

Holland Park School | *GCSE Classical Civilisations*

Thematic Study | **Women in the Ancient World**

Overview	This Route 2 course enables learners to explore the lives of women in ancient Greece and Republican Rome, including broader contexts such as Sparta and Pompeii. Students investigate the lived realities of women—from ideal virtuous figures to those embroiled in scandal—opening up discussion on gender representation in both history and myth. Key areas include women’s roles in religion (where their status could approach parity with men), their exclusion from political life, and what such disparities reveal about gender in antiquity. Mythological and legendary figures—Helen of Troy, Medea, Cleopatra—feature prominently, allowing students to consider how ancient narratives shaped cultural perceptions of female agency. Students develop comparative insights between Greek and Roman societies, and learn to integrate literary and visual/material sources—prescribed and unseen—to build and challenge interpretations
Assessment	Assessment for this thematic study aligns with OCR’s externally assessed Thematic Study paper, comprising a 90-mark, 1 hour 30 minute examination. The paper is structured in three 30-mark sections—Greece, Rome, and a synoptic comparison between the two—that include both short-answer and extended-response questions. Students must engage with both prescribed and unseen literary and visual/material sources, including one Greek and one Roman source (one literary, one visual/material) in comparison tasks. Assessment Objectives are evenly weighted across the course, but in the Women in the Ancient World component, AO1 (knowledge and understanding) carries approximately 32.2% and AO2 (analysis and evaluation) approximately 17.8% of the overall GCSE mark. This structure ensures that learners are tested on their factual understanding, contextual awareness, and ability to interpret and argue using multiple evidence strands.
Key skills	• Students developing in this unit will hone essential classical civilisation competencies: • Source analysis: Interpreting visual artefacts (e.g. Hegeso stele, Maenad Cup, Pudicitia statue) for cultural context, style, purpose, and audience, • Literary analysis: Understanding character, theme, genre, and cultural significance in texts like <i>Medea</i>, <i>Helen</i>, <i>Lysistrata</i>, <i>Aeneid</i>, works by Catullus and others, • Comparative evaluation: Juxtaposing Greek and Roman portrayals and experiences of women to draw nuanced conclusions. • Critical evaluation: Assessing various source types (literary vs. visual), discerning bias, symbolism, and context. • Argument construction: Forming coherent, structured arguments using integrated evidence underpinned by AO1/AO2 criteria. • Synoptic thinking: Combining thematic sources across genres to craft informed interpretations.

Topics	Key content
Women of Legend	Depiction of women in myths and legends of Greece and Rome, including the presentation of these women, and what this says about each culture's views on the nature of women and female virtue. Greece • Pandora • Helen of Troy Rome • The Sabine Women and Tarpeia • Lucretia
Young Women	Typical experiences of young women in Greece and Rome, and what these imply about the status of women in each society. Greece Athens: • Education in the home in preparation for marriage • Typical Athenian wedding rituals and arrangements Sparta: • Spartan system of education and marriage Rome • Education: in the home in preparation for marriage; evidence of academic education for some Roman girls • Varieties of marriage: ○ <i>coemptio</i>, <i>confarreatio</i> and by <i>usus</i> ○ difference between <i>cum manu</i> and <i>sine manu</i> marriages
Women in the Home	The roles and responsibilities of female members of the household, including domestic duties; childbirth; legal rights and property ownership; divorce and adultery; typical duties of female slaves. Greece • The <i>kyria</i>; Athenian ideas of wifely virtue • Athenian domestic slaves • The experience of a Spartan wife and mother Rome • The <i>matrona</i>; Roman ideas of wifely virtue • Roman domestic slaves

'Improper' Women	The legal and social position of women who were unmarried, but had relationships with men, including attitudes towards such women, and ideas about 'proper' female behaviour. Greece • The roles of, laws about, and typical portrayal of pornai and hetairai (including at a symposium) • Neaira and Aspasia Rome • The roles, laws about and typical portrayal of the meretrix and lena • Clodia (and her possible identification with 'Lesbia') and Cytheris/Lycoris
Women and Religion	Roles of women in religious rites and what these reveal about the nature and roles of women in their respective societies. Greece • Priestesses and prophetesses, including the Pythia • The roles of women played in state cult, including the Panathenaia, Thesmophoria and worship of Dionysus • The role of women in ritual mourning and preparation of the bodies of the deceased Rome • Priestesses; including the rights, responsibilities and punishment of the Vestal Virgins, and the Flaminica Dialis as the wife of the Flamen Dialis • Prophetesses, including the Sibyl • The roles of women played in state cult, including worship of the Bona Dea, Patricia Pudicitia and Plebeia Pudicitia
Women and Power	The political institutions of both cultures, and the extent to which women were able to be involved in the political process or effect political change. Greece • The Athenian Assembly; the exclusion of women • The story of the Assemblywomen of Aristophanes; presentation of women involved in politics in the context of farce • The trial of Agnodice Rome • The structure of the Roman Senate; the exclusion of women • The story of the repeal of the Oppian Law • Sempronia and her involvement in the Catilinarian Conspiracy
Warrior Women	The presentation of maiden warriors in art and literature, and what this presentation can tell us about the position of real women in these cultures. Greece

	- Penthesilea and the Amazons Rome - Camilla, as represented in Virgil's Aeneid
Women to be Feared	The presentation of foreign, powerful women in art and literature, including how they compare to 'respectable' women from each culture, and what makes them so dangerous and threatening to the ancient audience. Greece - The story and presentation of Medea by the Athenians; from meeting Jason in Colchis to her escape to Athens Rome - The story and presentation of Cleopatra VII by the Romans, including her love affairs with Roman generals (Julius Caesar and Mark Antony), her role in the decisive Battle of Actium, and the political and military threat she was seen to be.

Prescribed Literary Sources	Prescribed Visual Sources
- Aristophanes, Assemblywomen, 1–240 - Euripides, Helen, 1–67 - Euripides, Medea, 1–38; 1293–1389 - Hesiod, Works and Days, 54–105 - Homer, Iliad, 3:121–180 - Plutarch, Pericles, 24 - Catullus, 7, 8, 83 - Cicero, Pro Caelio, 49–51 - Laudatio Turiae - Livy, History of Rome, 1.9–10; 1.12–13; 1.57–59; 34.1 - Sallust, The Conspiracy of Catiline, 24.5–25 - Virgil, Aeneid, 8.671–713; 11.532–835	- Hegeso Stele, attributed to Callimachus, in National Archaeological Museum, Athens (3624) - Ampharete Stele, in Kerameikos Museum, Athens - Parthenon Frieze, in the British Museum - Maenad Cup, in the Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich - The Bassae frieze in the British Museum - The Flight of Medea krater, in the Cleveland Museum of Art - House of the Vestal Virgins "Sappho" Fresco of an educated upper class Pompeiian woman - Pudicitia (Pudicizia) statue of a woman in the Vatican Museum (Braccio Nuovo 23)

