



Women and the Athenian Polis

Women in Antiquity | Meeting #6

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Upcoming Dates

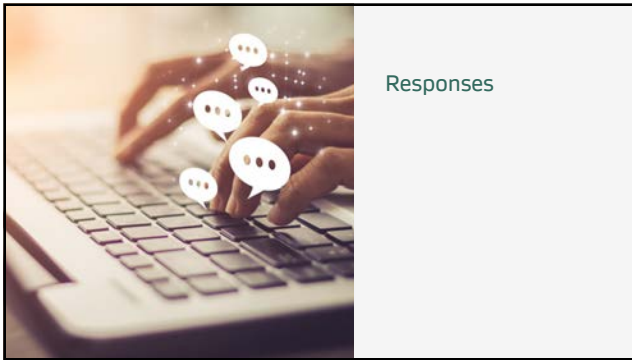
- Tuesday, October 14
No class meeting
- Monday, October 27
Proposal Due
- Sunday, October 12
Responses for Week 6 Due

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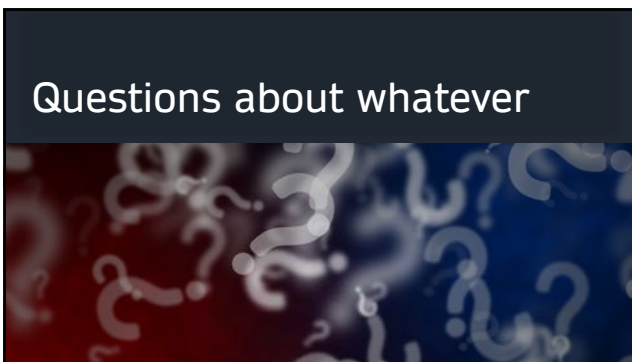
Five things today

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

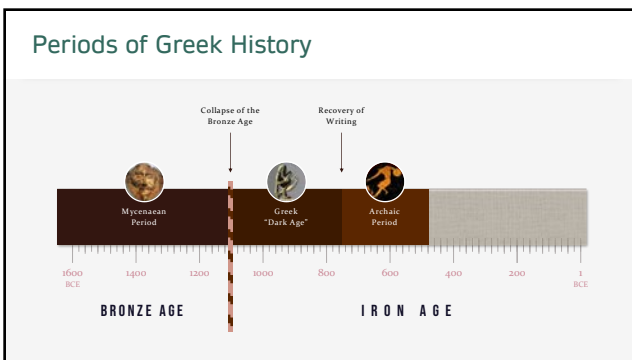
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Archaic Greece

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Physical ideals



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Sparta

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Sparta as a “warrior society”

- Spartan men solely devoted to war
- Lack of direct evidence about Sparta

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Spartan social hierarchy

- *homoioi* “men of equal status,” peers
Spartan citizen/warrior elite
- *periokoi* “dwellers nearby”
Laconians who were free, but disenfranchised
- *helots* heilotes, “prisoners of war”
State-owned serfs

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Agogē

- Begin training from age 7
- Bond with older boy who guides through training
- Eat at mess with the men
- Rituals to toughen and train

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Spartan women

- Property management
- Housework and clothes-making were performed by lower classes
- Physical fitness and training
- Infanticide

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Women and property

- Women controlled their dowries and inheritances
- By the fourth century two-fifths of Spartan land and property was controlled by women
- Originally austere
- Later Spartan women displayed their wealth
 - Clothing
 - Purchases like racehorses
 - Jewelry and cosmetics
 - Resistance to archaic austerity

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Primary Source Reading

Plutarch Sayings of Spartan Women

- Enforcement of Spartan expectations from birth to age 7
- Spartan patriotism begins with the matron



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Courtship and Marriage

- Spartan warriors were held to be equal = no arranged marriage for status
- Focus on compatibility and the ability to produce children
- Weddings were often secret
 - Unproductive marriages quietly annulled
 - Young men and women in a dark room
 - Groom carrying the bride away in secret
- Bride with male clothing, hair cut short
 - Possibly a transition from homosexual relations in the barracks

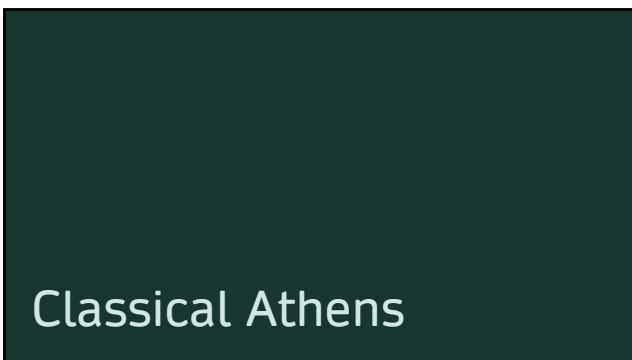
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Adultery and Children

- Women could bear children of men other than their husbands
- Helots' children could not be citizens
- Adultery was not as strictly proscribed as elsewhere

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Classical Athens

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The Polis

- City-state
- Synoecism
- Replacement of basileus with magistrates
- Council of "elders" (aristoi)
- Citizen assembly (demos)

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Athenian Democracy

- Citizen Assembly
 - Quorum of 6,000
 - Legislation, election, decrees, trialsekklesia
- Council of 500
 - Prepares measures for the Assembly
 - Executes will of Assembly (administration)
 - Chosen by lotboule
- Archons
 - Chosen by lotarchontes
- Military magistrates
 - Elected by Assemblystrategoi

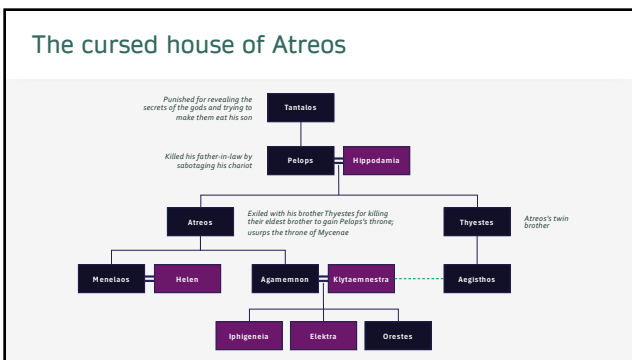
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Athenian theater

- Extension of epic poetry and performative rituals
- Community interaction
- Promotion of creative expression

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Primary Source Reading

Aeschylus from *Eumenides*

- 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

- Advantages and drawbacks
- Faction
- Demagoguery
- "Tyranny of the majority"
- Ostracism

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Secondary Source Reading

Sarah B. Pomeroy
"Women's Identity and the Family in the Classical Polis"

- 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

- Women have a place of isolation within the home
- Women should not be left alone with men who are not members of their own family

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Secondary Source Reading

Susan Walker

"Women and Housing in Classical Greece: The Archaeological Evidence"

- Seclusion only partially supported by archaeology
- Held to be an ideal rather than something occurs without fail or exception
- Why is this something the Athenians focus on?
- Must set aside assumptions and look at the evidence



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Historiography and ancient Athens

- Early Greeks melded history, legend, and myth
- Athenians develop history as a form of philosophy

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Secondary Source Reading

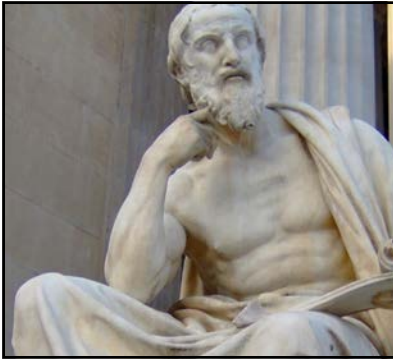
Marilyn A. Katz

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

- History has focused on the deeds of men
 - Women's studies as a reaction to that - disinterring the unheard female voice
 - 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 might be to talk about history of gender
- Talk about historical situations in terms of the relationships between and within genders



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The art of history

- Using stories of the past to make assertions about human identities
- Authenticity of evidence strengthens the case being made

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Primary Source Reading

Herodotus from *The Histories*

- 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 play sole survivor of disastrous battle



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Secondary Source Reading

Carolyn Dewald

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

- Herodotus is 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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