

WOMEN OF ATHENS: A CATALOGUE OF VIRTUES AND VICIES

Praxagora rehearses

Prax. I move that now the womankind be asked
To rule the state. In our own homes, ye know,
They are the managers and rule the house.

1stW. O good, good, good!

2nd W. Speak on, speak on, dear man.

Prax. That they are better in their ways than we
I'll soon convince you. First, they dye their wools
With boiling tinctures, in the ancient style.
You won't find them, I warrant, in a hurry
Trying new plans. And would it not have saved
The Athenian city had she let alone
Things that worked well, nor idly sought things new?
They roast their barley, sitting, as of old:
They on their heads bear burdens, as of old:
They keep their Thesmophoria*, as of old:
They bake their honied cheesecake, as of old:
They victimize their husbands, as of old:
They still secrete their lovers, as of old:
They buy themselves sly dainties, as of old:
They love their wine unwatered, as of old:
They like a woman's pleasures, as of old:
Then let us, gentlemen, give up to them
The helm of state, and not concern ourselves,
Nor pry, nor question what they mean to do;
But let them really govern, knowing this,
The statesman-mothers never will neglect
Their soldier-sons. And then a soldier's rations,
Who will supply as well as she who bare him?
For ways and means none can excel a woman.
And there's no fear at all that they'll be cheated
When they're in power, for they're the cheats themselves.
Much I omit. But if you pass my motion,
You'll lead the happiest of lives that e'er you dreamed of.

Aristophanes Ecclesiazusae (Women in Parliament).

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The character of the son begins to develop when he hears his mother complaining that her husband has no place in the government, of which the consequence is that she has no precedence among other women.

Plato The Republic Book VIII

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* Thesmophoria was a women's festival in honor of Demeter, goddess of the harvest and fertility. The ceremony consisted of throwing pigs into pits to rot. Later the women mixed the decayed flesh of the pigs with seeds to insure the fertility of the seeds.

Womankind

Away from home I am nothing. Oftentimes
 Have I considered what is womankind
 And seen that we are nothing. In girlhood's days
 Ours is the sweetest of all lives at home, -
 For thoughtlessness is a kind nurse to children.
 But when we reach maturity and wisdom,
 We are driven abroad and made a traffic of,
 Far from our parents and our country's gods,
 Some to strange men and some to foreigners,
 Some to true homes and some to contumely*
 And just because a single night has joined us,
 We must give praise and think that all is well.

Sophocles

Tereus.

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A woman should be good for everything at home,
 but abroad good for nothing.

Euripides

Meleager.

Marriage

That Wife is best (as prudent men have found)
 Who brings for dower (dowry) a Character that's sound.
 No Marriage Portion serves a man instead
 To stave Domestick Ruin from his head.
 He'll find no Shrew to task him, but a Friend, -
 A Fellow-worker faithful to the end.

Anonymous

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A woman should be seen, not heard.

Sophocles

Ajax

Best Days

Two days are the best of a man's wedded life.
 The days when he marries and buries his wife.

Pseudo-Hipponax

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* Contumely means abusive treatment toward a person for whom one has contempt.

Woman is woman's natural ally

Euripedes

Alope.

Dire is the violence of ocean waves,
And dire the blast of rivers and hot fire,
And dire is want, and dire are countless things;
But nothing is so dire and dread as woman.
No painting could express her dreadfulness,
No words describe it. If a god made woman,
And fashioned her, he was for men the artist.
Of woes unnumberd, and their deadly foe.

Euripedes

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A woman's vows I write upon the wave.

Sophocles

Acrisius.