



Women in Antiquity
SPRING 2025

MEETING 5

Women and the Athenian Polis

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



1

Upcoming dates

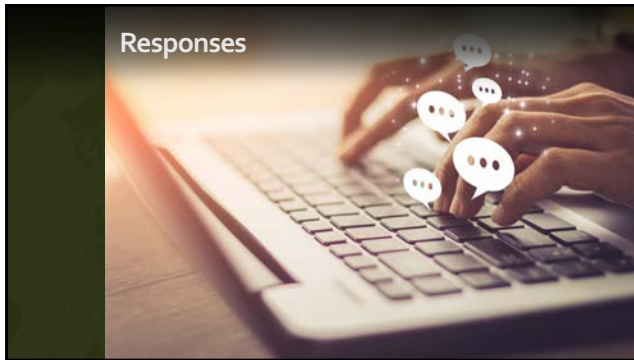
- Monday, March 10
 - Images essay due
 - upload to BlackBoard by midnight
- Monday, March 24
 - Proposal due
- Sunday, March 16
 - Post your Week 6 responses

2

Five things today

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

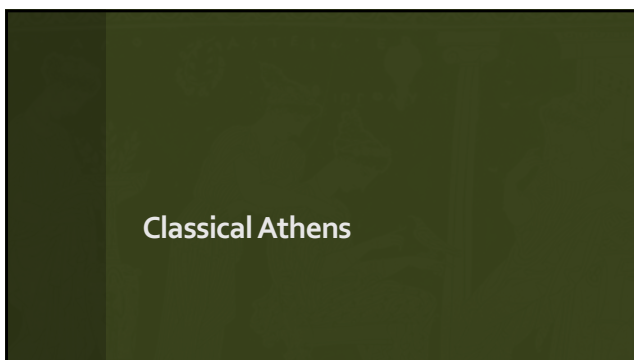
3



4

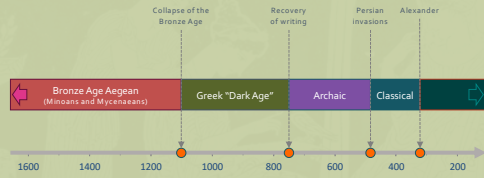


5



6

Periods of Greek history



7

The Polis



8



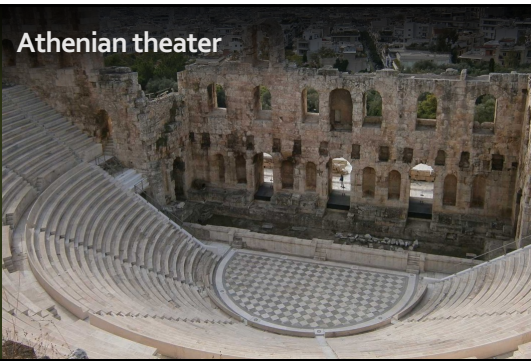
9

Athenian Democracy

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

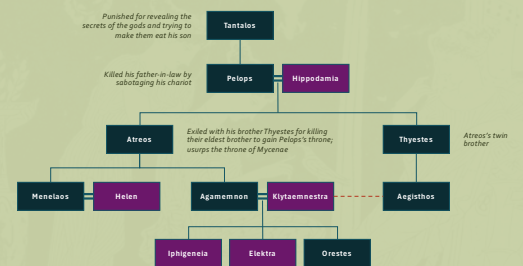
10

Athenian theater



11

The cursed house of Atreos

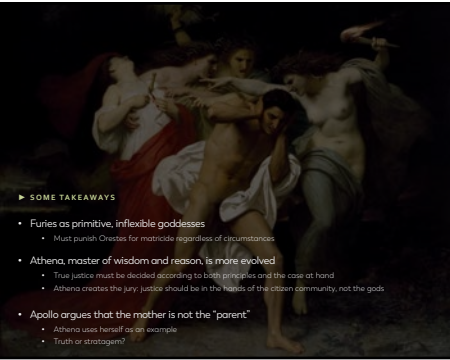


12

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?

13

Effects of democracy

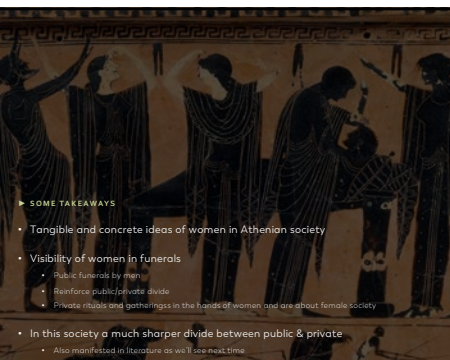


14

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

15



16

Secondary Source Reading

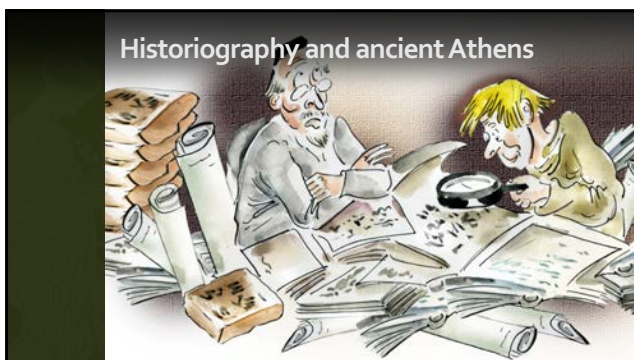
Susan Walker

“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 Neoplatonists
 - 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 are 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 stranger (not the whole story alone)
- Must set aside assumptions, and talk about what you are actually seeing taking place in Athens from the evidence you have before you

17



18

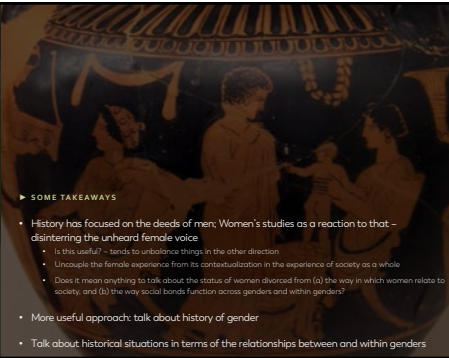
Secondary Source Reading

Marilyn A. Katz

"Ideology and the 'Status of Women' in Ancient Greece"

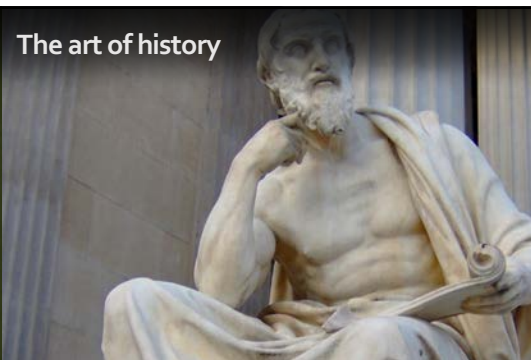
SOME TAKEAWAYS

- 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.



19

The art of history



20

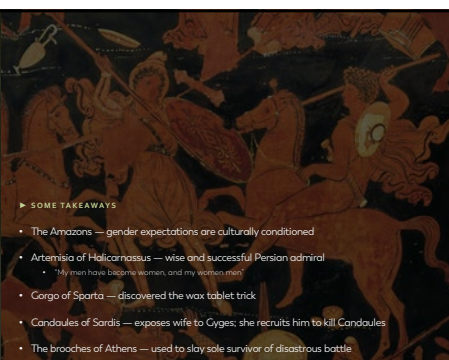
Primary Source Reading

Herodotus

from *The Histories*

SOME TAKEAWAYS

- The Amazons — gender expectations are culturally conditioned
- Artemisia of Halicarnassus — wise and successful Persian admiral
 - "My men have bigger 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



21

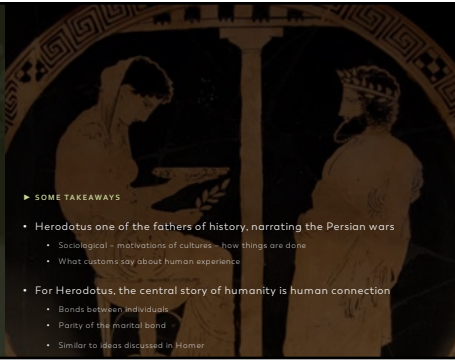
Secondary Source Reading

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



22



23
