

Women in Greek Art

Although they are
only breath, words
which I command
are immortal

Sappho, early Greek poet



Colossal Female Head Cyprus,
550-500 B.C.E., Limestone

Women in Society | Since ancient Greece was a male-ruled society, called a *patriarchy*, women had a limited voice. Women did not go to school and could only work in certain roles. A woman's marriage was decided by her father. Rarely the heads of the household, women were instructed to listen to their male family members. In ancient Greece, a woman's greatest responsibility was supplying a male child who could ensure that the family's property was passed down to the next generation.

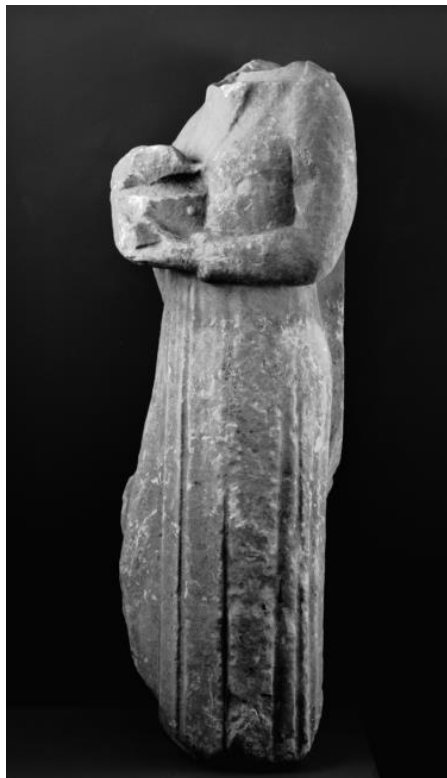
These factors make the accomplishments of female lyric poet Sappho all the more remarkable. She was born in Lesbos, an island east of the Grecian mainland, probably around 630 B.C. Sappho provides one of the few female voices from the ancient world, though little is known about the details of her life. Her poetry, which survives only in fragments,

provides the opportunity to gain a female perspective in an era full of men's art and writing.

And their feet move
rhythmically, as tender
feet of Cretan girls
danced once around an

altar of love, crushing
a circle in the soft
smooth flowering earth

Sappho



Grave Monument – Young Girl with a Jewelry Box 450-425 B.C.E., Marble

Portrayal | The art in this gallery depicts women in a particular way: we see women portrayed as goddesses and mothers, for instance. Furthermore, there is a major emphasis on women as representative of fertility. As subjects, women were rarely treated as everyday figures; instead, the typical portrayal of a woman in ancient Greece was usually as goddess, royal, or monster. Women in Greek art of the period received honorable portrayals as Olympian deities or queens. Otherwise, women were transformed into monsters meant to be enemies to humans. They were almost never portrayed as everyday citizens of the Greek society.