

Good ancient greek women and marriages research paper example

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Introduction

Marriage is often considered as an important milestone in people's lives and in ancient Greece; this was no different. The vast amount of ancient Greek literature that is currently in circulation features many themes with marriage being one of the most prevalent. Just like its definition of in the modern context, a marriage in ancient Greece was seen as a sacred bond between a man and woman. However, the Greek marriage had a lot of differences to the current type of marriage. The modern type of marriage dictates that the man and woman are equal partners, but this was not the case in ancient Greece. The man had a more accentuated role when it came to marriage. Women were married at a relatively young age and were then subjected to a long life of childbearing. This was to ensure the continuation of male dominance. Although marriage was considered as the most important decision in a woman's life, she had very little control over it. First, many women did not have the freedom to choose who to marry, and husbands were usually chosen for them. The male relatives took charge of arranging a marriage for a woman. All in all, it emerges that in ancient Greek marriage, women had very little say and everything in a marriage essentially revolved around the man.

The Story of Oedipus the King shows some of the elements and characteristics of ancient Greek marriage. In this ancient tale, a king named Laius was married to a woman named Jocasta. The two had been married for some time, but the marriage had not produced any offspring. Like any other king, Laius wanted a male offspring that would eventually succeed him and seeing that this was not forthcoming, he consulted the “

Oracle of Apollo” (Edmunds 67). The Oracle told Laius that if he ever had a son, the son would eventually kill him. Nevertheless, Jocasta sired the king a son after some time. Remembering what the Oracle had told him, King Laius was extremely fearful of the prophecy to be realized, and he, therefore, sent his son to be abandoned in faraway mountains. Luckily for the baby, he was saved by a shepherd who brought him to the King of Corinth, and his wife who raised him as their own.

However, Oedipus finally found out that he was adopted, and he consulted the same Oracle that this father had consulted a long time ago (Edmunds and Dundes 60). The Oracle told him everything except the truth about his real parents. Oedipus then starts travelling to Thebes and on the way, he comes across a travelling caravan. A disagreement over the right of way ensues and Oedipus ends up killing a man who is in reality his birth father. He finally makes it to Thebes whereby after solving a riddle given by a nasty Sphinx, he becomes a hero (Edmunds 89). He then goes on to marry the queen of the land who is newly single. After being married for many years and having four children, Oedipus finally finds out that the woman he is married to is his mother. He is too ashamed about the fact and consequently, he gouges his eyes out and then alienates himself (Edmunds and Dundes 70).

A lot of aspects about ancient Greek marriage are revealed from this tale. As mentioned earlier, women had no or very little say when it came to choosing who to be married to. Women could be married to men under the strangest of circumstances. For example, a man could marry a woman after winning her in a certain competition. In addition, a man who had fought and captured

foreign lands could take the leading lady of that land and marry her (Blundell 56). For instance, a King, who defeated another nation in war, could take the queen of that land as his wife or could take one the daughters of the king to be his wife.

In addition, a man who had achieved great things could be rewarded with the most beautiful girl in the land or even the queen, for instance, if she was widowed. This is exactly what happened in the case of Oedipus and Jocasta. When Oedipus first arrived in Thebes, he found out that the city was being terrorized by a sphinx. He went ahead to solve the sphinx's tricky riddle, and the locals were so overjoyed that they made King. Naturally, kingship was not complete without a queen, Oedipus was rewarded with the newly widowed queen. Jocasta, who unfortunately, unknown to him, was his mother.

This act shows how women were lowly valued when it came to the aspect of marriage. Many were viewed as property or objects that could be passed on from one man to another (Blundell 80). A woman, for instance, who was recently widowed could be immediately inherited by another man and married off. She did have any choice in the matter. Jocasta, who had just lost her husband, was not even granted enough time to mourn her dead husband. This was in addition to the fact that even in her first marriage to Laius, she had not done it by personal choice. She was forcefully married to Laius.

This aspect was very synonymous to Greek ancient marriages. It was very rare to find an ancient Greek couple that had been married out of love. In many occasions, women were married off by their fathers or the male figures

in their lives. It was not uncommon to see a father giving out his daughter to another man as a gift. For instance, in ancient Greece, men would often give their daughters to show their token of appreciation for something that the king had done for them (Blundell 83). Alternatively, some would give their daughters to the king seeking for particular favors.

In some instances, sexual attraction could be used as grounds for marriage in ancient Greece (Blundell 84). However, this was once again once sided. A man who would desire a woman sexually had the right to ask her father for her hand in marriage without considering the opinion of the woman. Even if a woman had sexual attraction to a man, there was very little that she could do about it.

As mentioned earlier, even after getting married, the role of a woman in a marriage in ancient Greece was also very diminished. Women had very little say if any at all in marriage (Blundell 78). This aspect is clear in both the marriages of Laus and later in the marriage of Oedipus and Jocasta. In both, the men were at the helm of their respective households. Although the opinion of the woman was often sought, it was never out of necessity and in fact, their opinion was rarely considered to be binding. A woman could have an opinion about certain aspects, but it was up to the husband to make the final or ultimate decision. Perhaps even more interesting is the fact that women seemed to be fully aware of their diminished role in a marriage and were seemingly contented with it (Blundell 61). Very rarely did women complain about being involved in the decision making. This is an aspect that is very clear in the book, Oedipus and the King.

The main women in the story and in the marriages rarely voiced their public

outrage about not being involved in the decision-making process in the marriage. If they had any concerns, it appears that they mostly held these concerns to themselves. This obviously very different that the definition of marriage today. Marriage nowadays is expected to be made up of two people who are equal, and who are both actively involved when it comes to making decisions affecting the marriage. Although, there are still some marriages in some societies where men remain at the absolute helm, many marriages of modern days involve equal partnerships between the man and a woman.

The tale also reveals other aspects about ancient Greek marriage and this is the importance of childbirth. A marriage was not considered complete without children; there was great emphasis on children when it came to a marriage especially, male children (Rehm 38). A man was considered complete unless his wife gave birth to a son who would ultimately succeed and inherit him. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Laus went to see the Oracle in the first place to enquire about the possibility of siring a son.

Unfortunately for him, the news from the Oracle was not so good. A son was supposed to bring great joy to a father but in Laus case, he was told that siring a son would only lead him to his death (Rehm 40). However, Jocasta did not believe the prophecy given by the Oracle. Laus, on the other hand, believed the prophecy so much that he tried as much as possible to stay away from Jocasta (Edmunds and Dundes 111). However, knowing the huge importance that was tied to childbearing in marriage, she devised a plan to get the king drunk so that he could lay with her. This obviously resulted in the birth of the Oedipus, who was immediately disposed of to the mountains

by the angry Laus.

The ancient Greek marriage also had a lot of moral maxims. Marriage and sexual relations between related people was prohibited, and anyone who found out that they were married to a relative were greatly ashamed and embarrassed (Yiftaḥ-Firanḳo 101). Familial relationships were completely out of the question. When Oedipus found that he was married to his mother all this time, he was so ashamed that he ended up gouging his eyes out and eventually alienated himself by moving to the mountains (Yiftaḥ-Firanḳo 103). When he finds out that he's been married to his mother, Oedipus states that " I stand revealed at last-cursed in my birth, cursed in marriage, cursed in the lives I cut down with these hands!" (Sophocles, 1309-11). He justifies his decision to gouge out his eyes by stating that " What good were eyes to me? Nothing I could see could bring me joy" (Sophocles, 1473). Another aspect from the story, Oedipus and the King is that polygamy was not a common feature. Although polygamy was a dominant characteristic of many ancient societies, it appears that the ancient Greek society did not emphasize much on polygamy. In fact, monogamy was encouraged. All the marriages in Oedipus the King involved one man and one woman partnerships. A deeper research into the issue however reveals that although polygamy was not practiced in the Ancient Greek society, men were nevertheless allowed to have concubines (Yiftaḥ-Firanḳo 105). Sometimes, concubines were even allowed to live in the same compound with the man and his wife. A man could also sire children with concubines. If the wife of the man gave the approval, the children sired between her husband and the concubine could be considered legal heirs (Yiftaḥ-Firanḳo 106). On the other

hand, the ancient Greek society demanded total faithfulness from the wife in regards to her marriage. This is quite ironical given that men were allowed to have concubines.

Conclusion

It is clear that marriage was one of the most important life events in the ancient Greek society. However, marriage in the ancient Greek society had very stark differences to the modern marriage because, in this marriage, the man had a more accentuated role. Women were usually married at a relatively very young age if possible and in most cases, many did not have a say in who they were going to marry. Women were viewed as objects which could be passed on from one male figure to the next other if need be and were, in fact, occasionally handed out as gifts or prizes if a man achieved something. Childbirth, especially of male children was a priority in Greek marriages. In addition, although polygamy was not common in the ancient Greek society, men were nevertheless allowed to have concubines while women were supposed to remain strictly faithful to their husbands.

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