



Citizen Bacchæ: Women's Ritual Practice in Ancient Greece

Barbara Goff

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What activities did the women of ancient Greece perform in the sphere of ritual, and what were the meanings of such activities for them and their culture? By offering answers to these questions, this study aims to recover and reconstruct an important dimension of the lived experience of ancient Greek women. A comprehensive and sophisticated investigation of the ritual roles of women in ancient Greece, it draws on a wide range of evidence from across the Greek world, including literary and historical texts, inscriptions, and vase-paintings, to assemble a portrait of women as religious and cultural agents, despite the ideals of seclusion within the home and exclusion from public arenas that we know restricted their lives.

As she builds a picture of the extent and diversity of women's ritual activity, Barbara Goff shows that they were entrusted with some of the most important processes by which the community guaranteed its welfare. She examines the ways in which women's ritual activity addressed issues of sexuality and civic participation, showing that ritual could offer women genuinely alternative roles and identities even while it worked to produce wives and mothers who functioned well in this male-dominated society. Moving to more speculative analysis, she discusses the possibility of a women's subculture focused on ritual and investigates the significance of ritual in women's poetry and vase-paintings that depict women. She also includes a substantial exploration of the representation of women as ritual agents in fifth-century Athenian drama.

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