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The Hippocratic Corpus and Soranus of Ephesus: Discovering Men's Minds Through Women's Bodies

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The Hippocratic Corpus and Soranus of Ephesus:
Discovering Men's Minds Through Women's Bodies

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Liberal Arts
Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies
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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my husband, Jared, who has supported me throughout this laborious process by inspiring and encouraging me in my accomplishment and taking on much more responsibility in caring for our children and our home. I would like to thank my mother, Shari Alzheimer, whose boundless encouragement and unrivaled optimism have pushed me to do better work than I could have without her support. I would also like to thank my mother-in-law Fran Slaughter for the uncountable hours she dedicated to taking care of my children while I worked on my degree. Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my children, Bailey and Nathaniel, whom I hope to inspire and encourage in following their dreams and pursuing their limitless potential. I could not have achieved such a feat without these amazing people and am eternally grateful for them.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Greece	11
The culture of Greek women as portrayed by Greek men.	11
The anti-woman: Amazons.	23
The medicine of the Hippocratic Corpus.	26
Conclusions.	31
Chapter 2: Hellenistic Alexandria	33
The culture of Hellenistic women in Alexandria.	33
The medicine of Herophilus of Chalcedon.	37
Conclusions.	41
Chapter 3: Rome	43
The culture of Roman women as portrayed by Roman men.	44
The anti-woman: Vestal Virgins.	56
The medicine of Soranus of Ephesus.	59
Conclusions.	64
Conclusions	65
References	69
Primary	69
Secondary	71
Bibliography	74

Abstract

This thesis addresses what cultural influences and social circumstances shaped the works of the Hippocratic Corpus and Soranus's *Gynecology*. This thesis will illustrate how these medical texts are representative of how women were viewed by men in Classical Greece and Early Imperial Rome, respectively. It deals additionally with how these gynecological works in turn impacted the way in which society viewed and treated women. In particular, these medical writers' changing views of the act of conception shed light on the differing attitudes of their cultures. Thus far research on these time periods and works has focused too narrowly on one aspect of society to do them justice, nor has there been an effort to separate Soranus's work from the Hippocratic Corpus as representative of a completely different culture and time period. Scholarship has not before discussed the importance of who controls power over conception, men or women, as the key to understanding why women were treated the way they were by men.

Using a feminist approach, this thesis examines the culture, mythology, literature, history, and medicine of these cultures, employing cultural morphology to understand how and why they changed. Greek men feared the women in their lives because they believed that women controlled conception. Roman men did not fear the women in their lives but respected them as mothers, for the important reason that women did not control or contribute to conception. All of the cultural evidence examined inclines one to believe that the way women were treated and viewed by men in the Classical period of Greece

and the early Imperial period in Rome, is related directly to who held the power over conception of children, men or women.

Introduction

This thesis analyzes the array of beliefs regarding fertility and conception from the Classical period of Ancient Greece to the early Imperial Period of Rome. Selections from the Hippocratic Corpus and from Soranus of Ephesus' treatise *Gynecology*, will provide the primary documentation of medical practices concerning women from these eras. It is the goal of this research to discover the cultural ramifications of, and causes for, the ways women were studied, written of, and cared for during these eras. Specifically, this work will address why the medical beliefs changed so drastically between these periods and how the beliefs about who controlled conception affected women in society.

This thesis seeks to answer what cultural influences and social circumstances led Soranus to comment copiously on the Hippocratic Corpus and why that serves as a significant source of cultural and social critique of women in fifth-century BCE Athens and the first and second centuries CE, the early Imperial period in Rome. Furthermore, this work examines what the content of these writings tells us about the development of women's healthcare over the course of half a millennium. The authors of the Hippocratic corpus and Soranus were of Greek origin. Even though Soranus was Greek by birth and training, he was part of the larger Roman world. By his time, Soranus's birthplace had already been deeply impacted politically and culturally by Rome; his training was in a Roman Alexandria, and his mature work was carried out in Rome for Romans. Soranus, therefore, bridges the gap perfectly between the Greek and Roman cultures and their

respective medical beliefs. Indeed, Soranus was the first biographer of Hippocrates himself. This connection between Hippocrates and Soranus creates a wonderful opportunity for a cultural morphological analysis that has not yet been effectively done.

An important goal of this research is to understand more accurately how men viewed women in classical Athens (5th century BCE) and early Imperial Rome (first and second century CE). This research will also specifically address why and how women's lives in society changed between these periods. Women were the object of much examination by men in mythology, literature, medicine, culture, and history. Through the study of women as portrayed by men in these societies, and then by focusing on who holds agency in conception, a better picture of how men thought about women emerges. What is interesting is how the views on women changed concerning agency in conception from the high periods of culture between Greece and Rome.

Thus far, scholars have not written a study of women's medicine in the Hippocratic Corpus and Soranus of Ephesus with the distinct goal of analyzing their similarities and differences. The fact that Soranus was so interested in Hippocrates as to write his first biography had to have affected Soranus's own medical writings. Soranus's ideas concerning female gynecology and fertility had a lasting importance on women's healthcare, enduring well into the sixteenth century, when Eucharius Rosslin wrote the prominent work on midwifery, The Rose Garden, in 1513 and made extensive use of Soranus's work.¹

¹ John Byers, "The Evolution of Obstetrics Medicine: With Illustrations from Some Old Midwifery Books" in *The British Medical Journal*, Vol. 1, No, 2685 (1912), 1345-1350.

Soranus's long-lasting influence and the cultural resonance of the Hippocratic Corpus, even in the medical profession today, create an unexplored and interesting insight into how men's cultural views of women impacted science's views of women's bodies and vice versa. By concentrating on the parallels and divergences between the Corpus's assertions and Soranus's, this research will focus more on the beliefs regarding fertility and conception than on the more generally gynecological. Most scholarship has focused on gynecology in these works, with an emphasis on menstruation. Fertility and conception occupies a much smaller part of the Corpus and has thus been neglected in research. By assessing the beliefs concerning fertility and conception in these works, unique insight can be discovered about how and why women were viewed the way they were by men in antiquity. Ultimately, this thesis will seek to prove that the beliefs men had about women, and the way women were treated, stem directly from the scientific beliefs about who held the power over the conception of children: men or women.

Modern scholars writing about women in Greek and Roman society, especially concerning women's healthcare, have some problems in their works. Many authors focusing on women in medicine in the classical world tend to narrow their center of attention to one aspect of culture, attempt to understand what women thought about their own lives through the works of men, or make one-dimensional assessments about women because of their research techniques. Although the focus on the study of women's medical history is still a relatively new discipline, the work can be done in a more accurate and more feminist manner. By concentrating on what men's beliefs were about women regarding agency in conception, this thesis will hopefully find new insights concerning how men viewed women. Using feminist perspective of research and

analysis, this thesis will treat the subject of women in ancient Greek and Roman culture in a clearer and hopefully more accurate style.

This thesis will apply a feminist approach to the study of medical texts in order to assess how women were treated differently in medicine as a reflection on the values of the men in society. Most scholarship on the Hippocratic Corpus has previously concentrated on the science involved in the works and how it compares to modern Western medical practices. In general, these studies have focused on men, since two-thirds of the Hippocratic works discuss men. However, some more recent studies have sought to use feminist inquiry to assess these texts in order to understand how women were treated differently and what can be ascertained from those medical variations about the ways women were valued in society.

As mentioned previously, most scholarship has concentrated on menstruation and physical differences as discussed in the works. However, this paper will seek to use passages from the Hippocratic Corpus and Soranus's *Gynecology* that focus on fertility and conception in order to assess not just how women were viewed, but also how women were analyzed through this distinctive scientific portrayal. It seeks to reassess what has previously been considered about how women were thought of by men in antiquity through these medical texts, using the lens of fertility instead of menstruation. In addition to a feminist perspective, this thesis will use cultural morphology to discover why and how medicine changed for women from the Classical period in Greece to the Imperial period in Rome. While medicine has often been in a state of flux throughout history, the changes between these particular periods are quite distinct and in direct relationship to

each other. Soranus, as the biographer of Hippocrates, was well aware of the Hippocratic Corpus, and this creates a wonderful opportunity for study.

Unfortunately, there is almost no primary evidence written by women from these eras. Sappho, a female poet from Lesbos, Greece, is the only female author whose works survive in any degree of completeness today.² Since these are only fragments however, and cannot be called upon to represent all women's views since she was an upper-class, educated woman, and lived in the seventh century BCE at the edge of the Greek world and therefore was part of an extreme minority. With minuscule evidence from the perspective of women (and actually written by women), it is impossible to understand how women, in general, viewed their own lives. Many scholars, however, have tried to interpret women's opinions through the only sources available to us, the works of men. Trying to understand how women thought about themselves through the lens of men's works undoubtedly biases the truth, which cannot be known.

Many scholars who have focused on women make the mistake of trying to examine, too narrowly, one aspect of society, whether that be law, art, literature, mythology, medicine, or history. It is only through the careful examination and study of all aspects of society that women can be better understood. Naturally, only a representative sample of the multitude of examples can be discussed in a work of this length, but it will cover all these areas of representation. The caveat is of course that what is learned about women has to be understood to be how men viewed women, not how women viewed themselves. Scholarly work typically is narrowly focused, which can lead

² There are a few short fragments from female authors like Erinna and Nossis, but they are not enough to support any conclusions of female thought.

to misconceptions and mistakes in the understanding of women in ancient Greek and Roman societies.

The final reason for undertaking this project is because women's lives have been unfairly talked about in shallow, unsupported positions that lead most people to vast misconceptions of the lives of women. Many times people will summarize ancient Greek women as powerless and subjugated while they characterize Roman women as powerful and free.³ These conclusions have been based on analysis resulting from too narrow a focus in time: one must look also at the changes over time and the reasons for those changes. Through a comprehensive cultural morphology a better representation of women as thought of by men can be discovered.

Although many scholars have written about the Hippocratic Corpus, little has been done on the value placed on women as seen through these works. There are three scholars in particular who have focused on women in these works, Lesley Ann Dean-Jones, Helen King, and Ann Ellis Hanson. Dean-Jones is a classicist whose main body of work concerns the medical texts of Aristotle and the Hippocratic Corpus. King's works offer insight into the correlation between scientific medical treatises concerning women, and the mythology of Greece. Hanson is the first scholar to translate a text integral to this work, Hippocrates's *Diseases of Women*. Her translation provides ample notes and commentary, which are essential to this thesis. She is also one of only two scholars to point out the connection between the Hippocratic Corpus and Soranus's *Gynecology* as a reflection of women's changing lives in antiquity.⁴

³ Gillian Clark, "Roman Women," *Greece & Rome*, Second Series, 28, no. 2 (1981): 193-4.

Lesley Dean-Jones's works "Menstrual Bleeding According to the Hippocratics and Aristotle," "The Cultural Construct of the Female Body in Classical Greek Science," and Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science investigates female physiology and the classical theories about woman's role in reproduction. She mainly consults the Hippocratic Corpus and Aristotle's biological claims. She discusses the social and historical context of women in Greek culture from a medical standpoint by comparing and contrasting the Hippocratics' and Aristotle's arguments. She argues that menstruation is fundamental to understanding Greek medical and biological conceptions of the female body. Dean-Jones is perceptive in arguing in her concluding chapter that Greek culture is characterized by a veritable silence about menstruation. A wide range of bodily functions turn up over and over in non-medical literature, but this one does not, and this silence is a real and important fact about Greek culture.⁵ Dean-Jones' work varies from this thesis by focusing almost exclusively on menstruation. Beliefs about fertility and conception provide much more potent insight into Greek beliefs about women than those on menstruation and this thesis will seek to prove that.

Dean-Jones's work is in-depth and well-researched in most of the topics she covers. There are several aspects, however, which cause questions to arise. In the areas in which the Corpus and Aristotle fail to address her concerns, such as the philosophical position of rape in Greek society, she uses the work of Soranus. The problem with her use

⁴ Ann Ellis Hanson, "The Medical Writer's Woman," *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, eds. David Halperin, John Winkler, and Froma Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990): 313-314.

⁵ Lesley Ann Dean-Jones, "The Cultural Construct of the Female Body in Classical Greek Science," *Women's History and Ancient History*, ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991): 111.

of Soranus is that she does not speak to the fact that his work is written five hundred years later, and affected more by "Roman" culture than "Greek". This is a huge temporal and cultural gap that will show the evolution of medical and cultural beliefs. The opportunity missed by Dean-Jones to address this evolution creates the need for this thesis.

Helen King is a leading authority on ancient medicine as it relates to women. Her works Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece and "Women's Health and Recovery in the Hippocratic Corpus" investigate ancient medical writing in a social and cultural context in order to better understand ancient societies. Her main area of study examines ideas of conception, the role of women, and also sacrifices, in order to make sense of the Hippocratic gynecology texts. According to King, gynecology in ancient Greece derived from the myth of the first woman, Pandora, whose beautiful appearance was seen to cover her dangerous insides.⁶ King explores how Greek healers understood the interior workings of the female body, and how gynecology was based on ideas about women and their bodies found in myth and ritual. She also presents a detailed account of how doctors warped these texts into ways of controlling women's behavior.⁷

King's work aids comprehension of the social and cultural ideas of women in Greek society as seen through the lens of the medical texts of Hippocrates. However, King's arguments tend to focus only on the mythological basis for reproductive science and this thesis will argue that all aspects of their culture were used to reinforce male-

⁶ Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 1998): 23-39.

⁷ King, 1-2.

conceived ideologies of woman's value in society, beliefs most potently obvious in the gynecological medical writings. Most of King's references to Soranus are not of use to this work since she calls his *Gynecology* an "historical accident of preservation."⁸ Her mentions of Soranus are surprisingly prejudicial and affect no pretense of objective use or study.

Ann Ellis Hanson is the first scholar to translate the Hippocratic text, *Diseases of Women*, into English. As such she is an important source of scholarship for this thesis. Her scholarly works "Continuity and Change: Three Case Studies in Hippocratic Gynecological Therapy and Theory," "Hippocrates: 'Diseases of Women 1'," and "The Medical Writer's Woman" concern mainly the Hippocratic Corpus. "The Medical Writer's Woman" however, deals with the connection between the Hippocratic Corpus and Soranus's *Gynecology*. Hanson closely examines the way the treatment of women develops from the Hippocratics to Soranus and clarifies some of the obscurities of the medical conceptualization of the sexual responses and reproductive capacities of younger and more mature women. She illustrates the ways in which the changing social role of women is reflected in the development of medical conceptualizations, but stresses that throughout the five centuries represented by these works, the social role of woman as mother and wife consistently motivates the medical conceptualization of her sexual nature.

Hanson's study into the phenomena of women's sexuality and fertility as seen through the Hippocratic Corpus and Soranus's *Gynecology* is an inspiration for the topic of this thesis. While Hanson focuses more on the sexuality of fertility, this work will

⁸ King, 176.

focus on the medical aspects of reproduction and assessing attitudes toward women and how they changes over time. With so few scholars writing about Soranus as a source in and of himself, as opposed to a side note in female medical history, Hanson's work is a welcome resource.

The relative lack of scholarly attention to Soranus's work, so culturally relevant for such a long period in history, is astonishing. However, this lack of formal investigation creates an opening for this thesis in the void. With most scholars of ancient medicine casually citing Soranus's work without individual study, it seems that academia as a whole and Humanities in particular have overlooked an important figure in the study of Roman culture and medicine. This work will try to correct the mistakes made in previous scholarship. It will focus on how men view women, not how women viewed themselves; it will give attention to varied sources related to each society in order to more accurately represent all women; and it will use the conclusions from this work to draw new, and more precise, representations of women in ancient Greek and Roman society and theories about why and how attitudes toward women changed over the course of 500 years. Finally, to bridge the 500-year gap between these two periods, it will briefly examine the important medical and cultural discoveries and changes that occurred in the intervening Hellenistic age. Specifically, it will focus on the gynecological discoveries made through the dissections of women's bodies executed by Herophilus in Alexandria. This is a pivotal time and helped mold Soranus as a doctor and scholar, so therefore it must be addressed. This is also a comparatively overlooked aspect of how medicine changed and how the change affected women in society.

Chapter 2: Greece

Greek men appear to have been scared of the women in their lives. The ancient Greek culture, particularly in Athens, is full of references to unbalanced women, powerful women, vengeful women, and other similar descriptions. Women were kept from contact with non-family males, their public persona was almost non-existent, and they were mostly uneducated. Indeed women were married young, around age twelve or thirteen, to better ensure their husbands' being able to mold them into the wives they desired.⁹ In most of Greece a woman had little or no access to money. In the realm of medicine, there was almost nothing known about women's actual internal anatomy and physiology, but men were sure that women were alien even in their construction. Mythology, literature, culture, history, and medicine all show the obvious fear, compounded by ignorance, men had of women. While this fear may not always have appeared consciously in most men, they definitely took steps to oppress women, and groups are typically oppressed when feared. This is seen very clearly in the treatment of slaves throughout history and across cultures.

The culture of Greek women as portrayed by Greek men.

The Greek poet Hesiod put forth the earliest known works that addressed the fear of women in Greek mythology. In his *Works and Days* and *Theogony*, he speaks of the

⁹ Xenophon, "On Household Management," *Oeconomicus* (4th c BCE), 6.17-10.13.

myth of Pandora.¹⁰ In many myths that speak to the origin of people, women often derive from the man in some way, for example, Eve being created from Adam's rib in Judeo-Christian culture. However, in Hesiod's genesis of humans, Pandora is made completely separate from man. This shows how different women were thought to be from man in Greek culture, in the very essence of their bodies.¹¹ In fact, Hesiod describes Pandora as the origin of the "race of women," essentially denying them the notion that they are at all related to the race of man.¹²

Pandora became the symbol for all women in Greek culture, the vessel containing all the evils in the world. According to the myth as set forth by Hesiod, Pandora was the first woman and she was created as a "beautiful evil," a punishment to mankind for Prometheus stealing fire from the gods. Of course, the Greeks paid no attention to the fact that man (Prometheus is a Titan, but clearly man is complicit) is the one who erred against the gods, bringing down punishment. Instead, they only see that woman is the punishment itself.¹³ Although Pandora carried this jar of evils, it was Epimetheus that accepted her as gift from Zeus, even though he was warned against it, and this resulted in "the earth and sea [being] full of evils."¹⁴ These evils include death, hard-work, sacrifice, and most telling of men's feelings for women, marriage.¹⁵ Once again, the Greeks did not

¹⁰ Hesiod, *Theogony* (8th c BCE) 558-613; Hesiod, *Works and Days* (8th c BCE), 54-105.

¹¹ Lesley Ann Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), 42-3.

¹² Froma Zeitlin, *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago UP, 1996), 60-1.

¹³ Giulia Sissa, *Greek Virginity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1990), 155.

¹⁴ Hesiod, 590-612.G.

¹⁵ King, 115.

pay any attention to the fact that a man kept Pandora despite his forewarning of the danger posed by her and therefore released the jar of evils upon the world, they only acknowledged that a woman brought it. This shows their single-minded attention to finding reasons to suppress women and support men being in charge.

Hesiod elaborated what made Pandora so dangerous: "From her is the race of women and female kind: of her is the deadly race and tribe of women who live amongst mortal men to their great trouble, no helpmates in hateful poverty, but only in wealth."¹⁶ Perhaps this was the first example of men thinking about women as only being in relationships for the financial rewards. Indeed, Hesiod added more about Pandora's evils, saying she had a "shameful mind and deceitful nature", speaks with "lies and crafty words" and carries with her a jar containing "burdensome toil and sickness that brings death to men... diseases...and a myriad other pains."¹⁷ Helen King pointed out that the Hippocratics' lack of internal physiological knowledge of women is akin to the myth of Pandora, who, while beautiful on the outside, is unknown and evil within.¹⁸ The duplicity of women lies in their duality: a beautiful exterior, and a wicked (and inexplicable) interior. The jar imagery is in fact likened to the female womb, whereby women are predisposed to evil since they are the inheritors of Pandora's evil vessel.¹⁹ Most pointedly, the Hippocratics seem to have learned from this myth that what comes out of

¹⁶ Hesiod, 590-612.

¹⁷ Hesiod, 590-612.

¹⁸ King, 23-7.

¹⁹ King, 26.

women's "jar" is dangerous, therefore women's true threat toward men resides in their womb and the unique power it holds to conceive and give birth to children.²⁰

The goddesses in Greek mythology are also examples to Greek men of the dangers of women. The typical stories of the goddesses' wrath surround the body and child-bearing, the source of their power. One of the most violent examples of a vengeful woman in mythology concerns Gaia's attempt to get rid of her husband. Gaia, in her hatred of her husband, Uranus, plotted with her children to have him punished: "My children, gotten of a sinful father, if you will obey me, we should punish the vile outrage of your father; for he first thought of doing shameful things."²¹ Her son Cronos agreed to help and Gaia "rejoiced greatly in spirit, and set and hid him in an ambush, and put in his hands a jagged sickle... Then the son from his ambush stretched forth his left hand and in his right took the great long sickle with jagged teeth, and swiftly lopped off his own father's members and cast them away to fall behind him."²² In this way Gaia plotted and aided in the destruction of her husband's manhood. Most importantly, it was her conception and bearing of the child that led to Uranus's downfall that instilled in male readers the fear of woman's power. While Cronos was revered in the overthrow of his vile father, Gaia was despised in her role of Uranus's castration.

Hera was notable for her revenge against Zeus's many adulterous affairs. In an episode in the *Iliad*, Zeus claimed that a child of his blood born on a certain day would be ruler over his people. Zeus tried to have his son Herakles declared ruler but Hera

²⁰ Zeitlin, 71-2.

²¹ Hesiod, II 164-6.

²² Hesiod, II 173-206.

interfered and delayed his birth while speeding up that of another child.²³ This event shows the deceitful nature of women, expressed in their power over childbirth. Hera also repeatedly tried to kill and harass Herakles, as the result of Zeus's adultery. Hera sought revenge against the women of Zeus's trysts, as well as the children, and in very intense gestures of hatred. Myth shows, in short, that Greek men were especially fearful of the power women held over them sexually, and of the power they had to control and direct the children they bore.

The episode with which Hera most portrayed the dangers of women in control of procreation is when she alone conceived and bore her child Hephaestus, without the aid of male seed.²⁴ She also gives birth to the monster Typhoeus: always parthenogenetic births are monstrous or incomplete: men were afraid of the idea. She was capable of this deed because women alone hold what the Greeks believed to be the material necessary to form a child, *menses*.²⁵ The creation of a child without the contribution of a father, parthenogenesis, had also occurred with the Titans of mythology. Gaia birthed the Gorgon in order to fight against the Olympians.²⁶ Of course, it must be noted that while Hera and Gaia were capable of procreation without the help of a man, the children they conceived and bore were not whole. Hephaestus was lame, and in Greek culture that made him unmanly. Typhoeus was a monster. The Gorgon has been described in many ways but she is always terrifying and not wholly human in form, because it was an idea men could not bear. While the phenomenon of creating children without male

²³ Homer, *Iliad* (8th c BCE), 19.97-119.

²⁴ Hesiod, I 927-8.

²⁵ Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies*, 151-2.

²⁶ Hesiod, II 274-277.

intervention was relegated to goddesses, not mortal women, it was a pointed reference to the fear men felt of women's control over conception, and more to the point, men's lack of control. This is why there are cases in mythology where men bore perfect children on their own (Athena and Dionysus), an effort to claim control where they typically lack it. Men wanted to prove that while women provided the raw material for making children, it was the male who gave the child its human form.

Greek mythology has many more references to women that were to be feared. Artemis sent a wild boar to kill Adonis as revenge for his claiming to be a better hunter than she.²⁷ This was seen by Greek men as the result of an over-emotional woman, not the consequences of hubris as it would be if the god doing the punishment was male. A main source of Artemis's power is that over childbirth. While she never gives birth herself, as a perpetual virgin, Artemis has the power to give or withhold a successful labor.²⁸ This source of power over the birth of children was of course held in the hands of a woman, which lends more weight to the reasons why men feared women so very much, and how it is again related to conception.

The play *Medea* by Euripides shows another prime example of why men would fear women. This play is based on mythology, but still would have demonstrated yet another example of woman's threat to men. In the play Medea is left by her husband Jason for another woman. She is heartbroken and angered by the desertion and seeks revenge by killing her two children by Jason, as well as Jason's new wife.²⁹ This play shows what men have to fear by crossing their wives, yet it does not point a finger of

²⁷ Apollodorus, *On the Gods* (2nd c BCE), III 183-5.

²⁸ King, 83.

²⁹ Elaine Fantham et al., *Women in the Classical World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994), 69.

guilt at the adulterous men viewing it in the audience, but emphasizes that women's revenge can be taken out on children, the source of their power over men. This play shows clearly how men fear the women's ability to take away a man's progeny. *Medea* also provides a quote by Jason that well explains what men thought of women in this society: "Men ought to beget children somewhere else, and there should be no female race."³⁰ This thought is repeated many times throughout Greek literature. Men sincerely wished women were not needed for childbearing, since herein lay their power over men.

In Euripides' play *Hippolytus*, Hippolytus also claims that he wishes women were not needed to make children since women are an economic drain, dangerous when clever, and prone to adultery: "Zeus, why have you allowed to dwell in the light of the sun among mankind, an evil counterfeit? If you wanted to sow a mortal race, you did not need to provide it from women."³¹ All the women in this play cause problems for Hippolytus. This play seems to be a tutorial to men that all women are deceitful and dangerous. Even in her death, Phaedra, Hippolytus's stepmother, seeks to hurt him. This seemingly reflected the belief to Greek men that no woman was safe, not even dead women.³² The lessons from *Hippolytus* seem to be that young wives are not to be trusted, female servants are not to be trusted, and the goddesses are vengeful if not properly honored.³³ The entire play screams distrust and fear of women by men. By viewing this play, Greek men would be reminded to keep a close eye on all their women because not only wives were dangerous.

³⁰ Euripides, *Medea* (431 BCE), 569-75 G.

³¹ Euripides, *Hippolytus* (428 BCE), 616-55.G.

³² Nicole Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987), 29.

³³ Zeitlin, 240.

In the play *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes, women take control of the Acropolis and withhold sexual favors from their men in order to end the Peloponnesian War. The women use cunning and sex to control their men: this was obviously something the men would have feared. The women in the play were able to get together and plot against the men in part because they left them unsupervised.³⁴ In essence, the whole event could have been prevented by keeping closer control on women, which seems to be a lesson of the play. Additionally, men were afraid that women were insatiable for sex and since men did not want to be controlled sexually by their wives they used hetaerae (courtesans) instead: “Besides, isn’t a hetaera more well-intentioned than a wedded wife? Yes, far more, and most understandably. For a wife remains at home contemptuous because of the law, but a companion knows that a man must be bought by her attentions or she will need to go and find another.”³⁵ By not wanting women to be able to control them with sex, men prove again that they fear what women could do with that power, withhold the production of needed paternally secure heirs.³⁶

Although *Lysistrata* is a comedy, it seems to be yet another warning to men to keep a close watch on their women. In fact, the most misogynistic aspect of this play lies in its portrayal of women as having power over men. Since this is a comedic play, Aristophanes, and Greek men in general, make the connection to the absolute

³⁴ Arlene W. Saxonhouse, “Public and Private: The Paradigm’s Power.” in *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*, eds. Barbara Gulick et al., 1-9 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 3.

³⁵ Amphis, *Fr. IPCG.G.*, (4th c BCE).

³⁶ Zeitlin, 4-5.

unsuitability for women to truly hold power over men. Only in a comedy could it be believed that women could run the city.³⁷

Aeschylus's tragedy, *Agamemnon*, provides a definitive example for how women are valued less than men. In restitution to the goddess Artemis for hunting in her sacred forest, Agamemnon was forced to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to obtain favorable winds to sail to Troy at the start of the Trojan War.³⁸ As in the myth of Pandora, a man offends the gods (Prometheus the Titan and Agamemnon) and women are blamed or receive the punishment (Pandora and Iphigenia). This shows the worth of women in society in its most basic form. Agamemnon insulted Artemis, therefore punishment is needed, but men are too important to be killed. In place of the male criminal, an innocent woman can take the place of sacrificial victim.³⁹ Aeschylus makes clear that Greeks thought enough of women to use as sacrifice, but that men are too important to kill when a woman is around to take their place.

Aeschylus also uses his play, *Agamemnon*, to show the archetypal dangerous woman. For the ten years between the killing of her daughter and her husband's return home, Agamemnon's wife Clytemnestra has been vowing revenge on her husband for her daughter's death. When Agamemnon returns with the Trojan princess Cassandra as his new concubine, Clytemnestra is even further enraged and promptly, viciously, kills both Agamemnon and Cassandra. While modern readers may interpret this as Agamemnon's just reward for his many sins, Greek men would have viewed it as the over-emotional,

³⁷ Saxonhouse, 4.

³⁸ Loraux, 32.

³⁹ Loraux, 32.

vengeful capacity of women, motivated by thwarted motherhood: control over her child had been taken away from her.

Aeschylus wrote a particularly derisive statement about women in his play, *Seven Against Thebes*, “I would not choose to live with the female sex either in bad times nor during a welcome peace While affairs outside are going so far as possible in our favour, we are destroyed from within by them- that’s what you get from living with a woman.”⁴⁰ Once again, we are shown the absolute disgust men have for women, hoping to rid themselves of the need for women.

In Classical Athens women had very few rights and ways of expressing themselves. Several quotes from classical Greek literature emphasized the lack of a woman’s ability to even leave the home. Medea, in the play of the same name by Euripides, has a speech bemoaning the dangers of childbirth without the glory men receive in their battles: “Of all creatures who live and have intelligence we women are the most miserable People say that we women lead a life without danger inside our homes, while men fight in war; but they are wrong. I would rather serve three times in battle than give birth once.”⁴¹ In Sophocles’ play *Tereus*, Procne asserts the shock that marriage caused for women, even stating that women must “praise our lot and pretend that all is well.”⁴² Xenophon argued that women should be married young so they can be easily trained by their husbands to run the inside of their home and then stay there.⁴³

⁴⁰ Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes* (467 BCE), 181-202 G.

⁴¹ Euripides, *Medea*, 203-51.G.

⁴² *Tereus* by Sophocles. *Fr. 583 Radt. G.*, (5th c BCE).

⁴³ Fantham, 71.

Xenophon continues to say that women are meant for this role because the gods saw fit to make women weak, scared, and small-minded while men are strong, brave, and intelligent.⁴⁴ This predisposition for men to control their fear of women was clearly evidenced by their desire to have women remain uneducated, marry young, and not have much opportunity to see men (or people in general) outside their immediate family.⁴⁵

Not just in mythology and literature were women shown to be very frightening, but also in real life. Perhaps the most famous and illustrative example of frightening real-life women is told by the historian Herodotus. Herodotus wrote in one of his histories that following a disastrous battle of the Athenians against Aegina, the widows used the brooches from their clothing to stab the lone male survivor to death in questioning where their husbands were. Herodotus claims that the style of dress was changed for women after that so as to not need brooches.⁴⁶ This story showed men that they needed to be careful of over-emotional women or, more to their way of thinking, of women altogether, because otherwise they might resort to violence in order to get their way. Also, this shows men that women must be carefully controlled so as to not give them access to weapons.

Perhaps in an effort to further suppress women in Greek society, Pericles (as quoted by Thucydides) says to Athenian women, “There will be great respect ... for whom there is the least renown among men, whether for virtue or for blame.”⁴⁷ This is

⁴⁴ Xenophon, 6.17-10.13.

⁴⁵ Fantham, 70.

⁴⁶ Fantham, 71.

⁴⁷ Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War* (431 BCE), II.45.

yet another way that men hoped to neutralize women: by keeping women from trying to achieve recognition they might keep even greater control over them.⁴⁸ Fifth-century Athens' democratic society furthers this suppression of women. Pericles reaffirms the belief that Athenian men were indebted to their society which they fulfilled through service for the city and this required men to attend duties outside their home. This forced their women to aid men by retreating into the home and attending the home and family's needs, intrinsically cutting women off from sources of power in society and government.

Thus women were separated from society very literally. Women were also purposely uneducated and forced to remain illiterate. The reasons for this are very clear to Greek men: "A man who teaches a woman to write should recognize that he is providing poison to an asp."⁴⁹ This is a comprehensible warning to any man who defies tradition and educates women, because they will make him regret it. Women have very little to look forward to in this society, and this was at least recognized, if not dealt with: "The two best days in a woman's life are when someone marries her and when he carries her dead body to the grave."⁵⁰ While this may seem to be recognition by men of the drudgery or horrors of a woman's life, more likely it was a man re-emphasizing that women are not good for anything. Women had no legal power over their own lives: "For the law expressly forbids children and women from being able to make a contract [about anything worth] more than a bushel of barley."⁵¹ By allowing women control over

⁴⁸ Saxonhouse, 1-2.

⁴⁹ Menander, *Synkrisis I* (4th c BCE), 209-10 Jakel= Fr.702 Kock, G.

⁵⁰ Hipponax, *Fr.68 West G* (6th c BCE).

⁵¹ Isaeus, *10.10.G.* (4th c BCE).

finances, men would be risking women's eventual control over other aspects of their lives. This obviously would have been frightening to Greek, and especially Athenian men.

The anti-woman: Amazons.

All the previous examples, even the mythological, portrayed typical roles of women in Greek society (mothers, daughters, wives). While not flattering in the least, they were thought of most definitely as women. The Amazons were a group of women from mythology that portrayed the ultimate example of dangerous women and yet they were, essentially, not thought of as women at all. Interestingly enough, Homer calls the Amazons, "anti-men," implying woman as either the opposite of or antagonistic to men.⁵² In all the other examples of how men thought about women, there were opinions espoused as to the desire that women were not necessary to propagating children and that in their essence women are not the same as men; however, the idea put forth by Homer furthers this distance in relation to the Amazons. Normal women are separate from men, but Amazon women are so different as to be anti-men.

Fantham states that "Amazon myths of a society ruled by women are a case study in understanding ways in which gender was used to conceptualize central cultural issues and problems in the Classical period."⁵³ Indeed, Lorna Hardwick states that, "the various stories and descriptions shows portrayal of the Amazons in a symmetrical relationship with the way the Greeks perceived their own ethnic identity."⁵⁴ This idea hypothesizes

⁵² Andrew Stewart, "Imag(in)ing the Other: Amazons and Ethnicity in Fifth-Century Athens" *Poetics Today* 16, no. 4 (1995): 576.

⁵³ Fantham, 129.

that the way Greek men viewed Amazon women is intrinsic to understanding Greek men and in essence Greek women as well. In an effort to prove this theory, it is important to examine exactly how Greek men perceived the Amazonian women.

These women were said to be fierce warriors who only used men to procreate female offspring.⁵⁵ If an Amazon bore a male child, he was killed.⁵⁶ By exposing male children, the Amazons were acting in exact opposition to societal regulations where in fact the Greeks preached, “If it is a female, expose it.”⁵⁷ By acting in a way opposed to normal behavior the Amazons provided a very frightening myth for Greek men. The Amazons had almost no use for men and were as fierce in battle as men so they needed no protection.⁵⁸ This myth seems to be evident of a deep-seated fear in men that women do not really need men and could rule society without them.⁵⁹ Note that the most frightening examples of their powers is that of selecting which children were to live, to the prejudice of boys.

Herodotus wrote in his *Histories* of an encounter between the Amazons and Scythian warriors in which they become lovers and the men wish to take the Amazons to wife. The Amazons reply:

⁵⁴ Lorna Hardwick, “Ancient Amazons- Heroes, Outsiders or Women?” *Greece & Rome* 37, no. 1 (1990) : 14-15.

⁵⁵ Hippocratic Corpus, *Articulations* 53 (5th and 4th c BCE).

⁵⁶ Fantham, 9.

⁵⁷ *Oxyrynchus Papyrus*, (1st c BCE), 744.G.

⁵⁸ Hardwick, 16.

⁵⁹ Fantham, 131-134.

“We could not live with your women- our customs are quite different from theirs. To draw the bow, to hurl the javelin, to ride a horse, these are our arts. Of women’s work we know nothing. Your women, on the contrary, do none of these things, but stay at home in their wagons, and never go out to hunt, or to do anything. We should never get along together. But if you truly wish to have us as your wives and will conduct yourselves with strict justice towards us, go home to your parents, ask them to give you your inheritance, and then come back to us, and let us live together by ourselves.”⁶⁰

What men would take from this is that women could not and should not be granted any freedom. Women with too much freedom could end up like the Amazons, ruling society with men acting only as stud horses. Herodotus’ portrayal of these Amazons is not only anti-female, but anti-Greek, “a form of dissent from the conventions of life for Greek women.”⁶¹ Amazons were not only threatening in their anti-Greek femininity but for their battle prowess. This condenses all the fears Greek men had about women, that women would take control over their way of life, and ultimately not need men for anything but procreation.

In an early fourth century BCE funeral oration the essence of Greek men’s views of Amazons is made abundantly clear: “They were considered men for their high courage, rather than women for their sex... by their disasters rather than their bodies they were deemed women.”⁶² Simply put, because the Amazons acted in a way opposite to traditional Greek women they were viewed as men, not women, their physique

⁶⁰ Herodotus, *Histories* (5th c BCE), 4.114.

⁶¹ Hardwick, 17.

⁶² Lysias, *Funeral Oration* (4th c BCE): 2.4-6.

notwithstanding. When the Amazons' misfortunes were considered, however, they were once again believed to be women, by the sheer incompetence and emotionalism they displayed. This not only insulted the Amazon women but made failure an intrinsic attribute of womanhood. The Amazons were considered barbaric, wild, and immature by Greek men. They represent women untamed by men and in that way cannot be considered true women. It is only when an Amazon submits fully to a man that she can be considered a true woman.⁶³

The medicine of the Hippocratic Corpus.

Many of the aspects of Classical Greek culture are most clearly seen in their medical texts. The most popular, respected, and influential works were those of the Hippocratic Corpus. These are medical treatises collected during the fifth century BCE in Greece and written in a style associated with the famous physician Hippocrates.⁶⁴ In Greece women were not supposed to be physically examined by men, their husbands included, let alone doctors (strangers). Since men were not allowed to view female anatomy the Hippocratics derived their medical knowledge from their traditional practice of whole-body study. The Hippocratics believed that by studying all symptoms (psychological, physical, and superstitious) they could accurately diagnose and treat the problem.⁶⁵ This allowed doctors to treat women without having to know what their internal or even external anatomy actually looked like or how it functioned in reality, only how the surrounding evidence seemed to theoretically work with medical

⁶³ Stewart, 584.

⁶⁴ Fantham, 184.

⁶⁵ Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine* (London: Routledge, 2004), 57.

expectations. In regards to women, the doctors were of course forced to rely on only a verbal description of any medical issues. While Hippocratic physicians were able to physically examine men, they still relied heavily on the whole-body diagnosis. They also regularly saw inside of men treating war wounds; although this did not give much time for study, they still had some idea of internal anatomy that they lacked for women. The actual difference between men and women patients is that the Hippocratic doctors did rely on observation of men, and just used theoretical ideas for women.

In the Hippocratic Corpus, many of the cases written of show medical, therefore scientific, proof for women being more emotional than men, as well as being prone to madness: “There is a thick vein in each breast. These contain the greatest portion of intelligence...In one who is about to go mad the following is a warning indication: blood collects in the breasts.”⁶⁶ Men believed women’s bodies in general were prone to excessive fluid because “she is more porous, draws more moisture and draws it with a greater speed from her belly to her body than does a man.”⁶⁷ Because of this predilection towards excessive porosity, women were more inclined to collect too much blood in the breasts, and therefore go mad. This medical explanation supports the cultural claims of women being more inclined towards excessive emotion. While unflattering toward women, it gave men a medical excuse for any woman’s irrationally emotional behavior. In this way, men were able to keep women from attempting to gain power by providing a medical reason that men were made emotionally and physically superior to women and therefore better able to lead.

⁶⁶ Hippocratic Corpus, *Epidemics II.*, Vi.19 and 32.

⁶⁷ Hippocratic Corpus, *Diseases of Women*, 1.1.

According to the Corpus, women could rid themselves of this excessive blood (i.e. madness) in their monthly courses. Menstruation evened out a woman's disproportionate moisture. When a woman did not menstruate normally, the blood would accumulate in other parts of the body and cause serious consequences for her health and well-being. The Corpus claimed that this accumulation might cause physical problems but most likely resulted in deviant and emotional behavior. In fact, virgins were said to be prone to suicide because of the extra blood that would accumulate around their hearts.⁶⁸ The cure for such problems was simple, intercourse: "Another point about women: if they have intercourse with men their health is better than if they do not," allowing for the excessive fluid to be siphoned off.⁶⁹ This innocuous point also gave medical backing to the idea that marrying off girls young was the key to keeping them healthy in addition to the obvious desire for production of children since, according to men, that was all women were needed for.

The Hippocratic Corpus was very decisive in its diagnosis of erratic behavior in women being due not only to defective menstruation, but, more important, to her "wandering womb." Women are inherently wet, according to the Corpus, so if their womb were to become dry it could become attracted to other organs to ease its thirst. If the womb draws moisture from the liver, heart, brain, or diaphragm "a woman could become voiceless, lose consciousness"⁷⁰ Of course, in keeping with tradition, the Hippocratics claim the source for the dryness of her womb is lack of sex, "If suffocation occurs suddenly, it will happen especially to young women who do not have intercourse

⁶⁸ Fantham, 187.

⁶⁹ Hippocratic Corpus, *On the Generating Seed and the Nature of the Child*, 4.

⁷⁰ Fantham, 188.

and to older women rather than young ones.”⁷¹ This scientific proclamation gives men the right they desire to suggest sex as a cure-all for most of women’s healthcare needs. This of course makes a woman even more dependent on her husband in order to stay healthy through the service of heterosexual intercourse that only men could provide. This made sex an act of hygiene for women, not a source of pleasure.

In addition to sex being a healthy activity for controlling women’s tendencies toward excessive emotions and other health issues, the Hippocratic Corpus claimed that the best prescription for women was to conceive and bear children: “a woman who has never given birth suffers more intensely and more readily from menstruation than a woman who has given birth to a child.”⁷² Once again, medical evidence supports men’s goals in the production of heirs but claims that it is medically beneficial to women to bear children. It would have been important to give women more reason to want to conceive children, and by claiming it as a health necessity, men may have thought they offered a good argument.

A very interesting component of the Hippocratic theories was that woman controlled whether or not she conceived. For the Hippocratics', the man's seed was the critical element in conception. The woman contributed only the space to grow the child and the *menses*, or the material they believed nourished the child. It was the man's contribution to give the resulting embryo its human form. The woman was seen more as a place of gestation, but she could accept or reject the implanting of the male seed.⁷³ This is precisely the example that proves conception is the key to understanding how men think

⁷¹ Hippocratic Corpus, *On Diseases of Women II*, 125.

⁷² Hippocratic Corpus, *Mul*, 1.1 (viii.10.1).

⁷³ Hippocratic Corpus, *Nature of the Child* 14-27.

about women.⁷⁴ Menstruation does give much insight into the reasoning behind men's ability to control women through medical beliefs. The idea concerning who held the power of conception places much power in woman:

“When a woman has intercourse, if she is not going to conceive, then it is her practice to expel sperm produced by both partners whenever she wishes to do so. If however she is going to conceive, the sperm is not expelled, but remains in the womb. For when the womb has received the sperm it closes up and retains it, because the moisture causes the womb's orifice to contract. Then both what is provided by the man and what is provided by the woman is mixed together.”⁷⁵

This very obviously endows women with the power over successful conception, and this is definitely reason enough to fear women and to want to control them. All the societal constraints placed on women to keep them without power, education, or support were created for the very purpose of making woman absolutely dependent on man. The medicine confirming the reasoning for these limitations would only make men more inclined to hold absolute power over their women. In this way the men may be able to manipulate the women into wanting to allow their sperm to remain in her womb and contributing the “sperm” of her own.

The content of Hippocratic medical teachings regarding women reinforces the societal demand for men to be claim agency in every instance they could. The medicine repeatedly gives “proof” for why women are predisposed to be physically and mentally

⁷⁴ For an alternate view of Greek medical beliefs concerning women's role in conception see Susan Guettel Cole, *Landscape, Gender and Ritual Space: The Ancient Greek Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004): 174-177. It is the beliefs of the Hippocratics', who held the most influence in Classical medicine, that is most important to this thesis. Although other opinions existed, it is my argument that the Hippocratic opinions were most influential in the culture.

⁷⁵ Hippocratic Corpus: *On the Generating Seed and the Nature of the Child*, 5.

incapable of rational thought and behavior. Indeed the medical science regarding conception being in a woman's control is yet another reason for men to fear women's potential power, violence, and independence. Men wanted power and they wanted women to believe themselves born incapable of being in charge. This was an additional motive to keep women uneducated. If women understood their power over conception, they could wield their power in potentially dangerous ways, denying men their most important desire, children.

Conclusions.

Greek men, especially Athenian men, were scared of women, and while they may not have been completely conscious of that fact, their mythology, literature, medicine, and history show that women were people who potentially wielded great power and were so emotional that they used that power destructively. Men obviously understood that women could be cunning and intelligent and took steps to prevent them from obtaining any real power. Men took pains to show women as emotional instead of rational in order to downplay their true abilities and create reasons why men should remain wholly in power. This would not have occurred if not for a fear that women could be more powerful than men and with greater predilection for revenge.

Men thought about Greek women quite often. This is probably because they were such an unknown factor. Women were feared for their potential power in creating life, for their cunning, revengeful, deceitful, and emotionally driven natures. At least this is how men saw women. When a group of people is feared it is necessary to suppress them. With women remaining uneducated they could not discover their own powers, and with women being separated from men they could not be tempted to betray their husbands.

Most of Greek culture focused on women who overstepped their bounds. By having a culture that did not and could not speak up about honorable women⁷⁶ they kept the fear of evil women at the front of the minds of men, as Pericles observed: “the greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men, whether they are praising you or criticizing you.”⁷⁷ By being constantly confronted with the possible and inherent dangers of women, men were able to easily continue their campaign of negative propaganda against women and for themselves. Of all the things that men feared about women, the worst was their power to deny men offspring.

⁷⁶ By law decent women could only be mentioned by their relationship to men (i.e. daughter of X or wife of X).

⁷⁷ Thucydides, 151.

Chapter 2: Hellenistic Alexandria

The time period between Classical Greece and the early Imperial period in Rome (323 to 30 BCE) was dominated by the Hellenistic culture. The period was greatly affected by the lands conquered by Alexander the Great, most especially Alexandria, the city he built up in Egypt. Although the culture and medicine of this era is important and fascinating, it is not the focus of this study. It is necessary, however, to provide some of the changes in culture and medicine that paved the way for the Roman views that are vital to this thesis. The Hellenistic era provided a transition between Greek and Roman culture.

The culture of Hellenistic women in Alexandria.

Women living in the classical Greek world were entrenched in tradition and immured by convention. Women in the Hellenistic age, especially those who travelled with their husbands to far-off lands, were no longer held captive by customary views of womanhood. Indeed they were often greatly affected by the new people and cultures they lived in. Without examples of what they should do and how they should act, Greek women became free for the first time to change, in both behavior and expectations.⁷⁸ The city that had the most effect on Roman culture and medicine was Alexandria, in Egypt.

Alexandria was a city founded by Alexander the Great in 331 BCE during his conquest of the known world. Alexander was a Macedonian King who conquered lands

⁷⁸ Fantham, 140.

from Greece to Persia, Egypt, Afghanistan, and India. These vast lands encompassed a huge variety of cultures, languages, and knowledge bases that before Alexander had barely come into contact with the Greeks. After Alexander's death the cultures merged through the Greek rule imposed by his successors. Alexander's successor in Egypt was his general, Ptolemy I Soter, who took as his capital Alexandria. The city became the epitome of a cosmopolitan Hellenistic center since people from all over the empire traded with or traveled to Alexandria in the Hellenistic era.

The life of women began to change in Hellenistic Alexandria and presaged the Imperial Roman culture of women to come. Women were not shut up in their homes and separated from men any longer. Women who chose to work outside the home were "noted with admiration in the historical sources."⁷⁹ There were even famous women artists, the most notable of the time being Laia of Cyzicus, who remained unmarried and commanded higher prices for her portrait work than any other artist of the period.⁸⁰ Theocritus's *Odes* portray women as free to move about the city on their own and address strange males in public without a stain upon their character.⁸¹ Women could talk about sex (at least in literature) without being portrayed as whores. Most obviously different from the previously Greek views, women in the Hellenistic world could be and were talked of in public in their own right, named and honored.

Women also were no longer forced to remain illiterate. In the atmosphere of the obsession with obtaining knowledge, women were apparently not completely removed.

⁷⁹ Fantham, 140.

⁸⁰ Pliny, *Natural History* (77-79 CE), 53.147-8.

⁸¹ Theocritus, *Odes* (3rd c BCE), 15.44-71.

Terra cotta figurines from the Hellenistic era repeatedly show the normality of women as literate by portraying them with scrolls.⁸² Women developed independence in their daily lives and often used writing to convey it.⁸³ In fact, some women even traveled to festivals in order to recite their own poetry. One woman, Aristodama, was awarded honors for her poetry celebrating the city, an award usually reserved for men.⁸⁴ Several female poets are noted for their skills in this time; however, only fragments remain of their works (Erinna of Teos, Nossis of Locri, Anyte of Tegea, Corinna of Tanagra).⁸⁵ Some women (Lasthenia of Mantinea and Axiothea of Philius) even had the opportunity to study at Plato's Academy.⁸⁶ Hipparchia famously left her family to learn Cynic philosophy with Crates of Thebes. While her family disapproved she still managed to leave them and live a philosophical existence with the man of her choosing.⁸⁷

Berenice II was an erudite Queen, the wife of Ptolemy III Euergetes, the third ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt. Callimachus's poem "Lock of Berenice" was dedicated to her. The poem is filled with references and allusions to astronomical, mythical, and historical matters that the author evidently expected Berenice to understand and value. Only an educated person would be expected to appreciate such references, and Berenice was such a one.

⁸² Fantham, 142.

⁸³ See examples of such in the following: Die Inschriften von Priene 208; *P. Elephantinus I*; *P. Enteuxis* 82; *UPZ* 1.59, *Select Papyri* 92; *P. Enteuxis* 26; *Diodorus Siculus* 1.80.3-6; *P. Oxyrhynchus* 4.744.1-10.

⁸⁴ *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* 3 532.

⁸⁵ Fantham, 163-7.

⁸⁶ Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum* (3rd c BCE), 3.46, 4.2.

⁸⁷ Diogenes Laertius, 6.96-98.

The center of this cosmopolitan atmosphere was at the famous Library of Alexandria. The goal of the Library was “To collect...all the books in the world.”⁸⁸ So intent were the Ptolemies on collecting all the world’s literary achievements that they went to extremes in their quest. Galen told of a law that was created to force all ships entering Alexandria to be searched for texts. If any texts were found they were confiscated and taken to the library to be copied. The copies were given back to the ships and the originals were kept at the Library. Aristotle said, “All men by nature desire to know.”⁸⁹ As the foremost academic leading off the Hellenistic age, Aristotle’s belief was proven by the drive to accumulate all knowledge and by the sheer volume of people who congregated at the Library of Alexandria.

The Library was not only intent on collecting books, but also collecting the greatest intellectuals of the day. The Library enticed intellectuals from across the empire to join the Library as members. As members the scholars were appointed by the Ptolemies for life. There were generally thirty to fifty men (no women) appointed as Mouseion members. This appointment included a generous salary, tax exemptions, free lodging, and free food.⁹⁰ In this way the Ptolemies were able to boast of having some of the greatest thinkers of the Hellenistic period at their disposal. Knowledge was revered and the more knowledge (and the more diversified) the better.

In the Hellenistic period people from many different backgrounds were able to pool their resources at The Library of Alexandria. This allowed the cosmopolitan

⁸⁸ Aristeas, *Letter to Philocrates* (2nd c CE), 9.

⁸⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 980a, 21.

⁹⁰ John Vallance, “Doctors in the Library: The Strange Tale of Apollonius the Bookworm and Other Stories,” in *The Library of Alexandria: Centre of Learning in the Ancient World*, ed. Roy Mcleod, (London: IB Tauris Publishers, 2004), 95.

combination of intellectual resources never seen before. It is thought that the Alexandrian library alone eventually collected some 700,000 scrolls. When Galen recorded that the goal of the Library was to collect “all” the books in the world, he truly meant all. There were no books that were banned from being collected or thought unworthy of collection. The library housed texts from everywhere its keepers could find them. The atmosphere of seeking all knowledge extended to medicine and it is in Alexandria that the greatest contribution to women’s medicine was made.

The medicine of Herophilus of Chalcedon.

Some of the most long-lasting and important scholarly discoveries made in the Hellenistic age came from the doctor Herophilus. Through the culture created by the cosmopolitan grandiosity of the Ptolemies' reign, the greatest and most controversial intellectual work about women was accomplished by Herophilus. The works of Herophilus are famous because of how he accomplished his medical advances, dissection and vivisection of human beings. Rebecca Flemming states that “the undertaking of systematic human dissection for the first time was a radical one, and did entail breaking with traditions of a rather stronger, more socially and religiously entrenched, variety than those which shaped the medical community.” Indeed she goes on to say that the climate which allowed the overturning of these entrenched positions is directly related to the “political realities of the world shaped by Alexander’s conquests.”⁹¹ There are many reasons why such bans were overturned. First, the Ptolemies provided condemned men, alive, to Herophilus for his vivisection work. Also, the success of the Ptolemies in attracting and cultivating scholars who were committed to innovation formed an

⁹¹ Rebecca Flemming, “Empires of Knowledge: Medicine and Health in the Hellenistic World,” in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, ed. Andrew Erskine (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 453.

atmosphere of determination to further their advances in any way possible. David Lindberg states that only the Ptolemaic dynasty was powerful enough to “violate traditional burial taboos” which helped to elevate the “significance of anatomical knowledge.”⁹² Heinrich von Staden, the preeminent Hellenistic medicine scholar, also believes that the Ptolemies' own break with Greek taboos (namely incestuous royal marriages), provided an atmosphere which allowed for more taboo-breaking. One final reason allowing the change in medical practices is that Egyptian practice of mummification became a legitimizing “precedent and proof that a cadaver may be opened with impunity.”⁹³

The superstitious atmosphere of the Hellenistic world's *Zeitgeist* was temporarily suspended. For a brief moment in time, Herophilus was able to overcome superstitions relating to the sanctity of the human body and make groundbreaking discoveries about the makeup of humans. Perhaps the biggest criticism aimed at his works in succeeding centuries was that he only sought to answer old questions and did not challenge the presumptions from which those questions arose.⁹⁴ For example, Herophilus discovered that the female womb was in fact anchored to the body. Women did not have a wandering womb like the Hippocratics claimed. However, Herophilus only stated that the womb did not move and did not seek to question why the Hippocratics believed it did. It was such a huge leap just to make the physical discoveries associated with dissection, however, that

⁹² David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, Prehistory to AD 1450* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 119.

⁹³ Heinrich von Staden, “Body and Machine: Interactions between Medicine, Mechanics, and Philosophy in Early Alexandria” in *Alexandria and Alexandrianism*, eds. Marion True and Kenneth Hamma (Malibu, CA: Getty Publications, 1996), 86.

⁹⁴ Flemming (2003), 452.

further intellectual questioning would have been astounding. It was enough to dissect and discover; questioning could be left to future scholars.

The fact that Herophilus did not question his findings but only sought knowledge is indicative of the era in which he lived. The Ptolemies' drive to amass all knowledge in the Library of Alexandria, at all costs, parallels the decision to use dissection and vivisection to gain knowledge of the human body. No one person could study all the scrolls accumulated at the Library just as no one doctor could collect information on the entire body and also interpret its data against all previous assumptions. The overturning of traditions and superstitions allowed Herophilus to accumulate vast stores of knowledge that could not be refuted for well over a millennium, since no known dissection was accomplished again for many centuries.⁹⁵

Herophilus was apparently the first court-sponsored physician in Alexandria. Although most famous for the mere use of dissection and vivisection, he is one of the early founders of the scientific method. This is obvious in his use of empirical knowledge in medicine. While seemingly obvious for modern readers, ancient scholars thought it contradicted rationality to use the experimental method; only the humoral method and whole-body study (as preached by the Hippocratics) were thought to be useful in medicine.⁹⁶

Herophilus' most important work as it relates to this thesis is his work on anatomy. Herophilus discovered and named many parts of the human body that were heretofore unknown. Most important to this study are his discoveries on the anatomy of

⁹⁵ von Staden, 87.

⁹⁶ Paul T. Keyser and Georgia Irby-Massie, "Science, Medicine, and Technology" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hellenistic World*, ed. Glenn R. Bugh (Virginia: Cambridge UP, 2006), 253.

the female reproductive system, which paved the way for Soranus' discoveries.

Herophilus distinguished the female ovaries and Fallopian tubes and compared them to the male testicles: "In females the two 'testicles' are attached to each of the two shoulders of the uterus, one on the right, the other on the left... easily damageable in their flesh, just like the testicles of males."⁹⁷ He discovered that the womb/uterus was stationary, which completely obliterated the Hippocratic theory of the wandering uterus as cause of female hysteria. Indeed, his discoveries of the female anatomy led to the completely new form of medicine and of gynecology pioneered by Soranus of Ephesus in the first century CE, which were based on Herophilus's dissection notes.

Herophilus made claims from his discoveries in anatomy that the male and female bodies were not as dissimilar as the Hippocratics believed. In fact, Herophilus says, "there is no affection peculiar to women, excepting conceiving, nourishing what has been conceived, giving birth, "ripening" the milk, and the opposites of these."⁹⁸ Simply put, Herophilus believed that the only difference between men and women is that women could conceive, bear, and nourish children from their bodies, while men could not. While this sounds like a big difference to modern readers it would have been astonishing for those used to thinking of women as a completely separate species from men (as discussed in Chapter 1) to be thought of as so similar. This newly discovered physiological similarity was reflected in the new, more public, "man-like" lives led by Hellenistic women.

⁹⁷ Galen, *On the Seed* (2nd c CE), 11.1.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Soranus, *Gynecology* (2nd c CE), III.3.

Another scholar whose life and experiences greatly reflected the changes between Greek and Roman society is that of Hagnodice, the first female obstetrician. Hagnodice studied under Herophilus in Alexandria then practiced medicine in Athens during the fourth century BCE. Although Hagnodice had to dress as a man to secretly earn her education in medicine, she became essentially an educated mid-wife, assisting in child-birth: “when she heard a woman was in labor-pains, she used to go to her. And when the woman refused to entrust herself [to Hagnodice], thinking she was a man, Hagnodice lifted her undergarment and revealed she was a woman. In this way she used to cure women.”⁹⁹ As will be discussed in the next chapter, Soranus elevated the opinion of midwives, believing they could be very useful as long as they were knowledgeable. It is quite possible that Hagnodice began a tradition of celebrated woman healers that were noticed by Soranus and venerated for their knowledge and skill. Of course Hagnodice’s education would not have been possible without the atmosphere of cosmopolitan learning available in Hellenistic Alexandria.

Conclusions.

Women in the Hellenistic world had more freedom and education than women in Classical Greece. They also were not regarded in the same fearful and derogatory way that Greek women had been. The works of Herophilus were made possible only through the atmosphere of the Hellenistic world of cosmopolitanism brought into existence through the patronage of the wealthy and powerful Ptolemaic dynasty at the incomparable Library of Alexandria. The Library itself has become one of history’s greatest mysteries and is known for producing the intellectual atmosphere conducive to

⁹⁹ Hyginus, *Fabulae* (1st c CE), 274.10-11.

aiding in the leaps in knowledge during the Hellenistic age. The Library fostered broad-based knowledge and diversification and created an atmosphere rich in intellectual scholarship never before possible. The effect of this rich and diverse educational ambiance was the knowledge gained through the dissection performed by Herophilus. The findings concerning female anatomy made by Herophilus had immediate results in the society around him, helping to free Greek women from men's fear of the alien and thus to become part of active mainstream society. But they also had a profound influence on the medicine of Soranus and the culture of Roman women.

Chapter 3: Rome

Women's roles changed in many ways in the 500 years between the Classical period in Greece and the early Imperial period in Rome. The values of Roman culture were in some ways a rebellion against all things Greek. Romans believed the Greeks to be philosophers and artists while Romans thought of themselves as serious engineers and masters of warfare. These differences led to great changes in how women were viewed in society. While Athenian women were once forced to stay away from men and strangers in their own part of the home, in Roman society women were expected to socialize with their husbands at banquet.¹⁰⁰ While men once sought to banish women from any possibility of power, in Rome women were thought of more as partners than the mere fertile wombs for the procreation of sons as in Greece. Indeed, many "factors converged to turn the energies and care of Romans inward to the family: ethics now focused more on the individual's private obligations... the importance of reciprocal fidelity and affection within marriage and [gave] new attention to the bearing and education of children as well."¹⁰¹ Roman women were not feared in the way women were in Greece. Men wanted their women to reflect positively on their husbands and fathers through being educated, interesting, beautiful, and loyal.¹⁰² This distinct difference in how women

¹⁰⁰ Cornelius Nepos, *Lives* (1st c CE), 6.L.

¹⁰¹ Fantham, 212.

¹⁰² Fantham, 281.

were expected to behave and present themselves in public is reflected in their mythology, culture, medicine, and history, just as in Greece, although with very different results.

The culture of Roman women as portrayed by Roman men.

Many believe that Roman mythology derives almost wholly from earlier Greek counterparts. It is often thought that Roman gods and goddesses are simply Greek deities who have acquired Roman names and continue to have the same attributes: Hera becomes Jupiter, Artemis becomes Diana, Aphrodite becomes Venus, and so on; but Roman versions of these goddesses reveal much about their culture and the differences between Roman and Greek values for women. While Hera was the Greek goddess of women and marriage, she was certainly not a motherly goddess. In Roman culture however, Juno became the goddess of motherhood and the protector of the state, Juno Lucina.¹⁰³ This reveals the concern in Rome for children to be cared for and looked after. It also envisions the state as a child of a protective and nurturing goddess. Obviously in Rome women were thought to possess more power than in Greece, even if it is expressed only through nurturing.

Similar to Hera's changeover to Juno from Greece to Rome is the transformation of the goddess Artemis into Diana. In Greece, Artemis was goddess over the hunt and was most notable for being a perpetual virgin. Stories of her perpetuated the myth of scary, virginal, independent women, as mentioned previously. As Diana, she appropriates more completely the mothering role as the goddess of childbirth, puberty, and courage.¹⁰⁴ She was seen to protect women in order to ensure the preservation of mankind through

¹⁰³Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* (2nd c CE), 16.16.4.

¹⁰⁴ Fantham, 370.

the protection she offered in childbirth. This reveals the more maternal side of Roman culture as well as a lack of fear regarding virginal women.

Most obvious of these changes towards a more maternal and family oriented state in Rome is the very distinct change of Aphrodite to Venus. In Greece, Aphrodite was the goddess of love, sexuality, and beauty, but she was notorious for being a poor mother. Aphrodite emasculates men and threatens marriage and motherhood with unrestrained sexuality in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*.¹⁰⁵ As Venus, however, she is the goddess of fertility, not sexuality. The creation of Venus cults were in fact often founded in reaction to moral predicaments.¹⁰⁶ An example of this is the cult of Venus Obsequens (Venus the obedient), founded on the funds raised from charges of adultery against the women of Rome, in hopes of steering the women back to the right behavior.¹⁰⁷ Another similar cult was that of Venus Venticordia (Venus who turned the hearts of women from lust to purity), focused on managing women's erotic desires through ritual bathing and worship of Venus as a bride.¹⁰⁸ Venus Venticordia promoted the idea of sexuality as a natural and inspirational feminine virtue, but only when it was associated with marriage.

Roman women were often portrayed in funerary statuary as having Venus's fertile body with their own aged faces. Although nudity for respectable women was unheard of, replacement of the body of a human woman with that of an immortal goddess invoked the idea that "rather than suffering the shame of nakedness, the matron's physical

¹⁰⁵ *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, 4th c BCE.

¹⁰⁶ Eve D'Ambra, "The Calculus of Venus: Nude Portraits of Roman Matrons," *Sexuality in Ancient Art*, ed. Natalie Kampe (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 221.

¹⁰⁷ Servius, *ad Aeneidem* (4th c CE), 1.720.

¹⁰⁸ Ovid, *Fasti* (8 CE), 4.133-8.

presence and social status were enhanced by the acquisition of the resplendent divine body, evoking the beauty of the goddess.”¹⁰⁹ By portraying her as the goddess of fertility the family proclaims their deceased mother/wife as having fulfilled her duty to the family and state; she produced heirs and was a respectable wife and mother. This is an excellent example of the collusion between mythology and the artistic evocation of the concept of ideals for womanhood in Roman society.

The most respectable women in Roman society were those who emulated Venus and were successful mothers and honorable wives. The summary of the Roman ideal of woman versus that of the Greek is best written by Plutarch:

“Regarding the virtues of women, Clea, I do not hold the same opinion as Thucydides. For he declares that the best woman is she about whom there is the least talk among persons outside regarding either censure or commendation, feeling that the name of a good woman, like her person, ought to be shut up indoors and never go out. But to my mind Gorgias appears to display better taste in advising that not the form but the fame of a woman should be known to many. Best for all seems the Roman custom, which publicly renders to women, as to men, a fitting commemoration after the end of life.”¹¹⁰

Plutarch employed a brilliantly simple, straightforward cultural morphology of women between Greek and Roman culture. In Greece women were “shut up indoors” but in Rome women were publicly honored for their good deeds. The only part missing from

¹⁰⁹ D’Ambra, 221.

¹¹⁰ Plutarch, “On the Bravery of Women,” in *Moralia*, 242e-243e.

Plutarch's morphology is that women went from being feared in Athens to being respected and honored in Rome.

Roman marriage customs and laws changed from the early formation of their culture of strict *iustum matrimonium* (legally valid marriage) to a freer form by the early Imperial period.¹¹¹ A woman was considered the property, *inpotestate*, of her father or male head of household, *paterfamilias*, until married, when she would then be under the *manus* of her husband. In the case of her father having died, a daughter or wife would be under control of her *tutor*, legal male guardian.¹¹² Even when the woman was widowed, she had to pass into the care of a *tutor*. The traditional form of marriage was *manus*, literally going under the hand of her husband.¹¹³ This is very similar to the Greek tradition. By the early empire, however, women had gained more freedom in marriage and in law.

Although it was always an option for Roman women, by the early empire it became more popular to not enter into *manus* marriage, but instead simply choose to live together. In this way the *patria potestas* stayed with the bride's father instead of her husband. This allowed the woman who was widowed to gain control over her own property by remaining a daughter in the law instead of a wife. She could also gain the position of *tutor* for her own children instead of being required to have a male relative assigned the responsibility.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Ulpian, *Regulae* (2nd c CE), V.2-6.

¹¹² *Justinian's Digest* (6th c CE), 26; Gaius, *Institutes* (161 CE), 142-96.

¹¹³ Gaius, 108-115, 136; Ulpian, 9.

¹¹⁴ Jane Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1991), 13-14.

By 186 BCE it became possible for a husband to allow his wife, *in manu*, to choose her own *tutor*.¹¹⁵ This allowed her more possible freedom by choosing a *tutor* who would benefit her most. Additionally, as a reward and inducement to Roman women to bear more children, when women had three living children they could be released from the necessity of *tutela* under the laws of the *lex Julia* (18 BCE), and the *lex Papia Poppaea* (9 CE). Wealthy women were even able to obtain this freedom from *tutela* without having children,¹¹⁶ as long as they had property of which to dispose. This is quite a bit more freedom than Greek women had access to.

Roman women had legal powers that Greek women did not, including the ability to keep total control of their lives away from their husbands: “If any woman is unwilling to be subjected in this manner (*manus*) to her husband’s marital control, she shall absent herself for three successive nights in every year and by this means shall interrupt his prescriptive rights of each year.”¹¹⁷ Women were also able to break *sponsalia*, an engagement, without any fear of legal reprisal.¹¹⁸

Women also had control over their own property and wealth and the law protected these rights: “Those who seize the property of a wife as a pledge on account of a debt of her husband, or because of some public civil liability which he has incurred, are considered to have been guilty of violence.”¹¹⁹ This protection of a wife’s property was held even in case of divorce: “If a husband in anticipation of a divorce abstracts anything

¹¹⁵ Gaius, 150-4.

¹¹⁶ Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana* (2nd c CE), 55.2; Gaius, 145, 194; Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* (1st c CE), 10.94.

¹¹⁷ “Table VI,” *The Twelve Tables* (450BCE).

¹¹⁸ Justinian, *Digest* 5.1.1

¹¹⁹ Justinian, *Codex* 9.12.1.L.

belonging to his wife, he will be liable to an action for the removal of property.”¹²⁰ This shows the capability of men to allow women access to some freedoms and powers over her life.

In Greece women were only talked about when they were doing something wrong. There are very few stories of well-behaved women from Greek culture. However, in Rome, good women and bad women were talked about. Women were not forced to stay shut up away from society. However, women who stepped beyond the acceptable roles of women in society were denigrated as whores, evil women, and other similar deprecations. The Romans had a very concrete way to decide who was acting normally and who was not in different situations, which is called by modern scholars the “Teratogenic Grid.”¹²¹ This grid addresses sexuality specifically, but has resonances across the culture in every area. The system that governed Roman sexuality was binary. This meant that participants in sexual activity were labeled as either active or passive. The issue was not so much who was involved (age, gender, class) but who was the active or passive member of the encounter. To be active was to be considered the normal course for a man and to be passive was the normal course for a woman.¹²² This obviously makes any passively sexual male abnormal and not only abnormal but unmanly. To be manly, or *virilis*, was the goal for all Roman men. To be unmanned sexually was the ultimate

¹²⁰ Ulpian, 7.2.L.

¹²¹ Holt N. Parker, “The Teratogenic Grid.” in *Roman Sexualities*, eds. Judith Hallet and Marilyn Skinner (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 47.

¹²² Parker (1997), 48.

affront to Roman sensibilities. The inverse, an active female, was equally disturbing, and her manlike aggression made her dangerous.¹²³

The interesting thing about Roman binary sexuality is that it is so complicated. Each orifice can be used passively or actively by men and women. When a man behaves actively sexually, he is fulfilling his role as a *vir*, but when he is passive he is *pathicus*, abnormal.¹²⁴ When a woman is passive sexually she is fulfilling her role as a *femina* or *matrona*, but when she is active a woman becomes a *virago* (war-like woman) or a *moecha* (a whore).¹²⁵ This labeling affects many aspects of Roman culture. The idea of virtue and vice is directly related to this concept. To be virtuous is to be *virilis* and this is typically a virtue only men can earn. Men can have *virtus* by being brave, tough, stoic, and simply “manly.” Men generally earn *virtus* by their conduct outside the bedroom, specifically in the public sphere. However, the same traits associated with public *virtus* are associated with sexual *virtus*. They are interchangeable; if a man has *virtus* in the bedroom he probably has *virtus* in public and vice versa. This is also the case for women. If a woman was passive sexually she was likely passive publicly. Being passive was the goal for respectable Roman *matrona*.¹²⁶

Vice in Roman culture is defined almost wholly by this system of sexuality. By acting in the “wrong” way sexually one is committing vice. If a man loses his *virtus* sexually, or in some other way (weakness in battle, improper professions: gladiator, actor) he is practically unmanned. He literally can lose his status as a man and the

¹²³ Seneca the Younger., *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* (1st c CE), 95.21.

¹²⁴ Parker (1997), 54.

¹²⁵ Parker (1997), 49.

¹²⁶ Parker (1997), 47-9.

privileges that go along with being a man, which is called *infamia*. Becoming an *infamis* would make a man into a woman legally: he could not vote, contest a will, hold public positions, etc. A woman could also be considered an *infamis* and lose some rights.¹²⁷ If a woman were to be active sexually she would be attempting to be a *vir*, but this would be unacceptable to Romans and she would be labeled *virago*, which was negative in society. A woman could also be labeled as *infamis* if she committed adultery; this made her an active persona sexually and she would be ostracized in society and in her family.¹²⁸ When a man was labeled *infamis* he becomes a virtual woman with regards to his rights. When a woman was labeled *infamis* she could lose her dowry, be divorced and made homeless, lose all legal status, and even be allowed to be beaten or killed by her husband.¹²⁹

While the Teratogenic Grid as it is applied to sexuality is in and of itself fascinating, its resonances across the culture are even more so. When women remain passive in life, not just sexually, they are labeled honorable and are respected. However, when women take on an active role sexually or in life in general, they are vilified. It was a fine line to walk in a society that allowed women more rights and access to the public than the Greeks: to champion individual rights and freedoms yet limit how far the freedom went. Some women managed this balancing act and became venerated in Roman society while they lived.¹³⁰ This balancing act is an important point because some of these heroines appear quite proactive, and yet they remain true to the patriarchal values of

¹²⁷ Thomas A. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 65.

¹²⁸ Gardner, 128-9

¹²⁹ Gardner, 129.

¹³⁰ Parker (1997), 59.

Rome. The Roman heroines, diverse as they are, are perfect examples of the definitions of virtue as practiced by women.

1. Strong but passive: *matrona*. Cornelia Africana is remembered as being the perfect example of the virtuous Roman woman.¹³¹ She married and lived happily with her husband, even birthing twelve children. She is particularly remembered for turning down a proposal of marriage from King Ptolemy VIII, instead choosing to honor her late husband by remaining a widow for the rest of her life.¹³² The Romans especially honored her “power of rational endurance” by Cornelia unemotionally honoring her dead sons and husband. Indeed, Cornelia is honored for proclaiming her children (the Gracchi) as “her jewels,” when she was offered a chest of jewels by Ptolemy.¹³³ Finally, Cornelia was honored for being highly educated, studying Latin and Greek languages as well as literature, and being a very compelling writer herself.¹³⁴ By portraying herself as an honorable wife and mother, as rational, intelligent, and educated, Cornelia was the perfect Roman woman. Of course, she was also not overtly active and therefore, non-threatening, which allowed her to be venerated by men.

Livia was the wife of Augustus, the first Roman Emperor. In Roman art and literature Livia serves as a public image for the idealization of Roman womanly qualities, a maternal figure, and ultimately a goddess-like image that alludes to her virtue. Livia’s power in symbolizing the renewal of the Republic with female virtues in public displays had a dramatic effect on the visual representation of future imperial women as ideal,

¹³¹ Augusto Frascchetti, ed. *Roman Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 34-65.

¹³² Fantham, 264.

¹³³ Plutarch, *Life of Tiberius Gracchus* (2nd c CE), 1.2-5. G.

¹³⁴ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* (1st c CE), 4.4 pr., 1st c CE.

honorable mothers and wives of Rome.¹³⁵ She was the first woman to appear on provincial coins in 16 BCE and her portrait images can be chronologically identified partially from the progression of her hair designs, which represented more than keeping up with the fashions of the time, as her depiction with such contemporary details translated into a political statement of representing the ideal Roman woman.¹³⁶ By acting as an honorable wife and mother, and not publicly overstepping her bounds, Livia was deeply respected. This is part of the idea of the Roman Empire as a family: like any good family, it had a mother and father.

2. Proactive strength balanced by respect for patriarchal values: *femina*. In a war between the Romans and Etruscans, twenty captives were taken by the Etruscan King. One hostage was an adolescent girl, Cloelia. She “eluded the guards, swam across the river under a hail of missiles, and brought her company safe to Rome, where they were all restored to their home.”¹³⁷ The king was at first furious that his hostages had escaped, however, his anger turned to admiration of Cloelia’s bravery and ingenuity. He granted her a promise of safety, should she return to his camp, and even swore to return her unharmed with half the other captives when a treaty was solidified. Cloelia returned and stayed with the camp, selecting male hostages to be returned home. The Romans so admired her courage and bravery that they erected an “equestrian statue” of her on the main road into Rome.¹³⁸ The reason she was honored was not wholly her bravery, but Cloelia’s determination to serve Rome itself by going back as a captive. She also earned

¹³⁵ Frascchetti, 100-117.

¹³⁶ Suetonius, *Augustus* 84.1 and *Claudius* 4.1, in *The Twelve Caesars* (121 CE).

¹³⁷ Livy, *History of Rome* (195 BCE), 2.13.

¹³⁸ Pliny the Elder, 34.29.

honor by saving the male hostages, the important hostages. Yet again, it is the balance between active behavior and civic service that allows Cloelia to be honored.

Hortensia earned fame during the late Roman Republic as a skilled orator. She is best known for giving a speech in front of the members of the Second Triumvirate that resulted in the partial repeal of a tax on wealthy Roman women. Perhaps the most important and famous example of the legal power of women in Rome was the repeal of the Oppian Law, led by Hortensia. In 195 BCE a law was enacted as an emergency measure during war to limit women's use of expensive goods. The women of Rome gathered together to fight to repeal the law when twenty years later the crisis had long since passed.¹³⁹ The tax had originally been set to raise money by targeting the 1,400 wealthiest women in Rome. However, after Hortensia's compelling speech, the law was changed to limit the number of women taxed and instead taxed men worth 100,000 sesterce or more.¹⁴⁰ Hortensia was not passive in her defense of women, however, she managed to speak in such way that men listened to her and honored her intelligence and skill in oration: "if we women have not voted any of you public enemies, if we did not demolish your houses or destroy your army or lead another army against you; if we have not kept you from public office or honour, why should we share the penalties if we have no part in the wrongdoing?"¹⁴¹

Although Hortensia is very active in her defense of women, she uses men's views of the proper behavior for women to her advantage. If these women had maintained their passive roles in life, which she claims they have, then why should women be punished? It

¹³⁹ Livy, 34.1. This will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

¹⁴⁰ Lefkowitz, 150.

¹⁴¹ Appian, *Civil Wars* (2nd c CE), 4.32-4.

was a clever argument that allowed Hortensia to straddle the line of activity and passivity. The most beneficial result of Hortensia's interference was that by taxing the men, Romans undoubtedly raised more money for taxes than they would have through the women alone. This ability to protect women but help men is what allowed Hortensia to be honored for her acts.

3. Too proactive: *virago*. Fulvia was an aristocratic Roman woman who is remembered for her political ambition and activity.¹⁴² She is most famous for her activities during her third marriage to Mark Antony and her involvement in the Perusine War of 41-40 BCE. According to the Roman historian Appian, Fulvia was a central cause of the war, due to her jealousy of Antony and Cleopatra's affair in Egypt. Appian claimed she escalated the tensions in Italy in order to draw back Antony's attention. She even raised the money to support eight legions of troops to fight for Antony's rights against Octavian (Augustus) in Rome. After her death due to unknown causes, both Antony and Octavian publicly blamed Fulvia for their troubles and promptly formed a peace treaty: "the death of this turbulent woman, who had stirred up so disastrous a war on account of her jealousy of Cleopatra, seemed extremely fortunate to both of the parties who were rid of her."¹⁴³ Since Fulvia acted in an active, even in a manlike military manner, she overstepped the honorable qualities of women and set herself up for disparagement by all Romans, attacked with defamatory poems with words sexualized because she was a woman.

¹⁴² Frascchetti, 66-81.

¹⁴³ Appian, 4.55.

The anti-woman: Vestal Virgins.

The Vestal Virgins were the priestesses of Vesta, the goddess of the hearth. Their duties included the preservation of the fire sacred to Vesta, collecting water from a sacred spring, making food used in rituals, and caring for sacred objects in the temple's sanctuary.¹⁴⁴ By maintaining Vesta's sacred fire, from which anyone could receive fire for household use, they functioned as an earthly incarnation of Vesta for all of Rome. The benefits for being a Vestal Virgin were immense. They amassed fame and fortune, enjoyed the legal rights of men, and the body of each was considered sacrosanct.¹⁴⁵

The Vestals were chosen between the ages of six and ten and vowed to remain celibate for thirty years. It is odd in a society that valued fertility that the Vestals were so honored for remaining virgins. Indeed, Vesta herself was goddess over hearth, family, and home, so why would Vesta's closest followers not honor the perpetuation of family? Many reasons have been put forth to explain why these women were so honored as virgins. It is possible that the Romans believed the powers associated with fertility were transferred to the state by the women. The fertility would have to go somewhere if not used, and so by remaining virgins their power went toward maintaining the continuation of the state. It is also possible that the women were to remain virgins so that all their attention and energy went to their duties. In this way they could not be swayed to abandon their duties or behave in a less than holy way.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Plutarch, "Numa Pompilius" in *Lives* (1st c CE), 9.5.

¹⁴⁵ *The Twelve Tables* 1.144-5, 3.114; Aulus Gellius, 1.12.9; Plutarch, "Numa" 10.

¹⁴⁶ Holt Parker, "Why were the Vestals Virgins? Or the Chastity of women and the safety of the Roman State," *The American Journal of Philology* 125, no. 4 (2004): 568.

The Vestals' well-being was regarded as essential to the maintenance and security of Rome.¹⁴⁷ This was shown by their nurturing of the sacred fire that could not be allowed to go out. The Vestals were freed of the usual social obligations to marry and raise children, and took a vow of chastity in order to devote themselves to the correct observance of state rituals. By essentially "giving" their fertility to the state, the women ensured Rome's continued prosperity. Vestals were even granted rights like the men in society. These rights included a reserved place of honor at public games and performances (like the honored men in the city); they were free to own property, make a will, and vote; their word was trusted without question; they were entrusted with important wills and state documents, like public treaties.¹⁴⁸ Their person was sacrosanct: death was the penalty for injuring them bodily; and they could free condemned prisoners and slaves by touching them.¹⁴⁹ This elevated the Vestals above even men's powers to a level comparative to sacred objects.¹⁵⁰ What is important to note, is that by renouncing their femininity by swearing a vow of chastity, the Vestals are somehow exempt from the traditional passivity required for women. It is only through her sacrifice of traditional feminine virtue of motherhood (literally ceasing to be a woman in the eyes of Roman men), that the Vestal was allowed such freedom.

The punishment for failure was as strong as the reward for fidelity: if the Vestals broke their vows of chastity, they were to be buried alive. The chastity and therefore purity of the Vestals exemplified the inviolability of Rome itself, so by breaking that

¹⁴⁷ Parker (2004), 564.

¹⁴⁸ Plutarch, "Numa," 10.

¹⁴⁹ Plutarch, "Numa" 10.

¹⁵⁰ Plutarch, "Numa," 10.3; Parker (2004), 574.

barrier the Vestal was theoretically exposing Rome to invasion. The physical body of the Vestal represented a “microcosm of the city,” so the penetration of the Vestal was representative of the destruction of Rome.¹⁵¹ Holt Parker raised the question as to how could a city sacrifice its symbol of inviolability: does this not murder the state itself? He argues the stain on the state created by the bodily treason committed by the Vestal is ritualistically cleansed by their death.¹⁵² So important was this rite of cleansing for the state that not even the family of the Vestal protested.¹⁵³

In much the same way as the Amazons were thought of as completely opposite from normal women in society, so the Vestal Virgins were. However, where the Amazons were denigrated for their behavioral differences and refusal to act like “normal” Greek women, Vestal Virgins were lauded for their sacrifice of typical Roman femininity. Vestals gave their fertility to the state and were honored and rewarded for it. Indeed, the Vestals were so integral to Rome that ancient Roman historians referred to Vesta as the reason why it would be impossible to ever abandon Rome.¹⁵⁴ Roman poets used Vesta as a metonym for Rome, so integral was she to Roman life.¹⁵⁵ The Vestal Virgins were honored in such a way as normal Roman women were not, by according them the privileges of men. This distinction between the Amazons, although mythical, whose refusal to conform to male norms of Greek women’s lives engendered fear in the Greek male, and the Roman Vestal Virgins, is that the Vestals, while not acting in a

¹⁵¹ Parker (2004), 570-1.

¹⁵² Parker (2004), 575.

¹⁵³ Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* (1st c CE), 1.3.

¹⁵⁴ Livy, 5.52.6-7.

¹⁵⁵ Horus, *Odes* (23 BCE), 3.5.11-12; Vergil, *Appendix Vergiliana* (1st c CE), 1.292.

normal feminine manner, were still following the dictates of male society. Therefore, by being virtuous, honorable, and chaste, Vestals were able to enjoy a state of freedom that the child-bearing Roman matrons, praised though they were, could not. The Vestals give themselves completely and passively to the customs of the male state, while the Amazons attack it.

The medicine of Soranus of Ephesus.

The more public lives of women in Rome are also reflected in their medicine. Soranus was a Greek-born and Greek-trained doctor who moved to Alexandria to practice medicine and then concluded his career in Rome. He gained new appreciation and understanding of women through living in Alexandria and Rome and this shows in his medicine.¹⁵⁶ For example, he acknowledges the ability and usefulness of midwives in women's healthcare where no other physicians had done the same before him or for centuries after him. In this and in many ways, Soranus championed women, as will become clear below. Soranus worked in a period several centuries after Herophilus, who was the first doctor to use dissection to learn about anatomy and physiology.¹⁵⁷ The knowledge gained about women from his predecessor's work allowed Soranus to create a different philosophy than the Hippocratics regarding his gynecological and obstetrical science.

The most important aspect of Soranus's philosophy that set him apart from other schools of medicine is his whole-hearted belief that superstition had no place in the practice of medicine. Soranus said the best midwife is the one without superstition "so as

¹⁵⁶ Oswei Temkin, *Soranus' Gynecology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1956), xxiii.

¹⁵⁷ Fantham, 196.

to not overlook what is expedient on account of a dream or omen or some customary rite or popular cult.”¹⁵⁸ This very succinctly excludes religion and superstition from the practice of medicine, and by default defines Soranus's own practice as a science and that of others (specifically the Hippocratics) as folklore. Although Soranus rejected the idea of superstition in the practice of medicine, he did state that women who believed a superstition to be in their favor should not be dissuaded of it. By belief alone, Soranus argued, a woman could improve her chances of getting better, and indeed belief could really make a better patient if it kept her calm.¹⁵⁹

Soranus confronted many of the issues set forth in the Hippocratic Corpus and refuted them. It is interesting that Soranus did not just record his opinion of what was correct, but offered reasoning as to why previous ideas were wrong. This fits in with the Roman value of reason triumphing over the Greeks’ superstitions. When confronting the Hippocratic idea of the “wandering womb” Soranus simply stated that “the womb is not an animal as was thought by some people.”¹⁶⁰ Soranus offered up reasoning gained through Herophilus's dissections and vivisections, knowing full-well that the womb is stationary by design, a fact which the Hippocratics could not have known since they did not practice dissection or vivisection. Soranus did not believe that dissection was appropriate for learning how to treat illness, but credited it with being able to combat superstition. Indeed Soranus exclaims that by being open to dissection “we shall not arouse the suspicion that we reject through ignorance something which is accepted as

¹⁵⁸ Soranus, I.4.

¹⁵⁹ Soranus, I.6.

¹⁶⁰ Soranus, 153.

useful.”¹⁶¹ In this statement, Soranus separates himself from the Hippocratics and their refusal to use information available to them: namely the reality of the female body.

Soranus confronted the Hippocratic belief that menstruation was beneficial to women’s health. He believed that “In regard to health menstruation is harmful to all, although it affects delicate persons more, whereas its harmfulness is entirely hidden in those who possess a resistant body.”¹⁶² Once again Soranus provides reasons for his hypothesis and he utilizes experience over superstition: “we observe the majority of those not menstruating are rather robust... and the fact that they do not menstruate any more does not affect the health of women past their prime... Besides, virgins not yet menstruating would necessarily be less healthy... menstruation, consequently, does not contribute to their health, but is useful for childbearing only.”¹⁶³ Soranus, living in Rome where women were seen regularly and were able to discuss these events with male doctors, was able to formulate these ideas, whereas the Hippocratics, who were not allowed to examine or discuss these issues with women, could not. Whether Soranus or the Hippocratics had the correct medical advice is not what is at issue here. The fact that Soranus was able to examine and interview women gave him a significant advantage over the Hippocratics. Without a culture that allowed women to be more accessible, Soranus could not have made these observations.

Soranus also dealt with the Hippocratics’ idea of “hysterical suffocation” but attributed it to different causes. The Hippocratics believed the suffocation was caused by the wandering womb. Soranus, through the knowledge gained from dissection, knew the

¹⁶¹ Soranus, 7.

¹⁶² Soranus, 26.

¹⁶³ Soranus, 26.

womb is motionless. This led him to have to credit to another cause the hysterical condition. Again, Soranus uses observation and interviews with women to create his hypothesis: “In most cases the disease is preceded by recurrent miscarriages, premature birth, long widowhood, retention of the menses and the end of ordinary childbearing or inflation of the uterus.”¹⁶⁴ These prior health problems cause the woman’s womb to constrict, which obstructs respiration. He categorically denied the practice of “the ancients” in their use of ill-smelling or pleasant-smelling odors to lure the uterus back into position.¹⁶⁵ Instead, Soranus prescribed reducing the constriction. The ancients mentioned by Soranus undoubtedly refer to the Hippocratics, who spent a lot of time talking of this specific problem. Again, Soranus used more scientific approaches than the Hippocratics and was able to do so because of the greater access to women in society.

While the Hippocratics believed that the woman held control over whether or not she conceived and that she contributed her own “semen” to the mix, Soranus disputed that belief. Soranus did not believe that women contribute “seed,” however, he did argue that only when a woman is physically excited during intercourse will she be able to conceive. Soranus said that “during intercourse the associated movement around the female genitals relaxes the whole body. And for this reason it also relaxes the uterus.”¹⁶⁶ Without relaxation men’s seed cannot enter the uterus and beget a child. This scientific theory provided a strong argument for Roman men to give their wives sexual pleasure. Soranus accounted for women conceiving unwillingly by saying “that in any event the

¹⁶⁴ Soranus, 26.

¹⁶⁵ Soranus, 26.

¹⁶⁶ Soranus, 28.

emotion of sexual appetite existed in them too, but was obscured by mental resolve.”¹⁶⁷

Soranus basically argued that raped women still feel pleasure but block it mentally in order for his theory to make sense of the reality of rapes that end with conception.

What is most intriguing about Soranus’s statements is the lack of female power in conception, which is diametrically opposed to the Hippocratic belief that women controlled whether or not they conceived. Soranus argued that both men and women contributed seed to the formation of the child, what we know as genetic material, however, women have no control over whether or not they conceived.¹⁶⁸ This shows very distinctly the change from Greece to Rome in their regard for woman’s power. In Greece men were frightened of women: they believed them to be defectively made and as unintelligent as children, and yet they believed women to hold the single, critical power to decide if they wanted to conceive. In Rome however, men were not scared of female power: indeed, up to a point, they wanted strong women in their lives. Yet, they did not believe women had the capability to prevent conception: all that was required for conception to take place was for the woman to feel pleasure during sex. This again plays into the idea that good women must be passive: they do not contribute seed or decide whether to conceive or not. Because of the passivity of “normal” women, they are not threatening.

¹⁶⁷ Soranus, 36.

¹⁶⁸ Soranus, 37, 43-44.

Conclusions.

Roman women's lives in the early Empire were much more complicated than many scholars acknowledge. These women had more rights and freedom than Greek women. Neither, however, were they understood to be bringers of the entire world's evil nor capable of controlling the conception of children. Women who supported the patriarchal ideals, especially that of passivity in sex, were admired for their strength, virtue and intelligence in other areas of life. Because in the critical ways Roman women were passive, and therefore no threat to the masculinity of men, they were allowed more leeway in life.¹⁶⁹ What is important to note, is that if a woman took an overly active role, a "masculine" role, she would be vilified. It is only through acting passively (normally) that women were honored and respected in Rome. This ideal passivity in sexual activity, and elsewhere in daily life, was a product of nature's decree (according to Soranus) that woman was passive in the act of conception.

¹⁶⁹ Kristina Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus: Inventing Private Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 1.

Conclusions

As stated in the introduction, it was the goal of this thesis to discover the cultural interaction of behavior with medical views about conception. The ways women were studied, written of, and cared for by men during the Classical period in Greece and the early Imperial period in Rome reflect directly the degree of fear or acceptance of women, and especially the way in which their role in the act of conception was viewed. The cultural influences and social circumstances discussed in the course of this thesis addressed these views of women in a feminist manner employing cultural morphology to see the change through time. A comparison of the respective views of Greece and Imperial Rome about who holds power over conception explains a great deal about their respective attitudes towards women.

By examining cultural portrayals of women in Greece and Rome and comparing them to the medical works of the same periods, a very clear picture of how men viewed women emerges. In Classical Athens women were feared for their potential power of being able to deny men heirs. Men suppressed women in every way they could to prevent women from obtaining too much power or finding out the powers they had. They kept this fear alive through manipulating it in their mythology, literature, culture, and historiography, and sought to relieve it by limiting the social and intellectual lives of women. The gynecological writings of the Hippocratic Corpus both reflect and contribute to this vicious circle.

Greek culture blamed women for all the ills in the world through their myth of Pandora. Greek Goddesses continually illustrated the wrath and destructive capabilities of women. Greek literature, whether comedic or tragic, sought to inundate the population with ideas about the dangerous ways of women. Greek myths about the Amazons showed how dangerous women could be if allowed to live free from traditional conventions for female behavior. Finally, Greek medicine, typified by the Hippocratic Corpus, proved scientifically how different women were from men, as well as how dangerous and prone to emotional extremes women were. Most importantly, the Hippocratic Corpus claimed that women held the control over whether or not they conceived children. This was a very significant reason for why men feared women so much and suppressed them in society as much as possible. The ability to control the production of heirs was too much power to allow to women. By keeping women illiterate and apart from potential sources of power, Greek men hoped to prevent their women from understanding just how much control they could exercise over men and their future.

The Hellenistic culture of Alexandria, which placed enormous value on knowledge, allowed for women to experience freedoms that traditional Classical Greek women would not have gained. Thanks to exposure to more tolerant cultures, Hellenistic women were allowed to be educated and were praised in public for their intellectual feats. The culture of Hellenistic Alexandria also allowed for the atmosphere in which Herophilus of Chalcedon was able to practice dissection. From the findings of his dissections, Herophilus disproved the Hippocratic claims that women were so different from men, for example definitively proving that women did not possess a wandering

womb. These medical discoveries disarmed some of the male fears of women, and made it possible for them to be accepted in new, more powerful roles.

In early Imperial Rome women were respected and honored for being wives and mothers, which took place through their passive acceptance of impregnation. A look at their culture shows that women were educated and treated much more fairly by men as a result of their having little leverage over men and the production of heirs. In Roman culture, sexuality was based on a passive/active binary. Women were supposed to be passive and men active. This sexual distinction of proper behavior for men and women crossed into their daily lives. Women who respected their roles as passive *matronae*, subservient to their paternalistic society, were revered and respected. Women who were too active and crossed the line into "manly" behavior were maligned. Vestal Virgins were honored for forgoing the traditional motherly role of Roman women in order to dedicate their "fertility" to the state of Rome itself. Unlike the Amazons, who were vilified for living outside traditional roles for women, Vestals were revered because they remained passive and supported the paternalistic values of Rome. No matter how women behaved, however, they were not feared, as in Greece. This is directly related to the lack of control women were believed to have over conception, as taught by Soranus of Ephesus.

Utilizing the cultural knowledge of how society treated women socially and physically allows for great insight into the minds of men, who constructed the written culture that has come down to us. This attitude was then justified in the elaboration of scientific rationales. The clearest way to view men's minds in these cultures is to look at how they dealt with conception, the all-important production of heirs and future citizens. In Greece, where women were not even considered parents but only vessels of the man's

child, they were feared because men ascribed the power of conception to woman's choice. In Rome where women were honored as mothers, they were not believed to have control over conception. The old adage that you only fear what you cannot understand is apropos here: the greater the knowledge, the lesser the fear. The Hippocratics, who scarcely looked at their female patients and never interviewed them, had little knowledge of actual internal anatomy and physiology and this resulted in a good deal of fear toward women, who were seen as virtually an alien species, inhabited by a roaming animal. Through Soranus' better understanding of female anatomy and the increased dependence on the patient's own testimony, this fear was turned into an attitude resembling respect and collaboration.

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