



The Bronze Age and its Homeric Echo

Women in Antiquity | Meeting #4

1



Upcoming Dates

- Monday, October 6
Images Essay Due
- Tuesday, September 23
No class meeting
- Sunday, September 21
Responses for Week 4 Due

2

Five things today

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

3



4

Quiz #2 | The Bronze Age and its Homer Echo

- In heroic Greek society, marriage patterns between powerful families included
 - matrilocal marriage (a rising warrior marries a princess and settles in her kingdom)
 - patrilocal marriage (a suitor brings a bride back to his lands and family)
 - all mature women being expected to marry in order to ensure the city's future defense
 - all of the above
- The legendary queen who, enraged by her husband sacrificing their daughter, cast him aside and married his cousin instead was
 - Iphigenia
 - Helen
 - Chryseis
 - Queen of Sparta
- In Greek art, the exclusively female Amazons were often depicted as
 - fighting against centaurs, who were originally thought of as exclusively male
 - signifying representing their androgynous nature
 - having a secret king
 - makers and sellers of household goods
- Women were a larger proportion of which group in heroic Greek society?
 - Landholders
 - Slaves
 - Adolescents
 - Stratagemists
- When Nausicaa meets Odysseus, she does all of the following [EXCEPT](#)
 - Accompanies him boldly into town and into her father's presence
 - Admires his beauty once he's had a bath
 - Chastises her handmaids for running away from him
 - Tells him he should ignore her father and try to win over her mother instead

Extra Credit

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

5



Responses

6

Questions about whatever



7

Olympian goddesses

8



Demeter

- Goddess of the harvest, agriculture
- Key myth involves her daughter, Persephone (Korē)

9

Secondary Source Reading

Lucia Nixon
"The Cults of Demeter and Korē"

- Collective religion – public festivals in agora
- Cults and rituals – Some just for women
 - Literal and figurative sanctuaries
 - Several about Demeter and Kore/Persephone
- Nice contrast to father/son hostility among gods
 - Parallel 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



10



Hekate

- Goddess of magic, the moon, the night, and crossroads
- On the boundary between the human and divine worlds

11



Olympian goddesses

12

Mortals, demigods, and monsters

13



Gods with mortals

- Male gods often shown seducing or raping mortals
 - Sometimes the god takes the form of an animal
 - Consequences for female victims, but not the god
 - Fallout different for male vs. female victims
- Female gods expected to consort with peers only

14



Pandora

- "First woman"
- Zeus was angry over Prometheus's theft of fire
- Pandora given as bride to Prometheus's brother
 - Made to be beautiful and alluring
 - Bears a gift of jar containing evils
- In some versions there are two jars

15

Secondary Source Reading

Froma I. Zeitlin
 "Signifying Difference:
 The Myth of Pandora"

- Pandora and Hekate
 - Pandora – represents rupture between gods and mortals
 - Hekate represents intermediation between divine and mortal
- Pandora seen as an image of the gods and something new and different
 - Evolution from the divine to the mortal (!)
 - Power of reason and ability to grow



16



Medusa

- One of the Gorgons
- Anyone who looked upon her was turned to stone

17

Secondary Source Reading

Philip E. Slater
 "The Greek Family in History
 and Myth"

- Relationship between parent and child and how this resonates in mythology and epic poetry
- Medusa represents all that men fear in women
 - Greek incapacity, 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



18

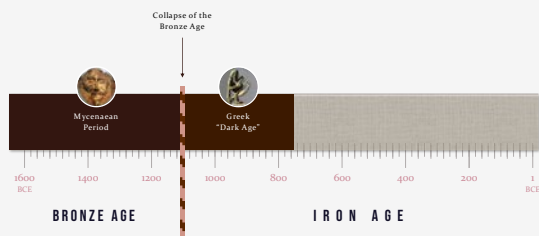
The Homeric Era

19



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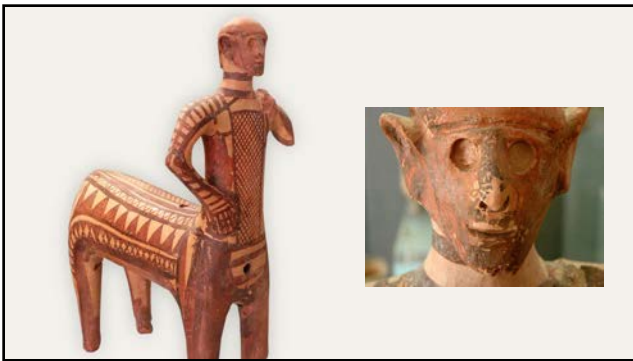
Periods of Greek History



21



22



23



The rhapsode

- Master storytellers of epic poetry in larger communities
- Chanting to the accompaniment of a lyre
- Stories retold to connect with each audience
- Apprentice becomes master rhapsode to next generation

24



The Greeks and their gods

- No priestly class
- Their understanding of the gods comes from literature
- Gods react to mortals' betrayals of the community
- Rarely punish the wrongdoer only, often visiting suffering on family and descendants

25



Recovery of writing preserves Homeric society

- Regional diversity of custom and tradition
- Emergence of hellenism and contrasting idea of barbaroi
- *Xenia* — guest friendship
- Critical importance of marriage bond
- Agonal society
 - *Timé* — honor and respect
 - *Arete* — achievement of excellence

26

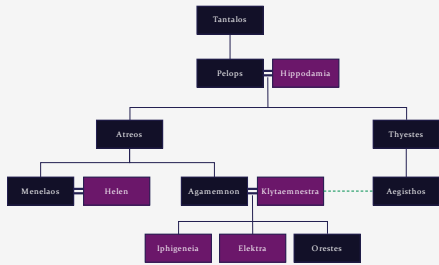


Homer's Trojan War

- Story of the Aegean trade conflict
- Emphasis on the bonds and connections within a community
- Expectations of human behavior, often contrasted with the gods' behavior

27

The "cursed" house of Atreos



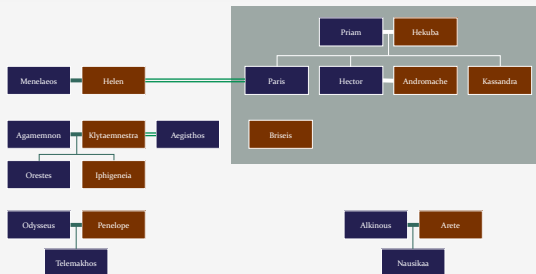
28



Helen

29

(Mortal) women in Homer



30

Primary Source Reading

Homer

Agamemnon's Insult

- 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

31



Odysseus and Penelope

32

Primary Source Reading

Homer

The Artifice of Penelope

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

33

Primary Source Reading

Homer

Nausicaa and the Stranger

- 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

34

Clytemnestra

35

Secondary Source Reading

Ken Dowden

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

- Clytemnestra 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 unreal, to cast the normal into relief

36

Secondary Source Reading

Sherry B. Ortner
 "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?"

- 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



37



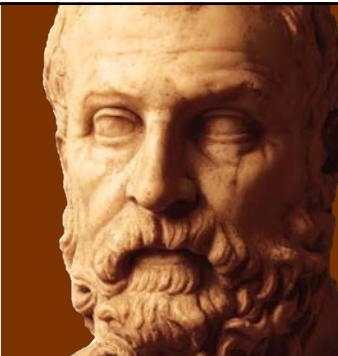
Hektor and Andromache

38

Secondary Source Reading

Marilyn B. Arthur
 "Early Greece: The Origins of the Western Attitude Toward Women"

- 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



39

Secondary Source Reading

Marilyn B. Arthur
 "The Divided World of
Iliad VI"

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



40



41
