



Women in Antiquity
SPRING 2025

MEETING 4

The Bronze Age and its Homeric Echo

- The Greek Dark Age
- Iliad and Odyssey
- Marriage in Homer
- Penelope and Nausicaa
- Helen and Klytaemnestra



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Upcoming dates

- Monday, March 10
 - Images essay due
 - upload to BlackBoard by midnight
- Monday, March 24
 - Proposal due
- Sunday, March 2
 - Post your Week 4 responses

2

Five things today

- 1 The Greek Dark Age
- 2 Iliad and Odyssey
- 3 Marriage in Homer
- 4 Penelope and Nausicaa
- 5 Helen and Klytaemnestra

3



4

Quiz #2: The Bronze Age and Homer

1. In heroic Greek society, marriage pattern between powerful families included:

- a. matrilineal marriage (a ruling warrior marries a princess and settles in her kingdom)
- b. patrilineal marriage (a ruler brings a bride back to his lands and family)
- c. all mature women being expected to marry in order to ensure the city's future defense

☒ d. all of the above

2. The queen who, enraged by her husband sacrificing their daughter, cast him aside and married his cousin instead was:

- a. Iphigenia
- b. Helen
- c. Clytemnestra
- d. Mary Queen of Scots

☒ c. Clytemnestra

3. In Greek art, the exclusively female Amazons were often depicted as:

- a. fighting against centaurs, who were originally thought of as exclusively male
- b. ugly, representing their unfeminine nature
- c. having a severe limp
- d. makers and sellers of household goods

☒ a. fighting against centaurs, who were originally thought of as exclusively male

4. Women were a larger proportion of which group in heroic Greek society?

- a. Landholders
- b. Heros
- c. Artists
- d. Housewives

☒ b. Heros

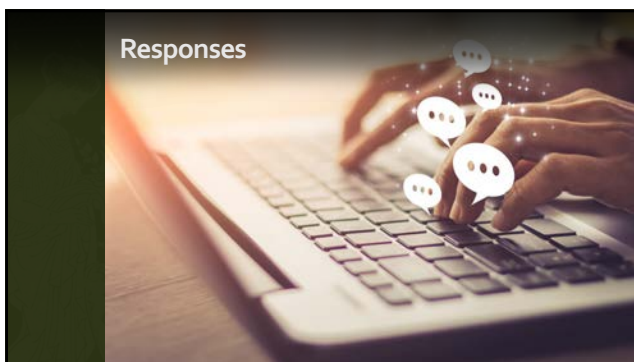
5. When Nausicaa meets Odysseus, she does all of the following EXCEPT:

- a. Accompanies him boldly into town and tells her father's promise
- b. Admires his beauty even before he bathes
- c. Chastises her handmaids for running away from him
- d. Tells him he should ignore her father and try to win over her mother instead

☒ a. Accompanies him boldly into town and tells her father's promise

EC. According to Penelope, why might the matrilineal pattern of marriage be better for the bride?

5



6

Questions about whatever



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Hera

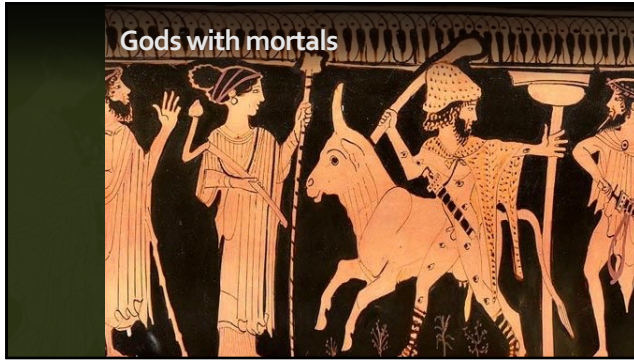


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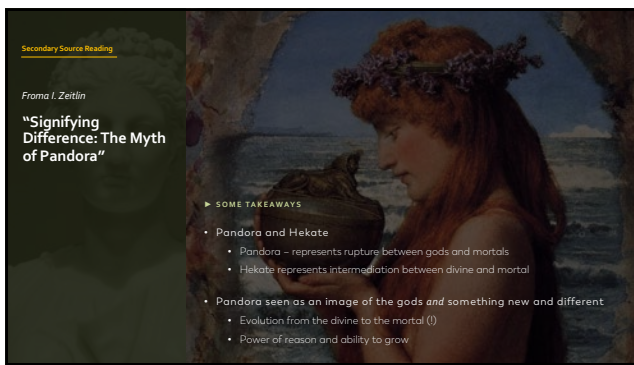
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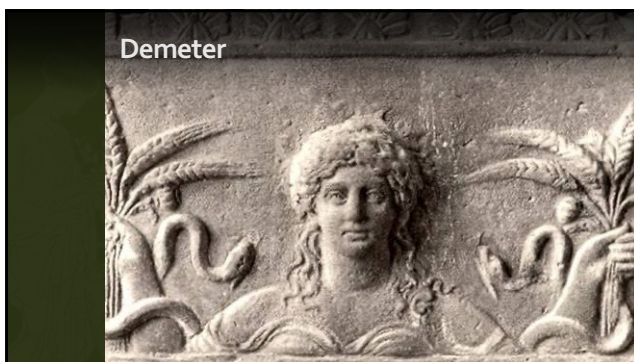
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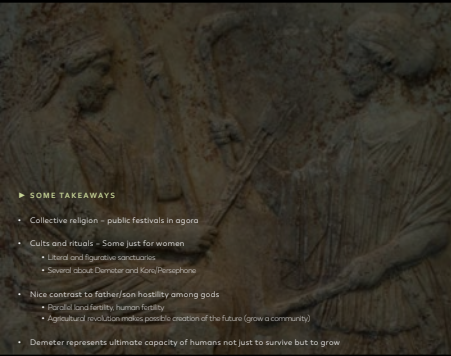


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Secondary Source Reading

Lucia Nixon

"The Cults of Demeter and Kore"



SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Collective religion – public festivals in agora
- Cults and rituals – Some just for women
 - Literal and figurative sanctuaries
 - Served about Demeter and Kore/Persephone
- Nice contrast to father/son hostility among gods
 - Paradox: land fertility, human fertility
 - Agricultural revolution makes possible creation of the future (grow a community)
- Demeter represents ultimate capacity of humans not just to survive but to grow

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Demigods and Monsters

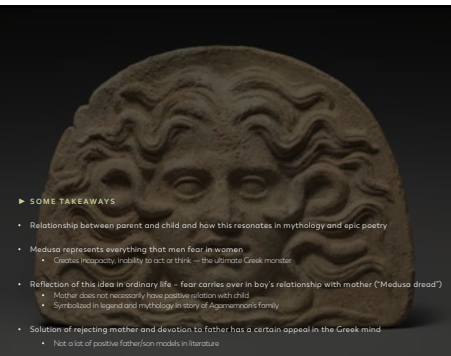


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Secondary Source Reading

Philip E. Slater

"The Greek Family in History and Myth"



SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Relationship between parent and child and how this resonates in mythology and epic poetry
- Medusa represents everything that men fear in women
 - Creates incestuous inability to act or think – the ultimate Greek monster
- Reflection of this idea in ordinary life – fear carries over in boy's relationship with mother ("Medusa dread")
 - Mother does not necessarily have positive relation with child
 - Symbolized in legend and mythology in story of Agamemnon's family
- Solution of rejecting mother and devotion to father has a certain appeal in the Greek mind
 - Not a lot of positive father/son models in literature

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The Homeric Era

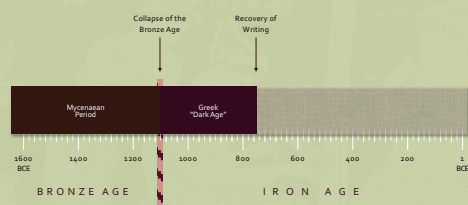
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Collapse of the Bronze Age

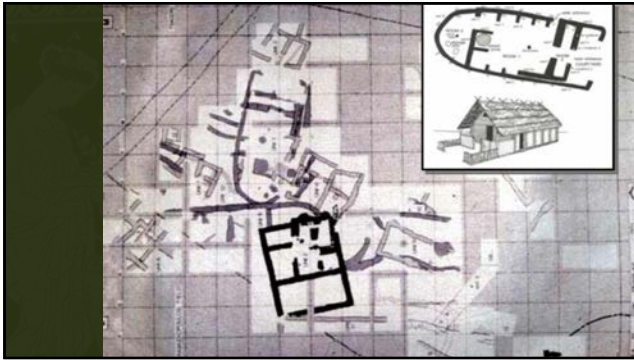


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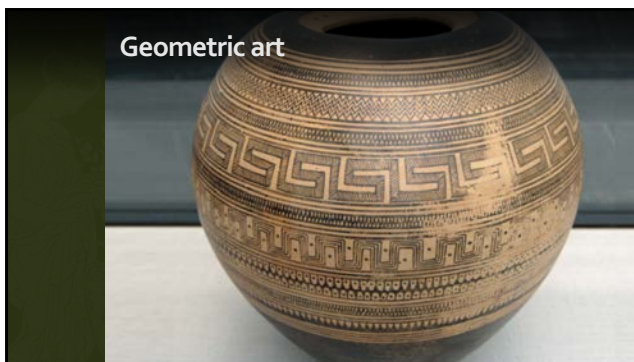
Periods of Greek History



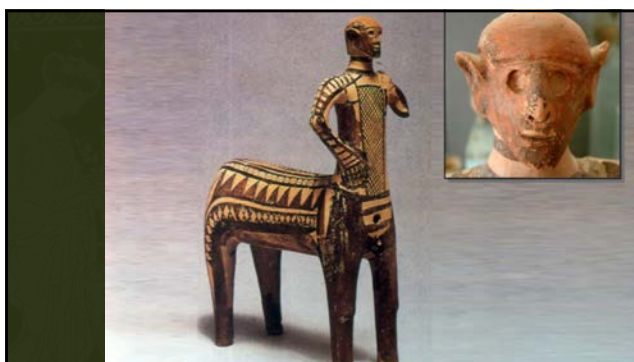
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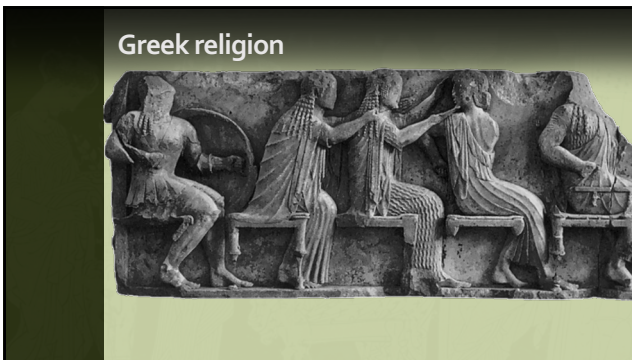
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The rhapsode



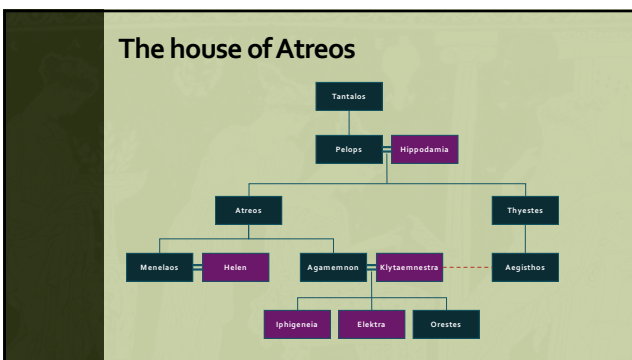
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Greek religion



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The house of Atreos



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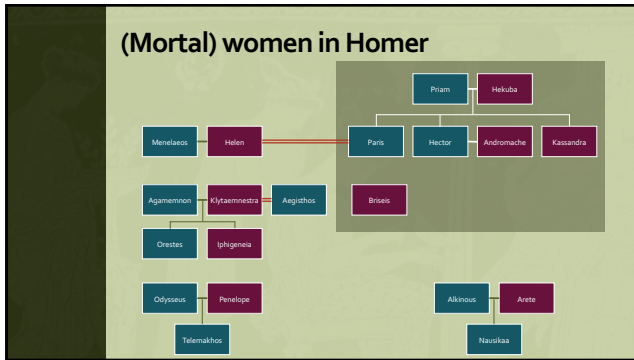
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Primary Source Reading

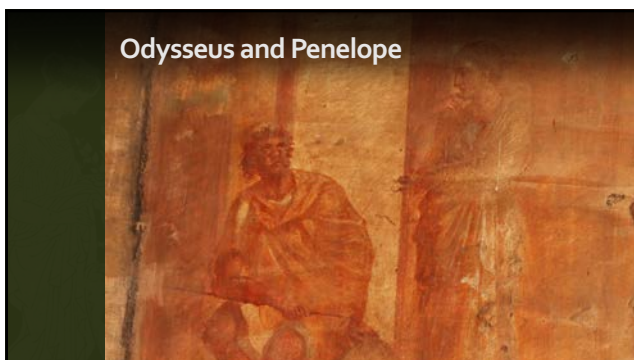
Homer

"Agamemnon's Insult" (from *Iliad*)

► SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Briseis is being claimed as a prize, causing conflict
 - Briseis degraded by the Greeks because the Greek men are prideful and greedy
 - Mistreatment of women is the result of male hubris
 - Homer is writing this story as an indictment of the Bronze Age Greeks
- Greek gods respond to actions by mortals that damage human society
 - Punish human behavior that doesn't greatly affect the gods
 - Greeks have moved beyond the basic function of ancient religion

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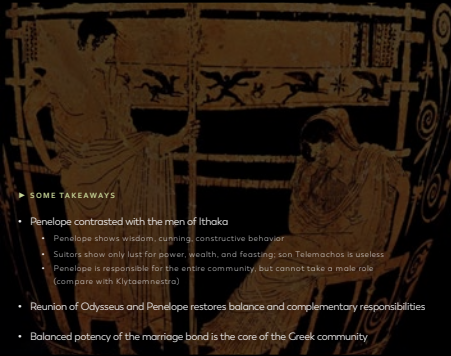
Primary Source Reading

Homer

"The Artifice of Penelope"
(from *Odyssey*)

► SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Penelope contrasted with the men of Ithaka
 - Penelope shows wisdom, cunning, constructive behavior
 - Suitors show only lust for power, wealth, and feasting; son Telemachos is useless
 - Penelope is responsible for the entire community, but cannot take a male role (compare with Klytemnestra)
- Reunion of Odysseus and Penelope restores balance and complementary responsibilities
- Balanced potency of the marriage bond is the core of the Greek community



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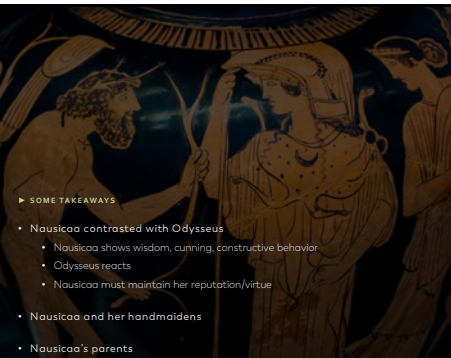
Primary Source Reading

Homer

"Nausicaa and the Stranger"
(from *Odyssey*)

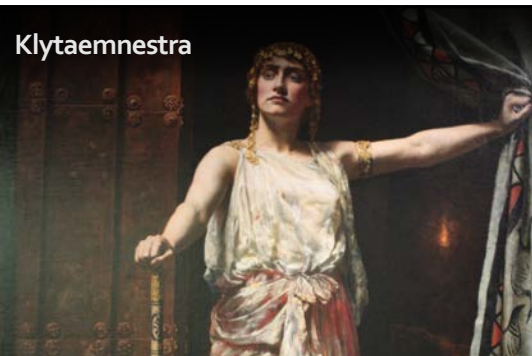
► SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Nausicaa contrasted with Odysseus
 - Nausicaa shows wisdom, cunning, constructive behavior
 - Odysseus reacts
 - Nausicaa must maintain her reputation/virtue
- Nausicaa and her handmaidens
- Nausicaa's parents



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Klytaemnestra



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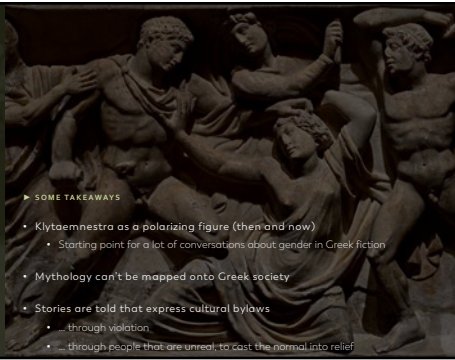
Secondary Source Reading

Ken Dowden

"Approaching Women Through Myth: Vital Tool or Self-Delusion?"

SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Klytaemnestra as a polarizing figure (then and now)
 - Starting point for a lot of conversations about gender in Greek fiction
- Mythology can't be mapped onto Greek society
- Stories are told that express cultural bylaws
 - ... through violation
 - ... through people that are unready to cast the normal into relief



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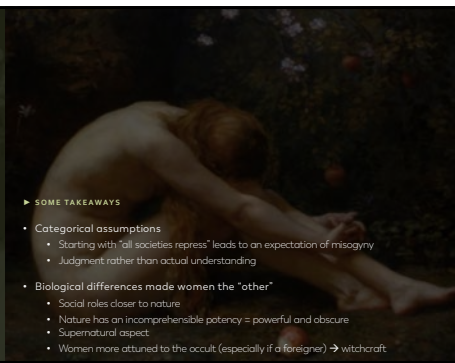
Secondary Source Reading

Sherry B. Ortner

"Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?"

SOME TAKEAWAYS

- **Categorical assumptions**
 - Starting with "all societies repress" leads to an expectation of misogyny
 - Judgment rather than actual understanding
- **Biological differences made women the "other"**
 - Social roles closer to nature
 - Nature has an incomprehensible potency = powerful and obscure
 - Supernatural aspect
 - Women more attuned to the occult (especially if a foreigner) → witchcraft



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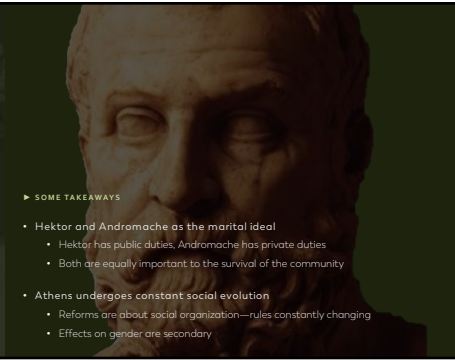
Secondary Source Reading

Marilyn B. Arthur

"Early Greece: The Origins of the Western Attitude Toward Women"

► SOME TAKEAWAYS

- Hektor and Andromache as the marital ideal
 - Hektor has public duties, Andromache has private duties
 - Both are equally important to the survival of the community
- Athens undergoes constant social evolution
 - Reforms are about social organization—rules constantly changing
 - Effects on gender are secondary



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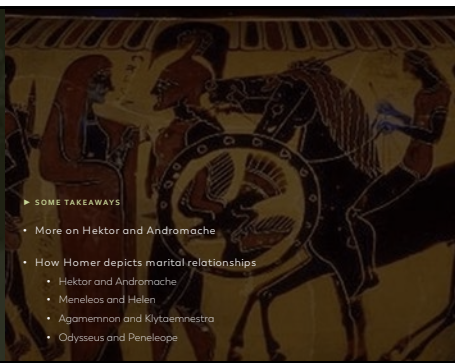
Secondary Source Reading

Marilyn B. Arthur

"The Divided World of *Iliad* VI"

► SOME TAKEAWAYS

- More on Hektor and Andromache
- How Homer depicts marital relationships
 - Hektor and Andromache
 - Menelaos and Helen
 - Agamemnon and Klytemnestra
 - Odysseus and Penelope



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