

ARISTOPHANES, *LYSISTRATA*, 641–647¹

- 641 ἐπτά μὲν ἔτη γεγῶσ' εὐθὺς ἡρρηφόρου·
 εἴτ' ἀλετρὶς ἢ δεκέτις οὐσα τάρχηγέτι·
 645 κᾶτ' ἔχουσα τὸν κροκωτὸν ἄρκτος ἢ Βραυρωνίοις·
 κᾶκανηφόρου ποτ' οὐσα παῖς καλὴ ἔχουσ'
 ἰσχάδων ὄρμαθόν·

THIS passage has been used—and abused—for the study of Athenian female initiations, or, more cautiously, of the practice of the *arkteia* at Brauron. As it is, it poses more problems than it solves. Most of all, it complicates the question of the age of the *arktoi*.² In fact the scholium seems *prima facie* to contradict the text, when on v. 645 it says that the ‘bears’ were not more than ten years and not less than five years old, while the accepted text of Aristophanes decisively implies an age greater than ten years. The situation is even more obscured by another indication pointing towards an association of the *arkteia* with the age of ten, the equation of the verb *dekateusai* with *arkteusai*.³

The age limits given by the scholium agree with what we know of the *arkteia*. A practice preserving elements of its original character as an initiatory institution and culminating in a penteteric festival had to give to all girls the theoretical opportunity of being eligible for the office. So an interval of five years between the higher and lower limit would appear correct, and, because of the particular connection of the age of ten with the *arkteia* in the sources, we should be inclined to believe that this was one or other of the age limits. That the scholium is correct in affirming that it was the *higher* one seems very likely because of the *arkteia*’s ‘pre-marriage rite’ associations,⁴ which would make it improbable for the ‘normal age’ to be put at the lower limit, which was just a necessary consequence of the five-year interval between festivals.

Brelich⁵ tries to resolve the discrepancy between Aristophanes and the other sources by suggesting a historical lowering of the *arkteia* age limits, with the *Lysistrata* passage corresponding to the situation before the change, and the scholium reflecting the low age limit supported by the statues of the *arktoi* found at Brauron, which represent very young girls. However, in order to accept such a change, we would have to suppose that the *arkteia* still had, at the end of the fifth century in Athens, a vital social function as an initiation rite,

¹ I am grateful to Mr. W. G. Forrest, Professor P. H. J. Lloyd-Jones, Mrs. A. Morpurgo-Davies, and Mr. T. C. W. Stinton for fruitful discussion and constructive criticism.

² See for discussion L. Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin, 1932), 207 and n. 4; L. Ghali-Kahil in *Antike Kunst*, viii (1965), 25, and most recently A. Brelich, *Paides e Parthenoi* (Rome, 1969), 266 f.

³ Harpocration s.v. *dekateuein* mentions the equivalence of the two terms as occurring in Lysias, and derives its origin from the fact that it was the ten-year-olds who

became ‘bears’. The incorrectness of his speculation must not affect the validity of this last observation. As Brelich writes (op. cit. 266): ‘Non bisogna tuttavia trascurare che l’affermazione secondo cui “le decenni compivano l’*arkteia*” non appare come una deduzione fondata sul termine: anzi, l’interpretazione erronea del termine non sarebbe stata possibile, se non fosse stata suggerita dal fatto che ragazze decenni realmente facevano le *arktoi*.’

⁴ Cf. Schol. Ar. *Lys.* 645.

⁵ Op. cit. 273.

rather than being merely part of a divinity cult of initiatory origin. And this I find very difficult to believe.

The essence of the divergence between Aristophanes and our other sources lies with the *κάρ'* which opens v. 645 and implies that the girl was an *arktos* after having been *aletris* at the age of ten.

The reading *κάρ' ἔχουσα τὸν κροκωτὸν* is Bentley's interpretation of the reading of the codices *Γ*, *B*, and *C*,¹ *κατέχουσα*. The best codex of *Lysistrata*, the Ravennas 137, 4A, reads *καταχέουσα τὸν κροκωτὸν*. (Discussion on the reading in this and the previous line is to be found in Bekker's edition of Aristophanes.²) If one accepts the Ravennas reading—which has in its favour also the principle of the *lectio difficilior*—interesting results follow.

To start with, we find a corresponding expression in Aesch. *Agam.* 239: *κρόκου βαφὰς δ' ἐς πέδον χέουσα*. This phrase is used of Iphigeneia who is described as having done just that before her sacrifice. Fraenkel's translation, 'as she let fall to the ground her saffron-dyed raiment', has been contested by Professor Lloyd-Jones³ on the basis of two arguments. The first is that, as he very elegantly puts it, 'no one has yet produced a convincing motive for what seems an unnecessary piece of exhibitionism, characteristic neither of Iphigeneia nor of Aeschylus'. The second objection concerns the physical possibility of Iphigeneia's performing such an act. As she was already firmly gripped, the possibility seems to be excluded. Therefore, he suggests the translation 'with her robe of saffron hanging down towards the ground'. However, it might be possible that what seems inexplicable in terms of everyday reality could be seen in a different light if considered in a ritual context. But here a parenthesis is needed.

Iphigeneia's connections with the Brauron cult are very well known.⁴ She actually founded the cult and took part in it; according to one tradition⁵ she was sacrificed at Brauron and not at Aulis and was replaced by a bear and not a deer, and 'consequently' *μυστήριον ἄγουσιν ἀδελφεῖ*. The analogies between Iphigeneia's sacrifice and the *arkteia* practice with its foundation myth have been stressed and analysed.⁶ We do not need to go into this complicated problem here; what interests us is that such analogies and close associations seem deeply rooted. It might, perhaps, be of some relevance to mention a hypothesis which does not seem to have attracted the attention, let alone the support, of many people. In 1934 P. Clément advanced, on the basis of epigraphical evidence, the suggestion⁷ that the cult of Artemis Pagasitis at Pagasae-Demetrias and the cult of Artemis Throsia at Larissa included a practice called *nebreia*, which consisted of the consecration of young girls to Artemis for a certain period during which they were called *nebroi*, fawns. This seems to me a plausible hypothesis. Clément's further suggestion is tempting but cannot be proved: he postulates a *nebreia* practice for Artemis at Aulis—where the deer seems indeed to have been, as in so many other places, the goddess's sacred animal—an Artemis who originally bore the epithet

¹ *Γ* = Laurentianus plut. 31. 15 and Leidensis Voss. Gr. F. 52; *B* = Parisinus inter Regios 2715; *C* = Parisinus inter Regios 2717.

² I. Bekker, *Aristophanis Comoediae cum Scholiis et varietate lectionis*, vol. iv (London, 1829), 388; cf. also G. Dindorf, *Aristophanis Comoediae*, vol. iii, *Annotationes* (Oxford, 1837),

789 f.

³ *CR* n.s. ii (1952), 135.

⁴ Cf. Brelich, *op. cit.* 242–6.

⁵ Schol. Ar. *Lys.* 645.

⁶ Most recently by Brelich, *op. cit.* 262 f.; cf. P. Clément in *Ant. Class.* iii (1934), 407 f.

⁷ *Op. cit.* 393–409.

Iphigeneia, 'she who causes the birth of strong offspring'. And the Iphigeneia legend, he suggests, arose from this practice.

There is no means of finding proof, either way. One thing seems clear to me as regards the interconnection between these rituals and legends, namely that the myth of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia has points of correspondence with the *arkteia* practice¹ and perhaps even more with the *nebreia*, if such a thing ever existed. The culminating point of Iphigeneia's story is her sacrifice, that of the *arkteia* the performance of a ritual of some sort, usually called *μυστήριον*, at the Brauronia festival. Both Iphigeneia and the 'bears' were on these two occasions wearing a *krokotos*, a saffron robe—a garment which might perhaps have a specific significance (connection with marriage?). If taken as a ritual act, there is every reason to believe that Iphigeneia shed her saffron robe before her sacrifice, and the Ravennas reading would indicate that the 'bears' did the same at some stage during the performance of the Brauronia festival ritual. But is there any positive evidence for such an act? I think there is; because when somebody wears a saffron robe and sheds it, they are naked.

Now L. Ghali-Kahil has published² a series of *krateriskoi* of a peculiar shape (with conical bases) found in various Attic sanctuaries, which, she believes, were used in some rite of the cult of Artemis in Attica. When they have figured decoration, these *krateriskoi* depict young girls running or dancing, sometimes holding torches or wreaths, at a place recognizable as a sanctuary by the presence of an altar and as an Artemis sanctuary by the presence of a palm-tree.

Most of the *krateriskoi* published by Mrs. Ghali-Kahil come from Brauron. The young girls on these vases, she believes, are 'bears' performing ritual acts belonging to the cult of Artemis Brauronia. She is, obviously, right beyond any possible doubt. The Brauron *krateriskoi* differ from the rest—so far as they are known—in one respect: on the *krateriskoi* coming from other sites the girls performing ritual acts wear a short chiton, on those from Brauron they either wear a short garment or are naked.

If we take the ritual acts represented on these vases to be part of the ritual of the Brauronia festival—which, I think, is the most reasonable hypothesis—our image of this festival would involve some ritual acts performed by fully-dressed 'bears' and some performed by naked 'bears'. A distinction of this nature in the ritual duties of the *arktoi* seems to me much less likely than a distinction in time, implying that at some moment the 'bears' undress—ritually without any doubt—shedding the saffron robe. Since the *krokotos* was the symbol of their office, it is reasonable to assume that the shedding of it marked the successful fulfilment of a 'bear's' career.

After the restoration of the Ravennas reading *καταχέουσα*, vv. 643–5 would read as follows:³

εἶτ' ἀλετρίς ἦ· δεκέτις οὔσα τάρχηγέτι
καταχέουσα τὸν κροκωτὸν ἄρκτος ἢ Βραυρωνίους.

'Then I was an *áletris*; at the age of ten, for the Archegetis [i.e. Artemis],⁴ I was a bear, shedding the saffron robe [perhaps with the implication 'finishing my office'] at the Brauronia.'

¹ See p. 340 n. 6 above.

² *Antike Kunst*, viii (1965), 20–33.

³ This was the text adopted by Bekker (op. cit., vol. i), but it earned an early unpopularity. (κᾶτ' ἔχουσα: G. Hermann,

Sophoclis Tragoediae Septem, vol. i (London, 1827), preface at *Oed. R.*, p. cxlvii.)

⁴ Schol. Ar. *Lys.* 644 οὔσα τάρχηγέτι: Τῇ δεσποίνῃ Ἀρτέμιδι, ἢ Δήμητρι.

I am aware of the uneasiness that the short sentence *εἴτ' ἀλετρὺς ἦ* might cause. But I believe that the contrast between this and the long sentence that follows may have been intentional, a means of putting the stress on the important institution of the *arkteia*. The opening with an *asyndeton* does not, I believe, constitute a problem. The participial clause *δεκέτις οὔσα* corresponds to *εἴτα* in the preceding verse. V. 641 opens with a participial clause and *μὲν*: *ἐπτά μὲν ἔτη γεγῶσα*; *μὲν* is answered by *εἴτα* in v. 643 and by the participial clause *δεκέτις οὔσα* taking the place of an *εἴτα* in v. 644. This creates a balance in the text in more ways than one. The *arrhephoria* and the *arkteia* seem clearly to be, in classical Athens, 'initiatory survivals', and they certainly had specific age limits. The *aletrides* and the *kanephoroi* were, so far as we can judge—and quite apart from the question of what their origin may have been—only sacral functions attached to divinity cults, honorific, no doubt, as we are told, but no evidence whatsoever can support their claim to be anything more.¹ It is only logical that the 'initiatory' institutions, depending on age limits, should be closely defined in the text through the mention of an exact age, while vague hints as regards age would seem to be enough for the two more generic sacral functions. The balance in these verses would thus be well established:

- (a) opening: mention of exact age through a participial clause—office of 'initiatory' character depending on age limits.
- (b) generic sacral function: age vaguely defined through a *terminus post quem* and a *terminus ante quem*.
- (c) opening: mention of exact age through a participial clause—office of 'initiatory' character depending on age limits.
- (d) generic sacral function: age vaguely defined through the expression *οὔσα παῖς καλή*.

This arrangement of the text, which has the merit of restoring an original reading which seems meaningful in the light of other documents, would resolve two further problems. First, the age of the 'bears'. What the woman would be saying now, that she was a 'bear' at the age of ten, is in perfect agreement with the rest of our evidence. Secondly, the expression 'I was a "bear"' ceases to refer to *Βραυρωνίους*, to which 'shedding the saffron robe' now refers, and this eliminates another minor puzzle. As the text stood, it worried some scholars,² who thought it might look as if the whole of the *arkteia* consisted of this one ritual performance, the festival of the Brauronia, an implication which, if taken literally, would diverge both from the rest of our information³ and from what would seem to be the logical and coherent pattern for an institution like the *arkteia*.⁴

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¹ For arguments against Brelich's contrary opinion (op. cit. *passim*) see my forthcoming review of *Paides e Parthenoi* in *JHS* xci (1971), 172–7.

² Cf. Brelich, op. cit. 241.

³ Cf. Schol. Ar. *Lys.* 645 (2): *παρθένον*

πᾶσαν μιμήσασθαι τὴν ἄρκτον πρὸ τοῦ γάμου καὶ περιέπειν τὸ ἱερὸν κροκωτὸν ἱμάτιον φοροῦσαν. καὶ τοῦτο ἀρκετεύεσθαι ἐλέγετο.

⁴ Brelich, op. cit. 241, 259, and n. 52 with bibliography.