**Egyptian Women**

In Egyptian society, women had a good deal of independence by the standards of the ancient world. Greek historian Herodotus wrote with surprise at the freedom of Egyptian women: "The Egyptians in most of their manners and customs, exactly reverse the common practice of mankind. The women attend the markets and trade, while the men sit at home at the loom." However, in most ancient portrayals of Egyptian women, they were shown as dutiful wives, daughters, and mothers. While women could function in some public roles, the heart of their role was at home within the family. Ancient Egyptians treasured family life; thus, wives and mothers were ***accorded*** a good deal of status.

A typical Egyptian family unit probably included a husband and wife, their children, a husband's widowed mother, and any of his unmarried sisters. Remarkably, though, there seems to have been no formal marriage ceremony to bind families. It appears that simply the cohabitation of the couple marked the establishment of a new household. A young woman left her father's home with all her possessions, which might have included a bed, clothing, jewelry, mirrors, a musical instrument, and other items… Even though wives enjoyed the protection of their new husbands, they were allowed to continue to administer their own property, accumulate their own wealth, and retain legal rights. That legal independence was unusual in the ancient world and probably contributed to Herodotus' assessment of Egyptian women's independence.

The most important job for women was to care for the needs of the household. In fact, the married woman's most ***coveted*** title was "mistress of the house," which showed the importance of her domestic role. The mistress of the house was charged with both purchasing the food and preparing it. Bread was the most important food prepared by the Egyptian housewife, and it was a daunting task. The wife and her servants had to grind the grain by hand to produce flour, which was then mixed with salt and water (or at times leavened with yeast) and cooked on a flat stone over a fire made by burning animal dung. Along with bread, the family ate various vegetables, fish, and occasionally meat. Women and men were also responsible for brewing large vats of homemade beer, which was a staple of Egyptian households.

"Egyptian women." World History: Ancient and Medieval Eras. ABC-CLIO, 2014. Web. 6 May 2014.

**Vocabulary:** *accorded:* given, *coveted:* wished for

1a. The word *attend* on line 4 has multiple meanings. How is the word used in this context?  
 a. to work for b. to go to  
 c. to pay attention to d. be a servant to

1b. Circle three context clues in the text to support your answer.

2. The word *heart* on line 7 has multiple meanings. What does the word often mean? How is it  
 used differently in this context? Underline the words in the first paragraph that support your  
 answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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3. What did the historian Herodotus mean when he wrote, "The Egyptians in most of their manners and   
 customs, exactly reverse the common practice of mankind.”? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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4. The word *charged* on line 19 has multiple meanings. How is the word used in this context?  
 a. given a duty b. having to do with electricity  
 c. to pay with a credit card d. the cost of something

5. The word *staple* on line 24 has multiple meanings. What does the word often mean? How is it  
 used differently in this context? How do you know? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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6. Explain the roles that women had in Egyptian society. Give three examples from the reading to   
 support your answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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7. How did these roles differ from other ancient societies? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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