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Aristophanes' *Adôniazousai*

Unlike the larger, state-sanctioned festivals like the Thesmophoria, the festival of Adonis occurred on the cultural margins during the classical period at Athens. The ritual performance of the festival was connected to the myth of Aphrodite and the young mortal Adonis, who was killed by a boar at an untimely age. During the Adonia, women planted seeds in pottery vessels (*Adônidos kêpoi*), and when the plants sprouted, they carried the tender shoots up to the rooftops of private houses. The plants were left there to wither in the sun and women lamented their fate. Archaeologically, the Adonis festival is hard to see. There are no remains of a temple of Adonis anywhere, no sanctuary complex devoted to Adonis where the rituals were performed. And in texts from the fifth and fourth centuries, the Adonia is a festival that is mentioned only in passing, as an aside – for example, in a philosophical dialogue like Plato's *Phaedrus* or in the middle of a comedy like Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*.

A scholiast's note on *Lysistrata* mentions that there was an alternative title to the play: *Adôniazousai*. The scholiast goes on to reject this title with a dismissive *ou kalos*, as have most scholars ever since. To most who read *Lysistrata*, the religious heart of the play seems to lie on the Acropolis, with Athena. The focus would then seem to be public, official, state-sanctioned religion, centering on the patron deity of Athens. The play appears to have little to do with a marginalized, foreign cult that took place on the roofs of private houses, a festival bound up with the goddess Aphrodite. However, as a handful of scholars have pointed out (Elderkin 1940; Loraux 1993), Aphrodite is as crucial to *Lysistrata* as Athena – she is just harder to see. The action of *Lysistrata* involves a sex-strike by women who take over the Acropolis in order to put an end to the Peloponnesian war. There is thus a denial or a displacement of Aphrodite during the course of the play, which results in a preoccupation with *aphrodisia*, as sexual jokes and innuendo abound.

I would like to take the scholiast's note seriously; in fact, the women of the play hold a sort of Adonis festival atop the Acropolis. The space of the Acropolis becomes, in a sense, a private rooftop, and Adonia-like activity proliferates. Boars, Aphrodite, 'gardens of Adonis,' and lamentation all play important roles in *Lysistrata*. In the end, the notion that women hold a kind of Adonis festival on the Acropolis, at the very heart of the *polis*, will force us to rethink the place of the Adonis festival at Athens as well as the distinction between public and private festivals.