WOMEN IN ANTIQUITY: FROM MYTH TO HISTORY

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF COURSE GOALS-
TIME-LINE OF ANCIENT GREEK HISTORY

• We will start a journey in Greek archaeology, literature and history.

• From the Bronze Age, 3,000-1000 BC (*pre-history*, oral tradition was there, but no extensive literary record) to Archaic times (8\textsuperscript{th}-6\textsuperscript{th}), then Classical Greece (5\textsuperscript{th} and 4\textsuperscript{th} c) and finally a stop in Hellenistic Times.

• We will approach literature and history, with a gendered eye: Mythic figures to historical figures, women’s voices, literary and beyond.

• First part will begin with a satellite overview on Bronze Age archaeological remains and moves on to famous epic figures from Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and with a stop in the renowned poetess of Lesbos, Sappho, among the first literary giants.
TWO MAJOR SEA-CIVILIZATIONS - THERAN AND MINOAN
THERA – LATE BRONZE AGE (17TH CENTURY B.C.)
WOMEN- HOUSE OF THE LADIES
AKROTIRI ON THERA –1500 BC
GIRL WITH SEMI-SHAVED HEAD COLLECTING A PLANT (?)
XESTE III
HOUSE OF THE LADIES (TENTATIVE RECONSTRUCTION) THERA-AKROTIRI
AKROTIRI (IN SANTORINII) THE “POMPEII” OF GREECE
CHARACTERISTICS

• Art more symbolic than naturalistic.
• Consistent use of certain flowers/motifs, the crocus (saffron) and/or papyrus
• *Papyri* and *crocus* related with concept of fertility (earth and female body).
• Female rituals?
• The female surrounded in a natural environment not in shrines. Importance of animals (such as monkeys, birds, griffins) in Minoan and Theran art.
HOMER

- Name given to the author of the Iliad and Odyssey.
- EPIC POETRY
- ORAL TRADITIONAL POETRY

- According to tradition, a blind bard from the island of Chios
- The evidence suggests that the Iliad and Odyssey were composed in the Greek settlements of Asia Minor
- Date of composition of the poems: 8th-7th century BCE - ARCHAIC GREECE

- catching sight of Helen moving along the ramparts, they murmured one to another, gentle, winged words: Who on earth could blame them? Ah, no wonder the men of Troy and Argives under arms have suffered years of agony all for her, for such a woman. Beauty, terrible beauty!” Iliad 3. 186-189

- (translated by Robert Fagles)
And now a messenger went to white-armed Helen too, Iris looking for all the world like Hector’s sister, wed to Antenor’s son, Helicaon’s bride Laodice, the loveliest daughter Priam ever bred. And Iris came on Helen in her rooms... weaving a growing web, a dark red folding robe, working into the weft the endless bloody struggles stallion-breaking Trojans and Argives armed in bronze had suffered all for her at the god of battle’s hands....

Quickly cloaking herself in shimmering linen, out of her rooms she rushed, .... and not alone- two of her women followed close behind, Aethra, Pittheus’ daughter, and Clymene, eyes wide, and they soon reached the looming Scaean Gates.

(tr. Fagles)
FIRST WORD OF HOMER’S *ILIAD*

- ANGER

Source of Achilles’s Anger who withdrew himself from the War in order to have his HONOR restored.

His prize (woman) was taken from him by Agamemnon who had by intervention of CHRYSES (Via God Apollo) the priest, to give back his prize slave girl, priest’s daughter CHRYSEIS.

**SPOILS-SLAVERY-WOMEN**

Themes of HONOR, GLORY FOR THE MALE WORLD
Briseis in this vase (*type: Kylix*) now in the British Museum, has her head (and mouth covered) as sign of her silence a “formalized behavior” in Greek culture (as S. Montiglio has shown).
WOMEN IN HOMER’S *ILIAD* AND *ODYSSEY*

- Appearance in groups
- Connections with work and lament.
- But what about ritual acts? Ritual and Time
- HERE IS THE COMPLICATION coming from ritual theory
- RITUALS are NOT about the past but, rather, about the PRESENT, and even more, the FUTURE. While remembering is an important part, the act of active recollection is part of managing time for posterity, or managing memory for posterity or, as we shall see, at the end, monumentalizing and ‘temporalizing’ time. Lamentation transforms time into temporality, a sense of time that you can own, one not bound by mortality.
RITUALS

- Rituals are discursive practices that involve formalization of language, a sense of repetition and channeling of specific actions, during which the ordinary is rendered extraordinary, and, as such, they embody, as Tambiah famously put it, the ‘logic of persuasion.’ They are part of community and cultural discourse and involve agency. The practitioners of rituals are the ones who act in often codified and prescribed ways.
KLEOS AND LAMENT

HEROIC Goal: GLORY

Archaeology of the English word Glory:

Cognate with Homeric Greek word KLEOS (that translates into glory, but semantics are far more complex than that, as the word kleos derives (scholarly majority supports the view) from roots connected with the verb KLUDIO which means to hear. Thus, kleos/glory is what is being heard about someone.

AGENCY- AGENTS>

INVOKING MEMORY- MEMORIAL- GLORIFICATION

Earlier feminist views: Lament an important ritual that controls heroic KLEOS, by channeling what the heroes DID.

In reality far more complex than that.
EXAMPLE WHEN HECTOR SPEAKS TO ANDROMACHE IN BOOK 6:

- Homeric heroes are conscious of their mortality and defy it.
- Notice Hector’s words which are a bit like an epitaph (like an inscription you see on a cemetery). Generic interplay –epic majestic heroism reduced in epigrammatic form.

- Someone will say as he looks at your weeping: ‘This is the wife of Hector, who was preeminent in fight above all the horse-taming Trojans when men were fighting around Ilios.’ ILIAD 6.460-461.
LAMENT AND TIME

While most scholars link lament with the past, the reality is actually quite different. Female performances in the *Iliad* are less about the past, and more about the FUTURE.

Helen’s speech acts in the *Iliad*.

“I wish I had perished”

Helen Book 24 (909ff): “And so I mourn for you and me, my doom-struck, harrowed heart! Now there is no one left in the wide realm of Troy, no friend to treat me kindly all the countrymen cringe from me in loathing!”

A view from anthropology (Lament in island of Crete) and studies of lament in contemporary context.

Managing one’s ‘afterlife’, meaning life after the war, as a captive or not. Helen as the “expert lamenter.”
THETIS LAMENTING WITH HER SISTERS
PATROCLUS, HER SON’S BEST FRIEND

• Again, lamentation geared towards the future.
• Patroclus is only an excuse. In reality Thetis laments her as yet-unfallen son Achilles.

• Listen, sister Nereids, so that one and all you may hear and know all the woes in my heart. Ah me, unhappy that I am; who bore to my sorrow the best of men…preeminent among warriors, and he shot up like a sapling, then when I had reared him like a tree in a rich orchard plot, I sent him in the beaked ships to war with the Trojans.  
  (Iliad, 18.52-59)
THE LYING IN STATE OF A BODY (*PROTHESIS*) ATTENDED BY FAMILY MEMBERS, WITH THE WOMEN RITUALLY TEARING THEIR HAIR, DEPICTED ON A TERRACOTTA *PINAX* BY THE *GELA PAINTER*, LATTER 6TH CENTURY BC
HECUBA’S LAMENT FOR HECTOR

Her voice rang out in tears and the women wailed in answer…"Hector dearest to me by far of all my sons…

He (Achilles) dragged you time and again around his comrade’s tomb, Patroclus whom you killed- not that brought Patroclus back to life by that. But I have you with me now…fresh as the morning dew you lie in the royal halls, like one whom Apollo, lord of the silver bow, has approached and shot to death with gentle shafts.”
MOMENTS OF WOMEN’S LAMENTATION IN THE ILIAD. BOOK 6

- Helen, lament-like discourse –self-reproach.
- Andromache addresses her husband using the forms of lamentation, ‘as if he had already been killed’ before stirring her servants into group lamentation for the as-yet-unfallen Hector:

And as she came in speed into the well-settled household of Hector the slayer of men, she found numbers of handmaidens within, and her coming stirred all of them into lamentation. So they mourned in the house of Hector though he was living ... (Homer, Iliad 6.497-500)

And in Book 24 (851ff): “Oh, my husband...cut off from life so young! You leave me a widow, lost in the royal halls. And the boy only a baby, the won we bore together, you and I so doomed...”
WOMEN IN THE ODYSSEY

- Nausicca
- Penelope
- Idealized womanhood
- Weaving-Work
- Female obstructions as Odysseus returns home
- Female Monsters- **Charybdis** (whirlpool sucks down water and then vomits it up) and **Scylla** (at straits)
- MY THESIS: Presence of women in the Homeric epics marked by FEMALE WORK throughout. Always a reference to things they were doing.
THE “REAL” ODYSSEY

• Begins with the scene at the island of the PHAECIANS, which was called “SCHERIA.”
• Odysseus’ adventures will be narrated by ODYSSEUS himself as a gift to the PHAEACIANS. His storytelling will be his gift to the people who offer him hospitality, to the king and queen of the Phaeceans. It’s a first person narration which will begins from book 9-12.
• HERO=Performer of oral traditional storytelling.
• ODYSSEUS is the paradigmatic hero, the paradigmatic performer.
• ODYSSEUS- HERO-PERFORMER-POET.
• Poet/Poetry relate to a verb in Greek (poio) that means “to make”
• Odysseus is the hero who is a performer. He is also a poet in the true sense of the word, he is the “MAKER” of his own adventures
• He is the one who presents his adventures.
1-MT. OLYMPUS 6-AEOLIA'S ISLAND 11-SCYLLA & CHARYBDIS 2-TROY 7-LAESTRYGONIANS 12-CALYPSO 3-CICONES 8-CIRCE'S KINGDOM 13-ITHACA 4 LOTUS EATERS

9-LAND OF THE DEAD 5-CYCLOPS 10-SIRENS
NAUSICAA - WASHING CLOTHES SCENE, 450 BC
CIRCE GIVING THE CUP TO ODYSSEUS
BOIOTIAN BLACK FIGURE SKYPHOS
450 - 400 BC
TERRACOTTA FROM BOEOTIA, FOUR WOMEN KNEADING DOUGH AND A FLUTE PLAYER KEEPS THE RHYTHM, 525 - 500 BC. LOUVRE MUSEUM
DETAIL OF AN ATTIC RED-Figure SKYPHOS, 440 BC, FROM CHIUSI, BY THE PENEOLOPE PAINTER. PENEOLOPE AND TELEMAChUS AWAIT ODYSSEUS' RETURN TO ITHACA
WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT SONGS IN THE GREEK WORLD BEFORE SAPPHO, THE LYRIC POETS?

• The Homeric poems are actually the best sources for songs before Sappho and Alcaeus as they present the culture of song as performing art so well. Here are some quick examples: in Iliad 18, where we have the ekphrasis, that is the description of the shield of Achilles that Hephaestus made for Achilles, the chief hero of the Acheans, doomed to die, we have a scene on the shield of a vintage where a young man was singing the so called linos song, possibly a vintage song. Others dance around him. Song and dance are very intricately connected. Achilles himself actually sings in the Iliad while he is away from fighting out of his anger, in Iliad 9, and that is an excellent example of solo music.

• LYRIC_ accompaniment of LYRE for music and song
DOES SAPPHO EXPRESS PERSONAL EMOTION?

• There is a trend now to view Sappho’s poetry as less monodic and more choral, namely wherever we see I, we are to understand “we.” A good parallel is the choral part in tragedy. There are various instances where the chorus leader will say “I” but we know very well that on the stage there was a chorus. That “I” equals “We”

• There is a lot of dialogue in Sappho’s poetry. There is Sappho’s “I”, a singing or poetic voice which addresses deities, like Aphrodite, as in fr. 1 which is ultimately a prayer to Aphrodite.
SAPPHO (NAMED). ATTIC RED FIGURE CALYX KRATER. 480 BCE (LATE ARCHAIC).
SAPPHO PERFORMS A DANCE STEP AND TURNS HER HEAD BACKWARDS TOWARD HER EXTENDED RIGHT ARM WHICH HOLDS THE PLEKTRON. THE LEFT ARM HOLDS THE BARBITOS IN PLAYING POSITION. TITHONOS PAINTER. WUPPERTAL, VON DE HEYDT MUSEUM 49.
WHO WAS THE HISTORICAL SAPPHO?

• Biographical tradition of the poets was dominated by a desire to find in poetry a window into a poet’s life. This was very much the case in Sappho. Her name appears in the remains of her poetry but also on ancient coins (as Psappho). We are told that she had a mother, Cleis, we get different names for her father, she had three brothers, a brother Larichus, another brother Charaxus, and that her siblings were not always a source of pride for her. Herodotus reports that Charaxus, her brother, engaged in trade and had commercial dealings with Naucratis, the Greek city in the Nile delta in Egypt.

• Mytilene (LESBOS) had a political landscape of shifting alliances among aristocratic clans. There’s a fragment of a poem in which she speaks harshly of a friend “of bad character” for supporting a rival clan.

• Admiration and hatred come together. Sappho comes from Mytilene, or else Lesbos, and that is from an Athenian perspective located in the East. East Greek cities and of any other Greek areas—Sybaris in South Italy, for instance were imagined to invoke luxuriousness and alleged profligacy of East Greece. East Greek women could have been easier targets for control at the same time
SAPPHO (NAMED) PLAYING BARBITOS. ATHENIAN BLACK FIGURE HYDRIA. SIX TECHNIQUE. 525-475 BCE (ARCHAIC).

WARSAW, NATIONAL MUSEUM 142333.
SAPPHO, MUS. CAPITOLINI, ROME
SAPPHO FROM POMPEII
FOR MORE ON SAPPHO- HERE IS A PODCAST

• With Prof. Karanika
• Podcast from Ancient Greece-Declassified

http://greecepodcast.com/episode4.html