

Ancient Greek Beliefs:

Women, Marriage and Funeral

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Disclaimer

The Ideal Ancient Greek Woman

- Beautiful with beautiful voice
- Intelligent
- Tall
- Fertile
- Modest
- Passive (with downcast gaze)
- Submissive
- Silent
- Invisible



Greek Girls

A baby girl's first hurdle was to be allowed to live a decision made by the father

Her Education – textile production

- behavioral guidance
- rudiments of reading and writing.

Spent most of her time in the *Gynaikon* and grew in comparative ignorance



The Ancient Greek Woman

She was housekeeper, store manager, textile maker and also participated in religious rituals. She was more of a glorified slave
Hesiod said “A wife’s efficiency was the factor that determined whether the household should prosper”



Occupation: Spinning and Weaving



‘A perfect woman was one of whom nothing was heard, either good or bad.’



Women were secluded in the *gynaikon* and only left the house to:

- fetch water
- visit tombs
- visit sanctuaries

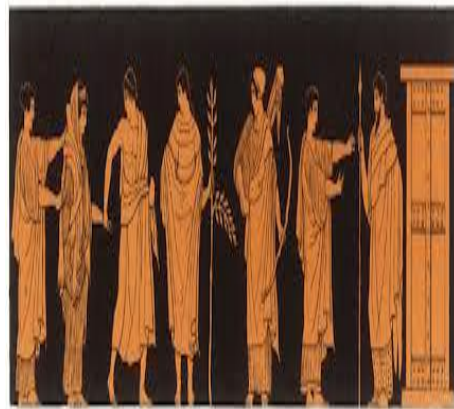
They however had to be conspicuous to the point of invisibility



Wedding / Marriage

- ▶ An obligation for the continuation of a family
- ▶ Bride 14–15 years old
- ▶ Groom about 30 years old
- ▶ In Homer's time, around 8th century BC, the bridegroom wooed the bride with rich gifts
- ▶ Ceremonies or 'gamos' varied in length and religious influence

- ▶ The bride was dressed in a white dress and adorned with jewelries by female relatives.
- ▶ Offerings were made to Artemis; the goddess of moon, fertility and childbirth



On the wedding day towards dark after the meal at the bride's home, the bride was conducted by the bridegroom to her new home with music, flutes, friends and relative



Marriage was a huge transition in a girl's life.

- ▶ – She abandoned childhood
- ▶ – left the care of her mother
- ▶ – was faced with the anxiety of sexuality
- ▶ – Co-existence with her mother in-law
- ▶ – Was faced with the fear of childbirth which was entirely life threatening

- ▶ A new wife was eager bear a child until then, she is not considered a woman or *gyne*
- ▶ Scholars believe that the average Greek woman died at age 40
- ▶ At age 27, a woman was getting ready to give her first daughter out in marriage.



- ▶ Publicly and legally, the husband's will prevailed at all times.
- ▶ Women had no legal rights to vote or participate in matters of the state
- ▶ Odysseus and Penelope was described by Homer as *ekluon*;
“they listened and paid attention to each other”



WHY?



Ancient Greek Beliefs about the Woman's Nature

Seclusion

- ▶ Women lacked the ability to control and resist outside influences
- ▶ Women were insatiable
- ▶ Women lacked the ability to control any physical cravings

▶ Lowered Gaze

A woman's gaze carried immense power and was considered a weapon



Early marriage

The uterus was the source of women's physical and emotional illnesses and the medical assumption was that being unmarried was a terrible situation



▶ **Exclusion from matters of the state**

Aristotle stated that “in a woman, the deliberative faculty in the soul is present but ineffective”.

Xenophon also stated that women and men have memory in like degree but the female nature lacks intellectual strength



Today's Woman

- Exhibits independence of thoughts
- Beautiful on the inside
- Modest
- Confident
- Intelligent beyond housekeeping,
- Exhibits a high degree of self control




- ▶ If a woman's true nature was uncontained, it could cause colossal damage to the society
- ▶ To ensure that women bore legitimate children to their husbands.
- ▶ Family's fortune was passed down to younger generations in confidence.
- ▶ To achieve this, the legal system was structured in such a way that a woman had no authority over her own being/existence at any point in her life



.....interesting

Ancient Greeks believed that the woman is a virtuous embodiment of the home and family.



The Greeks tried to contain this contrast by comparing women to horses;

‘a woman’s beauty, nobility and likely wild nature would not be diminished by domestication but will be enabled to flourish and serve others’



Death, Burial Rites and Afterlife

- ▶ The Greeks believed that at the moment of death, the *psyche* or spirit left the body as a little breath or puff of wind
- ▶ omission burial rites was regarded an insult to human dignity



- ▶ Funerals were considered women's public duty
- ▶ Display of family wealth, pride and kinship solidarity



The Greek funerals were a three-act drama

- ▶ *Prothesis* : Lying-in-state
- ▶ *Ekphora*: funeral procession and internment
- ▶ *Perideipnon*: celebration of the life of the deceased



Life after Death

“According to Christian teachings, death offers the way to salvation and eternal rest. For a Christian, the prospects of life after death stand as a consolation for the awfulness of this life” – Garland (2001)



The philosopher Socrates stated that in general the Greeks feared death.

"I'd rather be a day-laborer on earth working for a man of little property than lord of all the hosts of the dead." --Achilles



They believed that after death, the soul travels either of two places;

- the Elysian Fields, a sunny and green paradise, home of the good
- the Hades, a dark, subterranean place and land of torture where punishment was offered for the bad



Those denied proper funeral rites would wander by the river Styx for eternity and their souls will never receive rest. Therefore denying burial to the dead not only insulted the body, but also damned the soul for eternity.

