Women and Ancient Rome

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Introduction

Ancient Roman women were very interesting. They lived very different lives than ours and were also viewed with hostility. However, they were also similar, as there were women who sought a better place in life and wanted fairness, just like the women of today. Unlike other civilizations, Roman women were given more legal and economic rights than others.

View of Women

- In Ancient Rome, most men viewed women as inferior, meaning that they were misogynists. This includes Cato, who once said, “As soon as they begin to be your equals, they will become your superiors...”
- But, there were Roman goddesses, meaning that women were respected.
- Also, to the Romans, a woman must be chaste. Being chaste is a symbol of honor to the Roman women. They even had a story about a woman who was raped and, because she lost her chastity and honor, killed herself.

Bibliography

* Women demonstrate and obtain repeal of the Oppian law. Rome, 195 B.C. (Livy, History of Rome 34.1, exc. Late 1st century B.C. - Early 1st century A.D.)
* The Rape of Lucretia (Excerpt from Livy, History of Rome)
* Lucretius (98 -c.55 BCE): The Worship of Cybele

Lucretia

- Some women didn't like being pushed around, so they decided to do something about it.
- An example would be Hortensia, who was very vocal when she felt women were getting unfairly taxed. In one of her speeches, she said, “By nature of their sex women are absolved from paying taxes among all mankind.”
- There were also some women who tried to push their male children and husbands to higher positions. This was done so that the women themselves could get a position of influence. The ambitions that they could not achieve they shared with their family.
- Some women also sought higher education for themselves. They were not satisfied with the education that they received and sought more.

Life of a Roman Woman

- Roman women had good legal and economical rights for their time. Such rights include being able to own property and having free speech in the court.
- Most women were married off at a young age, usually around 12, whereas men were married in their 20s. This was due to low life expectancy and because women had to have a lot of children. If they were unable to, then the husband was allowed to divorce his wife.

Cornelia and Her Children

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Feminism of the Roman Woman

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The Ideal Roman Woman

- The ideal Roman woman was supposed to be modest, respectful and loyal to her family. They were also supposed to be pure, meaning that they are supposed to be chaste until marriage.
- To this end, women were supposed to wear a veil, which would protect their purity.
- Women were also supposed to run the home while the husband was away. This includes managing the slaves and taking care of the children.