

Goddess, Queen, Mother, Midwife: Women in Classical Antiquity



Yale Summer Session, 2025 (Session A: May 26 - June 27, 2025)

M/W/F, 10am-12:15pm, online

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 2-4pm, and by appointment

Course Overview

In courses on the ancient Mediterranean, women are often treated as a ‘tourist topic’, included in syllabi as a one-off detour from the historical narrative governed by elite male political, military, and socio-economic activity. This course seeks to redress this systemic issue by centering women in telling the story of the ancient Mediterranean. No prior knowledge of gender studies or of ancient history is expected.

The first class will be devoted to a historical, methodological, and theoretical introduction to the study of women and gender in classical antiquity. We will then proceed thematically, each meeting centered on one category of female experiences and male perceptions of them. Tackling case studies drawn from across the Mediterranean world, from the Bronze Age to Late Antiquity, we will work with a variety of evidence types, including literature, medical texts, art, and archaeology. The structure of the course is inherently experimental: within each session, we will work across the geographical and chronological boundaries typically used in courses on the Greek and Roman worlds. Through this comparative, interdisciplinary approach, the richness of each case study will come into focus in new

and exciting ways, allowing for a fuller appreciation of the diverse social, cultural, and political landscapes through which women moved.

Objectives

- To understand how women in the ancient Mediterranean engaged with the world around them and how they were perceived by society; to understand the construction of sex and gender from a historical perspective.
- To develop the skills to work responsibly and effectively with a range of primary sources and their scholarly interpreters.
- To hone the ability to articulate and take responsibility for your ideas in both group discussion and academic writing.

Course Materials

Required texts: None! Over the course of five weeks, we will read widely across both primary and secondary sources, with the aim of exposing you to a variety of perspectives with which you can engage in forming your own opinions and interpretations. That said, there are a few resources that we will return to frequently over the course of the semester. These are listed below, along with the abbreviations used in syllabus. **All readings (both primary and secondary) will be made available as PDFs on the course page.** If you would like to purchase your own copy of Laura McClure's *Women in Classical Antiquity*, you can do so on Amazon, through the publisher's website, and at the Yale University Bookstore (or, even better: at an independent bookstore of your choice!). The other two edited volumes are available online through Yale's library system.

Frequently referenced books:

- Laura McClure, *Women in Classical Antiquity: From Birth to Death* (Blackwell, 2019): WCA
- Lin Foxhall (ed.), *Studying Gender in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2013): SGCA
- Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (eds.), *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World* (Blackwell, 2012): CWA

Assignments and Grading

Your grade for the course will be determined by a number of factors, the breakdown of which is included in the table below:

Participation	20%
Pre-class discussion posts	20%
Source analysis	10%
Source comparison	15%

Final paper proposal	5%
Final paper WIP presentation	10%
Final paper	20%

Participation

Your respectful, consistent engagement in our class meetings is key to fostering our learning community, and it will also help your comprehension and consolidation of the material we cover. This 20% of your final grade is not dependent on flawless memory of the assigned readings or historical genius; instead, it is meant to reward effort, motivation, and thoughtfulness in and outside of our online classroom. If you come to class late* or unprepared, are clearly distracted during discussions, talk irrelevantly or disrespectfully, refuse to participate, and so forth, your participation grade will suffer. Active participation can take many forms, and you are encouraged to speak to me directly as early as possible if you are concerned about how best to demonstrate your engagement.

*A note on attendance: Due to the condensed nature of the Yale Summer Session, you will fall behind quickly if you do not attend every class. With that in mind, you are expected to attend all class meetings, including on holidays. If you cannot come to class due to illness or an emergency, please let me know as soon as possible. Unexcused absences will be reflected in your participation grade.

Pre-class discussion posts

Beginning in the second week, you will be asked to post on the Canvas discussion board prior to each meeting. These posts can include questions about and reflections on the assigned primary and secondary readings, and you are encouraged to respond to or build upon each other's thoughts. The goal is to provide space for us to think through and consolidate our thoughts on the readings, and to allow us to see where our interests and difficulties converge or diverge. Occasionally, you will be asked to respond to/think with specific questions; most of the time, however, the discussion will be open-ended. Your posts are not expected to be groundbreaking, or even fully coherent, but I do expect them to demonstrate that you are engaging thoughtfully with course material.

Source analysis

The first writing assignment will be a 2-page analysis of a primary source, due at the beginning of Class 5. You will be asked to choose between passage of text and a material object, both of which we will have encountered in the assigned readings and/or in class discussion. The options will be circulated in advance, along with additional guidelines for the assignment.

Optional: If your original submission represents a good-faith effort (i.e., full page count, reasonable content, and turned in on time), you may rewrite your analysis within the week after the assignment is returned to you. If the rewrite receives a higher grade, it will replace the original grade.

Source comparison

In the second writing assignment, you will be asked to choose two primary sources, drawn from those we have encountered in readings and in class meetings, and put them in conversation with one another. Your three-page analysis should discuss how this comparison informs our understanding of women's experiences and/or perceptions of them in classical antiquity. Additional guidelines for the assignment will be circulated in advance. **You must confirm your choices with me in advance, by the beginning of Week 3.**

Final Paper

The final paper will allow you to explore a topic of your choosing in greater depth and showcase the knowledge and analytical skills you have developed over the course of the session. This assignment can take the form of a traditional academic paper (8-10 pages in length), but you are also welcome to be creative: virtual exhibitions, podcasts, or creative writing are just a few alternatives, and I am happy to help you think through how best to pursue your interests. You will submit a one-page proposal in Week 4, outlining your topic and building in an opportunity to receive structured feedback on your ideas at an early stage, and present your work to your peers at the end of the session.

Technology

This course will meet on Zoom. That said, we will endeavor to foster the same sort of environment achieved through face-to-face interaction in a classroom. For that reason, unless you have been instructed otherwise or have made other arrangements with me, I ask that you join every meeting from a computer, keep your camera on, and use only programs that are relevant to the course (e.g., note-taking apps, PDF viewers, etc.). Please get in touch with me as soon as possible if you foresee any issues with this.

Inclusivity and Accommodations

I am committed to making this course a rewarding experience for everyone, and our classroom a safe space for students of all races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and abilities. As we learn about the experiences, perceptions, and treatment of women in the Greek and Roman world, we will discuss, and confront, several difficult topics, including but not limited to xenophobia, misogyny, and sexual violence. Appreciation of our own differences is fundamental to an intellectually honest and responsible exploration of cultures that exhibit variously the best and the worst of humanity, and all that lies between. All members of the class must conduct themselves with respect and open-mindedness; discrimination or disrespect of any kind will not be tolerated. It is central to the instruction of this course that we explore this material with the recognition that the ancient Mediterranean belongs to none of us and to all of us equally. Please see the guiding principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion of the Department of Classics [here](#).

If you encounter barriers, including those relating to inclusivity or accessibility, please let me know in any way that is comfortable for you. You are welcome to inform me of any accommodations you may need directly or through [Student Accessibility Services](#), which is also there as a resource for you to troubleshoot any barriers to accessibility you experience. I also encourage your feedback and suggestions on how I can help you thrive in this course and foster a learning environment that is usable, equitable, inclusive, and welcoming.

Support and Communication

I am always available for course-related help during regularly scheduled office hours and by appointment, where we can work together one-on-one. You do not need to have specific questions to attend office hours. As soon as you feel like your grasp of course material is slipping, set up a meeting so we can talk about it. The condensed nature of the Yale Summer Session means that it is easy to fall behind and difficult to catch up. The sooner you check in with me about your progress, the easier it will be to address issues that exist.

Please feel free to get in touch with me anytime via email with questions or concerns about any aspect of the course, including content, preparation, and graded assessments. I will do my best to always respond within 24 hours but may take a bit longer to get back to you between Friday evening and Monday morning.

Academic Honesty

The value and success of this course, and your intellectual growth as a scholar, depend on personal and academic integrity. I expect you to give credit when you use someone else's work, words, or ideas (including those generated by AI software) in your discussion posts and submitted assignments—not doing so constitutes plagiarism, which the university takes very seriously; the most common penalty is suspension from the university, but students caught plagiarizing are also subject to lowered or failing grades as well as the possibility of expulsion.

We will practice the proper citation of primary and secondary sources throughout the course, but I also encourage you to read Yale's full statement on academic integrity [here](#). Please know that I am more than happy to have a judgment-free conversation if you are confused or concerned about the topic, or if you ever feel like plagiarism is your only option for success in this course. You can also find a fuller discussion of using sources and avoiding plagiarism on the Writing Center's [website](#).

A note about Artificial Intelligence: Students are not permitted to use generative AI to compose course assignments, including papers and discussion posts. If you would like to use AI for another purpose, please get in touch with me in advance to request permission. You will be expected to describe both how you intend to use AI and how its use will enhance your learning. Any use of AI must be acknowledged in a citation, providing the prompt submitted to the AI chatbot, the date of access, and a URL link to the platform. Failure to do so constitutes academic dishonesty. In addition, please know that AI's knowledge of the ancient world, and its ability to engage fully and critically with

primary and secondary sources, is deceptively imperfect. Because of this, using AI may not have the desired effect and, in fact, may hinder your intellectual growth in more than one way.

Class Schedule

Week 1

Class 1 (May 26): Introduction

Before class, read:

- WCA, Ch. 2 (“Introduction to Ancient Greece”)
- WCA, Ch. 9 (“Introduction to Ancient Rome”)
- Lin Foxhall, “Gender and the study of classical antiquity,” in *Studying Gender in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2013)

Class 2 (May 28): Girlhood

- WCA, Ch. 4 (“Female Adolescence in Greece”)
- WCA, Ch. 11 (“Female Adolescence in Rome”)

Class 3 (May 30): Marriage

- WCA, pp. 214-220
- Allison Glazebrook and Kelly Olson, “Greek and Roman Marriage,” in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities*, edited by Thomas Hubbard (Blackwell, 2013)
- Foxhall, “Households,” in *Studying Gender in Classical Antiquity*
- Selections from Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*

Week 2

Class 4 (June 2): Motherhood

- WCA, pp. 89-96
- WCA, pp. 220-227

Class 5 (June 4): Women and space

Source analysis due!

- Monika Trümper, “Gender and Space,” in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*
- Ian Morris, “The archaeology of the excluded in Classical Athens,” in *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture*
- Foxhall, “Space,” in *Studying Gender in Classical Antiquity*

Class 6 (June 6): Queens and empresses

- Elizabeth Carney and Sabine Müller, introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Women and Monarchy in the Ancient Mediterranean World*
- BBC’s [In Our Time](#) episode on Agrippina the Younger
- Elizabeth Carney, “Oikos Keeping: Women and Monarchy in the Macedonian Tradition,” in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*

Week 3

Class 7 (June 9): Women and religion

- Foxhall, "Religion," in *Studying Gender in Classical Antiquity*
- WCA, Ch. 7 ("Women, Religion, and Authority in Greece")
- WCA, pp. 257-264

Class 8 (June 11): Women and magic

- Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), pp. 376-383
- Matthew W. Dickie, "Magic in Classical and Hellenistic Greece," in *A Companion to Greek Religion* (Blackwell, 2007)

Class 9 (June 13): Working women

Source comparison due!

- Walter Scheidel, "The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome: Rural Labour and Women's Life in the Ancient World," *Greece & Rome* 43.1 (1996)
- Selections from Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), Section VIII ("Occupations"), and pp. 338-352.

Week 4

Class 10 (June 16): Epic women

- Cristiana Franco, "Women in Homer," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*
- Mairéad McAuley, "Maternal Impressions: Reading Motherhood in Virgil's *Aeneid* and *Georgics*," in *Reproducing Rome: Motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and Statius*
- Selections from the *Aeneid*, *Iliad*, and *Odyssey*

Class 11 (June 18): Violence against women in Latin literature

Final paper proposal due!

- Selections from Ovid and Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*
- Tom Stevenson, "Women of Early Rome as 'Exempla' in Livy, 'Ab Urbe Condita', Book 1," *The Classical World* 104.2 (2011)
- Additional reading TBD.

Class 12 (June 20): Violent women in Greek tragedy

- Euripides, *Medea*
- Ruth Scodel, "Medea," in *An Introduction to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge University Press, 2010)
- Bonnie MacLachlan, *Women in Ancient Greece: A Sourcebook* (Continuum, 2012), pp. 131-141
- Reread WCA, pp. 31-34.

Week 5

Class 13 (June 23): The female body

- Foxhall, "Bodies," in *Studying Gender in Classical Antiquity*

- Holt Parker, "Women and Medicine," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*

Class 14 (June 25): **Final presentations!**

Class 15 (June 27): **Final presentations!**

Final paper due!