**Women and Marriage in Ancient Greece**

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1. **Introduction**

Over the years, the issue of equality between men and women in ancient Greece has been widely investigated and analyzed. A significant body of research and preexisting archaeological materials indicate that ancient Greece was a society characterized by segregation and discrimination against women in diverse parts of life. Throughout their lives, women in Greece were seen as subjects of men socially, politically, and economically. This is primarily based on men's attitudes towards women, leading to laws that did not recognize women as people with legal personhood (Cohen 1989, p7). They had limited rights to property, which was how people earned citizenship and entitlement to political and civil rights. Women were under their fathers or other male relatives' guardianship until they married, which their husbands assumed after marriage. In ancient Greece, women had virtually no rights to choose marriage partners, no right to make decisions on individual matters and issues related to their marriage. Their fundamental roles in marriage involved giving birth and managing household affairs.

1. **Rights to Choose Marital Partners**

Women in Ancient Greece had virtually no virtual rights to choose their partners. In Ancient Greece, love, sex, and marriage were portrayed as distinct yet closely intertwined elements of life. For most men in the upper social class, marriage was not undertaken for love. A comprehensive body of research on marriage in Ancient Greece discusses the relationships med had outside marriage, usually pederastic relationships (O’Neal1993, p116; Solovyeva 2020, p13 & Somin 2009, p 590). Marriage was a financial and social decision made by their fathers or close relatives, especially in Classical Athens, where women were required to stay indoors or otherwise face infidelity and immoral behavior accusations (Seitakasimova 2020, p7). In this upper-class society, marriage was a way for fathers to increase their family's social standing and wealth. This is indicated by the fact that dowry in the form of money, land, or any other valuable property was arranged by the bride’s father and given to the groom as part of the marriage agreement. Lyons (2003, p95) notes that a man would choose a woman for marriage based on their dowry, which was given to the groom by the bride’s father, her skills such as weaving, and her presumed fertility. Before marriage, the groom and the bride's father became allies by exchanging gifts in preparation for marriage (Lyons 2003, p100). In this case, gifts signified the alliance between the two. The exchange illustrated that the brides family was selling his Additionally, Cohen (1998, p90 notes that meeting of the young couple’s fathers was a way of arranging marriages whereby the two families built their agreements based on individual or shared interests of business expansion or forming an alliance with minimal or no consideration of the groom’s thoughts regarding the union and zero regard for the wishes of the bride. In Ancient Athens, the bride’s guardian or the kyrios and the groom arranged marriages (Somin 2009, p900). The kyrios would announce that he was allowing his daughter to marry, and suitors would compete against each other. Lyons (2003, p13) argues that in a bid to impress the kyrios and bag her daughter, the suitors would compete by song, dance, or games or bring extravagant gifts to the father. After selecting the suitor for the daughter, her father, and the suitor would shake hands and say some rituals, a process known as engysis (Lyons 2003, p15). The woman did not participate in either the selection of the suitor or in the engysis process.

As for the orphaned daughters, they were usually married by their cousins or uncles. Solovyeva (2020, p10) notes that in Athens, the death of a father who had no male children left the heiress with no choice in marriage. The woman was not considered an heiress as it is common in the contemporary Western world because owning land was illegal (Lyons 2003, p16). Nevertheless, she could not be separated from it, meaning that a man would have to marry her to own the land (Solovyeva 2020, p130. To prevent the loss of the land to another family, the heiress was compelled to marry her nearest relative, usually, an uncle or a first cousin provided they could father children (Cohen 1989, p14). If the heiress’ and potential husband were engaged elsewhere, the law dictated that they divorce unless the father had adopted his daughter's current husband as his heir before death (Lyons 2003, p15). Although the Spartans were one of the Greek communities known for their honor and respect for women, they had a tradition that allowed possession of women by their paternal uncles and paternal cousins of age (Seistkasimova 2020, p50). In case the heiress had no uncles to claim girls and marry them as early as 12 to produce an heir as quickly as possible (Lyons 2003, p18). However, these laws allowed the girls to decide who to get married to if no one claimed them. Consent to marriage indicates respect to the rights of both parties, and its denial among women in Ancient Greece by the law and cultural customs and practices signifies disrespect against women.

1. **Rights to Make Decisions**

Married women in Greek virtually had limited rights to make decisions in their marriage. In the contemporary world, marriage is considered an institution where both the husband and the wife have a typically equal right to decide on matters related to their marriage. Metmuseum.Org (2021b) notes that married women were under the absolute authority of their husbands under the various community laws. Writers such as Aristotle argue that this was based on the societal perception that women were intellectually incapable of making essential decisions for themselves. Consequently, they were expected to submit to their husbands by being faithful despite the husbands being free to hire or engage the services of prostitutes, courtesans, and live-in lovers. If any husband found out that their wife had any sexual relationship with another man, they could easily murder the lover without the fear of prosecution. Any woman who violated the provisions of the law on marriage by not preserving the honor of the family to protect the legitimacy of the male line would be prosecuted for the severe crime of moichea, which could lead to her being restricted from attending or participating in any public religious ceremony (Somin 2009, p587). Religion was the only aspect of the Grek life that women were empowered. Seitakasimova (2020, p7) notes that women played an essential role in domestic religion, especially in celebrating weddings, childbirth, and funerals, along with the major-based religious rituals. It was an opportunity for women to be recognized, express themselves, and contribute to the cultural and religious life of the city. Punishing married women with restrictions from attending or participating in religious ceremonies for indulging in an activity their husbands could freely undertake indicates that the Greek woman virtually had no right to make any decisions for themselves.

1. **Restriction to Household Duties**

Restricting women to household duties in most communities in Ancient Greece signifies discrimination and disrespect towards women. In Ancient Athens, households were divided into two sections, one for the husband and the wife (Cohen 1989, p15). The wives often occupied the upstairs space and men downstairs to keep women out of sight of visitors and strangers while in the households. Any form of entertainment was held in the men’s quarters to ensure that women were hidden. Lyons 2003,( p17) notes that a significant number of scholars in the past have cited that Athenian houses were partitioned into two separate sections, one for the women and one for men. Xenophon, a BCE author, quotes an account of an Athenian householder taking the bride around his house. The Athenian householder showed her that a bolted door separated the women’s apartment from the men’s apartment(Seitkasimova 2020, p49). In another text by Lysias, he cites a speech by a man attempting to elaborate possibilities of his wife committing adultery in his house without him knowing (Lyons 2003, p14). Reportedly, the man owned a two-story home with the men’s apartment downstairs and the women’s apartment upstairs. While men, whether married or not, could never associate with slaves, women were allowed to mix with slaves, especially when working together to produce textiles. Considering that men in Sparta and Athens spent a considerable part of their lives away, women raised children, spun, weaved, and sewed clothes for the family. Cohen (1989, p17) notes that the wife also supervised the routine operations in a household, and we're available to cook, clean, and fetch water from the fountain in the slave-based economy. If these women wished to work outside on warm days, the law limited them to the interior courtyard. Apart from in Sparta, Greek customs dictated that a woman would only visit her nearest female neighbors with expectations to rigid social conventions such as funerals, weddings, and state religious festivals where women had a prominent public role to play (Lyons 2003, p13).

Women in Ancient Greece were primarily married for bearing children. This childbearing role was demanding and stressful. Whether a Spartan man was married or not, they spent their lives in the barracks until the age of thirty in times of both war and peace (Cohen 1989, p17). Since this separation of husband and wife was limited the opportunities for intercourse, the relationship was thought to be guaranteed that they were more vigorous and energetic than the average child (O’Neal 1993, p545). Married women were expected to give birth to male children who would later become warriors to help safeguard the territories, take over other regions, and inherit the land. If a woman failed to give birth to a male child, the responsibility of giving the family a male heir was accorded to the daughter (Lyons 2003, p15). Giving birth to a daughter was considered a disgrace and an embarrassment to the family. Usually, the wife would look away from her husband in shame after giving birth to a girl (Seitakasimova 2020, p7). Restricting married women to the household and household duties and allowing them to mix with slaves signifies that the Greek society possibly considered them slaves with some rights.

1. **Conclusion**

In ancient Greece, women had no right to choose marriage partners or make decisions on individual matters and issues related to their marriage. Their fundamental roles in marriage essentially involved giving birth and managing household affairs. Marriage was a financial and social decision made by their fathers or close relatives. The bride’s guardian or the kyrios and the groom arranged marriages among the Athenians. After announcing that he was allowing his daughter to get married, suitors would compete against each other to be allowed to marry the daughter. If a man died without an heir, the heiress was compelled to marry her nearest relative, usually, an uncle or a first cousin provided they could father children to prevent the loss of the land to another family. After marriage, Greek women were expected to give birth to male children, cook, clean, weave clothes and take care of other household duties. Failure of a married woman to give birth to male children was considered a disgrace and an embarrassment despite both husband and wife having a significant role in this process. Besides, like almost any other woman in ancient Greek societies, especially the Athenians, married women were restricted to the household or the immediate neighbors' homes apart from festivals, weddings, and funerals. Finally, married women were not allowed to make any decision like their male counterparts, such that a husband could have extramarital engagements freely while a married woman engaging with another man in an intimate affair was considered a legal offense. Compared to modern society and many other traditional societies, married women in Greece were severely discriminated against and oppressed.

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