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# ANTIQUITY

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# 1

FOURTH EDITION

TONI HURLEY | CHRISTINE MURRAY

OXFORD

# ANTIQUITY

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YEAR ELEVEN

FOURTH EDITION

TONI HURLEY | CHRISTINE MURRAY | PHILIPPA MEDCALF | JAN ROLPH

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New South Wales' most trusted Ancient History series has been updated for the new Ancient History Stage 6 syllabus. The first of a two-volume series, *Antiquity 1* offers complete support for Year 11 teachers and their students, providing unparalleled depth and coverage and a range of new chapter features that will give students of all abilities the best chance of achieving success in Ancient History.

Key enhancements:

- All content has been explicitly aligned to the new Ancient History Stage 6 syllabus (Year 11).
- Subject experts, Toni Hurley and Christine Murray, have developed comprehensive, engaging and appropriately levelled content.
- Unambiguous language is used throughout the book, with visuals on every spread to engage students and support learning.
- ebook assess provides comprehensive student and teacher digital support including answers to every question in the book, detailed teacher notes, support for assessment and exam preparation, videos and more.



6 The treatment and display of human remains

'Focus questions', 'Focus concepts and skills', and 'Learning outcomes' are clearly stated at the beginning of each chapter to guide teachers and students through the content.

Content includes the latest scientific developments, up-to-date case studies, maps, and rich visual and written source material.

**6.1 Human remains from the past**

Many discoveries of ancient human remains have been made over time. A recent survey of newspapers, archaeological magazines and television documentaries reveals exciting reports of 'bog bodies' in Ireland, 'ice maidens' in Siberia and Peru, the Iceman in the Austrian Alps, mummified Etruscan babies, ancient Chinese mummies of the Tarim Basin and, of course, Egyptian mummies. These ancient human remains have survived for a variety of reasons and historians rely heavily on the work of scientists to unlock their secrets. This chapter focuses on the preservation, analysis, significance and display of human remains. It will investigate bog bodies, particularly Lindesay Man and the Iceman, Ozi.

**Bog bodies**

From time to time, people have come across preserved bodies in the bogs of northern Europe. The state of preservation of many of these bodies is so good that the discoverers have naturally assumed that they were recent murder victims and the local police have been called to investigate. For example, in England in 1983 a man confused to the murder of his wife when the partial remains of a human skull were found in a peat excavation site at the rear of his house. It was only after scientific investigation was conducted to determine the age of the remains that it became clear that the owner of the skull had died almost 2000 years ago.

The first recorded discovery of a bog body was in the Netherlands in the late 18th century, but people had no doubt found bodies before this as they are peat from the bogs to use as fuel for their fires. Many were obtained in local contexts, as one use of the peat and without artificial preservation, these bodies would have decomposed quickly.

Bog bodies have been dated from the Stone Age to modern times, but the best preserved examples date from the Iron Age and Roman periods, when the dominant culture of these regions was Celtic (see Chapter 11 The Celts). The reasons why they came to be in the bogs are diverse: accidental death, burial, murder and ritual sacrifice have all been suggested.

**Where are bog bodies found?**

Bog bodies have been found and recorded in the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany especially since the 1950s. These are all countries where low-lying boglands are common. Bog bodies are named after the geographical areas where they were found. Tollund Man and Grauballe Man from Denmark were perhaps the best known of all bog bodies until the discovery of Lindesay Man in England in the 1980s. Other well-preserved bodies have since been found in Ireland, including Cashel Man, the oldest flinted remains found anywhere. It was discovered in a bog near Cashel in County Lismore in 2011.



SOURCE 2 Places where bog bodies have been found

**How are bog bodies preserved?**

You would expect that bodies deposited in water typical peat bog there in little or no oxygen in its place. Bogs consist of two layers a thin, watery layer remains constant, underlaid by any one any archaeological material can remain there to consist of bogs is also vital to the preservation believe that muscle, tissue and tendons are a polyaccharide (carbohydrate) found in the excretory bacteria operating. As the pH level to the staining of the bodies, covering the skin usually very dark brown in colour.

There is great water in the mucous of the skeletons with no soft tissue, while others have Ozi's the hair, nails and major organs are preserved Clothing and objects made from wood, skin,

**Forensic analysis of the Iceman**

In the two and a half decades since the Iceman's remains were discovered, the body and the equipment found with it have undergone thorough forensic analysis. A wide range of specialists have analysed and interpreted hundreds of samples. All have contributed to the ongoing story of who the Iceman was and why he was on the mountain where he was found. Source 24 shows the results of these analyses over time.

2003 CT scans revealed the Iceman's death had occurred in a fall, as the neck of a pine branch had broken through his neck and into his brain. The Iceman had died shortly before death.

2004 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2005 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2006 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2007 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2008 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2009 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

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2014 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2015 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2016 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2017 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2018 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2019 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2020 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2021 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2022 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2023 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

2024 CT scans revealed a full-up of calcium in the Iceman's arterial system, suggesting he had a high cholesterol level at the time of his death.

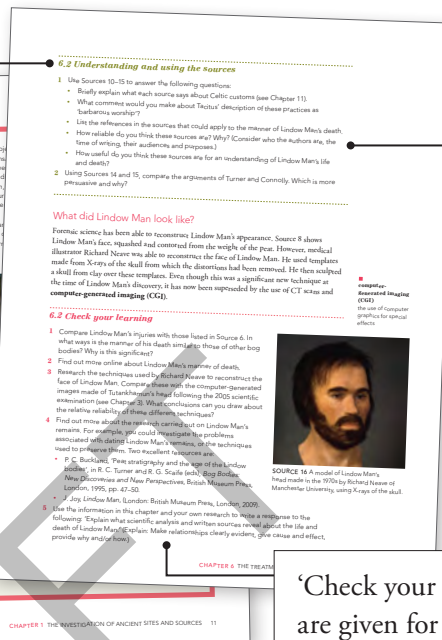
SOURCE 24 The latest reconstruction of the Iceman showing the results of the scientific analyses of his remains.

Margin glossary definitions help students easily find the meaning of unfamiliar words and assist with their understanding.

Many chapters feature a 'Profile' which allows for more in-depth learning about a historically significant person, event or phenomenon.

'Understanding and using the sources' questions throughout each chapter enhance student understanding of how to use and critically analyse historical sources.

Answers to every question in the Student book are provided on Teacher obook assess.



'Check your learning' questions are given for each topic.

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*Antiquity 1* is supported by a range of engaging and relevant digital resources via obook assess.

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- the ability to set up classes, set assignments, monitor progress and graph results, and view all available content and resources in one place.







# 16

## Women in ancient Greece and Rome

### FOCUS QUESTIONS

- 1 What do sources reveal about ancient Greek and Roman women?
- 2 What issues must be addressed in analysing the sources?
- 3 What roles did ancient Greek and Roman women play in family, economic, religious and political life?
- 4 What impact did influential ancient Greek and Roman women have on their times?
- 5 What are the main similarities and differences in the lives of ancient Greek and Roman women?

### FOCUS CONCEPT & SKILLS

#### **Perspectives**

From a modern perspective, the lives of women in the Western world are vastly different from those lived by women in ancient Greece and Rome. Things women take for granted today, such as the right to work and vote, were generally unknown to women back then. Considering historical perspectives, we need to understand the social and cultural contexts of women in ancient Greece and Rome, in particular the nature of the sources about them that were mostly produced by men. We must also be aware of the gaps in the evidence and other limitations of the sources.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

- 1 Analyse sources for evidence about ancient Greek and Roman women.
- 2 Identify and explain the strengths and weaknesses of the sources.
- 3 Describe the family, economic, religious and political family roles of ancient Greek and Roman women.
- 4 Examine the significance of influential ancient Greek and Roman women in their times.
- 5 Compare the lives of ancient Greek and Roman women.

## 16.1

# The nature of the sources

■ **sarcophagus** (*pl. sarcophagi*)  
a stone coffin

■ **stela** (*pl. stelae*)  
an upright stone slab or pillar bearing inscriptions or designs and serving as a monument

There is a range of sources available for women in both ancient Greece and ancient Rome. Frescoes, pottery and figurines frequently depict aspects of their family lives. For some women of high status we have statues and coins. Evidence of their death can be found in **sarcophagi**, grave **stelae** and tomb inscriptions.

Most of our evidence for women in ancient Greece and Rome comes from written sources: literary, political, legal and artistic texts. Plays and poetry feature women prominently. Historians have provided commentaries about women, and they often figure in legal documents. However, these documents were mostly written by men of the upper social classes and therefore reflect a narrow male perspective.

Women's voices are hard to find. The reasons for this vary; in some cases a lack of access to education is to blame, in others social opposition to women's attempts to write. But in many cases, whatever sources might have existed have simply not survived. Some women in ancient Greece and Rome certainly wrote, though, because we have examples of their poetry, prose and letters, and we have the names of the women who wrote them.

### 16.1 Check your learning

- 1 Find out about some of these female writers of the ancient world: Sappho, Aesara, Julia Balbilla, Pamphile of Epidaurus, Sulpicia I and II.
- 2 The Vindolanda writing tablets from the Roman fort at Vindolanda in the United Kingdom contain the earliest surviving letters in a woman's hand. Find out what Claudia Severa wrote to her sister, Sulpicia Lepidina, the wife of Flavius Cerialis.



SOURCE 2 The 4th-century BC grave stela of Polyxene

■ **imperial period**  
the period of time when Rome was ruled by emperors (27 BC – AD 284)

## Attitudes to women in ancient Greece and Rome

Women were a popular topic in the writings of men in ancient Greece, but did not appear as frequently in the works of Roman writers. The Greeks had conflicting views of women. They were regarded as highly important as the mothers of citizens and for passing on legitimacy, but they were protected and sheltered, even in their own homes, from the prying eyes of men. They had limited access to society and the activities that took place there. In the texts written by contemporary men they were seen as representing the forces of chaos. Women were often depicted as highly sexual beings who could not control their sexuality and therefore had to be restricted for their own good.

Although Roman women were more highly regarded as wives and mothers than Greek women, the attitudes of Roman men were similar to those of the Greeks. They had very fixed, conservative views of what women should be like. Such views were challenged during the **imperial period**, when Roman women of the imperial family were able to exert considerable influence over public affairs through their relationship with the emperor.

Source 3 provides examples of some of the male attitudes to women in ancient Greece and Rome.

**SOURCE 3** Greek and Roman male attitudes to women

WRITER	TEXT	EXTRACT
Demosthenes Greek statesman and orator of Athens 384–322 BC	<i>Against Neaera</i> , 122	For this is what living with a woman as one’s wife means – to have children by her and to introduce the sons to the members of the clan ... and to betroth the daughters to husbands as one’s own. Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, <b>concubines</b> for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households.
Euripides Greek playwright c. 480–406 BC	<i>Melanippe</i> [Spoken by Melanippe]	Women run households and protect within their homes ... and without a woman no home is clean or prosperous. Consider their role in religion, for that, in my opinion, comes first.
Xenophon Greek historian and soldier c. 430–354 BC	<i>Oeconomicus</i> , 7.22–24	For the god made a man’s body and soul better able to endure the cold and heat of travel and military service, so that he assigned to him the outdoor work. But the god endowed the woman with a body less able to endure these hardships and so ... I believe that he assigned the indoor work to her ... the god made the nursing of young children instinctive for women and gave her this task, and he allotted more affection for infants to her than to a man.
Menander Greek playwright 342 – c. 290 BC	<i>Synkrisis</i> , 1.209–210	A man who teaches a woman to write should recognise that he is providing poison to an asp.
Juvenal Roman poet 1st and 2nd centuries AD	<i>Satire VI</i>	There never was a case in court in which the quarrel was not started by a woman. If Manilia is not a defendant, she’ll be the <b>plaintiff</b> ; she will herself frame and adjust the pleadings; she will be ready to instruct Celsus himself [a Roman lawyer] how to open his case, and how to urge his points.
Aulus Gellius Roman author c. AD 125 – c. 180	<i>Attic Nights</i> , 1.6.1	If we could get on without a wife, Romans, we would all avoid that annoyance; but since nature has ordained that we can neither live very comfortably with them nor at all without them, we must take thought for our lasting well-being rather than for the pleasure of the moment.
Pliny the Elder Roman naturalist, author, philosopher AD 23–79	<i>Natural History</i> , 28.23	... there is no limit to the marvellous powers attributed to females ... that linen boiling in the cauldron will turn black, that the edge of a razor will become blunted, and that copper vessels will contract a fetid smell ... on coming in contact with her.
Livy Roman historian 59 BC – AD 17	<i>History of Rome</i> , 34.2 [Response to women objecting to limited use of luxuries]	If we had made it a rule to uphold the rights and authority of the husband in our own households we should not now have this trouble with the whole body of our women ... our liberty of action, which has been checked and rendered powerless by female <b>despotism</b> at home, is actually crushed and trampled on here in the Forum

■ **concubine**  
a secondary wife or mistress

■ **plaintiff**  
a person bringing a case against another in court

■ **despotism**  
the use of absolute power, often in a cruel manner

**16.1 Understanding and using the sources**

- 1 Briefly explain the attitude to women revealed in each source.
- 2 What do these sources reveal about the roles women were expected to perform in society?
- 3 What do the sources suggest about aspects of women’s lives and conduct that men disapproved of?
- 4 What possible conclusions can be drawn about male attitudes to women from these sources?
- 5 Comment on the contexts of the writers of these sources. What other sources would be useful to construct a picture of ancient Greek and Roman attitudes?

# 16.2

## Social status of women

■ **Classical period**  
the period of Greek history from c. 500 to 323 BC

■ **homogeneous**  
consisting of people who are of the same type

In the **Classical period**, the two most powerful Greek city-states were Athens and Sparta. In Athens, men took responsibility for public life, while Athenian women appear to have led very restricted lives. Sparta was renowned as a great military power, and everyone, including women, served this military end. The status of Spartan women was therefore very different.

Women in ancient Rome enjoyed freedoms generally denied to their Athenian counterparts. While men dominated public life as elsewhere in the ancient world, Roman women dominated social life.

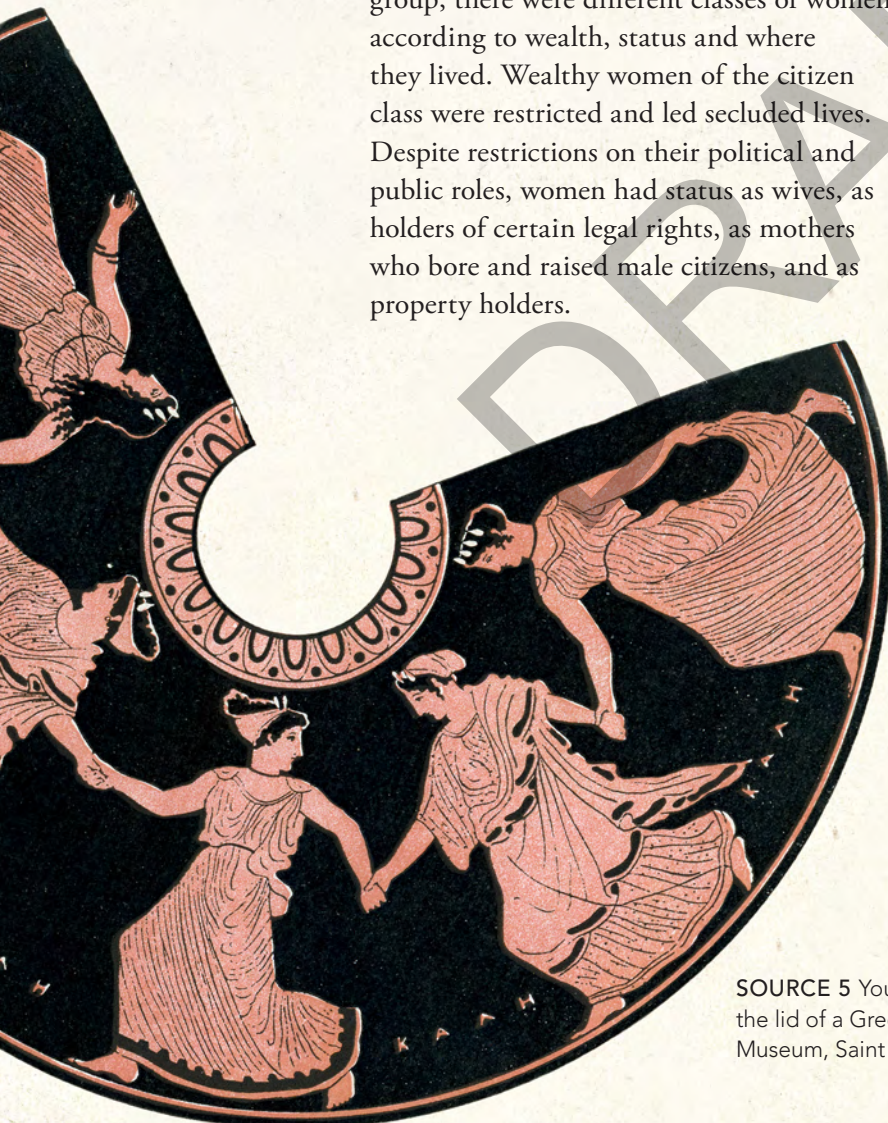
### Status of women in ancient Greece

There were clear divisions in Greek society, the most notable being between men and women. Women were not a **homogeneous** group; there were different classes of women according to wealth, status and where they lived. Wealthy women of the citizen class were restricted and led secluded lives. Despite restrictions on their political and public roles, women had status as wives, as holders of certain legal rights, as mothers who bore and raised male citizens, and as property holders.

<b>GYNAIKES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Married to citizen men; their children were legitimate</li> <li>• Did not appear in public without a male relative or slave</li> <li>• Usually poorly educated</li> <li>• Spent most of their time secluded at home</li> </ul>
<b>HETAIRAI</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally foreign born and educated</li> <li>• Hired to serve as sexual and intellectual companions or hostesses to wealthy and prominent Athenian men at <b>symposia</b> (dinner parties)</li> <li>• Their children were illegitimate</li> </ul>
<b>PALLAIKAI</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Owned as concubines or slave girls</li> </ul>
<b>PORNOI</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prostitutes of the streets or brothels</li> </ul>

SOURCE 4 Types of women in Athenian society

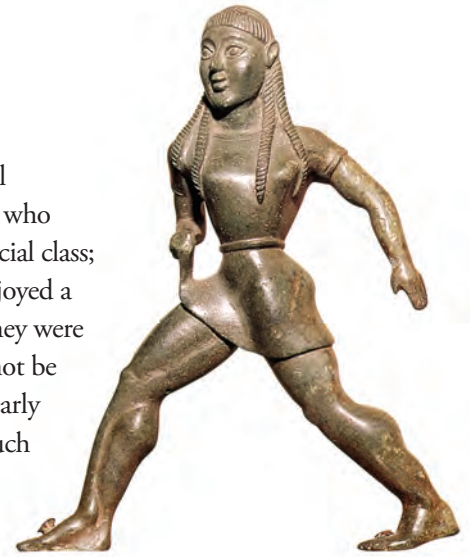
Athens had large numbers of resident foreigners, called metics, who came to Athens seeking employment. Many were craftsmen who became wealthy through their work. Neither they nor their wives had citizen status. Slave women formed another significant group. They lived under the control of their masters or their families. The terms in Source 4 are used for different types of Greek women, though there is some scholarly debate about their precise meanings.



SOURCE 5 Young women dancing, a drawing on the lid of a Greek red-figure vase at the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia

## Status of women in Sparta

The landowning upper classes in Sparta were called Spartiates and they possessed full citizenship rights. Other social groups included the *mothakes*, non-Spartan free men who were raised as Spartans; *perioikoi* or 'dwellers around', a manufacturing and commercial class; and *helots*, who were state-owned **serfs** and foreign-born slaves. Spartan women enjoyed a social status and respect unknown to their sisters in the rest of Greece. From birth they were treated like their brothers, having the same access to food and exercise. They could not be married until their late teens or even early 20s to protect them from the dangers of early child-bearing. Spartan women were not confined to their homes and could wear much less constricting clothing. They were also literate and numerate because they ran their households when their men were preoccupied with military duties.



SOURCE 6  
A Spartan girl athlete

## Status of women in ancient Rome

Women had no status of their own in ancient Rome but belonged to the classes of their fathers and husbands. Upper-class women could belong to the **senatorial** class or the **equestrian** class depending on the wealth and political status of their men. Women from these two groups enjoyed benefits of the special economic and legal privileges afforded to them. Women of the lower classes could be **plebeians**, **freedwomen** or slaves. Plebeian women could marry other Roman citizens and have legitimate children who would also be citizens. Freedwomen or former slaves had restricted rights but could become citizens if their former owners had been citizens. Women who were slaves had no status but could be **manumitted** by their owners, enabling them to become freedwomen.

In the imperial period, upper-class women began to enjoy social status in their own right. Women of the imperial household could have titles, such as the title *Augusta* bestowed on Emperor Augustus' wife Livia. Later, women claimed the social status that went with rank, eventually being able to use the title *clarissimae* or 'most distinguished', which denoted their membership of the senatorial class.

### 16.2 Check your learning

- 1 Compare the social status held by women in Athens, Sparta and Rome. You could draw up a table with categories like citizenship, privileges, personal freedom, slavery, access to education.
- 2 What conclusions can you draw from this comparison about the extent to which a woman's social class determined her rights and/or freedoms?



SOURCE 7 A fragment of a wall painting showing two Roman women from the early imperial period

■ **serf**  
a member of the class above slaves, owned by the Spartan state

■ **senatorial**  
relating to an aristocratic class whose ancestors had served in the Roman Senate

■ **equestrian**  
relating to the lower of the two aristocratic classes in ancient Roman society, also known as knights or equites

■ **plebeian**  
a person of the lower social classes in ancient Rome

■ **freedwoman**  
a woman freed from slavery

■ **manumitted**  
set free

## The role of women within the family

The most important role of a woman in ancient societies was to be a wife and mother. In both ancient Greece and Rome, women were expected to marry and bear children. One reason for the seclusion of women and restriction of their freedom outside of the home was to ensure that the children of a marriage were the legitimate offspring of the husband. Marriages could also function as a way of connecting families for political, economic and social benefit.

### Women and family in ancient Greece

In Athens, young women were married at about 14 years of age to much older husbands who were chosen by their fathers or closest male relatives. Romantic love was not a concern of Athenian marital unions, and couples might not even have met beforehand. Frequently, the chosen husband was a relative, particularly if the bride had no brothers. In this case the young woman was an *epikleros*, an heiress who could inherit property, but not take charge of it. It was vital that property remained in the family, so the production of children who could inherit their parents' property was the main point of marriage. A young woman was provided with a dowry, her portion of her father's estate, and on her marriage, control of the dowry passed to her husband. The dowry was to be used for her maintenance and was returned if the couple divorced. Either husband or wife could initiate divorce, and the dowry had to be returned or the woman was to be paid annual interest, to enable her to live or remarry. Until a woman had produced a child, her father had the right to end the marriage.

Athenian upper-class married women were responsible for running the household or *oikos* efficiently and for looking after the health of everyone in it. Most important was the bearing and raising of children, followed by weaving to clothe the family, supervising its slaves and managing the housekeeping budget. They also fetched water from the public fountains, and supervised the cooking and cleaning carried out by slaves. Married women of the lower classes often worked in the fields or in the marketplace stalls of their husbands.



### Women in Spartan families

In Sparta, young women were married when they were physically mature, probably in their late teens. They were expected to marry within their own class. Although Spartan mothers are thought to have had a say in the choice of their daughter's husband, a practice of marriage by capture apparently took place. This could well have been a symbolic practice in which the husband abducted the girl and carried her off.

The main function of upper-class Spartan women was to be wives and mothers of citizens. They were encouraged to undertake physical exercise so that they might bear healthy children for the state. A Spartiate, or free woman, was educated to be the proper mother of warriors in a warrior state. Spartan children, however, did not belong to their families but to the state.

## Women and family in ancient Rome

In Rome, **aristocratic** women married young, sometimes as young as 12 years of age, although lower-class girls might have been a few years older. The young age was a way of ensuring that the girl was a virgin when she married. Fathers were legally able to marry their daughters to men of their choice, thereby forming partnerships that would benefit them politically and economically. The only way in which a daughter could reject a match made by her father was by demonstrating the bad character of her prospective husband. In **republican Rome** a bride was subject to her husband, but in the imperial period she had achieved a form of independence by maintaining her legal relationship with her father rather than her husband. Her husband had no legal power over her.



**SOURCE 8** An ancient Greek black-figure vase depicting women fetching water at a public fountain

A Roman matron was valued for bearing and rearing children, especially for the number of children she had. However, aristocratic women gradually rejected the traditional aspects of motherhood such as breastfeeding, preferring to hire **wet nurses** instead. Large families became uncommon to the extent that Emperor Augustus passed laws to reward women who bore at least three children. One reward was to be released from the power of her father.

Like Athenian women, aristocratic Roman women managed large households, often comprising homes in town, country estates and large numbers of slaves. Many of their husbands spent long periods away from home on military or government business and, as a result, women ran the properties and businesses. A virtuous Roman matron was known for her thrift and seriousness. She was expected to clothe the family, often through her own spinning and weaving, even though she had slaves to do the majority of the work. Augustus' wife Livia is recorded as weaving the fabric for the clothes worn by her husband.

■ **aristocratic**  
a person from the upper classes

■ **republican Rome**  
the period from the overthrow of the last Roman king in 509 BC until the beginning of the imperial period under Augustus in 27 BC

■ **wet nurse**  
a woman who is paid to feed another woman's baby with her own breast milk

### 16.3 Check your learning

- 1 Find out more about the Spartan practice of marriage by capture, particularly what Plutarch had to say about it. Enter 'Plutarch: customs of the Spartans' in your browser.
- 2 What greater independence did Roman women enjoy during the imperial period?
- 3 Julius Caesar's wife, Calpurnia, managed his property during the years he spent away from Rome. Go online and find out about her life and responsibilities.
- 4 What was family life like for lower-class Roman women? Research this online.
- 5 List the similarities and differences you notice between ancient Greek and Roman family life for women.

# Economic and political roles of women

The ancient Greeks and Romans had differing views on the involvement of women in economic and political affairs. In general, there were more opportunities for women in the economic than the political sphere.

## Women and the economy in ancient Greece

It has already been noted that women often entered marriage with large dowries, and the income from these supported them during their lifetime. A large dowry could give a woman influence in the household because she retained it in the event of divorce. A woman could also inherit property if she was an *epikleros*, giving her some economic weight, but she could not buy or sell property. Nor could she own or sell slaves.

A Greek woman was expected to stay away from the *agora*, the central community space where political, judicial, cultural and economic activity took place. In reality, though, women of the lower classes, possibly the majority of Athenians, both visited and worked in the *agora*, but it is unclear whether they were citizen women, metics or slaves. Women kept taverns, were wool workers, traded goods (such as foodstuffs, perfume, ribbons and garlands), laundered clothes, boiled **unguents** and hired themselves out as wet nurses. They also worked as cobblers, gilders, net-weavers, potters and grooms.

Women could not engage in occupations where money could be made. However, they could control prostitution. Many foreign-born or metic women and slaves worked in the sex industry, as *hetairai* and *pornoi*, operating from brothels that were run by both men and women.



**SOURCE 9**  
A *hetaira* ties her gown while a customer watches.

■ **unguent**  
a thick, sweet-smelling ointment

## Spartan women and the economy

Spartan women played important economic roles in the transfer of property. Marriage alliances ensured that property ownership remained with the upper classes. Initially a Spartan woman could inherit part of her family's estate, but she did not own it and it passed to her offspring. By the end of the Classical period, Spartan women were required to have male guardians to manage their estates. They owned their dowries, but the king chose their husbands, possibly because the women would be managing their husband's estates and economic affairs while they were away fighting. Writers such as Aristotle (see Source 10) comment on the concentration of landownership in Sparta in the hands of women towards the end of the Classical period. It was feared that this might give women undue influence over Spartan affairs.

### SOURCE 10

This was exemplified among the Spartans in the days of their greatness; many things were managed by their women ... And nearly two-fifths of the whole country are held by women; this owing to the number of heiresses and to the large dowries which are customary. It would surely have been better to have given no dowries at all, or, if any, but small or moderate ones.

Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 2, Part IX



# Women and the economy in ancient Rome

Women were allowed to engage in business in Roman society; they borrowed money, invested money and gave loans. Wealthy aristocratic women lent money to their peers. There is evidence from the imperial period that women invested in public works. They bought and sold slaves, and there is evidence from the reign of Claudius that they owned and operated shipping companies. Information about many of the occupations of women comes from funerary inscriptions. For example, women are recorded as owning and operating brick factories. Women are also known to manage aspects of their husbands' businesses. Eumachia, known to us from her building at Pompeii, was a very wealthy woman who became the patron of the economically significant fullers' guild, which consisted of dyers and clothing-makers.

Lower-class women could be scribes and secretaries, wet nurses, midwives, dancers, acrobats, actresses and prostitutes. The latter two were low-status occupations with little to no legal protection. Women from the poorer classes all had to earn their own living.

We know very little of Roman women's working lives. In recent times, historians have become more aware of the gaps in the historical record where women are concerned.

## SOURCE 11

After the 1970s ... in the search of women or 'the female' in history, new methodologies developed. These entailed new ways of reading ancient sources and started from the notion that gaps and silences are as significant as what is actually in the sources. ... Suzanne Dixon ... in her paper on the **epigraphy** of textile production aptly called, 'How do you count them if they're not there?' ... argued that, in addition to what is in the sources, it is also vital to look at what is *not* there ... In short, recent scholarship has emphasised the need for a deepened rereading of various genres and types of evidence, and for an alertness to gaps, silences and absent information. In this way, it becomes possible to reach not only a reliable, but also a more complex and nuanced, picture of female working lives, and to give women their due place in debates about craftsmen and traders in the Roman world.

Andrew Wilson & Miko Flohr (eds), *Urban Craftsmen and Traders in the Roman World*, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 201–2

■ **epigraphy**  
the study of  
inscriptions

## 16.4 Understanding and using the sources

- 1 Why was Aristotle critical of Spartan women's increased ownership of property?
- 2 What questions can we ask about his perspective and attitude to women?
- 3 Suggest reasons why there are not more sources for women's working lives in ancient Greece and Rome.
- 4 What important issue of evidence is raised by Dixon's references to 'gaps' and 'silences'?

### 16.4a Check your learning

- 1 Research the lives of two well-known women from Pompeii: Eumachia and Julia Felix. What do we know about their role in the economy and their social status?
- 2 What is the nature of the sources for these two women?

## Women in political life

Women were unable to participate in politics in most ancient societies. In Athens, men had a duty to take part in voting, to attend assembly meetings, to hold public office to administer the law and workings of the city-state, and to do military service. Women were largely excluded from public life. They were not permitted to vote or to take part in the functioning of the state.

In Sparta, the landowning Spartiates possessed most of the political, legal, economic and military power. Even though Spartan women seem to have had more personal freedom than their Athenian sisters, they had no political role. They were forbidden to speak in assemblies and Spartan men actively kept them out of all political activities.

Roman women were similarly denied a role in public life. Men dominated the political system and women could neither hold formal office, nor vote. However, aristocratic Roman women realised that they could influence politics by influencing their husbands and in this way managed to gain a place for themselves in public affairs. For example, Agrippina the Younger, mother of the Roman emperor Nero played an important role in securing her son's accession as emperor. They often paid a high price for this influence, being exiled or even murdered by the powerful men of their families.

Richard Bauman, in his book *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, identifies five phases in the expansion of Roman women's political lives:

- 1 Mid 4th to the end of the 3rd century BC – women campaigned against their disadvantaged position in marriage and demonstrated against wartime casualty rates.
- 2 First half of the 2nd century BC – increased education of upper-class women led them to question and even challenge their roles in society.
- 3 150 BC to the death of **Julius Caesar** in 44 BC – many women, some named in the sources, gained political maturity and become more involved in public affairs and the law, e.g. Cornelia, mother of the **Gracchi**.
- 4 Mid 1st century BC to the end of the **triumviral** period – women such as Clodia and Servilia were virtual politicians who exercised real power over senators and magistrates. Octavia and Livia were vital in the rise of the early rulers of imperial Rome.
- 5 Accession of Augustus in 27 BC to the death of Nero in AD 68 – a new political system was advantageous to women. The **Julio-Claudian** family achieved the highest status and the women of the family shared its status.

### Julius Caesar

a significant Roman general and statesman of the late Roman Republic

### Gracchi

two influential brothers who served as magistrates during the Roman Republic

### triumviral

a period when Rome was ruled by a triumvirate or group of three powerful men

### Julio-Claudian

the family of the first five Roman emperors

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### 16.4b Check your learning

- 1 What expansion in opportunities for women's involvement in public life in Rome is evident in Bauman's five phases of Roman history?
  - 2 Investigate the influence exercised by Clodia and Servilia during the republican period.
  - 3 Roman women who paid a high price for their political influence in Roman imperial times include Agrippina I (wife of Germanicus and mother of Agrippina II), Julia (daughter of Augustus), and Messalina and Agrippina II (wives of the emperor Nero). Research these women. What price did they pay and why?
-

## 16.5

# The roles of women in religious life

Religion was an area where women were able to participate in both ancient Greece and Rome. They were priestesses of many deities, frequently those associated with aspects of female life such as childbirth and marriage. They were involved in festivals, sometimes performing rites that were restricted to women. They were also involved in funerary rites.

## Women and religion in ancient Greece

Athenian women played vitally important roles in the religious life of the city. For example, the main deity of Athens, Athena Polias (Athena of the city), was served by a priestess. They were priestesses to many other deities, including Athena Nike, Hera, Artemis and Aphrodite. Women participated in significant festivals and death rites. Some festivals were specifically for women, and they took the roles of priestesses and attendants.



**SOURCE 12** Priestesses adorn two bulls with garlands in preparation for sacrifice.

### The Thesmophoria

The Thesmophoria, the festival of Demeter Thesmophoros, was an important festival that was celebrated in Athens and throughout the Greek world. Men were strictly prohibited and only married women could attend. Demeter was the goddess of crops and female fertility, and the festival, held in autumn, was celebrated to secure her blessing on the corn shortly to be planted. The participants abstained from sexual relations before and during the festival, and took the name *melissai*, 'the bees of Demeter', as a sign of their domestic virtue. The sacred rites of the festival were kept secret, on pain of death. Excavations at Mytilene on the island of Lesbos in the 1990s shed some light on what took place. They uncovered a sacrificial pit within the sanctuary grounds that contained thousands of charred piglet remains and seeds. The archaeologists concluded that on the last day of the festival the remains of rotten piglets were brought up from underground caves, mixed with the seeds to be planted and placed on the altar to ensure a successful crop. Some might then have been spread on the fields.



SOURCE 13 Remains of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi

## The Delphic Oracle

The Pythia or the Oracle of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi is one of the best-known priestesses of the ancient world. Travellers from all over the ancient world came to Delphi to consult the Pythia, on both private and political matters. According to tradition, the priestess inhaled gases escaping from cracks in the earth, which caused her to fall into a trance. During this trance, she delivered unintelligible utterances that were then translated by the priests of the sanctuary and given to those who had requested them. The oracles or prophecies thus delivered were famous for their ambiguity.

## Other festivals

Other festivals attended by women include:

- the *Haloa* – another women-only festival, dedicated to the protection of sowing the grain. It was open to all classes of women who participated in the sacrifices made to Demeter and her daughter Kore, and the celebration of the rituals. Sacrifices were also made to Poseidon, the god of the sea
- the festival of the mystery cult at Eleusis – although a predominantly male ritual, it was open to women
- the *Panathenaia* – dedicated to the goddess Athena, patron goddess of Athens, celebrated annually by all groups in society including women
- the Heraean Games – conducted by women and girls at Olympia to honour the goddess Hera.

## Religious roles of Spartan women

Cults focusing on fertility, women's health and beauty were popular among women in Sparta. An important cult associated with women was dedicated to Artemis Orthia, a goddess of childbirth. Large quantities of offerings have been found at the sanctuary, brought by women who were barren, pregnant or survivors of childbirth. The cult of Eileithya, another goddess of childbirth, was also important. Helen, known to us from the Trojan War stories, was a cult figure too, with many artefacts used by women (such as mirrors, combs and perfume bottles) found at her cult sites.

Spartan women had roles to play at festivals, performing special dances. Examples of these are the *hyporchema* in honour of Apollo and the *caryatis* in honour of Artemis at Caryae. Women took part in the *Hyakinthia* festival in honour of Apollo, where they rode on decorated wicker work carriages. It is possible that women could have their name inscribed on their tombstone if they died while holding 'sacred office', which could refer to being a priestess or even to dying in childbirth.

## Women and religion in ancient Rome

Roman women had an important place in religious life despite its domination by men, and carried out a number of important roles. As in Athens, these roles were in the cults and festivals, several of which were specifically for women, such as the cult of Fortuna. Adolescent girls were protected by Fortuna Virginalis and they dedicated their childhood clothes to her when they came of age. When they put on the adult **stola**, it signified that they were now protected by Fortuna Primigenia. Another women-only cult was that of Bona Dea, the ‘Good Goddess’. Roman women could be priests or *sacerdotes*, usually of the cult of a goddess such as Ceres, goddess of agriculture and fertility.

■ **stola**  
a long, draped robe that was the traditional garment of Roman women

### Vestal virgins

The six women of the College of the Vestals were Rome’s only full-time priesthood. They served Vesta, goddess of the hearth, an important state cult. Vestal virgins served for 30 years, caring for the sacred, eternal fire that was considered essential to the security of Rome. By maintaining this sacred fire, which anyone could access for household use, vestals were like religious housekeepers for all of Rome. In the time of Augustus, the sacred fire was considered to be his household fire.

Vestals were not required to marry and have children like other Roman women. They were originally of aristocratic birth, but later the office was opened up to women of lower classes, even eventually to freedwomen. Vestals took a vow of chastity and dedicated themselves to their ritual duties. These included caring for the sacred cult objects, preparing ritual food and conducting the events of the annual *Vestalia*, the festival of Vesta, held in early June. They also ritually prepared the herbs used at sacrifices and made the bread offered on feast days. When their period of office was over, they retired, were given state pensions and were permitted to marry.

Over time, vestals gained much power and influence in the Roman state. Augustus included them in all religious ceremonies. Pliny the Elder comments on their supposed magical powers in Source 14.

#### SOURCE 14

At the present day, too, it is a general belief, that our Vestal virgins have the power, by uttering a certain prayer, to arrest the flight of runaway slaves, and to rivet them to the spot, provided they have not gone beyond the precincts of the City. If then these opinions be once received as truth, and if it be admitted that the gods do listen to certain prayers, or are influenced by set forms of words, we are bound to conclude in the affirmative upon the whole question.

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 28.3



SOURCE 15 A statue of a vestal virgin in the Roman Forum

## 16.5 Understanding and using the sources

- 1 What roles did women play in religious sacrifice as suggested in Source 12?
- 2 To what extent are you prepared to accept Pliny's account of the power of vestal virgins? Consider what he has said about women in Source 3.
- 3 Why were vestal virgins credited with magical powers by the Romans?

## 16.5 Check your learning

- 1 Read an online report of the interesting excavations at Mytilene: 'Thesmophoriazousai: Mytilenean Women and their Secret Rites'.
- 2 Find out more about the Oracle of Delphi and some of the famous oracles delivered, e.g. to Croesus of Lydia and to the Athenians before the Persian invasion.
- 3 Find out more about the vestal virgins, particularly their special privileges and what happened to them if they broke their vows of chastity.
- 4 Research the roles Greek and Roman women had in the funerary rites of their societies.
- 5 Summarise the status and roles of women in the religious lives of Athens, Sparta and Rome using the table below. An entry for each society has been done for you.

ATHENS	SPARTA	ROME
Participated in festivals, some for women only (e.g. the <i>Thesmophoria</i> , the feast of Demeter Themosphorus)	Participated in the cult of Artemis Othia	Observed the rites of Bona Dea, the Good Goddess

## 16.5 Profile

■ **Peloponnese**  
a geographical region in southern Greece

## Significant influential women: Artemisia I and Livia

Two women who made a substantial impact on the world of their time were Artemisia I of Caria, a Greek queen of the ancient Greek city-state of Halicarnassus in Asia Minor, which was a subject state of the Persian Empire, and Livia, wife of the Roman emperor Augustus.

### Artemisia I

Artemisia became the ruler of Halicarnassus after the death of her husband. When the Persians invaded Greece in 480 BC, she personally led her naval force into battle and advised Xerxes, king of the Persians, on naval strategy. At the naval battle of Salamis, which Artemisia had advised

Xerxes to avoid, she captained her own ship and managed to avoid attack by an Athenian ship by ramming and sinking a ship on her own side. Xerxes was so impressed by her manoeuvre that he said, 'My men have turned into women, my women into men'. The Persian navy was defeated at Salamis and the Athenians put a price on her head. Xerxes had to decide his next move. His general Mardonius proposed using the large Persian army to invade the **Peloponnese**, leaving the navy to return to Persia. Herodotus, the Greek historian who provides our information about Artemisia, records her advice in Source 16.

## SOURCE 16

'Tis a hard thing, O king! to give the best possible advice to one who asks our counsel. Nevertheless, as thy affairs now stand, it seemeth to me that thou wilt do right to return home. As for Mardonius, if he prefers to remain, and undertakes to do as he has said, leave him behind by all means, with the troops which he desires. If his design succeeds, and he subdues the Greeks, as he promises, thine is the conquest, master; for thy slaves will have accomplished it. If, on the other hand, affairs run counter to his wishes, we can suffer no great loss, so

long as thou art safe, and thy house is in no danger. The Greeks, too, while thou livest, and thy house flourishes, must be prepared to fight full many a battle for their freedom; whereas if Mardonius fall, it matters nothing – they will have gained but a poor triumph – a victory over one of thy slaves! Remember also, thou goest home having gained the purpose of thy expedition; for thou hast burnt Athens! The advice of Artemisia pleased Xerxes well; for she had exactly uttered his own thoughts.

Herodotus, *The Histories*



SOURCE 17 A very modern representation of Artemisia in the 2014 film *300: Rise of an Empire*

## Livia

Besides being the wife of Augustus, Livia Drusilla was the mother of the emperor Tiberius, grandmother of the emperor Claudius, great-grandmother of the emperor Caligula, and great-great-grandmother of the emperor Nero. She was married first to Tiberius Claudius Nero and had two small children when Octavian, later to become Augustus, fell in love with her. Two divorces were secured and Augustus and Livia married, a marriage that lasted for the next 51 years. Livia enjoyed a privileged status, taking the role of counsellor to her husband.

She was considered by many to have had a significant influence on Augustus' administrative affairs. She petitioned him on behalf of others, encouraging him to be merciful. She influenced his policies in a manner that was unusual for a Roman wife of her time.

Livia was considered by some in her own time to be a ruthless schemer. Tacitus, a Roman historian writing several decades after Livia's lifetime recorded her supposed intrigues to ensure her son, Tiberius, succeeded Augustus (see Source 18).

## SOURCE 18

When Agrippa died, and Lucius Caesar as he was on his way to our armies in Spain, and Caius while returning from Armenia, still suffering from a wound, were prematurely cut off by destiny, or by their step-mother Livia's treachery, Drusus too having long been dead, Nero [Tiberius Nero, Livia's son] remained alone of the stepsons, and in him everything tended to centre. He was adopted as a son, as a colleague in empire and a partner in the tribunician power, and paraded through all the armies, no longer through his mother's secret intrigues, but at her open suggestion. For she had gained such a hold on the aged Augustus that he drove out as an exile into the island of Planasia, his only grandson, Agrippa Postumus, who, though devoid of worthy qualities, and having only the brute courage of physical strength, had not been convicted of any gross offence.

Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*



SOURCE 19 A statue of Livia Drusilla

■ **tribunician power**  
the authority possessed by a tribune, a Roman official chosen by the lower classes to protect their interests

### 16.4 Profile tasks

- 1 What does Source 16 reveal about Artemisia's influence on Xerxes?
- 2 What advice does Artemisia give Xerxes? Why is he pleased with it?
- 3 What questions need to be asked about Herodotus' account to determine its accuracy?
- 4 In Source 18, what is the 'treachery' Tacitus accuses Livia of?
- 5 What allegations against Livia does Tacitus make in this source? What questions need to be asked about Tacitus to test the trustworthiness of his account?
- 6 Compare the representations of these two women by each of the ancient writers. What are the similarities and differences? How would you explain these differences?
- 7 Research the influential Greek and Roman women listed below. Who were they? What political impact did they make? What happened to them?  
Lucretia, Cornelia, Hortensia, Sempronia, Octavia, Fulvia
- 8 Find out what happened to Artemisia after her involvement in the Persian Wars.
- 9 Artemisia was a main character in the 2014 film *300: Rise of an Empire*. Find out about this modern representation of her impact on her times.
- 10 Aspasia was an influential Greek woman of the Classical period. Find out about her background, who she influenced and how. What impact did she have?



# 16.5

## Comparing women in ancient Greece and Rome

As you have worked through this chapter, you will have noticed where aspects of the lives of women in ancient Greece and Rome were similar and where they differed.



**SOURCE 20** An Attic red-figured bowl, c. 500 BC, showing a Greek woman playing a flute



**SOURCE 21** A 1st-century Roman woman pouring perfume into a flask. From the Villa Farnesina in Rome

FEATURE	ANCIENT GREECE	ANCIENT ROME
Family life		
Economy		
Religion		
Politics		
Representation		

### 16.5 Check your learning

- 1 Make a comparison of the lives of women in ancient Greece and Rome. You could address the aspects in a table like the one above and add any others you consider important.
- 2 Write a response to the following question: 'Compare the lives of women in ancient Greece and Rome.' (Compare: Show how things are similar or different.)  
To help you plan your response:
  - identify the main aspects of the lives of ancient Greek and Roman women you will address
  - use these aspects to structure your answer
  - draw conclusions about the similarities and differences in the aspects
  - use specific evidence from sources to support your comparison.

In this chapter we have seen how in many ways the lives of women in ancient Greece and Rome were similar. For example, both cultures placed a strong emphasis on women as wives and mothers. Upper-class Athenian and Roman women at some periods of their histories were largely confined to their homes, protected by their male relatives and prevented from participating in public affairs. The lives of Spartan women differed in that they were much less restricted, for different reasons. The most noticeable difference was the degree of participation in public life that imperial Roman women were able to achieve in comparison to their Greek counterparts. Most importantly you will have had the opportunity to recognise some critical issues of evidence. First, women are presented almost exclusively from a male perspective, and one that is often hostile. Second, we hear little from women themselves about their roles in society, which is a significant gap in the evidence we have for their lives.



## FOR THE TEACHER

Check your [obook](#) [assess](#) for the following additional resources for this chapter:

### Answers

Answers to each *Check your learning*, *Understanding and using the sources* and *Profile task* in this chapter

### Teacher notes

Useful notes and advice for teaching this chapter, including syllabus connections and relevant weblinks

### Class test

Comprehensive test to review students' skills and knowledge

### assess quiz

Interactive auto-correcting multiple-choice quiz to test student comprehension