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This presentation is titled "Textiles: Women's Art". It discusses how women contributed to the visual arts in ancient Greece. It is presented by Dr. Katherine Iselin.

Dr. Iselin holds a PhD in Art History and Archaeology from the University of Missouri. Her dissertation, "Historia Spintriae: The Pleasures of Collecting Ancient Erotica", explored the role of Roman erotic art in the collecting culture and creation of pornography in the early modern period. Her research continues to explore themes of gender and sexuality in visual and material culture, particularly through the reception of ancient art in later periods. She currently teaches in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Missouri and is affiliated with the Athienou Archaeological Project in Athienou, Cyprus.

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How did women contribute to the visual arts in ancient Greece? When we discuss Greek art we typically think of sculpture or vase painting. These are the types of art that survive most commonly from the ancient world but they're also to this day still considered the forms of art, sculpture and painting, that are the most highly regarded within the western world. These types of art were most commonly produced by men in ancient Greece. However we know that women were involved in visual arts in other ways as well, most notably through textiles. Unfortunately textiles are often ignored in discussions of Greek art. This is both the result of the lack of survival of these particular types of material culture but also because textiles to this day are considered to be a form of low art or craft. However we know that textiles require a significant amount of work, of skill, of artistic creativity, and so we really should not ignore these types of art when discussing Greek art, even if the textiles themselves don't survive. Even so there's a lot we can learn about women's art, like textiles, through various other aspects of material culture as well as looking at some of the literature in the past. In this video we're going to look at how women contributed to the visual arts in ancient Greece by looking at their role within textile endeavors and textile art.

Now the main form of art like I said that women produced was textiles. Weaving was considered to be a hallmark of the virtuous woman, of the ideal woman and so you will often see, even into the Roman period this ideal virtuous woman even being shown with spindle whorls and stuff like that because these were symbols of their ability to produce things through the weaving process. Girls learned how to weave and every part of the weaving process from very very early on and were expected to contribute to the household weaving. Weaving could be an economic endeavor. This was because they would make clothes for the entire household. And because women and girls couldn't really leave the household, this was a way for them to kind of get out into the outside world when the members of their household wore the clothes that they wove it was in a sense showing off what women and girls within a household could do.

We know that weaving was an important process especially through the mythological references as well. Athena was the goddess of weaving and thus weaving had kind of this really important role in terms of religious rituals as well. You can see here from this part of the ionic frieze that we have the peplos scene. So for the Panathenaea, which was of course the celebration of the goddess Athena in Athens, there was a select number of girls who were who were picked to weave this sacred peplos for the goddess's statue. So this was then presented to the statue during the Panathenaea and so it was a very very important religious event. And so we can see the role that weaving played within this particular ritual as well as the role that these young girls played within this ritual and the fact that the entire city of Athens put so much emphasis on it shows the importance of this endeavor, the weaving that these young women would do together for the Athena Polias statue.

We have other references in myth as well. The Odyssey has a number of references to weaving. For example in Odysseus's city-state of Ithaca he of course has been absent for 20 years when we start the Odyssey and 10 years at the Trojan War and then it takes him another 10 years to get home. During this time suitors move into his palace and begin vying for the hand of Penelope, his wife, that he has left behind. She has to kind of shake them off, she doesn't want to remarry. She has faith that her husband will return and so the way she does this is by weaving a burial shroud for her father-in-law. And so day by day they see her weaving this burial shroud for her and then by night, because she's so clever, she takes it back apart again and they're none the wiser. This is a way for her to kind of stave off any type of forcing of getting married and it also shows that Penelope is indeed the ideal wife. She is preserving Odysseus' household, his oikos, by not remarrying and at the same time she's also doing what a wife does where she is weaving something for her father-in-law. So it preserves Odysseus's father oikos as well because we're seeing this lineage go through here. Seen here on this cup that you can see here we have Telemachus, he's the son of Odysseus and Penelope, he's now a full-grown man, he was a baby when Odysseus left. And we have Penelope here very sad you know sitting by her weaving waiting for her long-lost husband to come home. Like I mentioned this is a subplot of the epic and it emphasizes just how important weaving is to a woman's identity. So Penelope is very much intertwined with weaving by kind of keeping on the household of Odysseus while also you know both figuratively in terms of keeping the suitors out of it and literally through this weaving process of the burial shroud. Now I mentioned Odysseus' oikos here and the oikos is a very important concept to understand particularly with regards to women. So the Greek word oikos has several meanings. The first one is family, this is not just blood relatives so not just you know a father, mother, and child but anybody who's been adopted into the family as well. So we have a different kind of ways that family could be construed with the term oikos here. It also can mean the household or estate and this includes the physical building in which a family might live, it includes all the property within that building, it also includes any enslaved individuals that were owned by the family. So when we talk about the term oikos it's multiple things all these things kind of coming together in this concept that you have here. Now the purpose of an oikos was to be self-sustaining. Weaving was part of this as I mentioned they would weave clothes and stuff for the family and so this was a way to be economically sufficient. They also would have grown their own food and stuff like that, but when we're talking about weaving we are talking about creating clothing and that kind of stuff in terms

of an economic part of the oikos. An oikos did have a hierarchy. So the patriarch would be at the top of an oikos and then his role was also outside the home. As I mentioned earlier, women and girls were not allowed to leave the home and so the man of the household was kind of this connection between the oikos and the larger community, the city, or what we would call a polis. A polis as a city. And so multiple oikoi make up a polis and so he would have been kind of this step in between all of them. The patriarch is also responsible for legitimizing any children, so if a wife bears her husband any children he has to actually acknowledge those children as his own and as part of the oikos family. Now girls married around the age of 14, 13 - 14, something like that and at that point they left their oikos and joined that of their husband. They did not own property, but they would have taken a dowry with them at that time. When men married they stayed within their own oikos and if there were no sons, daughters would be able to transfer property. So if a daughter got married and then had sons the property would transfer to her sons, she could not physically own them herself. Now while all of this seems very technical it's important to remember that an oikos is directly tied to a man's legacy. So as I mentioned when talking about Penelope and Odysseus, Penelope was ensuring Odysseus's legacy, his oikos by not remarrying and so in order to do that she went through all these different activities to prevent herself from being forced to be married. When a man kind of lost his legacy it was another form of death and so we see how important women were to the continuing legacy of a man through children, through weaving, all of these different things they kept the oikos together. Now it seems that in terms of the physical oikos, the house itself, there was likely gendered spaces you can see here on this plan of the House of Many Colors from Olynthos. On the upper left here highlighted in red we have a room which we found several objects that can be associated with the weaving process. We don't know for sure if this particular room was used certainly for weaving or if it was perhaps a temporary room, that wasn't always used for weaving, that sort of thing. But when we see different objects used for the weaving process, it indicates us to us that there was likely weaving happening here and it seems likely that this would have been a gendered space because only women and girls would have been participating in this weaving process. You can see here it's also the furthest from the entrance so back in this little corner here, they would have been protected you know visibly from any type of entrance, through various walls, and it seems that they could have temporarily blocked off rooms as well hanging a tapestry or some such thing over a doorway. So that there is a clear separation of space from any visitors to the house and the women of the household, whether they are the wife, the daughters, or any enslaved women of the family that you have here. As I mentioned they're not we don't know if they're permanently gendered or if this was something that happened you know just at certain times of the day.

This is another example, another image of an oikos you can see here from a pyxis where we have several women depicted within an oikos here and if you can read Greek you might be able to recognize a few of these names such as Iphigenia here above this figure who is standing within these folding doors and all these women are associated with Agamemnon. Agamemnon was the king of Mycenae, he fought alongside Odysseus in the Trojan War and of course got home much earlier than Odysseus. But he had several women within his household that he was associated with. We have here Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, Danae. And so these women within his household are doing other things that would have been appropriate for women to do in their

oikos. The folding doors are interesting to take note of because it shows that there's another way that they could separate space within the household, so more than just hanging you know some sort of fabric, we actually have physical doors here that would permit or deny people access to certain spaces as well.

Now the process of weaving was very complex, it was more than simply leading on a loom. Women were responsible for all steps of it and fortunately we have representations of this process on a multitude of vases and also there's a number of these processes that are still used today because they're very efficient and we have them used all over the world, it's by no means limited to just the Mediterranean. You can see here in step one the women are spinning the wool here. So before you spin you would have had to card the wool, this means that you're cleaning it out, you're getting it into a texture that allows it to be spun on using a drop spindle here. And if you take a look at the notes for this lecture there's a couple video links to videos that I've included within it and you can watch them for some more information about how this process goes because sometimes it's difficult to really visualize if you've never seen it happen before. There's two different weavers, one woman goes through and talks about the entire process through the weaving process and so she begins with carding wool, though a slightly different technique than what the the Greeks would have used as well as spinning the wool and then weaving and another woman shows exactly how to spin using a drop spindle. Now like I mentioned these women, one woman is a Navajo woman, another woman is a Scottish woman and so even then you can see these processes still being used today in different parts of the world. So like I said this is a very efficient process and has been used for thousands of years so it really goes to show how this has been passed on through the generations here and as you watch the videos you might be able to recognize some of these processes and they match very closely to what we see here on this vase by the Amasis painter. So step one we have these two women within the spinning process here. Next we have the weaving process and we see two women here next to a standing loom and you can see here they're weaving within all these threads that are hanging down and you can notice on the bottom that we have loom weights that are holding down the strings of fabric so that they they can weave within this standing loom here. The third step shown on this particular vase is the final product we have two women actually folding the piece of clothing that has been woven. And you'll notice that throughout the paintings here we have little details the Amasis painter really paid attention to what tools and implements are used for each process here. We even see patterns on the women's clothing that they're wearing themselves. This is of course from the Archaic period and this is when we do still see people being portrayed with patterned clothing on Athenian vases all these little details are important and can give us more information about the textile process. Now we also have, if you visit some museums sometimes, we can see how this process works. The Penelope Project, which is kind of an organization of multiple German organizations that work together to show how important weaving was in the ancient world, they have this in progress weaving on a loom so that visitors to the museum can actually go see what's happening here and you'll notice the pattern is exactly the same one that we have on this cup that featured Penelope and Telemachus here. So they're specifically drawing from Penelope's work here that well how it was portrayed on this particular vase even though this is well after the the Odyssey was written. But you can see here these beautiful patterns that are being used and it helps us kind of see just

how complicated this process was. It was by no means easy and required sometimes multiple people and you know just really a lot of focus and concentration on all of this. This is by no means without any type of creativity within it. Now while I mentioned that not many fabrics, textiles actually survive we do have a number of other implements used for weaving that do survive. Spindle whorls and loom weights are among them. So spindle whorls were often very highly decorated, you can see a couple here. One that is painted, one that is kind of incised with different patterns that you have here and note also the dates on each of these items. So we have this one from you know the first half of the second millennium BCE from Cyprus, we also have one from the sixth to fifth century BCE that's painted. So this same technique is being used again for centuries, for millennia and so you know it really was the best way to weave for people around the Mediterranean using all these different things. The spindle whorls were often beautifully decorated which means that they were very important to the owners and additionally many women were buried with them. So clearly this was something that they valued, it was an object that they valued and really enjoyed looking at when they were working within the weaving process. Loom weights, this one from the 6th century perhaps later from Turkey you can see here this is we don't have any type of decoration on it, perhaps there was at some point but loom weights were another thing that women must have valued because girls typically took these with them when they left their own oikos for that of their husbands. So this would have been an important part of their identity taking it from their original oikos into their new life when they joined that of their husbands.

And like I said these do survive quite frequently. All of these here, we have one that's terracotta or two terracotta but they could also be made out of wood as well. Unfortunately a lot of the distaff and the spindle shaft wouldn't have survived because they were made out of wood. So we only have again some of these implements that actually survive the ones that are made out of terracotta or clay or terracotta or stone are the ones that survive most frequently. Another type of artifact that often survives associated with weaving is the epinetron. So this is an item that a woman would have worn over their thigh, you can see the you know the curved shape here. Her knee would have gone here at the end and some of them are very highly decorated. These highly decorated ones were ones that were buried with women, but you can see that they would have still been functional. So an epinetron, when you card wool you it requires two, now they use brushes, but it requires two kind of rough surfaces to rub together and that gets the wool to have that texture that allows it to be spun. And so if you look very closely at this epinetron in this blank area on top there you can actually see incised semi-circles on it and so this was the texture that they would have used to kind of move around that wool on it to get it into that texture to be able to be spun. And you can see here that these are very highly decorated. This one features a lot of women doing various things together and you have a woman's bust on the on the end of it as well. But they weren't necessarily limited to iconography that dealt only with women there are plenty of other decorations that might deal with chariots and different things like that so the imagery did not always have to be exclusively feminine in any way shape or form. But you will notice that the way that it's decorated even the little ornaments that go around it are very similar to vase painting so we're they're working within that same visual language that we see with vases as well.

Now the vases themselves like I mentioned we have some connections with textiles here and one of the biggest is these ornaments that we see throughout various vase paintings. You can see here a couple of fabrics that survive from Turkey. So this is before 690 BCE so it's quite old and you can match a few of these decorative elements. So we have this meander that we see, on it just proliferates in Greek vase painting, and you can also see this diamond/lozenge pattern visible here on the Dipylon krater. So you can see that these are pretty close in date here and but they continue in vase painting as well. The meander is one of the most iconographically recognized ornaments that we see from ancient Greece, even people who don't study ancient Greek art might be able to see a meander and recognize it as being Greek in some way shape or form. And what's important about this is that it is likely the vase painters are drawing from the imagery used by women who were weaving things and so these would have all been you know decorations that we found on textiles and instead you know the vase painters are actually drawing from all of this, again they're working within the same visual language that women had at the time. And so while we don't have a lot of textiles that actually survive we can look to the decorations on pottery to kind of see what they're using and how they're drawing it from textiles. And one of the reasons we can see this is also because the garments that the figures wear are themselves decorated. Now during the Classical period in the 5th - 4th century BCE in Athens we don't see a lot of decoration on the garments figures are wearing. It seems to have gone out of fashion and Athens, as far as like that as well but that isn't necessarily the case outside of you know these two areas, around the Mediterranean some people are still wearing patterns and everything. But the Archaic and the Geometric pottery, the earlier pottery is where we see more of these decorative patterns on the garments that the figures are wearing. And so you can see here that these very, they had quite a you know diverse array of patterns that we see on this clothing, even the same garment might have multiple patterns showing on it. And so we can really see just you know how creative these women were in terms of what they were making for the patterns of this clothing and this go back, you can go back and look at some of the other vases as well. But they're kind of all over the place, you can even see a meander here on this woman on the far left that you see here, we have the meander showing there as well.

So yes we have lots of these different kind of like beautiful patterns that we see throughout these figures. Now the Iliad and the Odyssey also mention kind of elaborate patterns as well. Homeric epics, they mention these you know kind of complex designs, multiple points. In the Iliad Helen is discussed as kind of doing this beautiful figural scene and she's interrupted in the midst of it and so we do know that they made more than you know simply these meander or lozenge ornaments or something like that. They actually created figural scenes very similar to what Penelope was weaving in that earlier cup that we looked at. This one from Crimea is much later and it's painted, it's not woven but it does give us an idea of some of these kind of figural scenes that might have been more common on textiles, whether they were painted or woven. Also note this much earlier Corinthian neck-amphora. Corinthian pottery of course had these beautiful freezes that showed animal you know freezes going through with all these beautiful rosettes and other ornaments with it. But they're set freezes that go through the pottery and so again it is likely that the vase painters are drawing from this visual language used by women for their textiles. So there's lots of connections between all of these as well. It is unfortunate that so few of these textiles survive, the very few that I included in this lecture there's really not many

more that survive beyond that. So we have very little to look at in terms of actual textiles that survive, but because vase painters were drawing from these textiles we can get an idea of what women were doing on the textiles that they wove and so even though men are kind of running these pottery shops and responsible for the vase painting it's important to acknowledge the impact that women had on these designs. They were largely responsible for the you know the ornament and the different types of kind of fashion that we see within this visual imagery that we see later on in vase painting and so it's important to acknowledge women's role within that and not forget that women too made visual arts in ancient Greece.

Thank you for watching "Textiles: Women's Art" presented by Dr. Katherine Iselin. If you have any questions about the content of this presentation please leave a comment below. If you like this video and want to see more click Subscribe and make sure to hit the notification bell to get updates for future videos. Also be sure to check out our website, which you can find linked in the description below and follow us on social media so you never miss an update! Finally if you're an early career researcher and have an idea for a video, please take a look at our call for papers on our website and consider applying today! Our next deadline is December 1st. We hope you enjoyed learning all about the ancient world and we'll see you in the next video!