



**Living Unpublicly in Classical Athens**  
 Women in Antiquity | Meeting #7

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**Upcoming Dates**

- Monday, March 23  
Proposal Due
- Tuesday, April 7  
Tuesday, April 21  
No class meeting
- Sunday, March 29  
Responses for Week 6 Due

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**Five things today**

- Private Athens
- Seduction, adultery, and rape
- Prostitution and hetaerae
- The Bacchae*
- The Women at the Adonis Festival*

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**Quiz #5 | Living Unpublicly in Athens**

- In The Iliad, Patroclus is attacked and torn to pieces by
  - the goddess Athena
  - the women of Thebes
  - wild animals
  - the angry Furies
- All of the following were true of the hetairai [Click Here](#)
  - They were elite courtesans, registered and taxed like all prostitutes in Athens
  - Many possessed not only physical beauty but intellectual training and artistic talents
  - They were required to be above average in height and let their hair grow to their knees
  - The most famous woman in fifth-century Athens was a hetaira
- Seclusion of women in Athens involved
  - No access being permitted to any space outside the home to any woman of any class
  - Seely clothing for women as a kind of compensation for their inaccessibility
  - Any man seeing a naked woman having to undergo a cleansing ritual in front of his kinsmen
  - Separate quarters for men and women in wealthy homes if possible
- In Classical Athens, all of the following were true about seduction [Click Here](#)
  - Seduction was considered more serious crime than rape, because it implied longer contact
  - Adultery via seduction was allowed on one day a year, on the Festival of Enia
  - The aggrieved husband had the right, but not the obligation to kill the seducer
  - As with rape, the male was presumed to be the guilty party, not the female
- According to Pomeroy, the authors Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle all believed that Spartan customs regarding women were more wholesome than those of Athens because:
  - Athenian women married young, making childbirth more dangerous at an early age
  - Spartan women were kept as well fed as the men; this was less consistently true for Athenian women
  - Physical exercise for women was common in Sparta, but not in Athens
  - All of the above

**Extra Credit**

EC: If you were a woman in Athens, would you rather be (a) a hetaira or (b) a married woman in a noble family? Why?

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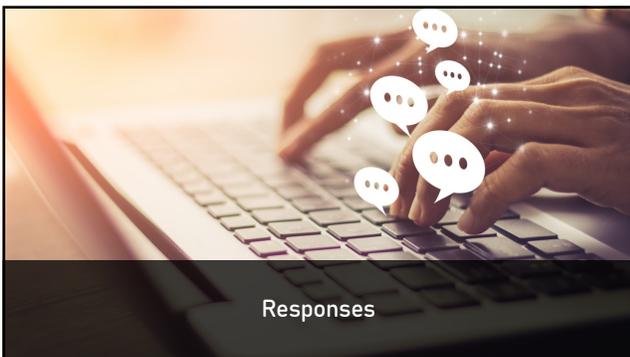
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# Questions about whatever



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# The Bacchae

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Primary Source Reading

## Euripides from *The Bacchae*

- Men and women are both transformed
- Both genders become other
  - Women become deranged hunters, and men become the hunted
- Both men and women suffer
  - Cadmus and Agave are both cursed
  - Pentheus is dead - because Dionysus tricks him, not because of the frenzy
- Don't just go looking for women — look for the relations between men and women
  - Father / daughter, mother / son, sister / sister



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### Dionysus

- His first speech – protector of grapes and what they have to offer
- Wine = liberation of the mind
- The liberation that comes from breaking free of rules and conventions temporarily
- Intoxication is a necessary element of a structured society; otherwise things become hidebound and stuck in the past

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### Dionysus's vindication

- Pentheus turned his back on him
  - Defending structure and order at all costs is to forsake the progress that comes from unbound expression
- New knowledge is crucial
  - Comes from methodological reason and science and thinking the unexpected (inspiration, epiphany, genius)
- Capacity for insight,
  - Catalyzed by rational and by irrational
  - What sets humans apart from animals, and Greeks from barbarians

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Secondary Source Reading

Charles Segal  
 "The Menace of Dionysus: Sex Roles and Reversals in Euripides' *The Bacchae*"

- City that Dionysus enters falls short of responsibilities
  - Failed in a basic function – to realize the full potential of its citizens
- City not just where people live
  - The whole point of the exercise is to push toward something greater
- How the hunt is involved in the frenzy



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**Private life in Athens**

- We have more info about private life in Greece than for other societies
- Constantly bear in mind the limitations of our sources
  - Most of our info has to do with the upper class
  - Can be very far from pertinent to what it's like to be a peasant woman living 20 miles from Athens
  - Focus on Athens, so much less is known about what it's like in Thebes, Corinth, Naxos, etc.
  - Primarily literary – fictionalized, dramatized, not narrations of ordinary life

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**Housing**

- Housing situation varies for every family
- We don't have the second stories archaeologically
- Public areas for guests (men)
- If there is an upstairs, women's quarters will be there

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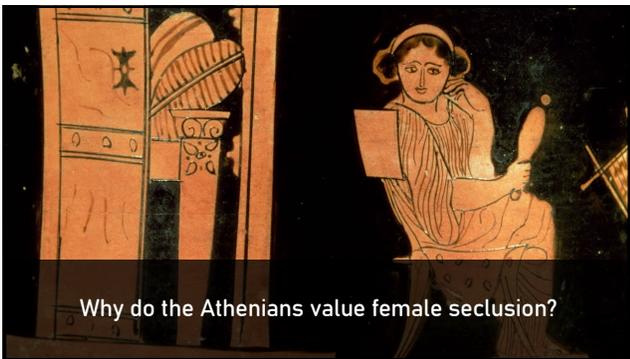
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Why do the Athenians value female seclusion?

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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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Secondary Source Reading

Joan Burton  
**"Women's Commensality in the Ancient Greek World"**

- Dinner parties, dancing parties all male – just not true
- Participation of women expected
  - Married women present is a demonstration of her respectability
  - You would not find a non-respectable woman at a dinner party
- Complexities of women's involvement in private gatherings
  - Any concern about a woman being susceptible to a man not of the family
  - A woman would not be left alone with a guest in the home



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**Clothing**

- Different traditions for clothing
  - Ionian
  - Dorian
- Female counterparts to what men are wearing
  - Not to obscure or to highlight
  - Practical household garb – knowledge is limited
- Still expected to conform to a certain standard and wear practical or dignified clothing

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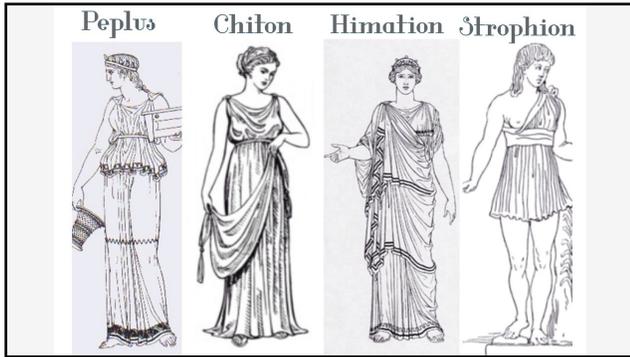
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**Secondary Source Reading**

Lin Foxhall  
**"Women's Ritual and Men's Work in Ancient Athens"**

- There are contributions that women make through festivals and rituals
  - Part of the way people contribute to their communities in general
- Women are doing it, men are doing it
  - Separately as genders and together as a community
- Festivals that involve women
  - Not just about women finding community among themselves
  - Part of the organic way in which all members of community contribute to health and strength of the community

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**Exercise**

- Some situations call for a different kind of dress
- We know a lot about Spartan female physical training
- Generally what we see in Sparta in the extreme is present in the rest of Hellas at a more subtle level
  - Athenian women expected to treat themselves with respect to perform duties to family and community
  - Physically healthy to produce physically healthy children

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### Health and folklore

- Texts on health and medicine
- Medicine as it develops  
Hippocrates, Galen
  - Application of reason and system to collective wisdom of the masses
  - Folk tales tested
- Medical tradition reaches back among women as well
  - Folk medicine for female health issues
  - Both find their way into the origins of medicine as it develops in Greece

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Secondary Source Reading

Marjorie Susan Venit  
"Women in Their Cups"

- Illustrated in article
- Large drinking vessel used to further a stock stereotype of women as pursuing of indulgence
- Wine equated with the pursuit of wanton sexual encounters
- Exaggerated stereotype used largely for effect, mostly in comedy



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### Sexuality

- Sexuality is psychoanalyzed in retrospect
  - The means by which a society collectively preserves itself
  - Very much associated with the marital bond
- We find out about social expectations of sexuality through deviation from the norm

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**Adultery and rape**

- Adultery
  - Responsibility of man? Woman? Both?
- Rape – extreme form of this
  - Adultery more mild and attitudes toward it can be taken a little more at face value

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**Rape in classical Athens**

- Tends to show up in literature as storytelling device
  - (mythology, plays, poetry)
- Larger-than-life events and crises
  - brought forward to exaggerate the normal human response
- Info about rape is less reliable because it tends to be more dramatized

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**Prostitution**

- Alternative path to social norm
- Not at bottom of society but at the side of society
  - Has freedoms and abilities that a maiden or a matron does not have (outside = allure)
  - Cannot enjoy the benefits of a secure social bond like daughters/ wives/mothers (outside – insecurity)
  - Not part of cultural transmission/creating the future (isolated and alone)
- Stigma is of not being part of the advancement of community
  - not part of the community's story

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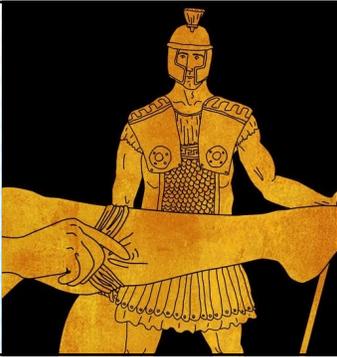
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Secondary Source Reading

K. J. Dover  
 "Classical Greek Attitudes to Sexual Behavior"

- Sexual behavior is more complex than we think
  - Varies across class and situation
- Not one of suppression, but firm ideas about appropriateness
- Athens is changing so rapidly that some of these things are coming into question
  - Erosion of social norms through rapid transformation
  - Backdrop for a lot of literature, especially comedies
- *Bacchae*
  - A god comes to Thebes and people are like we don't really need you, we're responsible for our own community and justice
  - Gods respond to human failings—things that impact negatively on the community



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**Hetaerae**

- Paid companions in Athens
- Educated and expected to converse on social and cultural topics
- Outside the social structure of marriage and families

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Hetaera or Athenian matron?

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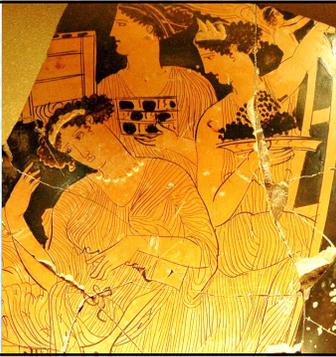
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Primary Source Reading

Theocritus  
"The Women at the Adonis Festival", from *Idylls*

- Idealized male and ordinary women
- Highlights the sexual component to religion and mythology



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