


Women in Antiquity  
SPRING 2024

MEETING 6

### Women and the Athenian Polis

- Classical Athens
- Democracy and gender
- Athenian female seclusion
- The persecution of Orestes
- History and historiography



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### Five things today

- 1 Classical Athens
- 2 Democracy and gender
- 3 Athenian female seclusion
- 4 The Furies' persecution of Orestes
- 5 History and historiography

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### Upcoming dates

- Proposal due Monday, March 18



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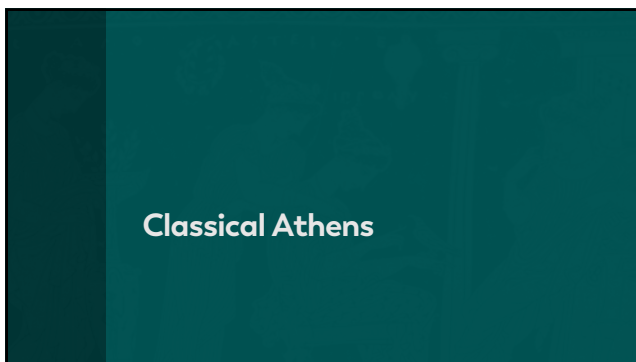
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The Polis

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### Athenian Democracy

- Citizen Assembly** ekklesia
  - Quorum of 6,000
  - Legislation, election, decrees, trials
- Council of 500** boule
  - Prepares measures for the Assembly
  - Executes will of Assembly (administration)
  - Chosen by lot
- Archons** archontes
  - Chosen by lot
- Military magistrates** strategoi
  - Elected by Assembly

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Athenian theater

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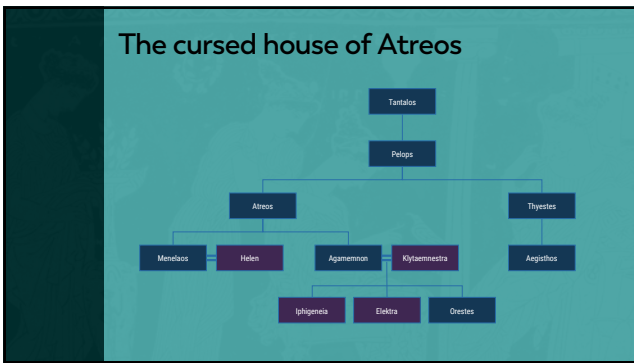
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The cursed house of Atreos

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**Primary Source Reading**

Aeschylus

**from *Eumenides***

**SOME TAKEAWAYS**

- Furies as primitive, inflexible goddesses
  - Must punish Orestes for matricide regardless of circumstances
- Athena, master of wisdom and reason, is more evolved
  - True justice must be decided according to both principles and the case at hand
  - Athena creates the jury; justice should be in the hands of the citizen community, not the gods
- Apollo argues that the mother is not the "parent"
  - Athena uses herself as an example
  - Truth or stratagem?

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### Effects of democracy



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Secondary Source Reading

Sarah B. Pomeroy

### "Women's Identity and the Family in the Classical Polis"

SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Tangible and concrete ideas of women in Athenian society
- Visibility of women in funerals
  - Public funerals by men
  - Reinforce public/private divide
  - Private rituals and gatherings in the hands of women and are about female society
- In this society a much sharper divide between public & private
  - Also manifested in literature as we'll see next time

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### Athenian female seclusion



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**Secondary Source Reading**

Susan Walker

### “Women and Housing in Classical Greece: The Archaeological Evidence”

► **SOME TAKEAWAYS**

- Seclusion only partially supported by archaeology
  - Archaeological problems studying Athens
  - Seclusion only practicable if you are wealthy enough to have the space = belongs only to elite
- Held to be an ideal rather than something occurs without fail or exception
  - Not achieved or practiced even in every home among the aristocracy
- Why is this something the Athenians focus on
  - Increased public/private divide
  - Athenian misogyny largely from 20th-century patriarchal historians
  - Men are flawed and in the presence of beautiful women not of their own family men are not to be trusted
- Seclusion = women should not be left alone with men who are not members of their own family
  - Men doing alone = friends and guests during the day women go about their business
  - Thing to be prevented is for women not to be left alone with a strange man (Not the whole story abt)
- Must set aside assumptions, and talk about what you are actually seeing taking place in Athens from the evidence you have before you

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### Historiography and ancient Athens

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**Secondary Source Reading**

Marilyn A. Katz

### “Ideology and the Status of Women in Ancient Greece”

► **SOME TAKEAWAYS**

- History has focused on the deeds of men; Women’s studies as a reaction to that – disinterring the unheard female voice
  - Is this useful? – tends to unbalance things in the other direction
  - Uncouple the female experience from its contextualization in the experience of society as a whole
  - Does it mean anything to talk about the status of women divorced from (a) the way in which women relate to society, and (b) the way social bonds function across genders and within genders?
- More useful approach: talk about history of gender
- Talk about historical situations in terms of the relationships between and within genders

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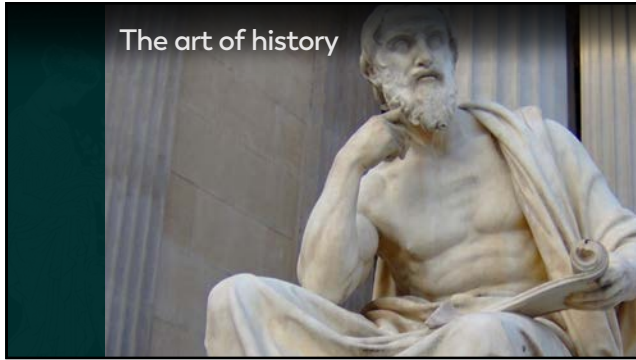
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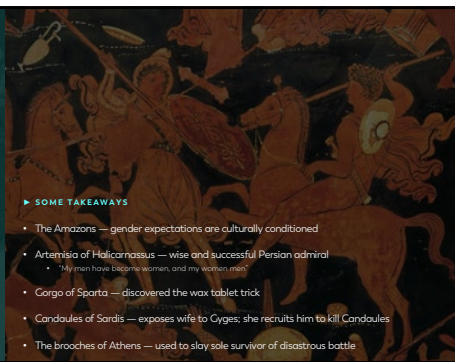
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**Primary Source Reading**

Herodotus  
**from *The Histories***



**SOME TAKEAWAYS**

- The Amazons — gender expectations are culturally conditioned
- Artemisia of Halicarnassus — wise and successful Persian admiral
  - “My men have become women, and my women men”
- Gorgo of Sparta — discovered the wax tablet trick
- Candaules of Sardis — exposes wife to Gyges; she recruits him to kill Candaules
- The brooches of Athens — used to slay sole survivor of disastrous battle

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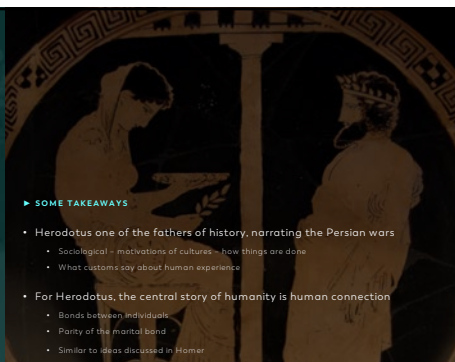
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**Secondary Source Reading**

Carolyn Dewald  
**“Women and Culture in Herodotus’s *Histories*”**



**SOME TAKEAWAYS**

- Herodotus one of the fathers of history, narrating the Persian wars
  - Sociological — motivations of cultures — how things are done
  - What customs say about human experience
- For Herodotus, the central story of humanity is human connection
  - Bonds between individuals
  - Parity of the marital bond
  - Similar to ideas discussed in Homer

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