

Greek Women

Semonides of Amorgos, Greek writer, *The Types of Women*, c. 550 BCE

God made the mind of woman in the beginning of different qualities; for one he fashioned like a bristly hog, in whose house everything tumbles about in disorder, bespattered with mud, and rolls upon the ground; she, dirty, with unwashed clothes, sits and grows fat on a dungheap. The woman like mud is ignorant of everything, both good and bad; her only accomplishment is eating: cold though the winters be, she is too stupid to draw near the fire. The woman made like the sea has two minds; when she laughs and is glad, the stranger seeing her at home will give her praise---there is nothing better than this on the earth, no, nor fairer; but another day she is unbearable, not to be looked at or approached, for she is raging mad. To friend and foe she is alike implacable and odious. Thus, as the sea is often calm and innocent, a great delight to sailors in summertime, and oftentimes again is frantic, tearing along with roaring billows, so is this woman in her temper. The woman who resembles a mare is delicate and long-haired, unfit for drudgery or toil; she would not touch the mill, or lift the sieve, or clean the house out! She bathes twice or thrice a day, and anoints herself with myrrh; then she wears her hair combed out long and wavy, dressed with flowers. It follows that this woman is a rare sight to one's guests; but to her husband she is a curse, unless he be a tyrant who prides himself on such expensive luxuries. The ape-like wife has Zeus given as the greatest evil to men. Her face is most hateful. Such a woman goes through the city a laughing-stock to all the men. Short of neck, with narrow hips, withered of limb, she moves about with difficulty. O! wretched man, who weds such a woman! She knows every cunning art, just like an ape, nor is ridicule a concern to her. To no one would she do a kindness, but every day she schemes to this end---how she may work someone the greatest injury. The man who gets the woman like a bee is lucky; to her alone belongs no censure; one's household goods thrive and increase under her management; loving, with a loving spouse, she grows old, the mother of a fair and famous race. She is preeminent among all women, and a heavenly grace attends her. She cares not to sit among the women when they indulge in lascivious chatter. Such wives are the best and wisest mates Zeus grants to men. Zeus made this supreme evil---woman: even though she seem to be a blessing, when a man has wedded one she becomes a plague.

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