

The Significance of Athenian Marriage Rituals

In ancient Athens the culture and idea of marriage were taken extremely seriously, and I wish to understand the importance of marriage rituals and then be able to explain that importance.

One ritual in classical Athens I found in the book, *The World of Athens: an introduction to classical Athenian culture*, was treated with utmost importance and it would be the giving of a dowry to the husband of the bride, this dowry would be treated as a deposit where if the couple was to divorce the dowry would follow the bride back to the Kurioi, this dowry would often consist of a large monetary gift. A dowry is an important Athenian marriage ritual because a “father might mortgage land to provide a dowry of suitable size.”¹ This is important information because land is a precious commodity among Civilians as they refuse to allow Metics to own a piece of land.

Another ritual that occurs in the life of a married couple I came across whilst reading *The World of Athens: an introduction to classical Athenian culture*, yet again. This ritual is that of symposia which involved the husband and his friend's in a drinking party where they are entertained by non-Athenian women or slaves instead of the wife as “for a woman to dine with an unrelated man could be used in court as evidence that she was not a legitimate Athenian wife.”² This ritual can be used to see how serious Athens took the idea of marriage and how isolated women were from men outside of the Oikos.

One other ritual that is important to marriage is the purification ritual that women would go under before their wedding is the loutra which is a bathing with her friends in a nearby lake, the bride would then cut her hair, continuing this she would then go with the groom to their house then eat foods symbolising fertility, after this the grooms mother would then “led them into their marital chamber (thalamos). The wedding party remained outside and sang wedding songs (epithalamia).”³

¹ Jones, P. V. (Peter V.) & Joint Association of Classical Teachers. Greek Course 1984, *The World of Athens: an introduction to classical Athenian culture: background book*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Page 162

² Jones, P. V. (Peter V.) & Joint Association of Classical Teachers. Greek Course 1984, *The World of Athens: an introduction to classical Athenian culture: background book*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Page 166

³ Ormand, K. (1999). *Exchange and the maiden*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

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To conclude this essay after researching different types of martial rituals and rituals that happen during the period that a couple are married, I can confidently say that these rituals are treated with the utmost importance thus leading me to conclude that they are extremely significant to marriage culture in classical Athens

Bibliography

Ormand, K. (1999). *Exchange and the maiden*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

The World of Athens: An introduction to classical Athenian culture. (1984). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.