



Women in Greek Myth

Mary Lefkowitz

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In the first edition of "Women in Greek Myth," published in 1986, Mary R. Lefkowitz convincingly challenged narrow, ideological interpretations of the roles of female characters in Greek mythology. Where some scholars saw the Amazons as the last remnant of a forgotten matriarchy, Clytemnestra as a frustrated individualist, and Antigone as an oppressed revolutionary, Lefkowitz argued that such views were justified neither by the myths themselves nor by the relevant documentary evidence. Concentrating on those aspects of women's experience most often misunderstood - life apart from men, marriage, influence in politics, self-sacrifice and martyrdom, misogyny - she presented a far less negative account of the role of Greek women, both ordinary and extraordinary, as manifested in the central works of Greek literature. This updated and expanded edition includes six new chapters on such topics as heroic women in Greek epic, seduction and rape in Greek myth, and the parts played by women in ancient rites and festivals. Revisiting the original chapters as well to incorporate two decades of more recent scholarship, Lefkowitz again shows that what Greek men both feared and valued in women was not their sexuality but their intelligence.

Women in Greek Myth Details

Date : Published August 3rd 2007 by Bristol Classical Press (first published 1986)

ISBN : 9780715635650

Author : Mary Lefkowitz

Format : Paperback 278 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Mythology, Nonfiction, History, Classics, Womens, Greek Mythology, Ancient History, Cultural, Gender, Feminism

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Christina says

A fair and researched series of essays about the roles of women in ancient Greek society, with ideals gleaned from Greek myth. I enjoyed how the book aims to show that the “traditional” roles women were confined to in the ancient world were neither dishonourable or as a result of some misogynist/patriarchal plot. A good read for anyone who is interested in the lives of ancient women with the interest of dispelling the over-sexualizing and negative myths that modern western analysis places on ancient Greek society and their culture.

Johanne says

Academic but readable review of women in Greek myth, not wholly convinced that the ancient Greeks were quite as fond of women as the author suggests but an interesting overview - I need to go off and read more of the original myths/plays now

Stefanie says

while the focus is on women, the author does not take a feminist stance in this review. enlightening book.

Jean Menzies says

Please don't read this as an intro to Women in Greek Myth, if you have not already read about this topic before and are not familiar with classical scholarship in this area. Some of her points were correct and fair, yes, but these were usually well established and accepted arguments that Lefkowitz offered no insightful additions to. Other chapters such as her chapter on the Amazons were entirely based on refuting claims almost no one really made (or were taken seriously) whilst representing them as falsehoods that were widely accepted. Other than that she draws spurious conclusions from selective evidence, failing to include anything that might contradict her argument and therefore anyone who isn't familiar with the original myths and texts will find it difficult to see where the gaps in her source material are.

Steklina says

I have read some papers by Mary Lefkowitz before so I was not suprised by her point of view. I think there are two extremes in considering ancient Greek attitudes towards women: Eva Keuls and Mary Lefkowitz and neither is correct, but I am more inclined to Keuls. Lefkowitz is right arguing that ancient tragedy (and almost all the extant texts) was written by men, but she does not take it in account by creating her conclusions. The reader can get the (wrong) impression that in Phaedras, Medeas or Andromaches utterances he can hear the voice of a real Greek woman. The other thing Lefkowitz does not take in account is the fact that social relationships can change in time. Despite the title of the book we learn about real Roman women and e.g. St. Perpetua, in particular in chapter where there is little to say about Greek myth or where the extant

evidence goes against the Lefkowitz's conclusions. The last (but not least) that bothered me extremely was the chapter about rape. The statement that the "rape experience is pleasant for the mortals" (page 54) simply took my breath.

Andrea says

Ugh. I skimmed through the last 10 pages. The book is written in a way that makes it look and sound like a well researched thesis, but as you read you slowly start to realize that a counterpoint is never presented. She claims constantly that some reactions to what women did were political rather than gender driven, but she never presents men who went through the same thing women did. (I'm perfectly willing to believe the argument, but you can't just throw it at me and hope it sticks.) When having to pick between two reasons a woman was killed, she repeatedly chooses the one that isn't gendered, as if gender couldn't possibly have facilitated the decision. I'm meh about this onesided presentation of "facts." (I'm not even getting into the whole title vs content thing. Roman reality is same as Greek myth, I guess.)

But I quit half way through last chapter, correct me if I'm wrong but conclusion is, Greeks were totally not sexist and misogyny didn't exist until Christians invented it. And even if by some freak chance a single Greek man WAS sexist, you can totally understand because GODS.

I have to stop reading books recommended by random strangers.

Kelly Linzey says

Was using this as a reference book and found it to be rather lacking in the information I was seeking on warrior women especially the Amazons. This was definitely NOT my favorite book.

Thomas says

Es gibt keine bessere Zusammenfassung als den letzten Satz aus dem Epilog der Autorin: 'Was Frauen in den Augen der Griechen reizvoll und gefährlich zugleich macht, ist, wie wir sahen, nicht ihre Schönheit oder ihre Sexualität, sondern ihre Klugheit.'

Kerrie Grain says

In this excellent book, Lefkowitz shows that the Greeks feared and revered women for their intelligence more than their looks or sexuality. Indeed, it was the early Christians rather than the ancient Greeks who first became conscious of, even obsessed with, women's physical sexuality. It is from the early Christians rather than from Plato, Aeschylus or Euripides that the fear of women's bodies ultimately derives.

Andy says

I have to say, I read this book for a possible research topic I'm working on. Though it was not helpful for my research project, but i kept reading because of the impressive absurdity of the authors claims and how she, as a scholar, felt that she was making a coherent thesis and point in spite of the fact that she continuously reuses the same handful of mythological example that happen to fit within her argument. She also consistently contradicts herself through out the book and doesn't ground her claims or cite specific evidence for them, and ends up make broad and near-sited claims about the examples that she does mention.
