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AND BRADY HUGHES

Women in the Classical Era

Sarah and Brady Hughes are modern historians. This selection is part of their essay on the history of women in the ancient world. They write here of the classical era in India, China, Greece, and Rome. All of these were patriarchal societies, but how were they different? The authors also mention later Greek Hellenistic society and pre-Roman Etruscan society. How do these two societies round out your understanding of women in the classical era? What seem to be the conditions or causes that improved the status of women in some societies and periods?

Thinking Historically

Notice that from the first sentence, the authors are interested in understanding the historical process, specifically how the role of women changed over time. In what societies do they see change? Did the roles of women improve or decline in these societies during this period? How do the authors use primary sources to show change?

India

Women's rights deteriorated after the Vedic* period (1600–800 B.C.E.). No one has been able to prove why this happened. Scholarly interest has focused on women's exclusion from performing Hindu rituals, which was in effect by 500 B.C.E. . . . Julia Leslie thinks that women's exclusion resulted from intentional mistranslation of the Vedas by male scholars, as the rituals became more complicated and as the requirement for property ownership was more rigorously enforced at a time when women could not own property.

*VAY dihk

Sarah Shaver Hughes and Brady Hughes, "Women in Ancient Civilizations," in *Women's History in Global Perspective*, vol. II, ed. Bonnie G. Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, published with the American Historical Association, 2005), 26–30 minus deletions and 36–40 minus deletions.

