the signature of the artist who presumably made the statue. A particularly illustrative instance of self-representation is the dedication of Mikythe, a mid-fifth-century BCE inscription in which the dedicant identifies the offering as a tithe (δεκάτη):

[Μ]ικύθη μ' ἀνέ[θηκεν]
[Ἀθ]ηναίηι τό[δ' ἄγαλμα]
[εὐξ]αμένη δ̣[εκάτην]
[καὶ] ὑ̣πὲρ πα[ίδων]
[κ]αὶ ἑαυτῆ̣[ς].
Εὔφρω̣ν [ἐπο]-
[ί]ησε̣ν.[77]

"Mikythe dedicated me to Athena, this statue, having vowed a tithe, both on behalf of her children and herself. Euphron made it."

[74] For example *IG* I^3 803, bearing Myrrine's name.
[75] *IG* I^3 700: —c.8— ἀνέθε̣[κεν — — —]
[κα]ὶ Φρύνε : καὶ Σμικ[ύθε — — —] τἀθεναίαι.
Wagner (1997, 132) suggests that the two women are probably sisters, but there is no evidence that could confirm this.
[76] *IG* II^2 4333: [– – – θυ]γάτηρ, Κυδα – – | [– – – γυνὴ τῆι Ἀθηνᾶι εὐξα]μένη ἀνέθηκε. | [– – –] ὑός. Μυρτία Ἀριστέως [– – – γυνή] | [ἐπὶ – – –]ς [ἱ]ερείας. For discussion and translation, see Giovagnorio (2015) n. 12. There is a reference to the deme starting with Κυδα (perhaps *Kydathenaion* or *Kudantidai*), which, according to Giovagnorio, must necessarily refer to the father of one of the two dedicants, as women are generally not given demotics in inscriptions. The name of Myrtia is also present in another inscription from around the same period: *MDAI(A)* 67 (1942).
[77] *IG* I^3 857.

Mikythe's dedication is remarkable for several reasons. First, the inscription explicitly states that she vowed a tithe of income – evidence that she possessed and controlled resources substantial enough to commission a sculptural votive. This stands in tension with rigid readings of women's economic incapacity in classical Athens, suggesting that some women were able to earn or manage money, whether through work, inheritance, or dowry income. Secondly, she dedicates "on behalf of her children and herself," a phrasing that positions her simultaneously as mother and economic agent. The inscription thus weaves together two aspects of female identity: the familial (representing her household before the goddess) and the personal (asserting her own ritual commitment and capacity to fulfil a vow). The inclusion of the name of the sculptor (Εὔφρων ἐποίησεν) further underlines the monumentality and cost of the offering, contrasting with the many small bronzes more commonly dedicated by women on the Acropolis. A later example, the mid-fourth-century BCE dedication of Philoumene, likewise stresses the dedicator's social identity, but in a different way:

> Φιλουμένη
> Λεωσθένους Κεφαλῆθεν θυγάτηρ
> τῆι Ἀθηνᾶι
> Κηφισόδοτος ἐπόησε

"Philoumene, daughter of Leosthenes of the deme of Kephale (dedicated) to Athena. Kephisodotos made this."[78]

Here, Philoumene is defined not through a vow or a professional act but through her father, Leosthenes of Kephale. The emphasis falls on established family identity and civic embeddedness: the demotic Κεφαλῆθεν situates her within the Athenian political geography, and the prominence of her family is corroborated by an ephebic inscription from the Amphiareion of Oropos; a man named Leosthenes is listed here as *strategos* of the countryside (στρατηγὸν τὸν ἐπὶ τῇ χώρᾳ) and honoured.[79] Depending on the dating of both inscriptions, a matter still debated, this individual could be either

[78] *SEG* 44.136. See also Giovagnorio (2015) for discussion. Interestingly, the base bears another inscription, an honorary document for Diphilos inscribed on the lower surface of the base around 100 BCE, a sign that it was reused, as evidenced by the cuttings for the feet of a bronze statue found on the surface with the honorary inscription.
[79] Leonardos (1918) 83 no. 95.

Philoumene's brother or father.[80] The connection with Philoumene's dedication seems, however, certain, and through the mention of her male relative the dedicant asserts status through lineage and deme membership rather than personal occupation or economic agency. This strategy is not exclusive to women: just as a male citizen routinely identified himself through his patronymic and demotic, Philoumene's naming formula reflects a parallel, structurally identical use of familial and civic markers. In this sense, the dedications examined above exemplify the range of epigraphic strategies available to women: while some prioritise civic identity through patronymics and demotics, others, like Mikythe, highlight personal vows or economic capacity.

The variability suggests that dedicatory inscriptions offered women a range of epigraphic strategies through which identity could be expressed. The surviving evidence does not permit us to determine whether these differences always reflect conscious self-fashioning or simply the absence of a fixed epigraphic convention. These inscriptions also reflect the blurred boundary between private and public for Athenian women. While the *oikos* is often framed as the appropriate sphere of female activity, dedications on the Acropolis (one of the most visible public sanctuaries in the classical world) render aspects of women's lives publicly legible. Whether through naming themselves, displaying familial connections, or hinting at economic capacity, female dedicants crafted inscriptions that placed their identities into a civic-religious context otherwise dominated by male voices. Explicit statements of motivation occasionally appear in women's dedications. One example is the fourth-century BCE inscription of Meneia, who dedicated to Athena after a dream:

> Ἀθηνάαι Μένεια ἀνέθηκεν
> ὄψιν ἰδοῦσα ἀρετὴν τῆς θεοῦ. [81]

"Meneia dedicated to Athena, having had a vision of the goodness of the goddess".

Here, the vision (ὄψις) becomes the catalyst for the offering, valorising female religious experience and the authority of personal revelation. This inscription proves that women's dedications could

[80] Matthaiou (1994).
[81] *IG* II² 4326. The name of the dedicant is also attested in other inscriptions from the same period: Peek, *Att. Grabschr.* II 134; *IG* II².11303.

articulate not only identity and social presence but also individual religious agency and subjective encounters with the divine. A number of women's dedications explicitly invoke Athena under the epithet Ergane, an aspect of the goddess closely associated with craft, labour, and technical skill. The choice to dedicate to Athena Ergane was rarely incidental: it typically bears a direct relationship to the motivation or content of the offering. One such example is a mid-fourth-century BCE dedication by Hedyle, daughter of Euphron, recorded on a fragmentary marble base and explicitly addressed to Athena Ergane.[82] More illuminating, however, is a second inscription from roughly the same period – one of the rare instances in which a female dedicant speaks in her own voice:

χερσί τε καὶ τέχ[ν]αις ἔργων
τόλμαις τε δικαίαις
θρεψαμένη τέκνων γεν[εὰ]ν
ἀνέθηκε Μέλιννα
σοὶ τήνδε μνήμην, θεὰ Ἐργάνη,
ὧν ἐπόνησεν
μοῖραν ἀπαρξαμένη κτεάνων,
τιμῶσα χάριν σήν. [83]

"With her hands, with the skill of her craft, and with just courage, having raised a line of children, Melinna dedicated this memorial to you, goddess Ergane, taking as first fruits a portion of her possessions earned by labour, honouring your favour."

The inscription, preserved on a marble base with a rectangular depression on its upper surface for the offering itself, reveals a remarkably rich self-presentation. Melinna emphasises manual labour (χέρσι), technical skill (τέχναις), courage (τόλμαις) and motherhood, presenting herself simultaneously as a skilled worker and mother, an identity that resonates with the double framing of Mikythe in the dedication discussed earlier. Both women define themselves as economically active agents who contribute materially to their households, while also fulfilling normative maternal roles. Yet Melinna's elaboration is more expansive, suggesting a desire not merely to record a vow but to articulate a moral persona grounded in work, perseverance, and piety.

[82] *IG* II² 4328: [Ἡ]δ[ύ]λη Εὔφρο[νος — —]
[Ἀθ]ηνᾶι Ἐργά[νηι ἀνέθηκεν].
[83] *IG* II² 4334.

These inscriptions raise further interpretative questions about authorship and agency. To what extent were women themselves selecting how to appear in these texts? Could they choose to identify themselves as workers, mothers, daughters of prominent men, or simply by name alone? The question of authorship – whether women themselves composed the inscriptions that speak in their voice – remains central to interpreting these dedications, as does the degree to which female dedicants were responsible for the wording, commissioning, and financing of the dedications. These short texts do not require advanced literary training; their diction tends to be formulaic, their metrical schemes simple, and their thematic patterns repetitive. Women like Melinna or Mikythe may have played an active role in determining how they wished to be represented, even though the authorship of the surviving wording cannot be established.In this context, self-presentation in epigraphic texts does not necessarily map onto authorship: inscriptions reflect communicative choices, not direct evidence of literacy. The absence of a standardised dedicatory formula across such inscriptions – Melinna's being highly individualised – may point to genuine authorial intention, whether composed by the dedicant herself or composed collaboratively according to her wishes. Furthermore, the argument for female authorship need not rest on the presumed simplicity of dedicatory epigrams. There is ample evidence – literary, epigraphic, and ritual – for women's capacity to compose verse and engage in poetic performance.[84] Greek culture recognised women as legitimate poetic agents: Sappho, Corinna, and Telesilla provide explicit examples of women composing complex verse for ritual, civic, and mythological contexts. Moreover, women and girls routinely performed choral hymns, laments, and processional songs in sanctuaries. These traditions required not merely rote recitation but active participation in a performative culture in which women were trained – formally or informally – to manipulate traditional poetic language.[85] Hellenistic epigrams reinforce this: poets such as Nossis of Lokroi and Anyte of Tegea composed dedicatory epigrams that were publicly inscribed in sanctuaries, demonstrating that female-authored votive poetry was culturally intelligible and publicly displayed.

[84] Cole (1981).
[85] Calame's foundational study remains essential for understanding the ritual and performative contexts in which Greek women learned, transmitted, and occasionally composed poetry. See Calame (1997).

Pausanias (2.20.8) tells us that Telesilla of Argos not only composed hymns but was honoured for them with a portrait statue. Antipater of Thessalonica's catalogue of female poets (*AP* 9.26) further attests to a cultural tradition that accepted and admired women's poetic production. These testimonia show that Greek audiences both expected and valued women's participation in poetic composition. Such evidence strengthens the case that Athenian dedicants (though certainly not a socially homogeneous group) possessed varying degrees of cultural and textual competency.[86] Some women, especially those of higher status with access to musical and ritual education, may well have been capable of composing or shaping sophisticated verse; others, whose literacy was more functional or situational, might nonetheless have been perfectly able to dictate simple formulae or select the thematic framing of their dedications. Verse composition by women was not anomalous: in ritual settings, women were expected to participate in the oral transmission of poetic forms. Consequently, the individuality of inscriptions such as Melinna's may reflect not merely spontaneous personal expression, but a broader tradition of female ritual poetics that equipped women with the tools to articulate identity through verse.

Whether or not women penned these lines themselves, what matters is that the dedications record a female claim to voice, one that purposefully highlights specific social roles and inscribes them into a public sacred landscape. The socio-economic spectrum of women engaging in such acts is further demonstrated by the dedication of Phrygia the bread-maker, dated to around 500 BCE:

Φρυγία: ἀνέθεκέ με τᾶι Ἀθενάαι ἡ ἀρτόπολ[ις].
"Phrygia dedicated me to Athena, the bread-maker."[87]

Here, Phrygia dedicated a small bronze shield adorned with a Gorgoneion – a motif directly associated with Athena. The modest scale and technical simplicity of the offering stand in contrast to

[86] Kosmopoulou (2001) 302-303: "When exploring the reality of their lives, one should keep in mind that Athenian women were not a homogeneous group but rather a mixed crowd that included ἀσταί, fore*ig*ners, metics, prostitutes, and other categories".
[87] *IG* I³ 546: Φρυγία: ἀνέθεκέ με ⟨τ⟩ὰθεναίαι *h*ε ἀρτόπολ[ις]. See Bather (1892) Plate VI n.60.

the expensive marble dedications of Mikythe and Melinna: it is comparatively inexpensive, accessible, and easily produced. This discrepancy highlights the broad accessibility of dedicatory practice on the Acropolis. Wagner has argued that Phrygia may have been a freedwoman or even a slave.[88] The name Phrygia appears for slaves in at least two other inscriptions from Athens and Tanagra, reinforcing the possibility of non-elite status.[89] Nevertheless, her act of dedication demonstrates that women across the social hierarchy – citizen, metic, freedwoman, possibly enslaved – participated in the sacred economy of offering. A similar case of work-related dedication appears in the early fifth-century BCE inscription of Smikythe the launderer, who dedicated a pedestal supporting a marble wash-basin as a tithe (δεκάτη) of her labour.[90] Unlike Phrygia's shield, however, this offering was costly and substantial; as has been noted, a bronze basin of this size implies either that laundering could be lucrative when operating on a large scale, or that the dedicant received financial contributions from others – possibly family members or employers – to fulfil the vow.[91] She may also have set aside earnings gradually until she could afford to finance the dedication herself. This example, alongside Mikythe's tithe, suggests that tithe dedications were a key avenue through which women publicly displayed economic agency. In dedicating the tools of their trade, women signal their participation in the economic and ritual economy of Athens. Here, the boundary between "domestic" and "public" becomes porous: weaving, for instance, was a domestic craft, but the production of the Panathenaic *peplos* was a public, civic duty; laundering served household needs, but the basins used in ritual purification belonged to the sacred sphere. Dedications to Athena Ergane by women extend beyond the Acropolis. A fragmentary Ionic capital bears an inscription stating that a woman, identified only as "the daughter of X from Acharnae," dedicated the object to Athena.[92] Although the text does not specify her occupation, the choice of the epithet Ergane and the architectural nature of the object suggest an offering linked to technical skill, handiwork, or artisanal

[88] Wagner (1997) 171.
[89] *IG* I³ 1037; *IG* VII 1488.
[90] *IG* I³ 794: Σμικύθε πλύντρια δεκάτεν ἀνέθεκεν.
[91] Jim (2014a) 171-174.
[92] *IG* I² 561: Ἀχαρνέος θυγάτη[ρ] Ἀθηναίαι Ἐργάνηι ἀνέθεκεν. See Jim (2014).

production. This pattern resonates with Kosmopoulou's study of Attic gravestones, which shows that some women's professional roles were publicly commemorated, indicating socially recognised female labour beyond the household.[93]

Women were not the only dedicants to honour Athena Ergane with tokens of professional identity. Numerous male artisans (particularly potters) made dedications referencing their workshops or skills. Male worshippers are likewise attested in the epigraphic record. A fragmentary fourth-century BCE dedication records Deinomenes, together with his wife and children, dedicating a statue to Athena Ergane Polias as a tithe (δεκάτη) of his possessions (*IG* II² 4318). Another inscription of the same period records Euktemon, son of Teisikles of Aphidna, dedicating to Athena Ergane (*IG* II² 4329), while a closely related dedication by Teisikles, son of Teisikles of Aphidna, offers first fruits (ἀπαρχή) to the same manifestation of the goddess (Meritt 1940, 58 no. 7). Since both men share the same patronymic and demotic, they were probably brothers, suggesting that devotion to Athena Ergane could be expressed within the same family. Individual male dedications are further attested through Bakchios, whose offering was addressed to Athena Organe, a variant of the epithet Ergane (*IG* II² 2939), and Aion, son of Nausimachos of Anagyrous, who fulfilled a vow to Athena Ergane (*SEG* 25.220). Male craftsmen also dedicated offerings to Athena without explicitly invoking the epithet Ergane. The best-known example is the dedication of the so-called Antenor Kore by the potter Nearchos (Acropolis Museum, inv. No. 681; *IG* I³ 485). These monuments demonstrate that artisans naturally associated their professional activity with Athena even when the goddess was addressed without the specific epithet Ergane.

Yet the female dedications stand out precisely because they challenge and nuance standard models of women's economic invisibility. While men's professional dedications reflect well-recognised participation in craft industries, women's offerings reveal that they, too, worked, earned,

[93] Kosmopoulou (2001) emphasises that while funerary imagery is highly conventional and selective, a number of monuments explicitly portray women engaged in identifiable professions, indicating that their labour, whether in caregiving, cultic service, medical professions or textile production, held social and economic significance.

and organised resources in ways not always captured in literary sources. A specialised category of materials adds additional nuance. Inventories record eight lyres and one plectrum under the treasury of Athena, objects that may have played roles in rituals requiring musical accompaniment.[94] Liveri has demonstrated that musical instruments dedicated in sanctuaries of Athena, Artemis, Hera, Kore and Demeter often reflect gendered patterns, with Athena most closely associated with music.[95] The dedication of a bronze cymbal by Lysilla (500-475 BCE) is particularly telling: she uses the term ἀπαρχή (aparché), signalling a first-fruit offering of personal significance.[96] This object opens space for alternative identities – perhaps occupational, performative, or ritual. Liveri notes that "the use of the term aparché at the dedication of musical instrument to a deity is rare or unique; in this case its meaning is difficult to explain. Perhaps the dedicant wants to offer the patron goddess of the city the best of her possessions".[97] The offering was not an expensive one, which may suggest lower-status background; yet, as with Phrygia's shield, socio-economic inference remains speculative.[98] There is no further evidence that the cymbal was linked to her occupation, and this need not always be the case, as shown in the dedication of a shield by a bread-maker. Should we interpret the cymbal as cultic equipment (used in ritual, sacrifices, or festivals) or as a marker of professional identity? Or does the choice reflect another, more personal, logic? Liveri, in her survey of musical instruments dedicated in various sanctuaries, concludes that although such offerings were made by both genders, in the Archaic period female dedicants of musical instruments appear more frequently than men.

Another crucial dimension of women's dedicatory practice on the Acropolis concerns motherhood, a role central to female identity in Athenian ideology and one that bore both private and

[94] Wagner (1997) 181-190. See, for instance *IG* II² 1388 lines 79-81, the dedication of Thaumarete, an ivory lyre and a plectrum: ταῦτα Θαυμαρέτη ἀνέθηκ[ε Τιμωνίδο γ]υνή. ἐγ κιβωτίωι· λύριον ἐλεφάντινον καὶ πλῆκτρον [ἠλεφαντωμέ]-νον ξύλινον.

[95] Liveri (2018). According to Liveri, while Athena is mostly connected with music, Artemis was more linked with dance and songs, yet both are shown playing instruments in representations on vases, unlike the other goddesses. Musical instruments are also attested, in small quantities, among the dedications in the Athenian Asklepieion.

[96] *IG* I³ 547: Λύσιλλα ἀπαρχὲν Ἀθεναίαι.

[97] Liveri (2018) 40.

[98] Indeed the size, cost, or material value of a dedication does not always reliably reflect the dedicant's social or economic status, since individuals of secure civic standing could dedicate small and inexpensive objects, while those of more limited means might have still mobilised sufficient resources for a costly dedication if the ritual or personal significance warranted it.

civic significance. Dedications associated with childbirth, child-rearing or the wellbeing of children – such as figurines, ex-votos representing infants, or inscriptions that explicitly mention children – reveal how women sought Athena's protection not only for themselves but for their households. Such offerings position women simultaneously as mothers and as mediators of familial prosperity, commending their children to the care of the goddess. In her study of what she terms "maternal votives", Avramidou argues that dedications made by mothers to Athena differ from those made to Asklepios or Artemis by women concerned with fertility, childbirth or health-related crises.[99] Rather than addressing the woman's own bodily concerns, dedications to Athena, she claims, express familial, and therefore public, concerns, positioning mothers as representatives of their *oikos*. Avramidou concludes that maternal dedications reflect a highly visible form of female religious agency and that mothers occasionally function as a public-facing extension of the family, thereby participating indirectly in the civic sphere.[100] While this argument is persuasive in highlighting the civic dimension of motherhood – especially in light of the Periclean Citizenship Law and its emphasis on legitimate descent – it may overstate the distinction between maternal dedications and other forms of female offerings. The evidence examined so far in this chapter suggests that the boundary between "maternal" and "non-maternal" dedications is more porous than Avramidou allows. Inscriptions by women who do not explicitly identify themselves as mothers frequently include implicit familial themes (e.g., mentions of kin, shared dedications, or references to household prosperity). Conversely, "maternal" dedications often appear alongside other modes of self-presentation, particularly those related to work or craft. The dedications of Melinna and Mikythe, for instance, integrate maternal identity with labour, thereby undermining the idea that maternal votives form a coherent, distinct

[99] Avramidou (2015). On maternal dedications to Athena and this particular aspect of the goddess, see also Cuche (2015) and Räuchle (2015).

[100] Avramidou (2015): "Like other elite women of the same period, the Athenians set up votive offerings that were not solely of a personal nature but aimed to the family's praise and the devotee's public esteem (cf. Lazzarini 1976, nos. 150-154 [Delos, unnamed], 157 [Delos/Naxos, Nikandre], 317 [Delos, Proxene], 726 [Paros, Telestodike]; Ridgway 1987; Kron 1996, p. 155, 157, 160, 166, 168, 181). The preserved maternal dedications examined here indicate that mothers occasionally acted as representatives of the *oikos*. This observation strengthens their role within the Athenian family and provides additional support for female participation in both private and public family festivals during the Archaic and Early Classical eras".

category. Their inscriptions place children and work on equal footing, representing motherhood not as a separate devotional domain but as one element within a broader repertoire of female self-fashioning.

What the Acropolis material does support, however, is the notion that "maternal" dedications functioned as public acts, not merely private expressions of domestic piety. Athenian women, particularly after the Periclean reforms, held a quasi-civic role even without formal political rights. Their dedications on the Acropolis – especially when inscribed and placed in a monumental, highly visible sanctuary – made this role public. By invoking children, household continuity and intergenerational legitimacy, women placed the *oikos* into the ritual spotlight, publicly affirming its contribution to the polis. These dedications therefore possess a double valence: they are devotional gestures but also statements of civic belonging, in which women articulate their household's presence within the broader community. At the same time, the wide range of objects mothers (and women in general) dedicated – from marble bases and columns to small bronze items, mirrors, cymbals, miniature shields, and figurines – shows that social status varied greatly among female dedicants**.** The diversity of materials and forms suggests that dedications were accessible to women across the socioeconomic spectrum. The maternal role itself was not restricted to elite self-representation, and for many women, motherhood may have been the most publicly legible identity available to them. "Maternal" dedications are best understood as one strategy among several through which Athenian women inserted themselves – and their households – into the public religious sphere. They co-exist with and overlap other strategies of self-representation, including labour, artistry, personal piety, and ritual participation. The Acropolis material therefore points to a continuum of female self-presentation rather than discrete categories.

1.3 Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated that female dedications to Athena – across inventories, inscribed monuments, and humble utilitarian objects – constitute one of the richest and most revealing bodies of evidence for women's religious agency in Classical Athens. Taking the Acropolis as a case study has

enabled us to observe not only the variety of objects dedicated by women, but the equally significant variety of motives, voices, and representational strategies embedded in these offerings, painting a dynamic picture of women's agency in the civic and ritual landscape. Athena's multiplicity provided women with a conceptual vocabulary through which they could articulate different aspects of themselves. Dedications reveal the active and varied roles that women, either independently or alongside male kin, played in expressing their devotion to the goddess. A quantitative analysis of temple inventories offers a unique perspective. The economic and social dimensions of the temple come to the forefront, showcasing the diverse array of valuable offerings by female worshippers. These dedications not only reflect the skills and contributions of women but also challenge conventional notions of their roles in ancient Greek society.

A central theme emerges: self-representation. Women, in choosing objects for dedication, act on two distinct levels. First, they align offerings with the specific role and attributes of the goddess in the sanctuary. Second, particularly evident on the Acropolis, women exercise agency in presenting themselves in varied ways. Athena, with her diverse attributes, becomes a framework through which women could emphasise particular skills, forging a distinctive means of self-representation. Women's dedications on the Acropolis hint at an emphasis on their *oikos* as a public entity, reflecting an expanded concept of family. Here, women view their roles as mothers, wives, or caretakers not merely as individual or familial duties but as integral components of the larger community. The dedication of weaving tools, signalling an active role in society, aligns seamlessly with this notion. These offerings become a means of integrating family life into the social fabric, with objects associated with childbirth and child-rearing serving as symbols of the societal importance of women's roles.

Some dedications, particularly those inscribed on objects like loom weights, raise the question of whether these women were intentionally crafting a narrative about themselves or simply articulating their daily activities – a fine line between conscious self-representation and the more pragmatic documentation of one's actions. The diversity of dedicatory practices suggests a spectrum of intentions. In some instances, women may have used dedications as a form of intentional self-

expression, emphasising particular skills, attributes, or aspects of their identity. The choice of specific objects, the inclusion of personal names, and the explicit reference to familial relationships can be indicative of a deliberate effort to communicate more than a mere record of activities. Conversely, pragmatic considerations might have driven certain dedications, where women sought to document their daily activities or fulfil societal expectations without necessarily infusing deeper layers of personal expression. Utilitarian objects, such as those associated with domestic or economic tasks, may have been chosen for their practical significance rather than any explicit desire for self-representation. Ultimately, the motivations behind these dedications likely varied among women. Some may have consciously used these acts of devotion to convey aspects of their identity, while others may have seen them more as routine expressions of daily life.

This chapter therefore provides the foundation for the broader arguments of the thesis. It shows that dedications cannot be categorised into rigid types – maternal, occupational, aristocratic – without oversimplifying or distorting the complexity of female religious behaviour. It establishes that women's dedications must be read as multi-dimensional identity claims, shaped by the institutional role of the goddess, by civic frameworks such as the citizenship law, and by the realities of women's economic participation. This finding will allow subsequent chapters to reinterpret dedications to other deities not as isolated cultic phenomena but as part of a broader pattern of gendered religious agency. When considering the broader landscape of Athena's worship beyond the Athenian Acropolis, further questions emerge about whether similar patterns occurred elsewhere. Attica and Athens are unique for the quantity and richness of evidence, and had it been possible, a comparative analysis of another major sanctuary might have identified a parallel or markedly different role performed by the goddess in other cities where Athena was worshipped. Women across the Greek world used dedications not simply to honour the gods but to negotiate visibility, authority, and belonging in contexts that formally excluded them from political participation.[101] The Acropolis material demonstrates with unusual

[101] This reading aligns with recent work arguing that women's inscriptions – whether dedications, epitaphs, or oracular questions – functioned as intentional acts to articulate identity and assert agency rather than passive records: Plant (2024) shows that women across the Greek world used inscribed texts to shape their public visibility beyond the constraints of literary narratives.

clarity that women's religious actions were neither peripheral nor silent. There was no single, uniform "female experience of Athena"; rather, we see a constellation of micro-histories, each offering insight into how individual women positioned themselves within the religious and civic institutions of the polis. The Acropolis evidence reveals that religion was one of the few spheres in which women's differentiated identities became visible – not despite their exclusion from formal politics, but precisely because religious dedication provided a socially acceptable venue for self-expression.

List of inscriptions cited

Reference	Location	Epithet	Date
IG I³ 987 (*IG* II² 4548)	Echelidai	—	c. 400 BCE
IG II² 4326	Athens	—	Mid 4th c. BCE
IG II² 4334	Athens	Ergane	Mid 4th c. BCE
IG II² 1400	Athens	—	390/389 BCE
IG II² 1492	Athens	—	End 4th c. BCE
IG II² 1388	Athens	—	398/397 BCE
IG II² 4328	Athens	Ergane	Mid 4th c. BCE
IG II² 4333	Athens	—	End 4th c. BCE
IG I³ 546	Athens	—	Ca 500
IG I³ 547	Athens	—	500-475 BCE
IG I³ 794	Athens	—	Early 5th c. BCE
IG I³ 857	Athens	—	Mid-5th c. BCE
IG I³ 700	Athens	—	Early 5th c. BCE
IG I³ 803	Athens	—	490-480 BCE
IG I² 561	Acropolis	Ergane	4th c. BCE
SEG 44.136	Athens	—	After 350 BCE

Chapter 2. Artemis and the ritual language of female transition

Artemis occupied a central place in the religious lives of ancient Greek women, guiding them through the most vulnerable and socially significant moments of the female life-course – childhood, puberty, marriage, childbirth, and early motherhood. From Brauron in Attica to Thessaly, Boeotia, Sparta, and the Aegean islands, her sanctuaries attracted girls, wives, and mothers, whose dedications reveal a sustained engagement with the goddess as overseer of bodily development, reproductive risk, and social reclassification. This chapter argues that women's dedications to Artemis across the Greek world reveal a coherent pattern: Artemis is consistently activated as the deity who oversees moments of female transition – puberty, fertility, childbirth, and symbolic "rebirth." Through an analysis of inscribed dedications from Attica, Boeotia, Thessaly, Sparta and elsewhere, including cults where Artemis appears jointly with Apollo, I show that these offerings constitute a distinct ritual language through which women and their households negotiated bodily danger, social liminality, and forms of legal or symbolic transformation. Far from being routine gestures of piety, dedications to Artemis provided women with a distinctive way to express religious agency, guided by local ritual practices but connected by shared worries about the body and stages of life.

Scholarly work on Artemis highlights her complex role and the gendered nature of her worship. King has portrayed Artemis as a paradoxical figure – an eternal virgin overseeing menstruation, defloration, and childbirth.[102] King ties her epithets, like *Lysizonos* (girdle-releaser), to rituals such as garment dedications associated with the "loosening" of the girdle at childbirth, connecting these to Hippocratic anxieties about female maturation and societal efforts to regulate women's reproductive roles. The spatial context of Artemis' worship further shows her gendered significance. Cole's study locates Artemis in liminal areas, such as borderlands and forests, where her sanctuaries supported rites of passage for young women.[103] Cole links epithets like *Agrotera* and *Limnatis* to these wild settings, suggesting they reinforced Artemis' role as protector of the untamed

[102] King (1983).
[103] Cole (2004) chs. 6-7. See Goff (2004) on women's dedications at sites removed from civic centres, signalling their peripheral social status even in moments of cultic agency.

and those in transitional states, such as girls shedding childhood garments. Recently, Johannessen has critiqued the traditional view of Artemis as solely a goddess of wild nature and fertility, arguing that such labels oversimplify her social and cultural importance; focusing on votive offerings at Brauron, Ephesos, and Sparta, her study prioritises archaeological evidence over literary sources, revealing Artemis as a deity bridging nature and culture, especially through women's bodies and sexuality.[104] Senkova's study adds a health-focused perspective, arguing that Artemis' sanctuaries consistently yielded votives tied to women's gynaecological concerns.[105] Her work highlights Artemis' widespread role in safeguarding female biology, a theme central to this chapter's analysis of dedications, examined here for dedicants' names, Artemis' epithets, offered objects, and cultural contexts. Artemis' worship in ancient Greece varied by region and function, as reflected in the epithets her dedicants invoked. These titles reveal how her identity shifted across sanctuaries, highlighting how epithets reflect both Artemis' divine persona and the lived experiences of her worshippers. By analysing key examples tied to specific epithets, we uncover the social and cultural roles Artemis played in women's lives, from guiding rites of passage to safeguarding childbirth and fertility. The subsections below explore three epithets – Brauronia, Eileithyia, and Kyparissia – through their associated dedications, regional contexts, and gendered significance.

2.1 Artemis Brauronia and the ritual construction of girls' transitions

The epithet Brauronia, associated with Artemis' sanctuary at Brauron in eastern Attica, encapsulates her role as a guardian of young girls navigating the passage from childhood to womanhood. Active from at least the eighth century BCE, with significant development by the fifth century BCE through the Hellenistic period, and located approximately 40 km from urban Athens, Brauron's rural isolation in a marshy, coastal landscape reinforced Artemis Brauronia's connection to the untamed, a liminal space where girls symbolically bridged nature and culture. This sanctuary served as a vital religious centre for women's rites, particularly the *arkteia* ritual, where girls aged five to ten, known as *arktoi*

[104] Johannessen (2021).
[105] Senkova (2016).

("bears"), performed rites under female oversight, preparing for puberty and marriage.[106] These rituals included dances and offerings, symbolically taming the wildness of childhood. In later literary traditions, this process became associated with the figure of Iphigeneia. In *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, Euripides has Athena decree that Iphigeneia will serve Artemis at Brauron and receive posthumous offerings from women who died in childbirth, while the cult image from Tauris is installed at nearby Halai Araphenides. Yet Euripides' testimony constitutes the earliest explicit evidence for Iphigeneia's presence at Brauron, and modern scholarship has demonstrated how difficult it is to substantiate this association on archaeological, epigraphic, or iconographic grounds.[107] The supposed cult of Iphigeneia at the site may therefore reflect literary construction rather than securely attested ritual practice. Within the myth itself, Iphigeneia's reintegration is only partial: her rescue removes her from the human sphere altogether, relocating her to a liminal, divinely controlled existence. Just as the mythic Iphigeneia negotiates danger and liminality without fully returning to ordinary civic life, the *arktoi* undergo a stylised passage from wildness toward civic belonging. The ritual logic underlying the *arkteia* – temporary separation, controlled performance, and symbolic reintegration – finds a further echo in the later dedications of garments recorded in the clothing catalogues, which likewise mark moments of transition and completion within the female life cycle. The *arktoi'*s activities, which may have included bear-like movements or gestures but are difficult to reconstruct securely, were connected to Artemis' role as protector of the vulnerable, guiding girls toward societal roles as wives and mothers.[108] Johannessen highlights the absence of overtly sexual imagery at Brauron, in contrast to the explicit depictions of female and male sexuality

[106] Scholarly interpretations of the *arkteia* vary, with some, like Kahlil (1988), focusing on iconographic evidence from vases to reconstruct the ritual's actions, suggesting that the girls might have performed dances or symbolic acts imitating bears. Cole (1984) compares the *arkteia* to male maturation rituals, highlighting its social function in preparing girls for marriage. Sourvinou-Inwood (1988) emphasises age representation in Attic iconography, arguing the ritual marked biological and social maturation. Conversely, debates exist around the exact age of participants, with Aristophanes's *Lysistrata* suggesting ages five to ten, though interpretations remain controversial due to limited textual clarity. See also the contributions in the collection of essays edited by Gentili and Perusino (2002), exploring various dimensions of this practice.

[107] Ekroth (2003).

[108] See Bocksberger (2021). Bocksberger proposes that the *arkteia* functioned as a form of embodied education in which dance and controlled movement disciplined the girls' bodies and characters alike. The clumsiness associated with "bear-like" behaviour thus metaphorically marked their pre-social condition, while participation in the ritual chorus cultivated self-mastery and prepared the girls for their transition into normative female roles.

at Artemis sanctuaries at Ephesos and Sparta (Orthia). She notes that the sanctuary's sole naked female figure and lack of male images suggest worshippers expressed concerns about sexuality and life transitions through subtler means, such as images of girls and adolescents seated on the lap of a woman, likely Artemis, symbolising her role as overseer of the passage from childhood to adulthood.[109] These iconographic choices show Brauron's focus on pre-pubescent girls and their preparation for societal roles, aligning with the *arkteia* ritual's emphasis on taming youthful wildness.

This ritual context frames the sanctuary's primary evidence: the clothing catalogues, a collection of fragments of stone stelae: *IG* II^2 1514, 1515, 1516, 1517B, 1518B, 1521B, 1522, 1523, 1524B, 1525, 1528, 1529 and 1530, dated ca. 349/8-336/5 BCE, which record garments dedicated primarily by women. These catalogues, meticulously detailed, offer a rare glimpse into women's religious practices and social roles.[110] The garments preserved in the inventories often mark post-ritual states: clothing outgrown, abandoned, or symbolically surrendered after initiation. The inscriptions were discovered on the Athenian Acropolis, specifically associated with the Brauronion, a secondary sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia established in Athens. This sanctuary, located near the Propylaia and Parthenon, served as an urban extension of the main cult site at Brauron. At Brauron, archaeological excavations by J. Papadimitriou (1948-1962) uncovered a temple, stoas, and other structures, along with inscriptions believed to be the original treasure records. These Brauron inscriptions, which likely catalogued the same or similar dedications as the Acropolis ones, remain largely unpublished, thereby limiting direct comparison. The inscriptions detail garment types, dedicants' names, decorative features, colours, and display methods. A dataset compiled from these inscriptions lists 322 garments

[109] Johannessen (2021) 93. Johannessen argues, however, that Brauron's limited sexual imagery does not negate concerns about sexuality but reflects alternative expressions.

[110] For a comprehensive examination of the clothing catalogues from the Artemis Brauronia sanctuary, see Cleland (2005). Cleland's work provides an in-depth study of the terminology, material culture, and ritual significance of the garments listed, offering critical transcriptions, translations, and a glossary of terms, alongside contextual analysis that elucidates their role in the cult of Artemis and female rites of passage in 4th-century BCE Attica. Her analysis builds on Linders (1972), which offers foundational epigraphic and archaeological insights into the Acropolis-based inventories, proposing that they are administrative copies or adaptations of original records from the Brauron sanctuary, and providing detailed textual restorations and commentary on their cultic and material context. Linders emphasised that these catalogues, unlike typical temple inventories, were public displays of piety, linking individual acts to communal worship. Cleland has certainly helped make these invaluable inscriptions more accessible, and her work was an excellent source for the publication of other more recent studies on textile dedications, such as Brøns (2017) and Petsalis-Diomidis (2018).

across 13 fragments, with *chitones* (44 instances) and *himatia* (25 instances) most common, followed by *kredemna* (8 instances), head-coverings used to secure or support a veil.[111] The *kredemnon* carries strong literary associations: in *Iliad* 22, Andromache's veil falls from her head as she collapses in grief (*Il.* 22.468-470), a moment long recognised as symbolising the shattering of her married identity.[112] Seen against this wider literary backdrop, the presence of *kredemna* in the Brauron clothing catalogues may be especially telling: these were not children's accessories but markers of adult womanhood and feminine modesty. Their appearance among offerings made by women and girls suggests that the catalogues captured a spectrum of female experience, from pre-marital adolescence to fully mature marital identity.

This distribution reflects practical clothing used in daily life, repurposed as sacred offerings. Descriptive terms provide further granularity: for example, *chitoniskos* entries often feature adjectives like "κτενωτὸς" (scalloped, e.g., *IG* II² 1514, l. 7-9, dedicated by Kallippe) or "περιποίκιλος" (patterned all over, e.g., *IG* II² 1515, l. 2 by Kallippe), indicating high-quality craftsmanship. Colours such as "λευκός" (white, 17 instances), "ἁλουργής" (purple, 22 instances), and "βατραχείους" (frog-colored, 3 instances) highlight aesthetic preferences. Fabrics like "ἀμόργινος" (Amorgian linen, 27 instances) and "στύππινος" (coarse linen, 12 instances) reflect a range from luxurious to modest offerings. The former evokes the fine linen for which Amorgos was famous, whereas the latter designates tow-cloth, woven from the coarser remnants of flax processing. Such distinctions point not only to differences in cost, but also to varying tactile qualities, degrees of refinement, and perhaps the intended social visibility of the garment within the sanctuary. Notably, some garments are described as "ῥάκος" (worn-out, 34 instances), a term whose interpretation has been debated but is here understood, reasonably, as indicating well-used or tattered items. These worn garments suggest that even humble items held ritual value, broadening access to the cult. The catalogues predominantly record female dedicants, with over seventy named women (e.g., Archippe, Philoumene, Eukoline)

[111] E. Mackin Roberts & L. Cleland, *Brauron Clothing Catalogue Dataset* (Figshare, 2023), https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.24132006.v2, accessed 10 June 2025.
[112] Segal (1971) 50.

and numerous anonymous entries likely female, reinforcing Brauron's female-centric cult. The garments, often woven by the dedicants themselves (as suggested by Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* VII.35.6), represented a woman's feminine identity and labour. *IG* II² 1514, one of the most extensive catalogues, records over fifty offerings. The inscription details a wide variety of textiles, including *chitones* (short tunics), *himatia* (cloaks), *zomata* (belts or sashes), *ampechona* (shawls or overgarments), *tribonia* (heavy cloaks), *kandyes* (oriental-style tunics possibly inspired by Persian fashion), and *epiblemata* (embroidered veils or coverings). A single non-textile item, an ivory mirror (*katoptron*), is also mentioned. A comparable mirror dedication comes from an inscribed bronze mirror found in the sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron, reading:

> hίππυλλα hε Ὀνέτορος ἀνέθεκεν τὰρτέμιδι τẽι Βραυρõνι
>
> Hippylla, daughter of Onetor, dedicated [this] to Artemis Brauronia.[113]

The catalogues reveal economic and social nuances. The range of materials and levels of decoration – from simple tunics to finely embroidered textiles – suggests that dedicants came from a variety of economic backgrounds, with both elite and non-elite women participating in the cult through offerings suited to their means. Many of these garments are described with adjectives emphasising their quality and decoration, such as *poikiloi* (variegated or richly decorated), *halourgoi* (dyed purple), *katastiktoi* (with dotted patterns), and *perikymation* (with a wave-like border). One remarkable detail is the mention of an *epiblema* embroidered with a mythological scene – Dionysus pouring a libation and a woman holding a wine jug – adding both symbolic and artistic value (*IG* II² 1514 col. II, 31-32). The formula ἐν πλαισίῳ, appearing with offerings from 10 of the 39 named women – for example, Archestrate's tower-patterned chiton (*IG* II² 1514 col. II, 25) or Eukoline's spotted *chitoniskos* (*IG* II² 1514 col. II, 9) – suggests that frames were used to showcase elaborately decorated textiles described as ποικίλον ("patterned"), κατάστικτον ("spotted"), or πυργωτόν ("tower-patterned"). These frames likely served both to protect and to elevate the textile's decorative

[113] *IG* I³ 985, early 5th-century BCE. The text is inscribed counterclockwise around the circumference of the mirror. This artifact supports the inclusion of mirrors among votive offerings and attests to the longstanding tradition of female dedication at the site.

programme, as seen in Aristeia's *epiblema* with animals facing right (*IG* II² 1514 col. II, 33), which required framing to display its intricate central design effectively. The inscriptions further record the placement of certain garments – for example, "around the old seated statue" (περὶ τῶι ἔδει τῶι ἀρχαίωι, *IG* II² 1514, col. II, 34-38), or "the upright statue has it" (τὸ ἄγραλμα τὸ ὀρθὸν ἔχει, *IG* II² 1522, 28-29) – showing that textiles were deliberately displayed in relation to key cult installations, thereby shaping the visual environment of the sanctuary. The offerings strongly suggest an association with female rites of passage – puberty, marriage, and childbirth – though this link is often implied rather than explicitly stated. Child-specific garments, like a "child's *chlaniskion*" marked as sacred to Artemis (*IG* II² 1514 col. II, 40) or a saffron-dyed *chitoniskos* (*IG* II² 1514 col. II, 58), directly connect to childbirth or early childhood, while other items evoke pre-marital or marital transitions, aligning with Artemis' role as a goddess presiding over key female life stages.

Out of thirty-nine named women dedicating garments and objects listed in *IG* II² 1514 , only five are identified with their father's name and deme (e.g., Ἀρχεστράτη Μνησιστράτου Παιανιῶς θυγάτηρ), and five with their husband's name. This distribution suggests that while familial and geographic affiliations were significant for some dedicators, the majority appear with only a personal name: women appear as autonomous dedicators within the catalogues. This pattern indicates that the sanctuary's dedicatory practice, whether by accident or design, prioritised the act of offering over formal social identification, allowing women from diverse backgrounds to be represented within the cult. While a small number of garments are explicitly attributed to men or children, the overwhelming majority are associated with women, both in terms of the dedicants' identities and the nature of the offerings. Cleland notes that joint dedications, where husbands are mentioned alongside wives, often reflect female initiative, with men appearing as secondary or supportive figures rather than primary agents; she emphasises that these dedications must be understood within a broader framework in which the cult of Artemis was primarily female-focused.[114] The presence of men in such records likely reflects their participation in a familial or supportive capacity rather than indicating equal religious

[114] Cleland (2005) 91-92.

agency. The textual and linguistic markers, such as the use of diminutives and gendered attributions, reinforce the idea that even when garments were designated as male or a child's, they remain embedded within a context of female religious practice, suggesting that women were the primary managers of household clothing and thus of the family's ritualised relationship with Artemis.

Scholars interpret these textiles as more than material offerings. Their catalogued nature indicates a ritualised, collective practice rather than individual pleas, with stelae functioning as permanent records of communal devotion. Foxhall and Stears further highlight the gendered significance of these clothing dedications, arguing that textiles, as quintessential products of women's labour, were uniquely female offerings, contrasting with men's dedications of armour, and emphasising that Artemis, particularly under her epithet Orthia (meaning "upright" or "correct"), presided over life-stage transitions.[115] Cole argues that the sacred inventories of Artemis Brauronia's clothing catalogues transcended mere administrative records, serving as public displays of individual piety and collective ritual success; the inscribed stelae, listing dedicated textiles, symbolise the city's role in overseeing women's rituals and promoting healthy reproduction, with the stones themselves acting as enduring votive offerings to the goddess.[116] Senkova supports Cole's view that these public displays reflect societal concerns for women's reproductive health, potentially encouraging childbearing, and suggests they served as health-related votives, offered to secure Artemis' protection against gynaecological risks; Senkova emphasises the personal nature of these dedications, often garments worn or produced by women, as expressions of feminine identity and bodily concerns, akin to medical texts.[117] The Brauron clothing catalogues therefore testify to the interaction of personal and communal devotion, weaving women's identities into Artemis' cult through textiles. They reveal a socially diverse group of dedicants, from elite to modest, engaging in ritual acts that symbolised fertility, transition, and familial roles, while their public display reinforced civic values. These sources

[115] Foxhall and Stears (2000). Drawing on comparative evidence from Sparta's Artemis Orthia sanctuary, where lead figurines mimic textiles, Foxhall and Stears highlight the ephemerality of clothing as a marker of transient life stages, reinforcing Artemis' guardianship over women's roles as orchestrators of these transitions.
[116] Cole (2004) 230.
[117] Senkova (2016) 35-36.

offer a vivid snapshot of fourth-century BCE Attic religious life, centred on women's experiences under Artemis Brauronia's protection.

In addition to the clothing catalogues, votive reliefs provide a sculptural lens into women's dedicatory practices at Brauron, depicting processions, family offerings, and individual acts of devotion to Artemis. These reliefs, carved in marble, offer visual narratives of ritual engagement, complementing the textual evidence of the catalogues and highlighting female agency in cultivating relationships with the goddess. At Brauron, reliefs such as the Lycoleon family dedication, and another monument possibly linked to a musician's family, illustrate communal and artistic dimensions of Artemis' cult, while comparative reliefs from Sicily and Thessaly reveal regional variations in dedicatory practices. Together, these reliefs highlight Artemis' role as a protector of female transitions and her adaptability to local contexts. One of the most significant votive reliefs from Brauron, the Lycoleon family relief (c. 350 BCE), depicts a family procession led by Lycoleon sacrificing a bull to Artemis, accompanied by her divine family, Apollo and Leto (*Figure 1*).[118]



Figure 1. Peisis and Lycoleon relief, Archaeological museum of Brauron, Inventory number 1152. Photo by the author.

The inscription, carved on the epistyle, reads: "Πείσις Λυκολέοντος γυνή ἀνέθηκεν Ἀρτέμιδι Βραυρωνίᾳ" (Peisis, wife of Lycoleon, dedicated to Artemis Brauronia), prominently naming Peisis

[118] Archaeological Museum of Brauron, inventory number 1152. Despinis (2002).

as the dedicator and emphasising her central role despite the collective nature of the scene. The relief shows Lycoleon leading the bull, followed by Peisis, their four children, a nurse, and a servant carrying a covered box. Artemis stands to the right of the altar, holding a torch, with Leto seated on a pedestal and Apollo bearing a palm branch. The presence of the Apollonian reflects Artemis' familial ties within Greek religion, though its prominence at Brauron suggests a local emphasis on divine kinship. Peisis' named dedication, unusual in family reliefs where male heads often dominate, demonstrates her agency, plausibly reflecting a convention of female dedication to Artemis. The bull sacrifice, a costly act, aligns with Brauron's ritual culture, potentially marking a daughter's completion of the *arkteia* or a family's gratitude for fertility.

Another Brauron relief depicts a procession of twelve worshippers and an ox approaching an altar, with Artemis standing behind holding a phiale *(Figure 2*).[119]



Figure 2. Aristonike's relief, Archaeological Museum of Brauron, Inventory number 1151. Photo by the author.

The inscription reads: "Ἀρτέμιδι εὐξαμένη ἀνέθηκεν Ἀριστονίκη Ἀντιφάτους Θοραιέως γυνή" (Aristonike, wife of Antiphates from Thorai, dedicated [this] to Artemis, having made a vow). The composition is carefully structured to articulate family hierarchy. Aristonike can be identified as the

[119] Archaeological museum of Brauron, inventory number 1151. *SEG* 52.170.

second figure behind her husband Antiphates, a wealthy Athenian citizen; behind them are arranged additional adult couples and children, whose smaller size and secondary positioning suggest generational distinction, effectively presenting an extended *oikos* gathered in collective devotion.[120] The relief thus visualises the dedicant's household as a coherent and prosperous familial unit. Artemis herself stands apart from the procession, larger in scale and positioned behind the altar. Her extended arm holding the phiale both receives and sanctions the offering, visually closing the ritual circuit between mortals and goddess.

Comparable reliefs from Tyndaris (Sicily) and Echinos (Thessaly) illuminate Artemis' broader cultic adaptability. The Tyndaris relief (*IG* XIV 375, mid-fourth century BCE) depicts a family group approaching an altar; although the girl appears visually prominent, it is in fact the male figure who seems to perform the act of offering, perhaps a family dedication rather than an exclusively female ritual (*Figure 3*).



Figure 3. Votive relief from Tyndaris, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen. From Fischer-Hansen (2009), Figure 10.

[120] Despinis (2002): Antiphates Thorateius is mentioned in *IG* II^2 1622.

The relief shows Artemis holding a torch, while incense is being placed on the altar; the accompanying inscription ("Πρῶτος καὶ Μενιππέα Ἀρτέμιδι Εὐπραξίᾳ" ("Protos and Menippea to Artemis Eupraxia") identifies the parents as dedicators. The epithet Eupraxia, meaning "good outcome" or "successful conduct", is unique to Sicilian Artemis and likely reflects local concerns for orderly transition and prosperity rather than specifically female maturation, though it could encompass a girl's readiness for adult life. The representation of incense offering highlights one mode of ritual engagement with Artemis. It differs from the sacrificial scenes attested at Brauron, illustrating the variety of ritual actions through which Artemis could be honoured in different cult settings. The Echinos relief (late fourth century BCE) shows a mother presenting her newborn to Artemis, who stands with a torch (*Figure 4*).[121]



Figure 4. Echinos relief, Archaeological Museum of Lamia, Greece. Photo licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

No inscription survives, but the scene suggests a dedication for safe childbirth or protection for the infant. The offering, in this case, is performative: the child's presentation itself serves as the votive act, a practice attested elsewhere in Thessaly (cf. *SEG* 45.616, Auschryba). Unlike the textile offerings of Brauron, which materialise a completed rite, this relief captures an act of supplication in progress, emphasising Artemis' maternal and protective capacities.

[121] Dakoronia and Gounaropoulou (1992).

These votive reliefs, unlike the clothing catalogues' textual focus, offer visual narratives of women's engagement with Artemis. At Brauron, the Lycoleon and Aristonike reliefs emphasise family and the domestic dimensions of the offering, with women like Peisis and Aristonike leading dedications. The Tyndaris relief foregrounds Artemis' role in transitions toward adulthood, with a young girl's presence possibly functioning symbolically, though the act remains that of a family unit rather than a solitary female ritual agent. The Echinos relief highlights Artemis' protective role in childbirth, with the mother's presentation of her infant marking a critical life stage. Together, these reliefs demonstrate women's agency within household and civic contexts, using sculptural media to negotiate social roles and divine favour. Unlike the clothing catalogues, which emphasise textiles and inventory, the reliefs convey the embodied and communal dimensions of Artemis' worship.

2.2 Artemis and Eileithyia in Boeotia: overlapping competences in childbirth and healing

The epithet Eileithyia, when applied to Artemis, identifies her with the goddess of childbirth and labour, a syncretism well attested in Greek religion. Recent scholarship has emphasised that divine names and epithets acquire their meanings through local ritual practice rather than through fixed theological definitions. As Versnel has emphasised, divine epithets in Greek polytheism do not simply label a single, fixed theological identity but operate as flexible markers that may denote either different aspects of a deity or distinct divine personae; they signal functional differentiation, local specificity, or even independent cult figures sharing a name.[122] Pironti and Pirenne-Delforge have argued that Eileithyia's sphere of action extends beyond labour itself to include not only the moment of birth but also the child's incorporation into the family, and its early development.[123] Mili has shown that the significance of Artemis Eileithyia varied according to regional dedicatory practice; whereas the Thessalian evidence associates the goddess primarily with women acting independently in relation to childbirth, the Boeotian dedications place much greater emphasis on children and the continuity of

[122] Versnel (2011) 60-72, on the ambiguity of epithets, functional vs local differentiation, and the many gods who share one name but not one identity.
[123] Pironti and Pirenne-Delforge (2013).

the household.[124] Artemis' supervision of transitions aligns naturally with Eileithyia's domain over birth, while the epithet simultaneously accentuates a context-specific manifestation shaped by Boeotian ritual needs. The epithet therefore highlights Artemis' protective role over women during pregnancy, labour, and early motherhood. Primarily attested in Boeotia, especially Chaeronea, and more marginally in Thessaly,[125] Artemis Eileithyia's cult centres on adult women's reproductive experiences, contrasting with Artemis Brauronia's focus on pre-pubescent girls. Active predominantly in the second century BCE, the cult facilitated a range of socio-religious actions, forming a dense repertory of votive and priestly commemoration that together made Artemis Eileithyia a locally institutionalised focus for women's reproductive and transitional practices.

A particularly rich body of evidence comes from Thespiai (IThesp 235–252). These inscriptions, mostly dated between the late fourth century and the early second century BCE,[126] demonstrate that Artemis Eileithyia in Boeotia was embedded in a ritual world with organised female personnel and recurring public forms of commemoration. What emerges clearly is a dense and consistent pattern of female dedicants making offerings to Artemis Eileithyia either in connection with childbirth, the safeguarding of children, the completion of priestly service, or broader concerns relating to family continuity. The Thespian texts fall into three overlapping categories: (i) dedications by outgoing priestesses; (ii) dedications by incumbent priestesses; and (iii) votives offered by women alone or together with men for childbirth, the safeguarding of offspring, and other family transitions. A significant feature of the corpus is the frequency of the form ἰαρειάξασα ("having served as priestess"), which suggests that participants in the Thespian cult of Artemis Eileithyia cultivated a distinctive epigraphic habit of commemorating the completion of priestly service through formal dedications. Outgoing priestesses such as Xanthis (dedicating a brazier),[127] Mnasis,[128] Diokleia (in a

[124] Mili (2025).
[125] For Thessaly, the clearest evidence is a dedication to Artemis Eileithyia by a woman named Aischryba from Larisa: *SEG* 45.616 (Ἀρτέμιδι Ἰλιθυίᾳ Αἰσχρύβα Καλ[…]).
[126] The latest inscriptions are IThesp 250 (early 2nd c. CE) and IThesp 251 (possibly 1st c. CE), both dedications of children. The chronological span of the Thespian inscriptions, extending from the late Classical into the early Roman Imperial period, reveals continuity in women's engagement with Artemis Eileithyia.
[127] IThesp 237 (mid-third c. BCE): Ξανθὶς Μνασαρέτω ἰαρειάξασα Ἀρτάμιδι [Εἰλ]ιθίη τὸ [ἐπί]πουρον [ἀνέθ]εικε.
[128] IThesp 238 (third c. BCE): Μνασὶς Ξενέαο ἰαρειάξασα Ἀρτάμιδι Εἰλειθίη ἀνέθεικε.

joint dedication with a man),[129] and Ameinokrateia[130] explicitly frame their offerings as end-of-tenure votives, indicating that priesthood for Artemis Eileithyia was an office publicly closed through dedicatory action.[131] Further confirmation of this pattern is provided by a recently published Thespian dedication to Apollo Genetas and Artemis Eileithyia, made by an outgoing priestess using a different but functionally equivalent formula (ἰάρεια γενομένα).[132] This inscription is unique within the Thespian corpus in pairing Artemis Eileithyia with Apollo, and it is the only attestation at Thespiai of a joint dedication to these sibling deities. The use of the otherwise unattested epithet Genetas for Apollo further distinguishes the monument, suggesting a locally specific articulation.[133] Incumbent priestesses also appear. Achelois dedicates explicitly as priestess (ἰάρεια) to Artemis Eileithyia,[134] and Aristo similarly dedicates while still in office.[135] These inscriptions demonstrate that women were publicly acknowledged both during and after their terms, reinforcing the visibility and institutional structure of female priesthood in this cult. The repetition of these formulas over several generations suggests a stable ritual system, rather than an isolated or episodic practice.

The third category consists of dedications made by women alone and together with male relatives. The earlier group includes Sappho, "by origin a Phrygian," whose self-identification as a foreigner demonstrates the cult's accessibility to non-local women, Satyra, whose dedication is the only one addressed to Eileithyia without the name of Artemis; and Antigo, who dedicates Xenokrateia, most likely her daughter, to the goddess.[136] One example stands out: the dedication of the child Stasimbrotos, made by a woman whose name is lost, is the only one to preserve the base of a bronze statuette together with the signature of its sculptor (-σίων ἐπόησε), suggesting an unusually

[129] IThesp 239 (end fourth/early third c. BCE): Ἀρτάμιδι Ἐλειθυίη ἀνέθεαν Fαστίας Πισιῆος, Διοκλία Ὀρσελαία ἰαρειάξασα.
[130] IThesp 249 (end third/beginning second c. BCE) [Ἀ]μεινοκράτεια Πολουκρατίδα ἱερεάξασα Ἀρτάμιδι Εἰλιθίη κὴ Λοχίη εὐχάν. Here Artemis Eileithyia and Lochia are the recipients of the dedication.
[131] Cf. also IThesp 235 (ca. 240-220 BCE), another dedication made by an outgoing priestess, this time to Artemis Hagemone: Θεοδότα Ἀμφικράτειος ἰαρειάξασα δίς, Ἀρτάμιδι Ἀγεμόνη.
[132] Thespiai Museum, inv. 3188: […] Νέωνος | MN […] Ἀπόλλωνι Γενετή | Ἀρτάμιδι E[i]λειθίη ἰάρεια γενομένα | ἀνέθεικε. For edition, archaeological context, and discussion, see Schachter and Marchand (2012).
[133] See §2.5 below on dedications to Artemis and Apollo together.
[134] IThesp 240 (ca. 250-230 BCE): Ἀχελωὶς Νέωνος ἰάρεια Ἀρτάμιδι Εἰλειθίη.
[135] IThesp 242B (second/first c. BCE): Ἀριστὼ ἱερατεύουσα.
[136] IThesp 241 (ca 350-300 BCE): Σαφφὼ τὸ γένος Φρυγία Ἀρτάμιδι Εἰλειθίη; IThesp 252 (mid-third c. BCE): Σατύρα Δαματρία Δαματρίαν Ἐλειθυίαι; IThesp 248: Ἀντιγὼ Ξενοκρ̣ά[τειαν] Ἀρτάμιδ[ι Εἰ]λ̣ειθίη.

high-value offering to Artemis Eileithyia.[137] Mixed-gender dedications were also a regular feature of the cult, pointing to family-based participation in ritual acts.[138] Two further dedications explicitly involve children: Kallistheneia and a man (whose name is illegible) dedicate their son Simon,[139] while Olympion and Philareta dedicate their daughter Philareta.[140] A handful of dedications are by men alone, showing that men, too, could address the goddess, whether on behalf of female relatives or as part of broader household concerns.[141] Child-dedications, explicitly naming sons or daughters (Xenokrateia, Philareta, Stasimbrotos), suggest that Artemis Eileithyia's protection was sought not only for childbirth itself but also for infants and young children.[142] Artemis Eileithyia emerges in the Boeotian evidence as a deity concerned with the successful continuity of the household. The dedications reveal a cult in which childbirth formed only one stage within a wider sequence that included the protection of infants. The density, variety, and long chronological reach of this Thespian material significantly enrich our picture of Artemis Eileithyia. Far from being a marginal or derivative manifestation, she emerges as the focal point of a local religious system structured around female ritual actors, whose participation formed part of a durable and locally embedded cult tradition.

If the Thespiai inscriptions shed light on the cult's priestly structures and personal votives, an additional group of texts from Boeotia reveals its significant legal and civic functions: the sixteen Boeotian manumission inscriptions of the second century BCE (*IG* VII 3385, 3386, 3391, 3412; Roesch and Fossey (1978), nos. 1-9; *BCH* 1953). These documents record the dedication of female slaves to Artemis Eileithyia. Such dedications were made either by women alone (e.g., Damo, *IG* VII 3385; Poliarchis, *IG* VII 3412; Kaphisa, Roesch and Fossey no. 9) or jointly by women and men (e.g., Menekleis and Biottis, Roesch and Fossey no. 4; Mnason and Kallis, no. 6). The Boeotian texts record

[137] IThesp 245 (early third c. BCE): – – νις Ἀρτάμιδι [Εἰ]λεθίη [Στ]ασίμβροτον. – – σιων ἐπόησε.
[138] IThesp 242A and IThesp 243 show collective offerings, suggesting family-based ritual actions. IThesp 242A(second/first c. BCE): Δαμοχάρεις Πατ[ρ]όκλεια Κλεμνίδα Φαε[ί]ναν Ἀρτάμιδι Εἰλειθυίη ἀνέ[θε]αν; IThesp 243 (third c. BCE): [Βο]υκολίαν Καφισίωνα [Δι]ουκλεῖς Κλεωῖς Ἀρτάμιδι Εἰλειθίη.
[139] IThesp 244 (mid-third c. BCE): […]ς Καλλισθένια […τὸν υἱὸ]ν Σίμωνα Ἀρτάμιδι [Εἰλειθ]ίηι.
[140] IThesp 246 (third c. BCE): Ὀλυμπίων κὴ Φιλαρέτα Φιλαρέταν Ἀρτάμιδι Εἰλιθίη.
[141] IThesp 236 (third c. BCE): Ἀμφίνικ[ον, Ἀ]γε[ισί]ξε[νον], Ἀγεισ[ι]ξέναν Εὔδαμος Ξενίω Ἀρτάμιδι Εἰλειθυίη ἀνέθε[ικ]ε; IThesp 247 (fourth/second c. BCE): Πλάτων Δαματρίαν Ἀρτάμιδι Ἐλειθίη ἀνέθεικε Θειβῶν.
[142] This mirrors the Athenian evidence for Eileithyia presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis, in which multi-generational dedications similarly highlight the family's role in securing divine protection during the earliest stages of life.

formal legal acts in which a slave is "sold" to Artemis Eileithyia under public authority: they are issued κατὰ τὸν νόμον and ratified by civic councils (synedrion), and frequently include paramone clauses requiring continued service for life (e.g., *IG* VII 3386, "ἄως κα ζώει"; Roesch and Fossey no. 5), for a fixed term (e.g., ten years, no. 4), or until a specific date (e.g., approximately two months, no. 5). Thus, Poliarchis dedicates her slave Kallo, who remains in lifetime service (*IG* VII 3412), while Kaphisa frees Soson with lifelong *paramone,* witnessed by friends (Roesch and Fossey no. 9). One inscription (Roesch and Fossey no. 6) uniquely dedicates two slaves to different deities (Zopoura to Artemis Eileithyia, Prostateirida to Mater Megale), and another (Roesch and Fossey no. 7) grants permanent sacred status (τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον), indicating diverse outcomes ranging from prolonged temple service to nominal freedom. Artemis is thus one recipient among several in a wider manumission landscape: comparable "sales to a god" are attested for Zeus Soter, Apollo (especially at Delphi), the Mother of the Gods and local hero cults, and there is no clear gendered distinction in the choice of divine patron, even if Artemis Eileithyia's association with female reproduction may explain her particular popularity among Boeotian women.

These dedications reveal a cult in which women exercised significant agency. Of the sixteen dedications, six are by women alone (*IG* VII 3385, 3391, 3412; Roesch and Fossey nos. 1, 9; *BCH* 1953), eight by women jointly with men (*IG* VII 3386; Roesch and Fossey nos. 3, 4, 6, 7, 8; two additional *IG* VII 3385 entries), and two by men alone (Roesch and Fossey nos. 2, 5). This distribution shows the predominance of female involvement, with women initiating fourteen of the sixteen dedications, either independently or collaboratively. Joint dedications, such as Mnason and Kallis (Roesch and Fossey no. 6), suggest familial cooperation, with women's names often listed first, indicating primary agency. The male-only dedications (e.g., Nikodamos, Roesch and Fossey no. 5) may reflect specific social contexts, such as fulfilling vows on behalf of female relatives, but do not overshadow the cult's female-centric nature.

This pattern aligns with Brauron's predominantly female dedicators, reinforcing Artemis Eileithyia's role as a goddess for women's concerns, where manumission amplified their socio-

economic influence. The symbolic significance of these offerings ties directly to Artemis Eileithyia's childbirth role. Manumission, as a transformative act, may symbolise "rebirth," aligning with the goddess's power to bring forth life, with freed slaves' sacred status mirroring the transition of birth. Darmezin suggests that only girls were consecrated to Artemis Eileithyia, given her "specifically feminine" domain, which supports the predominance of female slaves in these inscriptions; however, Ricl also notes that Boeotian deities for manumission varied, and no deity was specialised in protecting freed persons, indicating Artemis Eileithyia's role was not exclusively tied to manumission but adapted to local religious and social practices.[143] Ricl's broader analysis of human consecrations in the Hellenistic East further contextualises these manumissions as religious acts that blurred the lines between liberation and divine service, often benefiting temple economies or social prestige.[144] The manumission texts remain central to understanding one aspect of the cult's social function, yet they constitute only one strand of an otherwise variegated epigraphic network that includes priestly dedications, child-offerings, and private votives attesting to childbirth, healing, and household concerns.

2.3 Artemis Kyparissia at Sparta: anatomical votives and gynaecological protection

In Sparta, the cult of Artemis Kyparissia is attested through a substantial assemblage of anatomical votives dating from the first century BCE to the early first century CE, excavated in 1985 and fully published by Kourinou.[145] The corpus comprises eighteen marble anatomical votives, of which at least ten are inscribed, representing several different body parts: female genitalia, hands, legs and feet, as well as one relief of a standing female figure. The inscribed vulva votives preserve the names of female dedicants – e.g. Νικιππία (*SEG* 50.397), Καλλίστη (*SEG* 50.399), and probably Ξενόι/Ξενώ (*SEG* 50.396) – followed by a brief dedicatory formula to Artemis Kyparissia, typically Κυφαρισίᾳ / Κυπαρισσίᾳ εὐχάν. Other inscribed anatomical votives from the same context depict hands (*SEG*

[143] Darmezin (1999). Ricl (2017).
[144] Ricl (2017).
[145] *SEG* 50.395-405. See Kourinou (2000) 167-185. The votives were excavated by the Greek Archaeological Service in 1985 and are now in the Sparta Museum.

50.400-401) and legs or feet (*SEG* 50.402-404), again dedicated by women and accompanied by similar vow formulas. These offerings broaden the cult's therapeutic scope beyond gynaecological concerns alone, aligning Artemis Kyparissia with healing and bodily protection more generally. The absence of male dedicators across the entire inscribed corpus is noteworthy and reinforces the conclusion that this was a female-driven cultic space, oriented toward private bodily anxieties rather than public ritual performance. Such a concentrated set of anatomical votives – uniform in both theme and gender of dedicant – provides rare insight into a specifically female sphere of Artemis' worship in Sparta, distinct from the more public, initiatory rituals associated with Artemis Orthia. The epithet Kyparissia, derived from *kyparissos* (cypress), most plausibly refers to the natural setting of the sanctuary rather than to a specific functional attribute of the goddess. Many Artemisian epithets describe the landscape or environment of a sanctuary rather than the cult's ritual specialisation.[146] In this case, the functional profile of the cult emerges instead from the votive evidence itself: Artemis Kyparissia appears as a protector of women's bodies at moments of vulnerability, including illness, injury, and reproductive stress. Kourinou further suggests that this cult may have overlapped conceptually with local forms of Artemis Agrotera and Phosphoros and may even have been connected to the Asklepieion noted by Pausanias (3.15.10), further supporting a therapeutic interpretation.[147] Cole situates this material within Artemis' panhellenic profile as a guardian of female physicality and bodily thresholds – puberty, injury and the aftermath of childbirth.[148] The Kyparissia cult's regional specificity highlights Sparta's unique adaptation of Artemis' worship, emphasising fertility over initiatory or hunting motifs prevalent in Thessaly or Attica.

[146] Cole (2004) 181: "The epithets of the goddess describe the environment of her sanctuary: Agrotera, Limnatis, Heleia (of the marsh), Koryphaia (of the peak), Kedreatis (of the cedar trees), Karyatis (of the walnut trees), and Kyparissia (of the cypress trees). These descriptions are all the more striking when we notice that Artemis's earliest attested sanctuaries are in the most remote places".
[147] Kourinou (2000) 177-185.
[148] Cole (2004) 171-174.

2.4 The *nebeusasai* rite in Thessaly: Artemis, adolescence and ritualised female mobility

In Thessaly, Artemis' cult is distinguished by a ritual term – νεβεύσασαι – attested in eleven inscriptions of the third century BCE, primarily from Atrax, with further examples from Demetrias, Larisa, and Phayttos. These texts commemorate girls and young women who performed a ritual service for Artemis, often followed by a dedicatory act. Although the inscriptions do not record material offerings, the ritual fulfilment and subsequent dedication fit squarely within the broader logic of Greek votive practice: they publicly mark the completion of an obligation and the securing of divine favour at critical stages of the female life cycle.[149] This section explores the ritual, its parallels with the *arkteia* at Brauron and its significance in Thessalian society, emphasising women's agency and the debated etymology of the ritual term. The primary evidence consists of white marble naiskos stelae naming the girl and identifying her as *nebeusasa*. Typical examples include *SEG* 49.602 from Atrax recording: Ἀρτέμιδι Θαυμαρέτα Εὐδαμιδαία νεβεύσασσ[α], indicating Thaumareta, daughter of Eudamidas, dedicated to Artemis after her ritual role. Similarly, *SEG* 34.493 states: Ἀρτέμιδι Ἀρχελοχὶς Πυ[θ]αγ[ο]ραία ἐπινε[β]εύσασσα ὀνέθεικε, where Archelochis, daughter of Pythagoras, performed the ritual to Artemis and dedicated accordingly. Other examples list Nike daughter of Nikagoras (*SEG* 34.489, Νίκη Νικαγόρου νεβεύσασα), Antipatra daughter of Kleugenes (*SEG* 43.240, Ἀντιπάτρα Κλευγενεία Ἀρτέμιδι νεβεύσανσα), and Laukrita daughter of Philonikos (*SEG* 46.633, Λαυκρίτα Φιλονικεία νεβεύσανσα), all from Atrax. Comparable inscriptions appear further south: Dynatis daughter of Melanthios at Demetrias (*IG* IX.2 1123, Δυνατὶς Μελανθίου Ἀρτέμιδι Παγασίτιδι νεβεύσα[σα]) and Agis daughter of Astokrates at Phayttos (*SEG* 51.732, Ἀρτέμιδι Ἀγὶς Ἀστοκρατεία νεβεύσα[σα]).

One inscription (*SEG* 53.554 from Larisa) departs from this otherwise consistent pattern. Here, Hippolochos son of Hippolochos dedicates to Artemis Throsia on behalf of Eubioteia: Ἀρτέμιδι Θροσία Ἱππόλοχος Ἱπολόχειος ὑ[πὲρ] | Εὐβιοτείας Ἀλεξιππείας νεβεύσανσας | λύτρα.

[149] See Hatzopoulos (1994) 32; Graninger (2006) 156-165; and Kravaritou (2019). On the exceptional density of inscribed dedications in Thessaly, and the striking prominence of women as dedicants – especially to Artemis, see Mili (2015) 17-31.

The text implies that the girl had already performed the ritual, and that λύτρα functions not as a "ransom" in a manumission sense but as the payment or concluding dedication that released her from her ritual obligation – a function analogous to τελέουμα in *SEG* 35.615 from Larisa ("Ἀρτέμιδι Θροσία Εὐπάτρα Πασιμεδοντεία τελέουμα"). The fact that a man, Hippolochos, makes the dedication on behalf of Eubioteia remains unexplained and raises important questions about agency within the ritual. Since the remaining members of the corpus – girls equally under the authority of a *kurios* – appear as dedicants in their own names, this deviation cannot be explained by female legal incapacity. The offering may reflect a household obligation, in which the male head acted as ritual sponsor even if the ritual labour itself was female. The inscription therefore exposes a tension between the personal, female-centred nature of the ritual and the civic or familial structures that governed the formalisation of ritual completion. This instance anticipates a broader pattern of men dedicating on behalf of women, which will be explored in detail in the sixth chapter of this thesis, where such inscriptions are analysed in relation to female ritual competence, male mediation, and the social and epigraphic norms governing public dedication.

The semantic range of λύτρα in Thessaly supports this interpretation. As Graninger notes, λύτρα in Thessalian dedications seldom corresponds strictly to "ransom" but frequently marks a compensatory, concluding, or reciprocal offering, comparable to ευχή, τελείωμα, or τελέουμα; parallels from Trikka (*IG* IX² 303), Demetrias (McD 1034), and another Larisa stele (*SEG* 35.605) show λύτρα functioning as a ritual recompense offered to deities such as Artemis Akraia or the Dioskouroi. In these contexts, λύτρα expresses not liberation in the juridical sense but a symbolic repayment, a ritualised compensation for divine favour or for the completion of a period of service. In *SEG* 53.554, therefore, λύτρα is best understood as the closing act – the ritual "settlement" – that marked Eubioteia's transition out of her period of obligation to Artemis Throsia. That this final act was performed by Hippolochos may reflect social constraints on young women's ritual self-representation, but it may equally signal male participation in the public, commemorative dimension of the offering, even when the ritual performance itself was undertaken by the girl.

The ritual denoted by *nebeusasai* has long been debated. The traditional interpretation, following Clement (1934), derives the term from *nebris* (fawn skin), suggesting that girls "played the deer", paralleling the Attic *arkteia* where girls "played the bear".[150] This reading fits Thessaly's strong hunting imagery and Artemis' role as a liminal goddess of the wild. Yet Hatzopoulos has proposed an alternative, arguing that *nebeusasa* derives not from *nebris* but from néeFos ("young"), via the root νεύω, ("to nod, signal"), and this aligns the ritual with Macedonian néai, young girls who participated in races for Demeter and Kore.[151] On this reading, *nebeuein* would denote the performance of a structured youthful service or initiation – an interpretation that avoids animal imagery and broadens the semantic field beyond Artemis. Denis has further refined the linguistic context, noting that *nébai* (the Thessalian equivalent of *néai*) indicates girls at a transitional stage preparing for marriage and that such rituals may have included competitive running.[152] These dedications are overwhelmingly female-centric, with ten of the eleven inscriptions naming women as dedicants, such as Thaumareta, Archelochis, and Dynatis, often identified by patronymics, reflecting their individual agency. Of the eleven inscriptions, nine name women acting alone (*SEG* 49.602, 34.493, 34.489, 43.240, 46.633, 44.444, 46.636, 51.732; *IG* IX.2 1123), one is made by a man on behalf of a woman (*SEG* 53.554), and one ambiguous (*SEG* 44.456). This pattern parallels the predominance of female dedicators at Brauron (e.g., Archippe, *IG* II² 1514) and in Boeotian manumissions (e.g., Poliarchis, *IG* VII 3412) and confirms that the *nebeusasai* ritual belonged to the domain of women's agency.

The symbolic significance of the ritual lies in its function as a form of ritualised female service associated with adolescence and marriageability, aligning with Artemis' guardianship over female transitions. Whether involving fawn skins or ritual gestures, it likely marked the movement from *parthenos* to marriageable *gune*. Kravaritou argues that such rites created and maintained age-classes, structuring social and biological transitions;[153] Graninger situates the practice within a local

[150] Clement (1934).
[151] Hatzopoulos (1994). For a discussion of the various interpretations, see Denis (2009) 186-188.
[152] Denis (2009).
[153] Kravaritou (2019).

Thessalian framework, in which cults of Artemis Pagasitis and Throsia shaped civic identity.[154] The λύτρα in *SEG* 53.554 – also interpreted by Denis as a pre-marital tribute to Artemis – parallels Boeotian manumissions language, symbolising a kind of ritual "rebirth". *SEG* 35.615 τελέουμα by Eupatra, marking "accomplishment," likely reflects a similar transition, compensating Artemis for the girl's movement into adulthood. Hatzopoulos' hypothesis, that the ritual belonged originally to an adolescent initiatory cycle centred on Demeter and Kore, rather than Artemis, is supported by linguistic arguments and by parallels from Macedonian cult. This, however, does not necessarily contradict the Artemisian setting of the Thessalian inscriptions: rites of transition for young women were often transferable across different divine recipients, whose local "personalities" could diverge significantly from their more familiar Panhellenic expressions. As Sourvinou-Inwood has shown in her analysis of Persephone and Aphrodite at Locri, the functions and identities of goddesses could be reshaped dramatically by local social and cultic structures, producing configurations that depart from Panhellenic norms.[155] Given the consistently Artemisian formulae in the Thessalian inscriptions, however, the *nebeusasai* are best understood within an Artemis-focused framework, even if their conceptual underpinnings resonate with adolescent rites elsewhere associated with Demeter and Kore.

2.5 Joint cult with Apollo: divine kinship and the protection of the *oikos*

Alongside the regionally specific manifestations of Artemis examined above, a substantial and geographically diverse body of inscriptions attests to the joint worship of Apollo and Artemis, frequently accompanied by their mother Leto. This cultic grouping presents a different dimension of Artemis' religious presence. Rather than presiding over discrete aspects of female experience – puberty, childbirth, illness – Artemis here appears as part of a divine family unit, whose combined authority was mobilised by human families seeking protection, guidance, and stability. The mythical kinship between Apollo, Artemis, and Leto becomes a ritual language through which dedicators

[154] Graninger (2006).
[155] Sourvinou-Inwood (1978), esp. on how local cults construct distinct divine "personalities" through rites, social structures, and pantheon-specific functions.

articulated ideals of familial cohesion, intergenerational care, and household well-being. In Pausanias' description of Pyrrhichus in Laconia, he notes that Apollo and Artemis are worshipped together under locally inflected epithets (Apollo Amazonius and Artemis Astrateia), and both deities are represented by wooden images said to have been dedicated by women from the Thermodon, mythical homeland of the Amazons.[156] Recent work on the Cycladic sanctuaries of Apollo and Artemis further illustrates how strongly local landscapes shaped the articulation of divine roles. Angliker's study of the Delion on Paros and the early sanctuary on Despotiko demonstrates that, even within the same island group, the balance between Apollo and Artemis could shift dramatically: Artemis dominates the Parian Delion's ritual profile, strongly associated with female life-stage concerns, whereas Apollo overwhelmingly prevails at Despotiko, where elite male display and feasting structures frame the cult.[157] Wallensten's systematic study of 127 dedications to Apollo and Artemis (often with Leto) has shown that this triad is overwhelmingly favoured when the twins are worshipped together, and that the cult is strongly oriented towards family contexts, with women largely appearing as members of such kin groups rather than as isolated dedicants.[158] A particularly illuminating example comes from Karia: the mid-fourth-century dedication of a field at Lagina by Skoaranos and his wife (her name partially lost).[159] In this long, legal-administrative text, Apollo and Artemis receive a substantial, jointly consecrated estate – forty olive trees and twenty medimnoi of seed – set up with full civic oversight. The donors dedicate this "wooded land" field to Apollo and Artemis "so that it may remain theirs for all time," thus establishing a perpetual sacred claim over the property, which borders the sacred land of Artemis herself.[160] The act is explicitly familial, initiated by husband and wife together, and embedded in a Karian elite milieu, as the onomastic profile of both

[156] Paus. 3.25.3.
[157] Angliker (2022).
[158] Wallensten (2011). The Apollo-Artemis dossier is overwhelmingly dominated by male dedicators and civic groups. The patterns discussed here therefore concern not the cult as a whole, but the particular configuration of female participation within it.
[159] *SEG* 26.1229 = *IStratonikeia* 502.
[160] […]ωσι τῶι Ἀπόλλωνι καὶ τῆ[ι Ἀρτέμιδι] Κωρανζεῖς. Σκοάρανος δὲ καὶ Τε[…] ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἀνέθηκαν Ἀπόλλωνι καὶ Ἀρτέμιδι γῆν ἔνδενδρον τὴν καλουμένην ἐγ Κοαρβωνδοις ἐλαιτιν, ἀριθμῶι δένδρη τεσσαράκοντα,
σπόρου μεδίμνων εἴκοσι, ἣν ὁμουρεῖ τὰ ἱερὰ χωρία τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος, ὅπως διαμένη αὐτοῖς τὸν ἀεὶ χρόνον.

dedicators and officials is overwhelmingly Karian.[161] In contrast to the Artemis-only dedications elsewhere that mark girls' transitions or women's bodily concerns, this document presents Apollo and Artemis as guardians of household continuity, landed property, and long-term stability, with the female participant acting as co-dedicator within a marital partnership.

In Euboea, a coherent cluster of dedications from Tamynai and Amarynthos (*IG* XII.9 97,98, 141, 142) reveals how the Apollo-Artemis-Leto triad operated within the religious landscape of a region dominated by the Amarynthian cult of Artemis and Eretria's long-standing devotion to Apollo. These inscriptions consistently present households – not isolated individuals – as ritual agents. Two dedications from Tamynai involve members of the same family: in the first one, Kleokrateia, Xenokhares and Arkerimos are mentioned acting together in dedicating to Artemis, Apollo, and Leto,[162] while a second inscription records another Kleokrateia dedicating on behalf of her husband Xenokhares while their children, Arkerimos and Philistides, make a parallel dedication on behalf of their father.[163] These Tamynaian texts illustrate household-based religious action across two generations, with spouses and children jointly honouring the divine triad. At Amarynthos the pattern is even more pronounced: entire family groups act together in dedications that almost certainly belonged to base monuments, perhaps originally supporting portrait statues or votive markers within the sanctuary. A particularly interesting monument from Amarynthos preserves two related inscriptions on different columns of the same base.[164] The better-preserved text records Oropiades son of Biottos together with Biottos son of Oropiades dedicating Demokrite, described respectively as the wife of the former and the mother of the latter, to Artemis, Apollo, and Leto.[165] The more fragmentary inscription on the adjacent column appears likewise to commemorate female members of the family,

[161] Piras (2010) 153–154, on Karian onomastics in the Stratonikeia region.
[162] IG XII.9 97 (late second c. BCE): [Ξενοχάρης] Κλεοκράτεια | [Ἀρκέριμ]ος τὸν πατέρα | [Ἀρκέριμο]ν Ξενοχάρου | [Ἀρτέμιδι, Ἀπ]όλλωνι, Λητοῖ. Dedication of a family group (Kleokrateia, Arkerimos, and others) on behalf of their father Arkerimos son of Xenokhares.
[163] *IG* XII.9 98 (late second c. BCE): Κλεοκράτεια Ἀπολήξιδος τὸν αὑτῆς ἄνδρα | καὶ Ἀρκέριμος καὶ Φιλιστίδης τὸν αὑτῶν πατέρα | Ξενοχάρην Ἀρκερίμου | Ἀρτέμιδι, Ἀπόλλωνι, Λητοῖ. A coordinated dedication by Kleokrateia for her husband, and by Arkerimos and Philistides for their father Xenokhares.
[164] *IG* XII.9 142.
[165] Ὡρωπιάδης Βιόττου τὴν γυ[ναῖκα] | καὶ Βίοττος Ὡρωπιάδου τὴν μ[ητέρα] | Δημοκρίτην Καλλιστρ[άτου] |Ἀρτέμιδι, Ἀπόλλωνι, Λητοῖ.

mentioning at least a mother and a grandmother, although the identities of both the women and the dedicants are now lost.[166] Another inscription most probably records two brothers dedicating, together with their mother Isota, their sister Astylla to the same divine triad.[167] Together, these inscriptions suggest that family monuments in the sanctuary could commemorate several generations of women within a single dedicatory context. These inscriptions reveal a version of the Apollo-Artemis relationship in which the two deities are activated as co-protectors of the entire *oikos*. The dedications invoke not only the siblings' complementary powers – Artemis' oversight of bodily integrity and domestic transitions, Apollo's oracular and civic authority – but also their mother Leto, whose presence reinforces the familial logic that binds mortal households to divine ones.

This pattern becomes far more pronounced in Delos, where the family triad of Apollo, Artemis, and Leto occupies a central place in the island's epigraphic landscape. Three second-century BCE inscriptions – *ID* 1537, 1830, and 1869 – demonstrate how the Delian sanctuary configured divine kinship as a framework for human familial identity. Unlike the Euboean dedications, which stress household unity in a more local setting, the Delian material emphasises status and ritual achievement. In *ID* 1537, Kleopatra, daughter of King Ptolemy, dedicates a figure named Himeros to the triad. Her act is notable both for her royal status and because she acts independently at a major Panhellenic sanctuary: even in the Hellenistic period, the evidence shows women acting as independent dedicators in the Apollo-Artemis cult only in exceptional circumstances – a royal context on this occasion.[168] Beyond the Aegean basin, a Cyrene dedication (*SEG* 9.102) presents the only other example, within the surviving evidence, of female initiative: Kallikleia dedicates a marble statue of Polykles, presumably her husband, to Apollo and Artemis. Though brief, the inscription mirrors the Delian pattern in presenting the divine siblings as guarantors of household prosperity and legitimacy. Two further inscriptions (ID 1830 and ID 1869) show families marking their children's ritual offices:

[166] [- - - - - - -]Ε <τ>ὴν μητέρα | [- - - - - - -]ου τὴν τήθην | [τὴν δεῖνα] Βιόττου | [Ἀρτέμιδι, Ἀπό]λλωνι, Λητοῖ.
[167] *IG* XII.9 141 (early first c. BCE): Φιλῖνος καὶ Γοργίας οἱ Κλεομάχου | τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἀδελφὴν καὶ Ἰσώτα? Μικί- | ωνος τὴν θυγατέρα Ἄστυλλαν Κλε- | ομάχου Ἀρτέμιδι, Ἀπόλλωνι, Λητ[οῖ].
[168] Wallensten (2011) 25–28: of eighteen dedications involving women, only two women dedicate alone, the rest being family-group dedications.

Eukles as *kleidouchos* (key-bearer), and Philippe, Medeios, and Laodameia as *kanephoroi*, *hyphiereia*, or members of the Athenian Delian delegation. Here the triad guarantees the successful completion of high-prestige civic-religious service. The dedications operate simultaneously as family self-promotion, as expressions of piety, and as markers of the children's integration into broader Athenian and Delian religious structures.

An even more revealing constellation comes from Anaphe, where four closely related statue bases of the second century BCE form a small but coherent epigraphic cluster centred on Apollo Pythios and Artemis Soteira**.** *IG* XII.3 269 records a dedication by two siblings, Nikomachos and Sokrataia, "on behalf of their mother Onasagoreia," explicitly placing a female family member under the dual protection of Apollo and Artemis.[169] The formula and the surviving stone suggest that the base supported her portrait statue, set up in the principal sanctuary on the acropolis. This dedication is not isolated. Another base (*IG* XII.3 268) records Simias son of Telesikrates dedicating "on behalf of his mother Akeuso," to the same pair of deities;[170] a third (*IG* XII.3 270) has the *demos* of Anaphe honouring Simias for his arete and kalokagathia, again "to Apollo Pythios and Artemis Soteira";[171] and a fourth (*IG* XII.3 271) preserves a dedication of a man on behalf of his wife and their son, once more set up to Apollo Pythios and Artemis Soteira.[172] The repetition of the same divine pair, the consistent familial formulae, and the concentration of these bases in a single sanctuary landscape indicate that Anaphe developed a distinctive family-focused version of the Apollo-Artemis cult. Here the divine siblings function as custodians of familial memory, lineage, and, in the case of Akeuso and Onasagoreia, female well-being in later life.

Across these varied regions – Karia, Euboea, Delos, Cyrene, Mysia, and Anaphe – the joint worship of Apollo and Artemis emerges, as a "family-care" cult, structured explicitly around

[169] Νικόμ[α]χος καὶ Σωκράτεια οἱ Σωσικλεῦς [ὑπ]ὲρ τᾶς ματρὸς Ὀ[να]σαγορείας Ἀπόλλωνι Πυθίωι Ἀρτέμιδι Σωτεί[ραι].
[170] Σιμίας Τελεσικράτευς ὑπὲρ τᾶς ματρὸς Ἀκευσῶς Ἀπόλλωνι Πυθίωι καὶ Ἀρτέμιτι Σωτείραι.
[171] ὁ δᾶμος ὁ Ἀναφαίων Σιμίαν Τελεσικράτευς Ἀπόλλωνι Πυθίῳ Ἀρτέμιδι Σωτε[ίρ]ᾳ ἀρετᾶς ἕνεκα καὶ καλ[ο]καγαθίας τᾶς εἰς αὐτόν.
[172] [{ὁ δεῖνα τοῦ δεῖνος}ὑ]πὲρ τοῦ τᾶς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ [{τᾶς δεῖνος} υἱοῦ Σ]ωκράτευς τοῦ Τελεσικράτευς [Ἀπόλλωνι Πυθίωι κ]αὶ Ἀρτέμιτι Σωτείραι.

kinship.[173] Women appear in this dossier, but their position shifts compared to Artemis-only contexts. In many of the Artemisian sanctuaries discussed earlier, women and girls dominate as primary dedicants, offering objects that speak directly to their own bodies, life-stages, and fears. In the Apollo-Artemis cult, by contrast, women tend to appear either as members of dedicating households (wives, mothers, daughters, sisters) or as the honoured subjects of portrait and "on behalf of" dedications. Their agency is still present – co-dedicating with husbands in Karia, standing alongside brothers in Euboea, being named as the focus of care in Anaphe – but it is embedded within a broader *oikos*-centred framework where Apollo's authority carries equal weight with Artemis' protective identity.

What binds these inscriptions together, then, is their consistent mode of address: dedications on behalf of parents, children, spouses, or siblings, made to a divine family whose internal relationships model and sanctify the ideal human *oikos*. Within this framework, Artemis' identity is both recognisably Artemisian and significantly reframed. The goddess who, in Attica, guarded the liminal space between girlhood and marriage, and who in Boeotia oversaw childbirth through her amalgamation with Eileithyia, now participates in a shared divine guardianship over entire families. The cultic pairing with Apollo does not erase her gendered competences but situates them within a wider horizon of household welfare and memory. For women, dedicating to Artemis together with Apollo and Leto means acting not only as bearers of their own concerns, but as representatives and beneficiaries of the family as a whole. This relational configuration enlarges Artemis' sphere from narrowly defined female transitions to general protection and well-being, while at the same time revealing how deeply women's religious agency was linked with the fortunes of the *oikos*.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that women's dedications to Artemis form a coherent system of ritualised transition: Artemis consistently emerges as the goddess who supervises female change. The Artemisian quality of these dedications emerges not from any single ritual element but from their

[173] See Wallensten (2011) 28-29, esp. her conclusions on Apollo and Artemis as models of sibling solidarity and protectors of family and youth.

patterned consistency. In Attica, girls move from wildness to socialisation through the *arkteia*, leaving behind garments that index growth, maturation, and incorporation into civic order. In Boeotia, women invoke Artemis Eileithyia's authority over childbirth to initiate manumission acts that express both religious piety and household strategy. In Thessaly, the *nebeusasai* inscriptions mark adolescent service that publicly affirms a girl's transformation into marriageable adulthood. In Sparta, anatomical votives present Artemis as the guarantor of bodily integrity and reproductive capacity. Across all regions, Artemis presides not over a single stage, but over the movement between stages – the unstable liminal spaces between childhood and puberty, menstruation and marriage, pregnancy and childbirth, illness and recovery. This shared concern with transition forms the common thread uniting these otherwise disparate corpora. Nevertheless, Artemis' domain is neither isolated nor monopolistic. Her authority frequently overlaps with that of other deities whose competences touch adjacent aspects of female life. Demeter and Kore, for example, offer agricultural and marital models of maturation that resonate with Thessaly's *nebeusasai* (as Hatzopoulos has argued, even when the inscriptions themselves are unambiguously addressed to Artemis). In Boeotia, Artemis merges with the childbirth goddess Eileithyia: the epithet Eileithyia does not replace Artemis but specifies the particular aspect of her power mobilised to address local women's needs. Joint dedications with Apollo similarly reframe Artemis' gendered competences within the wider civic and prophetic authority of the *oikos*. What remains distinctive is that such overlaps never dissolve Artemis' identity. Instead, she absorbs, adapts, or complements other deities' functions while retaining her signature role. The Boeotian manumissions, although formally framed as "sales" to Artemis Eileithyia, carry a symbolic weight that extends beyond legal liberation. The transition from enslavement to sacred status is consistently articulated using the same vocabulary – λύτρα, τελέουμα – that marks the completion of adolescent service in Thessaly. Both contexts treat Artemis as the guarantor of a new state of being, whether the newly freed person or the newly marriageable girl. These parallels stress Artemis' authority over transformative, socially significant reclassifications of status. The evidence demonstrates that Artemis' sanctuaries offered women not a marginal or "secondary" space but a

primary arena for marking personal transformation. By mapping this across regions and ritual forms, this chapter demonstrates that Artemis' cult was among the most important religious frameworks through which Greek women of all social statuses publicly inscribed their transitions and hopes into the sacred landscape.

List of inscriptions cited

Reference	Location	Epithet	Object / Type	Date
IG II² 1514-1530	Athens	Brauronia	Clothing catalogues	349/8-336/5 BCE
IG I³ 985	Brauron	Brauronia	Bronze mirror	c. 500-480 BCE
Brauron Arch. Museum, Inv. n. 1151 (*SEG* 52.170)	Brauron	Brauronia	Votive relief	Ca 350-330 BCE
Brauron Arch. Museum, Inv. n. 1152	Brauron	Brauronia	Votive relief	Ca 340 BCE
IG VII 3385	Chaeronea	Eileithyia	Manumission	2nd c. BCE
IG VII 3386	Chaeronea	Eileithyia	Manumission	2nd c. BCE
IG VII 3391	Chaeronea	Eileithyia	Manumission	2nd c. BCE
IG VII 3412	Chaeronea	Eileithyia	Manumission	2nd c. BCE
Roesch & Fossey nos. 1-9	Chaeronea	Eileithyia	Manumissions	2nd c. BCE
BCH 1953	Boeotia	Eileithyia	Manumission	2nd c. BCE
SEG 49.602	Atrax (Thessaly)	—	Naiskos stele	3rd c. BCE
SEG 34.493	Atrax	—	Naiskos stele	3rd c. BCE
SEG 34.489	Atrax	—	Naiskos stele	3rd c. BCE
SEG 43.240	Atrax	—	Naiskos stele	3rd c. BCE
SEG 46.633	Atrax	—	Naiskos stele	3rd c. BCE
SEG 44.444	Atrax	—	Naiskos stele	3rd c. BCE
SEG 46.636	Atrax	—	Naiskos stele	3rd c. BCE
SEG 51.732	Phayttos (Thessaly)	—	Naiskos stele	3rd c. BCE
IG IX² 1123	Demetrias (Thessaly)	Pagasetis	Naiskos stele	3rd c. BCE
SEG 53.554	Larisa (Thessaly)	—	Statue	late 2nd/early 1st c. BCE
SEG 35.615	Larisa	Throsia	Naiskos stele	ca. 200 BCE

Reference	Location	Epithet	Object / Type	Date
SEG 50.395/399	Sparta	Kyparissia	Anatomical marble vulvae	1st c. BCE–1st c. CE
IStratonikeia 502 (*SEG* 26.1229)	Lagina (Karia)	—	Field dedication, limestone stele	mid-4th c. BCE
IG XII.9 97	Tamynai (Euboea)	—	Family dedication (base)	Hellenistic
IG XII.9 98	Tamynai	—	Family dedication (base)	late 2nd c. BCE
IG XII.9 141	Amarynthos (Euboea)	—	Family dedication	early 1st c. BCE
IG XII.9 142	Amarynthos	—	Family dedication	Hellenistic
ID 1537	Delos	—	Dedication by Kleopatra, daughter of King Ptolemy	2nd c. BCE
ID 1830	Delos	—	Family dedication	150–100 BCE
ID 1869 (a, b, c)	Delos	—	Three family dedications (ritual offices)	120–110 BCE
SEG 9.102	Cyrene	—	Marble plaque (couple dedication)	late 2nd–early 1st c. BCE
IG XII.3 268	Anaphe	Artemis Soteira & Apollo Pythios	Statue base	2nd c. BCE
IG XII.3 269	Anaphe	Artemis Soteira & Apollo Pythios	Statue base	2nd c. BCE
IG XII.3 270	Anaphe	Artemis Soteira & Apollo Pythios	Honorific statue base	2nd c. BCE
IG XII.3 271	Anaphe	Artemis Soteira &	Statue base	2nd–1st c. BCE

Reference	Location	Epithet	Object / Type	Date
		Apollo Pythios		

Chapter 3. Guardians of women's lives: inscribed dedicatory practices to Hera, Aphrodite, Demeter, and Eileithyia

This chapter explores women's dedicatory practices to deities closely associated with female experiences, focusing on Hera, Aphrodite, Demeter and Eileithyia. While each goddess presided over distinct spheres of women's lives, their cults collectively illuminate the ways in which female piety intersected with personal, familial, and communal concerns. The epigraphic evidence demonstrates a highly differentiated set of ritual behaviours shaped by local cult environments. Elite families used goddess cults to consolidate status; priestesses leveraged their office to produce durable ritual legacies; non-elite women used dedications to articulate anxieties and needs. These inscriptions also bring into focus a spectrum of emotional registers – from formulaic civic offerings to personalised, affective language that disrupts standard epigraphic conventions. Dedications to Hera primarily emphasised themes of marriage, family, and domestic stability, with offerings such as loom weights, garments, and household items serving as tangible expressions of her role as divine guardian of the household and female transitions within it. Aphrodite's cult encompassed not only love, beauty, and marriage but also civic and political dimensions, with votive dedications reflecting women's involvement in personal identity, social status, rites of passage, and broader communal and administrative frameworks. The worship of Demeter (and Kore) connected female religious participation with fertility, agricultural cycles, and concerns about the afterlife. Finally, dedications to Eileithyia demonstrate the continued focus of Greek communities on reproductive welfare and the protection of children. As noted in the earlier discussion of Boeotian dedications to Artemis Eileithyia, childbirth was frequently articulated through overlapping divine identities. This Athenian case study extends that analysis, shifting from Artemis' hybridised role to Eileithyia's independent cult, where parents and grandparents dedicated on behalf of children, as particularly evident in the *IG* II³.4 1141-1152 dossier. By analysing dedications across the four cults, this chapter shows how

women's ritual actions were not passive reflections of gendered roles, but forms of participation that shaped communal memory and cult practice.

3.1 Hera's sacred spaces: female dedicatory practices in domestic and civic realms

Hera's divine portfolio made her a central figure in women's religious practices across the Greek world. As a protectress of key female transitions – marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing – Hera's role was deeply tied to both the domestic sphere and the broader civic order, ensuring the well-being of the *oikos* and, by extension, the polis.[174] Votive offerings dedicated to the goddess in various sanctuaries are vital for understanding the nature of each local cult.[175] Textiles were among the most characteristic offerings dedicated to Hera, yet their meaning within her cult must be understood against the broader patterns of textile devotion already examined in the chapters on Athena and Artemis. Weaving was a quintessential female activity, embodying domestic labour and societal expectations of female virtue, making textiles a fitting offering to Hera as the deity overseeing marriage and motherhood.[176] The act of dedicating textiles also carried communal significance, as women's reproductive roles were crucial to the polis's continuity, thus bridging private labour with public ritual expression. Offering textiles, which were often produced in domestic settings, brings the private sphere into the public domain of the sanctuary.[177]

The sanctuary inventories from the Heraion at Samos, especially the marble stele of 346/5 BCE, provide important insights into this practice while also highlighting its interpretative challenges.[178] This inventory lists garments as κόσμος τῆς θεοῦ (adornments of the goddess), likely draped around Hera's statue, but the dedicants are not named, with the exception of only one man,

[174] Clark (1998) on Hera's links with marriage. See also Giacco and Marchetti (2017). This role is evident in rituals such as the Heraia at Olympia, where maidens (*parthenoi*) ran races marking their transition to marriage, an expression of Hera's guardianship over rites of passage: see Provenza (2011).
[175] As Baumbach (2009) has shown, votive offerings in Hera's sanctuaries vary considerably by locality: these dedications primarily reflect polis-specific cult practices shaped by local beliefs and needs, rather than a single panhellenic model. While some cultic elements are shared, each sanctuary developed its own focus and rituals in response to local concerns.
[176] See Brøns (2017), ch.3, for discussion of textile dedications as part of women's rites of passage, especially in relation to marriage and childbirth, and for their role in maintaining both household and civic stability.
[177] Brøns (2016) emphasises the ritual importance of textiles in the Greek world: they embodied divine power and registered women's agency through production and dedication.
[178] *IG* XII.6 1:261.

Diogenes, recorded as dedicating a chiton.[179] Other inventories, such as those from sanctuaries of Athena and Artemis – particularly Athena, whose function as the guardian deity of Athens parallels Hera's significance in Samos – consistently highlight the predominance of female dedicants.[180] While women are typically the majority in textile dedications across other inventories, the ambiguity at Samos suggests that men, possibly acting on behalf of families or due to their administrative roles in sanctuaries, may have mediated women's visibility in such records. This is not particularly surprising in light of the well-documented important public and political role of the Heraion at Samos, which likely influenced the recording practices of dedications, where male dedications and activities were more prominently documented due to their alignment with the broader socio-political structures of the polis. The practice of offering garments to Hera is mirrored in other sanctuaries. Pausanias, for instance, describes rituals involving the weaving of specific textiles for deities, including Hera at Elis and Apollo at Amyklai.[181] At Argos, similar textile dedications to Hera formed part of local cult practice, symbolising piety and communal participation in religious festivals.[182] As Mansfield highlights, however, while dressing cult statues is a widespread practice, the ritual weaving of garments for these statues is quite rare. Documented examples include Athens, where a *peplos* is woven annually for Athena Polias; the Argive Heraion, where Hera receives a *patos*-robe; Amyklai, where a chiton is woven annually for Apollo; and Olympia, where a *peplos* is produced every four years for Hera. Notably, only in Athens is there evidence that the woven garment was actually placed on the statue, highlighting that the central ritual lies in the act of weaving and dedicating the cloth rather than adorning the cult statue.[183] It is also worth noting that Apollo is the only male deity for whom this practice has been attested.[184]

[179] See Brøns (2017) ch.2; see Appendix 2, no.3 for the translation.
[180] See chapter 1 and chapter 2 for discussions on Athena and Artemis respectively.
[181] Paus. 3.16.2; 5.16.2; 6.24.10.
[182] Aleshire and Lambert (2003) 71: "rituals involving the making and presentation of garments for cult statues are attested for Hera at Argos (Kallimachos, *Aitia* 3, fr. 66, Pfeiffer, 2-6, with scholia on underlying sources, Antimachos fr. 179 Wyss, *P Cairo* 6577, col. 2, 23)".
[183] Mansfield (1985) 443.
[184] On the dedication of textiles to Apollo at Amyklai, see Vlachou (2017). Vlachou interprets these offerings as ritual acts centred on the ceremonial weaving and presentation of a chiton to Apollo. The presence of spindle whorls and loom weights underlines the close association between textile production, female labour, and cult practice, drawing a parallel with the *peplos* offered to Athena in Athens.

Inscribed dedications provide concrete evidence of women's active engagement with Hera's cult, often reflecting personal milestones and communal ties. At Tegea, Nikostrata and Kallistrata jointly dedicated an offering, suggesting collaborative labour and shared piety, perhaps as sisters or mother and daughter, aligning with Hera's role in familial bonds.[185] An inscription from Astypalaea, carved on a one-meter-long stone base, records a dedication made by a priestess: "Aristokleia, the daughter of Kydarchos, having served as a priestess of Hera."[186] The deliberate choice to inscribe the dedication on such a substantial and costly medium reveals the importance of the offering. This may suggest that Aristokleia or her family sought to publicise their religious observance, perhaps as an assertion of their social status within the community. From Trogir (Tragurion) on the eastern Adriatic coast, a woman named Lyso dedicated a limestone altar to Hera in the early first century BCE, inscribed "Lyso, daughter of Sosias, to Hera" and decorated with a relief of the goddess holding a sceptre and wearing a veil, two of her characteristic iconographic attributes.[187] This dedication reflects the spread of the goddess' cult among the Greek communities of the eastern Adriatic. Although the monument takes the form of a miniature funerary altar, the inscription itself is a straightforward dedication to Hera, illustrating the fluidity with which established monument types could be adapted for dedicatory purposes in Hellenistic contexts.[188]

Hera's influence also extended into the civic sphere, as seen in her role as Hera Boulaia, the goddess of the council, which complemented her domestic functions. An inscription from Athens records a male dedication to Hera Boulaia, indicating that her cult appealed to men soliciting divine favour for political stability, thereby demonstrating her adaptability across gendered domains of Greek society.[189] While women appear to be the primary dedicants in Hera's sanctuaries, the presence

[185] *IG* V.2 562: Ἥραι Νικοστράτα, Καλλιστράτα ἀνέθε[ν].
[186] *IG* XII.3 196 (ca. fourth/third c. BCE): Ἀριστόκλεια Κυδάρ[χο(υ)] ἱαρωσαμένα Ἥρα[ι]. The same Aristokleia also dedicates to Athena using identical language, *IG* XII.3 184: Ἀριστόκλεια Κυδάρχου ἱαρωσαμένα Ἀθαναίαι. The repetition of the formula suggests that priestly office was commemorated in a standardised way on the island and that elite women could serve multiple major cults. Her service to both Hera and Athena – two of the most prominent civic goddesses – points to her likely high social standing.
[187] *SEG* 31.613: Ἥραι Λυσὼ Σωσία; the object is described as a "small funerary altar" by Nikolanci (1980).
[188] See Mirnik (2003) on Hellenistic miniature altars from Vis and Trogir.
[189] *IG* II² 4675: Ἥραι Βουλαίαι. [Ἀ]πο[λ]λό[δ]ωρος Ἀρίστωνος Ὀ[ῆθεν], [πρ]οστάξαντος τοῦ θεοῦ ἀν[έθηκεν]. ἐπ[ὶ] ἱ[ε]ρ[έως] Κηφισοφῶντος Ἀθμ[ον]έ[ως], τὸ πέμπτον.

of male dedicants in civic contexts challenges this assumption, and the numerical dominance of female worshippers remains uncertain without comprehensive data. This civic role is further exemplified in multigenerational dedications, such as that of Sokrates Pardalas and his granddaughter Iulia Lydia in Sardis, dated shortly after 17 CE: "Sokrates Pardalas, son of Polemaios, built the temple and erected the (statue of) Hera. Iulia Lydia, his granddaughter, restored it after the earthquake.[190] Sokrates, a prominent civic figure who was also honoured for his piety (Sardis VII, 1, nos. 22, 91, 122),[191] built a temple and statue for Hera, which Iulia Lydia restored after an earthquake, an act that reaffirmed her family's bond with the deity and their social standing. While later in date, this example demonstrates the enduring nature of dedicatory practices to Hera and the continued prominence of women in maintaining and restoring her sanctuaries. In particular, Iulia Lydia's restoration of the temple illustrates how elite women could actively maintain and transmit family prestige through pious acts, using Hera's cult as a framework to assert both religious devotion and social status across generations.

As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, considering later evidence alongside earlier Greek examples highlights both continuity and adaptation in women's roles within religious life. The involvement of multiple generations within a single family emphasises the enduring significance of Hera's worship across time, with her sanctuaries serving as focal points for familial identity and continuity. This restoration, possibly in response to divine will interpreted through natural disasters, highlights Hera's role as a protector of the community, with Iulia Lydia's benefaction aligning with broader patterns of elite female agency in the Hellenistic and Roman Greek East, as analysed by van Bremen.[192] Comparative evidence, such as Echenike's 250 BCE dedication on Delos, where the

[190] *SEG* 28.928. Σωκράτης Πολεμαίου Παρδαλᾶς τὸν ναὸν κατεσκεύασεν καὶ τὴν Ἥραν ἀνέθηκεν. Ἰουλία Λυδία ἡ ὑωνὴ αὐτοῦ μετὰ τὸν σεισμὸν ἐπεσκεύασεν.

[191] Buckler and Robinson (1933). Sokrates Pardalas is recorded as a leading civic figure, honoured by the Worshippers of Zeus among the Enterers into the Shrine for his inherited reverence for the gods (no. 22). This phrasing suggests that religious service ran in his family, reinforcing the idea that elite piety was often interwoven with lineage. His priestly office in Sardis (no. 91) further attests to his prominence and its connection to the city's relationship with Rome. His role in dating official documents (no. 122) confirms his standing in the administrative hierarchy, linking his religious activities with broader civic responsibilities.

[192] Van Bremen (1996). Natural disasters were often interpreted in antiquity as expressions of divine will or trials, reinforcing the religious importance of sanctuary restoration as both a public duty and an act of piety. See Hdt. (6.27, 6.98)

woman endowed a festival for Aphrodite, mirrors Iulia Lydia's role as a custodian of familial religious traditions, illustrating how women's benefactions contributed to both private legacy and public religious life.[193] The case of Sokrates Pardalas and Iulia Lydia therefore illustrates how religious benefaction could be a deliberately multigenerational enterprise, with both men and women playing crucial roles in maintaining civic cults. These examples highlight the dynamic roles women played in Hera's cult, ensuring the continuity of sacred traditions while shaping the civic and cultural landscapes of their communities, with Hera's sanctuaries serving as spaces where personal piety, familial identity, and communal resilience converged.

3.2. Aphrodite's harmonising power: female votives from private devotion to civic harmony

Aphrodite's role in the Greek world extended far beyond her traditional association with love and beauty, encompassing civic, political, and administrative dimensions that made her a deity revered by both men and women. Wallensten's study of 600 dedicatory inscriptions to Aphrodite reveals that over 300 were made by men, often in official capacities, challenging the perception of her as primarily a goddess of women.[194] While there were no significant gender differences in dedicatory language or objects offered – typically statues or statuettes using formulae of vows and prayers – men more frequently invoked epithets like *Stratagis* and *Nomophylakis*, emphasising Aphrodite's involvement in civic and political life and her role in the welfare of the community. A fuller understanding of this multidimensional Aphrodite must be situated within the broader landscape of her cults as reconstructed by Pirenne-Delforge in *L'Aphrodite grecque*, still the most comprehensive study of the goddess' worship in the Greek mainland and Cyprus.[195] Pirenne-Delforge's synthesis demonstrates that the seemingly disparate functions of Aphrodite – sexuality, marital harmony, procreation, concord (*homonoia*), negotiation (*peitho*), maritime protection, civic stability, and even her rare

on plagues and earthquakes interpreted as omens or divine signs; Plato, *Laws* (677b-d), on natural disasters as divine phenomena; Thuc. (2.53-2.54) on the great plague of Athens, attributed to divine wrath by many Athenians.

[193] *IG* XI.2 287. This inscription will be discussed in more detail in section 3.2.

[194] Wallensten (2009) highlights Aphrodite's role beyond love and beauty, particularly her involvement in civic and political spheres and her connections to public welfare and magistrates.

[195] Pirenne-Delforge (1994).

"armed" manifestations – ultimately derive from a single core attribute: Aphrodite as a unifying and harmonising force within both the household and the polis.[196] Pirenne-Delforge's survey of Aphrodite's identities, from *Pandemos* and *Ourania* to Cypriot forms, shows a goddess whose personality adapts to local needs while consistently mediating social cohesion, regulating the potentially disruptive dimensions of sexuality, and underpinning civic well-being. This broader framework reinforces the significance of women's dedicatory practices: their offerings to Aphrodite, whether in domestic, personal, or civic settings, participated in a cult whose scope was always more expansive and politically embedded than the literary stereotype of a purely erotic goddess would suggest.[197]

A set of dedications from Athens (mid-fourth century BCE) illustrates how women engaged Aphrodite in the context of sexuality and personal wellbeing. Several inscriptions record offerings in the form of vulvae, attached to small marble pigeons or presented as independent figurines, dedicated to Aphrodite by several women: Euandria, Phile, Philoumene, Pamphile, Dorias.[198] Among these, Philoumene's dedication, who presents a thank-offering (*charisterion*) to Aphrodite, concluding with the public injunction "praise her, you who pass by", transforms a private vow into a publicly shared recognition of divine efficacy.[199] It is within this intersection of the personal and the civic that Aphrodite Pandemos' role as a deity of civic unity becomes especially significant.[200] A dedication of ca. 350-300 BCE exemplifies this dynamic. The inscription records a collective offering by Archinos, son of Alypetos of the deme Skambonidai, together with Menekrateia, daughter of Dexikrates of Ikaria and priestess of Aphrodite Pandemos, and a second, unnamed woman, likewise identified as a daughter of Dexikrates and explicitly described as the mother of Archinos; the dedicants state that

[196] Pirenne-Delforge (1994) 467-472.
[197] Chapter 6 of this dissertation returns to how Hellenistic epigrams depict Aphrodite and her female dedicants – often reducing complex ritual practices to literary motifs centred on erotic allure, ageing, or beauty, thereby revealing not cult reality but its cultural reinterpretation.
[198] *IG* II² 4574, 4575, 4576, 4635. See Van Straten (1981) 121, nos. 11.1-11.5.
[199] *IG* II² 4575: Φιλουμένη Ἀφρο[δ]ίτε[ι χ]αριζομένη· ἐπαινεῖτε οἱ παριόντες. "Philoumene, offering in gratitude to Aphrodite; praise her, you who pass by".
[200] On Aphrodite Pandemos, see Daniels (2018) and Rosenzweig (2004) ch.4.

they "adorn" the goddess with statues of themselves (κοσ]μοῦμεν δώροις εἰκόσιν ἡμετέραις).[201] The formal structure of the dedication thus highlights a family group anchored in female kinship, in which Menekrateia's priestly authority and her sister's maternal role frame Archinos' participation. Although the male name appears first, in accordance with epigraphic convention, the inscription places particular emphasis on women's civic and religious identities. By publicly dedicating statues as a family unit that spans siblings and generations, the offering aligns domestic relationships with the integrative function of Aphrodite Pandemos, demonstrating how acts of personal piety could simultaneously articulate communal cohesion.

A second dedication to Aphrodite Pandemos, though separated by both geography and period, reveals a similar convergence of private and communal concerns. This inscription, found at Amantia in Illyria and possibly dated to the first century CE, preserves the upper fragment of a small flat stele framed by a moulded border and written in Doric dialect:

> Ἀφροδίται Πανδάμοι Ἀριστὼ Ἀλεξάνδρου ὑπέρ τε αὐτᾶς καὶ τέκνων εὐχάν.[202]
>
> Aristo, daughter of Alexandros, dedicates a vow to Aphrodite Pandamos on behalf of herself and her children.

The formula places the well-being of the household – *herself and her children* – under the protection of a goddess whose very epithet (Pandemos) connotes communal solidarity and the shared life of the civic body. These inscriptions highlight how women's dedications to Aphrodite Pandemos bridged personal anxieties with the goddess's broader role in fostering civic cohesion. This emphasis on communal harmony parallels Demeter's role in the Thesmophoria, where women's dedications ensured societal prosperity through agricultural renewal, as discussed in the next section. At the same time, Aphrodite could be invoked in more personal registers: the Delphic dedication of Praxo to Aphrodite Epiteleia ("she who brings fulfilment") – preserved on the upper part of a limestone stele –

[201] *IG* II² 4596: τόνδε σοι, ὦ μεγάλη σεμνὴ Πάνδημε Ἀφρ[οδίτη κοσ]μοῦμεν δώροις εἰκόσιν ἡμετέραις, | Ἀρχῖνος Ἀλυπήτ[ο]υ Σκαμβωνίδης Μενεκράτεια Δεξικράτους Ἰκαριέως θυγάτηρ, ἱέρεια τῆς [Πανδήμου Ἀφροδίτης - - - Δ]εξικράτους Ἰκαριέως θυγάτηρ Ἀρχίνου δὲ μήτηρ,
[202] *SEG* 1.265.

shows the goddess addressed as a divine agent who brings personal aims, vows, or major life-transitions to completion.[203] A further example of such intimate devotion appears in a small, yet telling, dedication from Kamarina, where a woman named Aristokleia offered a white pebble to Aphrodite, described by the editor as a *ciottolo veramente marino*.[204] The pebble, inscribed on one side with the goddess's name and on the other side with that of the dedicant, illustrates the tactile and modest scale of some female offerings. Though undated, the dedication illustrates how women could enact piety in ways that were both materially modest and symbolically meaningful, placing their personal and familial concerns under Aphrodite's protection without relying on large-scale civic frameworks.

This more intimate dimension of Aphrodite's agency becomes even clearer when we turn to the dedications made by women in the Aphrodision of Stesileos on Delos, which provide a particularly rich case study for the intersection between private devotion and public religious display in the Hellenistic period.[205] Founded by the Delian Stesileos around 300 BCE, during the early years of Delian Independence (314-167 BCE), the Aphrodision was a private sanctuary distinct from the public cult of Aphrodite within the sanctuary of Apollo. As Carbon and Pirenne-Delforge have shown for other Hellenistic family foundations, such private cults were not independent of civic religious structures but consciously adopted the language, forms, and administrative frameworks of polis religion.[206] Stesileos' foundation fits this model closely: an archon in 305 BCE and choregos for the Apollonia in 284 BCE and Dionysia in 280 BCE, he established the sanctuary with monumental offerings, likely including the temple, an altar, and a marble cult statue of Aphrodite holding a gilded phiale; he also endowed the Stesileia festival, linking the cult to Apollo and reinforcing its civic significance.[207] These actions anchored the cult in civic forms while preserving its character as a family-controlled space through which elite households, especially his own, could assert religious and

[203] FdDelphes III 4, 468: [Π]ραξὼ Ἀφροδίτ[αι] Ἐπιτελείαι. Cf. Jacquemin et al. (2012) n. 159.
[204] *SEG* 34.930: Ἀφροδίται | Ἀριστόκλεια.
[205] For a comprehensive discussion on the votive offerings in the Delian Aphrodision and its foundation, see Durvye (2009).
[206] Carbon and Pirenne-Delforge (2013).
[207] Durvye (2009) 151-152.

social prominence. During the Independence period, offerings to the Aphrodision were costly and durable – statues of Aphrodite, bronze statues of Stesileos' parents flanking the temple entrance, and substantial festival endowments – reflecting a version of Aphrodite that may have appealed to magistrates and the male elite as a guarantor of harmony and authority. Yet within this male-dominated framework, Echenike, Stesileos' daughter, emerges as a pivotal figure whose dedications illustrate the gendered dimensions of private religious agency.[208] Her benefactions display how women could intervene meaningfully in family-founded cults while operating within structures shaped by lineage, inheritance, and civic imitation. Echenike's benefactions were substantial and multifaceted: she dedicated a statue of Aphrodite,[209] a luxurious glass perfume vase (ἐξάλειπτρον) on a wooden plinth, and, in 250 BCE, endowed the Echenikeia festival with 3,000 drachmas. The interest from this endowment funded annual sacrifices to Apollo and Aphrodite, as recorded in an inscription: "In the month of Lenaion, by a decree of the city and by the pre-loan agreements with the councilors, three hundred drachmas were dedicated by Echenike, daughter of Stesileos, for a sacrifice to both Apollo and Aphrodite, in accordance with the income from public revenues".[210] This act not only affirmed her commitment to these deities but also ensured the perpetuation of her family's religious legacy across generations. The naming of the festival after Echenike, rather than the deities, mirrors her father's Stesileia and reflects a familial strategy to embed their identity within the cult's framework. Her perfume vase, a rare and costly item, suggests a personal connection to Aphrodite's feminine aspects, possibly reflecting her own experiences or aspirations as a woman, while its value aligns with her family's elite status. By dedicating resources to this private cult, Echenike demonstrated personal piety while reinforcing her family's distinct religious identity, a pattern that resonates with other examples of women navigating the boundary between private and public spheres.

[208] Her family's association with the cult of Aphrodite illustrates how private and public religiosity intersected in elite patronage. See Aneziri (2020).
[209] *IG* XI.4 1277: Ἐχενίκη Στησίλε[ω] Ἀ[φρ]οδίτ[ηι].
[210] *IG* XI.2 287 A, l. 122-123: Ἐν μηνὶ Ληναίῳ, κατὰ ψῆφισμα τῆς πόλεως καὶ προδανεισταῖς τοῖς βουλευταῖς, δραχμὰς τριακοσίας ἀνέθηκε Ἐχενίκη Στησίλεω εἰς θυσίαν τῷ τε Ἀπόλλωνι καὶ τῇ Ἀφροδίτῃ, ἐπὶ ὑποθήκει ταῖς προσόδοις ταῖς δημοσίαις.

The expulsion of the Delians in 167 BCE by the Roman Senate marked a significant shift for the Aphrodision, as Athenian oversight introduced a more cosmopolitan body of worshippers, altering the profile of dedicants and the character of the offerings deposited in the sanctuary until its eventual abandonment in the first century BCE. Athenian inventories from ca. 156–146 BCE document a discernible change in dedicatory practice: offerings became smaller, more personal, and less monumental, reflecting a clientele broader than the elite households prominent during the Independence period. In this phase, four female dedicators stand out, indicating the evolving role of women within the cult. Eudora, a priestess active before 156 BCE, dedicated a white linen chiton.[211] Pleistarche, a former priestess, dedicated silver earrings for the cult statue, with the text explicitly employing the formula τὰ ἐνώιδια ἃ ἔχει ἡ θεὸς,[212] indicating that the earrings were conceived as ornaments worn by the goddess' image. Ionis, also a priestess, contributed a diverse set of votives, including a small stone incense burner, wooden figurines, plaques, garments, a fan, and other items.[213] Demetrias dedicated gold earrings, again emphasising the offering's integration into the visual and ritual presence of the statue.[214]

The choice of everyday and personal items is coherent with objects offered by female dedicants in inventories of other sanctuaries. The prominence of priestesses as the primary dedicators during this Athenian phase suggests that women acted as visible mediators of religious practice, yet their agency remained circumscribed by established ritual roles. Echenike's benefactions, while significant, must be understood within the constraints of female agency, as analysed by van Bremen. Van Bremen argues that elite women's increasing visibility in public roles like priesthoods and benefactions did not equate to true autonomy, as their influence was tied to familial and social

[211] *ID* 1417 (A, II, l. 21): χιτῶνα ἐρεοῦν λευκόν, ἀνάθεμα ἱερείας Εὐδώρας.
[212] *ID* 1423 (Ba, II, l. 18-19): τὰ <ἐ>νώιδια[ἃ … ἔχ]ει ἡ θεὸς ἀργυρᾶ περικεχρυσωμένα ἀνέθηκεν ἡ ἱέρεια ἡ πρότερον Πλειστάρχη· τράπεζα[ν].
[213] *ID* 1442 (B, l. 33-35): καὶ ἃ προσταρέδωκεν [ἡ ἱέρει]α Ἰωνίς· ἀφροδίσιον λίθινον· θυμ[ιατήριον …] ζωιδάρια μικρὰ ξύλινα τρία· χιτῶνας ἀνακιμένους τρεῖς· ἄλλο ἐρεοῦν παιδικόν· τήβενναν· ῥιπίδιον […και]νόν· τύπιον ἐν ὧι καὶ περιστέριον α …] χρυσᾶ, ὁλ. Ι· σανδαλίων ἀνακιμένων ζεύγη τρία· πινάκια πρὸς τῶι τοίχωι ἀναθέσιμα τρία· θυμιατήριον λίθ[ινον·…]ς ἔχουσα μυδρόν. ἐν τῶι τῆς Ἀγαθῆ[ς Τύχης· ἄγαλμα λίθινον Ἀγα].
[214] *ID* 1412 (a, l. 29): ἐνώιδια χ[ρυσᾶ ἃ [ἔχει ἡ θεὸς ὧ]ν ὁλ[κὴ δραχμ]αὶ (2), ἀνάθεμα Δημητρίας.

expectations within male-dominated structures.[215] Carbon and Pirenne-Delforge's analysis demonstrates that women's participation in these private foundations, though often substantial, was embedded within the structures and expectations of family authority rather than representing autonomous civic agency.[216] Echenike's endowment of the Echenikeia, though a public act, was rooted in her family's tradition, reinforcing their prestige rather than asserting independent authority, with her father Stesileos as a legitimising figure. Similarly, the Athenian-period priestesses – Eudora, Pleistarche, Ionis, and possibly Demetrias – gained visibility through sanctioned roles, but their modest offerings served familial and community interests, reflecting a democratised yet symbolic participation. The Aphrodision thus encapsulates van Bremen's thesis: women shaped Aphrodite's cult through dedications, yet their agency operated within patriarchal limits, balancing personal piety, familial legacy, and civic responsibility. This dynamic highlights how women's inscribed votives to Aphrodite, from personal prayers to public festivals, contributed to her identity as a deity of love and civic harmony across Greek communities.

3.3. Demeter and Kore's sacred cycles: offerings for fertility and renewal rites

Women's dedications to Demeter and her daughter Kore, spanning the late fifth century BCE to the Hellenistic period, demonstrate a diverse range of votive practices that shed light on the goddesses' roles in agriculture, fertility (a function most explicitly expressed in the Thesmophoria), and the conduct of sacred rites across the Greek world. At Katane in the late fifth century BCE, a family group dedicated an offering to Demeter and Kore, explicitly naming the wife and children.[217] By the fourth century BCE, Karthaia on Keos provides especially rich evidence for women's religious agency within the cult of Demeter. Philanthe, mother of Pittikon, dedicated an offering to Demeter after

[215] Van Bremen (1996).
[216] Carbon and Pirenne-Delforge (2013). Echenike's endowment, like Epikteta's foundation on Thera examined in the article, exemplifies how elite women shaped cult life while simultaneously reinforcing the prominence and memory of their own family.
[217] *SEG* 50.1009: Δάματρι καὶ Κόραι [· · ? · ·]ων καὶ ἁ γυνὰ αὐτοῦ Ἀρισ[· · ·] καὶ τα τέκνα.

serving as a priestess, marking her ritual authority through the formula ἱερῆ γενομένη ("having become priestess").[218] Another inscription, dated to the mid fourth century BCE, commemorates a priestess named Phileto daughter of Dexikles;[219] a later inscription from the third century BCE records another Phileto, daughter of Sokleios and wife of Philokharos, dedicating after serving as priestess of Demeter and Kore.[220] Finally, a dedication from Karthaia, dated between the third and the second centuries BCE, made by Arete daughter of Philanthos, likewise records her service as priestess of Demeter and Kore.[221]

Collectively, these dedications attest the repeated appointment of women as priestesses of Demeter and Kore at Karthaia over several generations. Although the inscriptions do not allow us to establish hereditary succession or familial relationships between all these women, they point to the enduring prominence of female priesthood within the civic cult. Salvo has demonstrated that Greek religion operated through forms of informal religious education, in which ritual competence, cultic knowledge, and behavioural norms were passed down within families, associations, and local communities rather than through formal schooling.[222] In this light, the repeated priestess-dedications from Karthaia may reflect the long-term transmission of cultic expertise, even if the precise mechanisms of succession cannot be reconstructed from the surviving inscriptions. This phenomenon was not limited to Keos. Euxena's dedication from Messene, a cylindrical grey-marble altar inscribed around 300 BCE, offers further evidence.[223] Her formula is concise and traditional, yet the use of the

[218] *SEG* 56.987: Θ ε ο [ί] Φιλάνθη Πιττικῶντος μήτ[ηρ] καὶ Λεοντίχο Δήμη[τρι] ἀνέθηκε ἱερῆ γενομένη.
[219] *IG* XII.5 575: [θεοί]. Φιλετὼ Δεξικλέος θυγάτηρ ἱέρεια γενομένη Δήμητρι ἀνέθηκε.
[220] *IG* XII.5 1089: Φιλητὼ Σωκλείους θυγάτηρ, Φιλοχάρους γυνή, ἱέρεια γενομένη Δημήτρι καὶ Κόρηι.
[221] *IG* XII.5 1088: Ἀρέτη Φιλάν[θους θυγάτηρ] ἱέρεα γενομέ[νη Δήμητρι] καὶ Κόρηι ἀνέθ[ηκεν].
[222] Salvo (2021).
[223] *SEG* 51.484: Εὐξένα Δάματ[ρι] ἀνέθ[ηκεν].

Doric form Δάματρι clearly situates the offering within local linguistic and cultic practice. The choice of an altar as a votive object – rather than a base or figurine – may suggest a more substantial ritual investment, possibly linked to domestic or public rites of Demeter in a Messenian context. From Halos, in Thessaly, comes another short base inscription, in which Nikoboula, daughter of Polykleitos, dedicates to Demeter.[224] Similarly, in a dedication from Mesembria (Thrace) Archeanassa, daughter of Kephalos, is attested as the dedicator of a marble base inscription dated to the fourth century BCE.[225] In Isthmia, Kleo, daughter of Thasis, dedicated a sculpture to Demeter in the fourth century BCE, a personal offering possibly linked to ritual participation,[226] and in Kyrene, Aristopatra, daughter of Thalinnos, dedicated a marble plinth to Demeter.[227] In the second century BCE, Charikleia in Argos dedicated a white limestone pillar base to Demeter, with dowel holes on the upper surface that probably held small statues of her children, suggesting a familial offering for protection. The Greek text reads:

Χαρίκλει[α] Δ[άμ]ᾳτ[ρι] | παρατέθετο | τὰ παιδία[228]

"Charikleia [to Demeter?] entrusted the children."

The reconstruction of Δ[άμ]ᾳτ[ρι] as "Demeter" is plausible but not certain; the preserved letters could theoretically represent a patronymic, though a divine reference is more likely in context. The verb παρατέθετο ("entrusted" or "placed in the care of") is noteworthy: it conveys a sense of delegating responsibility or protection, suggesting that the children were ritually entrusted to the

[224] *SEG* 53.532. Νικοβούλα Πολυκλείτου θυγάτηρ Δάματρι.
[225] *SEG* 34.710: Ἀρχηνάσσα Κεφάλου Δήμητρι.
[226] *SEG* 37.272 (= SEG 37-270): Κλεὼ: Θασίδος: Δάματρι.
[227] *SEG* 26.1833: Ἀριστοπάτρα Θαλίννω τᾶι Δάματρι ἀνέθηκε.
[228] *SEG* 64.172.

goddess rather than simply being dedicated.[229] This formula is relatively rare in Greek dedications. We do not find it, for instance, in another fragmentary dedication from Athens recording a woman dedicating her daughter to Demeter and Kore, [230] and it may reflect a more intimate or protective dimension of the offering, linking familial devotion to divine guardianship.

A series of Hellenistic dedications illustrate how female dedicants engaged with Demeter and Kore through objects ranging from modest ritual implements to more substantial sculptural offerings, each expressing a particular relationship to the goddesses and to the rites performed in their honour. The earliest of this group comes from Chalkis, where Diogeneia, daughter of Bion**,** dedicated to Demeter and Kore a small marble column carved in the form of a torch.[231] The inscription is dated to the second century BCE and the torch form is particularly significant. Torches appear in a number of other Demeter rituals, including the Eleusinian Mysteries and Thesmophoria rites connected with the goddesses' search mythology.**[232]** The torch likely references Demeter's ritual luminosity and the broader theme of guidance and transition, aligning the offering with rites centred on movement between darkness and light (initiation, purification, or nocturnal procession).[233] Diogeneia's brief, formulaic dedication suggests personal piety expressed through an object whose form is itself a ritual cue. A more complex case comes from Arsinoe, where Phalakra dedicated a whitish limestone base originally found near the local Demeter sanctuary**.** The inscription is partially preserved:

Φαλάκρα ὑπερστραταγ[- - θευκο]

λήσασαν Δάματρι καὶ [Κόραι ἀνέθηκε ?][234]

The key difficulties lie in restoring the participle and understanding what ὑπερστραταγ[– –] means. As the editor notes, this could represent either a second personal name (Hyperstrata), or the beginning

[229] Cf. Chaniotis (2018), n.120, on the use of the verb παρατίθημι in dedications, curses, document submissions, and childcare contexts.
[230] *SEG* 48.255: τὴν ἑαυτῆς θυγατέρα Δήμητρι κα⟨ί⟩ Κ[όρηι ἀνέθηκεν].
[231] *SEG* 27.563: Διογένεια Βίωνος Δήμητρι καὶ Κόρῃ.
[232] In the *Homeric hymn to Demeter*, the goddess wanders for nine days on earth holding blazing torches in her hands; *ll*. 45-46: ἐννῆμαρ μὲν ἔπειτα κατὰ χθόνα πότνια Δηὼ │ στρωφᾶτ' αἰθομένας δαΐδας μετὰ χερσὶν ἔχουσα.
[233] Patera (2021) on the importance of light and lighting equipment in Demeter's festivals.
[234] *SEG* 40.457 (second c. BCE).

of the formula ὑπὲρ Στραταγ[–], "on behalf of Stratag–". The participle]λήσασαν is best restored as θευκο-]λήσασαν = θεοκο-]λήσασαν, "having served as priestess". The same expression is attested on another dedication inscription from Zakynthos, involving two parents dedicating to Artemis Opitais their daughter Klenippa, who has served as priestess of the goddess.[235] Thus, the Arsinoe inscription likely recorded that Phalakra dedicated a statue commemorating priestly service, either her own, if Hyperstrata was her second name, or that of another woman, possibly a relative, whose name originally stood at the end of line 1. Either reading shows a woman engaging in cult personnel roles and marking this service through a sculptural offering. The emphasis is not on 'sacred rites' in the abstract but on specific ritual office: the dedication therefore reflects women's participation in the infrastructure of the cult, not merely its ritual performances. A further example comes from Phrygia, where a woman, together with her husband, dedicated a relief to "Lady Demeter".[236] The relief depicts a veiled goddess seated on a bench, a common Anatolian iconography associated with mother goddesses and domestic protection. The epithet κυρίᾳ emphasises Demeter's authority and elevated status within the local cult. The inclusion of both spouses shows that dedications to Demeter were not exclusively female, even when oriented around fertility or protection – an important counterexample that nuances the gender patterns generally associated with Demeter cults.

Many of these offerings reflected Demeter's dual role as both provider of grain and protector of sacred rites, a function particularly emphasised in her epithet Thesmophoros. Closely tied to the widely celebrated Thesmophoria, a women-only festival centred on agricultural renewal and communal ritual, this title reflects Demeter's function as a divine lawgiver – not in the civic or political sense, but as the revealer of the sacred rites and practices that ensured the prosperity of crops and society.[237] Women's dedications to Demeter Thesmophoros, often associated with fertility,

[235] *IG* IX.1 600: Ἀρχικλῆς Ἀριστομένεος καὶ Ἀλκιδάμα Ἀρχικλέος Κληνίππαν τὰν αὐτῶν θυγατέρα θεοκολήσασαν Ἀρτέμιτι Ὀπιταΐδι. See Gennimata (2006) 79.
[236] *SEG* 26.1387: [ὁ δεῖνα καὶ ἡ] | γυνὴ Μ.α.ια κυ- | ρίᾳ Δήμητρι.
[237] Stallsmith (2008). See also Faraone (2011) on female activities during the festival; McLardy (2023), who has shown that the Thesmophoria exhibited significant local variations between Attica and Sicily; and Patera (2020) on the identification of Demeter Thesmophoros' sanctuaries based on archaeological evidence. Dillon (2017) has explored both the Thesmophoria and Haloa as pivotal female-centric festivals that challenged male authority, highlighting women's roles in fertility, agriculture, and sexuality through ritual practices such as sacrifices and the symbolic use of pigs and

abundance, and the continuation of agricultural cycles, can thus be understood within the broader framework of ritual participation, divine reciprocity, and the preservation of sacred knowledge. The following discussion examines the evidence for such dedications, considering their material, epigraphic, and regional variations. Women's dedicatory inscriptions provide direct evidence of their active participation in these sacred rites across the Greek world. At Bitalemi near Gela (Sicily) graffiti on vessels from the fifth century BCE explicitly name Demeter Thesmophoros, confirming the sanctuary as a Thesmophorion where women dedicated ceramic vessels like *skyphoi* and craters during the festival.[238] These vessels likely contained *hydromeli* (a honey-water mixture) symbolising purity and fertility; their intentional breakage, as Albertocchi argues, may reflect the ritual closure of offerings.[239] This aligns with the Thesmophoria's focus on chthonic fertility, as Sfameni Gasparro notes, where women performed secretive acts such as the *megarizein* (throwing piglets into underground pits), evoking the myth of Kore's abduction and ensuring agrarian renewal.[240] Similarly, at San Nicola di Albanella near Paestum, also in the fifth century BCE, miniature vases (*skyphoi, kotyliskoi, krateriskoi*) turned toward the ground, a practice typical of Thesmophoria sanctuaries like Bitalemi, suggest women's dedications during the festival, reinforcing Demeter's role in fertility through piglet sacrifices, though no specific female dedicators are named.[241] In Erythrae in the fourth century BCE, Zosime, priestess of Demeter Thesmophoros, was honoured with an inscription by the *boule* and *demos* for her forty years of service, likely overseeing Thesmophoria rituals involving sheep and piglets sacrifices, as attested in the city's sacrificial calendar; her honour demonstrates not only her longevity in office but her role in maintaining ritual continuity across two generations.[242] In

dough.

[238] On the civic and marital qualification implied by *eugeneis gynaikes* in the context of the Thesmophoria, see Detienne (1979) 196-197. Participation in the festival is restricted to citizen women lawfully married (*aste* and *enguete*), excluding slaves, *parthenoi,* and courtesans. Detienne's discussion situates the Thesmophoria within a politico-religious framework, emphasising the close association between Demeter Thesmophoros and women embedded in the civic order by birth and marriage.

[239] Albertocchi (2012).

[240] Sfameni Gasparro (2009).

[241] Ibid.

[242] *IErythrai* 69: ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμ[ος] [ἐτεί]μησεν Ζωσίμ[ην] [—]γόνης ἱέρειαν Δ[ή]- [μη]τρος θεσμοφόρ[ου καὶ] [Ἔρ]σης, ἱερασαμέ[νην] [ἔτη] τεσσαράκοντα [εὐ]- [σε]βείας ἕνεκεν τ[ῆς] [πρ]ὸς τὰς θεάς [—] [—]ματαμουσ[—] [—]τ… [—].

the Attic deme of Melite in the early second century BCE, Satyra, another priestess of Demeter Thesmophoros, received an honorific inscription for contributing over 100 drachmas to annual sacrifices, earning a myrtle crown and a painted portrait in the temple of Demeter and Kore.[243] Her benefaction reflects her communal responsibility in ensuring agricultural prosperity through the Thesmophoria.

It is precisely when we turn to regions with distinctive local cult practices, such as Knidos, that this diversity becomes even more apparent, bringing to light forms of female religious expression that depart sharply from the Thesmophoric model while still centring Demeter and Kore. The epigraphic corpus from the sanctuary of Demeter in Knidos consists not only of conventional votive offerings but also of prayers for justice, laments, and confessional texts deposited by worshippers.[244] What is particularly significant is the overwhelming predominance of female authors across both votive and non-votive texts, a pattern attesting to a sanctuary space where women's experiences, emotions, and conflicts were articulated with exceptional explicitness.[245] The earliest dedications (late fourth to third centuries BCE) already show this pattern. One dedication records the simple but significant offering of Philis, a priestess, who dedicates to Kore (Φιλὶς ἱέρεια Κούραι).[246] The formula is minimal, yet the presence of a named female cult official shows women's institutional authority within this sanctuary. Shortly thereafter, another dedication shows Adinna, together with her children, dedicating to Demeter and Kore – a family offering that situates the goddesses within the sphere of household continuity and maternal oversight.[247] Similar dedicatory brevity appears in another inscription where Diokleia dedicates to Demeter.[248] These formulae (stripped of narrative detail) highlight a type of unadorned female piety characteristic of Knidos: concise, direct, and focused on the identity of the dedicant. Another dedication introduces a further nuance:

[243] Broneer (1942) no. 51 for full text and English translation.
[244] Chaniotis (2009) who analyses these texts as part of a broader corpus of female ritual speech in Hellenistic Asia Minor.
[245] *IKnidos* I 131-146. *IKnidos* I 141 is the only dedication made by a man: Σώστρατος Λαχάρτου Δάματρι, Κούραι, Πλούτωνι, Ἐπιμάχωι, Ἑρμᾶι.
[246] *IKnidos* I 132.
[247] *IKnidos* 133: Ἄδιννα Σωπόλιος θυγάτηρ, Πολυχάρευς γυνά, καὶ τοὶ παῖδες Δάματρι καὶ Κούραι.
[248] *IKnidos* 134: Δάματρι Διόκλεια Νικαγόρα, Ἀρχιδάμου γυνά.

Νικόκλεια Νικοχόρου, γυνὰ δὲ Ἀπολλοφάνευς, Δάματρι καὶ Κούραι καὶ θεοῖς τοῖς παρὰ Δάματρι εὐχάν.[249]

"Nikokleia, daughter of Nikochoros and wife of Apollophanes, offered this vow to Demeter, to Kore and to the gods accompanying Demeter".

Here Nikokleia, a married woman, dedicates not only to Demeter and Kore but also to "the gods beside Demeter" (θεοῖς τοῖς παρὰ Δάματρι), designating her act as εὐχή, a vowed offering. The phrase echoes language found later in the Knidian prayers for justice and suggests a local hierarchy of deities closely associated with Demeter and Kore, likely with strong chthonic colouring. These formulae, while rare elsewhere, recur in Knidos and appear again in Plathainis dedications. A woman named Plathainis, wife of Platon, dedicates three times in the Knidian sanctuary and her repeated activity points to a space where women regularly made formal dedications, not only participating but actively shaping the sanctuary's ritual profile. *IKnidos* I 136 and 137 retain only the dedicatory names, but the third inscription, *IKnidos* I 138 (fourth quarter of the third century BCE), offers invaluable detail:

Δάματρι καὶ Κούραι καὶ τοῖς θεοῖς τοῖς παρὰ Δάματρι καὶ
Κούραι χαριστεῖα καὶ ἐκτίματρα ἀνέθηκε Πλαθαινίς,
Πλάτωνος γυνά.[250]
"To Demeter and Kore and to the gods who are beside Demeter and Kore,
Plathainis, wife of Platon, dedicated (this) as thank-offerings and ἐκτίματρα."

The expanded invocation, again naming "the gods beside Demeter and Kore," situates the dedication within a local chthonic framework. Plathainis characterises her offering as χαριστεῖα καὶ ἐκτίματρα, a combination that stands out within the Knidian material. While χαριστεῖα is a familiar term for expressions of gratitude, ἐκτίματρα is unique to this inscription and its precise meaning remains unknown.[251] The designation therefore suggests that Plathainis intended to signal a particular ritual

[249] *IKnidos* I 135.
[250] *IKnidos* I 138.
[251] Chaniotis (2009) 62, who emphasises the uniqueness of ἐκτίματρα and surveys proposed interpretations.

nuance – perhaps a compensatory gesture, an act connected with fulfilment of an obligation, or a form of heightened veneration – but the exact nature of the term cannot be determined. Even without the accompanying object, the inscription conveys an offering framed in terms of repair, appeasement, and renewed alignment with the goddesses. *IKnidos* I 138 thus stands as a key example of women's agency within this cult: a structured, formulaic, and emphatically public act of offering, framed in language that reflects local understandings of Demeter and Kore's chthonic authority and moral oversight. A further inscription of exceptional interest is the epigrammatic dedication of Chrysina, prompted by a sacred dream:

> Κούραι καὶ Δάματρι οἶκον καὶ ἄγαλμ' ἀνέθηκεν | Χρυσογόνη[ς]
> μήτηρ, Ἱπποκράτους δὲ ἄλοχος, | Χρυσίνα, ἐννυχίαν ὄψιν
> ἰδοῦσα ἱεράν· | Ἑρμῆς γάρ νιν ἔφησε θεαῖς Ταθνηι προπολεύειν.[252]

The text supports two plausible interpretations**.** One reading understands Hermes' message as referring to Chrysogone's death, with the dream presenting her daughter's new status among the goddesses; the episode would thus function as a form of divine consolation, a pattern familiar from other Hellenistic epigrams in which dreams mediate between grief and reassurance.[253] A second interpretation understands the language in non-funerary terms, suggesting that Chrysogone is still alive and that her mother, Chrysina, has entered a sphere of sacred service or initiation after being instructed by the god Hermes in a dream.[254] Whichever interpretation is adopted, the inscription indicates a distinctive emotional dynamic. Chrysina appeals to deities who themselves embody the

[252] *IKnidos* I 131.

[253] Rigsby (2003) translates: "To Kore and Demeter the house and statue were dedicated by Chrysogone's mother, Hippocrates's wife, Chrysina, who saw a holy vision at night: for Hermes told her she is an attendant to the <dread?> goddesses." In this interpretation, Rigsby has argued that Ταθνηι should not be understood as a toponym or cult place, but as a corrupt or misunderstood adjective qualifying the goddess (or goddesses), with Hermes informing Chrysina of her daughter's role as an attendant in the afterlife rather than issuing a command; the dream thus conveys knowledge rather than vocation. Chaniotis (2009) 63 draws attention to such parallels, particularly cases where dreams serve as a bridge between the bereaved and the divine, and shows how the emotional register of this inscription resonates with a broader consolatory tradition.

[254] Dignas (2006) 77 translates: "Chrysina, the mother of Chrysogone, wife of Hippokrates, dedicated a house and votive statue to Kore and Demeter because a sacred vision had appeared to her at night, and Hermes told her to serve as priestess to the goddesses in Tathne."

experience of separation and reunion between mother and daughter, and this may explain why Demeter is named in the epigram even though the physical dedication was directed to Kore. The epigram thus situates the mother's anxiety and her hope for reassurance within a divine framework shaped by shared mythic experience, whether the threshold crossed by her daughter was death or initiation.

Alongside these dedications, the sanctuary also produced a notable group of prayers for revenge and confessional curses from the late second to early first century BCE.[255] Their linguistic proximity to the vocabulary of the true dedications (especially references to divine witness, household harmony, and accountability) helps to characterise the cultic idiom of Knidos but should not be overemphasised as examples of offering practice. These texts are not dedications in the ordinary sense, but they nonetheless demonstrate a strong female ritual presence**.** Examined together, the Knidian dedications – ranging from terse formulae to epigrammatic expressions of personal anxiety – show a sanctuary in which women's ritual presence was exceptionally dominant, and where Demeter and Kore were approached in registers that encompassed gratitude, obligation, family identity, and emotional vulnerability. They also show how local ritual idioms shaped even standard dedicatory acts. The combination of conventional votive offerings and emotionally charged dream-epigrams creates a uniquely female-centred religious landscape, one that both reflects and expands the spectrum of women's agency in Hellenistic cult.

3.4 Eileithyia's protection: dedications for childbirth and familial piety

Eileithyia, a goddess of childbirth whose origins trace back to the Bronze Age – as evidenced by her mention alongside Amnisos on a Linear B tablet from Knossos –[256] held a significant place in Greek religious practice, particularly among women confronting the dangers of pregnancy and delivery.[257] Pausanias discusses a sanctuary in Argos founded by Helen during her pregnancy: after being brought

[255] See Chaniotis (2009), who emphasises that the Knidian "prayers for justice" reveal a sanctuary in which women not only dominated the dedicatory record but also articulated emotionally charged appeals that negotiated authority, injustice, and interpersonal conflict.
[256] KN Gg 705. The Linear B tablet records the offering of a jar of honey to Eileithyia.
[257] Willetts (1958); Sourlas (2017).

to Lacedaemon, she gave birth and dedicated the site to Eileithyia, entrusting her daughter to Clytaemnestra before marrying Menelaus.[258] He also provides a vivid description of Eileithyia's iconography, which echoes themes observed in Athenian dedications. At Aegium, he describes her statue as clothed in finely woven drapery, with a wooden body and marble face, hands, and feet; one hand is outstretched, while the other holds a torch.[259] Pausanias suggests that the torch may symbolise either the fiery pangs of childbirth or the goddess' role in bringing children safely into the light, reflecting Eileithyia's dual power to both cause and relieve labour. As a Minoan deity with widespread cults across Greece, especially in Laconia and Crete, Eileithyia was regarded as a chief goddess at Lato, often associated with Hera as her daughter,[260] or Artemis (Artemis Eileithyia) in her role as a childbirth deity.[261] In epic narratives, Eileithyia aids or hinders births, embodying an ambivalent figure: in the *Iliad* she brings pain (likening labour pangs to sharp darts in 11.270), yet also facilitates birth and leads newborns to the light (16.187; 19.103), while sometimes acting under Hera's control (19.119). Her recurring epithet "μογοστόκος" encapsulates this duality.[262] In Magna Graecia Eileithyia appears in association with Hera's protective role over childbirth;[263] in Boeotia, the evidence consistently points to offerings made to Artemis Eileithyia, indicating a local fusion of the two divine figures.[264] This section focuses on Athenian dedications to the goddess, attested until the third century CE, testifying to the continuity and popularity of the cult even during the Imperial period. While my analysis concentrates on the Classical and Hellenistic material, the later dedications are noted here to show the long-lasting vitality of Eileithyia's worship in Athens. Most of these dedications were made by parents and grandparents on behalf of their children, often accompanied by statue bases depicting infants the protection of whom was sought. Related evidence, such as

[258] Paus. 2.22.6.
[259] Paus. 7.23.6.
[260] Hesiod, *Theogony,* 922.
[261] Theocitus, *Idyll.* 27.30: "CO: I tremble at giving birth; harsh is the dart of Eileithyia. DA: But your queen, Artemis, is the helper in travail" (ὠδίνειν τρομέω· χαλεπὸν βέλος Εἰληθυίης. ΔΑ. ἀλλὰ τεὴ βασίλεια μογοστόκος Ἄρτεμίς ἐστιν). In this pastoral dialogue, Theocritus shifts the epithet "μογοστόκος" from Eileithyia to Artemis, blending their roles as labour-assisting deities.
[262] Notably, Homer refers to her both in the singular (Εἰλείθυια, e.g., *Il.* 16.187; 19.103) and plural (Εἰλείθυιαι, e.g., *Il.* 11.270; 19.119), possibly reflecting a dual tradition of a single deity or multiple birth attendants under Hera's influence.
[263] Giacco and Marchetti (2017).
[264] As discussed in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

dedications of clothing for Eileithyia at Delos,[265] comparable to those offered Artemis, Hera and Athena, and terracotta figurines of pregnant women from Crete (likely thank-offerings or pleas for safe delivery)[266] further attest to the goddess's enduring role in safeguarding childbirth.

The Athenian dedications to Eileithyia provide valuable insight into familial piety and the protective functions attributed to Eileithyia. Of the thirteen dedications, dated between the early fourth century BCE and the third century CE, nine are by women, two by men and two by parents dedicating jointly.[267] The earliest known example (ca. 400-350 BCE) is a votive relief discovered in 2008, offered by a woman from Thespiai in Boeotia, whose name is illegible.[268] This relief depicts three female herms, possibly reflecting the wooden figures Pausanias noted in Eileithyia's Athenian temple,[269] and may represent the goddess in her plural form (e.g., Hom. *Il.* 11.269-272, 19.119), symbolising her multifaceted protective power over childbirth. The choice of a relief suggests a public, visual expression of gratitude or supplication, aligning with Thespiai's tradition of honouring Eileithyia. Significantly, despite her Boeotian origin, the dedicant addresses the goddess in her independent form. This may reflect her adaptation to the Athenian cultic framework, but it may also be chronological: the relief predates the Boeotian inscriptions to Artemis Eileithyia, all of which date from the late fourth to the third century BCE. Moving into third century BCE, an inscription records Philoumene, wife of Amphimachos, dedicating a statue of her infant daughter Eukoline to Eileithyia during the priesthood of Archebia.[270] The text, inscribed on a small column base with a cutting for an iron clamp to secure the statue, reflects a mother's personal appeal for her child's protection, an act typical of Athenian dedications to the goddess.[271] Fathers likewise participated in this practice. Two earlier inscriptions, from the mid-fourth and the third century BCE respectively, show men dedicating statues of their infant daughters to Eileithyia.[272] In both cases, as seen in Philoumene's dedication, the

[265] Pingiatoglou (1981).
[266] Van Straten (1981) 99 n. 172.
[267] See *IG* II³ 4 1141-1152; *AIUK* 2 no. 6; *IG* II² 4793.
[268] *IG* II/III³ 4, 1141: [– – – Θε]σπικὴ Εἰλε[ιθυίαι]. Cf. Sourlas (2017) 168-9.
[269] Paus. 1.18.5.
[270] *IG* II³.4 1144: Εὐκολίνη·Ἰλειθύαι Φιλουμένη Ἀμφιμάχου γυνὴ ἀνέθηκε, ἐπ' Ἀρχεβίας ἱερείας.
[271] *IG* II³.4 1151, a later dedication from the second century CE: Γά(ϊος) Ἰούλιος Ὀπτᾶτ[ος] τὴν ἑαυτοῦ θυ(γατέρα) [Ἰου]λίαν Ῥουφῖναν Ἰλιθυίαι χαριστήριον, [ἐπὶ] ἱερήας Ἰσιδώρας τῆ[ς]… ἐξ Αἰ[…θυ]γα[τρός].
[272] *IG* II³.4 1142-1143.

dedicator explicitly dates the offering by naming the serving priestess, a formula that recurs throughout the Athenian corpus of dedications to Eileithyia and stresses the centrality of the priestess in marking and legitimising these acts of family piety. These dedications emphasise the intimate nature of the offering: the child's statue stands as a tangible representation of the newborn placed under the goddess's protective care. A slightly later inscription (ca. 229-203 BCE) attests to a joint dedication by a father and mother from Kephale, who offered a statue of their infant son to Eileithyia. This dedication illustrates the familial dimension of the goddess's cult in Athens, where both parents sought divine protection for their child – a pattern that contrasts with the predominantly female fertility dedications at Asklepios' sanctuaries.[273] In the first century BCE Polla, a grandmother, dedicates a statue of her grandson Publius, son of Bassus, to Eileithyia, illustrating the continuity of this tradition into the Roman period among citizen families.[274] The involvement of a grandmother further emphasises the multigenerational concern for infant safety, with the statue symbolising the family's collective hope for divine safeguarding. A final inscription, *IG* II² 4793, offers a compelling example of how women could reshape conventional dedicatory language to articulate personal religious experience with unusual precision. The text reads:

> Βλαυθία Ἀλεξάνδρου
> ὑπὲρ ἑαυτῆς Εἰλειθυίῃ
> σωζούσῃ ἐπισωζούσῃ
> εὐχήν.
> "Blauthia, daughter of Alexandros, on her own behalf, dedicated this vow to Eileithyia, who saves and continues to save."

The expression ὑπὲρ ἑαυτῆς is itself noteworthy. As Jim has shown, the ὑπέρ formula normally marks the beneficiary of the divine favour sought or acknowledged, and while dedications *on behalf of*

[273] *IG* II³.4 1145: […Φ]ιλίππου Κεφαλῆθ[εν] [ὁ πατὴρ καὶ ἡ] μήτηρ Ἰλυθείαι [ἀνέθ]ηκαν.
[274] *IG* II³.4 1146: Πῶλ[λα τοῦ δεῖνος θυγά]τηρ Πόπλιον [.]ε…ὐὸν Βάσσον τὸν [ἑαυτῆς υἱ]δοῦν Εἰλειθυί[α ἀνέθηκεν].

family members are extremely common, offerings made solely on behalf of the dedicator are much rarer.[275] Blauthia's explicit specification of herself as the sole beneficiary therefore gives the inscription an unusually intimate and self-directed focus, suggesting a context of acute personal need or crisis. Even more distinctive is her participial pair σωζούσῃ ἐπισωζούσῃ, a formulation unattested elsewhere. Instead of the conventional epithet σωτείρᾳ, Blauthia chooses a dynamic, iterative construction that compresses past deliverance and hoped-for continued protection into a single intensifying expression. The vocabulary effectively creates a micro-narrative: the goddess has saved her, and she must keep saving her. As Chaniotis argues, such personalised deviations from standard dedicatory phraseology often occur in women's offerings to goddesses and convey a deliberate attempt to heighten emotional immediacy and individual agency.[276] In the broader landscape of Athenian dedications, these examples collectively demonstrate Eileithyia's enduring role in protecting newborns, the involvement of entire families in her worship, and the emotional depth of women's expressions through innovative dedicatory language.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that women's inscribed dedications to Hera, Aphrodite, Demeter, Kore, and Eileithyia encompass a wide spectrum of motives and meanings, many of which remain only partially recoverable. While Hera's dedications often relate to marriage and family, the surviving material does not always allow us to determine whether these offerings marked rites of passage, commemorated priestly service, or served broader purposes of familial display; in many cases, they likely functioned simultaneously as acts of piety and as public assertions of identity. Likewise, dedications to Aphrodite and Demeter illustrate how women moved between private concerns – sexual wellbeing, agricultural fertility, ritual participation – and the social visibility afforded by inscribing their names and familial relationships. Eileithyia's dedications, especially those involving statues of infants, focus on the

[275] Jim (2014b).
[276] Chaniotis (2009) 62.

emotional and protective dimensions of childbirth, yet even here the votive record is shaped by choices about what families wished to present publicly.

Even across these cults, women used dedications to shape personal and familial identities within communal frameworks, using them as vehicles for self-definition within the cult. Whether through the costly benefactions of figures like Echenike or the carefully crafted language of Blauthia's vow, dedications could operate as subtle forms of self-advertisement, situating female piety within networks of kinship, prestige, and civic identity. At the same time, women's visibility remained framed by the structures of patriarchal society, with many offerings mediated through family interests or shaped by local religious hierarchies. Nevertheless, the epigraphic record preserves a remarkably rich array of female voices – sometimes terse, sometimes emotive, sometimes aspirational – through which women left enduring traces of their engagement with the divine. These dedications, collectively, bring into focus not a single model of female piety but a flexible, situational spectrum of religious agency.

Chapter 4. Female agency in the Asklepian healing landscape

Women's significant involvement with healing cults and deities in the ancient Greek world is undeniable and can be seen in votive reliefs, dedications, epigraphic and literary sources. It has often been pointed out, on the basis of the many examples of votive dedications made by women, that most of these dedications are directed towards female deities.[277] There are large groups of dedications predominantly made by women to certain goddesses, while only a few examples are known of female dedications made to male gods. In this panorama of female dedications mainly dominated by goddesses, Asklepios (and his family) represents an exception, as female worshippers very frequently offered dedications to the healing god and his family (Hygieia in particular)[278] and the evidence consistently shows women's important role in this cult. This unusual presence of women's dedications to a male deity (and, in the case of Asklepios, his 'entourage', that is, his family) requires us to place dedications made in the context of healing cults in a distinct category, as they also present different motivations for the action of offering something to (and asking something of) the divinity, as well as differences in the specific objects offered.

This chapter draws on literary sources, inscriptions, and votive objects to explore how women engaged with Asklepios and his cult across different sanctuary contexts and time periods, showing not only what women asked of the god, but how their actions constructed healing sanctuaries as gendered yet accommodating religious spaces. It should nevertheless be acknowledged that Asklepios did not operate in isolation within the Greek religious landscape; the need for medical attention could be, and frequently was, addressed to a wide range of gods and heroes, such as the Hero Doctor and Amphiaraos, but also Apollo, Zeus, Aphrodite and Herakles among others.[279] The coexistence of these cults indicates that divine healing was not perceived as the exclusive prerogative of Asklepios, but rather as a shared domain in which worshippers engaged with a pluralistic and overlapping sacred

[277] In the early 20th century, McClees (1920) claimed that only six dedications by women made to Zeus alone had been found before the Roman period. Several dedications by women to Zeus from the Roman period have been found, including some statuettes of body parts usually dedicated to Asklepios as thank-offerings for the cure of diseases.
[278] See Compton (2002) on the goddess Hygieia, personification of physical health, who was mostly invoked as Asklepios' daughter, but sometimes also as the god's wife or sister.
[279] See Colosimo (2017) 30-39 for an exploration of evidence for healing among deities.

environment. Healing cults offered Greek women a uniquely flexible sphere of religious agency, one that operated differently from both domestic ritual and mainstream civic cult. Women approached Asklepios for a broad spectrum of concerns – medical, social, domestic, and emotional – and did so as active ritual agents rather than passive patients. The first obvious question that comes to mind is what made Asklepios so appealing to women. While other deities with female attributes usually worshipped by women have features that associate them with crucial moments in the lives of women (such as Eileithyia and childbirth) or are known as the protectresses of a certain category, Asklepios seems to be universally worshipped by men, women, slaves and other often marginalised social categories, such as veterans. For this reason, the god has been recognised as a deity appealing to those who were in danger of social exclusion.[280] Hughes has argued that anatomical votives show the perception of pain and illness as a form of fragmentation and dismemberment of the body, claiming that the cure performed by the deity and the subsequent healing can be seen as a form of reintegration.[281] More recently, Scott has argued that healing tales support this interpretation, presenting illness as a process of fragmentation and disaggregation that is overcome through divine intervention, with healing functioning as "a procedure of somatic and social integration"; one example provided is the tale from Epidauros of a young slave praying to Asklepios to fix his master's broken cup, symbolising both the "illness" and the fragmentation: as the cup is "healed", the boy's social identity is also reconstituted.[282] Women coming as suppliants to Asklepios for infertility and pregnancy issues, according to Scott, went through a similar process: "cures at the temple find female suppliants in a state of socio-physical disability and marginalisation and transform them into normative models: mothers of healthy (mostly male) children".[283] This interpretation builds on King's work on the medicalisation of the female body,[284] but adds a social-religious dimension through the lens of literary metaphor and sanctuary experience.

[280] A. Klonizaki*, Social Groups and the Cult of Asklepios*, delivered at the Swedish Institute at Athens 'Athens Greek Religion Seminar', 5/05/2021.
[281] Hughes (2008) 25-61.
[282] *IG* IV².1 121 ll. 79-89. See Scott (2018).
[283] Scott (2018) 335.
[284] King (1998); King (2018).

The body of evidence examined in this chapter includes the healing tales known as *iamata*, temple inventories, anatomical votives, and inscribed offerings of various kinds. While the focus remains on the Classical and Hellenistic periods, occasional reference is made to Roman-era material where it illuminates patterns of continuity in cult practice. For example, some anatomical votives from later sanctuaries, such as those dedicated at the shrine of Zeus Hypsistos, reflect longstanding traditions of healing dedications, but are not central to the analysis presented here. The main collections of *iamata* known to us are those from Epidauros and Lebena; the former is a group of four stelae inscribed on the same occasion, dated to the latter part of the fourth century BCE,[285] while the tales from Lebena, which were not collected at the same time, are spread over a longer period, ranging from the end of the third century BCE to the third century CE (although the majority of them are dated to the second century BCE).[286] The Epidaurian *iamata* were collected and re-inscribed together by, presumably, the sanctuary's personnel, presenting therefore a coherent style throughout the text.[287] The Epidaurian collection thus does not represent the singular views of the dedicants, making this evidence less amenable to identifying the worshippers' perception and feelings; furthermore, it is almost impossible to date the original inscriptions before they were re-inscribed on the same stelae.[288] By contrast, the accounts from Lebena offer a clearer glimpse of the dedicants' "voices", as will become clear in the following analysis.

The temple inventories were also collected by the personnel of the sanctuary and then set up on the temple's walls so that they were visible to everyone. These inventories – especially the one from the Athenian Asklepieion, which lists dedications from the mid-fourth to late second century BCE – [289] have proven to be particularly useful for quantitative statistical analyses of the types of objects dedicated by women and men, but in almost every case they do not report anything more than the object and the name of the dedicant; they do not record, for example, the reason or the occasion behind

[285] LiDonnici (1995) 17. See below for a discussion of chronological issues and dating of the tales.
[286] Edelstein and Edelstein (1945) 426, 439-442; Girone (1998) 75-135.
[287] According to LiDonnici (1995) this happened during the process of renovation and expansion of the temple which was transformed into a Panhellenic shrine.
[288] LiDonnici (1995) pointed out that "the corpus had a long history of collection, arrangement and redaction".
[289] Aleshire (1989).

the gesture. This can sometimes be inferred, especially in the case of anatomical votives, which can indicate, at least vaguely, the condition suffered by the dedicants that triggered their request for help. The absence of explanations regarding the circumstances of the dedication does not allow us to determine the proportion of thank-offerings versus preliminary offerings in the inventory.[290] Other dedications, votive objects and reliefs therefore constitute an important evidence base documenting, in most cases, the circumstances behind the donations and allowing us to study another aspect of dedicatory practice.

4.1 Literary representations of women in Asklepian ritual

Women's involvement in the cult of Asklepios is also vividly attested in literary sources. Herodas' mime IV, entitled 'The women dedicating and sacrificing to Asklepios' (Ἀσκληπιῶι ἀνατιθεῖσαι καὶ θυσιάζουσαι) offers a striking portrayal of female ritual engagement in what is likely – though not certainly – the Asklepieion of Kos.[291] The mime, set in the third century BCE, opens with two women, accompanied only by their female slaves, entering the sanctuary to offer a cock and a *pinax* as humble thank-offerings to Asklepios, referred to here as Paion. As they approach the *naos*, the women pause, awestruck by the splendour surrounding them. Herodas lingers on their marvelling gaze as they take in the sanctuary's dazzling visual landscape: gleaming marble statues of men, women, and children; intricate votive tablets hung on sacred walls; and rows of richly decorated reliefs and offerings arranged along the *temenos*. These dedications, left by grateful worshippers, testify to the god's widespread veneration and the profound hopes invested in his powers. The *neokoros*, or temple guardian, is then summoned to oversee the ritual, confirming the sacrifice's favourable reception and offering prayers not only for the women but also for their husbands and households.

Scholars have suggested that Herodas may be drawing attention to the opulence of the Kos sanctuary – by the Hellenistic period, likely brimming with elite dedications and known across the Aegean.[292] The episode, however, is interesting for several reasons: first, the women travel to the

[290] See Jim (2012) on the difference between these two types of offerings.
[291] Skinner (2001).
[292] Oliver (1934).

sanctuary alone, bringing with them only female slaves, which suggests that they could act independently. Secondly, one woman invokes not only Asklepios but also members of his divine household, demonstrating the importance of his familial cult in the broader Asklepieion ritual landscape. Notably, the exact reason for the offering is left vague: we know it is a thank-offering for diseases that were healed, as one of the women declares at the beginning of the mime. The objects dedicated – a sacrificial cock and a tablet (*pinax*) – are presented as modest gifts, in contrast to the luxurious surroundings.[293] In this context, the *pinax* is also an instructive example of the type of material under consideration: most such tablets in healing sanctuaries were likely made of wood – relatively inexpensive and perishable – reminding us of how much of this category of offering has disappeared archaeologically. Even if the social realism of the dialogue has been challenged – Skinner reads the women's literary allusions and aesthetic opinions as parodic, reflecting not real rural women but a comic exaggeration – the mime nonetheless captures core elements of ritual behaviour.[294] If the dialogues cannot be considered reliable indicators of the social status or inner thoughts of female worshippers, Herodas' description still isolates several features central to women's participation in the cult: independent pilgrimage, offering practices, and engagement with the divine household of Asklepios. Rather than providing a literal ethnographic account, the mime offers a stylised but informative representation of behaviour that is consistent with what we can reconstruct from epigraphic and archaeological evidence. In this sense, Herodas' vignette situates female ritual action within the broader Asklepieion environment, pointing toward patterns – such as modest offerings, familial devotion, and women's active presence in healing sanctuaries – that can be examined more securely through the material record.

[293] "χαίροις, ἄναξ Παίον, ὃς μέδεις Τρίκκης καὶ Κῶν γλυκεῖαν κὴπίδαυρον ᾤκηκας σὺν καὶ Κορωνὶς ἥ σ'ἔτικτε κὠπολλων χαίροιεν, ἧς τε χειρί δεξιῇ ψαύεις Ὑγίεια, χὤνπερ οἵδε τίμιοι βωμοί, Πανάκη τε κὴπιω´ τε κὶησὼ χαίροι, χοὶ Λεωμέδοντος οἰκίην τε κὰι τείχεα πέρσαντες, ἰητῆρες ἀργίων νούσων Ποδαλείριός τε καὶ Μαχάων χαίροντων"; text from Herodas *Mimiambs,* ed. Zanker, (Oxford 2009). The importance of the family of Asklepios is also confirmed by archaeological evidence attesting the presence of areas for preliminary sacrifices for the members of the family, whose names are inscribed on the altars: Melfi (2007) 28-29.

[294] Skinner (2001) 221. Skinner pointed out the allusions to women poets (in particular Anyte and Nossis, writers of epigrams) in the dialogues between the two women, highlighting "the parody of dedicatory epigrams" and the "incongruous attribution of academic opinions on art to poor rural women".

While Herodas offers an insight into female ritual performance in the Hellenistic period, Aristophanes provides a comic but instructive glimpse into incubation rituals during the late Classical period. A very detailed description of the practice of incubation in the Athenian Asklepieion can be found in Aristophanes' *Plutus,* first performed in 388 BCE. Here, while the patients are lying down and sleeping in the temple, Asklepios prepares a cure using medical instruments and ingredients described in medical treatises.[295] In this scene of the play, all suppliants, men and women, are lying together in the temple, sharing the same spaces and taking part in the cult in the same way, performing the same role. The building where people practiced incubation was undoubtedly one of the most important areas of every healing sanctuary, and Aristophanes' description reflects the centrality of this ritual. The reality, however, might have looked a little different from the scene in the play. The sources we have on incubation practice do not show substantial differences between men and women in the activity of sleeping in the temple, but the archaeological and epigraphic evidence suggests that they may not have shared the same spaces. The last section of a dossier of regulations concerning cult practice from the sanctuary of Amphiaraos at Oropos, dated to the beginning of the fourth century BCE, contains precise rules regarding those incubating in the dormitory, stating that men and women should sleep in separate rooms, respectively in the areas to the east and to the west of the altar.[296] Rather than being an exceptional measure, such separation was likely standard practice in healing sanctuaries – indeed, more plausible as a normative arrangement than Aristophanes' comic depiction.

A later source from the sanctuary of Asklepios in Pergamon, conventionally dated to the second century CE,[297] provides valuable insights into the continuity and evolution of ritual practices within healing cults.[298] The inscription's detailed rules on incubation and sacrificial conduct, despite its later date, attest to enduring traditions and social norms surrounding gendered spaces and behaviours within the sanctuary. Pergamon's Asklepieion was one of the major healing centres of the

[295] Arist. *Plutus* (660-747). For a discussion of the ingredients of Asklepios' recipe see Totelin (2016) 297-303, who argues that Aristophanes might have had access to medical treatises now lost. See also Hobe (2018) 179-189.
[296] *LSCG* 69 ll. 43-47. This is the only evidence of sexual segregation in a healing sanctuary.
[297] Wörrle (1969), who dates the surviving copies to the second century CE on palaeographic grounds while arguing that they reproduce a Hellenistic original.
[298] *IvP* III 161A; see Petsalis-Diomidis (2010) 222-231 for an English translation and discussion.

Roman Imperial period, renowned for its extensive medical facilities and elaborate cult practices.[299] This text helps to shed light on long-term ritual frameworks that likely had their roots in earlier practices, thereby enriching our understanding of the cult's development across time. The set of regulations provides detailed instructions regarding incubation and refers to a designated 'sleeping area' (τὸ ἐγκοιμητήριον), though it does not explicitly mention any gender segregation within this space. However, the same inscription mandates abstinence from sexual intercourse – as well as from goat meat and cheese, interestingly – in the three days prior to sleeping in the temple.[300] Given the emphasis on ritual purity and order**,** and in line with the evidence from Oropos, it would be surprising if men and women were not separated during incubation; such a division was likely the expected norm, even if left implicit here.

4.2 Healing narratives and the ritual logic of incubation

A different kind of evidence emerges when we turn from comedy and ritual regulations to the healing narratives themselves. The healing tales (*iamata*), mostly compiled by priests or temple attendants, do not offer direct access to the voices and inner thoughts of female dedicants, yet they nonetheless provide compelling glimpses into their behaviour, needs, and agency. In the case of Epidauros, four inscribed stelae preserve a range of miracles attributed to the god.[301] Women appear less frequently than men in these narratives (e.g., in Stele A: 3 women, 17 men; in Stele B: 8 women, 15 men), but their stories are no less striking. Some tales are vivid and unsettling, even grotesque in their bodily detail – especially those from Stele B, which LiDonnici suggests may have been intended to awe or frighten the reader; some of the tales are also paired for content similarity: the first two regard pregnancies, the third and fourth concern impiety.[302]

LiDonnici has argued that although precise dating of individual *iamata* is not possible, stylistic and structural analysis allows for a relative chronology; she identifies three main groups – early,

[299] Tozan (2024). Paus. 2.26.8 reports that a certain Archias brought the cult of Asklepios to Pergamon after being healed at Epidauros.
[300] *IvP* III 161A 11-15.
[301] *IG* IV².1 121-124. Individual tales are cited following LiDonnici (1995).
[302] LiDonnici (1995).

middle, and late – based on features such as narrative length, use of personal names, and increasing formalisation.[303] These patterns suggest a degree of development over time, though the entire corpus likely spans less than a century. Early tales are typically short and formulaic, often omitting names or background details, while later accounts tend to be longer, more vivid, and include personal names, places of origin, and moralising elements.[304] For instance, simple cures such as the healing of a limp or a swollen abdomen contrast with more elaborate stories like that of Hermon, who is blinded again for failing to offer thanks, or Kaphisias, mocked for laughing at the god's remedies.[305] The evolution toward a standard narrative structure – problem, incubation, dream, cure, and offering – alongside the inclusion of divine punishments and exemplary behaviour, suggests a shift from minimal miracle-recording to more didactic and persuasive storytelling. Importantly, even the earliest tales appear to postdate the major fourth-century building phases at the sanctuary, indicating that this narrative tradition was a later cultic development rather than an original feature of worship at Epidauros.[306]

Amid mythologised strangeness, we also catch moments of deeply human emotion and ritual performance. Two tales in particular highlight women as independent religious actors. One recounts the healing of Arata, a young girl suffering from severe fluid retention. Rather than Arata herself undergoing incubation, it is her mother who sleeps within the sanctuary, keeping vigil overnight on her daughter's behalf. Her act conveys both maternal devotion and religious confidence – believing that by interceding through ritual, she could move the god to heal her daughter. Another tale describes Kallikrateia, who turns to Asklepios not for healing of the body, but to locate a treasure hidden by her husband. Her story blurs the line between medicine and divine arbitration. Why did she come to the god of healing for such a non-medical matter? Perhaps it was Asklepios' reputation as a reliable divine fixer, or simply the sanctuary's accessibility and local prestige. Whatever the reason, Kallikrateia's tale reminds us that sanctuaries could address not just physical ailments, but broader existential

[303] LiDonnici (1995) 76-82.
[304] LiDonnici (1995) 80, summarises these features in schematic form, noting that while exceptions and cross-category cases exist, these general characteristics define the three basic groups. She also observes that some tales were collected not long after their origin, reflecting an evolving narrative tradition rather than fixed, ancient compositions.
[305] LiDonnici (1995) B2, B16.
[306] LiDonnici (1995) 82.

anxieties – from health and fertility to wealth and justice. Although relatively uncommon, this is not the only case: another example is the Epidaurian tale regarding a slave with the broken cup, as discussed above (p.115).[307]

The woman also takes part in ritual incubation, after having sacrificed the 'customary things'. The ritual of incubation (ἐγκοίμησις) recurs throughout the *iamata* for both male and female suppliants and formed the central therapeutic practice of the Asklepieion. Typically, the temple stood close to a spring whose waters were used for drinking, bathing, and libations, and were likely integrated into the preparatory phases of the incubation ritual.[308] The most important architectural feature of these sanctuaries was the incubation hall, known by various term, including ἐγκοιμητήριον ("place for sleeping within") and, at Epidauros, ἄβατον ("not to be trodden"), a structure that appears never to have been absent from Asklepieia. It was here that suppliants, after performing the required sacrifices, lay down to sleep and await divine intervention. Women, like men, would spend the night within this sacred space, anticipating a revelatory dream. In these dreams, Asklepios might appear beside their pallet, performing a miraculous surgery, whispering instructions, or placing healing hands upon their body. Descriptions of these dreams are formulaic but consistently portray the god's intervention as immediate and effective, highlighting incubation's central role in the healing process. Such dream experiences formed part of a broader Greek tradition in which dreams were considered significant channels for divine communication – so much so that dream interpretation became a respected discipline. In the second century CE, Artemidorus of Daldis authored the *Oneirocritica*, the only complete Greek dream manual extant, presenting dream analysis as an empirical, culturally grounded practice.[309] Most healing stories associated with women centre on pregnancy and childbirth – seven out of fifteen women's tales in Epidauros involve such concerns. The god is often invoked to assist in conception, protect a pregnancy, or ensure safe delivery. Yet the sanctuary's boundaries also

[307] *IG* IV².1 121 ll. 79-89.
[308] Sanctuaries of Asklepios were frequently located near sources of fresh water, and although the presence of water was not absolutely essential, it was a consistent and significant feature of the healing environment. All sanctuaries also had sacrificial areas.
[309] On dreams in antiquity, see Harris (2009).

imposed limits: the god frequently commands pregnant women to leave the precinct to give birth, reaffirming the ritual impurity of childbirth and the sacredness of the space.

Men's inscriptions are significantly more numerous across all three stelae – a disparity that may reflect both the larger number of male visitors to the sanctuary and the greater likelihood that men's ailments, including those linked to civic and military life, were deemed worthy of public record – and reflect a wider range of ailments, including paralysis, partial and total blindness, ulcers, wounds, headaches, consumption, epilepsy, and even divine punishments for impiety.[310] Many of these healings occurred through incubation, frequently involving animals – particularly snakes, and occasionally dogs and geese – emphasising visible, physical cures.[311] Several male dedications also include episodes in which moral failings provoke divine punishment, such as Hermon's second blinding or Kaphisias' chastisement already mentioned. These narratives highlight themes of divine justice and reciprocal piety.[312] By contrast, although women's dedications are fewer in number, they reflect a somewhat narrower thematic scope, with a strong emphasis on fertility, pregnancy, and childbirth – but not exclusively so. Alongside these reproductive concerns, women also sought healing for various other ailments, including blindness, dropsy, stomach pain, and tumours. While incubation appears in stories of both men and women and snakes often feature as "agents" of healing, the dedication of objects is less commonly mentioned for either gender. While both men and women undergo similar healing rituals, male inscriptions generally portray a broader spectrum of afflictions, whereas female accounts are more likely to frame healing within the context of familial roles and fertility.

Evidence from other Asklepieia, such as that of Lebena in Crete, adds a comparative dimension to the picture emerging from Epidauros. While these sites differ regionally, certain patterns in female healing dedications recur. The tales from Lebena (*IC* I XVII), although fewer and more

[310] See LiDonnici (1995) 84-131.
[311] For instance, LiDonnici (1995) A17, A30, B6, B13, B23.
[312] LiDonnici (1995) B2, B16.

fragmentary, sometimes offer a more direct connection to women's voices.[313] One remarkable inscription preserves a woman's own words as she describes healing from a finger ulcer. She writes in the first person, stating that Asklepios ordered her to inscribe his miracles – testimony to the blending of divine command and personal devotion.[314] As LiDonnici has noted, the *iamata* from Lebena, which likely date to the Hellenistic period (third to second centuries BCE), reflect an established literary tradition shaped by the earlier Epidauros model.[315] Though shorter and less formally structured than their Epidauros counterparts, these tales still reproduce key features – dream healing, snake imagery, moral framing – highlighting the diffusion and local adaptation of Asklepian healing narratives.[316] Though many other tales from Lebena survive only in fragments, they often mention the presence of snakes in healing – an echo of the god's chthonic, regenerative powers (*IC* I XVII 10b, *IC* I XVII 12b). One of the more curious stories from Lebena involves not a woman but a man: Phalaris, aged fifty, who appeals to Asklepios because he remains childless.[317] The healing, however, is not performed on Phalaris himself, but on his wife, who undergoes incubation in his stead. As in the Epidauros tales, Phalaris' wife is ordered to leave the sanctuary immediately after the healing dream – again, a subtle reminder of the sanctuary's ritual boundaries. This offers an instructive parallel – but also a contrast – to the Epidaurian tale of Arata, whose mother sleeps in the sanctuary on her daughter's behalf. In both cases, incubation is delegated to a close relative, showing that the ritual could, in certain circumstances, be carried out by a proxy. Yet the underlying logic differs: in Arata's case, the

[313] Unlike the free-standing stelae at Epidauros, the Lebena *iamata* were inscribed directly on the walls of a stoa adjacent to the temple, resulting in fragmentary preservation.
[314] *IC* I XVII 19 (9-12): Ἰδοῦσαν δέ με πλείονας ἀρετὰ[ς τοῦ θεοῦ καθ ὕπν]ον [ἀν]αγράφειν ὁ θεὸ[ς ἐκελευσε τὰς ὄψ]εισ[…].
[315] LiDonnici (1995) 46-49.
[316] LiDonnici (1995) 47-48 emphasises several contrasts and parallels between the Lebena and Epidaurian tales. Both collections begin accounts with the suppliant's name, father's name, and hometown, and utilise formulaic language describing incubation and cures. However, Lebena uniquely incorporates specific pharmacological elements – such as named plants (lettuce, laurel, chestnut, myrtle) and medical devices like the cupping glass – which do not appear explicitly in the Epidaurian *iamata*, where only general terms for "herbs" occur. This difference may reflect developments in healing practices and expectations over time, or regional variations in cultic activity. LiDonnici suggests that as the cult of Asklepios matured and became more widely experienced by the populace, the "fantastical" or mythologised elements of healing dreams may have been tempered, replaced by more pragmatic and medicalised narratives. The Lebena inscriptions, collected from wooden votives and redacted into a coherent corpus, probably reflect this later stage of cult development, incorporating evolving religious, medical, and social elements. In contrast, Epidauros' *iamata*, with their broader geographic range of dedicants and longer chronological depth, present a more heterogeneous and evolving tradition, likely reflecting multiple phases of cult growth and even a shift from Apollo to Asklepios as the principal deity.
[317] *IC* I XVII 9.

substitution is practical, since a young child could not perform the ritual herself; in the Lebena inscription, by contrast, the substitution reflects cultural expectations surrounding fertility, in which the woman's body is treated as the focus of reproductive diagnosis and treatment. In both narratives, kinship forms the medium through which healing is mediated, but the reasons for delegating incubation – care for an incapacitated child versus assumptions about female reproductive responsibility – are distinct. These two cases together suggest that proxy-incubation was acceptable within Asklepian ritual, but that it was motivated by different social and medical frameworks depending on the context.

The request for children is a common motif in Epidaurian tales, but we never see men involved. There are, however, attestations of men asking about infertility and children in an oracular context.[318] Lack of children was undoubtedly a concern for men too, as testified by the numerous questions to the oracle of Zeus at Dodona regarding how to have offspring; all these questions, however, seem to be focused in particular on whether the wife of the enquirer will be able to provide him with children or not, and consequently the enquirer would sometimes also interrogate the oracle on the possibility of success if taking another wife.[319] Phalaris' case is illuminating. We do not know whether the woman was travelling alone to the sanctuary or not, but this tale seems to suggest the involvement of Phalaris' wife alone at least in the healing process. Even when men express concern over fertility, the therapeutic burden falls primarily on women. In this way, the god is effectively absolving Phalaris, as he is presented as not responsible for the inability of the couple to have children, for which his wife must be "blamed". This reflects prevailing Greek medical thought: although male infertility was acknowledged in theory, all diagnostic focus and treatment fell on the woman's body.[320] The female body in Classical Greek medicine was often constructed as inherently pathological, with conditions like infertility seen as disruptions of women's natural state. A key belief was that women's health depended on successful reproduction, encapsulated in the idea that

[318] Scott (2018) 331.
[319] Such as *SEG* 24.454a; on other questions regarding lack of children at Dodona see Parker (2016) 79-80, who reported many examples.
[320] Flemming (2013) 570-571.

pregnancy ensured health, reflecting both traditional social views and innovative medical theories.[321] The Hippocratic corpus, Aristotle, and Diocles of Carystus mention the male contribution to conception, yet in practice, their remedies were overwhelmingly directed at women.[322] These cultural perceptions likely drove women to seek Asklepios' divine intervention, as evidenced by the high number of fertility-related *iamata*. In this light, Asklepios appears not only as a healer of female reproductive disorders but as a divine arbiter of social expectations. Fertility was a woman's social duty; failure to produce children was her burden to bear. Even when men sought divine assistance, it was the wife who entered the sanctuary, lay upon the sacred bed, received the god's vision, and was ultimately healed. This pattern – of women bearing the physical and ritual responsibility for reproductive success – sheds light on why Asklepios loomed so large in their religious landscape.

A fragmentary third-century BCE inscription from Delphi records an unusual dedication to Apollo celebrating a pair of miraculous childbirths, which scholars have interpreted as reflecting wider healing cult traditions, including those of Asklepios.[323] The poem describes a woman who, after earlier miscarriages and painful pregnancies, successfully gives birth to a daughter through the god's intervention. The child, whose parents named her Delphis "in memory of the Delphians," is said to have been carried for an extended eleven-month pregnancy and to have been born healthy, already possessing hair reaching down to her eyes, which grew to her breast within the first year. As Weinreich observes, the rapid hair growth belongs to a well-established class of ancient "hair-miracles," often associated with divine favour. The continuation of the poem is more uncertain. Because the left portion of the stone is lost, several restorations are debated, but most editors accept that a second girl is born and receives a name connected with Pytho. The corresponding miracle echoes the first: the second child likewise displays exceptionally long hair, said to reach as far as her

[321] King (2018); Hanson (1990) 318-320.

[322] On infertility, ancient medical writers overwhelmingly attribute responsibility to the woman. This view is found across a wide range of sources: Aristotle (*Historia Animalium* 9.6, 585b9–29; and the whole of *HA* 10; *Generation of Animals* 727b–728a; 746b16–747a22); the Hippocratic Corpus (*Nature of Women* 1; *On Sterile Women* 1–3); Diocles of Carystus (frs. 42–43); and Soranus (*Gynaecology* 1.14–18).

[323] *SEG* 3.400. Weinreich (1925) provides the fullest discussion of the inscription's fragmentary state, the proposed supplements and the wider phenomenon of ancient hair-miracles. LiDonnici (1995, 45-46**)** has observed parallels between this Delphic miracle story and the Epidaurian miracle inscriptions of Asklepios, particularly in the language of thanksgiving and the emphasis on divine intervention in childbirth.

knees. The stele concludes with the performance of vows and the dedication of the poem as a memorial, most plausibly for the mother, since she alone is securely affected by both miracles. Despite its Apolline setting, the narrative displays close affinities with the Epidaurian *iamata*. Weinreich has noted that its motifs – painless childbirth, extended pregnancy, rapid infant development, and divine demand for a thank-offering – find their closest parallels in the healing aretalogies of Asklepios.[324] The Delphic text thus demonstrates how the language and structure of miraculous healing narratives could circulate beyond Asklepieia, shaping the commemorative strategies of other sanctuaries.

4.3 Material expressions of healing: inventories, anatomical votives, and votive reliefs

Beyond narrative texts, material evidence from sanctuaries further brings to light patterns in gendered religious expression. Inventories of dedications, in particular, offer an important quantitative and qualitative perspective. The inventories from the Athenian Asklepieion, thoroughly examined by Sara Aleshire in two studies,[325] provide the opportunity to study dedications from a different perspective, as they record lists of objects left by people of different social groups, genders and families. These inventories are all dated to the fourth century BCE, a period in which the cult of Asklepios in Athens had become fully integrated into civic religious life following its introduction in 420/419 BCE. The inventories themselves span from ca. 350 BCE down into the 320s BCE, and they provide a unique snapshot of Athenian devotional practice during the later Classical period. Aleshire noted a higher proportion of women dedicants in the inventories, registering for the five inventories a total of 51% of women's dedications, 45% of men's dedications, and 2% of couples'; she also highlighted the great discrepancies from year to year among different inventories – for instance, in some priesthoods there is a much higher proportion of female dedicants (80%), while in others a lower proportion (33%).[326] It should be noted, however, that several names, of both men and women, appear multiple times, and there is therefore a chance that the same person dedicated objects on different occasions. The name of

[324] Weinreich (1925).
[325] See Aleshire (1989) and Aleshire (1991).
[326] Aleshire (1989) 45-46.

Malthake, for instance, can be found three times in the same inventory (Inventory III, dated between 341 and 328 BCE),[327] dedicating a cup and a certain number of drachmas (the figure on the stele is impossible to read). The absence of patronymics, which might be a specific choice of the compilers, makes it difficult to identify whether in these cases the inventories mention the same person or not. Furthermore, in some cases the inscription is too fragmentary for the name of the dedicant to be read, and on other occasions the name is simply missing. Therefore, those statistical analyses aiming to quantify the number of dedications for each sex in the Asklepieion inventories cannot be as reliable as we would want; what we can assert, however, is the substantial presence of both men and women in the sanctuary. Sometimes we find the same dedicant offering multiple identical votives, like Glykera, offering three bodies (σώματα);[328] Van Straten pointed out that there might be several explanations of this practice: one person could be dedicating on behalf of herself and someone else, or the votives might have been dedicated at different times, perhaps some before and some after the cure.[329]

A more fruitful study can be carried out by analysing the objects dedicated by each sex and trying to establish patterns in different categories of objects left by men, women and couples. As Aleshire noted, in the inventory there are no objects which can be exclusively attributed to one sex, despite the prevalence of certain categories of dedications for men – coins, crowns, cult equipment – and, likewise, for women – jewellery and anatomical votives.[330] If we look at the objects dedicated by women in the inventories, we find drachmas,[331] *typoi*,[332] silver and bronze cups, tablets, reliefs and jewels, but the most numerous objects are without any doubt anatomical body parts. These were also dedicated by men, but less frequently, at least according to these inventories. While the higher number of objects such as crowns and coins dedicated by men can be seen as related to their civic life, and it is also not surprising that jewellery is mostly associated with female supplicants, it is less obvious why

[327] Aleshire (1989) 127-134, III.
[328] *IG* II^2 1534 B 271.
[329] Van Straten (1981) 112.
[330] Aleshire (1989) 46.
[331] Interestingly, coins appear to be much more frequently dedicated by women in Inventory III (compiled between 341/0 BCE and 329/8 BCE) and are less common in Inventory IV and V (compiled over the course of the 3rd century BCE), where we find a clear prevalence of anatomical votives.
[332] Small statuettes showing the dedicant in the act of worshipping the deity. See Aleshire (1989) 43.

there seems to be a clear prevalence of body parts offered by women. Some of this difference in the types of offerings might plausibly be due to financial constraints, and some, though not all, of the body parts may have been made from less expensive materials.

Anatomical votives are also the only dedications that we find exclusively associated with Asklepios and other deities invoked for medical treatment, while other types of offerings such as coins, clothes and jewels are also commonly found in other sanctuaries.[333] Some reliefs representing mostly female body parts, though dated significantly later, to the first to third centuries CE, were also found in the sanctuary of Zeus Hypsistos, evidently suggesting the healing nature of the sanctuary.[334] Although much later than the Athenian inventories, these Roman-era examples show the long continuity of anatomical votives as a ritual language of healing, a tradition that continued into Late Antiquity and found echoes in later Christian ex-voto practices, though the nature and meaning of these offerings changed significantly over time.

These dedications can give an indication of the reason why the deity was thanked or invoked; clearly, anatomical votives can be easily linked to diseases and conditions involving the specific part of the body they represent, such as an arm or a leg. The frequency of votives representing breasts and genitalia, in particular, aligns with the way Greek medical texts conceptualised the female body as primarily defined by its reproductive function.[335] Women's medical identity was strongly tied to fertility, pregnancy, and gynaecological health, and this framework is reflected in the anatomical offerings found in healing sanctuaries. The predominance of dedications of eyes even led to the hypothesis of a particular role of the Athenian Asklepios as "successful oculist", and to the idea of the specialisation of each local sanctuary of Asklepios in a particular category of diseases.[336] In a recent paper, Oberhelman has argued, on the basis of the anatomical votives that have been found in each location examined in his paper, that several healing centres in antiquity specialised in the cure of

[333] See Hughes (2017) 25-61, a complete study of anatomical votives in Classical Greece.
[334] Forsén (1993) 515-516; Parker (2005).
[335] Dean-Jones (1996) offers a detailed analysis of how ancient Greek medical thought understood the female body – especially its reproductive functions such as menstruation and fertility – and how these theories shaped attitudes toward women's health.
[336] Van Straten (1981) 149-150; Aleshire (1989) 42.

specific ailments.[337] So, the 145 hands and, in general, the high number of appendages and limbs in the offerings from the sanctuary of Asklepios in Corinth may be related to the agricultural lifestyle of the suppliants, involving lots of walking and manual labour, and likewise the high number of genitalia (52) in the same sanctuary might indicate that the sanctuary in Corinth was the healing centre for sexually transmitted diseases.[338] These hypotheses are certainly attractive, but remain unproven given the uneven survival of material in archaeological contexts: for this conclusion to be considered valid, as van Straten underlined, we must arbitrarily assume that the sample of offerings we have from each sanctuary is representative of the pattern of dedications left in the shrine, but we know that in most archaeological contexts the survival of certain objects rather than others is entirely fortuitous.[339] Furthermore, the hypothesis of sanctuary specialisation may overemphasise medical specificity, as the prevalence of genitalia votives could instead reflect cultural anxieties about female fertility.

Neither the votives mentioned in epigraphical records nor the ones which have survived give precise indications of the reason why they were dedicated, and it becomes quite challenging to give a meaning to the various items offered.[340] This lack of clarity has not stopped scholars from formulating hypotheses in order to explain the meaning of these dedications: jaws and teeth for abscesses and caries; breasts for fertility and milk supply; genitalia in the hope for future children or for sexual difficulties; bodies in the hope for general health.[341] Most of these certainly look plausible, even though the general uncertainty about their real meaning remains and we may never have a firm answer. Most anatomical votives appear to have been made in silver, but there are a few examples of gold votives in the Athenian Asklepieion's inventory. Van Straten has suggested a different meaning behind the dedication depending on the material: "did they dedicate the silver one as a prayer, and at the same time promise to offer gold ones when their prayer would be granted and the cure

[337] Oberhelman (2014).
[338] Oberhelman (2014) 50.
[339] Van Straten (1981) 150.
[340] Van Straten (1981) 150 pointed out that "More specific information, in the form of a realistic or at least recognisable rendering of the symptoms of the disease, is found in very few instances only".
[341] Aleshire (1989) 40-42.

effected?".[342] Such material distinctions may also reflect the economic status and social aspirations of dedicants during a period marked by continued political instability and shifting civic dynamics in post-imperial Athens – particularly in the decades following the Peloponnesian War and amidst the growing influence of Macedon. In this context, dedicating certain objects – especially more elaborate or costly ones – may have served not only a religious function but also have signalled a desire for visibility and social reintegration.

Another particularly illuminating example of medical votive practice appears in an Athenian decree from 220/19 BCE (*IG* II³.1 1154), concerning the sanctuary of the Hero Doctor (Ἥρως ἰατρός).[343] The decree outlines a state-supervised effort to melt down accumulated silver and gold dedications in the sanctuary to create a new oinochoe (wine-pourer) as a formal offering. This process, known in Athenian accounting as *kathairesis* – the ritual "cleaning up" or renewal of temple assets – was a periodic administrative act that made space in the sanctuary while reaffirming communal piety. The decree also mandates that a list of all dedicants and the items offered be inscribed on a stone stele, a telling example of how personal religious acts could become part of public, civic record. The resulting inventory exhibits distinctive patterns that mirror those seen in the better-known inventories from the Asklepieion at Athens. The list includes nineteen named dedicants – ten men and nine women – but women are far more active overall. One woman, Kallistion, appears no fewer than eight times, suggesting that she either offered repeatedly or that dedications were attributed to her across a span of time or family networks. As in the case of the Asklepieion, this might indicate that women were not only frequent recipients of healing but also more likely than men to fulfil vows and record thanks through votives.[344] In both sanctuaries, women's religious agency – particularly in the realm of health – is clearly foregrounded, and their dedications are a key source for understanding female participation in public cult. In terms of form, anatomical votives appear less prominently in this

[342] Van Straten (1980) 112.
[343] *IG* II³.1 1154. On the cult of Heros Iatros, attested not only in Athens, but also at Eleusis, Marathon and Rhamnous, with different names (which could suggest that there were several heroes worshipped with the same attribute) see Kearns (1989) 171-172; Lawton (2017) 86-89; and Dow (1985).
[344] Dow (1985) concludes: "But the fact is that, whether women were ill more often, and/or had more faith in the deity, they did spend more money on health than men did".

inventory than abstract "models" (*typoi*), which dominate the list. Unlike inscribed statue bases or reliefs, the *typoi* recorded in the inventories are not described as bearing inscriptions. Indeed, the inventories regularly note inscriptions when these occur, for example by recording the inscribed weight of silver vessels, but no comparable remarks accompany the *typoi.* Their association with individual worshippers therefore depends not on texts carried by the objects themselves but on the administrative act of recording the dedication in the sanctuary inventory. A few anatomical items stand out: eyes (e.g., those dedicated by Kteson, Lamidion, and Philostrate), thighs or thigh-bones (by Xenokles and Spinther). In both the Asklepieion and the Hero Doctor's sanctuary, the recurrence of anatomical and typological votives illustrates the same core ritual logic: the physical body – especially in its suffering and restoration – was offered up to the divine through representation. This Athenian inscription thus not only attests the continuing importance of heroic healing cults alongside those of Olympian figures like Asklepios but also illustrates the evolving relationship between personal religiosity and civic management in the late third century BCE. It reinforces how votive practice – especially in healing sanctuaries – served as a space where gender, piety, and social responsibility intersected in highly visible and durable ways. Considered together, these inventories highlight the sustained participation of women in Asklepian cult and suggest gendered tendencies in the types of offerings made, especially regarding the body and its symbolic representation.

Votive reliefs add a visual dimension to this material corpus, providing evidence for gesture, spatial arrangements, demographics of worshippers and iconographic choices. Though this study focuses on inscribed dedications, reliefs help contextualise the patterns and absences in the epigraphic record. The inclusion of such material allows for a more holistic reconstruction of women's devotional practices, especially in cases where inscriptions alone provide limited information. These objects not only commemorate divine encounters but also reflect broader cultural narratives about supplication, family, and the body. In sanctuaries like that of Asklepios, reliefs frequently depict moments of direct communication between the god and individual worshippers. These sanctuaries functioned as privileged meeting places in which pilgrims could address the divinity on a personal

level. The reliefs often visualise this encounter, representing the epiphany of Asklepios and his divine family or the moment of healing itself. What began as an intimate exchange between suppliant and god could thus assume a public dimension: sculptural representations of these encounters were displayed in prominent sanctuary spaces, transforming private experience into communal memory.[345] Several votive reliefs from Athens and beyond depict Asklepios and Hygieia flanked by male and female worshippers, often with children included. The iconography of these reliefs also follows relatively stable conventions. Asklepios is consistently represented as a bearded, middle-aged, fatherly figure, frequently accompanied by a snake. Many of these images appear to draw inspiration from established cult statues. The accompanying worshippers are typically rendered with limited individualisation; female figures in particular are not strongly characterised. These images, however, offer important insight into the ritual practices and social composition of the cult's participants.

One particularly illustrative example comes from the Athenian Agora, discovered in 1956. This small relief (Agora inv. S 1939), likely dating to the late fourth or early third century BCE, features Asklepios and Hygieia receiving a family of three worshippers: a kneeling woman, a small girl, and a standing man (*Figure 1*).

[345] The public and performative dimension of healing is made explicit in an inscription recording a series of cures performed by Asklepios in his sanctuary in Rome (c. AD 212-217): *IGUR* I 148. The text repeatedly stresses the communal setting: the healed are said to have given thanks publicly, and the δῆμος is described as standing by and rejoicing together. What begins as a personal appeal to the god is thus enacted before a gathered community and formally inscribed.



Figure 1. Asklepios and Hygieia relief, Agora inv. S 1939. From Lawton (2017) Plate 5 no. 22.

Asklepios, draped in a himation, holds a phiale (libation bowl), while Hygieia stands veiled, possibly holding an oinochoe for libation.[346] The kneeling woman, dressed in a chiton and himation, extends both hands in a gesture of prayer – an image of urgent supplication that departs from the more conventional standing postures of earlier Classical votive iconography. Although no inscription survives, the relief's worn and abraded condition, with broken edges and weathered surface, suggests that any shallow lettering may have been lost. Flat chisel marks on the background indicate that an inscribed base or field may once have carried the donor's name or dedicatory formula, now erased through erosion or reuse. Even without the text, however, this relief preserves valuable evidence of the ritual setting and the transformation of personal healing encounters into publicly displayed acts of devotion.

First, it confirms that Asklepios was worshipped by women, men and families. Secondly, it shows a fairly uncommon feature, the representation of the female figure kneeling before the deities, a

[346] Lawton (2017) 41 no.22.

posture that diverges from the usual gesture of prayer.[347] The same gesture can also be seen in other reliefs of Asklepios and Hygieia, where female worshippers are depicted kneeling.[348] Van Straten, who examined Greek practices of kneeling in ritual contexts, suggested that the gesture was closely associated with urgency – with *hiketeia*, a form of supplication addressed to the gods in moments of acute need.[349] This interpretation is consistent with the nature of prayers to healing deities, which were typically motivated by pressing bodily crises. There might also be a precise choice behind the representation of the female figure kneeling rather than the male. Women kneel far more frequently than men, both in votive reliefs and in literary sources. Abe has suggested that kneeling could be perceived as an "effeminate" or highly submissive act from an iconographic standpoint.[350] Building on this, we might consider additional social dynamics that shaped representation. The kneeling posture – visibly humble, physically lowered, and suggestive of heightened emotional investment – may have been considered inappropriate or undesirable for male dedicants, who might have avoided being shown in such a subservient position. Conversely, contemporary male perceptions of women as more emotional, expressive, or vulnerable may have made such a posture seem more "natural" or socially legible for female worshippers. A further hypothesis is that kneeling was associated not with gendered qualities per se but with the type of relationship imagined between worshipper and deity. Supplicants might have knelt before gods perceived as approachable and responsive to urgent personal requests.[351] Healing gods fit this category particularly well, though examples of kneeling before Zeus, Artemis, and Athena indicate that the gesture was not exclusive to healing cult. As a whole, the evidence suggests that kneeling was a flexible ritual gesture whose use depended both on situational context and on broader gendered expectations of behaviour. The predominance of women in this

[347] See Van Straten (1974) 161: "Normally one stood upright, raising one's hands, or the right hand only, with the palms facing more or less upward and forward".
[348] See the evidence presented by Van Straten (1974) 167-168.
[349] Van Straten (1974).
[350] Abe (2018) 29-30. The evidence presented by Mitropoulou (1975) and Van Straten (1974), who also highlighted the predominance of female kneeling worshippers in relief, confirms the differences between religious behaviours of men and women.
[351] Lawton (2017) 41.

posture may therefore reflect a convergence of artistic convention, cultural assumptions about female emotionality and propriety, and the perceived urgency of female petitions in healing contexts.

The question of representation becomes even more complex when we consider how families are depicted in these reliefs. It is noteworthy that votive reliefs depicting women worshipping Asklepios alone appear to be less common – the only other relief with Asklepios found in the Agora excavations represents a male suppliant – despite the huge female presence in all other evidence we have on the cult. Van Straten, noticing a similar pattern in the dedications and votive reliefs from the sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia – a large percentage of dedications by women in the inventories and almost every relief representing these women with their husbands and children – has concluded that this necessarily means the women's dedications were always regarded as a family affair, since they were portrayed alone on very few occasions.[352] This might not actually be the case for Asklepios, as some of the tales and dedications certainly seem to reflect very personal issues of the women who were asking for the help of the deity and seem less likely to be linked with their families; thus, there may be other explanations for it. There might have been, for instance, a common style used in the creation of these votive reliefs, perhaps with standard iconographic "formulas". We also should not forget that often the prayers of female suppliants to Asklepios were related to infertility problems, and so it seems rather natural that the whole family is depicted on the votive relief perhaps dedicated to the god after the birth of a child. These examples may reflect broader cultural narratives in which women's social identities were embedded in family roles. However, the dedications themselves – especially when depicting personal healing experiences – also reveal individual agency and devotional autonomy.

In other votive reliefs to Asklepios and Hygieia, children are depicted in a prominent position, standing beside the deities: these representations might indicate that the children are the primary focus of the dedication and subsequently of the protection of the divinities. Finally, women may have often chosen to be represented with their families because their husbands, households and children were the

[352] Van Straten (1992).

real focus of their lives. At the end of Herodas' mime discussed above, when the *neokoros* blesses the two women, their husbands and their near kindred, the female dedicators promise to come back to the sanctuary with greater gifts together with their husbands and children, showing that family was central in the cult practice, even though from Cynno's initial speech we can infer that the ailments from which the two women were healed affected only them, not their relatives.

4.4 Women and medical practitioners: cultural and practical concerns

If we are to understand why women sought Asklepios' help so frequently, we must also consider their relationship with human physicians. We have been considering so far women's experiences with healing deities, and the evidence has shown that women habitually frequented healing sanctuaries. Several texts in the Hippocratic corpus warn the doctor that when entering households he might face all kinds of temptations, such as women and maidens, and that he must show moral integrity when in the presence of female patients.[353] In other words, it seems evident that there was a genuine concern about the relationship between physicians and female patients.[354] As Scott highlights, in the healing tales Asklepios also intervenes physically on women's bodies, sometimes in a sexual way, yet the god "is careful not to meddle in the affairs of that first and most fundamental social unit – the household".[355] Moreover, Asklepios himself is depicted with a household and children – an unusually conventional familial configuration for a Greek god**,** which may have carried reassuring implications for female worshippers. His presentation as embedded within a stable kin group stands in contrast to the often unpredictable erotic or punitive behaviour of many Olympian male deities. This domestic framing may have rendered his interventions less socially troubling: unlike a male physician entering the *oikos*, the god's actions did not threaten household boundaries or reputations. Importantly, there is no evidence that Hippocratic physicians opposed or criticised Asklepios or temple medicine; on the contrary, the two were viewed as complementary forms of healing. Physicians often participated in

[353] *Oath:* 18-21, 4.630; *Physician:* 1, 9.206. For discussion see Scott (2018) 333-334. In this paper the author examines the knowledge shared by Hippocratic and temple medicine by comparing cases of female ailments.
[354] Scott (2018) 334 stresses the "specific worry about a class of 'professional' males tasked with overseeing and maintaining female sexual and reproductive health and invited into the otherwise carefully regulated space of the oikos".
[355] Scott (2018) 333.

the religious aspects of healing by serving as priests at Asklepian sanctuaries, making dedications and sacrifices, which reflects a close and respectful relationship between human medical practice and divine intervention in health.[356]

King further suggests that, rather than being strict alternatives, Hippocratic and Asklepian healing served different but overlapping roles that might influence a patient's choice, especially for female patients: while both aimed at healing, the kinds of ailments treated, practical considerations such as access and cost, and the personal experience of care all played a role.[357] Asklepios was especially associated with complex reproductive issues, such as prolonged pregnancies and sterility,[358] but was also believed to be capable of curing a broad range of illnesses. Access to healing sanctuaries often involved pilgrimage and could vary geographically, whereas physicians travelled between cities and charged fees, making availability uncertain. Temple medicine also carried costs, though the economic differences between the two remain unclear. These considerations suggest that recourse to Asklepios may have been shaped not only by religious beliefs but also practical concerns, including accessibility and confidence in the god's perceived therapeutic powers. Dean-Jones observes that the Hippocratic case histories in the *Epidemics* overwhelmingly focus on male patients, with roughly twice as many cases as for women.[359] This imbalance may indicate that many women preferred to rely on traditional forms of medicine – administered by midwives, female relatives, or wise women – rather than consulting male physicians. Moreover, since male family members typically summoned physicians, they may have downplayed women's complaints or been reluctant to have their wives and daughters examined by men. In contrast, within the religious sphere, women could approach Asklepios directly, exercising greater autonomy in pursuing care. An additional layer to consider is the broader context of women's roles in domestic religious practice. As Faraone emphasises, women were often central actors in household cults, particularly in relation to healing and

[356] King (1998) 102.
[357] King (1998) 107.
[358] See healing tales A1 and A2, for instance.
[359] Dean-Jones (1996) 34.

magical rites.[360] In this domestic context, women exercised a form of religious and therapeutic agency that complemented, rather than replaced, professional medical care. This pattern reinforces the idea that, for reasons of modesty, practical knowledge, or emotional resonance, women may have found traditional or religious forms of healing more approachable and sympathetic than professional medicine. Women's discomfort with male physicians, due to social constraints on physical examinations, may have made divine healers like Asklepios more appealing, as they operated outside human sexual boundaries. Yet because female bodies were seen as less governable, women occupied an ethically ambiguous space – where they were both less responsible for their health but also in greater need of constant care. Holmes has shown how ancient medical discourse framed female bodies as fundamentally different – defined by wetness, porosity, and instability – which marked them as physically weaker and ethically ambiguous; while this made women appear less capable of self-mastery (and thus less blameworthy), it also positioned them as especially in need of care.[361] Such portrayals made women ideal recipients for divine healing, emphasising a therapeutic relationship free from the social complications that could arise with human male healers.

Another interesting story, reported by the Roman fabulist Hyginus, records a law passed by the Athenians prohibiting women from practising medicine within the city, causing a huge protest by women who would rather fall ill and die rather than be attended by a male physician.[362] While admittedly apocryphal and offering no reliable evidence about the actual prevalence of female medical activity, the story nonetheless reflects broader social anxieties surrounding gender, bodily exposure, and medical authority. The lack or scarcity of female physicians and the refusal to be visited by a male physician could have been among the reasons why female worshippers were regular visitors to the sanctuaries of Asklepios and required his help so often. Women tended to address their prayers

[360] Faraone (2008) 218-222, showing that Plato, for instance, critiques the proliferation of household shrines, attributing their multiplication to two groups: professional sorcerers and women or seriously ill individuals who, lacking *dianoia* (deliberation or prudence), made impulsive votive offerings and established domestic altars (*Laws* 909e-910b). While Plato's account is coloured by moralising concern, it highlights a recurring pattern: women frequently engaged in ritual acts at home, dedicating objects or performing rites that aimed at health, protection, or recovery.
[361] Holmes (2010) 183-209.
[362] Scott (2018) 334; Dean-Jones (1996) 32.

more often to female deities, but perhaps the lack of a divine female counterpart of Asklepios – as Hygieia is not a physician, but the personification of health –, which could also be due to the general absence or scarcity of female physicians, meant that there was not a human model for a godlike female physician. Consequently, when in need, they would request the help of a divine doctor, who would guarantee both the competence and success of human doctors but also, more importantly, would respect the sexual boundary which seems to be a consistent worry in the interaction between male physicians and female patients.

4.5 Conclusion: healing, gender and the dynamics of ritual agency

Across all forms of evidence – literary, epigraphic, and archaeological – what emerges is that women appear consistently as self-directed agents who travelled, incubated, vowed, dedicated, and commemorated; they intervened on behalf of children and kin; and they sought guidance not only for their bodies but for their households and futures. People visited Asklepieia when confronted with specific problems they hoped divine intervention could resolve. For women, these issues often involved fertility, pregnancy, or disruptions to bodily function with clear social consequences. The diversity of their petitions reminds us that women's interactions with Asklepios cannot be reduced to medical vulnerability, nor to reproductive anxieties alone. Their appeals encompassed material concerns, domestic responsibilities, and broader forms of uncertainty. King's observation that Greek medical discourse pathologised the female body remains important,[363] but cannot in itself explain the full range of women's dedications. Likewise, Holmes's analysis of the porous, ethically unstable female body helps to contextualise why divine healing might seem particularly appropriate for women,[364] but it is unlikely that ancient worshippers uniformly conceptualised themselves through such theoretical frameworks. In practice, decisions to visit a sanctuary probably often depended on more immediate factors: access to the site, familiarity with local cult personnel, or the desire for a form of healing perceived as less invasive than treatment by a male physician. The motivations behind

[363] King (1998).
[364] Holmes (2010) 183-209.

women's recourse to Asklepios were therefore multiple – shaped by cultural ideas about the body, but also by pragmatism and the realities of everyday life.

Dedications highlight the dynamic relationship between worshipper and deity. As the *iamata* show, healing was structured as a reciprocal exchange, publicly displayed and collectively witnessed. These dedications reinforced Asklepios' reputation and contributed to a ritual economy in which men and women participated on broadly equal terms. While women are often pictured within family groups on reliefs, this reflects social representation rather than religious dependence. Across the textual, archaeological, and epigraphic record, women appear as autonomous agents: incubating alone, commissioning dedications, and navigating their own spiritual and medical needs. Taken together, the evidence shows that women's engagement with Asklepios cannot be explained solely through concepts of bodily instability, modesty, or fear of male practitioners. Rather, Asklepieia offered a spectrum of possibilities – spiritual, medical, social, and emotional – that made them valuable spaces for both sexes. For women, especially, these sanctuaries enabled forms of agency that intersected with but were not determined by their reproductive roles. The healing cult thus emerges not simply as a domain of gendered vulnerability, but as a field in which women exercised choice, cultivated relationships with the divine, and articulated their place within the broader structures of Greek society.

A final consideration concerns the apparent disparity between the prominence of women in the narrative and visual evidence, and their less frequent appearance in certain categories of epigraphic material. Women clearly had compelling reasons to turn to divine healing, but this does not necessarily mean that they were numerically more present in the sanctuaries than men. The impression of disproportionately active female participation may instead reflect the selectivity of our surviving sources. Inventories privilege more durable or valuable dedications, which men were often better positioned to afford, while modest female offerings – especially small wooden tablets, inexpensive anatomical pieces, or one-off thank-offerings – may have been under-recorded or have perished entirely. Likewise, the compilation of *iamata* depended on pre-existing dedications; the very

existence of the tales presupposes a votive landscape that is now largely lost. What we read today is only the visible tip of what must once have been a far larger and more varied archive of votive practice. We should also acknowledge the practical challenges affecting women's access to healing sanctuaries. For many, undertaking a journey – often overnight, and sometimes far from home – required facing social expectations, household responsibilities, and logistical obstacles that men did not face to the same extent. In this context, even a single visit to an Asklepieion could represent a significant act of agency. What survives, therefore, may reflect not only patterns of ritual behaviour but also the asymmetries of preservation and the differing social constraints that shaped men's and women's ability to travel, dedicate, and be publicly inscribed.

Female healing narratives from the Epidaurian *iamata*

The tale numbers correspond to the edition of LiDonnici (1995).

Stele A

Healing	Notes
A1. Kleo, five-year pregnancy. After she slept in the temple, she gave birth to a son who washed himself and walked with the mother (perhaps a dream-vision).	Incubation
A2. Ithmonika, three-year pregnancy. Wishing to conceive a daughter, she came as a suppliant. After three years she returned and finally gave birth.	Incubation
A4. Ambrosia, blind in one eye.	Incubation

Stele B

Healing	Notes
B1. Arata, dropsy. Her mother slept in the temple on her behalf.	Incubation
B3. Aristagora, worm in her belly.	Incubation
B5. Sostrana, false pregnancy.	Incubation
B11. Andromache, concerning children.	Incubation
B14. Unnamed woman, concerning children.	Incubation
B19. Unnamed woman, concerning children; a snake lay down upon her.	Incubation
B21. Erasippa, stomach pain.	Incubation
B22. Nikasiboula, concerning children; dream involving a snake.	Incubation

Stele C

Healing	Notes
C1. Unnamed mute girl, saw a snake.	

C2. Melissa, tumor on right hand; cured by a snake.	Incubation
C3. Kallikrateia, concerning a treasure she could not find.	Incubation
C6. Unnamed Epidaurian girl, dropsy.	

Female healing narratives from Lebena

Healing	Notes
IC I XVII 9. Wife of Phalaris, infertility. The god ordered the husband to send his wife to sleep in the sanctuary; in the adyton he applied a cupping-glass to her womb and ordered her to leave immediately.	Incubation; male petitioner
IC I XVII 10b. Fragmentary; possibly healing of two women; snake involved.	
IC I XVII 12b. Fragmentary; chestnut (καστανέα) mentioned; snake involved.	
IC I XVII 19. Unnamed woman healed from ulceration on finger; oyster, rose unguent, oil, and mallow applied. The god ordered her to record her dream visions.	Incubation implied

Chapter 5. Imagined offerings: women's roles in the dedicatory epigrams of the Palatine Anthology

This chapter examines how female dedicatory practices are imagined, stylised, and transformed in the literary epigrams of Book VI of the *Greek Anthology*, setting them against the epigraphic realities explored in the previous chapters. I argue that dedicatory epigrams construct a gendered narrative of religious agency centred on moments of transition – marriage, childbirth, professional change, and ritual service – and that these poetic representations both echo and reshape what is attested in inscribed votive texts. While the distinction between inscribed and literary dedication is necessarily porous (and some epigrams may preserve, rework, or imagine inscriptional acts), this chapter is concerned less with identifying direct correspondences than with analysing how dedicatory practice was conceptually framed within the literary imagination. By analysing recurrent objects, ritual gestures, and divine recipients, I show that the epigrams mobilise a shared cultural logic of "marking change" through offerings, yet refract women's actions through the agendas, humour, and moralising tendencies of mostly male poets. My aim is not to treat these poems as evidence for cult practice, but to read them as a parallel tradition that reveals how ancient readers conceptualised feminine piety, and how literary imagination amplifies, distorts, or codifies the dedicatory acts women performed in reality. Inscriptions preserve the "what happened": succinct formulas, named dedications, and the minimal language of ritual fact. Literary epigrams instead preserve the "what it meant": they dramatise fear, desire, transformation, and identity, revealing the emotional and symbolic charge that historical dedications themselves rarely verbalise. When a literary epigram lingers on a girl's loosened girdle, or on a priestess' cropped hair, it articulates the very motifs – bodily change, liminality, divine reciprocity – that structure the epigraphic record, but with a narrativising and moralising intensity absent from stone. Reading these two corpora together therefore allows us to reconstruct not only the material practice of female dedication but also the cultural scripts through which those practices were understood, valued, and reimagined. This chapter thus complements the

earlier inscription-focused analysis by showing how the same ritual gestures circulated as literary tropes, and how gendered piety operated simultaneously as religious reality and as a poetic construct.

5.1 The Anthology and the limits of literary evidence

Compiled in the tenth century by Constantine Cephalas, the Palatine or Greek Anthology gathers thousands of epigrams and poems by hundreds of authors spanning from the seventh century BCE to at least the fifth century CE, incorporating both literary compositions and transcriptions of earlier epigraphic material.[365] The sixth book of the Palatine Anthology contains over three hundred dedicatory epigrams, drawn from a variety of sources, some of which may represent purely poetic exercises, while others may preserve echoes of actual inscriptions carved on stone.[366] These texts, while inevitably shaped by the conventions of their literary genre, nonetheless offer an invaluable comparative perspective on the dedicatory inscriptions preserved in temple inventories and other epigraphic corpora. However, literary sources inevitably need to be treated differently and cannot offer a direct one-to-one comparison with the archaeological and epigraphic record. They are mediated by the author's agenda, aesthetic choices, and the expectations of a reading audience, and are detached from the specific spatial and ritual contexts that give material dedications their immediate meaning. Whereas inscriptions carved on stone are often bound to a physical setting, literary epigrams tend to be longer and more explicative, emphasising narrative. Precisely because of this stylisation, they shed light on broader cultural ideals, revealing how dedicatory practices were remembered, reinterpreted, or idealised within the cultural imagination, and how women's roles as dedicants were represented and shaped by literary discourse.

[365] Beckby (1965) vol. 1, 10-116. Among Cephalas' main sources were three anthologies: the Anthology of Meleager, consisting of poems from the seventh to the third century BCE; the Anthology of Philippus, probably contemporary with the reign of Augustus; and the Cycle of Agathias, containing works from the Byzantine era. The compiler of the Palatine Anthology also incorporated other sources such as inscriptions and other collections of poems.

[366] On the definition of ἐπίγραμμα and the essential connection between early dedicatory epigrams and their original physical context, see Licciardello (2022) 2-5. Unlike other poetic texts, early epigrams were intrinsically tied to a specific object and spatial setting; their meaning depended on their material context, especially in dedicatory and funerary inscriptions. From the fourth century BCE onwards, however, epigrams increasingly circulated in book form, gaining a new context of transmission and reception. This shift allowed inscriptional types to coexist with fictional, erotic, or sympotic compositions, expanding the thematic and formal scope of the genre. From the Hellenistic period onwards, epigrams could thus exist both on stone and on the written page.

Modern scholarship has explored in depth the complex relationship between inscribed and literary epigrams, emphasising that the two forms exist in a continuous dialogue rather than functioning as separate or unrelated traditions. Day has argued that many of the themes and formal structures of later literary epigrams consciously echo their inscriptional antecedents, with archaic and classical dedicatory verses carved on stone functioning as poetic performances embedded in ritual space and communal memory.[367] Day highlights how the physical presence of the monument and the public act of reading or reciting an inscription shaped the way these texts were received, a performative dimension that literary epigrams later sought to evoke nostalgically. Building on similar premises, Tueller has traced how recurrent oppositions and motifs in Hellenistic epigram, such as the contrasts between land and sea, life and death, or presence and absence, derive from the conceptual patterns and language of earlier dedicatory and funerary inscriptions.[368] Barbantani and Meyer have further emphasised the porous boundaries between engraved dedications and bookish compositions, noting that shared formulas, invocations, and emotional tones circulate freely between the two media, and that even epigrams designed primarily for literary circulation preserve echoes of actual dedicatory practices.[369]

Other scholars have investigated how literary epigrams simulate the spatial and visual experience of encountering a monument. Scicolone, drawing on linguistic theories of *deixis*, has shown how descriptive and dedicatory epigrams use demonstratives, spatial markers, and narrative framing to guide the reader's imagined viewing of an object, thereby creating an illusion of presence even when the monument itself is absent.[370] Licciardello has similarly examined *deixis* and frames of reference in Hellenistic dedicatory epigrams, demonstrating how poets manipulate the deictic language of inscriptions to recreate, within a literary context, the sense of immediacy and localisation characteristic of actual epigraphic texts.[371] Cairns, on the other hand, has argued more provocatively

[367] Day (2007); Day (2019).
[368] Tueller (2019).
[369] Barbantani (2019); Meyer (2019).
[370] Scicolone (2024).
[371] Licciardello (2022). See also Lee (2023), who shows how Nossis' epigrams activate the imagined presence of votive objects, ritual space, and festival practice, highlighting the material and performative dimensions of literary epigram.

that many epigrams traditionally regarded as purely literary were in fact composed for, or at least imagined as intended for, inscriptional use, pointing to onomastic formulas, ethnic markers, and stylistic conventions that strongly suggest a dedicatory or commemorative origin.[372] Finally, Kaczko's monumental commentary on archaic and classical Attic dedicatory epigrams has reinforced the importance of reading these texts within their full archaeological and religious contexts, providing a crucial benchmark for identifying the inscriptional features that literary poets later reinterpreted or idealised.[373] Other key contributions are included in the volume *Brill's Companion to Hellenistic Epigram*, such as Bettenworth's exploration of the mutual influence between inscribed and literary compositions.[374]

Paton, author of the *Anthology*'s Loeb translation published in 1916, identified distinct groups of female dedicatory epigrams, classified according to the occasion of the dedication and the social status of the dedicant (or dedicants, in the case of group offerings). His categories include dedications made before or after a wedding, before or after childbirth, those made by priestesses, by spinsters and workwomen, and finally by courtesans. This chapter will follow Paton's broad division as an organising framework for the analysis, examining each group in turn. While his categories remain useful for mapping the material, they will be reconsidered here in light of the Anthology's literary tropes and the cultural meanings attached to each type of offering.

5.2 Marriage dedications

Epigrams made on the occasion of a marriage are, together with dedications related to pregnancy, numerically the most significant, and this is unsurprising, as these two occasions were crucial rites of passage in the life of a Greek woman.[375] The two events are, of course, closely related, since procreating was the immediate consequence – and, we could even say, the aim – of a marriage: as

While some aspects of her social interpretation remain debated, her analysis is valuable for understanding how literary epigram simulates inscriptional presence and ritual context.

[372] Cairns (2016).

[373] Kaczko (2016).

[374] Bettenworth (2007).

[375] Marriage was an essential step for men too: together with entry into the army, it marked their formal admission into the polis as a full citizen. See Vidal-Naquet (1986) 107.

Demosthenes remarked, "For this is what getting married is, to have children of one's own".[376] Aphrodite is the goddess most frequently invoked by newlyweds, addressed as γαμοστόλε, "she who arranges marriage".[377] Five women jointly dedicated to Κύπρις – a common epithet for the goddess in these epigrams – several objects they clearly used in their everyday lives, such as a veil, sandals, and a fan, on the occasion of their weddings.[378] Such group dedications already suggest a semi-ritualised scene that, although mediated by literary stylisation, could plausibly echo collective offerings attested in some sanctuary inventories. Another joint dedication to Aphrodite, made by three recently married women, testifies to a further change in their lives, as they claim to be former courtesans (πᾶσαι δ'ἀσταὶ ἔσαν καὶ ἑταιρίδες).[379] It is not clear whether the objects they dedicate (shoes, a cloak, and a goblet) are related to their past as ἑταιρίδες, and thus signify their renunciation of their former lives, or whether these items instead symbolise their new status as married women. The dedication to Aphrodite made by Cythere, as Natsina has noted, powerfully expresses the *do ut des* scheme of reciprocity: by dedicating a statue to Aphrodite on the occasion of her wedding, she explicitly states that she expects a great gift in return for her small one, wishing that she and her husband may enjoy unity of mind and feeling.[380] This explicit contractual framing situates the poem very close to the formulaic language of inscribed dedications (e.g. κατ' εὐχήν), even though the elaborated narrative voice marks it as a literary reworking rather than a direct inscriptional text.

A more problematic case, and one that raises important questions about the status of literary epigrams as "performative" dedications, is the short poem in which Samytha (Σάμυθα)[381] offers her κεκρύφαλον to Aphrodite, attributed to Nossis, one of the very few identifiable female poets of the Greek epigrammatic tradition.[382] The epigram does not specify its occasion, purpose, or

[376] Dem., *Against Neaera,* 122: τὸ γὰρ συνοικεῖν τοῦτ' ἔστιν, ὃς ἂν παιδοποιῆται.
[377] *Anth. Pal.* 6.207. Pausanias mentions several sanctuaries where Aphrodite was honoured in connection with marriage rites. At Hermione, maidens and widows about to remarry sacrificed to the goddess before their wedding (2.34.12), while on the road to Hermione he notes a sanctuary of Aphrodite Nymphia, founded by Theseus to commemorate his marriage to Helen (2.32.7). Aphrodite's role in marriage rites appears particularly prominent on Kos: Dillon (1999).
[378] 6.206, 6.207.
[379] 6.208.
[380] 6.209: ἀλλὰ σὺ τῇ μικκῇ μεγάλη χάριν ἀντιμερίζου, | ὡς ἤθος· ἀρκεῖται δ'ἀνδρὸς ὁμοφροσυνῃ. Natsina (2012) 257.
[381] The name of the dedicator appears in manuscript variants as Σάμυθα, Σαμύθα, and Σιμαίθα.
[382] 6.275: Χαίροισάν τοι ἔοικε κομᾶν ἄπο τὰν Ἀφροδίταν | ἄνθεμα κεκρύφαλον τόνδε λαβεῖν Σαμύθας· | δαιδαλέος τε γάρ ἐστι, καὶ ἁδύ τι νέκταρος ὄσδει | τοῦ, τῷ καὶ τήνα καλὸν Ἄδωνα χρίει.

circumstances, and – perhaps for precisely this reason – it occupies an ambiguous position between inscriptional and literary modes. Unlike most dedicatory inscriptions, which articulate either a request (ὑπὲρ παίδων) or thanksgiving (κατ' εὐχήν), Samytha expresses neither desire nor gratitude: she merely hopes that the goddess will enjoy the sweet scent of nectar with which the veil is perfumed. As Natsina observes, the focus falls not on the mortal dedicator but on the deity's own sensory pleasure and disposition.[383] Such a shift in focus – from dedicator to deity – might seem to resonate with Nossis' interest in intimate, affective interactions with Aphrodite, and is also consistent with the author's broader poetic agenda, which often centres on sensuality, embodied experience, and the evocative power of luxury objects.[384] This raises the question of whether the verse *is* a dedication, accompanying and enacting an actual offering, or whether it *describes* a dedication imagined by the poet. The absence of formulae typical of inscribed texts, the emphasis on Aphrodite's enjoyment, and the highly literary imagery all suggest that the speaker is not Samytha herself delivering an inscriptional address, but rather a poetic voice – an onlooker or narrator – presenting an imagined scene of dedication. In this sense, the poem functions as a "para-dedication": a literary appropriation of dedicatory language that gestures towards cult practice but was not designed to serve as an inscribable votive text. The ambiguity of the speaker, combined with the lack of clear ritual framing, positions the epigram at the more 'literary' end of the spectrum of dedicatory fictions. As Lee argues in her analysis of this and related votive epigrams, the hairnet's materiality and perfumed scent evoke a direct, sensory link between the dedicant and Aphrodite, compressing the dedicatory act so as to imply immediate divine reception; this elision further ties the poem to broader Locrian ritual

[383] Natsina (2012) 269-270.

[384] On Nossis' epigrammatic corpus*:* the other securely attributed dedicatory epigrams centred on female protagonists (all discussed in this chapter) are *Anth. Pal.* 9.332, in which Polyarchis dedicates a gold statue of Aphrodite; *9.*605, where Callo hangs her portrait in Aphrodite's temple; and 6.265, in which Theophilis dedicates a woven garment produced with "her noble daughter Nossis," suggesting an authorial self-reference. A childbirth epigram, 6.273, invoking Artemis on behalf of Alcetis, is transmitted under Nossis' name but is generally regarded as of uncertain attribution. Other epigrams ascribed to Nossis in the Anthology, though not strictly dedicatory, include 5.170; 6.132; 6.353; 6.354; 7.414; 7.718; 9.604. These poems confirm Nossis' distinctive focus on women's lived experience, sensual emotion, and the allure of opulence, elements that shape her treatment of the dedicatory mode.

practices, including the Adonia festival, where women anoint Adonis with nectar-like perfumes, blurring mortal and divine roles in a female-centred cult context.[385]

Artemis is also frequently invoked in marriage dedications, but unlike Aphrodite, the goddess is primarily addressed by women who are still *parthenoi* and stand at the threshold of marriage: Hippe, explicitly identified as a maiden, dedicates her hair at the moment when the fulfilment of marriage has arrived and frames her prayer through the language of virginity (αἱ δ'επὶ κόρσῃ μίτραι παρθενίας αἰτέομεν χάριτας), asking Artemis to oversee her transition to marriage and childbirth.[386] Timareta, dedicating to Artemis before her wedding, prays that the goddess may preserve her purity (σώζοις τὰν ὁσίαν ὁσίως).[387] In other dedications made on the occasion of weddings, the women involved invoke the goddesses Hera (6.133) and Rhea (6.281). As regards the objects dedicated, almost all wedding dedications have something in common: hair (χαίτη and πλόκαμοι, which in the plural means 'locks') and hair accessories, such as κεκρύφαλος (head-dress), δέσμα (headband) and σφιγκτήρ (lace) are the most common offerings. The dedication of hair was an ancient and deeply symbolic practice, closely tied to pivotal transitions in an individual's life cycle. Early sources attest that hair was offered to rivers or deities in moments of crisis or as a thanksgiving after escaping danger, suggesting its function as a liminal gift marking survival and renewal.[388] In literature, it frequently appears at critical thresholds: Death cuts a lock of Alcestis' hair before escorting her to Hades, signifying her passage into the realm of the dead;[389] Orestes sacrifices a lock at his father's tomb as an act of mourning and familial duty;[390] and Helen, in Euripides' *Orestes*, instructs Electra to offer hair at a sister's grave.[391] Yet the same gesture also marked joyful transformations. In *Hippolytus*, Artemis refers to girls dedicating their hair upon marriage, signalling the loss of

[385] Lee (2023) 217-218, 222-223.
[386] Ibid., 6.276.
[387] Ibid., 6.280.
[388] Rouse (1902) 240-241. Pausanias (2.11.6) records a statue of Hygieia at Titane (northern Peloponnese) surrounded with offerings of women's hair.
[389] Eur. *Alcestis* 74-76: στείχω δ' ἐπ' αὐτὴν ὡς κατάρξωμαι ξίφει: | ἱερὸς γὰρ οὗτος τῶν κατὰ χθονὸς θεῶν | ὅτου τόδ' ἔγχος κρατὸς ἀγνίσῃ τρίχα.
[390] Eur. *Electra* 90-92: νυκτὸς δὲ τῆσδε πρὸς τάφον μολὼν πατρὸς | δάκρυά τ' ἔδωκα καὶ κόμης ἀπηρξάμην | πυρᾷ τ' ἐπέσφαξ' αἷμα μηλείου φόνου.
[391] Eur. *Orestes* 96: κόμης ἀπαρχὰς καὶ χοὰς φέρουσ' ἐμάς.

maidenhood and the assumption of a new social identity as a wife.[392] Similarly, after childbirth, women are sometimes recorded dedicating locks of hair as a thanksgiving for safe delivery. Thus, the ritual offering of hair consistently marks the end of one stage of life and the beginning of another – mourning and death on one hand, but also marriage, motherhood, and social integration on the other. It is precisely this polyvalent symbolism, oscillating between grief and joy, loss and renewal, that made hair an especially potent dedicatory gift.

Newlyweds also dedicated clothes, shoes, and various accessories such as a fan (6.206), a ball and a tambourine (6.280) and ornaments such as a coiled snake (τὸν ἐυσπειρῃ δὲ δράκοντα), an ankle decoration dedicated by Aristoteleia (6.206). One of the dedications already mentioned, Hippe's epigram (6.276) raises an interpretative question concerning the final adjective. The manuscript reading, according to Gow and Page, is φιλαστραγάλητι ("loving her knuckle-bones").[393] Earlier editors proposed alternative readings, λιπαστραγάλῃ ("who has bidden farewell to her knuckle-bones")[394] or φυγαστραγάλῃ ("who has parted with her knuckle-bones").[395] Both would suggest that Hippe is leaving behind *astragaloi,* along with balls and tambourines (6.280), marking her transition from childhood to adulthood at marriage. Φιλαστραγάλητι, however, more literally conveys a sense of attachment to the knucklebones. It is worth considering what semantic and ritual resonances *astragaloi* may have carried in this dedicatory context. Herodotus records their introduction among the Lydians together with other games.[396] They were commonly used for play, but astragalomancy is also well documented in ancient Greece. To interpret *astragaloi* simply as discarded childhood toys seems reductive, given their long attested religious and divinatory significance.[397] *Astragaloi*, while indeed used in children's games, also carried strong associations with chance (τύχη) and the revelation of divine will. Pausanias (7.25.10), for instance, describes an oracular practice at Pharae in Achaia where a petitioner cast four *astragaloi* before the image of Hermes and then consulted a sacred

[392] Eur. *Hippolytus* 1425-26: κόραι γὰρ ἄζυγες γάμων πάρος | κόμας κεροῦνταί σοι.
[393] Gow and Page (1965) 76.
[394] Paton (1916) 446-447.
[395] Stadtmüller (1894) 377.
[396] Hdt. 1.94.2.
[397] Eidinow (2013) 54, 69-70 on knucklebones used in divination in oracular contexts.

tablet listing all possible throws. Marked knucklebones have been found in various sanctuaries – including that of Aphrodite Ourania in Athens, Artemis Orthia at Sparta, and the Sanctuary of Eros and Aphrodite on the Athenian Acropolis – suggesting their use in divination.[398] On this basis, a more speculative reading may be proposed. If φιλαστραγάλη is understood not as sentimental attachment to childhood toys but as affection for *astragaloi* as instruments of chance and divine revelation, the adjective may allude to Hippe's engagement with fortune and her willingness to entrust her future to the goddess. By dedicating them, Hippe expresses her willingness to entrust her future – her hoped-for husband and children – to the goddess' decision. This interpretation offers a possible enrichment of the ritual significance of this image within the broader logic of liminal dedication.

5.3 Childbirth dedications

The deities most frequently invoked are Artemis and Eileithyia, confirming – just as the epigraphic evidence also shows – that the goddesses were central figures called upon for safe childbirth and maternal protection. They are asked to ease the pangs of labour (e.g. βᾶθι λύσους' ὠδίνων Ἀλκέτιν ἐκ χαλεπῶν, 6.273), to ward off death (λευγαλέας οἱ κῆρας ἀπ' ὠδίνων τῆλε βαλεῖν λοχίων, 6.270), and to ensure the healthy growth of the newborn (νηπίαχον δὲ καὶ εἰσέτι παῖδα Λέοντι νεῦσον ἰδεῖν κοῦρον γυῖ' ἐπαεξόμενον, 6.271). The range of dedicatory objects recorded in childbirth epigrams is relatively uniform. Girdles, belts, headbands, breast-bands, veils, and sandals – objects tightly bound to the female body – are the most common offerings. Archaeological finds from sanctuaries of Artemis Brauronia, Eileithyia, and other childbirth goddesses confirm the presence of these "loosening" objects, highlighting the deep entanglement between bodily practice and votive symbolism in childbirth rituals. Within this corpus, several motifs recur: survival of the ordeal, fulfilment of vow *in extremis*, and the marking of the child's successful birth through garments or hair that symbolise both vulnerability and renewal. For example, in epigram 200 Ambrosia dedicates her headbands and robe because she survived a ten-month pregnancy and bore "double fruit"; Euphrante

[398] Reese (1989).

(6.201) dedicates sandals, a headband, hair, and a breast-band – an assemblage of items that together narrate the physical transformation wrought by childbirth.

The literary epigrams also exhibit an interest in narrative voice, authorial positioning and the dramatisation of childbirth. Some poems seem close to plausible inscribed dedicatory practice – short, object-focused, and formulaic (e.g. 6.200, 202, 270, 272) – while others clearly lean toward a more literary and theatrical mode (e.g. 6.273). Epigram 6.273 (attributed, perhaps incorrectly, to Nossis) vividly stages a prayer to Artemis in elaborate hymnic language rather than a succinct dedicatory formula. Its cult setting (Locri) and invocation of the Inopus stream reflect a literary conceit rather than a historical ritual moment, making the poem read more like a constructed poetic scene than a real inscription. A notable feature of childbirth dedications is the presence of joint offerings by husband and wife**.** In 6.271, the shoes are offered by Cichesias' son while Themistodice dedicates her gown, and Artemis is asked to grant strength to the newborn boy. This dual-authority scene subtly reveals how childbirth, although centred on the woman, involved male investment in dynastic continuity and the future of the *oikos*. Male participation in these epigrams is rare; its appearance here likely marks childbirth as an event where household concerns and divine protection intersect most intensely.

Equally significant are the emotional valences embedded in these poems. Childbirth epigrams often place emphasis on the intensity of fear and the proximity of death: Eileithyia is asked to "keep dreadful death far away" (6.270), and the moment of delivery is repeatedly imagined as suspended between life and death. These dedications thus capture the existential stakes of childbirth in antiquity and articulate the profound dependency of women (and their families) on divine assistance. The dedicatory corpus also shows an important diachronic layering. While most childbirth epigrams are Hellenistic in tone, the inclusion of later compositions in Cephalas' compilation (e.g. 6.59, probably Byzantine) shows how deeply entrenched childbirth dedications remained as literary tropes, even when cult practice was no longer directly accessible to poets. This later poem expands the dedicatory constellation to include a triad of Aphrodite, Athena, and Artemis, highlighting how childbirth could

become a poetic stage on which multiple divine competencies were displayed, an aesthetic typical of late antique or Byzantine epigram rather than classical ritual. In this respect, literary epigrams often elaborate on motifs well attested in the material record, even when the ritual framing is highly stylised. They take recognisable votive gestures and amplify them into emblematic scenes of female piety, shaped by the expectations and aesthetics of the poets who composed them. Through these dedications, childbirth emerges as a critical threshold in the female life cycle. The gods provide not only immediate aid but also reassurance that the dedicant's identity as wife and mother aligns with broader social norms. Childbirth thus becomes both deeply embodied and culturally symbolic: a point at which fear, ritual, gender and divine reciprocity converge.

5.4 Dedications by priestesses and sanctuary personnel

The Anthology preserves three epigrams attributed to women holding formal roles in cult, offering a rare glimpse into how female sanctuary personnel marked the beginning or (more often) the end of their service. Because the titles used (θαλαμηπόλος, πρόπολος, νεωκόρος) denote different levels of ritual responsibility, not all of these women should strictly be called "priestesses" in the technical sense; nevertheless, all three function as part of the sanctuary's officiating staff. These dedications often coincide with the completion of a term of office, a transition comparable to the retirement dedications of weavers or courtesans. Achrylis, θαλαμηπόλος ("attendant of the inner chamber") of Cybele, dedicates a lock of hair to the goddess (6.173). Here, the hair had already been consecrated during her service, and the final dedication formally ends her office.[399] Arista, πρόπολος of Artemis Aethopia, dedicated a portrait statue of herself (6.269). This epigram seems to reproduce an actual inscribed base and may reflect a real cult in Lesbos or Asia Minor, where priesthoods of Artemis Aethopia are attested.[400] Portrait dedications, common in Hellenistic sanctuaries, served both as votive offerings and as commemorations of the official status, situating this epigram toward the

[399] Gow and Page (1965) 506.
[400] Paton (1916) 445, who believes the epigram refers to a Lesbian cult of Artemis. See *IG* XII.2 92, a dedication to Artemis Aethopia from Lesbos, and *IErythrai* 201, a document from Erythrai in Asia Minor concerning the sale of priesthoods, including that of Artemis Aethopia.

"inscribable" end of the literary spectrum. The third epigram concerns Cleo, described as νειοκόρος, caretaker of the sanctuary of Artemis.[401] Cleo dedicates her two Cretan four-year-old daughters to Artemis, exhorting the goddess: κἀντὶ μιῆς θὲς δύο νειοκόρους, "make yourself two priestesses instead of one" (6.356). Gow and Page have argued that Cleo is likely to be leaving her office; otherwise she would have said τρεῖς νειοκόρους and not δύο.[402] It is unclear whether the epigram records the literal dedication of the girls to temple service or – as many scholars have thought – the dedication of their portraits.[403] Either reading implies a desire to transmit ritual service as a familial legacy, a phenomenon well attested in several Greek cities where priesthoods – or other sanctuary offices – were hereditary or strongly endogamous. As a group, these epigrams map a range of female roles within sanctuaries and the different levels of ritual authority they could exercise. They also point to a shared pattern: women marked the conclusion of their sacred duties through bodily offerings (hair), representational dedications (portraits), or symbolic acts of succession (children or their images). In doing so, they reaffirmed their personal connection to the deity even as they stepped back from formal service, situating their experience within broader cultural patterns of transition and ritual commemoration.

5.5 Dedications by textile workers and professional women

Weavers, spinners and other textile workers mentioned in the epigrams made their offerings almost exclusively to Athena – unsurprisingly, given the goddess's close association with domestic and craft activities – and only a few dedications are made to Artemis, usually for a specific reason. Moreover, in the majority of cases we find joint dedications made by two or three women together, a recurring numerical motif that might hint at symbolic associations between triads of women in ritual or social

[401] On νεωκόροι, see Gow and Page (1965) 445.
[402] Gow and Page (1965) 446.
[403] See Gow and Page (1965) 445: "The dedication has generally been understood to be of the girls' portraits, and Meleager (if the grouping was his) so understood it, for the surrounding epigrams are all on portraits. This may be right, but the petition in the last line – that Artemis shall accept the girls in place of Cleo herself – is less easily understood if the girls are not to discharge any duties in the temple, at any rate for some years to come".

contexts.[404] The objects dedicated by textile workers are, predictably, the tools of their trade: baskets (τάλαρος, κάλαθος), combs (κτείς), spindles (ἄτρακτος, κλωστήρ), distaffs (ἠλακάτη) and thread (νῆμα, πήνη), all standard implements of female labour in antiquity. These appear in every dedication made to Athena. Interestingly, the three weavers who jointly dedicate to Artemis offer the goddess a piece of woven cloth they produced and decorated together, highlighting a more collective act of female creativity rather than individual tools (6.286 and 6.287). The dedication of garments by Praxidice and Dyseris, "linked with skill of both", may also be addressed to Artemis, though the dedicatee is unstated.[405]

One of the most interesting aspects of dedications by weavers is their recurring thematic emphasis on independence and self-sufficiency. Several dedicants explicitly declare that "they all wanted to live without reproach, earning their livings with their own hands".[406] At the same time, these texts glorify the dignity of labour, even when performed in poverty. The three Samian sisters**,** for example, dedicate the very tools "with which they supported themselves in their long and poor life" upon retiring from weaving.[407] This fictional scene resonates strongly with real-life Athenian dedications by working women on the Acropolis, such as Melinna's inscription to Athena Ergane.[408] Melinna, like the Samian sisters, frames her offering as the culmination of a lifetime of labour, explicitly presenting herself as a woman who "with hands and with the skill of work" supported her children and honoured the goddess with the first fruits of her toil. Similarly, Aesione, in her old age (βαθύγηρως), dedicates to Athena "the gifts of her misery" (a comb, a spindle, and a basket) marking the end of her professional life.[409] Through these fictional epigrams and historical inscriptions alike, we glimpse a shared cultural logic: textile work served as a marker of female respectability and

[404] Triads of dedicators (and occasionally of dedicatees) recur across this corpus. Whether this reflects a symbolic association of the number three in women's ritual networks or merely a narrative convention of the epigrammatic genre remains open to exploration.
[405] 6.136: Πρηξιδίκη μὲν ἔρεξεν, ἐβούλευσεν δὲ Δύσηρις | εἶμα τόδε: ξυνὴ δ'ἀμφοτέρων σοφίη.
[406] 6.174.7-8: ζώειν γὰρ δίχα παντὸς ὀνείδεος ἤθελ'ἑκάστα, | ξεῖνε, τὸν ἐκ χειρῶν ἀρνυμένα βίοτον.
[407] 6.39: αἱ τρισσαί, Σατύρη τε, καὶ Ἡράκλεια, καὶ Εὐφρώ, | θυγατέρες Ξούθου καὶ Μελίτης, Σάμιαι: | ἃ μέν, ἀραχναίοιο μίτου πολυδινέα λάτριν, | ἄτρακτον, δολιχᾶς οὐκ ἄτερ ἀλακάτας: | ἃ δὲ πολυσπαθέων μελεδήμονα κερκίδα πέπλων | εὔθροον ἃ τριτάτα δ' εἰροχαρῆ τάλαρον | οἷς ἔσχον: χερνῆτα βίον δηναιόν, Ἀθάνα | πότνια, ταῦθ' αἱ σαὶ σοὶ θέσαν ἐργάτιδες.
[408] *IG* II² 4334. See chapter 2 of this dissertation.
[409] 6.247: πενίες δῶρος.

autonomy, and the dedication of work tools operated both as a religious gesture and as a public statement about one's identity. The epigrams magnify these themes with emotional and moralising language, while the Acropolis inscriptions ground them in the lived experiences of actual dedicants. Finally, two epigrams illustrate not only the poverty experienced by weavers but also an unusual situation: two women abandoning their profession in order to become courtesans. Bitto, who dedicates her comb to Athena, first remarks on the harshness of her working conditions, claiming that the comb is "suitable for the work that causes her hunger" (λιμηρῆς ἄρμενον ἐργασίης). She then declares, with a deliberately ironic self-presentation: "I, a widow in my fortieth year, refuse your gifts and instead engage in the works of Aphrodite; for I see that the wish is stronger than age".[410] The irony here lies in the tension between age, poverty, and erotic desire, as Bitto undermines the expectation of a respectable widow turning toward chastity or domestic virtue. Similarly, Nicarete refuses Athena's weaving gear by burning all her implements in a bonfire dedicated to Aphrodite, announcing her desire to change her life and offering the goddess the tenth part of her income in return for the opportunity granted.[411]

5.6 Dedications by courtesans (hetaerae)

The final group of texts comprises dedications attributed to courtesans (hetaerae). These belong to a long-standing literary trope that deliberately opposes the hetaera to the wool-working woman, the quintessential symbol of domestic virtue and respectability in Greek thought.[412] This opposition, deeply rooted in comedy, oratory, and moralising discourse, frames the courtesan's offerings as the conscious inversion of the modest dedications made by weavers and other working women. Whereas

[410] 6.47: χαῖρε, θεά, καὶ τήνδ'ἔχε· χήρη ἐγὼ γὰρ | τέσσαρας εἰς ἐτέων ἐρχομένη δεκάδας, | ἀρνεῦμαι τὰ σὰ δῶρα· τὰ δ'ἔμπαλι Κύπριδος ἔργων | ἅπτομαι· ὥρης γὰρ κρεῖσσον ὁρῶ τὸ θέλειν. In 6.48 (an almost identical epigram) Bitto claims she started to loathe all the toils of spinners and the miserable concerns of weavers (πάντας ἀποστυξασα γυνὴ τότε τοὺς ἐν ἐρίθοις | μόχθους καὶ στυγερὰς φροντίδας ἱστοπόνων·).

[411] 6.285: Παντὸς σοὶ δεκάτην ἀπὸ λήμματος οἵσω, | Κύπρι· σὺ δ'ἐργασίην καὶ λάβε καὶ μετάδος.

[412] On the symbolic role of woolworking as the defining domestic virtue of wives, see Xen. *Oec.* 7. Ischomachus tells his wife that her main duties are to manage the household and supervise the woolworking, markers of the ideal domestic woman. By contrast, hetaerae operate outside the *oikos*. On the ideological and social separation between wives, concubines, and hetaerae in Greek thought, see Kapparis (2018) 181-182. Drawing on *Against Neaira* and other sources, he shows that hetaerae were associated with pleasure, whereas wives embodied household management and legitimate reproduction. While not absolute, this distinction shaped both legal and social expectations throughout antiquity and evolved further under Roman and early Christian moralising influences.

the weaver's spindle, distaff, or basket embodies toil and self-reliance, the courtesan's mirror, sandals, or ornaments belong to a different moral register, signalling erotic allure, leisure, and a life lived outside the boundaries of domestic respectability.

Within this framework, four epigrams (6.1, 18, 19, and 20) celebrate Lais, one of the most famous hetaerae, who appears frequently in comic and sympotic literature as the archetype of the desirable but ultimately ephemeral courtesan.[413] These epigrams, like most courtesan dedications in the Anthology, do not necessarily reflect cult practice but rather exploit a literary topos of the courtesan's retirement from beauty and desire. In these verses, Lais offers Aphrodite her mirror – the emblem of her former grace and erotic power –because old age has stripped her of youth and charm. Unable to bear the sight of her own decline, she dedicates the mirror as a final gesture of surrender to the goddess of love, effectively acknowledging that her beauty now belongs only to Aphrodite.[414] The mirror, in this sense, functions less as a cult object than as a narrative device, making visible the fleeting nature of beauty and the inevitability of ageing. Similar motifs recur in other epigrams. Nicias, for example, offers her sandals, locks of hair, and a bronze mirror – objects of adornment that once enhanced her charms but now testify to their loss.[415] Calliclea's offerings to Aphrodite express gratitude for a specific wish fulfilled (ὧν ἤθελεν τυχοῦσα), a variation on the same theme of reciprocal exchange between the courtesan and the goddess.[416] Finally, an anonymous epigram presents an unusual scenario: a former courtesan who, having fallen into poverty, has become a weaver. Here the text stages an explicit competition between goddesses: Nemesis punishes the woman for neglecting her devotion; Athena claims her as a weaver and domestic worker; and Aphrodite is displaced from her sphere of influence – "late did Athena plunder Kypris" (ὀψέ γ' Ἀθηναίη Κύπριν ἐληίσατο).[417] This imagined "revenge" of Athena neatly inverts the usual hierarchy between erotic and domestic spheres,

[413] Lais is mentioned by Plutarch, Athenaeus and several fourth-century comic writers: see Natsina (2012) 252, no.6.
[414] The four Lais epigrams express the same idea: she dedicates her mirror, proof of her decline, because she can no longer bear to see herself, "hating the evidence of her wrinkled age" (6.18: γηραλέων στυγέει μαρτυρίην ῥυτίδων).
[415] 6.210.
[416] 6.211.
[417] 6.283 (not strictly dedicatory but thematically related).

showing that the goddess of the household ultimately triumphs when beauty fades and necessity forces women back into labour. These epigrams, operating within a playful literary discourse, reflect broader cultural anxieties about ageing, beauty, and social roles, while simultaneously reinforcing ideological boundaries: the respectable wife versus the courtesan whose value lies only in her transient youth. At the same time, the trope of retirement dedications allows the Anthology to humanise hetaerae, granting them a voice of resignation, wit, or even self-awareness, as they transition from one phase of life to another under the watchful gaze of the goddess who once empowered them.

5.7 Female poetic voices and dedicatory perspective: Nossis and the gender of authorship

The presence of female poets in the dedicatory tradition introduces a distinct narrative perspective that complicates the overwhelmingly male-authored landscape of epigram. Although the dedicatory epigrams of Book VI are mainly composed by male poets, a small but significant subset is attributed to Hellenistic women – above all Nossis, but also, in other books of the Anthology, Anyte and Moero. These female-authored poems offer a rare opportunity to observe how the representation of women's piety shifts when articulated from a female perspective rather than through the lens of male poetic convention. Unlike their male counterparts, who often frame women's dedications in moralising, ironic, or eroticised terms, female poets privilege intimacy and embodied experience. Nossis, especially, constructs a devotional landscape defined by sensuality and reciprocity. As recent sociolinguistic analysis has shown, her epigrams employ dialectal innovations, expressive compounds, and linguistic features associated with "female speech," marking a deliberate authorial self-fashioning as a woman speaking about women.[418] In epigrams such as 6.275, discussed above, or 6.265 (the woven garment of Theophilis and Nossis), the dedicated object becomes a site of female agency, aesthetic labour, and devotional intimacy rather than a moralising emblem. A further illustration of this feminine gaze appears in another epigram by Nossis, where a woman named Callo,

[418] Cf. Redondo (2021), a comprehensive study of dialect, gendered language, and female authorial voice in Hellenistic epigram.

presumably a courtesan, dedicates her portrait to Aphrodite.[419] The poem lingers not on eroticised self-display, but on Callo's gentle presence and flawless life (οὔ τινα… μέμψιν). The narrator's admiring imperatives – "see how gently she stands" and "look how her charm blooms" – construct a female gaze that sanctifies rather than objectifies. The votive portrait thus becomes a celebration of character and self-fashioning within a sacred space. Nevertheless, Nossis' work should not be romanticised as more "authentic" or "real" than male-authored epigrams. She participates fully in the Hellenistic literary economy, crafting aestheticised scenes of female piety that play with, rather than reproduce, epigraphic conventions.

A further dimension to her technique is seen in another epigram included in the ninth book of the Anthology.[420] Here, a female narrator invites a group of female addressees (ἐλθοῖσαι) to accompany her to Aphrodite's temple and see the golden statue dedicated by Polyarchis. Licciardello argues that this collective "let us go and look" (ἰδώμεθα) establishes a deictic centre outside the sanctuary, at the threshold of an imagined approach, rather than at the votive object itself.[421] This is highly unusual: in inscriptional dedications, the deictic centre almost always coincides with the object. In Nossis, however, the approach becomes part of the meaning itself. The poem stages an imagined female procession toward the shrine, inviting the reader into the communal act of viewing votives *in situ*. This effect is intensified if 9.332, as it has been suggested, functioned as a proem to a book of Nossis' epigrams devoted to Aphrodite, portraits, and temple dedications: its first-person plural would create a double frame – Nossis as internal narrator speaking to Locrian companions, and Nossis as external author guiding her readers.[422] The feminine participle limits identification to a female audience, reinforcing a specifically female communal gaze – a ritualised act of viewing that no inscription could ever narrate.[423] In this sense, Nossis' literary dedications do not merely simulate inscriptional practice; they stage it, constructing a quasi-processional, affective encounter with

[419] 9.605: τὸν πίνακα ξανθᾶς Καλλὼ δόμον εἰς Ἀφροδίτας | εἰκόνα γραψαμένα πάντ᾽ ἀνέθηκεν ἴσαν. | ὡς ἀγανῶς ἕστακεν ἴδ᾽ ἁ χάρις ἁλίκον ἀνθεῖ. | χαιρέτω: οὔ τινα γὰρ μέμψιν ἔχει βιοτᾶς.
[420] 9.332.
[421] Licciardello (2022) 243-244.
[422] Gutzwiller (1998) 83.
[423] Licciardello (2022) 243.

votives. Her epigrams thus foreground a female-centred, authorially self-aware perspective that is formally distinct from the male-authored norm and from the self-effacing anonymity of real dedications, while still anchored in the cultural logic of ritual viewing and offering. Integrating these rare female voices into the broader analysis sharpens the contrast between lived dedicatory practice and its literary stylisation, and demonstrates how poetic authorship itself participates in constructing, manipulating, and sometimes resisting cultural scripts about women's ritual behaviour.

5.8 Male and female dedications: gendered markers of change in the *Greek Anthology* and Posidippus' *Anathematika*

Comparing dedicatory epigrams of women with those of men in Book VI of the *Greek Anthology* reveals both parallels and divergences, especially in the shared motif of dedicating objects at moments of work or life transition. This shared ritual logic of "marking change" is nevertheless inflected by sharply gendered roles, motivations, and stylistic choices. Men's dedications frequently reflect their engagement with public, professional, or competitive spheres, offering objects such as hunting and fishing gear, military equipment, agricultural or craft tools, and civic or royal ornaments. For instance, in epigram 11, the brothers Damis, Pigres, and Cleitor dedicate nets for hunting, fowling, and fishing to Pan, symbolising their respective crafts and seeking divine favour, a theme echoed in epigrams 182-187, which reiterate this collective offering. Similarly, military dedications such as Promachus' shield, Aconteus' spears, and Eumedes' sword to Ares in epigram 91, or Menius' spear in epigram 122, celebrate martial prowess and survival, with the spear itself boasting of its "havoc among the Odrysae". Agricultural and craft tools also feature prominently, as in epigram 21, where Potamon offers his hoe, sickle, cloak, boots, dibble, and mattock to Priapus, marking his labour as a gardener; or epigram 117, where Polycrates dedicates his hammer, pliers, and tongs to Hephaestus, signifying the end of his blacksmithing career. Civic and royal dedications, such as Trajan's cups and urus horn to Zeus in epigram 332, highlight leadership and conquest, emphasising public honour. These objects symbolise external achievement, economic contribution, or communal glory, often dedicated to male

deities like Pan, Ares, Hermes, Poseidon, or Zeus (e.g., 23, 34, 143, 233, 332), reflecting men's roles in the polis, battlefield, or trade.

In contrast, women's dedications are rooted in domestic, personal, or ritual contexts, focusing on objects like hair, garments, textile tools, or representations of themselves or their children. Hair dedications – such as Alcibia's veil to Hera in epigram 133 or Arsinoe's lock to Artemis in epigram 277 – mark the transition from maidenhood to marriage, while Amphareta's head-kerchief and veil to Eileithyia in epigram 270 or Timaessa's girdle and frock to Artemis in epigram 272 signify gratitude for safe childbirth. Textile tools, like Bitto's loom-comb to Athena in epigram 48 or the Samian sisters' tools in epigram 39, reflect women's roles as weavers, often dedicated upon retirement or a shift to another life stage, such as Bitto's ironic transition to courtesanhood. Courtesans' offerings, such as Lais' mirror to Aphrodite in epigram 1 or Nicias' sandals, hair, and mirror in epigram 210, symbolise the loss of beauty and the end of their careers, imbued with moralising undertones. Women predominantly dedicate to female deities – Aphrodite, Artemis, Eileithyia, Hera, or Rhea/Cybele (e.g., 1, 51, 133, 265, 270–275, 277, 280) – aligning with their roles in marriage, childbirth, or ritual service, though occasional dedications to Dionysus (e.g., 119, 172) reflect specific cultic contexts.

The symbolism of men's and women's offerings further highlights their roles. Men's objects represent active engagement with the external world, embodying strength, skill, or authority. The shield in epigram 124, described as "befouled with the dust of iron war,"[424] or the nets in epigram 11, tied to specific crafts, symbolise public contributions and survival. Women's offerings, such as hair or garments, are deeply personal, marking liminal moments like marriage or childbirth. Samytha's caul in epigram 275, "delicately wrought" and scented with nectar, evokes both beauty and divine favour, while Timareta's tambourine, ball, and dolls in epigram 280 signify the end of childhood. Men often dedicate to mark professional success, retirement, or survival, as in epigram 245, where Diogenes offers his cloak to Cabeirus after surviving a storm, or epigram 34, where Polyaenus thanks Pan for hunting success. Both genders express gratitude or seek divine favour, but men's acts tend to prioritise

[424] Ἀσπὶς ἀπὸ βροτέων ὤμων Τιμάνορος ἅμμαι | ναῷ ὑπορροφία Παλλάδος ἀλκιμάχας, |
πολλὰ σιδαρείου κεκονιμένα ἐκ πο-λέμοιο | τόν με φέροντ᾽ αἰεὶ ῥυομένα θανάτου.

communal or economic outcomes, while women's are framed more tightly around personal or familial roles.

Stylistically, men's epigrams adopt a functional, heroic, or declarative tone, focusing on the object's utility or the dedicator's prowess. Epigram 122 has the spear itself boast of its battlefield exploits, while epigram 332 exalts Trajan's conquests with grandiose language. Imagery is vivid but practical, as in epigram 3, where Dionysius's club is "yet green" from a wild olive, or epigram 21, detailing Potamon's gardening tools. Women's epigrams, by contrast, are lyrical and introspective, emphasising emotional or divine intimacy, often using sensory imagery – hair as "lovely tresses" (277) or garments as "flowered" (272) – and incorporate dialogic or personified elements, as in epigram 269, where Arista's statue "speaks" to Artemis. Where men's epigrams tend to list objects and purposes with relative directness, women's more often weave narrative threads, especially in courtesan epigrams, which frequently employ irony.

Parallels between men's and women's dedications are evident in the shared theme of change, particularly the act of giving up work or marking life transitions. Men like Alcimus (297) or Callon (294), who dedicate tools upon retiring from farming or teaching, parallel women like the Samian sisters (39) or Bitto (48), who offer weaving tools upon retirement or career shifts. Both genders dedicate in gratitude for divine aid, as seen in men's offerings for survival (245) or success (11) and women's for childbirth (270-274) or marriage (133, 280). The theme of change (professional, social, or personal) thus unites these acts, even as men's dedications are largely outward-facing, tied to the polis, battlefield, or economic production, and women's are more inward-facing, centred on the *oikos* or ritual sphere, with objects like hair or mirrors symbolising personal transformation (e.g., 1, 133, 265). Men's epigrams emphasise achievement and utility, while women's emphasise emotional depth or irony, often shaped by male poets' fascination with gendered stereotypes such as the courtesan's decline (1, 210) versus the weaver's virtue (48, 283). Thus, while men's and women's dedications share a ritual framework of change and reciprocity**,** their differences lie in the gendered inflection of

objects, spaces, and narrative tones, reflecting the social boundaries of public versus private spheres and the literary stylisation of male-authored narratives.

The *Anathematik*a section of Posidippus's Milan Papyrus, comprising 27 dedicatory epigrams, offers a Hellenistic counterpoint to the ritual practices depicted in Book VI of the *Palatine Anthology*, reinforcing the theme of change while illuminating the Ptolemaic elite's distinct blend of personal piety and political expression.[425] Within the extant portion, six epigrams (AB 36-41) concern human dedicants; three of these feature female dedicators (Hegeso, Arsinoe II, and Epikratis) whose offerings mirror the Anthology's emphasis on women's domestic or ritual transitions, but are refracted through the lens of Ptolemaic royalty and court culture. In AB 36, Hegeso, a Macedonian maiden, dedicates a linen cloth (*bregma*) from Naucratis to Arsinoe II, envisioned as a divine figure wielding a spear and shield in a dream, symbolising her devotion and a ritual transition, possibly marking divine favour or a shift in status. Similarly, in AB 38, Epikratis dedicates a phiale to Arsinoe, celebrating her "freedom" – potentially manumission or a symbolic liberation – echoing Anthology dedications like Bitto's loom-comb to Athena (48), which marks a shift to courtesanhood, both emphasising personal transformation through ritual objects. Arsinoe II's dedications in AB 37 (a lyre to Apollo, carried by an Arionian dolphin) and AB 39 (a temple to herself as Euploia, dedicated by Callicrates) reflect royal piety and maritime protection. The lyre in AB 37 symbolises cultural patronage, while the temple in AB 39, invoked by sailors, shows Arsinoe's divine role as protector, contrasting with the Anthology's more intimate offerings but aligning with its ritual logic of divine reciprocity.

Men's dedications in the *Anathematika* are consistent with the Anthology's emphasis on public or professional milestones, employing a functional tone. In AB 40, Lykos dedicates a "treasure" to Leto, likely a hunting-related item given his name ("wolf") and the epigram's imagery, paralleling Anthology offerings like Polyaenus' hunting gear to Pan (34) or Potamon's gardening tools to Priapus (21), which mark professional success or retirement. Callicrates' temple dedication to

[425] Bastianini et al. (2001): the edition of the Milan Papyrus (3rd-2nd century BCE), containing c. 112 newly discovered epigrams attributed to Posidippus, including the *Anathematika*, with text, translation, and commentary.

Arsinoe Euploia in AB 39, as a Samian admiral, mirrors grand civic offerings in the Anthology, such as Trajan's cups and urus horn to Zeus (332), emphasising leadership and communal glory. The fragmentary AB 41, mentioning a tortoise and eagle's talons, suggests a possible dedication but lacks a clear dedicator, limiting gender assignment; it may echo Anthology animal-related offerings like Comaulus' hedgehog to Bacchus (45), which could be male or female. In Posidippus as in the Anthology, the symbolism of men's and women's offerings reinforces gendered roles: women's objects, like Hegeso's linen or Epikratis' phiale, evoke personal or ritual transitions with sensory imagery (e.g., "sweet sweat" in AB 36), while men's offerings, like Lykos's "treasure" or Callicrates' temple, signal public achievement and status.

5.9 Conclusion: What epigrams reveal – and invent – about women's ritual lives

The dedicatory epigrams of Book VI present a rich but highly stylised vision of women's votive practices, shaped not by cult realities but by the literary imagination of the poets who composed them. While the poems feature an impressive array of female dedicants – maidens, brides, new mothers, priestesses, textile workers, courtesans – a unifying motif underlies this diversity: change. Whether the transition is marriage, childbirth, illness, retirement from service, or the ironic reinvention of weavers as courtesans, the epigrams consistently frame dedication as the ritual articulation of a life-stage shift. Even Bacchylis, in her dedication to Demeter, articulates a moment of change, albeit a temporary and deliberately playful one, when she vows to avoid Bacchus and wine for the time of a hundred suns if she survives her illness.[426] This epigram, however, may not reflect a straightforward votive abstinence in the sense of ritual self-denial, but rather plays with a familiar stereotype of old women as habitual drinkers, a trope present already in comedy (e.g. Aristophanes) and increasingly popular in Hellenistic and Roman-period epigram.[427] Bacchylis' name itself belongs to the cluster of speaking names that evoke wine and intoxication.[428] In this light, her vow acquires a humorous and

[426] 6.291.
[427] Damer (2010) 81-82.
[428] Within Hellenistic epigram, epitaphs for old women often give them wine-associated names: see (Damer) 2010 82 n. 20.

recognisably ironic tone: the audience would immediately detect the implausibility of someone named ‘Bacchylis’ avoiding Bacchus. Moreover (and this is the sharper point) she fulfils the letter of her vow through an ingenious loophole, effectively sidestepping its spirit**.** Such playful subversion reinforces the literary, rather than ritual, nature of the composition, positioning it firmly on the fictional side of the dedicatory spectrum.

Crucially, these texts reflect not actual cult practice but literary constructions of piety. They draw on recognisable epigraphic gestures – cut hair, loosened girdles, discarded tools – yet rework them into symbols dense with narrative, emotional, or moralising weight. The courtesan’s mirror, the child’s toys, the weaver’s spindle, the priestess’s cropped hair: all become emblematic of identity, loss, desire, or social evaluation. Male poets in particular use dedications to comment on female virtue, ageing, erotic capital, or domestic roles, while female poets such as Nossis offer alternative perspectives centred on intimacy, self-fashioning, and embodied experience. The result is a corpus that does not record women’s dedications, but rather how dedicating women were imagined, judged, and aestheticised in Greek cultural memory. For instance, the trope of the ageing hetaera surrendering her mirror to Aphrodite, prominent in Hellenistic and Roman-era epigrams, points to a literary fascination with beauty’s transience, possibly tied to specific cultural moments. The repetition of such themes across the Anthology hints at their role as rhetorical or stylistic experiments, designed to evoke the form and language of inscriptions while prioritising narrative over historical accuracy. The poets’ selective focus on Aphrodite or Artemis, or their fascination with hetaerae, reflects aesthetic choices rather than historical cult patterns, but nevertheless illuminates the ideological landscape within which real dedicatory acts were interpreted. The literary and epigraphic traditions reveal a shared ritual logic: life changes are marked through offering, and offering becomes a way of negotiating one’s place in the world. The significance of this chapter for the study lies in this interpretative space. Inscriptions show practice; epigrams show perception. By juxtaposing the two, we see not only the actions women performed but the stories Greek culture told about those actions.

The dedicatory epigram emerges not as peripheral ornament but as a crucial complement to material evidence, revealing how rituals were imagined, aestheticised, and morally evaluated. In this sense, literary epigrams contribute an indispensable dimension to the study of female piety: they expose the cultural narratives through which women's religious acts were framed, giving access to the symbolic, emotional, and ideological meanings attached to the dedications that, in stone, remain silent. These literary epigrams document how Greek culture imagined, judged, and narrativised female agency, revealing not women's dedications, but the ancient imagination of them.

Catalogue of female dedicatory epigrams in book VI of the *Greek Anthology*

Number in Anthology	Reason behind dedication/status of the woman	Deity	Object dedicated	Notes
1	Courtesan, Lais	Aphrodite	Mirror	
18	Courtesan, Lais	Aphrodite	Mirror	
19	Courtesan (likely Lais)	Aphrodite	Mirror	
20	Courtesan, Lais	Aphrodite	Mirror	
39	Three weavers, workwomen	Athena	Spindle, distaff, comb, basket (for wool)	Joint dedication by three women; they dedicate tools with which they supported themselves in their long poverty; retirement.
47	Widow, former weaver	Athena	Comb	Change of profession; she intends to become a courtesan.
48	Widow, same as 47	Athena	Comb	
59	After childbirth	Aphrodite, Athena, Artemis	Garland, lock of hair, girdle	
60	Not specified	Isis	Glossy locks (hair)	
133	Wedding	Hera	Veil of hair	
136	Two weavers	Not specified	Garment	One woman designed the garment, the other wove

				it.
146	Before childbirth	Eileithyia	Not specified	Prayer that the goddess ease the pain of labour; hope for another male child.
160	Weaver	Athena	Comb, spindle, spinner, thread, and basket	
173	Priestess of Cybele	Cybele	Hair	
174	Three weavers	Athena	Basket, spindle, comb	They declare their wish to “live without reproach”, earning their livelihood with their own hands.
200	After childbirth	Eileithyia	Headbands and robe	Ambrosia thanks the goddess for saving her through a ten-month pregnancy and delivering twins.
201	After childbirth	Artemis	Headbands, hair, belt, under-vest, breast-band, sandals	
202	After childbirth	Artemis	Belt and frock	
206	Weddings	Aphrodite	Sandals; dyed net (for hair); fan; veil; coiled snake-shaped anklet	Group dedication by five women of the same age.
207	Weddings, same as 206	Aphrodite	Same as 206	

208	Now wives, formerly free-born courtesans	Aphrodite	Cloak; shoe; goblet	Group dedication by three women. Work of Aristomachus.
209	After wedding	Aphrodite	Statue of the dedicant	*Do ut des* formula: “give her a great gift in return for this little one”-
210	Courtesan	Aphrodite	Sandals, mirror, belt, hair	
211	Courtesan	Aphrodite	Silver statuette of Love, anklet, caul, girdle, mirror, comb	Thank-offering.
247	Weaver	Athena	Comb, spindle, basket	Offered as a “gift of her poverty”.
265	The female poet Nossis and her mother	Hera	Linen garment	Written by Nossis; mother and daughter dedicate together.
266	Hagelochia, daughter of Damaratus	Artemis	Statue (?)	
269	Priestess of Artemis	Artemis Aethopia	Stone	
270	After childbirth	Eileithyia	Head-kerchief and veil	Prayer to keep death away during labour.
271	After childbirth	Artemis	Shoes and folds of gown	Joint dedication by man and woman. They pray for the child to grow strong.
272	After childbirth	Artemis	Belt, flowered frock, breast-band	

273	Before childbirth	Artemis	Not specified	Prayer to relieve the pains of labour.
274	After childbirth	Eileithyia	Bridal brooch and diadem	Thanks for delivering Tisis from the pangs of labour.
275	Not specified	Aphrodite	Caul (hair ornament)	Focus on the goddess' response; written by Nossis.
276	Before wedding	Artemis	Hair	Prayer for husband and children.
277	Arsinoe, Ptolemy I daughter	Artemis	Hair	
280	Before wedding	Artemis	Tambourine, ball, caul, dolls, dresses	Virgin gift to Virgin Artemis.
281	Before wedding	Rhea	Hair	To bring Aristodike to an age suitable for marriage.
283	Former courtesan	Not specified, (mentions Nemesis, Aphrodite and Athena)	Not specified	
285	Former weaver	Aphrodite	Bonfire of weaving gear	Change of profession: from weaver to courtesan.
286	Three weavers	Artemis	Garment	Jointly produced garment.
287	Three weavers (same as 286)	Artemis	Garment	
289	Three sisters,	Athena	Spindle, wool-	

	weavers		basket, comb	
290	Courtesan	Aphrodite	Fan, tithe	
291	Bacchylis (courtesan?)	Demeter		Vow to abstain from wine; playful literary abstinence.
356	Priestess of Artemis	Artemis	Not specified	Dedication by a mother on behalf of her two daughters.

Chapter 6. Men dedicating for women: proxy, commemoration and representation

Dedications made by men on behalf of women constitute a significant body of evidence within the Greek epigraphic record, one that has often been treated only incidentally within broader discussions of family religion or male dedicatory practice. These proxy dedications, however, raise fundamental questions about women's visibility as ritual agents, the mechanics of religious representation, and the ways in which gendered social structures shaped access to public religious expression. Unlike dedications made by women, which openly position women as ritual actors, dedications made for women occupy a more ambiguous space, one in which women are simultaneously present as named beneficiaries, yet absent as acting dedicants. The significance of this phenomenon lies precisely in this tension. On the one hand, proxy dedications may reflect constraints on women's ability to act independently in public or contractual contexts. On the other hand, they may represent deliberate familial strategies of commemoration, through which male relatives publicly affirmed bonds of care, responsibility, and continuity by means of religious offerings. Proxy dedications therefore cannot be read simply as evidence of female exclusion from ritual action; rather, they illuminate the socially mediated ways in which women's religious presence was expressed within the framework of the *oikos*.

At the centre of this interpretative challenge lies the language of the inscriptions themselves, in particular the use of the preposition ὑπέρ. As Jim has demonstrated, ὑπέρ in dedicatory contexts does not carry a single, fixed meaning, nor does it automatically imply substitution or the displacement of agency; instead, it performs a range of functions: it may designate the intended beneficiary of divine favour, introduce the benefit sought or received, or indicate the vicarious fulfilment of a vow undertaken by another person.[429] Failure to distinguish between these uses risks imposing modern assumptions onto ancient practice and may lead to the erroneous identification of "substitutive" ritual

[429] Jim (2014b).

where none was intended. Jim's analysis is therefore crucial for the present chapter, as it cautions against reading male dedications as straightforward indicators that women were absent from ritual action. Rather, such formulations must be evaluated contextually, with attention to cult, occasion, family structure, and the broader epigraphic habit of the region.

More broadly, proxy dedication should be understood as a general category of religious practice, encompassing any instance in which one individual performs a dedicatory act on behalf of another. Such dedications are not limited to men acting for women, but include a wide range of configurations: women dedicating for men, parents acting for children, individuals fulfilling vows for deceased relatives, or family members acting in a representative capacity for one another.[430] The present chapter isolates the specific case of men dedicating on behalf of women not because it is the only or even the most common form of proxy dedication, but because it raises particularly acute questions about gendered visibility and representation. By focusing on this subset, the analysis can explore how broader practices of proxy dedication intersect with structurally asymmetrical relationships, within which women's religious agency is more likely to be mediated, reframed, or obscured in the epigraphic record. These inscriptions intersect closely with broader questions of male guardianship and ritual representation. Fathers, husbands, brothers, and, in some cases, masters appear as intermediaries acting on women's behalf, raising the question of whether such acts represent literal substitution – men performing ritual acts in place of women – or whether they reflect inscriptional conventions that obscure women's participation in vows, funding, or cultic engagement. Formulae such as ὑπὲρ τῆς γυναικός, or the simple naming of a woman as beneficiary without explicit markers of agency, blur the boundary between representation and erasure and require careful

[430] The phenomenon of family-related dedications has been most systematically treated by Christoph Löhr's monograph *Griechische Familienweihungen. Untersuchungen einer Repräsentationsform von ihren Anfängen bis zum Ende des 4. Jhs. v. Chr. Untersuchungen einer Repräsentationsform von ihren Anfängen bis zum Ende des 4. Jhs. v. Chr.* (2000), which offers a catalogue and analysis of monuments erected by or for family members from the Archaic period to the end of the fourth century BCE. Löhr's typology distinguishes between monuments erected jointly by relatives, dedications *for* relatives, and representations of family groups, and draws attention to the public articulation of kinship through religious monuments. Löhr shows that from the fourth century BCE onward, the public articulation of kinship through religious monuments became increasingly legitimate in its own right, allowing family relationships – rather than civic office or individual achievement – to structure dedicatory display.

contextual analysis informed by the semantic flexibility of dedicatory language. From a methodological perspective, proxy dedications prompt a reassessment of how visibility operates in epigraphic evidence. While inscriptions naming female dedicants allow women's religious agency to be reconstructed directly, proxy dedications reveal a different register of practice, in which women appear as religious subjects but not as grammatical agents. This distinction complicates any straightforward reading of agency based solely on inscriptional form and highlights the need to separate ritual initiative from epigraphic representation.

Within the broader framework of this thesis, this chapter serves as a counterbalance to the preceding ones. While earlier chapters have emphasised women's capacity to act independently as dedicants – particularly in cults associated with healing, protection, and female life stages – this final chapter examines the limits of that visibility and the conditions under which women's religious action was mediated through male kin. In doing so, it challenges linear narratives of female religious autonomy and highlights the coexistence of agency and constraint within Greek religious practice. Accordingly, this chapter asks not whether women participated in religious dedication – an issue already settled – but how that participation was shaped, framed, and sometimes displaced by male familial authority. The analysis focuses on when and why men acted as dedicators for women; which familial relationships are most frequently attested; whether certain cults or dedicatory contexts favoured proxy representation; and how inscriptional formulae both reveal and obscure women's religious roles. Viewed through this lens, proxy dedications emerge not as marginal anomalies, but as a crucial category of evidence for understanding gender, family, and ritual representation in the ancient Greek world. A central problem raised by this material is therefore why, in certain cases, men appear as formal dedicators on women's behalf. What governs this choice, and whose choice is it? The evidence does not permit a single answer. Instead, proxy dedication emerges as a flexible strategy shaped by multiple variables: age, familial hierarchy, sanctuary context, inscriptional convention, and

the demands of public visibility. The following analysis does not aim to resolve this tension definitively, but to make it analytically productive.

6.1. Defining proxy dedication: terminology, scope, and methodological challenges

Before turning to individual case studies, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by "proxy dedication" and to define the scope of the material examined in this chapter. The term is used here to describe votive dedications in which an individual appears as the named dedicator, while another individual is explicitly identified as the primary beneficiary of the offering. Not all dedications involving both men and women fall within this category. Joint dedications, in which men and women appear together as co-dedicants, are excluded unless agency is clearly assigned to the male alone. Likewise, dedications made by men on behalf of households or families more broadly are considered only when a specific female individual is singled out as the beneficiary. This distinction is essential, as the focus of the chapter is not collective family piety per se, but the representation of individual women through male ritual action. One of the principal methodological challenges posed by proxy dedications is the ambiguity of agency. Epigraphic formulae rarely clarify whether the male dedicator acted independently, fulfilled a vow originally made by a woman, or merely formalised the dedication on her behalf. In some cases, the dedication may commemorate a woman who was deceased, absent, or otherwise unable to act publicly; in others, it may reflect conventions that privileged male names in permanent inscriptions regardless of who initiated the offering. The absence of explicit explanation requires the analysis to move beyond grammatical roles and to consider contextual factors such as the nature of the offering, the deity involved, the sanctuary setting, and comparisons with parallel inscriptions.

A related difficulty lies in distinguishing between legal incapacity and social convention. While women's limited legal standing is often invoked to explain proxy dedications, such explanations risk oversimplifying a phenomenon that varies considerably across time, region, and

cult. In the Hellenistic period, for example, women's increased economic visibility complicates any straightforward association between proxy dedication and incapacity. The existence of elite women acting independently as dedicants elsewhere in the epigraphic record likewise cautions against assuming that proxy representation necessarily implies prohibition rather than preference or custom. For this reason, the chapter adopts a comparative and contextual approach. Particular attention is paid to patterns of relationship (father-daughter, husband-wife, and master-slave), which reveal differing logics of authority and representation. Finally, the chapter considers whether certain dedicatory contexts are especially conducive to proxy representation. Dedications involving substantial financial investment or high public visibility may have encouraged male mediation, whether because of cost, administrative requirements, or social expectation. Mapping these patterns allows proxy dedication to be understood not as an ad hoc phenomenon, but as a structured and meaningful practice within Greek religious life.

6.2. Types of female agency revealed through proxy dedications

The phenomenon of men dedicating on behalf of women does not reflect a single, uniform pattern of female exclusion from religious action. Rather, the inscriptions examined make clear that women's religious participation took multiple forms, ranging from situations in which women appear unable to act publicly as dedicants, to cases in which their religious initiative was delegated, commemorated, or embedded within collective family practice. Organising the material according to these configurations allows for a more precise interpretation of such dedications, avoiding both reductive and overly symbolic readings of male mediation. Each inscription is analysed primarily within one analytical configuration, while areas of overlap are addressed through cross-reference.

6.2.1 Structural proxy: women represented by legal or social necessity

The clearest and most internally consistent group of proxy dedications consists of inscriptions in which men, most commonly fathers acting on behalf of daughters, fulfil vows or record offerings in

the name of female relatives. In these cases, proxy dedication is best understood not as an optional or symbolic gesture, but as a structural response to women's restricted capacity to appear publicly and permanently as dedicants within the epigraphic record. The repeated configuration of male dedicator and female beneficiary, especially when the beneficiary is a daughter, points to a normative pattern rooted in systems of guardianship and in prevailing expectations surrounding public religious representation. A clear example is the dedication set up on the Athenian Acropolis by Kynarbos on behalf of his daughters Aristomache and Archestrate, dated around 500 BCE.[431] The inscription is preserved on a marble base and is reconstructed as a short elegiac poem. Cast in poetic form, the text explicitly names the two girls and frames the dedication around their welfare and continuity, addressing Athena Parthenos and extending the hoped-for divine favour to their future descendants (γενεάν), while the father appears only in the final verse as the individual who sets up the offering.[432] Even if the precise formulation of the vow cannot be recovered with certainty, the structure of the text carefully separates ritual intention from epigraphic agency: Aristomache and Archestrate are at the centre of the religious concern and the male agent, the father Kynarbos, is responsible for the public, inscribed act of dedication. Proxy dedication here does not efface female presence; on the contrary, the daughters' names stand at the head of the inscription, and the offering is conceptually framed around their well-being and continuity. At the same time, their agency is unmistakably mediated. The father's role is not merely honorary or commemorative, but functionally necessary: he acts as the legitimate public spokesperson through whom the vow can be translated into a durable monument. The base originally supported at least two bronze figures. Earlier scholarship interpreted these as statues of Aristomache and Archestrate, but Kaczko has argued that the larger plinth almost certainly belonged to an Athena Promachos, while the identity of the second figure cannot be established with confidence from the surviving cuttings.[433] The precise sculptural programme therefore remains

[431] *IG* I³ 745 (= *IG* I² 555).
[432] On the find context and reconstruction, see Raubitschek and Jeffery (1949), 79: Αριστομάχεν καὶ ᾽Αρχεστράτ[εν σοίσον δύο] παῖδε· Φαρθένε, καὶ γενεὰν ἠοῖν [ἐπεύξαμένοιν]· Κύναρβος παῖς᾽Ικ[τίνο τόδ᾽ ἄγαλμ᾽ ἀνέθηκε]. Although the precise wording of the first two verses remains uncertain, the overall logic of the text is secure: a male guardian as the epigraphic agent acting in a representative capacity for his daughters.
[433] Kaczko (2016) 197-200.

uncertain. What is clear, however, is that the inscription itself foregrounds the two daughters as the primary beneficiaries of the dedication, while Kynarbos appears as the formal dedicator through whom their religious interests are publicly articulated. This example represents a socially intelligible and structurally sanctioned mode of female participation, one in which women could be central ritual subjects while remaining epigraphically dependent on a male guardian. In cases involving daughters, it is important to consider age alongside gender. An unmarried daughter is likely to have been young, and in such cases ritual capacity may have been constrained not primarily by gender but by age. The repeated pattern of fathers acting as dedicators for daughters may therefore reflect assumptions about minors' capacity to appear as public agents in durable inscriptions, rather than a general exclusion of women from dedicatory action. Thus, proxy dedication in these cases is better understood as a form of age-mediated representation.

A closely comparable Athenian example is provided by an inscription dated to the mid-fourth century BCE (on the basis of the priesthood of Pataikos, priest of Asklepios before 343/2 BCE)[434], in which Delophanes dedicates an image in connection with a vow attributed to his daughter:

> Φανόστρατη– – – – – –
>
> Δηλοφάνης ἀνέθηκε Χο[λαργεὺς εἰκόνα τήνδε],
>
> τῆς αὑτοῦ θυγατρὸς Δ[–˘˘ εὐξαμένης].
>
> Λυσιμάχηι γὰρ μητρὶ ˘–˘˘–˘˘–
>
> χεῖρα μέγας σωτὴρ –˘˘–˘˘–
>
> ἐπὶ Πατ[αίκου ἱερέως].[435]
>
> Phanostrate …
>
> Delophanes of Cholargos dedicated [this likeness], on behalf of his own daughter D-[who had made a vow]. For on her mother Lysimache … his hand, the great saviour …
>
> During the priesthood of Pat[aikos].

[434] Pataikos' priesthood is recorded in one of the inventories of the Athenian Asklepieion: Aleshire (1989) 126.
[435] *IG* II/III³.4 700.

The opening line names a woman, Phanostrate, and it is at least possible that the statue dedicated represented her, although the relationship between Phanostrate and the dedicating family is not explicitly defined. The participle εὐξαμένης is restored in line 3. Although the restoration is not secure, if accepted it would identify the daughter as the maker of the vow and thus as an active ritual agent, even though the public dedication is carried out by the father. Lines 4–5 further introduce Lysimache, the mother, suggesting a broader family logic of representation, in which paternal dedication is framed and justified through maternal association as well. Lambert plausibly suggests that Phanostrate may be identifiable with the midwife-doctor later commemorated on a funerary monument (IG II² 6873), and that the dedication records a healing of Lysimache, possibly gynaecological, attributed ultimately to Asklepios' hand (l. 5).[436] Even with its textual uncertainties, the inscription fits a wider pattern in which daughters appear as legitimate ritual subjects, while paternal authority mediates their epigraphic visibility. A late Hellenistic Athenian dedication commemorating service as *arrephoros* provides a useful complement to these earlier Classical examples. Shortly before 103/2 BCE, a statue was dedicated for Panarista, daughter of Mantias of Marathon, to Athena Polias and Pandrosos, marking her completion of service:

Παναρίσταν Μαντίου Μαραθωνί[ου ὁ πατὴρ]
καὶ ἡ μήτηρ Θεοδότη Δωσιθέου ἐ[γ Μυρινούττης]
θυγάτηρ καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ Κλεομέν[ης καὶ – – –]
[ἐ]ρρηφορήσασαν Ἀθηνᾶι Πολιά[δι καὶ Πανδρόσωι]
ἀνέθηκαν.[437]

[436] S. Lambert, commentary on *IG* II³.4 700, Attic Inscriptions Online, https://www.atticinscriptions.com/inscription/IGII34/700 (accessed 5 December 2025). On the therapeutic significance of the hand and hand-imposition in Greek healing cults, especially in relation to Asklepios, see Camassa (2023), 134-40.
[437] *IG* II² 3488.

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 *arrephoros* for Athena Polias [and Pandrosos].[438]

The inscription records that the dedication was made not by Panarista herself, but by her father and mother together, along with her brothers. As *arrephoroi,* girls chosen to weave the sacred *peplos* for Athena, were normally between the ages of seven and eleven, Panarista's exclusion from the role of formal dedicator is best explained by childhood rather than by gendered incapacity. At the same time, the inclusion of the mother alongside the father nuances any purely male model of guardianship, suggesting that the proxy action represents the household as a whole rather than a single *kurios.* The text thus combines an explicit commemoration of female ritual labour with a strongly mediated inscriptional voice, articulated through the family as a collective dedicating unit.

More examples come from fourth-century Athenian material from the Asklepieion. Thoudosios of the deme Paiania, for instance, dedicates to Asklepios on behalf of his daughter Theano.[439] The dedication was set up on a circular marble base with a cutting for the plinth of a statue, most likely of Theano herself. The healing context strongly suggests that the vow concerned the daughter's health, yet the act of dedication is carried out and recorded by the father. A closely related inscription records Praxias dedicating to Asklepios, having himself made a vow on behalf of his wife.[440] In this case, the grammatical subject of εὐξάμενος is unambiguously the male dedicator, not the female beneficiary. The inscription therefore represents a distinct configuration of proxy action, in which both the ritual initiative and the epigraphic act are assumed by the man. Despite this difference, the inscription operates within the same structural framework: a woman's bodily vulnerability and religious need are articulated publicly through male agency within a healing cult. In the same context

[438] Translation by Stephen Lambert and Feyo Schuddeboom, Attic Inscriptions Online, https://www.atticinscriptions.com/inscription/IGII2/3488 (accessed 5 December 2025).
[439] *IG* II/III³.4 738 (end 4th c. BCE): Θουδόσιος Παιανιεὺς Ἀσκληπιῶι ἀνέθηκε ὑπὲρ τῆς θυγατρός· Θεανώ. The text is now complete following the identification of a joining fragment found on the south slope of the Acropolis (*EM* 2917), which joins the original base (EM 8766): Choremi (2010). The nominative Θεανώ is most plausibly interpreted as identifying the statue's subject. A woman bearing the same name is also mentioned in one of the Asklepieion inventories dated 329/8 BCE, dedicating a silver cup: Aleshire (1989) Inventory III, l.15, p.129.
[440] *IG* II/III³.4 687 (mid-4th c. BCE): ὑπὲρ τῆς γυναικὸς εὐξάμενος Πραξίας Ἀσκληπιῶι.

of healing cults, another dedication from Carthaea on Ceos, dated to the third century, records Euktemon dedicating to Asklepios on behalf of his daughter Xanthylle.[441] Once again, the daughter's role is central but mediated.

In the northern Black Sea region, at Hermonassa, Demophon dedicates to Apollo Iatros on behalf of his wife Akis.[442] The inscription explicitly identifies Akis as the beneficiary (ὑπὲρ τῆς γυναικός Ἄκιος). The cultic context is again medical, and the dedication is explicitly dated by reference to the Bosporan ruler Leukon, showing its public and formal character. As in the Asklepieion material discussed above, the husband's epigraphic agency should not automatically be taken as evidence of female exclusion from the healing process. The inscription identifies Akis as the beneficiary of the dedication and thus places her at the centre of the transaction with the god, even though the surviving text attributes both the dedication and its public commemoration to her husband. Unlike some of the Athenian healing dedications discussed above, however, the inscription does not provide direct evidence for Akis' own ritual participation. This caution is particularly important because women are otherwise exceptionally well attested as dedicants, incubants, and participants in healing cults, meaning that the absence of explicit female agency in a single inscription cannot be assumed to reflect ritual passivity more generally. Rather, it highlights the coexistence of strong female participation and dedicatory practices in which male relatives sometimes acted as the publicly identified dedicants. The motivations behind such arrangements remain difficult to determine. Dedicatory practice was shaped not only by social and legal conventions but also by the spatial organisation and regulatory regimes of sanctuaries.[443] In such contexts, worshippers who were otherwise active ritual participants may have relied on third parties to place offerings in restricted areas, such as temples, inner precincts, or zones near cult statues. While this hypothesis cannot be

[441] *IG* XII.5 1086: Εὐκτήμων Εὐάνδρου ὑπὲρ τῆς θυγατρὸς Ξανθύλλης Ἀσκληπιῶι.
[442] *CIRB* 1037 (Hermonassa, 389-348 BCE).
Δημοφῶν Ἐργίνο ἀνέθηκεν ὑπὲρ τῆς γυναικὸς Ἄκιος Ἀπόλλωνι Ἰητρῶι ἄρχοντος Λεύκωνος Βοσπόρο καὶ Θευδοσίης καὶ βασιλεύοντος Σίνδων καὶ Τορετῶν καὶ Δανδαρίων καὶ Ψησσῶν.
[443] Colosimo (2017) 188-190, where she suggests that restrictions on access to sanctuaries or specific areas within the *temenos* may have encouraged third-party placement of dedications.

demonstrated directly for the inscriptions examined here, it offers a plausible supplementary explanation for cases in which women appear as primary beneficiaries of dedications executed by male relatives, particularly in sanctuaries where women's ritual presence is otherwise well attested.

In sanctuary inventories women are similarly well-attested as dedicants and simultaneously as beneficiaries of dedications. The inventory of the Athenian Asklepieion dated to the 274/3 BCE records, for instance, a man named Oinokles dedicating some *typoi* on behalf of his wife.[444] In a sanctuary inventory from Didyma (late second to early first century BCE), multiple items are recorded, including at least two gold *hypomelides*, each listed ὑπὲρ a female beneficiary.[445] The daughters are named Bitto and Batio, but their paternal affiliation is largely illegible, and the text is extremely fragmentary. It is therefore unclear who exactly made each dedication or the precise relationship between the donor(s) and the beneficiaries. As is typical of such administrative records, the inscription emphasises the individual responsible for delivering the offerings, while the religious interests of the women are signalled indirectly through the repeated formula ὑπὲρ τῆς θυγατρὸς. Despite the uncertainty, these dedications are conceptually framed around the daughters' welfare.

Comparable configurations are observable elsewhere in the Greek world. In Chios, Phainomenos dedicates to Artemis on behalf of his wife, demonstrating that conjugal mediation could foreground the wife's identity through the explicit mention of both her personal name and patronymic, while still relying on the husband's epigraphic authority.[446] A second Chian dedication of the third-second century BCE reflects the same structural logic. Although fragmentary and textually disputed, the inscription clearly employs the proxy formula ὑπὲρ in connection with a dedication to Artemis Ephesia, again positioning a male figure – probably Agoratos son of Aratos – as the formal dedicator

[444] *IG* II/III³.1 898 ll. 47-48: [---] καὶ τύποι : Ι : ᾶ ἀνέθη[κ]εν Ο̣ἰ̣ν̣[ο]κλῆς : Ἀθμο(νεὺς): ὑπὲρ τῆς γ[υναικὸς.
[445] *IDidyma* 476: ἐπὶ στεφανηφόρου — τοῦ — προφητεύοντος δὲ — τοῦ — ος, ταμιευόντων δὲ καὶ παρεδρευόντων ἐν τῶι ἱερῶι Μενίππου τοῦ Λεο — τοῦ Δημητρίου τάδε ἀνετέθη· ὑπομηλὶς χρυσῆ, ὁλκὴν ἄγουσα χρυσοῦν Ἐ — τοῦ — ὑπὲρ τῆς θυγατρὸς Βιττοῦς — … ὑπομηλὶς ἀπαμ — ὑπὲρ τῆς θυγατρὸς Βατιοῦς — (uncertain whether continued on stone beneath).
[446] *CHIOS* 111, *SEG* 22.516: Φαινόμενος Ἀγγελεῦς ὑπὲρ τῆς γυναικὸς Βίστας τῆς Φειδόλεω θυγατρός Ἀρτέμιδι.

for a female beneficiary.[447] A late fourth-early third century BCE dedication from Chersonesos records a man, whose name is only partially preserved ([Δί]ων or [Βί]ων), dedicating to Athena Soteira on behalf of his wife Kathara, daughter of Damokles.[448] The monument itself, a marble statue base with cuttings for a standing figure, suggests that a statue, plausibly representing Kathara, was erected in fulfilment of the dedication. As in other conjugal proxy dedications, the wife is fully named and genealogically situated, while the husband appears as the public and inscriptional agent through whom the offering is realised. By contrast, from the same city and addressed to the same goddess comes a closely contemporary inscription that adopts a different representational strategy. In a late fourth to early third century BCE altar dedication from Chersonesos, a woman named Arkeso, identified as the wife of Sopolis, appears as the sole dedicant to a goddess characterised as Soteira.[449] Although the text is fragmentary, Arkeso's role as dedicator is unambiguous. This inscription demonstrates that women at Chersonesos could and did dedicate independently to this deity, and that no cultic restriction prevented female self-representation in this context. Male-mediated and female self-dedication coexisted as alternative and equally legitimate modes of religious representation within the same city, cult, and chronological horizon. The coexistence of both forms within identical cultic settings suggests that the selection of dedicatory voice was contingent rather than prescribed, and that inscriptional agency was negotiated rather than mechanically determined. In another fragmentary Chersonesian inscription from the same period a man makes a dedication, probably to Demeter, on behalf of his wife, further indicating that conjugal proxy was not confined to a single cult or goddess within the city.[450]

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[447] Chios, dedication to Artemis Ephesia, 3rd-2nd c. BCE. Gray marble base; fragmentary. Key editions and discussions: *SEG* 35.934; *SEG* 38.838; *CIG* 2227; *SGDI* 5668. Greek text (reconstructed; variant readings):
Reading A (Martin / *SEG* 40.721): [ὁ δεῖνα ὑπὲρ] | Ἀγ[- -]ος Ἀράτου | καὶ … τῆς Δωροθέου θυγα[τρὸς] | Ἀρτέμιδι Ἐφεσείηι
Reading B (Forrest / *SEG* 38.838 / Museum Catalogue): Ἀγ[όρατ]ος Ἀράτου καὶ ὑπὲρ [Ἐ]ὐκλείης, Δωροθέου θυγά[τρος,] Ἀρτέμιδι Ἐφεσείηι
Other variants suggested: Ἀγ[ναῖ]ος, Ἀγ[· · 7–9 · ·]ος (based on *SEG* 35.934; Fraser-Matthews, *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, s.v. Agoratos).
[448] *IOSPE*³ III, 121: [---]ων Ἡρώιδα ὑπὲρ τᾶς γυναικὸς | [---]θαρας θυγατ[ρο]ς Δαμοκλέος | Ἀθαναῖ Σωτείραι. vac. | [Π]ολυκράτης ἐπόησ[ε].
[449] *IOSPE*³ III 122: Ἀρκεσὼ Ἰπ[. c. 6.]ος | Σωπ[ό]λιος γυνά | vac. | [...]ΑΙ Σωτ[ε]ί[ρ]αι.
[450] *IOSPE*³ III 123: [--- ὑπὲρ τᾶς] γυναι[κὸς ---] | [θυγατρὸς ---]Α Δάμα[τρι] vac. This would be the only epigraphic attestation of the goddess at Chersonesos.

In an inscription from Pantikapaion, in the northern Black Sea region, dated 349-310 BCE, a father dedicates an offering to Artemis Ephesia on behalf of his daughter.[451] Another Northern Black Sea example, from Olbia, dating to the third to second century BCE, shows a slightly more complex household configuration:

col. a, left

[– – – – – – – – –]

[.]ω[– – – – – – –]

Ἐπικ[ράτης Νικηράτου]

ὑπὲρ τῆς θυγατρός.

col. b, right

Τιμὼ Ὑψικρέοντος

θυγάτηρ,

Ἐπικράτου γυνή.

Ἐπικράτης Νικηράτου

Ἀρτέμιδι ἱερησαμένην.[452]

In column a, Epikrates dedicates on behalf of his daughter, while column b records Timo, wife of Epikrates, and her service as priestess of Artemis. Τιμώ appears in the nominative, while ἱερησαμένην stands in the accusative. A plausible interpretation is that Epikrates is the dedicant of a statue or representation of his wife, with the nominative naming the figure represented and the accusative reflecting her status as the object of dedication. This dual formulation illustrates the relationship between proxy dedication and female religious office: the daughter remains the beneficiary of her father's dedication, whereas Timo's priestly service is publicly acknowledged. The Olbia inscription

[451] *CIRB* 11 = *IOSPE* II 11: [ὁ δεῖνα] Κοιρ[άν]ου ἀνέθηκεν [ὑπὲρ τ]ῆ[ς θυ]γατρὸς Ἰτίης Ἀρτέμιδι Ἐφεσείηι ἄρ[χοντο]ς Παιρισάδους Βοσπόρου καὶ Θευδ[οσίης] καὶ βασιλεύοντος Σίνδ[ων καὶ Μαϊτ]ῶν πάντων.
[452] *IOSPE* I² 190.

shows that proxy dedication could accommodate multiple female figures within a single monument, combining guardianship, epigraphic convention, and priestly authority in one household context.

Further parallels are found in the eastern Mediterranean. In a dedication from Golgoi, Cyprus, Onesagoras dedicates to Aphrodite Mykeroa on behalf of both his wife Nikion and his daughter, explicitly naming multiple female beneficiaries within a single act of devotion.[453] Here, the dedication functions as a means of representing the religious interests of the family unit as a whole, with the male head of household acting as spokesperson. A further dedication from Golgoi (third century BCE) records instead a woman, named Onasion, dedicating a vowed offering (εὐχήν) to Artemis Golgia on behalf of her daughter Stasio.[454] Thus, the Cypriot material also shows that proxy dedication within the cult of Artemis was not restricted to male dedicators. As is evident more generally in the epigraphic record, women themselves could act as dedicatory agents on behalf of their children, both daughters and sons. It is also worth noting that many of the proxy dedications discussed in this section are addressed to deities whose cults were closely associated with female life stages and familial concerns. Artemis, in particular, recurs across a wide geographical range as the recipient of dedications made on behalf of daughters and wives, while Aphrodite appears in comparable proxy contexts in Cyprus. The prominence of these goddesses suggests that structural proxy was especially suited to cults in which women were central ritual subjects, even when their religious interests were articulated through the epigraphic voice of a male relative.

A further factor that may have favoured proxy dedication concerns not legal capacity but access to ritual space itself. Beyond legal and familial frameworks, the organisation of sacred space itself could shape who appeared as the formal agent of dedication. Greek sanctuaries were not uniformly accessible environments: entry into temples, inner precincts, groves, and cult statues could be regulated according to gender, ritual status, priestly office, or specific moments within the ritual

[453] *IG* XV.2 325: Ὀνησαγόρας ὑπὲρ τῆς γυναικὸς Νικίου καὶ τῆς θυγατρὸς […] Ἀφροδίτηι Μυκηροαί κώμης Ἑλικούσης.
[454] *SEG* 6.830**,** *SEG* 32.1377: Ὀνάσιον ὑπὲρ τῆς θυγατρὸς Στασίου Ἀφροδίτηι Γολγίαι εὐχήν. See Pirenne-Delforge (1994) 356-358 on the cult of Artemis Golgia. Other dedications to the goddess: *SEG* 6.831, *SEG* 6.832.

calendar.[455] Inscriptions outlining sanctuary regulations preserve numerous local traditions that attest to gender-specific restrictions governing visibility, movement, and ritual performance.[456] The late fourth-century dossier of purity regulations from Cyrene, for instance, articulates in exceptional detail how bodily states, sexual activity, childbirth, and ritual transgression condition access to sanctuaries and the performance of cult acts for both men and women, demonstrating the extent to which participation in ritual space was procedurally regulated rather than universally available.[457] A late fifth-century sacrificial regulation from the Anakeion at Elateia stipulates that the one who sacrifices must set up a tent within the sanctuary, and adds tersely: "a woman cannot enter" (γυναῖκα μὲ παρίμεν).[458] Although the precise scope of the prohibition remains debated – whether it excluded women from the sanctuary altogether or specifically from participation in sacrifice – the regulation nonetheless demonstrates that access to ritual space could be formally limited by gender in particular cult contexts. At Lindos, a series of regulations concerning sacrifices to Athena Apotropaia, Zeus Apotropaios and to Zeus Amalos specify that certain rites were "not religiously permitted to women" (γυναιξὶ οὐκ ὁσία).[459] These prohibitions frame exclusion not as a matter of civic status or incapacity, but as a question of ritual correctness internal to the cult. Similar language appears in a mid-fifth century regulation for Heracles on Thasos, which combines restrictions on sacrificial practice with an explicit interdiction on female participation (οὐδὲ γυναικὶ θέμις).[460] Such cases are relatively rare and highly localised, but precisely for that reason they are revealing: they show that women's exclusion from specific ritual acts was exceptional, cult-specific, and normatively marked.

[455] Carbon and Harris (2025) analyse how Greek sanctuaries were tightly regulated spaces, with "policing" encompassing the enforcement of rules governing access, conduct, sacrifices and dedications. Sanctuary officials ensured that only appropriate individuals entered, that rituals were carried out correctly, and that offerings were properly managed, using fines, physical punishment, or social and divine sanctions to maintain sacred norms and protect the integrity of the space.
[456] On gendered regulation in *leges sacrae*, see Cole (1992), who offers a systematic analysis of restrictions affecting women, including exclusions from cult, purity requirements, and priestly regulations. Cole notes that formulae such as οὐ θέμις and οὐχ ὁσία are applied to women and foreigners – but not to men –suggesting that cultic privilege was defined through the exclusion of marked groups. She further observes that women are most frequently excluded from the cults of male gods (notably Heracles and several manifestations of Zeus), especially where these cults are associated with typically male activities, and that purity regulations disproportionately frame pollution in explicitly female terms. More broadly, the evidence reflects a gendered hierarchy embedded within the normative regulation of ritual participation.
[457] *CGRN* 99.
[458] *CGRN* 33.
[459] *CGRN* 62; *CGRN* 63.
[460] *CGRN* 27.

Pausanias records several instances in which access to cult images or sacred areas was restricted exclusively to women. At Bryseae in Laconia, the temple of Dionysus contained an image that only women could see, since women alone performed the sacrificial rites in secret.[461] Similarly, at Aegium, the image of Hera was visible only to the serving priestess,[462] while at Megalopolis women were permitted to enter the sanctuary of the Maid at all times, whereas men were admitted only once a year.[463] Pausanias also notes a sanctuary of Demeter "in the Marsh" near Megalopolis, entry to which was restricted to women alone, further attesting the close association between female-only access and cults concerned with fertility, agriculture, and life-cycle transition.[464] Elsewhere, restriction operated not through permanent exclusion but through ritual or divine regulation. In Sparta, the sanctuary of Hilaeira and Phoebe was served by young priestesses, yet even here ritual authority was circumscribed: Pausanias records that a former priestess who adorned one of the images was forbidden by a dream from adorning the other, illustrating how divine sanction could delimit ritual action even for authorised female agents.[465] In other contexts, restrictions functioned along different axes altogether. At Erythrae, Pausanias recounts that access to the sanctuary of Heracles was denied to all women except Thracian women, following a mythic precedent in which only they complied with a divine command; the sanctuary thus preserved an enduring rule of ethnic and gender-specific access.[466] Conversely, some sanctuaries excluded women altogether. At Geronthrae, women were forbidden to enter the grove of Ares during the annual festival,[467] and at Elis access to the sanctuary of Hades was limited exclusively to the priest, even when the enclosure was opened, once a year.[468] In some contexts, restrictions operated temporarily and ritually rather than permanently: at the Mysaeum near Pellene, men withdrew from the sanctuary on the third day of the festival of Demeter, leaving women alone to perform the nocturnal rites, before ritual reintegration followed the next day.[469]

[461] Paus. 3.20.3.
[462] Paus. 7.23.8.
[463] Paus. 8.31.8.
[464] Paus. 8.36.6
[465] Paus. 3.16.1.
[466] Paus. 7.5.7.
[467] Paus. 3.22.7.
[468] Paus. 6.25.2.
[469] Paus.7.27.10.

These examples demonstrate that access to sacred space was neither uniform nor governed by a single logic of inclusion or exclusion. Gender, ethnicity, ritual role, local traditions and divine mandate could each determine who was permitted to see, enter, or act within a sanctuary at a given moment. Women could be the sole performers of secret rites, exclusive viewers of cult images, or the only individuals permitted entry into certain sanctuaries, just as they could be barred from other spaces altogether. What these cases highlight is that ritual participation and spatial access were carefully regulated, and that such regulation shaped how religious action was publicly articulated. If access to a temple interior, cult statue, or restricted precinct was limited to specific categories of participants, the physical placement of a dedication may have required mediation by an authorised individual. These cases provide a comparative framework that highlights how sanctuary-specific rules could structure visibility and representation. Within such regulated environments, proxy dedication can be understood as a practical and socially intelligible mechanism: a mode of representation that accommodated women's ritual involvement within locally defined spatial and procedural constraints.

6.2.2 Delegated representation: women with demonstrable ritual capacity

A second category highlights contexts in which women were demonstrably capable of independent ritual action, yet male mediation persists. The inscriptions considered here name women who held recognised priestly offices or cultic responsibilities – as in the case of Timo previously mentioned, whose service as priestess of Artemis is publicly recorded even as epigraphic agency remains male-mediated – suggesting that their formal capacity to act was not in question. The continued appearance of male dedicators in these contexts therefore reflects choices about public visibility, epigraphic authority, and the social framing of ritual acts rather than the women's inability to participate. A particularly clear illustration of delegated representation shaped by civic procedure rather than ritual incapacity is provided by the late Hellenistic decrees honouring the *ergastinai*, the girls responsible for weaving Athena's *peplos* for the Panathenaia.[470] In the decree of 108/7 BCE the maidens are

[470] *IG* II² 1036; *AIUK* 1, Petworth House no. 1 with Lambert's translation.

explicitly credited with fulfilling their ritual obligations, participating in the procession, and preparing, from their own resources, a silver *phiale* intended as a dedicatory memorial to Athena. Yet the formal request for permission to dedicate is made not by the girls themselves, but by their fathers, who approach the *boule* on their behalf. The decree records that the fathers "make clear" that the maidens have acted correctly and request authorisation for the dedication, which the Council and People subsequently grant (lines 18-20). This case is particularly instructive because it demonstrates that even where women's ritual competence, initiative, and financial contribution are explicitly acknowledged, the act of dedication could still require male mediation at the level of civic approval and inscription.[471] The *ergastinai* are not substituted for, nor rendered invisible; their names are listed publicly by tribe, and their piety is formally praised. In this context, proxy action emerges not as a corrective for female incapacity, but as a mechanism through which women's ritual labour is translated into publicly authorised and durable commemoration.

A dedication from Thessaly, already introduced in Chapter 2 in the context of the *nebeusasai* rite, provides an important bridge between women's independent ritual action and male-mediated public representation. The text reads: "To Artemis Throsia. Hippolochos, son of Hippolochos, dedicates this on behalf of Eubioteia, daughter of Alexippos, who had performed the ritual, as a *lytra*".[472] This inscription is exceptional within the *nebeusasai* corpus, where women almost invariably appear as dedicants in their own names after completing the ritual service. This case exemplifies the delegated representation model, in which male intermediaries appear in the epigraphic record not because women lacked capacity, but because social conventions, familial obligations, or the public visibility of the act favoured male names. Hippolochos' dedication functions as an epigraphic formalisation of an act already performed. The anomaly demonstrates that while ritual performance belonged to girls, the monumentalisation of that performance could be appropriated into

[471] Colosimo (2017) 122-124, esp. on civic regulation of dedicatory practice and the role of third-party mediation.
[472] *SEG* 53.554. Ἀρτέμιδι Θροσία Ἱππόλοχος Ἱππολόχειος ὑ[πὲρ] | Εὐβιοτείας Ἀλεξιππείας νεβεύσανσας | λύτρα.
As noted in Chapter 2, Eubioteia had clearly performed the ritual for Artemis Throsia, confirming her personal ritual competence and active agency, yet the dedication is issued under the name of Hippolochos.

male-controlled modes of public display. In another mid-fifth-century dedication from Agia in Thessaly, the dedicant Patrokles explicitly identifies the offering as a vow of his mother, while carrying out the act of dedication himself:

[μ]ατέρος εὐχολάν, Αἰσό[νι]-
ε, τοὶ τόδ’ ἄγ<α>λμα, vacat
Πατροκλέας ὀνέθεκε
ὁ Μάλλ[οι Ὀρε]σσθειάτας.[473]

To you, O Aisonios, as a vow of [his] mother, this statue Patrokles dedicated, son of Mallos, from Oresthasion.

The offering is explicitly identified as an ἄγαλμα*,* implying a statue dedication. It is interesting to note the use of the term εὐχολάν,[474] while Αἰσό[νι]ε is a vocative divine epithet, probably of Apollo (cf. *SEG* 53.529). The mother herself is therefore not named, yet her ritual initiative is unambiguously asserted. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the vow is made by a woman to a male deity.

A dedication from Histria, in modern Romania, offers an example of interpretive ambiguity. Dating to ca. 350-300 BCE, the fragmentary marble plaque records a dedication to Leto on behalf of a woman described as priestess of Artemis Pythia and wife of Apollodoros; editors reconstruct the text as follows:

[· · ? · ·]δίου ὑπὲρ
[· · ? · ·] Ἡφαιστοῦς
[· · ? · ·] Ἀπολλο-
[δώρου δὲ γυνῆ]ς, ἱερησα-
[μένης Ἀρτέμ]ιδος Πυ-

[473] *IG* IX.2 1098 (ca. 450-425 BCE).
[474] On εὐχωλή as the epic and poetic variant of εὐχή, see *LSJ* s.v.

θίης εὐχήν Λητοῖ.[475]

The surviving evidence leaves open two possibilities. The conventional reading, followed by the editors, suggests that a male intermediary (whose name is lost in the first line) made the dedication on behalf of the priestess, daughter of Hephaistes, marking a formal act of representation after her term of office.[476] Alternatively, Chaniotis has proposed that the priestess herself may have been the dedicator: since priests often marked the end of their service through dedicatory acts, the text could be read as a dedication made by a mother on behalf of her children, a possibility that he connects with the fact that the offering is addressed to Leto rather than to Artemis.[477] Two fifth-century dedications attest the goddess' presence at Histria prior to the later, fragmentary plaque: the statue base *IHistriae* 170 and the smaller base *IHistriae* 380. The latter, republished by Avram, records a dedication to Leto made by a woman identified as the wife of Protogones, who offered a κόσμημα on what is likely the base of a small bronze statuette.[478] Avram argues persuasively that the dedicator herself was a woman acting in her own right, while the earlier statue base (*IHistriae* 170) appears to have been dedicated by a male descendant whose father may belong to the same family group.[479] On this reconstruction, both inscriptions point to sustained familial engagement with Leto's cult across generations, involving both female and male dedicators. While Chaniotis' reconstruction is compelling, explicit naming of multiple children in proxy formulas remains comparatively rare, and the fragmentary state of the stone prevents a definitive resolution. The Histria material therefore complicates a simple opposition between autonomous female action and delegated male representation: women could dedicate independently, yet familial frameworks and commemorative conventions shaped how agency was inscribed. In this light, the later priestess inscription need not be read as exceptional or restrictive; rather, it participates in a local epigraphic habit in which cultic continuity, family memory, and the

[475] *SEG* 58.722; […]δίου ὑπὲρ […] Ἡφαιστοῦς […] Ἀπολλο[δώρου δὲ γυνῆ]ς, ἱερησα[μένης Ἀρτέμ]ιδος Πυ[θίης εὐχήν] Λητοῖ.
[476] Avram et al. (2008).
[477] ὑπὲρ | [τῶν τέκνων] Ἡφαιστοῦς, | [name of a boy], Ἀπολλο|[δώρου, name of a girl]ς, Chaniotis.]
[478] Avram (2003). *IHistriae* 380: [Σ]ωθεμ[ίς,] [Πρ]ωτογέν[ους] [γυ]νή, κόσ[μημα] Λητο[ῖ].
[479] *IHistriae* 170: [ὁ δεῖνα] Ἱ[ππο]λό[χο]εμιος Λητοῖ [ἀ]νέθηκ[ε]ν ἐπὶ Ἱπ[πολόχ]ο το Θεοδ[ότο] ἱέ[ρεω].

public articulation of ritual action intersect, sometimes foregrounding male names, sometimes female, without undermining women's demonstrable ritual capacity.

6.2.3. Honorific dedications and household representation

A distinct subset of inscriptions operates in a register that stresses remembrance and the durable inscription of personal identity. Rather than the fulfilment of a specific vow or ritual obligation, the honorific monuments analysed below commemorate women through statues or other permanent representations erected by male relatives. As Ma has shown, private family monuments constitute a distinct category of dedication, occupying the same public and sacred spaces as civic honorific statues while making visible networks of kinship through the representation of particular family members.[480] Their inscriptions do not simply identify the honorand, but map the relationships between dedicators and the person represented, transforming the monument into a public display of family solidarity and genealogy. Löhr emphasises that female portrait statues are rare before the fourth century BCE and usually embedded within family groups, with women honoured primarily as relational figures; from the late Classical period onward, family itself becomes a displayable value, and monuments increasingly include relatives without public roles as part of a strategy of household representation.[481] Whether or not the women commemorated were deceased cannot always be established; what is clear, however, is that these dedications stabilise female identity through repetition, genealogical positioning, and public inscription. A paradigmatic example is a late Hellenistic inscription from Amarynthos (Euboea), where the same woman is commemorated through the actions of both husband and son:

Ὡρωπιάδης Βιόττου τὴν γυ[ναῖκα]
καὶ Βίοττος Ὡρωπιάδου τὴν μ[ητέρα]
Δημοκρίτην Καλλιστρ[άτου]
Ἀρτέμιδι, Ἀπόλλωνι, Λητοῖ.[482]

[480] Ma (2013) 155-194.
[481] Löhr (2000) 191-218.
[482] *IG* XII.9 142.

"Oroppiades son of Biottos (dedicated) his wife,
and Biottos son of Oroppiades (dedicated) his mother,
Demokrite daughter of Kallistratos,
to Artemis, Apollo, and Leto."

The duplication of dedication signals the consolidation of female identity within the familial line: the woman's position is articulated simultaneously through conjugal and filial relationships. The inscription inscribes Demokrite's identity through male kinship roles, embedding her within the genealogical structure of the *oikos* and ensuring her visibility within the cultic space of Artemis, Apollo, and Leto. As argued in Chapter 2 (§2.5), the recurring invocation of Artemis together with Apollo and Leto frames these acts within a household-oriented cult logic, and the divine family's kinship mirrors and protects the human *oikos*.[483] A closely related mechanism appears in another inscription from Amarynthos, dated to the early first century BCE, in which two brothers, together with their mother, dedicate are honouring their sister:

Φιλῖνος καὶ Γοργίας οἱ Κλεομάχου
τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἀδελφὴν καὶ Ἰσώτα? Μικίωνος
τὴν θυγατέρα Ἄστυλλαν Κλεομάχου
Ἀρτέμιδι, Ἀπόλλωνι, Λητοῖ.[484]

"Philinos and Gorgias, sons of Kleomachos,
(dedicated) their sister and Isota
daughter of Mikion (dedicated),
Astylla daughter of Kleomachos,
to Artemis, Apollo, and Leto."

Here again, the dedication clearly operates as an act of representational fixation. Astylla's identity is stabilised through fraternal mediation, her presence within the sanctuary articulated not through her

[483] And as shown in the same section, women, too, could act as commemorative agents and could inscribe male memory directly, without mediation: see, for instance, *IG* XII.9 98.
[484] *IG* XII.9 141.

own ritual action but through male kin who control the epigraphic voice. In both Amarynthos inscriptions the women appear in the accusative as the direct object of the dedicatory act, rather than as the beneficiary of a dedication expressed through ὑπὲρ + genitive. This grammatical choice signals a different epigraphic logic from the proxy dedications discussed earlier in this chapter: the woman is not represented as the recipient of divine favour, but as the object of dedication itself, most plausibly in the form of a statue or other representation. Such formulations may – but need not – imply posthumous commemoration, and they may also reflect cultic roles, such as priesthood, that warranted durable memorialisation. In the absence of explicit funerary markers, these dedications are best understood not as unequivocally posthumous, but as acts of memorialising representation that stabilise female identity within the religious and genealogical order of the household. The accusative construction frames the woman as a figure to be fixed, displayed, and remembered within the sanctuary, while the authority to inscribe that presence remains with her male kin.

An elaborate articulation is found in a late Hellenistic/early Imperial stele from Idyma, Caria (IG XII.4 4:3320bis). The inscription records multiple male family members acting on behalf of female relatives, demonstrating how honorific dedication can operate to construct and perform household memory across generations. The text reads:

ὑπὲρ Σωτηρίδος Κῴας
Μόσσχος δ᾽ Ῥόδιος
ὑπὲρ τῆς τροφοῦς,
καὶ Ἀρτεμῆς Κῷος ὑπὲρ
τῆς μητρὸς καὶ ὑπὲρ Ἀθηνα-
ε̣ίδος τῆς ἀδελφῆς, καὶ Ἀρι-
σ̣τόβουλος Παυσανία Ἰδύ-
μιος ὑπὲρ τῆς γυναικὸς κα[ὶ]
ὑπὲρ τῆς προγόνου μνήμης
ἕνεκεν.[485]

[485] *IG* XII.4 4:3320bis.

Mosschos of Rhodes (set this up) on behalf of Soteris of Kos, his foster mother; and Artemes of Kos, on behalf of his mother and his sister Athenais; and Aristoboulos, son of Pausanias, of Idyma, on behalf of his wife and in memory of his ancestor.

While the inscription is formally an epitaph rather than a votive dedication, it provides a particularly instructive case for male-mediated female commemoration within household religious frameworks. The stele features a niche containing a relief of a woman (Soteris) holding the hand of a girl (Athenais), visually reinforcing the generational and familial relationships recorded in the text.[486] Careful reading shows that three male dedicants commemorate female family members across generations. Mosschos honours his foster mother Soteris; Artemes commemorates his mother and his sister; Aristoboulos, son of Pausanias, dedicates for his wife and grandmother.

Despite its funerary context, the inscription exhibits the same logic as votive dedications: male heads of the household publicly formalise and stabilise women's identities, embedding them within genealogical and household frameworks. Although slightly later than the Classical-Hellenistic range of this study, it serves as a late-Hellenistic *terminus ad quem*, illustrating the persistence of household-oriented commemorative strategies. The inscription does not explicitly name a deity, indicating that the focus is memorial rather than cultic. Nevertheless, the act remains a form of religious inscription, as it marks family members' presence within sacred or public visible space, effectively ritualising remembrance. What is particularly striking about this inscription is its multi-generational logic. Women appear not as peripheral figures but as central nodes linking branches of the family network. The male dedicants operate as formal representatives, yet the visibility and specificity of women's identities remain central: each dedication names particular female relatives and situates them within a living genealogical framework. Mosschos' dedication for his foster-mother acknowledges the maternal care that structured household life; Artemes' commemoration of mother and sister demonstrates intergenerational continuity; Aristoboulos' dual dedication to his wife and ancestor reinforces both conjugal and ancestral memory. The inscription exemplifies how honorific dedication

[486] *SEG* 63.882. A related mechanism appears in a contemporaneous epitaph from Idyma, where a husband and son commemorate a woman, further illustrating male-mediated household commemoration: *SEG* 63.883.

can transform individual religious action into collective household memory. Male heads of the family act publicly, but the women remain fully present as named beneficiaries, their identities encoded in the epigraphic record. In doing so, the stele performs a form of lineage construction: it records and links past, present, and future family members, embedding female presence in a durable, relational, and commemorative framework.

This commemorative dimension finds a close, though chronologically later, parallel in the Delian dossier analysed by McClain and Rauh: their analysis demonstrates that the unusually private and domestic dedications of Sp. Stertinius to Greek and Egyptian deities were intimately shaped by the presence and ongoing religious influence of the women of his household.[487] They point in particular to the repeated inclusion of female family members in dedicatory formulas and subscription lists, as well as to the domestic orientation of the cults addressed, which together indicate that these offerings functioned to articulate and preserve household memory rather than to advertise individual male devotion. In this respect, the Delian evidence closely parallels the logic observed in the Idyma stele: in both contexts, male heads of household act as inscriptional representatives, while women remain the central objects of commemoration, embedded within genealogical and household memory through durable religious inscription.

6.3 Integrating literary and legal evidence: proxy, representation, and household authority

The epigraphic patterns analysed in this chapter reflect broader normative frameworks governing gender and public representation in Greek society. Literary and legal sources provide a necessary comparative lens through which proxy dedication can be situated as a socially intelligible practice. Read alongside the inscriptions, these texts confirm that women's religious, economic, and commemorative agency was widely acknowledged, yet often articulated through male intermediaries when it entered into public and consequential forms. Athenian legal discourse offers the clearest articulation of the principle that underpins many of the "structural proxy" cases examined above

[487] McClain and Rauh (1996).

(§6.2.1): women could initiate religious commitments, yet their actions were frequently validated, executed, or recorded through a *kurios*. Isaeus' speeches, especially *On the Estate of Pyrrhos*, are particularly instructive in this respect.[488] The case revolves around the transmission of property through a woman who, while central to the dispute, never appears as a direct legal actor; instead, her interests and decisions are reconstructed through the claims of male relatives acting on her behalf. Pyrrhos, who had no sons but had a daughter, Phile, adopted his nephew Endios. When Pyrrhos died, Endios succeeded him and married Phile to an Athenian man, Xenokles, with a dowry. Upon Endios' death, a protracted inheritance dispute erupted: Phile claimed her father's estate as the sole surviving child, while Endios' mother and brother sought to block her claim. Their legal strategy involved attacking her legitimacy by casting her mother as a *hetaera* and inventing claims about household conduct, despite witnesses attesting to the legality of her parents' marriage and Phile's own marriage and citizen children.[489] This case highlights the precarious position of women in public and legal spheres, even when their claims were strong and unambiguous. Importantly, the dispute demonstrates that the articulation of female agency was often mediated through male relatives and legal advocates: Phile's interests were represented by her husband, while her opponents relied on family members and hired orators to pursue their claims. The persistence of this litigation and the strategic manipulation of witnesses expose how gendered assumptions could be leveraged to contest a woman's property rights, even in the face of clear legal entitlements.[490] What matters here is not simply women's exclusion from court procedure, but the fact that female agency was real and consequential, even when it had to be voiced through male intermediaries. This logic closely parallels the epigraphic phenomenon analysed throughout this chapter. Just as women's property interests could be decisive without being formally expressed in court, women's religious intentions (vows, ritual participation, or commemorative initiatives) could shape dedicatory practice without necessarily being reflected in the grammatical

[488] Isaeus 3, *On the Estate of Pyrrhus.*
[489] Kapparis (2022) 73-74: Phile's claim was challenged on grounds of illegitimacy and maternal conduct; Endios' brother and mother employed Isaeus to advance their interests.
[490] Kapparis (2022) 145-147: even with unambiguous legal entitlement, female heirs could be vulnerable; agency was exercised through male intermediaries, paralleling epigraphic proxy practices.

role of dedicator. The distinction repeatedly drawn above between ritual initiative and epigraphic representation finds strong confirmation in legal discourse, where agency and representation are systematically disentangled. The contrast between women's exclusion from litigation and their presence as dedicants therefore reveals an important asymmetry: while legal procedure imposed strict barriers on female speech and action, religious dedication remained a domain in which women could act meaningfully, albeit sometimes through mediated forms of representation.

In Xenophon's model of the household, religious responsibility is explicitly shared yet asymmetrically structured: the wife is entrusted with the internal management of the *oikos*, including domestic cult, storage of sacred objects, and ritual routines, while the husband functions as the household's public representative.[491] This division assigns visibility and public articulation to the male head of household, while not denying women's religious competences.[492] This model aligns closely with the "delegated representation" cases discussed in §6.2.2, particularly those involving women with demonstrable ritual capacity, such as priestesses or ritual performers. The Thessalian *nebeusasai* inscription, where a man dedicates on behalf of a woman who had herself completed the ritual, exemplifies precisely this dynamic: the woman performs, the man inscribes. Xenophon's household ideology thus offers a conceptual bridge between female ritual labour and male epigraphic authority, reinforcing the interpretation that male mediation often formalised rather than replaced women's religious action.

Later literary sources further illuminate the commemorative dimension of proxy dedication explored in § 6.2.3. Pausanias' likewise records occurrences of statues of women in public and sacred spaces, demonstrating how female figures could serve as focal points of collective memory even when the dedicatory voice was not their own. For example, in his description of Troezen Pausanias notes a

[491] Xen., *Oeconomicus* 7-10.
[492] On the broader logic whereby women's ritual labour underpins, rather than competes with, male public authority, see Foxhall (1995) who demonstrates that women's cultic activity was both socially indispensable and structurally channelled through male modes of civic representation. Foxhall's analysis helps explain why ritual initiative and public articulation need not coincide, reinforcing the interpretation of male inscriptional mediation as a formalising mechanism rather than evidence of female incapacity.

row of stone statues of women and their children set up under a portico in the marketplace; these commemorated the Athenian women whom the Troezenians sheltered when Athens resolved to evacuate in the face of the Persian invasion, and the likenesses were made only for those of high rank.[493] Elsewhere Pausanias records statues of individual women embedded in wider monumental contexts. At Sparta, he reports seeing a statue said by the locals to be Euryleonis, a woman associated with Olympic victories in chariot racing.[494] At Olympia, he describes a statue of Cynisca, the Spartan woman who won the four-horse chariot race, set beside the race monuments and accompanied by inscriptions relating to her victories.[495] Significantly, in these examples Pausanias' interest lies primarily in the women commemorated and the local traditions attached to their monuments rather than in the identity of the original dedicators. His descriptions therefore preserve the public visibility of female commemoration while often leaving the circumstances of dedication unspecified. They illustrate how women could occupy a prominent place in civic and sacred memory, even when the processes through which such monuments were commissioned and dedicated remain unclear.

Legal texts demonstrate that women's actions could carry weight without direct public articulation; philosophical and didactic literature normalises a division between internal religious competence and external representation; and historiographical and periegetic sources confirm that women's commemoration through male agency was both meaningful and valued. Crucially, these sources also help explain why proxy dedication takes different forms across the analytical categories developed above. In "structural proxy" cases, male mediation reflects widely shared assumptions about guardianship and public authority. In "delegated representation," it reflects conventions of inscription rather than incapacity. In "memorialising proxy," it becomes a strategy for stabilising identity, memory, and lineage within the religious sphere. Literary and legal evidence thus does more than contextualise the inscriptions: it supports a differentiated reading of proxy dedication as a flexible and meaningful mode of articulating women's religious presence. By integrating these

[493] Paus. 2.31.7.
[494] Paus. 3.17.6.
[495] Paus. 6.1.6.

discourses, proxy dedication emerges not as a residual category defined by absence, but as a structured practice through which women's religious agency was translated into durable, socially legible form. The epigraphic record, far from distorting women's roles, preserves precisely those moments where agency, authority, and memory intersected most sharply within the ancient Greek household.

6.4 Conclusion: proxy dedication as negotiated agency

This chapter has demonstrated that proxy dedication was a structured and socially intelligible mode of religious representation rather than a straightforward sign of female exclusion. The inscriptions examined reveal that women's religious agency could be articulated through intermediaries who navigated the conventions of epigraphic visibility, household authority, legal and social norms. Proxy dedications make visible the gap between the act of performing the ritual and the act of recording it. Women often defined the religious action, initiated vows, or served as primary beneficiaries, while male relatives formalised the act in durable inscriptions. The separation between practice and documentation reveals the limits of epigraphy: the named dedicator is not always the effective agent, and apparent male dominance in inscriptions reflects the logistics of public representation rather than the absence of female participation. The analysis has also shown that not all male-mediated dedications belong to the same epigraphic phenomenon.

A distinction must be drawn between genuine proxy dedications, in which one individual performs or records a religious act on behalf of another, and honorific or commemorative monuments, in which male relatives dedicate statues or other representations of women. Although both forms make women visible through male mediation, they operate according to different inscriptional logics. Proxy dedications primarily concern ritual action and its public articulation, whereas honorific family monuments construct household memory by embedding women within networks of kinship and genealogy through durable public display. Ultimately, proxy dedications reveal agency as negotiated, mediated, and socially constrained rather than absent. Recognising this distinction allows a more

nuanced reconstruction of women's religious lives, showing that epigraphic silence or asymmetry does not equate to ritual passivity, and that male execution of a dedication can coexist with female initiative and authority. The evidence suggests that the choice of dedicator was not governed by gender alone. Factors such as marital status, age, household strategy, sanctuary practice, commemorative intent, the scale or cost of the monument, and conventions of epigraphic display may all have played a role, shaping whether a woman appeared as the named dedicator or as a beneficiary represented by a male relative. In many cases, this choice cannot be recovered from the evidence; acknowledging that indeterminacy is itself essential to interpreting proxy dedication without reducing it to absence or exclusion.

List of inscriptions cited

Reference	Location	Deity	Date
IG I³ 745	Athens (Acropolis)	Athena Parthenos	ca. 500 BCE
IG IX.2 1098	Agia (Thessaly)	Apollo (?) Aisonios	450–425 BCE
CIRB 1037	Hermonassa (Bosporos)	Apollo Iatros	389–348 BCE
SEG 58.722	Histria	Leto	ca. 350–300 BCE
CIRB 11	Pantikapaion (Bosporos)	Artemis Ephesia	349–310 BCE
IOSPE³ III 121	Chersonesos	Athena Soteira	late 4th–early 3rd c. BCE
IOSPE³ III 123	Chersonesos	Demeter (?)	late 4th–early 3rd c. BCE
IG II/III³.4 687	Athens (Asklepieion)	Asklepios	mid-4th c. BCE
IG II/III³.4 738	Athens (Asklepieion)	Asklepios	ca. 300 BCE
IG XII.5 1086	Carthaea (Ceos)	Asklepios	3rd c. BCE
IOSPE I² 190	Olbia (Black Sea)	Artemis	3rd–2nd c. BCE
CHIOS 111	Chios	Artemis	—
SEG 35.934	Chios	Artemis Ephesia	3rd–2nd c. BCE
IG XV.2 325	Golgoi (Cyprus)	Aphrodite Mykeroa	3rd–2nd c. BCE
SEG 6.830	Golgoi (Cyprus)	Aphrodite Golgia	3rd c. BCE
IG II/III³.1 898	Athens (Asklepieion)	Asklepios	274/3 BCE
IDidyma 476	Didyma	Apollo	late 2nd–early 1st c. BCE
SEG 53.554	Thessaly	Artemis Throsia	late 2nd/early 1st cent BCE
IG II² 3488	Athens	Athena Polias, Pandrosos	103/2 BCE
IG XII.9 141	Amarynthos (Euboea)	Artemis, Apollo, Leto	early 1st c. BCE
IG XII.9 142	Amarynthos (Euboea)	Artemis, Apollo, Leto	early 1st c. BCE
IG XII.4 4:3320bis	Idyma (Caria)	— (memorial context)	late Hellenistic / early Imperial

Conclusions

This dissertation has shown that inscribed votive dedications constitute a primary and autonomous form of evidence for women's religious agency in Classical and Hellenistic Greece. Far from being marginal or merely domestic expressions of piety, women's dedications indicate intentional and socially meaningful engagement with the divine across a wide range of cultic contexts. Through inscription, women made themselves visible in sacred space, articulated relationships to gods, families, and communities, and inscribed their presence into the religious landscape in ways that were durable, public, and recognisable. The evidence confirms that women were active, discerning agents who engaged in a sophisticated process of religious decision-making that allowed them to manage the social and legal restrictions of their time. This agency is most clearly manifested through the deliberate acts of selection that preceded the dedication itself. Women did not simply follow a rote tradition; they exercised autonomy in choosing the specific deity to be honoured, often matching the god's attributes to their personal or familial needs, such as the frequent appeals to Asklepios for health or to Athena for civic recognition. Furthermore, the selection of the material object and the curation of the accompanying text represent critical moments of self-representation. By commissioning a permanent record on stone, bronze, or clay, women utilised the votive habit to establish a direct, unmediated relationship with the divine. In a context that limited women's formal public speech, votive inscriptions provided an alternative register of visibility, embedding their names and personal histories within the sacred and social landscape of the sanctuary.

The systematic focus on inscribed dedications has shown that epigraphy offers access to dimensions of women's religious lives that literary and archaeological evidence alone cannot recover. Unlike normative texts or male-authored narratives, dedicatory inscriptions preserve moments of self-presentation chosen by women themselves or formulated explicitly on their behalf. Even when formulaic, these texts encode decisions about naming, kinship, object, deity, and occasion. Careful differentiation between inscription types is essential: each category constructs female presence

differently and cannot be read interchangeably. Read together, these materials demonstrate that women's religious participation was not only widespread but also embedded in Greek cult practice.

A primary conclusion of this study is that the dichotomy between the private world of the *oikos* and the public arena of the polis is fundamentally inadequate for describing the religious lives of Greek women. The epigraphic record of votive dedications reveals that these two spheres were not separate but were connected through ritual action. While formal civic visibility for women was most clearly embodied in priesthoods – positions that were frequently gentilician in Classical Athens and overwhelmingly occupied by elite women in the Hellenistic period – dedications offered a more modest but significantly more accessible avenue for public recognition. Through the physical and permanent markers of votive offerings, women who did not hold priestly office were nonetheless able to inscribe their presence into civic-religious space. When a woman dedicated an offering to Athena Polias or Eileithyia, she was publicly affirming her household's contribution to the religious and social continuity of the polis. In this limited but meaningful sense, dedications enabled women – particularly those outside elite priestly networks – to assume a quasi-civic role grounded in ritual participation rather than office-holding. The administrative practices of the Greek sanctuaries further reinforced this dynamic. Temple inventories, which incorporated individual, personal offerings into a state-controlled textual corpus, ensured that even non-elite women achieved a degree of public visibility that was otherwise denied to them in purely political or legal documents. By recording the names of daughters, wives, and mothers alongside their specific offerings, these inventories effectively mapped women into the civic fabric of the city.

Comparison with male dedicatory practices reveals that women's dedications were not defined by exclusion from religious action but by patterned differences in emphasis, context, and self-representation. While men more frequently foreground civic achievement, office, or agonistic success, women's inscriptions tend to articulate relational identities or situate devotion within life-cycle events, health crises, and household continuity. Importantly, these differences are statistical

rather than absolute. Women's votive dedications cluster most densely around moments of transition and vulnerability: marriage, childbirth, illness, recovery, and familial continuity. These acts of piety reflect how religion functioned as a framework through which women managed both predictable life stages and unpredictable crises. Dedications operated within a logic of reciprocity, obligation, and gratitude, allowing women to respond to divine intervention or to solicit protection in moments of uncertainty. Women were not only concerned with their own reproductive transitions but were deeply engaged in a diverse array of religious transactions aimed at navigating the challenges of the lived human experience, ranging from chronic illness and family safety to professional achievement.

The analysis of dedicatory patterns across the pantheon demonstrates that women's religious choices cannot be reduced to a preference for female deities or narrowly defined women's cults. While goddesses such as Artemis, Hera, Demeter, and Eileithyia were central to key moments in the female life cycle, women's engagement with male deities is most clearly and consistently attested in contexts of healing and protection, particularly in dedications to Asklepios and, in related therapeutic or oracular settings, to Apollo. Scholarship has shown that women did, on occasion, dedicate to other male gods in sanctuaries not primarily associated with healing – such as Zeus, Hermes, or the Cabiroi – but that such cases are comparatively limited and unevenly distributed.[496] These patterns suggest that women's approach to male divinities depended primarily on divine function rather than gender alone. Women's piety was responsive to need, tradition, and circumstance, and their engagement with the divine extended across the pantheon in ways that challenge assumptions about gendered religious boundaries. The strongest evidence for women's sustained engagement with male gods therefore comes from healing sanctuaries, which provided institutional contexts that facilitated women's access to divine power. These sanctuaries offered a space where women could exercise considerable autonomy, often approaching the god directly to invoke intervention for themselves or on behalf of

[496] Lazzarini (1976) 169 documents the scarcity of female dedications to male deities in the archaic epigraphic corpus; those that can be identified are addressed to Asklepios (Epidauros, Laconia, Phokis), the Cabiroi (Thebes), Hermes (Clazomenai), and Zeus (Dodona). Jacquemin (2009) emphasises that this scarcity reflects both quantitative imbalance and methodological constraints, arguing that women's participation in male cults – but especially those concerned with healing, divination, and kourotrophic functions – should be understood as a recurrent pattern rather than an anomaly.

husbands and children. The healing narratives and dedicatory inventories from sites like Epidaurus and the Athenian Asklepieion prove that women's concerns were not limited to female ailments but encompassed a broad spectrum of health-related crises.

Beyond the realm of health, women used religious dedication to mark their professional and economic contributions. The material dimension of women's dedications highlights the diversity of their economic capacities and degrees of autonomy. While elite women could commission statues, precious-metal objects, or monumental bases, women of more modest means dedicated smaller items, whose ritual value did not depend on cost. Inscribed loom weights and textile offerings, in particular, reveal how women integrated labour and devotion, presenting tools of production as meaningful votives, proving that their piety was frequently rooted in their identities as creators and economic contributors to the *oikos* and the polis. These objects demonstrate that female piety was articulated through a broad material vocabulary, shaped by access to resources but not constrained by them. One area that emerges as particularly significant when viewed across the corpus is the role of priestesses and other female cult officials as dedicants. Their dedications offer valuable insight into forms of female religious authority that were institutionally sanctioned and publicly recognisable. In these inscriptions, religious authority does not depend only on gender or kinship, but on ritual knowledge and ongoing involvement in the cult. Priestess dedications often employ formulae that foreground fulfilment of duty and long-term ritual responsibility, situating the dedicant within a framework of public religious labour.

Female piety was as diverse and strategically motivated as that of their male counterparts, addressing the full complexity of their lives within the sacred and social landscapes of Greece. The phenomenon of men dedicating on behalf of women reveals the mechanisms through which women's piety could be publicly mediated. Fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers appear in inscriptions as agents who materialised vows, fulfilled obligations, or commemorated female relatives within cult. These acts must be understood within household structures, financial conventions, and epigraphic

habit. Women did not operate outside the religious system of the polis; they engaged it through forms of piety that were meaningful within their social and familial positioning. The phenomenon of proxy dedication was often a pragmatic response to the physical or social limitations of the time.

The comparison between dedicatory epigrams and inscribed votives exposes a fundamental tension between literary constructions of female piety and lived religious practice. Literary epigrams, largely authored by men, often idealise, moralise, or aestheticise women's devotion, framing it through lenses of beauty or exemplarity. Epigraphic evidence, by contrast, reveals a pragmatic, situational, and socially embedded piety that is less concerned with ideal types than with concrete relationships between humans and gods. This divergence highlights the importance of privileging epigraphic evidence when reconstructing women's religious agency and cautions against relying on literary representations as transparent reflections of practice. Furthermore, literary epigrams often employ humour or satire to comment on women's piety, a feature never found in the respectful and formulaic language of the stones.

Comparative analysis of Classical and Hellenistic material shows both continuity and adaptation in women's dedicatory practices. The core practices of making, inscribing, and depositing offerings remained fundamentally consistent, suggesting that the religious structures through which women conducted their lives provided a stable framework even as the political world of the polis was transformed by the rise of Macedonian influence and the expansion of Greek culture. While the Hellenistic period offers a greater quantity and geographic spread of evidence, this should not be interpreted as a sudden expansion of female agency. Instead, it reflects changing epigraphic habits, increased monumentality, and broader patterns of visibility across the Greek world. Despite these shifts, the fundamental motivations for female dedication remained remarkably persistent. Core features of women's piety persist across periods, suggesting that women's religious engagement was a stable and enduring component of Greek religious life rather than a product of specific political moments.

Inscribed votive dedications show that women were not peripheral figures at the margins of cult life, but active participants whose piety was recognised and publicly embedded within sacred spaces. Through dedication, women made themselves present and defined their place within family and community, working with existing structures while also shaping them. As the inscriptions make clear, female piety was neither silent nor hidden: it endured in durable materials and in the collective memory of the sanctuary. This dissertation proposes a model that locates female influence not in formal structures of power, but in their capacity to act within ritual settings and to make that participation publicly enduring. Agency, as revealed by women's votive dedications, was situational, relational, and embedded, operating through recognised religious practices rather than through direct access to civic power. This study contributes to a broader understanding of Greek religion – one that recognises the diversity of its practitioners and acknowledges that the votive habit was a shared cultural language used by men and women alike to confront the complexities of their world.

While this study has addressed its central questions within clearly defined chronological, geographical, and evidentiary limits, the analytical framework developed here offers productive directions for future research. Comparative studies across regions and sanctuaries, particularly beyond major centres like Athens, could test how the patterns identified in this dissertation operate within different local cultic environments. Investigating factors such as rural versus urban settings, colonial contexts, and proximity to healing or chthonic cults may reveal whether observed patterns reflect panhellenic tendencies or localised religious ecologies. Similarly, focused investigation of dialectal variation and cultic epithets (for example, Artemis Locheia versus Artemis Brauronia) could refine understanding of how women adapted dedicatory language to particular divine functions. Further research could examine levels of literacy, oral dictation, and collaboration with stonecutters or poets in women's inscriptions.[497] Comparative study of verse versus prose dedications, alongside evidence for female poetic education and ritual performance, could deepen understanding of how

[497] On this topic, see some excellent contributions in the volume edited by Salvo and Scheer (2021).

women engaged with written culture and constructed their voice in epigraphic form. Finally, applying the interpretative model developed here to the late Hellenistic and Roman periods would permit diachronic comparison, situating the Classical and Hellenistic evidence within a longer trajectory of continuity and transformation in female piety under changing social and religious conditions.

Appendix: Women dedicating to male deities outside healing contexts

This appendix brings together the epigraphic evidence for women who dedicated offerings to male deities outside healing contexts, a phenomenon that is attested but relatively rare in the surviving record. The material spans the fifth to the first centuries BCE and encompasses a wide variety of cultic settings, deities, and forms of dedication. As a result, it does not lend itself easily to sustained thematic analysis or to the construction of a unified interpretative framework. A significant proportion of the Classical material assembled here is discussed in the work of Jacquemin, who drew attention to a small but significant group of inscriptions in which women dedicate to male deities outside healing sanctuaries, thereby challenging assumptions about a strict correspondence between the gender of the dedicant and that of the recipient.[498] Jacquemin's study builds on the methodological foundations laid by Lazzarini's analysis of dedicatory formulae, which remains essential for identifying female dedicants and assessing broader patterns in the epigraphic record, even where the focus extends beyond the archaic period.[499] Jacquemin's survey, however, concentrates primarily on Classical evidence and does not extend systematically into the Hellenistic period.

The present appendix therefore both acknowledges and builds upon this scholarship by assembling the securely identifiable Classical cases highlighted by Jacquemin, while also incorporating a small number of additional Hellenistic inscriptions identified through a survey of epigraphic corpora. Taken together, the inscriptions collected here remain highly heterogeneous, involving different regions, chronological phases, and cultic contexts, as well as a range of dedicatory practices, from small votive objects to monumental statue bases and family commemorations. For this reason, the material is presented in documentary form, with concise contextual notes and full epigraphic references, rather than as a separate chapter within the main body of the thesis. Its purpose is to make the evidence accessible and transparent, while avoiding overinterpretation of a corpus that is limited in scale and uneven in its distribution.

[498] Jacquemin (2009).
[499] Lazzarini (1976).

1. The Theban Cabeirion

The most substantial and internally coherent body of evidence for women dedicating to a male deity outside healing contexts comes from the Cabeirion of Thebes. The Cabeiri, together with the associated divine figure known as the Pais, were male deities worshipped at Thebes in a cult that prominently featured votive offerings connected with childhood and transition, including spindles and other objects dedicated to Pais, the youthful companion of the principal deity (or deities), which have often been associated with rites of passage and mythic narratives linked to Dionysiac and mystery traditions.[500] A relatively large number of private dedications made by women in this sanctuary, dating mainly to the fifth century BCE, preserve the names of female dedicants and explicitly identify Cabeiros (singular) or Pais as the recipient. The majority are brief inscriptions on ceramic vessels, especially *kantharoi*, and employ simple dedicatory formulae without patronymics or additional contextual detail.[501] The uniformity of the dedicatory formulae and the modest nature of the offerings point to private acts of devotion rather than public or civic display, and the inscriptions themselves are indistinguishable in form from those set up by male dedicants.

As Jacquemin has argued, the relative prominence of female dedications at the Theban Cabeirion is best explained by the initiatory and soteriological character of the cult.[502] Schachter's reconstruction of the Theban Cabeirion as a cult centred ultimately on a Mother goddess, with Cabiros and Pais functioning as subordinate or attendant daimones, is persuasive and rightly emphasises the importance of a female divine presence within the cult.[503] As Schachter also notes, the overwhelming majority of inscribed offerings – including those made by women – are explicitly addressed to Kabiros and/or Pais, not to the goddess, whose presence remains largely implicit and ritually concealed. The Kabirion therefore presents a case in which the primary recipients of individual votive

[500] Cruccas (2014).
[501] Lazzarini (1976) 120-122, 175, who plausibly explains this uniformity as the result of standardised votive objects produced locally for purchase by visitors to the sanctuary. The group also includes a statuette of Pan.
[502] Jacquemin (2009).
[503] Schachter (2016) ch. 20, 'Evolutions of a mystery cult: the Theban Kabiroi'.

acts are male divine figures, even though these figures may be hierarchically subordinate within the cult's theological structure.

IG VII 3620; Lazzarini no. 369

Διογίτα Παϊδὶ Καβίρο.

IG VII 3611

Ἀργεία Καβίροι.

IG VII 3634; Lazzarini no. 366

Κεφάλε τοῖ Καβ[ίροι].

IG VII 3629

Ἴππυλλα.

IG VII 3628

*h*ιποτίμα {Ἰπποτίμα} τοῖ Πα[ϊδί].

IG VII 3639

Κοθίνα Καβίρο<ι>

IG VII 3648

Μιρύλα

IG VII 3675–3676

Τιμολλο͞ Κα[βίροι]
[Τι]μολλο͞ το[ῖ Καβίροι]

(Double dedication by the same woman.)

IG VII 2458; Lazzarini no. 370

Ἀνθέμα τοῖ
Παϊ[δὶ] τῶ Καβίρ<ω>

2. Dodona: Polyxena and Zeus

A further Classical example is provided by an inscription from the sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona. The inscription is engraved on a bronze mirror, and records its dedication, together with a sum of money, to Zeus. The dedicant is a woman, Polyxena, whose name is given without patronymic or ethnic. The recipient deity is unambiguously male and explicitly named in the dative (τοῖ Δί), leaving no doubt as to the direction of the dedication. The cultic context at Dodona, however, differs in important respects from most polis sanctuaries: Zeus Naios functioned above all as an oracular deity, whose capacity to provide authoritative guidance and divine communication placed him in a category comparable, in some respects, to healing gods, whose powers likewise transcended ordinary cult expectations. In the Dodonaean corpus more generally, inquiries are typically addressed jointly to "Zeus Naios and Dione", reflecting the paired structure of the sanctuary's divine authority.[504] Against this background, Polyxena's dedication is striking in that it is directed to Zeus alone, with no mention of the female consort. While mirrors are also known as votive offerings to goddesses such as Aphrodite or Eileithyia, and might prima facie be thought more appropriate to a female recipient, Polyxena's choice to dedicate both a mirror and money exclusively to Zeus may suggest a response to a specific oracular interaction or perceived divine intervention, rather than a generalised act of devotion. The isolated character of the dedication and the absence of further contextual detail underline the limits of the evidence: Polyxena's offering demonstrates the possibility of female dedication to Zeus in his oracular capacity, but does not in itself point to a broader pattern of sustained female engagement with male oracular cults.

Carapanos, *Dodone et ses ruines* p. 45 n. 15, pl. 25 no. 1; Lazzarini no. 774
Πολυξένα | τά<δ>ε | [ἀ]να{ν}τίθη | τι τοῖ Δὶ καὶ χρήματα.
(With minor orthographic variation in the verb.)

3. Xenokrateia and Kephisos (Attica)

[504] Eidinow (2013) ch. 5, 'A Catalogue and Summary of Published Questions by Individuals and Responses from the Dodona Oracle', for numerous examples of inquiries addressed to "Zeus Naios and Dione".

Another important Classical example is provided by the well-known relief dedicated by Xenokrateia at the sanctuary of Kephisos at Echelidai, near Phaleron. Although this inscription has already been discussed in detail in the main body of the dissertation (Section 1.1), it is included here for completeness as one of the clearest epigraphic attestations of a female dedicant addressing a male god in a non-healing, civic cult context. The inscription explicitly names Xenokrateia as dedicant and Kephisos, a male river deity, as the primary recipient. The monument combines a sculpted relief with an inscribed sacrificial regulation, situating the dedication firmly within a civic cultic framework. While scholarly debate continues over whether Xenokrateia should be understood as the founder of the sanctuary or as the dedicator of a single monument, the inscription nonetheless provides secure evidence for a woman acting publicly and independently in relation to a male deity. Particularly important in the present context is the phrase διδασκαλίας τόδε δῶρον, conventionally understood as "this gift on account of teaching/instruction". The expression has been variously taken to refer either to the education or upbringing of Xenokrateia's son Xeniades or, more persuasively, to a form of divine instruction granted to Xenokrateia herself, enabling her to act competently within the spheres of household, cult, and citizenship.[505] On either reading, the dedication is situated within a broader civic framework: Kephisos occupied a distinctive position in the Athenian pantheon as a river-god closely linked with kourotrophic functions and with the symbolic and material foundations of the polis, a context within which such a substantial dedication by a female agent is readily intelligible.[506]

IG II² 4548 (cf. **IG I³ 987**)

Marble relief, National Archaeological Museum, Athens, inv. no. 2756.

Ξενοκράτεια Κηφισο ἱερ-

ὸν ἱδρύσατο καὶ ἀνέθηκεν

ξυμβώμοις τε θεοῖς Διδασκαλ-

ίας τόδε δῶρον, Ξενιάδο θυγάτ-

[505] Purvis (2003) ch. 2; Blok (2018).
[506] Blok (2018) 17-18.

ηρ καὶ μήτηρ ἐκ Χολλειδῶν

θύεν τῶι βουλομένωι ἐπὶ

τελεστῶν ἀγαθῶν.

4. Dedications to Dionysos

Two inscriptions from the late Classical and early Hellenistic periods attest women acting as dedicants to Dionysos. Although differing markedly in scale and social framing, both inscriptions explicitly name female dedicants and identify Dionysos as the recipient, providing clear evidence for women's engagement with a male deity whose cult occupied an important civic and ritual position in the Greek world. The first, concise inscription records Demonike as the sole dedicant and Dionysos as recipient, without further specification of occasion or cult title. The marble base, with a cutting on the top for a votive, was found in Eleusis and has been plausibly associated with the Dionysiac festivals of the deme. The dedicant identifies herself by patronymic and deme, situating the act within a civic framework: she is the daughter of Aischraios of Pithos, an Attic deme whose precise location has not been identified.

In contrast to the Eleusinian dedication, the second inscription represents a highly visible, monumental act of female dedication. Simo, priestess of Dionysus at Erythrai, identifies herself not only through family relationships but also through her cultic office as ἱερέα πρὸ πόλεως, a formulation that has been variously interpreted.[507] The dedication of her own statue to Dionysos combines votive practice, civic priesthood, and family commemoration, and exemplifies a mode of female religious self-representation characteristic of the Hellenistic period. As Connelly has observed, the inscription articulates a strong sense of family pride, naming both husband and father and framing the monument as a lasting memorial for children and ancestors, while the use of the title *hiereia* situates the dedicant

[507] Connelly (2007) 139, translates the phrase as "priestess of the city". This translation has been criticised by Dignas (2008), who notes that, particularly in a Dionysiac context, πρὸ πόλεως cannot be understood as "of the city" and should not be taken to imply a civic epithet of the god. Pilz (2013) 163-164, has shown that the expression is rarely spatial in meaning and instead designates a priesthood exercised on behalf of the polis, that is, a publicly financed civic cult, as opposed to private or associational worship. On this reading, Simo was a priestess of Dionysos serving in a civic cult.

within a recognised civic cultic role.[508] While exceptional in scale, the inscription nonetheless confirms Dionysos as a male deity to whom women could dedicate directly and publicly. More broadly, Dionysiac cults across the Greek world frequently afforded women an unusually prominent ritual role, whether as exclusive ritual agents, priestesses, or the subjects of commemorative dedications set up by family members.[509] While such patterns should not be generalised to Greek religion as a whole, they help to contextualise the relatively rare cases in which women are attested as dedicants to Dionysos, and caution against treating these inscriptions as anomalous within the god's cultic sphere.

IG II³.4 970

Δημονίκη Αἰσχραίου Πιθέως
θυγάτηρ Διονύσωι ἀνέθηκεν

IErythrai 201a

[Σ]ιμὼ τήν[δ' ἔστη]σ[α] γυνὴ Ζωίλου
Διονύσωι [i⟨ε⟩]ρέα πρὸ πόλεως
Παγκρατίδεω θυγάτηρ, [εἰ]κ[ό]να μὲ[μ] μορφῆς,
ἀρετῆς δ' ἐπίδειγμα καὶ ὅλβου,
[ἀθ]άνατον μνήμην παισί τε καὶ προγόνοις.

5. Dedications to Apollo at Delphi

Two inscriptions from Delphi provide clear Hellenistic evidence for women dedicating to Apollo outside healing contexts. Both originate from the late third century BCE and involve large-scale monuments erected in a major panhellenic sanctuary. Although the two dedications differ in the degree of personal identification preserved, they share an emphasis on family commemoration and public visibility, features characteristic of Hellenistic votive practice and of the increasing monumentalisation of private religious display. In the first case, Aristaineta is explicitly named as dedicant and identifies herself by patronymic and ethnic. The monument consisted of a statuary group

[508] Connelly (2007).
[509] Frigerio (2025).

representing multiple members of her family, including herself, and was dedicated to Apollo Pythios. The inscription thus records a woman acting as the primary agent of a substantial family dedication to a male deity within a highly visible, panhellenic setting. Although the reconstruction of the text is uncertain in places, the dedicatory act itself is clear and securely attributable to a female dedicant. As Dillon has observed, monuments of this kind place emphasis less on individual portrait likeness than on the sheer scale and prominence of the structure, which elevated the statues well above the viewer and foregrounded the monument's visual impact as a whole rather than the detailed representation of its subjects.[510] In this context, Aristaineta's dedication can be understood as part of a broader Hellenistic strategy of familial self-representation through monumentality.

The second inscription similarly attributes to a woman the dedication of a group of family statues to Apollo, although her personal name is lost. She is nonetheless explicitly identified as an Aetolian, and the text assigns to her the dedication of statues representing her parents and brothers. The monument took the form of a monumental exedra approximately nine metres in length, notable for its scale and public prominence. As in the case of Aristaineta, the emphasis lies on genealogical display and commemoration rather than on a narrowly defined votive occasion, while the involvement of a sculptor and additional dedicators further situates the monument within a context of deliberate, large-scale public display. While limited in quantity, the evidence confirms that women could act as primary dedicants to a major male deity in a panhellenic sanctuary, employing the language and forms of public commemoration characteristic of elite religious self-representation in the Hellenistic period.

FD III 4.130–131; PHI 240261

(A):

[Ἀρισ]ταιν[έ]τα Τιμολάο[υ]

[Αἰτωλὶς(?) Ἀπόλλωνι Πυθίωι(?)]

(B):

[Ἀρισταινέτα Αἰτωλὶς(?) τὸμ πατέρ]α Τιμόλαον

[καὶ τὰμ] ματέρα [……] καὶ αὐτὰν

[καὶ τὸν υ]ἱ[ὸ]ν Τιμ[όλαον Ἀπ]όλλωνι.

[510] Dillon (2010) 49.

IG IX 1² 182; FD III 3.292

[{ἡ δεῖνα τοῦ δεῖνος}] Αἰτωλὶς τὸμ πατέρα καὶ τὰμ ματέρα καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς Ἀπ[όλλωνι].

Ἄντοχος Τα[— — — — — — καὶ τὸ]ν υἱὸν Ἀπόλλωνι.

[{ὁ δεῖνα} καὶ {ὁ δεῖνα} ἐπ]οίησαν.

6. A dedication to Egyptian deities at Athens

A final Hellenistic example is provided by an inscribed base from Athens associated with the Isiac sanctuary near the Sarapis precinct. Although differing markedly from the polis cults discussed elsewhere in this appendix, the inscription is included here because it explicitly records a female dedicant and names male deities among the recipients. The text records Megallis as the dedicant of an inscribed base to a group of Greco-Egyptian deities – Isis, Sarapis, Anubis, and Harpokrates – on behalf of her daughter Demarion and her sons. The dedication is explicitly made on behalf of her children and is described as being carried out κατὰ πρόσταγμα ("in accordance with a command"). As Fassa has shown, in Isiac and Sarapiac cults this formula marks an "imperative dedication", indicating compliance with a divine command rather than voluntary initiative, and typically reflects a revelatory encounter – often mediated through dreams or visions – in which the god required the performance of a specific act.[511] The monument further situates the dedication within a complex institutional framework by naming the priest, the temple guardian, the *zakoros* (temple attendant), and the interpreter of visions, a configuration that accords closely with the authoritative and interventionist mode of divine–human communication characteristic of Egyptian cults in the Hellenistic period. With its association with a foreign cult and its emphasis on revelatory authority, this dedication highlights the diversity of contexts in which female dedicatory agency could be expressed.[512]

***SEG* 42.157**

Epigraphical Museum, Athens (EM 649).

Ἴσιδι vac. Σαράπιδι | Ἀνούβιδι Ἁρποκράτη[ι] |

[511] Fassa (2016).

[512] For a recent discussion of women, dedicatory practice, and religious agency in the Greco-Egyptian cults at Athens and Delos, see Neumann (2024).

Μ̣εγαλλὶς Μάγα | Μαραθωνίου θυγά||τηρ ὑπὲρ τῆς θυγα|τρὸς Δημαρίου καὶ |
τ̣ῶν ὑῶν vac.]] vac. κατὰ | πρ̣όσταγμα, vac. ἐπὶ ἱε|ρέως Μενάνδρου ||
τ̣οῦ Ἀρτέμωνος | Ἀλωπεκῆθεν, κλε[ι]|δουχοῦντος Ἀσω|ποκλέους Φλυέως, |
ζ̣ακορεύοντος Σω||σικράτου Λαοδικέ|ως, κρίνοντος τὰ ὁ|[ρ]άματα Διονυσίου |
Ἀ̣ντιοχέως.

List of inscriptions cited

Woman	Deity (male)	Place	Date	Object / Form	Epigraphic reference
Diogita	Pais (Cabeiri)	Thebes	5th c. BCE	Kantharos	*IG* VII 3620; Lazzarini no. 369
Argeia	Cabeiri	Thebes	5th c. BCE	Kantharos	*IG* VII 3611
Képhalè	Cabeiri	Thebes	5th c. BCE	Kantharos	*IG* VII 3684; Lazzarini no. 366
Hippula	Cabeiri	Thebes	5th c. BCE	Kantharos	*IG* VII 3629
Hippotima	Pais (Cabeiri)	Thebes	5th c. BCE	Kantharos	*IG* VII 3628
Kothina	Cabeiri	Thebes	5th c. BCE	Kantharos	*IG* VII 3639
Mikulla	Cabeiri	Thebes	5th c. BCE	Kantharos	*IG* VII 3648
Timollo	Cabeiri	Thebes	5th–4th c. BCE	—	*IG* VII 3675–3676
Anthéma	Pais (Cabeiri)	Thebes	5th–4th c. BCE	Statuette of Pan	*IG* VII 2458; Lazzarini no. 370
Polyxena	Zeus	Dodona	5th c. BCE	Bronze mirror + money	Carapanos, *Dodone* pl. 25.1; Lazzarini no. 774
Xenokrateia	Kephisos	Attica (Phaleron/Echeleidai)	ca. 410–400 BCE	Relief	*IG* II² 4548
Demonikē	Dionysos	Eleusis	late 4th c. BCE	Votive base	*IG* II³.4 970
Astuocheia	Chthonic male deity	Argos	late 4th c. BCE	Relief	*IG* IV 568
Simo / Timo	Dionysos	Erythrai	late 4th – early 3rd c. BCE	Statue of the dedicant	*IErythrai* 201a
Aristaineta of Aetolia	Apollo Pythios	Delphi	c. 225 BCE	Statuary group	*FD* III 4.130-131; PHI 240261
Anonymous Aetolian woman	Apollo	Delphi	270–230 BCE	Monumental exedra	*IG* IX 1² 182; *FD* III 3.292
Megallis daughter of Magas	Isis, Sarapis, Anubis, Harpokrates	Athens	116–94 BCE	Inscribed base	*SEG* 42.157; PHI 229685

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