

Many interesting details and you go forward much more  
outside research than expected for an introductory -  
level course. Nice job; Score 99.

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History 1100  
First Major Exam

### The Status and Treatment of Egyptian, Greek and Roman Women

I have chosen to compare the status and treatment of the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman women. There is a considerable amount of difference in these civilizations which we will discover. First I will start discussing the Egyptian women and the rights and roles that they held.

The Egyptian women generally had the same legal rights as free men in Ancient Egypt. It can be said that their roles were different, but they were pretty much equal. Women bore children and took care of the home. Egyptian women's rights extended to all legally defined areas of Egyptian civilization. Women could manage, own, and sell private property, which included slaves, land, portable goods, servants, livestock, and money. Women could resolve legal settlements. Women could conclude any kind of legal settlement. They could appear as a contracting partner in a marriage contract or a divorce contract; they could execute testaments; they could free slaves; women could make adoptions. Women were entitled to sue at law. This amount of freedom was at variance with that of the Greek women who required a designated male, called a kourios, to represent or stand for her in all legal contracts and proceedings ([www.library.cornell.edu](http://www.library.cornell.edu)). This can be reinforced if you look at Old Egyptian portrait statues where they are shown as being the same size and sitting on the same type of chair. It is apparent that they are equal. The men would dominate public life while the woman would basically manage the home and property. They certainly were treated fair, considering if a woman's husband died she would then take over the man's work. This would allow them to hold government posts such as practicing medicine, managing farms, or being a priestess which was a

very prestigious position (The Making of the West p27). They were even thought to have access to life after death.

Egyptian women could acquire possessions in many different ways. They could inherit it, receive it as a gift from her father or husband, or simply purchase them with the goods she made from working. A woman had claims to up to one-third of all the community property in her marriage. When a woman brought her own private property to a marriage, (dowry), it remained hers, even though the husband often had the free use of it

Let's take a look now of how the Greek women were treated and what differences they had from the Egyptian women. When Greek girls were young they were controlled by their father, and after they were married they were controlled by their husband. Women were identified with nature, and so they needed to be controlled. These girls would usually be married in their teens to a man around this 30's. Most often the husband would be chosen by the girl's father and usually when she was much younger. Often the girl would not meet her chosen husband until the dowry had been agreed on. It was very important that the girl was a virgin; if the father discovered that her daughter was unchaste, he could sell her in to slavery. Once they were married all possessions and property were controlled the husband. If they divorced or the husband died. It would all go to the husband or her father. Women did not have these kinds of possessions.

The women counted as citizens legally, socially, and religiously, however they did not hold the right to political politics and did not have the right to vote. Their basic function was to bear male heirs for her husband and to manage his household. Respectable women were secluded in their homes; they did not go out into the market place or even eat at the same table as their husbands and guests (Sources of the Western Civilization p71).

Greek women had very limited freedom outside the home and in no way could just roam around the town. They could attend weddings, funerals, some religious festivals, and could visit female neighbors for brief periods of time. They were not allowed to attend school. In their home, Greek women were in charge since the men had control of property and all other possessions (<http://www.crystalinks.com>). Some of the household chores that they did in their homes were weaving, spinning, cooking, and sewing, and the basic responsibilities of raising children. When it came to having children, having a son was important. Women could not overrule the husband if he chose to expose a newborn. Many female infants were exposed by their families because they could not carry on the family name. They could even just be left on the side of the road.

Roman Women in the late Republican Roman society were quite a bit different than that of Greek woman during the classical age. They were even a little better off. They ate meals and entertained with their husbands. Roman aristocratic women influenced politics, but they could not serve as magistrates, senators, or military commanders. At no time in Rome's history were women allowed to hold office, and they were never allowed to vote. In the early days of the Republic women were not even allowed to make suggestions. During the empire, the wives of emperors began to wield more power than women had ever held before. Only archaeology provides much material about the lives of lower-class Roman women. Stone carvings and funeral inscriptions show that women worked as nurses, waitresses, midwives, weavers, and food sellers. Women performed other jobs such as jewelry making, leather working, and ceramics alongside their husbands in family businesses, but this type of work was rarely recorded.

Roman Women, or more correctly, girls, were usually married by the time they were twelve years old, sometimes even younger. Girls married very young and often died in

childbirth or because they were weakened from having too many children without reprieve. Women were expected to have as many babies as they could because they were never sure how many of the children would reach maturity. Aristocratic families wanted male children to carry on the family name and lineage, and expected their wives to be perpetually pregnant. Infertility was actually grounds used for divorce, and women would often offer a divorce so that their husbands would have the opportunity to have children with someone else. Women did not have a choice between having children or not.

Women did have some personal freedoms, but they had little chance for individuality or personal choice. They were under the constant supervision of their fathers, male relatives, and husbands ([www.moyak.com](http://www.moyak.com)).

Romans traditionally depicted the ideal woman as a virtuous daughter, brave wife, or devoted mother. Some women were cast into heroic roles in reaction to political persecution; they hid their families, or even followed banished husbands or children into exile. Like men, upper-class women also won praise through public generosity; they built public monuments and temples, subsidized games, and became patrons of their home cities. As a sign of their rank, aristocratic women were given seats with the senators at public games, where they could display fine clothing and jewelry ([www.crystalinks.com](http://www.crystalinks.com)).

By comparing I found that Egyptian women were treated the best followed by the Roman women, and then the Greek. Egyptian women seemed to be viewed as somewhat equal and not so much as property like the Greek and Roman women were. They seemed to have more freedom and could even hold high positions such as a priestess which the others could not. They had more power and could even manage, own, and sell property. By far, the Egyptian women were treated better, and had more opportunities than the Greek and Roman women did.

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