

As Demand has demonstrated, becoming pregnant, surviving childbirth and attaining motherhood through the survival of the infant was one of the most formidable achievements of the ancient world (1994:17,44,121). As Hunter has demonstrated, failing in this achievement, a young bride would find herself at best remarried, at worst, dead (1993:108). Seen in these terms, the experience of the *nymphê* is essentially agonistic, and Vernant's comment that, "marriage is to the girl what war is to the boy," is placed in high relief. Among strangers, in her husband's home and bed, she was tested: for fidelity, fertility, and ultimately fecundity. The insecurity of the pre-partum bride in her conjugal home is confirmed by cross-cultural comparison which emphasizes childbirth as the event that secures the bride's place (Gennep, Campbell, Flueckiger, Hirschon, Silverstein). Further, much of what we know about the wedding ritual looks forward to the future child (e.g. the formula of the *enguê*, the ritual of the *amphithalês* at the wedding). Thus, the *teleia* of women, (both their *perfection* seen from a cultural standpoint, and their *goal*, from a personal standpoint) was achieved on "the field" of marriage, but attained in the act of childbirth (King, 1983:111-12; Loraux, 1995:25).

The identification of marriage as the locus of female perfection has been discussed by Kerenyi (1975), and developed by Redfield (1982:190; 2003), who rightly views the wedding ceremony as a heroization of the couple (especially the bride), which both effects the transfer of the bride from her natal to her conjugal home, and initiates her transformation. I disagree however that the wedding (*enguê* or *gamos*) completes her "transformation" (Redfield:1982: 187). For although the wedding launches a change in role status for the *parthenos*, by detaching her from her home and previous identity, the status it confers on her is the intermediate status of *nymphê*. Her "transformation" remains partial until she bears a child, preferably a male heir, in her new household. At this time, it would seem, further rites of incorporation were necessary. Such rites, we would expect, would serve to align the bride permanently with her conjugal hearth and provide her with the stability necessary to develop her adult identity.

So far, the evidence for a ritual of incorporation for the bride following the birth of a child is largely negative. A dedicatory plaque from Echinus (Dakoronia and Gounaropoulou, 1992) which depicts the presentation of a child after its birth suggests an avenue for further inquiry: namely that the dedication of a child at a kourotrophic shrine coincided with the incorporation of its mother into her conjugal home. By comparing the Echinus relief with the votive inventory of Hera *Akraia* at Perachora (Payne, Baumbach), I will assert that the latter was a kourotrophic shrine to which infants were likewise dedicated. By analyzing these votives in light of modern ethnographic accounts depicting the mother's "the social return from childbirth" (Gennep, 1964: 46) I will argue that a comparable ritual of incorporation was practiced in Ancient Greece, and that it resolved the ambiguous status of the *nymphê*, allowed her to "take root" in her new family, transformed her into a *gunê*, and granted her *teleia* at last.