

The ancient civilizations of Greece, Rome, and Egypt varied in their treatment of women. Greece and Rome had more of a conservative idea of women's place in society and women were dominated by men. Egypt, on the other hand, was very ahead of its time in the treatment of women. Egyptian women enjoyed equality with men in all aspects of their society. These three civilizations did have some notable similarities in the roles that females assumed, particularly as priestesses in their respective religions, and as domestic housewives raising children and managing their households.

In Ancient Greece women were seen as the property men. They had little if any social or legal rights. Viewed as more than the 'weaker sex', the Greek male saw the female as almost a different species, a tool to propagate the population; however, Greek women were considered citizens and therefore had the protection of the law and could not be sold into slavery. Women were to be protected and controlled. Women were under the control of their fathers until they were married (normally around fourteen and fifteen years of age) and then they were subservient to their husbands. It was not an uncommon practice for girls to be abandoned after birth; normally placed in a clay pot and left on the side of the road to die of exposure. Greek women also did not receive any formal education beyond that of learning domestic duties. When a girl was married off she would be given a dowry (material possessions, sometimes including land) and this was added to property of her husband. Women in Greece had no say in how their dowry was managed. However, the husband was responsible for returning the dowry to his wife's father if a divorce occurred. Wives were required to remain chaste until marriage and then to be loyal during marriage to their husbands. This was a double standard in Greece as men (even married men) were allowed to have sex with prostitutes,

slaves, and even willing young boys. Women in Greece participated in religious ceremonies not only in their own homes but for the community as well, some even served as priestesses. Women were held in higher regard than one might think in ancient Greece. Their role as mother and supervisor of the household gave them some respect in society, especially if they gave birth to male heirs. The gender role of women in ancient Greece tended to be very stringent with little room for leeway. This varies slightly from the Roman treatment of women.

Ancient Rome, while similar to Greece in their treatment of women in many ways, made more allowances for women and their role in society. Rome was also a patriarchal society like the Greeks and women remained under the care of their fathers until they were married, though Roman women retained more of a right over their dowries than those of Greece. Fathers had a supreme rule over their children, and just as in ancient Greece, infanticide was practiced. Roman girls were also married young and divorce was possible. Officially all Roman women were under the guardianship of a male; however some individuals owned their own land and others still were employed as professionals (teachers, artists, and physicians). Though, these cases were the exception and not the rule of Roman society. The majority of women in Rome assumed their expected role of domestic homemaker. They raised and educated their children and managed their households. Roman women also attended social functions and entertained guests, accompanied by their husbands of course. Like the women of ancient Greece, women in Rome were expected to be loyal to their husbands, while the men could demand sex from a slave or visit a prostitute. While Roman gender roles for females may have given women more freedom than those of Greece, it was the ancient Egyptian society that truly gave women equality.

The treatment of women in Ancient Egypt was a very stark contrast to that of women in ancient Greece and Rome. Women in Egypt enjoyed a freedom and equality that few civilizations have ever achieved. The Egyptian royal line was matriarchal, meaning that right to rule was passed from the mother to the son. This is quite a contrast from the patriarchal (passed from father to son, or son-in-law) system of Greece and Rome. Women of the royal blood line were called 'Daughters of the Gods' and in order to become pharaoh one had to marry such a woman. Thus, it was not uncommon for brothers to marry sisters. While the males may have needed the women to become pharaoh it was not the same the other way around. Some women assumed the position of pharaoh for themselves. During the New Kingdom period of Egypt (1569 – 1081 B.C.E.) five women ruled as pharaohs. Royal women took active participation in the court life of Egypt. They also were involved in religion and some practiced as priestesses. The way women were seen and treated in the higher circles of society are no exception in Egypt, indeed even common women were equal to men.

The common women of Egypt were equal in the law and even received the same pay as men for the same work. In ancient Egypt a woman could own her own property and even pass it on to her children. Common women participated in court as witnesses and could seek legal action if their property was threatened. Egyptian women worked in markets and were employed as scribes and treasurers, thus they had received education to some degree. It should not be thought that these women were domineering or unwilling to do what is commonly classified as women's work or that they sought to take over the man's role in society. Women did not become soldiers or engage in battle, being content to stay at home

and raise a family. Egyptian women had and cared for children and took care of the household work, and it is in that way that a similarity is seen to Greece and Rome.

Women have always played a pivotal role in history, though albeit one that has been sometimes obscure and hard to identify. We have records of battles and government systems, but the daily, mundane tasks that were performed by women, tasks that in many ways allowed men to go and fight the battles and serve in the government, are lost to us. So we look at history as the battles and the governments and not as the mother's preparation or housewife's duties. In comparing these ancient cultures similarities are seen in the women's roles as housewives and even priestesses in their respected religions. Though, a contrast is also seen in ancient Greece, Roman, and Egypt in their varying levels of freedom that was allowed to women; ranging from the very open-minded to the very restricted.

*Excellent essay;
extremely thorough
and well-written 98*

Works Cited

Hunt, Lynn, et al. The Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures. 3rd ed. New York: St. Martin's, 2009.