



Women and the Athenian Polis

Women in Antiquity | Meeting #6

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Upcoming Dates

- Monday, March 23
• Proposal Due
- Tuesday, April 7
• No meeting (Spring Break)
- Sunday, March 22
• 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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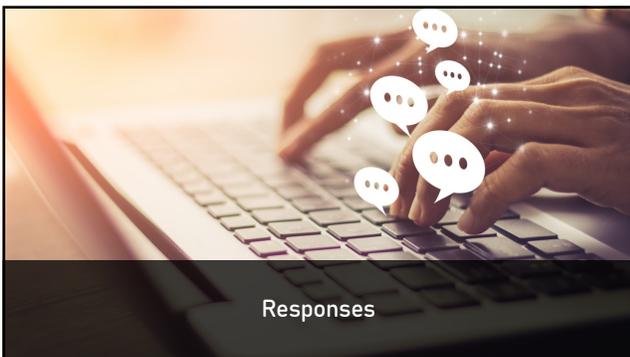
Quiz #4 | Women and the Athenian Polis

- For an Athenian woman from a wealthy family, marriage typically
 - was arranged by her guardian and the groom
 - included a dowry for her support
 - could be easily ended without stigma
 - all of the above
- Modern historians have disagreed about the status of women in Athens. According to Pomroy, recent scholarly opinions about Athenian women have included all of the following **EXCEPT**:
 - They were respected and enjoyed freedom
 - They were despised and kept hidden
 - They were praised and shared between neighbors
 - They were secluded but revered in the home
- In the play *Gammaricks* by Aeschylus, Orestes is tormented by the Furies for killing a parent (his mother, Clytemnestra). All of the following beings oppose the Furies' torment **EXCEPT**:
 - Orestes, because he was ordered to kill her, and because his mother was "twice afflicted with pollution" for killing a husband and father
 - Apollo, because "the mother... is not the parent, but the nurse of the newly-soon embryo"
 - Athena, because she had no mother and "in all things, except for marriage, wholeheartedly I am for the male and entirely on the father's side"
 - Bacchus, because Orestes was "lilled with the sweet wrath of wine" at the time of the murder
- Athenian religious cults in which women played an important role included all of the following **EXCEPT**:
 - the festival of the Spargarti Terai
 - the cult of the Cyprian goddess Athena
 - the mysteries of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis
 - the exclusively female celebration of the Thesmophoria
- Education for propertied women in Athens normally consisted of
 - tutoring in art and music by the father's patron
 - instruction in domestic arts by the mother
 - physical education with the soldiers
 - training in rhetoric by the city archons

Beta Credit

EC: Which story from Herodotus in today's reading did you find most interesting or surprising?

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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 in Sparta

- Women controlled their dowries and inheritances
- By the 4th 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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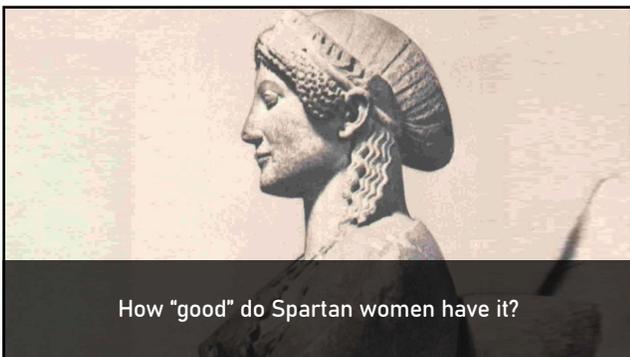
Primary Source Reading

Plutarch
Sayings of Spartan Women

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



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How "good" do Spartan women have it?

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Courtship and marriage in Sparta

- 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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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 Assemblystratēgoi

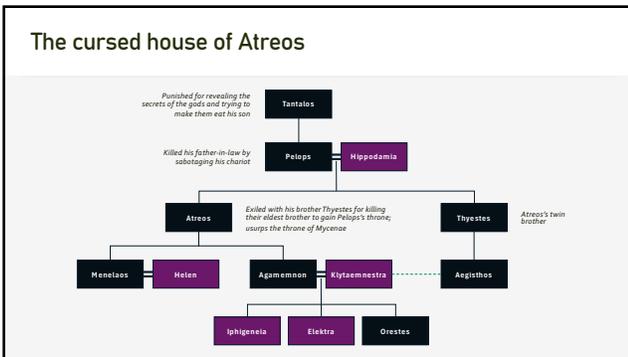
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Athenian theater

- 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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Why do the Athenians value female seclusion?

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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

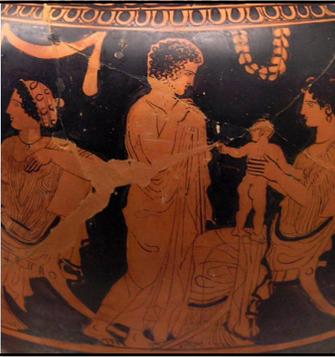
- Early Greeks melded history, legend, and myth
- Athenians develop history as a form of philosophy

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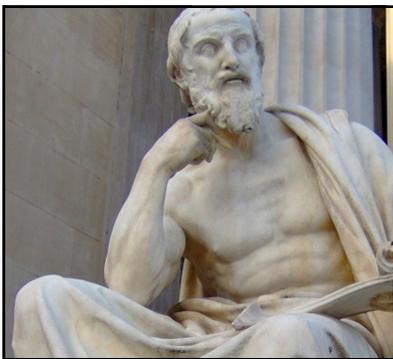
Secondary Source Reading

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

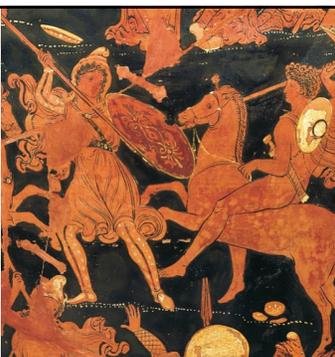
- Using stories of the past to make assertions about human identities
- Authenticity of evidence strengthens the case being made

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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 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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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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