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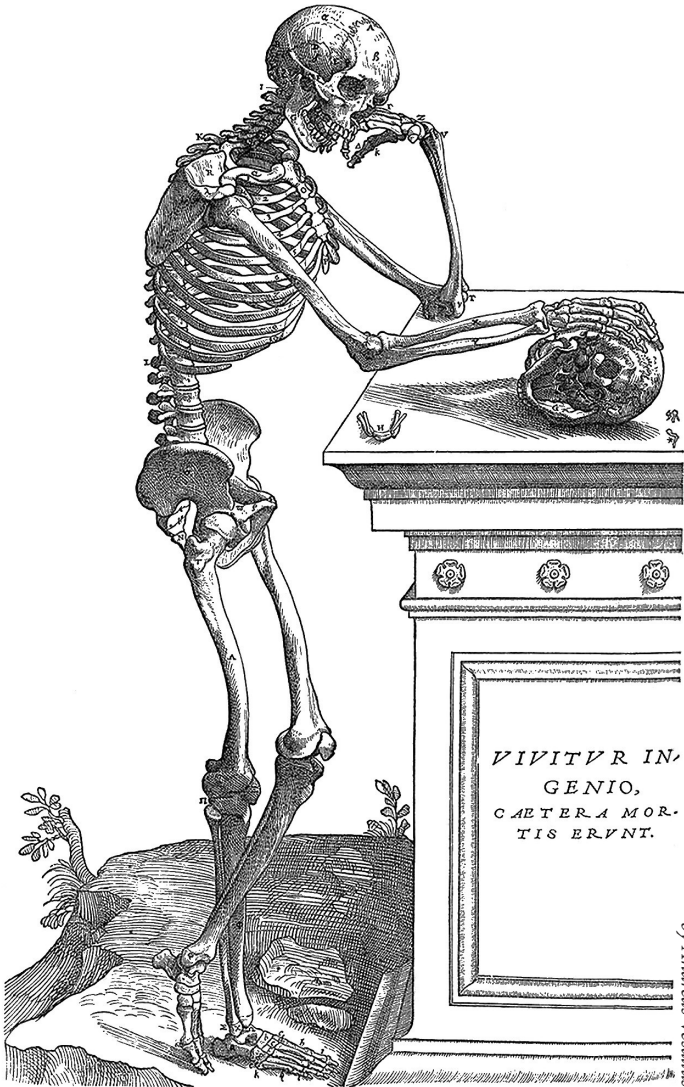
Volume 26, Number 1 & 2

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# RELIGION & CULTURE

Volume 26, no. 1



The Journal of Religion and Culture is produced  
by the Graduate Students of the Department of Religion at Concordia University.

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Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec.

ISSN 1198-6395  
Journal of Religion and Culture Volume 26, no. 1 & 2 (2015/2016)

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Montreal, Quebec  
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JRC logo designed: Christopher Burkart  
Book design: Joseph E. Brito  
Front cover artwork: Noémie Jean-Bourgeault  
The type face of this journal is Minion Pro,  
designed by Robert Slimbach,  
issued as a digital Open Type font  
by Adobe Systems, Mountain View California, 2000.



# RELIGION & CULTURE

*A Canadian Graduate Student Journal*

2016 Volume 26, no. 1 & 2

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Lynda Clarke, our very supportive department Chair;  
Tina Montandon and Munit Merid, administrators extraordinaire;  
The executive staff of the CRSA, for letting us drop by all their wine  
and cheese events; all of our referees, readers and everyone else who  
gave their time to the publication of this journal.

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# “Miasma and Sexual Intercourse in the Ancient Greek World: *A Literature Review*”

Spyridon Loumakis

## *Abstract*

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the first edition Mary Douglas' seminal work, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo*. This article offers a small contribution to the history of the reception of her ideas and concepts by reviewing the scholarly literature surrounding *leges sacrae* or *Sacred Laws*. The *Sacred Laws* are body of inscriptions from the Ancient Greek world dealing with ritual regulations, and this article will be interested in examining how the scholarly literature surrounding these inscriptions treats the issue of regulating sexual impurity in order to avoid any uncleanness that might defile or pollute the sacred sphere. It will be asserted that classicists and historians of religion have not taken into full account the most important theoretical work on the issue of dirt and pollution - namely, that of Mary Douglas's. Rather than simply call to attention the lack of engagement with her ideas, this paper will underline the potential missed opportunity that her work may have played when examining Ancient Greek purity systems pertaining to sexual intercourse.

Key Words: Mary Douglas; *Purity and Danger*; Sacred Laws; Ancient Greece; Sexual Impurity.

This literature review<sup>1</sup> focuses on a body of inscription from the ancient Greek world containing ritual regulations, dated from the sixth century BCE to the third century CE, mostly known as *leges sacrae* or *Sacred Laws*; of particular concern is its issue of regulating sexual impurity in order to avoid uncleanness that might defile/pollute the sacred sphere, and notably issues of pollution from sexual interactions before entering sanctuaries.<sup>2</sup> Classicists and historians of religion who are more familiar with this material have unfortunately failed to take into full account the most important theoretical work on the issue of dirt and pollution, which is Mary Douglas' work *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo*.<sup>3</sup> Since this is a literature review, this



article will limit itself in marking out this lack of interaction with Mary Douglas' ideas, especially modern scholars who do apply Douglas' views on dirt and pollution but have missed the opportunity to explain the logic at work within ancient Greek purity systems that mark sexual intercourse as ritually impure. We should bear in mind that even after almost fifty years from the publication of Douglas' book, classists are refusing to engage with her ideas on why sexual desire, sexual intercourse and sexual relations may be a source of pollution for the ancient Greeks. I will start this introduction with some modern examples of perceived sexual impurity as a source of pollution to mark out the importance and the implications of this subject matter which transcends the limits of time and space.

On the 26th of September 2014 the Greek journalists Manos Voularinos and Petros Nikolaou posted on the Facebook account of their satirical radio show *Whatever*<sup>4</sup> a dialogue from a group called *Mammies United*<sup>5</sup> on the issue of what a young mother should do to avoid contact between her newly-born baby and a menstruating woman. In this seemingly real dialogue the original statement was: "and they told me that a menstruating young woman should not touch it [i.e. the baby] because [the baby] will be marked."<sup>6</sup> Menstruating women as a source of pollution is a very widely held concept in cultures across the world, but here it is important because it is coupled with another source of pollution for a newly-born baby "in case that some couple visits you they should be clean, namely having made no ... throughout the previous night."<sup>7</sup> It is also important that answers given by seemingly other members of this group were related to religion: "do whatever your priest says", and "it is the tradition, you never know," and also "these things are known to none but God." These are the types of answers you frequently hear in Modern Greek society, answers which are seldom linked directly to any particular educational, cultural or socio-economical background. Rather, these are Modern Greek attitudes on women's bodily functions and on sexual intercourse that go back thousands of years. They have just been reinterpreted and re-enhanced under a Greek Orthodox garment. If we look at the so-called *Greek Sacred Laws*, dated from the 6th c BCE to the 3rd c. CE, both issues of menstruation and sexual intercourses as sources of impurity appear regularly.

Similarly, another fairly recent example comes from the 1980's frenzy against the victims of AIDS in the United States of America, where this disease at that time was associated with homosexual sexual activity. Ambulance

drivers and hospital workers were refusing to take care of people suffering from this disease and the houses of HIV-positive individuals were burned down by mobs (in the rural American south). What is important to note for this paper is that pastors could be heard preaching that gay people are a dangerous and violent group that *corrupt* children and *infect* the community with AIDS or that AIDS was their *punishment* by the God for their sexual anomaly.<sup>8</sup> Of course in this case, as well as in the case of modern Orthodox Greek attitudes on sexual intercourse, people who are perceived as sexually impure are not tolerated or welcomed in the Church during mass or during any other religious ceremony or festivals.

### ***I. From the early years to Mary Douglas<sup>9</sup>***

The first scholar to have ever directed modern research towards matters of ritual regulations on purity in the ancient Greek cult was Theodor Wächter in his 1910 monograph *Reinheitsvorschriften im griechischen Kult* which included inscriptions and literary texts, and was divided into many sections like clothing, birth, menstruation, sickness, death, murder, animals, plants, metals, social-based exclusions, gender-based exclusion, excrements, but *no* room for sexual impurity. It is, however, hardly a surprise that the multi-volume *magnus opus* of the study of Greco-Roman Antiquity *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* did not dedicate even a single entry on sexual purity or impurity. Following Theodor Wächter's work, Harold J. Stukey in his 1936 article "Purity in Fifth and Fourth Century Religion" made a short study of the broad use of purity-related vocabulary in the ancient Greek language, based on evidence from the classical period, suggesting that the essence of purity is a resemblance to God's holiness and cleanness, echoing Marcel Mauss's and Henri Hubert's early insight in their seminal 1899 article "Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice" and prefiguring Mary Douglas' elaborate theory on the same issue (see below).

It was then not before the important 1952 work of Louis Moulinier, *Le pur et l'impur dans la pensée des Grecs d'Homère à Aristote*, that we have a voluminous monograph (over 400 pages) on Greek ideas of dirt and defilement expanding the research on broader purity—and pollution—related vocabulary. It also contained an enormous amount of helpful lexicographical material, but again *nothing* specifically related to sexual impurity. The French structuralist Jean-Pierre Vernant, in his 1966 book *Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne*, and specifically in his chapter

on “le pur et l’impur” accused Moulinier’s work for lacking an “esprit de système,”<sup>10</sup> an effort to offer a unified narrative or to explain its very rich, but confusing and contradictory evidence. What is interesting is his call to understand this matter under the lens of the religious thinking of the Ancient Greeks,<sup>11</sup> insisting in the symbolic character of “defilement,”<sup>12</sup> and in the idea that “defilement” refers to a disorder of the system.<sup>13</sup> These were also basic elements in Mary Douglas’ understanding of the whole notion of purity and danger in human societies, who herself published a work examining these issues the exact same year (see in more detail below). And still, despite all this, sexual defilement played a significantly minor part in Vernant’s book.

This brings us to a major change in the study of impurity in general, which was brought by the work of Mary Douglas. It comes as no surprise that her book is still considered by most scholars “the single most important work in the study of impurity across human culture,” as very recently expressed.<sup>14</sup> The ideas in it are based on: (i) the author’s own fieldwork among West African Lele, conducted in 1949; (ii) the Book of *Leviticus*; (iii) comparative material from other ethnographic works; and (iv) an in-depth analysis of nineteenth and early twentieth-century discourse on public health and purity. Despite the fact that only a few mentions are dedicated to pollution from sexual impurity, this book remains a key starting point for any subsequent study on such issues, although she used no classical material into consideration. She actually admitted in her book that she was lacking classicist training and, although familiar with Moulinier’s work, she also admitted that she could not bring in any helpful critiques of his work (contrary to against accusations that Douglas’ work was universalistic and ahistorical, she was in fact careful not to expand her theory into areas she was not familiar with specifically in order to prevent her theory having any a priori applicability).<sup>15</sup>

## ***II. “There is no such thing as absolute dirt”***

Her most well know idea about dirt (and thus the unclean and the polluted) is that there is no such a thing as dirt in absolute terms. To elaborate this, her two most emblematic and much-quoted phrases were the following:

...no single item is dirty apart from a particular system of classification in which it does not fit<sup>17</sup>

and

[t]here is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. If we shun dirt, it is not because of craven fear, still less dread of holy terror. ... Dirt offends against order.<sup>18</sup>

What she does then is criticize the two classical ways to explain purity laws and purification rituals, which are still prevalent even today: (a) purity laws have a sound hygienic basis;<sup>19</sup> or that (b) they come from primitive people's erroneous fancies.<sup>20</sup> In particular, she considers the former explanation insufficient and an unnecessary detriment for further explanations. Instead, hygienic benefits are *side-effects* of ritual actions.<sup>21</sup> For the second explanation, she noted that there is always a logic behind ritual practices of purification or pollution and suggested that "the more deeply we go into [purity] rules, the more obvious it becomes that we are studying *symbolic systems*."<sup>22</sup> This emphasis on symbolic systems (and their classifications) is in alignment with the work of Vernant (see above) but she also moves beyond. As she wrote:

Dirt then, is never unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements<sup>23</sup>

and

In short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications<sup>24</sup>

For Mary Douglas whatever is deemed ambiguous to a culture, creates wavering uncertainty, brings intellectual and social disorder, is threatening, and therefore denounced as dirty and dangerous precisely in order to control whatever may challenge it may bring to the established classification.<sup>25</sup> The "unclassified" exaggerates the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, and reflects on the relation of clean and unclean, holiness and unholiness, order and disorder, being and not-being, form and formless, life and death.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, humans react to notions of dirt individually: 1) they organize the world into patterns for which they are responsible; 2) through this organizing process they create a stable world for them, in which objects have recognizable shapes, in order that this stable world gives them confidence; 3) ambiguous items are harmonized, and anomalies are rejected; 4) if anomalies need to be accommodated and accepted, then people modify their structure of assumptions; 5) confronting anomalies is not always an unpleasant experience, and thus there are several ways of treating them; 6) thanks to anomalies they are forced to reflect on their system of classification, confirming their confidence in the system they have created; and 7) their scheme of classification has to be at least partly accepted by others, by communities or by entire societies. However, communities and societies create more rigid, hard to revise, and public sets of standardised values, imposing and regulating them with authority. And so anomalies are treated in five ways: 1) anomalies are often reduced; 2) anomalies are physically controlled; 3) rules of avoiding anomalous things are created and they strengthen the definition to which anomalies do not confirm; 4) anomalies are labelled as dangerous; and 5) ambiguous symbols are used in ritual to enrich meaning to a single, grand, unifying pattern. The last three ways are actually the most common treatments in a large number of religious traditions.

Most famous is her demonstration of pure and impure animals in the Torah. Ancient Israelites believed that men's affairs prosper under God's blessing, since God's benevolent will is essential element to create order. Similarly, livestock and inhabited lands also receive the blessing from God. If God's blessing is withdrawn, then a curse is unleashed. Therefore lands and livestock can be fertile only long as they are blessed by God. Since God is complete and perfect, he similarly requires everything to comply with the categories that he created in the book of Genesis. These categories, including animals on earth, on air and in the sea, are to be kept distinct and thus perfect. Keeping them distinct is therefore a quintessential act, and mixing becomes an outrage.<sup>27</sup> Keeping these categories ensures the continuous blessing of God. Therefore, since swine parts the hoof but does not chew the cud, it mixes God's categories, and is therefore anomalous, failing to fit the cherished category of animals on earth. Thus pork is labeled unclean and should not be eaten.<sup>28</sup> Mary Douglas thus made the most serious effort to understand *why* pork is impure and its consumption is considered defilement within the ancient Israelite mentality. That is her most important contribution to later generations of scholars: to

understand each system of purity and purification within an internally informed understanding of the premises and ideologies that created these purity regulations in the first place. So, how have classicists and historians of ancient Greek religion studying pollution and impurity issues dealt with this ground-breaking work so far?

### **III. After Mary Douglas (from Robert Parker to Angelos Chaniotis)**

In 1983, a new book with a fresh look on impurity in the ancient Greek world appeared, Robert C. T. Parker's *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*. In it, Parker explored pollution as a "pervasive phenomenon" and so he expanded his inquiry in other sources, like the "alternative religions of the Greek world", such as the Hippocratic corpus, and set out to establish a working definition of terms.<sup>29</sup> He explored "certain dangerous conditions to which the metaphor of defilement is often applied,"<sup>30</sup> and included a whole chapter on sexual defilement, entitled "Works of Aphrodite" (translating the ancient Greek generic term *ta aphrodisia*). Parker also set a series of helpful parameters for a prudent study: (a) place matters, (b) time matters even more, (c) different classes of evidence exist, (d) different genres have different world-views, (e) there is scope for large diversity within a genre, and (f) the spasmodic appearance of pollution in literature needs to be explained. All in all, this was the first time in the bibliography of classical religion where we saw a whole chapter dedicated to sexual impurity.

The impact of his book was so great that twenty years after its appearance, the 14th biannual conference of the *Centre International d'Étude de la Religion Grecque* (CIERGA) was entitled "Pureté et purification en Grèce ancienne: conceptions et pratiques. Purity and purification in Ancient Greece - conceptions and practices," which was held in the l'Université de Liège in Liège, Belgium, from the 10th to the 12th of October 2013. This conference was meant to coincide with the thirtieth anniversary from the publication of Robert Parker's seminal book (reissued with a new preface in the meantime, in 1990) which is described by the publisher as followed:

Purity is a constant concern in ritual texts, and any Greek underwent many small purifications in his everyday life. Certain abnormal religious movements of the archaic age made 'purification' the path to felicity in the afterlife. First published in hardback in 1983, *Miasma* is the first work in English to treat this theme in detail.<sup>31</sup>

Mary Lefkowitz in her review of the book at the London Review of Books argued:

Whenever possible, [Parker] compares what the Greeks did with practices in other cultures, but he never pushes analogies too far, and avoids applying foreign terms to describe Greek practices. As a result, his book is not as easy to read as the general anthropological studies that first present a theory and then discuss the evidence in terms of it. Parker often refers to such work, but he realises that ultimately the Greeks are best understood on their own terms. Anyone who seriously wishes to know about Greek ethics and culture will need to refer to this book, and anthropologists who study other cultures will find it a comprehensive and reliable resource.<sup>33</sup>

However, refusing to engage with the results of Mary Douglas' work, as many other classicists who see as almost as a miasma an open engagement with anthropological theories as analytical model, Parker drew some awkward, and arbitrary, conclusions in his discussion for sexual impurity and the explanation of sexual regulations—few of which help the reader find the reasons behind ancient Greek mentality:

If lovers sometimes yielded to the tempting seclusion of rustic precincts, they may have reassured themselves with the thought that *the easy-going country deities would not stand upon formalities*<sup>34</sup>

and

If an explanation is needed as to why sexuality is drawn into the contrast between sacred and profane at all, it must lie in that *embarrassment about bodily functions*<sup>35</sup>

and

... it might be helpful to put the sexual offences in a category of *'metaphorical moral pollutions'*... We are dealing with breaches of social rules – just like desertion

in battle – which are spoken of as pollutions because they derive from ‘dirty’ acts<sup>36</sup>

and

although their deeds [e.g. of sexual offenders] are described in the language of pollution, *it is because they are disgraced, not because they are dangerous*, that they are banned from religious life... It is hard to show that the adulteress or male prostitute is *endangered or dangerous on any supernatural level*.<sup>37</sup>

The failure to use the work of Mary Douglas resulted in what seems to be a superficial attempt to understand sexual impurity within the context of ancient Greek religious behaviour. Nevertheless, it is indeed surprising that a host of critical reviews on his book, appearing in various journals from 1984 to 1987, insisted in pointing out that one of the work’s main assets is the view of miasma as a disruption or a breach of normal order.<sup>38</sup> This would seem to be a clearly influenced from the works of Mary Douglas and Jean-Pierre Vernant. In addition, another critical review remarked that: “[c]omprendre le mécanisme du sacrilège suppose que l’on réfléchisse sur la nature du sacré en Grèce,”<sup>39</sup> which is exactly what Mary Douglas is trying to convince other scholars to do throughout her book. So, when one of Parker’s reviewers, Frederick Brenk, praised him for avoiding “the pollution of careless anthropological and literary speculations”<sup>40</sup> we are left wondering why Parker should not then engage his work with careful anthropological theories.<sup>41</sup>

What followed after Parker’s work was of little promise. In 2007, Fritz Graf published an article under the title “Religiöse Kathartik im Licht der Inschriften,” where he explicitly mentioned in the first paragraph of his article that he is heavily influenced by Mary Douglas’ work, yet without any particular references to her work.<sup>42</sup> For Graf the existence of all these purity regulations in the Greek Sacred Law inscriptions was either seen as:

Die drei Grundbedingungen biologischer Existenz [i.e. Birth, Death and Sexuality] warden radikal ausgeschlossen vom Raum, in dem Mensch und Gottheit verkehren.<sup>43</sup>  
and



Die mit der Gottheit rituell kommunizierende Person  
distanziert sich von der biologischen Grundlage  
menschlicher Existenz<sup>44</sup>

However, he did not try to explain *why* these three basic elements of human existence (“die drei Grundbedingungen biologischer Existenz”) have to be “radically excluded from the area where humans and gods operate together” (this is Graf’s actual wording in translation; see right above for the German original). In particular, *why* was sexual intercourse prohibited from the sacred precinct and why was having sexual intercourse before entering such a place was a source of pollution requiring the body to be purified? *Why* did the Ancient Greeks believe that their gods did not allow people to enter a sacred place after having committed such a basic physical, bodily action, or having touched someone or something related to these actions, unless they had been cleaned before?

The same year Andreas Bendlin, underscored some important difficulties facing the study of pollution and purity, as well as some key points regarding approaches to this issue, such as the new emphasises on mental and ethical dimensions of purity (see more on that by Angelos Chaniotis below). Unlike other works, he seemed to be familiar with the work of Mary Douglas, citing her works and trying to evaluate their results, but he was clearly cautious accepting her interpretation because of her tendency to see the ancient world in very general terms and under a universalistic approach.<sup>45</sup> However, her work is once more misunderstood as something that its author never claimed to be attempting to achieve.

Finally, in 2013, a volume entitled *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism* appeared. From this series of articles, two were dedicated to the ancient Greek world. The first article (“The Concept of Purity in Greek Sacred Laws”) by Noel Robertson focused on the concept of *hagnos* and *katharos* as attested in the updated *Sacred Laws* corpus, and was based on Parker and Moulinier, but not on Mary Douglas, and thus brought no real contribution to *how* we could explain this phenomenon. Similarly, the other article (“Concepts of Purity in Ancient Greece, With Particular Emphasis on Sacred Sites”) by Linda-Marie Günther, focused on the concept of purity and sanctity of a *temenos* and its protection through a set of rules and regulations, mostly reliant on Herodotus, Thucydides and the *Sacred Laws*. She was based her

work on Parker and made no reference to Moulinier or Douglas, and her contribution in providing explanations is minimal. Needless to say that neither of these contributions made any special mention on sexual (im)purity.

#### **IV. Conclusions**

Before offering some preliminary suggestions for the future of the research, it is necessary to mention Michel Foucault and his second volume of *Histoire de la sexualité*, entitled *L'usage des plaisirs*, which appeared in 1984. We have to bear in mind that Foucault was a critical historian who studied the ancient Greek world and used ancient sources to write the *history* of sexuality. In the chapter “Aphrodisia” within the bigger section “La problématisation morale des plaisirs,” he appeared with a promising scheme to explain the phenomenon of sexual impurity. However, it was not based on epigraphic nor papyrological evidence and his primary sources were often restrained to a few of the classical authors. In fact, Foucault did what he knew best: he problematized the concept and offered the seed of what still awaits a full and deep exploration.<sup>46</sup> In a few pages he explained that sexual intercourse, despite the fact that is something natural and necessary, is subjected to social press in order to mark the limits of its practice. He sees in the classical texts a tendency to describe sexual intercourse as something subordinate and inferior, bestial, depended on bodily desires, taking back human existence in a state of need, of uncontrolled passion, which reverses hierarchy, prioritises satisfaction, submits the soul in its power, is assimilated to rebellion and riot, and leads to excess and hyperbole. If Foucault was right, then could we also start understanding *why* Greeks regulated *ta aphrodisia* as another source of pollution? Can we see the emotions, feelings and passions created by sexual desire and sexual intercourse as a state for humans that make them “material out of place” as defined by Mary Douglas? Are all these above-mentioned characteristics of sexual intercourse, as described by Foucault, the source of seeing sexual intercourse as dirty, dangerous and polluting?

One of those who emphatically criticized Foucault for providing an explanation that rested entirely upon the “philosophical speculations” of Plato, Xenophon and Aristotle, is David Cohen, who nevertheless made an ample use of data from “social anthropology of *contemporary* Mediterranean societies.”<sup>47</sup> Cohen also chose not to use one of the major anthropologists of his century, Mary Douglas, whose work is still relevant to those sections

of his book pertaining to impiety and contagious pollution, and avoided exploring *why* ancient Athenians saw sexual behaviour under the lenses of social control, enforcement of morals, legal prosecution and discipline. In other words, what exactly and why in particular were the Athenians trying to control? In his critique towards Foucault, Cohen concludes that:

[a] culture is not a homogeneous unity; there was no one 'Athenian attitude' towards homoeroticism. The widely differing attitudes and conflicting norms and practices which have been discussed above represent the disagreements, contradictions, and anxieties which make up the patterned chaos of a complex culture.<sup>48</sup>

Against these warnings Bruce Thornton published in 1997 his work *Eros: the Myth of Ancient Greek Sexuality* in which he brought more examples than Foucault,<sup>49</sup> to argue our need to debunk any romanticised notion we might have about the Ancient Greek *eros*. According to his broad research on primary sources, *Eros* was indeed a form of madness that destroys rationality and the power of mind to control body, suspends the ability to think reasonably against physical desires and natural emotions, a frenzy, often described like death, violence, war, wind, storm, wild sea, shipwreck, bestiality, slavery and so on. *Eros* is something ambiguous that creates disorder, a threat that needs to be confined, controlled and regulated. Humans' sexual desires and the very act of sexual intercourse are dangerously mixing the category of higher, superior, civilized and logical humans with that of the wild, savage, bestial state of existence.

I suspect that we need to revisit the tremendous volume of primary sources we have from the ancient Greek world related to sexual desire, intercourse and morals.<sup>50</sup> We also need to put them into a meaningful dialogue with Mary Douglas. Parker's and Cohen's accounts should not automatically be considered more nuanced simply because they are more careful to avoid the pitfall of ahistorical narration or an essentialist fallacy (because, despite all their critique, they cannot avoid using anthropological insights). Similarly, Thornton's work may be dubious, and superficial at times, but I believe that classicists and historians of ancient Greek religion should start with the sources we possess, but this time *as many as possible*. Only then will they find out what made the ancient Greeks see sex as a source of pollution when it comes to their relations with the divine realm. These sources need to be

problematized together with the vast secondary bibliography on issues of gender and body, women, sex, social control and so on. There is a big why that still needs to be answered and we are clearly in need of a new *Histoire de la sexualité*.<sup>51</sup>

## Notes

1. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer who helped me clarify parts of my paper in need of clarification, pointed out ideas not phrased properly, any sections which needed to be better organised, in making my thesis more explicit. However, all remaining mistakes found herein are entirely mine.
2. For the large body of inscriptions modern scholarship has labelled *Greek Sacred Laws*, see the standard works of Ludwig Ziehen et Jean de Prott, *Leges Graecorum Sacrae et Titulis Collectae*, deuxième partie (Leipzig: Teubner, 1906); Franciszek Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées de l'Asie Mineure*, Travaux et Mémoires IX, École Française d'Athènes (Paris: De Boccard, 1955); idem, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques*, Travaux et Mémoires XVIII, École Française d'Athènes (Paris: De Boccard, 1969); and idem, *Lois sacrées des cités grecques. Supplément*, Travaux et Mémoires XI, École Française d'Athènes (Paris: De Boccard, 1962). More recently Eran Lupu in his *Greek Sacred Law. 2nd Edition with a Postscript. A Collection of New Documents* (NGSL2), Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 152 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), has published new "sacred laws", while for those appeared after 2009 the reader can consult either the extremely valuable *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, published annually, as well as the *Epigraphic Bulletin on Greek Religion* which is also periodically published as part of the journal *Kernos*, thanks to the tireless work done by Angelos Chaniotis, Ancient History and Classics Professor at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton (and also senior editor of the afore-mentioned *Supplementum*). For a very recent re-evaluation of the meaning and usefulness of the term "Sacred Laws," see J.-M. Carbon and V. Pirenne-Delforge, "Beyond Greek 'Sacred Laws,'" *Kernos* 25 (2012): 163-82, which is connected with their on-going project *Collection of Greek Ritual Norms*.
3. Originally published in 1966 and reprinted in 1969, 1970, 1978, 1984, 1991, and 2002.
4. Gr. "O,ti na'nai".
5. Gr. "Manoules Enomenes".
6. "κ μου ειπαν οτι δεν κανει να ερθει κοπελα με περιοδο να το ακουμπησει γιατι θα κανει σημαδι..." (no accents on the original dialogue)
7. "ναι ισχυει οπως και αν σε επισκεφθει καποιο ζευγαρι πρεπει να ειναι «καθαροι» δλδ το προηγουμενο βραδυ να μην εχουν κανει κατι ..." The word "sex", or "sexual intercourse" is omitted in the original; emphasis added.
8. The reader may easily consult the rich footage available on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) from US news and documentaries dated to that period of time. In addition, Thomas L. Long in his book *AIDS and American Apocalypticism: The Cultural Semiotics of an Epidemic* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005) brings our attention to the vocabulary used by radical Evangelical pastors, televangelists and journalists of the late 1970s who were already fiercely attacking homosexuals, described as "epidemic," "moral death," "social decline," a sign of "sin" in "homosexually-decadent societies," which had once previously been punished by the biblical Flood (Long 2005, 2-8).
9. This is a period when no modern scholar was using the *sacred laws* which became more accessible to researchers after the seminal work of Sokolowski between 1952 and 1969 (see also above, footnote 2).
10. Vernant, 121.
11. Ibid., 131.
12. Ibid., 133.

13. Ibid., 134.
14. Lennon, 2014, 4.
15. She writes: “Again, a learned French classicist, Moulinier, makes a comprehensive study of ideas of purity and impurity in Greek thought. Free of the bias of Robertson Smith, his approach seems excellently empirical by current anthropological standards. ... The anthropologist, weak in classical scholarship, looks round for specialist guidance on how much reliance can be placed in this author, for his material is challenging and, to the layman, convincing.” (Douglas 2002, 33-34).
16. Douglas, 1966, 2.
17. Douglas, 2002, xvii.
18. Douglas, 1966, 2.
19. For example: due to medical materialism, e.g. Jews and Muslims avoid eating pork due to the dangers of eating pig in hot climates; the ritual washing of hands before entering holy places as a measure against contagious plagues, etc.
20. In contrast to modern people’s sound ideas of hygiene, such as the primitives’ ritual practices being symbolic, and not based on hygiene.
21. E.g. Moses’ dietary laws, inscribed in sacred books do not make him an enlightened public health administrator, but a spiritual leader.
22. Douglas 1966, 43; my emphasis.
23. Ibid., 1966, 44.
24. Ibid., 1966, 45.
25. Douglas, 2002, xi.
26. Douglas, 1966, 5-10.
27. E.g. the animals on earth which ancient Israelites may eat are those which God created: (i) with the parting of the hoof; (ii) having the hoof cloven into two; and (iii) chewing the cud. See Deuteronomy 14:6 and Leviticus 11:3.
28. See Deuteronomy 14:8 and Leviticus 11:7.
29. E.g. the difference between *miasma* and *agos*.
30. E.g. shedding blood, sacrilege, curses, disease, bewitchment, purity and salvation etc.
31. <https://globaloup.com/academic/product/miasma-9780198147428?cc=ca&lang=en&#> (accessed on 15 February 2016)
32. See vol. 5, no, 21 [17 November 1983]: 23.
33. long these lines is also the review by Robert Garland in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 106 (1986): 235.
34. Parker 1983, 76; my emphasis.
35. Ibid., 91; my emphasis.
36. Ibid., 96; my emphasis.
37. Ibid., 95; my emphasis.
38. See Parker, 1983, 325-7; for the reviews see Frederick Brenk in *Gnomon* 56.8 [1984]: 673; M.L. West in *Classical Review* 35.1 [1985]: 93; John Herington in the *Classical World* 78.6 [1985]: 615; H.F.J. Horstmanshoff in *Mnemosyne* 39.3-4 [1986]: 538-9; Michael Morgan in *The Journal of Religion* 67.1 [1987]: 133.
39. See Christian Jacob in the *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 103.3 [1986]: 298.
40. See *Gnomon* 56.8 [1984]: 673.
41. In 2012 Angelos Chaniotis published an article under the title “Greek Ritual Purity. From Automatismus to Moral Distinctions” (which appeared in a collection called *How Purity is Made*). Chaniotis’s article is a true successor of the work of Parker on the issue of purity, using literary sources and epigraphy in a masterful way. He argued

in this particular article that purification rituals began as a form of regulation which was requiring ritual experts (*kathartai*) to perform them, focusing in the purity of the body, while pollution could be removed automatically and externally. But, then, a change took place towards the purity of the soul, starting from evidence in the tragedies of Euripides and later in a “sacred law” in Epidauros (c. 340 BCE), reflecting an even broader trend, attested in secular law and attitudes of afterlife. Chaniotis is using all this evidence to reconstruct the context within which this impressive change is happening at that time. A similar formula reappears in second-century-BCE inscriptions, only to become regular in imperial times, demanding purity in mind, and not only in body, focusing on internal cleansing, condemning intensions, and asking for justice against sin. Again, Chaniotis provides the context of these changes in tracing similar developments in the idea of asylum, in mystery cults, in magic, in oath-taking, and in rituals in general, which become less indifferent to morals, spiritual offerings, true intensions, and need for justification of an action. Although this article is remarkable in its effort to explain the way ideas of purity are built up, and how they can be understood within their cultural context, there is no particular mention in sexual purity or why sexual impurity within the symbolic system of the ancient Greek world can be seen as dirty, defiling and polluting.

42. In another book of Fritz Graf, together with Sarah Iles Johnston, on the so-called *Bacchic Golden Tablets* he follows more clearly Mary Douglas’s insight (see Graf and Johnston 2007). These golden tablets are enigmatic texts invoking Demeter, Great Mother, Persphehne, Hades and Dionysos, of which four texts form the so-called “purity group”, written in Greek and spanning from the 4th c. BCE to the 2nd c. CE. In these tablets the initiates are called as “pure coming from the pure ones” (e.g. 5 Thuri 3, v. 1: ἔρχομαι ἐκ κοθαρῶ<v> κοθαρά; 6 Thuri 4, v. 1: ἔρχομαι ἐκ <κ>αθαρῶ<v> καθα<ρά...>), and express the hope that the owner of such a tablet might enter the blissed race of gods (5 Thuri 3, v. 3: καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼν ὑμῶν γένος ὄλβιον εὐχομαι εἶμεν; 6 Thuri 4, v. 3: καὶ γὰρ ἐ<γ>ὼ ὑ<μῶν> γένος εὐχομα<i> ε<ί>να<i> ὄλβιο<v>). At the end of the text the tablets often provide with instructions on how the initiate might travel in the underworld to meet the pure Persephone (e.g. 7 Thuri 5, v. 6: ἀγνη<v> Φε<ρ>σέφονειαν), and how the goddess might send the initiate to the seat of the pure (7 Thuri 5, v. 7: ἔδρας ἐς εὐαγέ<ι>ων). Both scholars, following the work of Mary Douglas, explain that the purity of these texts refers to a kind of being in a fit state to approach the gods, and that the purification process is preliminary and prepares the initiate for contact with the divine.
43. Graf, 2007, 113.
44. Ibid.,115.
45. Bendlin, 2007, 182.
46. See Foucault, 1984, esp. 66-71.
47. Cohen 1991, 36; my emphasis. It is not that he found it problematic to compare pre-modern and modern societies, but that Foucault’s limited data problematic.
48. Cohen, 1991, 201-2.
49. E.g. Homer, Pindar, Theocritus, Archilochus, Sappho, Anacreon, Theognis of Megara and other archaic and classical Greek poets, as well as historians and philosophers, dated from the eighth to the first century BCE.
50. This is not the right place to list all the ancient Greek sources that sustain this view of dangerous, uncontrolled and out-of-place *eros*, but this long list includes sources from archaic, classical and Hellenistic Greek epic and lyric poets, Attic Greek comedies

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and tragedies, Greek and Roman magical papyri, *gnomai* (or wisdom sayings), philosophical, medical and political treatises, orations, epigrams, ancient novels, fables, erotic literature, and so on and so forth (not to mention artistic representations and their symbolism).

51. See for example Goldhill 1995.



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