

THE POSITION OF WOMEN DURING ANCIENT GREECE

By
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First of all, I have to thank Prof. Alia HANAFI, Head of the Dept. of Ancient European Civilization, Faculty of Arts at Ain Shams University who gave me the opportunity to speak to this convention.

I'll study the position of woman during Ancient Greece from Pre-Homer Ages till the end of Classic Ages, covering a period of 3.000 years BC.

It was claimed that around the ages in which the City- State was organized, the political organization of Ancient Greece kept women away from social life, and gave them little opportunities to be involved to Public life. They could act only around their family, and were citizens without political rights.

They lived continuously in their own homes with some exceptions, when the city celebrated the Gods. On these days women could be involved in social life.

In Pre-Homer society and especially during the Bronze Age between 2.800 and 1.100 years BC, women were able to accomplish more liberty in the MINOAN CRETE. The position of the Queen was special in the high priest circles, because religion in this period gave the main role to women.

So, women could live in society without prohibitions, and could be involved in life proving their capabilities and personalities.

They could work in public occupations and be involved in dangerous sports and special games with bulls, known in Greek as Taurokathapsia. They could wear men's clothes to help their bodies act freely. At the same time there were special shops in the city for taking care of their faces and bodies.

They wore red color on their lips, and use white color for their faces, and dark for their eyes. The use special instrument for taking out the hairs from their eyebrows. I'll show some photos at the end of the speech.

A good example for the above description is the painting of a priest woman found on the whole of KNOSSOS PALACE.

This painting made the laborers who worked in the palace during restoring period to call her PARIS- WOMAN.

During Homer Age women in other parts of Greece were under the will of their husbands, and yet they could act freely, talk, and have their own opinions. Beauty, sensitivity, dignity, and above all faithfulness were the special characteristics of women, which are taught to young girls.

In the Homeric society and especially in the stricter and more benevolent societies which came after Homer, there were some special elements survived from the Ancient Social Organization, known in Greek as MITRIARHIA, which means Mother Control. In this type of society women rule people according to their will, and give priorities to food productivity, education, multiplication and take care of men who are used as soldiers for the defense of the family. Unfortunately, we have no written information about this period.

After the creation of the City- State, men laid down some strict rules concerning women's lives and restricted them to the house. After the PELOPONESE WAR in 404 BC, these rules became weaker, but still nothing changed in a woman's life. This situation could be understood under the ideology of the City- State, and the social organization of productivity which depended on slave work, and other groups of people who did not have political rights as citizens.

In order to preserve the purity of their children born into the family and save their economical, social, and political position, they had to be sure of the paternity for their inheritance. By keeping women in their houses and forbidding them to be involved to social life, they wanted to have a strict control of women's actions, which preserved marriage fidelity.

POSITION OF WOMEN ACCORDIND MEN'S LAWS

In most Greek cities during Classical Ages, there was an established law, which showed the dependence of women on someone who ruled and controlled their lives. Until the day of marriage, the woman was controlled by her father and by her husband after him.

If her father died before her marriage, she was controlled by her father's inheritance. If her husband died and has children, she could remain in her husband's family and be controlled by her husband's inheritance. If

she decided to return to her father's family, her father or his inheritance would control her.

If the owner of a woman has to live the city for a long trip, he nominated someone else to control his wife during his absence.

Only a foreigner woman living in Athens and has no relatives could control her own life. In this case she has to find someone to protect her.

LIFE OF FREE WOMEN: RAIS OF CHILDREN

During the Classical Ages in Athens and most Greek cities, boys and girls grew up together under the same rules with their families, until the age of seven. At the age of seven, the education of boys became more systematic and the girls remained at home, taking lessons from their own mothers.

They learnt how to read and write, but especially they learnt how to sew, wash clothes, cook, and control their house and be strict to the slave girls.

The goal of this system of education aimed to prepare them to run their own home, and be efficient housekeepers and good wives.

In SPARTA the education of girls was not different from that of boys. The young girls used to run and have drills alongside to the boys, and in some cases, they tried to defeat them in the game of the disc and spear throw.

According to LYCOURGOS LAWS, home jobs were not given to Sparta women, as slave girls had to do them.

Their jobs were to bring into the world healthy children and for this reason they had to train their bodies.

LIFE OF MARRIED WOMEN

Married women of the Classical Ages had to remain at home, in the women quarter. In Urban and rural areas, in both High and Low levels of society, women were left at the border of the social and political life. They preserved the right to bring into the world children, and had no rights in city life.

They worked at home, raised and educated their children. If she had slaves at home, she had the right to control and teach them. According to XENOFON, woman inspected slave girls, raised her children, prepared

meals, sewed and wove clothes. In Urban Areas, women helped their husbands in the cultivation of land, beside other jobs.

The main point is that they rarely went outside their home. If they had to go out, they were accompanied by someone or at least by a maid.

In SPARTA the lives of men were spent in the army, and at war which did not give a chance for family involvement. So, the rules for women's lives were not strict.

In SPARTAN SOCIETY women accomplished a better position than women did of any other city of Greece during Classical ages. PLOUTARHOS said that women in SPARTA were brave and were not dependent on their husbands. They were involved in social life, talked freely, even about serious problems.

During Classical Ages we had three types of women: a. the free women, b. The slave women and c. The heaters.

LIFE OF SLAVE WOMEN

Slave women had been captured during wars and were two types: the workers, and the palakides.

Regarding to the workers, we can say that they worked in free houses without salary and participated without communicating in special jobs prepared for each one of them.

The oldest slave worked as a housekeeper. On special occasions, the family gave jobs to other women who worked in raising of children or helped the pregnant women to give birth.

PALAKIDES

As far as I concern, palakides were slave young girls captured in a war and had sex with owner of the house and lived under the same roof with the family. Men wanted them to be as faithful as their own wives. However, the children of these women did not get political rights, but could inherit a part of their father's inheritance. This condition was acceptable to the wife without any jealousy.

HETERES

They were free women who accompanied men in the feasts, because legal wives were restricted at home. They were educated spiritual

women who knew how to entertain men and had not only sex, but also spirit acquaintance with men in Ancient Greece. They came to Athens from other parts of Greece, and became famous, because they were beside famous men.

ASPASIA was a famous hetaera who helped PERIKLES to be a special politician in Athens, and FRINI was another hetaera lived beside PRAXITELIS, one of the most famous sculptures of the Classical Ages.

CONCLUSION

From the above speech, we can say that women in Ancient Greece were not free people. They had not political rights and they had been used to bring into the world children under a strict control system aimed to preserve marriage fidelity and paternity of father's inheritance. They run their home productivity and slavery, and at the same time accepted their husbands activities towards slaves women in their own home. Exceptions to this conclusion are the MINOAN period of Bronze, and the free women who lived in SPARTA.



1. The ruins of Cnossos palace beside Iraklion city.

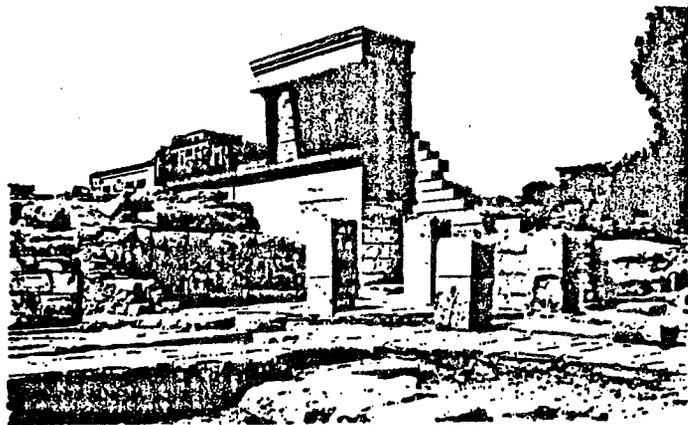


2. The ruins of Egistos palace in Iraklion province.
Egistos was another great center of the Minoon
Crete.

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**3. A reproduction of Cossos palace,
We can see the paintings on the wall.**



**4. A temple beside the Cossos palace,
We can see the paintings on the wall.**



5. A statue of a bull's head.



6. A small statue showing four people who dance.



7. A statue of a woman god who grasp on her hand two makes and have a small leopard on her head. That shows that she controls the animals.



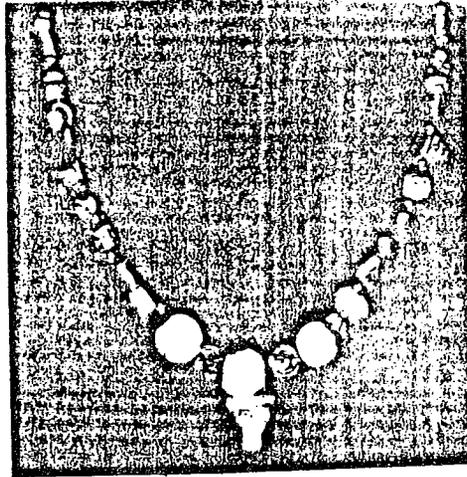
**8. A painting shows the bull game
TAUROKATHAPSIA**



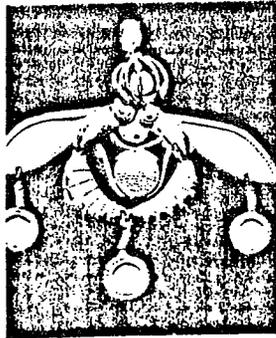
9. This painting shows a man during the bull game.



**10. A painting on a vase shows the game with a bull
known as TAUROKATHAPSIA.**



11. A best jewel Necklace of a woman found a grave.



12. In earring of a woman found in a tomb in Iraklion.



13. A small statue of a woman shows the way they dress and hair-dressing

14. A painting showing a dancer of Minoon Crete,
The painting found on a wall of Minoon palace.



15. The Paris-woman found on a wall of Cnossos
palace.