

Notes on Quiz #3: Women and the Athenian Polis

1. In this chapter, Pomeroy begins by outlining a controversy among modern historians over the status of women in classical Athens. What two opposing positions have historians held about the status of Athenian women?

Some historians have argued that women in classical Athens were despised and kept in extreme seclusion, like eastern harems (according to Pomeroy, a position severely colored by the historians' own views of a woman's proper place).

Others have countered that they were respected and enjoyed freedom comparable to women of most other ancient societies (citing fictional heroines like Antigone and Elektra).

A third position has argued that they were secluded, but in that seclusion they were both respected and, within the house, dominant (emphasizing that the seclusion was primarily a means of protection something cherished against male strangers).

Pomeroy presents this debate as part of a broader concern regarding the best interpretation of our limited sources for Athenian women, and is flawed in treating Athenian women as if they were all the same. Within the Athenian culture there are major differences across class, region, and period. What's more important, from her point of view, was that the state considered the duty of citizen women to be the production of legitimate heirs to the *oikoi*, and thus to the citizenry.

2. What key moment or scene in particular stood out for you from Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, and why? What do you think the playwright was trying to get across in that moment?

This is subjective and could include any number of key moments, including the persistence of the Fates, the judgment of the citizens, the intervention of Athena and the opinions she expresses, etc.

EC1. Athenian religious cults in which women played an important role included all of the following EXCEPT:

- ✓ (a) the festival of the Spangeti Teras [= Greek for Spaghetti Monster]
- (b) the cult of the Olympian goddess Athena
- (c) the mysteries of Demeter and Korē at Eleusis
- (d) the exclusively female celebration of the Thesmophoria

EC2. According to Pomeroy, how did inheritance normally work in propertied families where there were daughters, but no son to preserve the *oikos* (estate/household)?

The daughters were responsible for perpetuating the *oikos* and were regarded as *epikleros*, meaning attached to the family property. Inheritance went to her husband and thence to her child. This means that succession was not strictly through men in Athens.

The main idea was to marry such a woman to the deceased's male next of kin to preserve the family line. The nearest male kinsman was expected to marry the heiress (first dibs), and dibs passed through the other kinsman in an order similar to actual inheritance (brothers, sons of brothers, etc.). Though the process was to the disadvantage of rich heiresses, Pomeroy argued that it might have benefitted poorer women who had no dowry.