

Briseis

*A Literary Reflection on the Social Position of Women and Enslaved
People in Antiquity and Modern Times*

Master thesis

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Introduction

Greek and Roman myths have long been a part of Western culture, and they continue to be retold to this day.¹ This is evident in various forms of popular culture, including video games such as Assassin's Creed, webtoons like Lore Olympus, Marvel movies² and music including Cassandra by Taylor Swift.³ Since 2017, there has been an increase in retellings of these myths from a female perspective.⁴ This focus on the female perspective has previously been underrepresented. Women were present in myths, but they were often portrayed in smaller roles.⁵ This shift in the portrayal of mythological retellings is indicative of a societal change since ancient times, reflecting the societal position of women in current times. Given that current writings are at least partly reflections of modern times, it could be argued this is also the case for ancient mythological stories. Based on this observation, this thesis will explore the following questions: *Do the mythical women of classical literature reflect the social position of women and enslaved people, and if so, how has this evolved across cultures and time?* The working hypothesis is that there is a connection.

The focus of this research is Greek and Roman myths. It is important to note that these myths do not hold an elevated status compared to other stories written in the past, or myths from different cultures. They were selected because they continue to play an important role in our Western society.⁶

¹ Jacqueline Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze: Recente hervertellingen van klassieke mythen vanuit een vrouwelijk perspectief," *Lampas: Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse klassici*, 3 (2023); "Spilling Over: Ovid's Heroides and the Mythological Female Voice," Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>; "The Enduring Popularity of Mythological Retellings," Ainsley Atinon, Grattan Street Press, September 17, 2024, <https://grattanstreetpress.com/2024/09/17/the-enduring-popularity-of-mythological-retellings/>; "From Hero to Zero - Why are Greek mythology retellings so popular right now and why are the straight males being pushed from centre stage?" Ellie Rees, *The Everyday Magazine*, accessed January 5, 2025, <https://theeverydaymagazine.co.uk/fictionandpoetry/fromherotzero/>; "Pat Barker's Classical Tradition," Catherine Sorrentino, *Discentes*, July 24, 2022, <https://web.sas.upenn.edu/discentes/2022/07/24/pat-barkers-classical-tradition/>; Almost-Barbara Renger and Jon Solomon, "Introduction," in *Ancient worlds in film and television: gender and politics* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 1-14.

² Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 202; Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>; Renger and Solomon, "Introduction," 1-14.

³ Taylor Swift, "Taylor Swift - Cassandra (Official Lyric Video)," April 20, 2020, video, 00:00-04:05, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hYY86DmqPY>.

⁴ Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 201; "Spilling Over: Ovid's Heroides and the Mythological Female Voice," Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>; "The Enduring Popularity of Mythological Retellings," Ainsley Atinon, Grattan Street Press, September 17, 2024, <https://grattanstreetpress.com/2024/09/17/the-enduring-popularity-of-mythological-retellings/>; "From Hero to Zero - Why are Greek mythology retellings so popular right now and why are the straight males being pushed from centre stage?" Ellie Rees, *The Everyday Magazine*, accessed January 5, 2025, <https://theeverydaymagazine.co.uk/fictionandpoetry/fromherotzero/>.

⁵ Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 202; "Spilling Over: Ovid's Heroides and the Mythological Female Voice," Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>; "The Enduring Popularity of Mythological Retellings," Ainsley Atinon, Grattan Street Press, September 17, 2024, <https://grattanstreetpress.com/2024/09/17/the-enduring-popularity-of-mythological-retellings/>; "From Hero to Zero - Why are Greek mythology retellings so popular right now and why are the straight males being pushed from centre stage?" Ellie Rees, *The Everyday Magazine*, accessed January 5, 2025, <https://theeverydaymagazine.co.uk/fictionandpoetry/fromherotzero/>; Pat Barker's Classical Tradition," Catherine Sorrentino, *Discentes*, July 24, 2022, <https://web.sas.upenn.edu/discentes/2022/07/24/pat-barkers-classical-tradition/>.

⁶ Hugo Koning, *Mythologie* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 8.

These stories are still being translated⁷ and studied academically after thousands of years,⁸ and rewritten and depicted in Western pop culture,⁹ making them a fascinating subject for examination from literary, historical and socio-cultural perspectives.

Researchers employ a variety of definitions for the term myth, with no definitive consensus.¹⁰ The myths of the Greeks and Romans are known as classical myths,¹¹ and their definition may differ from that of myths from other periods and cultures.¹² In African cultures, for instance, myths are often transmitted orally, generation to generation, embodying philosophical ideals, moral standards and values. There is no unified mythology in the entire continent of Africa, partly due to its size. However, there are some recurring themes, including twinship, the Golden Age, serpents and the origins of the world.¹³ In contrast, Japanese mythology is primarily a combination of traditions from Buddhism and Shintoism, and has changed over the course of centuries. It is characterised by a rich tapestry of deities, including both traditional gods and spirits known as kami associated with forces of nature, the departed, and geographical features such as nature or shrines.¹⁴

The relationship between these classical myths and historical circumstances is interpreted differently by researchers. One school of thought posits that myths were once used to clarify phenomena that people could not explain.¹⁵ One notable example is that of the Greek Theagenes of Rhegium (6th century BC), who argued that the conflicts between the gods in Homer's work, were the conflicts between the principles of physics, such as air, fire and water.¹⁶ Euhemerus (ca. 300 BC) proposed that myths are based on historical events and that the gods were human beings who, after years and years of retelling the stories, were deified for their great deeds. The figure of Zeus may have

⁷ Homer, *Ilias & Odysee*, translated by M. A. Schwartz (Amsterdam: Athenaeum - Polak & Van Genneep, 1982), I-XXIV; Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2024), I-XXIV; Ovidius, *Legendarische vrouwen: Heroides*, translated by W.A.M. Peters (Amsterdam: Ambo, 1994), 11; Ovid, *Ovid's Heroides: A New Translation and Critical Essays*, translated by Paul Murgatroyd, Bridget Reeves and Sarah Parker (New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁸ Anastasia Bakogianni and Ricardo Apostol, "Introduction: Face to Face - Locating Classical Receptions on Screen," in *The New Antiquity Locating Classical Receptions On Screen: Masks, Echoes, Shadows* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 1-16.

⁹ Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 202; Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>; Renger and Solomon, "Introduction," 1-14.

¹⁰ Koning, *Mythologie*, 9; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 3-6; Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 5-6; G. S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths* (Great Britain: Pelican Books, 1974), 1-29; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979).

¹¹ Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 3-6; Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, 16.

¹² David Adams Leeming, *The Oxford companion to world mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

¹³ "Mythology in African religions," *Britannica*, last updated November 25, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/African-religions/Mythology>; *Epic African Myths & Tales: An Anthology of Classic Tales* (Fulham: Flame Tree Publishing, 2019), 14-23; Leeming, *The Oxford companion to world mythology*, 7.

¹⁴ Sokyō Ono, *Shinto: The Kami Way* (Tokyo: TUTTLE Publishing, 1962), 1-19; Leeming, *The Oxford companion to world mythology*, 354-355; "Ultimate Guide to Japanese Mythology," *Mythopedia*, accessed December 28, 2024, <https://mythopedia.com/guides/japanese-mythology>.

¹⁵ Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 6.

¹⁶ Koning, *Mythologie*, 24.

been a mortal king of Crete who deposed his father Kronos.¹⁷ Modern researcher Georges Dumézil, also states that some myths are based on historical events but are exaggerated, while others are literary fiction that depict important concepts of ideology.¹⁸ There are also those who argue that myths by definition go together with rituals, a concept called myth-rite. Researchers who study this are called ritualists, some being James George Frazer and William Robertson Smith.¹⁹

Myths can also be interpreted as a product of the psyche.²⁰ Researchers adhering to this theory are Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Freud interprets dreams and myths as similar phenomena, theorising that they are expressions of unconscious mental forces. Myths can be regarded as collective cultural dreams, and when interpreted symbolically, they offer insights into the unconscious psyche of a culture.²¹ Jung is a student of Freud and agrees that myths are an expression of the unconscious. He introduces the concept of archetypes, which he defines as universal unconscious psychic tendencies, or primordial images of the collective unconscious, that people express in myth.²²

Another interpretation of classical myths is that they all have the same structural building blocks. Vladimir Propp, in his analysis of Russian fairy tales, recognised that these elements always recurred in an identical order. While not every part occurred in every story, they always fitted in the structural order.²³ This approach was further elaborated by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, where he posited that recurring elements within myths consistently manifest in the narratives of mythological heroes.²⁴ This suggests that classical myths can also be analysed and defined on the basis of syntax.

In this study, Fritz Graf's definition of myths is adhered to, with classical mythology being studied using a general definition of myths. According to Graf, a myth is defined as a traditional story. A myth, therefore, is not the product of a single author as is a text. Myths are transmitted across generations without knowing who created the myth. These stories are not constrained by textual or genre limitations. The plot and characters are not strongly fixed. This quality of adaptability, coupled with their cultural significance contributes to their evolution over time, reflecting the changing needs

¹⁷ Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 6; Koning, *Mythologie*, 25.

¹⁸ Georges Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 3.

¹⁹ Robert Ackerman, "Frazer on Myth and Ritual," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (1975): 115-134; Robert A. Segal, "The Myth-Ritualist Theory of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 19 (1980): 173-185; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 11; Koning, *Mythologie*, 49-64.

²⁰ Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, 71; Cohen, "Theories of Myth," 340; Koning, *Mythologie*, 65-78; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 680; Leeming, *The Oxford companion to world mythology*, 139.

²¹ Cohen, "Theories of Myth," 340; Koning, *Mythologie*, 65-78; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 680; Leeming, *The Oxford companion to world mythology*, 139.

²² Cohen, "Theories of Myth," 340; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 680; Koning, *Mythologie*, 65-78; Leeming, *The Oxford companion to world mythology*, 27.

²³ Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 13-14; Koning, *Mythologie*, 102-106; Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, 223-254.

²⁴ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (California: New World Library, 2008); Koning, *Mythologie*, 73-77.

and perspectives of the societies that surround them.²⁵ These stories deal with the origins of the world, society, institutions, the gods and their relationship with mortals, everything on which human existence rests.²⁶ This broad definition was chosen because it is effective for this study to start broadly. With the option of further refinement if subsequent research shows that myths will delineate properties that reflect their society to a greater extent. In addition, the fluid nature of myths in Graf's definition is appropriate for this study, for this study examines, among other things, retellings.²⁷

According to the adopted definition, the Trojan War narrative is considered a myth. It is a traditional story, given the long oral tradition that preceded the composition of Homer's account.²⁸ Contemporary researchers believe that the Trojan War was not a historical event, but a narrative of the mythical conflict between the Greeks and Trojans.²⁹ The narrative focuses on the relationship between mortals and gods. Gods such as Apollo, Athena and the demigod hero Achilles play a role in the conflict.³⁰ The narrative of the Trojan War changes because of oral tradition,³¹ and there are currently multiple iterations of the story, including the *Iliad*, the *Heroides* and *The Silence of the Girls*.³² This underscores the interconnection between myths and literature. Myths are inherently fluid,³³ but when a version is committed to writing, it becomes fixed in literature. By comparing these written versions, the changes made over time and across different cultures can be identified, and the reasons behind them can possibly be established.

Myths such as the Trojan War have played a significant role in history, through education, art and retellings, which is why a literary and historical angle was chosen.³⁴ The research questions: *Do the mythical women of classical literature reflect the social position of women and enslaved people, and if so, how has this evolved across cultures and time?* are explored through a case study of the myth of the Trojan War, specifically of the character Briseis. Briseis plays a major role in the

²⁵ Fritz Graf, *Greek mythology: an introduction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 3.

²⁶ Graf, *Greek mythology*; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 3.

²⁷ Graf, *Greek mythology*; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 3.

²⁸ Corinne Ondine Pache, "General Introduction," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), xxvii; Margalit Finkelberg, *Homer and Early Greek Epic: Collected Essays* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 154; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 51.

²⁹ Casey Dué, "Learning Lessons from the Trojan War: Briseis and the Theme of Force," *College Literature*, 34 (2007): 248; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

³⁰ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

³¹ Pache, "General Introduction," xxvii; Finkelberg, *Homer and Early Greek Epic*, 154; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 51.

³² Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Pat Barker, *The Silence of the Girls* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), 1-324.

³³ Graf, *Greek mythology*; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 3.

³⁴ "VI.8.5 Pompeii. Casa del Poeta Tragico or House of the Tragic Poet," Pompeii in Pictures, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R6/6%2008%2005%20p2.htm>; "Homer Before Print," UChicago Library, accessed July 16, 2024, <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/homer-print-transmission-and-reception-homers-works/homer-print/>; Edward D. Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women; With an Introductory History of their Legal Condition in the Hebrew, Roman and Feudal Civil Systems* (Cincinnati: William H. Moore & CO, 1845), 74-75; Peters, *Her*, 11; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

narrative of the Trojan War and has a relationship with Achilles.³⁵ She has been selected for analysis in this study due to her status as both a woman and an enslaved individual.³⁶ In this thesis, the term ‘enslaved’ will be used instead of ‘slave’, which is often used in literature. The term ‘slave’ implies that people at their core were slaves, whereas ‘enslaved’ suggests that slavery was something that happened to individuals.³⁷

First, an analysis will be conducted of how Briseis is described in different literary narratives of this myth, in different cultures and times. This will include an examination of the degree of agency she is granted. When reference is made to Briseis' agency, it is meant to what extent Briseis has the freedom to take actions and take her fate into her own hands. Next, Briseis' position is compared to the social position of women and enslaved people in ancient and modern times in their respective societies, as based on historical sources.

Obviously, within the scope of this thesis, it is not feasible to discuss all versions of the story. Therefore, three versions from three historical periods have been selected for analysis. The mythological narratives analysed are Homer's *Iliad* (8th century BC),³⁸ Ovid's *Heroides* (1st century BC)³⁹ and Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (2018).⁴⁰ Briseis has never been made a heroine or a major character in a large-scale ancient work.⁴¹ Other characters in the Trojan War narrative that will be mentioned are Achilles, the king of Phthia; Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae; and Patroclus, Achilles' closest companion.⁴² In regards to the Trojans, Helen is a key figure. She is the wife of King Menelaus, who was taken to Troy, thus instigating the Trojan War. Another significant character is Hector, the eldest son of King Priam of Troy and husband to Andromache.⁴³

The mythological narratives covered in this study have been selected for the following reasons. The *Iliad* is examined because it is one of the most famous sources on the mythological Trojan War. What is interesting about this work is that Briseis is part of the central conflict, but appears only four times in the text.⁴⁴ Additionally, relatively little attention is paid to Briseis' inner life. However, this changes in the *Heroides*; this work was chosen because of its focus on Briseis and its response to the *Iliad*. One of the letters in the *Heroides* is written from Briseis' perspective with a greater focus on her inner life.⁴⁵ *The Silence of the Girls* stands out because it tells the events of the

³⁵ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

³⁶ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV.

³⁷ "Why We Use "Enslaved"," Shannon Browning-Mullis, Telfair Museums, May 4, 2020, <https://www.telfair.org/article/why-we-use-enslaved/>.

³⁸ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

³⁹ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

⁴⁰ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁴¹ Howard Jacobson, "Ovid's Briseis: A Study of *Heroides* 3," *Phoenix*, 25 (1971): 335-446.

⁴² Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

⁴³ Schwartz, *Il*, III-VI; Wilson, *Il*, III-VI.

⁴⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, I-II; Wilson, *Il*, I-II.

⁴⁵ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

Iliad from Briseis' viewpoint, with a particular emphasis on war violence against women.⁴⁶ These works are analysed with the proposed hypothesis that stories born in societies reflect those societies to some extent, and that these retellings could respond to other versions of the myth.⁴⁷

A significant amount of research has been conducted on the influence of culture on mythological narratives.⁴⁸ For example, Malinowski proposes the theory of *charter myths*. With this, he argues that every custom and institution tends to be validated or confirmed by a myth. For example, why does the king belong to a specific clan? Because the first king belonged to the same clan. The *charter* idea is right for some myths, but does not apply to all.⁴⁹ For, *charter myths* do not explain how other cultures can adopt these myths from each other. Indeed, other cultures often have other institutions, which should maintain these myths. This is a static understanding of myths, but myths are fluid in nature.⁵⁰ In regards to the written versions discussed in this thesis, this could be explained by the concept of intertextuality. The idea that texts do not exist in isolation but rather respond to other texts. For instance, by altering details that are not aligned with the cultural norms of the society in which they are produced.⁵¹

This concept of intertextuality is closely related to the field of reception study.⁵² This field has gained prominence in the scientific world since the late 20th century and examines both classical and post-classical reception.⁵³ The retellings that will be discussed in this thesis are part of both classical and post-classical reception, thus positioning this research in the field of reception studies. Additionally, there has been significant research on female characters in literature from antiquity, and on the emergence of modern retellings, including recent work by J.J.H. Klooster.⁵⁴ The rise of gender studies has also led to increased interest in these topics, as illustrated by Lillian E. Doherty's study of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and how it reflects the social values of the time.⁵⁵ However, Briseis is

⁴⁶ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁴⁷ Christiaan Caspers, Jacqueline Klooster, Inger N.I. Kuin and Bram van der Velden, *Muze, vertel: De Griekse en Latijnse literatuur van de oudheid* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), 315; Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, "Ancient Religious Texts and Intertextuality: Plato's and Plutarch's Myths of the Afterlife," in *Religion as relation: Studying Religion in Context* (South Yorkshire: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2021), 134-139.

⁴⁸ Lillian E. Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 102; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 11-12; Sue Blundell, *Women in ancient Greece* (London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 14.

⁴⁹ Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, 59-61; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 102; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 11-12; Jaime de Angulo, "Reviewed Work(s): Myth in Primitive Psychology By Bronislaw Malinowski," *American Anthropologist*, 30 (1928): 322-326; Cohen, "Theories of Myth," 344; Ivan Strenski, *Malinowski and the Work of Myth* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), xi-xxix.

⁵⁰ Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 101-105; Koning, *Mythologie*, 62-63; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 11-12.

⁵¹ Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 315; Lanzillotta, "Ancient Religious Texts and Intertextuality: Plato's and Plutarch's Myths of the Afterlife," 134-139.

⁵² Renger and Solomon, "Introduction," 1-14.

⁵³ Renger and Solomon, "Introduction," 1-14; Bakogianni and Apostol, "Introduction: Face to Face - Locating Classical Receptions on Screen," 1-5.

⁵⁴ Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze."

⁵⁵ Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*.

often unfairly omitted from similar research, but is central to this study. This research stands out by taking into account the fluid nature of myths and by focusing on Briseis, a character that has received minimal scholarly attention to date.

As noted, myths are fluid in nature and have multiple versions, deviations from a ‘primordial version’ do not make the later versions any less legitimate.⁵⁶ Adaptations of myths are caused by the story being told in a different time, culture and place. Myths are not isolated entities; they develop to some extent as an image of this society; hence researchers can also gather some information about antiquity based on myths, taking into consideration artistic liberties.⁵⁷ The working hypothesis proposed that based on different versions of mythological narratives, one can also learn different aspects of the society. One mythological narrative may reflect one aspect of society, while another may reflect others.⁵⁸ In today’s society, we see a diversity of opinion and experience,⁵⁹ and it can be inferred that this was also true in antiquity.

The contemporary narrative *The Silence of the Girls* is an apt illustration of the time-bound nature of a mythological tale.⁶⁰ *The Silence of the Girls* is a retelling of the *Iliad*, about the sexual exploitation of women in times of war. It can be placed in the trend of increasing retellings of Greek-Roman myths from a female perspective, as of 2017.⁶¹ Briseis is raped by Achilles and Agamemnon.⁶² The following definition of rape will be used in this thesis: unlawful sexual activity, most often involving sexual intercourse, against the will of the victim through force or the threat of force or with an individual who is incapable of giving legal consent because of minor status, mental illness, mental deficiency, intoxication, unconsciousness, or deception.⁶³ In this narrative Briseis has no love affair with Achilles.⁶⁴ This interpretation of Achilles and Briseis’ relationship as one of rapist and victim, may be due to the modern view of consent. A relationship between the two is considered inappropriate due to their difference in power.⁶⁵ To some extent, this work reflects the risk of sexual

⁵⁶ Koning, *Mythologie*, 14-16; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 101; Graf, *Greek mythology*; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 3.

⁵⁷ Koning, *Mythologie*, 14-16; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 101.

⁵⁸ Renger and Solomon, “Introduction,” 1-14; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 315; Lanzillotta, “Ancient Religious Texts and Intertextuality: Plato’s and Plutarch’s Myths of the Afterlife,” 134-139; Koning, *Mythologie*, 14-16; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 101.

⁵⁹ “Different people, different opinions? Huh?,” Anjali Udasi, Medium, September 21, 2022, <https://anjaliu9994.medium.com/different-people-different-opinions-huh-3e4fa2a69b7c>.

⁶⁰ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁶¹ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; Klooster, “De Revisionistische Muze,” 201-202; “The Enduring Popularity of Mythological Retellings,” Ainsley Atinon, Grattan Street Press, September 17, 2024, <https://grattanstreetpress.com/2024/09/17/the-enduring-popularity-of-mythological-retellings/>; “Spilling Over: Ovid’s *Heroides* and the Mythological Female Voice,” Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>.

⁶² Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁶³ “Rape,” Britannica, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rape-crime>.

⁶⁴ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁶⁵ “Rape,” Britannica, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rape-crime>.

violence that women face, both in everyday life, and in times of war in the 21st century (2001-2100 AD).⁶⁶

The Silence of the Girls was published in 2018 in America, during the fourth feminist wave, which has a focus on raising awareness about sexual harassment. A prime example of this is the #MeToo movement. Individuals who experienced sexual harassment or rape from all over the world shared their experiences on social media.⁶⁷ While rape is illegal in America,⁶⁸ studies between 1987 and 2000 indicate that 1 in 4 women in America have experienced rape or an attempted rape in their lifetime.⁶⁹ Sexual violence is prevalent and can be experienced regardless of gender, but since 2017 people are able to discuss it more openly.⁷⁰ This phenomenon is also reflected in the book. The sexual violence perpetrated against Briseis is depicted as a negative occurrence, which corresponds with contemporary values.⁷¹

Briseis in *The Silence of the Girls* reflects the real risk that women, both free and enslaved, face of sexual violence in everyday life and in times of war.⁷² Recently, in 2024, the UN reported an incident in which at least two Palestinian girls and women in captivity were raped by the Israeli army.⁷³ And despite slavery being illegal,⁷⁴ during World War II, Japanese soldiers forced Korean women into sexual slavery.⁷⁵ This topic is explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

Myths may not always fully reflect the realities of their respective societies. This can be inferred due to fantasy and detective books also not fully reflecting modern societies.⁷⁶ This is similar to *The Silence of The Girls* in that there is no contemporary Trojan War.⁷⁷ These narratives are

⁶⁶ "The 21st Century and the 3rd Millennium," Astronomical Applications Department, accessed January 19, 2025, <https://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/millennium>.

⁶⁷ "The Third Wave of Feminism," Laura Brunell, Elinor Burkett and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica, last updated December 15, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>.

⁶⁸ "Rape in the First, Second, and Third Degree," Vindicate Criminal Law Group, accessed May 21, 2023, <https://vindicatelaw.com/sex-crimes/rape-defense/rape-first-second-third-degree/>.

⁶⁹ "Statistics," me too, accessed November 27, 2024, <https://metoomvmt.org/learn-more/statistics/>.

⁷⁰ "Statistics," me too, accessed November 27, 2024, <https://metoomvmt.org/learn-more/statistics/>; "The Third Wave of Feminism," Laura Brunell, Elinor Burkett and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica, last updated December 15, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>.

⁷¹ "Rape," Britannica, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rape-crime>; "The Third Wave of Feminism," Brunell, Laura, Elinor Burkett, and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica, last updated December 15, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>; "Feminism: The Fourth Wave," National Women's History Museum, December 3, 2021, <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-fourth-wave>; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁷² Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁷³ "Israel/oPt: UN experts appalled by reported human rights violations against Palestinian women and girls," United Nations, February 19, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/israelopt-un-experts-appalled-reported-human-rights-violations-against>.

⁷⁴ "Slavery's last stronghold," John D. Sutter, CNN, accessed May 18, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2012/03/world/mauritania.slaverys.last.stronghold/index.html>.

⁷⁵ Keun-Joo Christine Pae, "Factory Girls and 'Comfort' Girls: A Feminist Theo-Ethical Reflection on Korean Girl Soldiers in Japanese Empire," in *Female Child Soldiering, Gender Violence, and Feminist Theologies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 116-118; Asian Boss, "Life As A 'Comfort Woman': Story of Kim Bok-Dong," October 28, 2018, video, 00:00-18:14, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsT97ax_Xb0.

⁷⁶ Jacqueline Klooster, interview organised by Yona Siero, email, April 25, 2024.

⁷⁷ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

fictional and are of interest to readers, and authors take artistic liberties.⁷⁸ However, these narratives do reflect *elements* of the era in which they were written, as illustrated by *The Silence of the Girls*.⁷⁹ Therefore, in this research, it is necessary to compare the works with other historical sources, rather than immediately assuming elements of the story are true. This way, one can find out what a depiction of reality is and what is an interesting fiction.

Furthermore, it is crucial to consider the author and intended audience of mythological (re)tellings. Many ancient written versions of myths were authored by men from a male perspective for an often male audience.⁸⁰ While there may have been versions of myths recorded by and from a female perspective, these have not survived. These versions may not have been handed down because they were told by women and because of power relations. After all, historically women had less access to education and were often subject to male control.⁸¹

Consequently, male perspectives on women can significantly influence the content of such works. A contemporary illustration of this phenomenon can be found in Haruki Murakami's *1Q84*. The novel features a female character who mourns the loss of her friends, but more acutely the disappearance of their breasts from the world.⁸² This represents one male perspective on female characters. When analysing works from both ancient and modern times, it is essential to compare them with historical sources. This allows researchers to identify and address any potential bias introduced by the author and the intended audience regarding the social position of women and enslaved individuals.

However, it is also important to acknowledge the potential for historical bias in the research process. Researchers endeavour to interpret ancient texts as objectively as possible, but their analysis is inevitably influenced by their personal experiences, cultural backgrounds and the historical period.⁸³ As a young woman living in the 21st century, I am influenced by my personal experiences, including growing up at a time when feminism was gaining traction and more individuals were coming forward to speak about sexual violence. This, combined with my own experiences, makes me biased when reading ancient texts. When encountering an enslaved character such as Briseis, my initial reaction is to question the possibility of her loving Achilles, assuming that she is a victim of sexual assault. However, it is important to acknowledge that women from ancient times might have

⁷⁸ Jacqueline Klooster, interview organised by Yona Siero, email, April 25, 2024.

⁷⁹ Jacqueline Klooster, interview organised by Yona Siero, email, April 25, 2024; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁸⁰ Jacqueline Klooster, interview organised by Yona Siero, email, April 25, 2024; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

⁸¹ "The Rise of Women in Ancient Greece," Michael Scott, *History Today*, November 11, 2009, <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/feature/rise-women-ancient-greece>; Emily A. Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated women in the Roman elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (London: Routledge, 1986); "The Education System in Ancient Greece," Duncan Howitt-Marshall, *Greece Is*, September 14, 2023, <https://www.greece-is.com/the-education-system-in-ancient-greece/>.

⁸² Haruki Murakami, *1Q84: Book 3* (New York: Vintage, 2012).

⁸³ Maarten De Pourcq, Nathalie de Haan and David Rijser, "Framing Classical Reception Studies: Introduction," in *Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity: Different Perspectives on a Developing Field* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 1-11; Bakogianni and Apostol, "Introduction: Face to Face - Locating Classical Receptions on Screen," 1-16.

had a different interpretation of such narratives. The objective of this research is to confront these biases and gain a more nuanced understanding of the historical context.

The aim is to ascertain the extent to which one can learn about the social position of women and enslaved people based on different historical written versions of mythological narratives. This is examined through the character of Briseis in the mythological written (re)tellings of the Trojan War, the *Iliad*, the *Heroides* and *The Silence of the Girls*. These literary works are studied using historical sources to draw conclusions about the extent to which Briseis reflects the social position of women and enslaved people in their respective eras and societies.

Chapter 1: Briseis in early Archaic Greece

This chapter examines how Briseis is depicted in the *Iliad* and then considers whether Briseis truthfully depicts the position of women or enslaved people in early Archaic Greece. To this end, section 1.1. discusses the author and intended audience of the *Iliad* and what researchers can learn from this in relation to the research question. Section 1.2. examines Briseis' role in the *Iliad* and how she is described. The subsequent section 1.3. examines whether Briseis' position corresponds to the position of women and enslaved people in early Archaic Greece.

1.1. The author and audience of the *Iliad*

In this section, the author and the intended audience of the *Iliad* are explained. The degree of literacy in early Archaic Greece will be examined, in order to deduce who the intended audience is. This is significant as an author's gender and social status can influence their literary work. When the *Iliad* is aimed at women, its interpretation as a literary mythic narrative differs from when women are not part of its intended audience. To understand the influence of early Archaic Greece on the character of Briseis, it is essential to consider historical information about the author, the audience, and the *Iliad* itself.

Author of the *Iliad*

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are epic works attributed to Homer, or Homeric epic. Homer's work is considered the starting point of Greek poetry and the accumulation of ancient oral traditions.¹ Thus, the stories of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were not invented by Homer, as he has written down one of the many versions of the Trojan War narrative. Briseis is therefore a character who probably existed before Homer describes her.²

If Homer was a historical person, he probably lived in the 8th century BC. Most researchers now consider Homer to be a symbol of tradition rather than a real historical figure.³ Another possibility is that the *Iliad* was written by several authors, whom researchers have not yet been able to

¹ Corinne Ondine Pache, "General Introduction," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), xxvii; Margalit Finkelberg, *Homer and Early Greek Epic: Collected Essays* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 154; Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardo, red., *Classical Mythology: Eighth Edition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55; Christiaan Caspers, Jacqueline Klooster, Inger N.I. Kuin and Bram van der Velden, *Muze, vertel: De Griekse en Latijnse literatuur van de oudheid* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), 23.

² Pache, "General Introduction," xxvii; Finkelberg, *Homer and Early Greek Epic*, 154; Lawrence Kim, "Homer in Antiquity," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 417.

³ Hugo Koning, *Mythologie* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 14; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 24-26; Pache, "General Introduction," xxvii; Casey Dué, Jim Marks, "The Homeric Question," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) 585-589; Michael Silk, *Homer: The Iliad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5.

trace historically.⁴ In instances where the term ‘Homer’ is used, it is important to note that this is not referring to a specific historical figure, but rather a symbol of tradition, unless otherwise specified.

In the event of multiple authorship, the work is understood to represent the ideals and realities of multiple individuals. This is further supported by the oral and performance tradition of the *Iliad*.⁵ Due to a lack of information about the author(s),⁶ it is not possible to draw clear conclusions about their social status and its impact on the work. However, it is conceivable that the work reflects values expressed by multiple authors. If Homer was a real person, he was a man.⁷ Briseis is thus a female character written from a male perspective.

As discussed, female characters may be portrayed differently when female authors describe them.⁸ Perhaps female authors contributed to the *Iliad* or to the oral tradition, women may have contributed to the story. These stories, or the evidence for them, may not have stood the test of time, due to power relations.⁹ Gender thus plays a role in the depiction of Briseis, but with the *Iliad* there is no evidence of the gender of the author, or authors, except on the assumption that Homer was a historical man. Emily Wilson’s modern translation of the *Iliad*, effectively demonstrates the role of gender and interpretation of texts. In her introduction and notes, Wilson discusses the absence of the female perspective in these texts, acknowledging that her own experiences as a woman have influenced her introductory narrative.¹⁰

When considering the possibility that the *Iliad* was primarily composed by a man or men, it is important to recognise that the male perspective on women may not be entirely reliable, as it is likely

⁴ Dué and Marks, “The Homeric Question,” 585-589; Casey Dué, “Conclusion: Tradition and Innovation,” in *Homeric Variations on a Lament by Briseis* (Washington: Center for Hellenistic Studies, 2006), 83-91.

⁵ Pache, “General Introduction,” xxvii; Finkelberg, *Homer and Early Greek Epic*, 154; Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardo, red., *Classical Mythology: Eighth Edition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 23; Silk, *Homer: The Iliad*, 13-15.

⁶ Dué and Marks, “The Homeric Question,” 585-589; Dué, “Conclusion: Tradition and Innovation,” 83-91.

⁷ Koning, *Mythologie*, 14; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 24-26; Pache, “General Introduction,” xxvii; Dué and Marks, “The Homeric Question,” 585-589.

⁸ “Avoiding Gender Stereotypes in Fiction Writing,” Rosemount, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://rosemountediting.com/avoiding-gender-stereotypes-in-fiction-writing/>; “Men & Women Writing Each Other Badly,” Shelby Sullivan, Medium, May 26, 2021, <https://medium.com/inspired-writer/men-women-writing-each-other-badly-9c0f46aeac5c>; “30 Times Male Authors Showed They Barely Know Anything About Women,” Jonas Grinevičius, Justinas Keturka and Rutuja Dumbre, Boredpanda, last updated January 3, 2024, <https://www.boredpanda.com/male-authors-writing-about-women/>; “Bechdel test,” Jordana Rosenfeld, Britannica, last updated December 11, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bechdel-test>; Aeschylus, “The Texts of the Oresteia,” in *The Oresteia Agamemnon, Women at the Graveside, Orestes at Athens*, translated by Oliver Taplin, edited by Oliver Taplin and Joshua Billings (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 1-130; Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Oedipus ; Agamemnon ; Thyestes ; Hercules on Oeta ; Octavia*, translated by John G Fitch (London: Harvard University Press, 2018).

⁹ “The Rise of Women in Ancient Greece,” Michael Scott, History Today, November 11, 2009, <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/feature/rise-women-ancient-greece>; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated women in the Roman elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (London: Routledge, 1986); “The Education System in Ancient Greece,” Duncan Howitt-Marshall, Greece Is, September 14, 2023, <https://www.greece-is.com/the-education-system-in-ancient-greece/>.

¹⁰ Emily Wilson, “Introduction,” in *The Iliad* (New York: W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2024), chapter 1; Emily Wilson, “Notes,” in *The Iliad* (New York: W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2024), chapter 28.

to present a biased view of women.¹¹ A male perspective could also possibly explain why Briseis is written mainly in relation to men, such as Agamemnon, Achilles and Patroclus, and has only one moment where she speaks.¹² Given the possibility that the author of the *Iliad* is male, and that the work represents multiple ideals and views from multiple authors, it is important to make additional comparisons with historical sources in order to draw conclusions about Briseis as a historical reflection of women and enslaved people in early Archaic Greece.

The intended audience for the *Iliad*

The historical Homer is believed to have written the *Iliad* in the period from 800-700 BC,¹³ which falls under the Archaic Greek period from 800-500 BC or more specifically the early Archaic period.¹⁴ During this period, the *Iliad*, and consequently Briseis, was received by a significant Greek audience.¹⁵ The intended audience of the *Iliad* may influence the depiction of Briseis, potentially introducing bias rather than a realistic portrayal of women in early Archaic Greece. In order to explore the intended audience of the *Iliad*, the level of literacy in the period of Archaic Greece will be discussed. While the performance aspect of the *Iliad* will be discussed briefly, this research will primarily focus on the written version, as this thesis explores the relationship between texts and retellings.

The *Iliad* draws from a long oral tradition, and subsequent performances of the work continued, as they were performed as rhapsodes.¹⁶ These performances took place at significant festivals, such as the Panathenaea in Athens during the late Archaic Greek period, where the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were recited in their entirety.¹⁷ Women were permitted to attend these performances.¹⁸ However, it is unlikely that women constituted the target demographic for the public performances of

¹¹ "Avoiding Gender Stereotypes in Fiction Writing," Rosemount, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://rosemountediting.com/avoiding-gender-stereotypes-in-fiction-writing/>; "Men & Women Writing Each Other Badly," Shelby Sullivan, Medium, May 26, 2021, <https://medium.com/inspired-writer/men-women-writing-each-other-badly-9c0f46aeac5c>; Aeschylus, "The Texts of the Oresteia;" Seneca, *Oedipus ; Agamemnon ; Thyestes ; Hercules on Oeta ; Octavia*; "30 Times Male Authors Showed They Barely Know Anything About Women," Jonas Grinevičius, Justinas Keturka and Rutuja Dumbre, Boredpanda, last updated January 3, 2024, <https://www.boredpanda.com/male-authors-writing-about-women/>; "Bechdel test," Jordana Rosenfeld, Britannica, last updated December 11, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bechdel-test>.

¹² Homer, *Ilias & Odyssee*, translated by M. A. Schwartz (Amsterdam: Athenaeum - Polak & Van Gennepe, 1982), I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2024), I, XIX, XIX, XXIV.

¹³ "Ancient Greece - Timeline," World History Encyclopedia, July 17, 2024, <https://www.worldhistory.org/timeline/greece/>.

¹⁴ "Ancient Greece - Timeline," World History Encyclopedia, July 17, 2024, <https://www.worldhistory.org/timeline/greece/>.

¹⁵ "Homer Before Print," UChicago Library, accessed July 16, 2024, <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/homer-print-transmission-and-reception-homers-works/homer-print/>; Pache, "General Introduction," xxvii; Finkelberg, *Homer and Early Greek Epic*, 154; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 55; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 23.

¹⁶ "Greek literature," Robert Browning, Peter A. Mackridge and Donald William Lucas, Britannica, last updated August 22, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Greek-literature>.

¹⁷ Martin L. West, "Rhapsodes at Festivals," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 173 (2010): 1-13.

¹⁸ "Women in Classical Greece," Colette Hemingway, The Met, accessed January 12, 2025, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wmna/hd_wmna.htm.

the *Iliad*, as they were often expected to remain indoors and the Panathenaea was one of the few occasions where women were allowed to be part of public life. Consequently, these performances were primarily designed for a male audience.¹⁹

In Archaic Greece, there were individuals who were literate. However, this literacy was not often comparable to that of a skilled craftsman or writer, and literacy often remained very limited, also differing per region.²⁰ This was due to a number of factors, including limited access to formal education, an absence of an ideological notion that all citizens should be literate, and the scarcity of effective methods for disseminating texts on a large scale.²¹ However, the literacy rate among the male population was relatively high during the Archaic Greek period. This was primarily due to well-off archaic Greek families placing a high value on education and ensuring their sons received schooling, where they learned to read and write at an early age.²² Elite men were often literate, as they mostly had access to an education.²³

Research suggests that women in Ancient Greece were largely excluded from formal education, and therefore from reading and writing.²⁴ This is supported by the degree of evidence of female literacy during the classical period of the fifth and fourth centuries BC. While some Archaic Greek women were literate, this was not a common occurrence, and was likely due to their affluent background.²⁵ An example of this is Sappho, a renowned female poet, from an affluent family, who

¹⁹ "Women in Classical Greece," Colette Hemingway, The Met, accessed January 12, 2025, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wmna/hd_wmna.htm; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 25-26; "Spinning and Weaving in Ancient Greece," Women In Antiquity, April 2, 2017, <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2017/04/02/spinning-and-weaving-in-ancient-greece/>; Sarah B. Pomeroy, Stanley M. Burstein, Walter Donlan, and Jennifer Tolbert Roberts, red., *A Brief History of Ancient Greece: Politics, Society, and Culture* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12, 72; Cynthia W. Shelmerdine, "Women in the Mycenaean economy," in *Women in Antiquity: Real women across the Ancient world* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 631; Deborah Lyons, "Dangerous Gifts: Ideologies of Marriage and Exchange in Ancient Greece," in *Classical Antiquity*, 22 (California: University of California Press 2003): 93-134; "Consent and Rape Culture in Ancient Greece," Women in Antiquity, December 6, 2017, <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2017/12/06/consent-and-rape-culture-in-ancient-greece/>; Andrea Doyle, "Cassandra - Feminine Corrective in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*," in *Acta Classica* 51 (2008): 57-75; Sue Blundell, *Women in ancient Greece* (London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 69-71.

²⁰ Carol G. Thomas, "Reviewed Work(s): Ancient Literacy by W. V. Harris," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 111 (1991): 241; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 8, 24; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures>.

²¹ Thomas, "Reviewed Work(s): Ancient Literacy by W. V. Harris," 241.

²² William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 59.

²³ "The Education System in Ancient Greece," Duncan Howitt-Marshall, Greece Is, September 14, 2023, <https://www.greece-is.com/the-education-system-in-ancient-greece/>; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 47-48; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures>.

²⁴ "The Life of Athenian Women in Ancient Greece: A Comprehensive List," Anisia Jacob, The Collector, September 18, 2021, <https://www.thecollector.com/athenian-women-in-ancient-greece/>; "The Education System in Ancient Greece," Duncan Howitt-Marshall, Greece Is, September 14, 2023, <https://www.greece-is.com/the-education-system-in-ancient-greece/>; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 96.

²⁵ Alfred Burns, "Athenian Literacy in the Fifth Century B.C.," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 42 (1981): 371-387; Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan, and Roberts, red., *A Brief History of Ancient Greece*, 10; J. A. Davison, "Literature and Literacy in Ancient Greece," in *Phoenix*, 16 (Place: Classical Association of Canada, 1962), 154; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 8, 24, 96; "The Life of Athenian Women in Ancient Greece: A Comprehensive List," Anisia Jacob, The Collector, September 18, 2021, <https://www.thecollector.com/athenian-women-in-ancient-greece/>; "The Education System in Ancient Greece," Duncan Howitt-Marshall, Greece Is, September 14, 2023, <https://www.greece-is.com/the-education-system-in-ancient-greece/>.

lived during the late 7th century BC.²⁶ This suggests that social status, in addition to gender, played a significant role in determining literacy rates in Archaic Greece.²⁷ Given the lower level of female literacy, it is likely that the intended audience for the written version of the *Iliad* were not Greek women, but elite Greek men.

Despite the depictions of women in the *Iliad*, including Briseis, it was a popular story, as evidenced by the many found copies, art and long oral tradition.²⁸ The story of the *Iliad* did not go so far against accepted social values that people did not want to hear the story. This suggests that the depiction of women in the *Iliad* may have been perceived as acceptable. This is evidenced by the similar portrayal of women in other works from this period.²⁹ If people had viewed women differently from how they were portrayed in these ancient works, it is unlikely that they would have enjoyed such widespread popularity. However, this cannot be proven conclusively, as it is not necessary for books to always reflect society in detail.

The notion that the *Iliad* was a text intended for male audiences is further supported by its content. For instance, there are more male characters, with only a small number of female characters.³⁰ Furthermore, female characters are frequently portrayed in relation to men, as exemplified by Briseis with Achilles,³¹ Andromache with Hector³² and Chryseis with Agamemnon.³³ This phenomenon is discussed in more detail in section 1.2. The abundance of speeches by male characters, in contrast to the limited dialogue of female characters, lends further support to this assertion.³⁴ The male characters are also shown to have more agency than the female characters, as illustrated by the interactions of Andromache and Hector, and Briseis and Achilles, where the men make the decisions.³⁵

²⁶ Kim, "Homer in Antiquity," 418; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 47-48; Blundell, *Women in ancient Greece*, 82-83; Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan and Roberts, red., *A Brief History of Ancient Greece*, 10; J. A. Davison, "Literature and Literacy in Ancient Greece," in *Phoenix*, 16 (Place: Classical Association of Canada, 1962), 154; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 47-48, 96.

²⁷ "The Education System in Ancient Greece," Duncan Howitt-Marshall, Greece Is, September 14, 2023, <https://www.greece-is.com/the-education-system-in-ancient-greece/>.

²⁸ "Homer Before Print," UChicago Library, accessed July 16, 2024, <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/homer-print-transmission-and-reception-homers-works/homer-print/>; Pache, "General Introduction," xxvii; Finkelberg, *Homer and Early Greek Epic*, 154; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 55; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 23; Anneliese Kossatz-Deissmann, "Briseis," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC): III 1 Atherion-Eros* (Switzerland: Publisher, 1986), 158-160; Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, *Hellenistic-Byzantine Miniatures of the Iliad* (Olten: Urs Graf-Verlag, 1955), picture list 4, 12, 117-118.

²⁹ Hesiodus, *Theogony and Works and Days*. Translated by M. L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Archilochus, *Sappho and the Greek Lyric Poets*, translated by Willis Barnstone (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), fragment 20.

³⁰ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

³¹ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV.

³² Schwartz, *Il*, VI.445-489; Wilson, *Il*, VI.400-590.

³³ Schwartz, *Il*, I; Wilson, *Il*, I.

³⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

³⁵ Schwartz, *Il*, I, VI, IX, XIX; Wilson, *Il*, I, VI, IX, XIX, XXIV.

If the *Iliad* was intended for a female audience, it is possible that the few female characters served as exemplars of behaviour for women in early Archaic Greece.³⁶ This may also be the case when the target audience is male, as it could indicate the desired behaviour for a woman to be married to. Given the long oral and performance tradition of the *Iliad*, it is possible that the depictions of desirable behaviour may originate from a different time period than the early Archaic period. To explore this further, section 1.3. Briseis will be compared to the social position of women and enslaved people in the early Archaic period.

1.2. Briseis in the *Iliad*

This section discusses the role of Briseis in the *Iliad*. The *Iliad* chronicles an episode from the Trojan War.³⁷ In the *Iliad*, Briseis is depicted as a spoil of war, captured from her city of Lyrnessus and claimed by Achilles, yet she can also be possibly connected to the city of Brisa.³⁸ She plays a pivotal role in the central conflict of the *Iliad*, the feud between Achilles and Agamemnon.³⁹ Despite her pivotal role in the *Iliad*, Briseis is mentioned in only four Books and speaks on just one occasion.⁴⁰ This section will discuss passages related to Briseis from Books I, IX, XIX and XXIV in order to gain a better understanding of her character. This will then allow for a comparison to be made with the social position of women and enslaved people in early Archaic Greece in section 1.3.⁴¹

The *Iliad* commences with Book I, which details the start of the conflict at the center of the *Iliad*, between Achilles and Agamemnon concerning Briseis. The two men are Greek kings who are fighting in the Trojan War.⁴² Agamemnon had Chryseis as his spoils of war, but she was under the protection of Apollo. Agamemnon's refusal to return Chryseis to her father, led to a divine retribution, as Apollo punished the Greek camp with a plague.⁴³ Within the Greek camp, both Achilles and Agamemnon are formally recognised by the army, which assigned them their respective ranks. The

³⁶ Doyle, "Cassandra - Feminine Corrective in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*," 57-75; "Finding women in Greek literature," Sam Newington, OpenLearn, March 10, 2021, <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history/classical-studies/finding-women-greek-literature>.

³⁷ James Whitley, "Homer and History," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 257.

³⁸ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Casey Dué, "Briseis," in *The Homer Encyclopedia*, edited by Margalit Finkelberg (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 144; William M. Owens, *Classics@ Journal*, accessed January 3, 2024, <https://classics-at.chs.harvard.edu/briseis-and-andromache-enslaved-sleeping-with-the-enemy-in-greek-and-roman-epic/>.

³⁹ Schwartz, *Il*, I; Wilson, *Il*, I.

⁴⁰ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV.

⁴¹ The passages from the *Iliad* are discussed based on the translations by M. A. Schwartz and Emily Wilson. Both are classicists who are appreciated in academic circles for their translations. Schwartz's Dutch translation has been chosen to comprehend the *Iliad* in my first language. Whereas Wilson's was chosen, because it was in the written language of this thesis, and the first English translation of the *Iliad* by a woman. "The *Iliad*' Review: Emily Wilson Revives the Ancient Sensations," *The Harvard Crimson*, accessed January 15, 2025, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2023/10/17/iliad-emily-wilson-review-odyssey-the-multitude/>; "Maximiliaan August Schwartz, 1884-1973," VNLEX, accessed July 15, 2024, <https://www.vertalerslexicon.nl/1884/04/04/maximiliaan-august-schwartz-1884-1973/>; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

⁴² Schwartz, *Il*, I; Wilson, *Il*, I.

⁴³ Schwartz, *Il*, I; Wilson, *Il*, I.

army has chosen to place Agamemnon above Achilles.⁴⁴ When Achilles tells Agamemnon to return Chryseis to her father to appease Apollo's anger, Agamemnon is unable to comply without compromising his own status.⁴⁵ Agamemnon then asserts that, since Achilles thinks they are of equal status, Achilles should bestow Briseis upon him as a token of their shared rank. Agamemnon's insistence on Briseis serves to underscore the distinction in their respective statuses.⁴⁶ Consequently, Briseis is removed against her will.⁴⁷ This action was perceived as a violation of Achilles' honour, angering him. As a result of this violation of his honour Achilles refuses to continue to fight in the Trojan War.⁴⁸

Agamemnon's decision to take Briseis was not influenced by her abilities or physical attributes; rather, she was seen as a symbol of Achilles' conquest and a trophy.⁴⁹ Briseis' value is derived from her association with a prominent figure. Her status is further elevated when she becomes the property of Agamemnon, given Agamemnon's own elevated status.⁵⁰ Therefore, the role of Briseis in this conflict is not intrinsic to her.

Briseis is depicted as having less freedom than other women. For example, Helen is more verbal than Briseis.⁵¹ This is a noteworthy observation, particularly given that both Helen and Briseis were held in captivity. Hanna Roisman concludes that it is unclear whether Helen went to Troy voluntarily or not. However, it is evident that she cannot leave Troy voluntarily, thus confirming her status as a prisoner.⁵² Roisman contends that Helena's circumstances are analogous to those of other mortal women, despite her divine origins as a daughter of Zeus.⁵³ I respectfully disagree with the final assertion. The two women originate from different places Helen from Sparta and Briseis from Lyrnessus.⁵⁴ However, Helen is freer in Troy than Briseis in the Greek camp. The difference is that Briseis is of mortal descent and Helen of divine descent as a daughter of Zeus. Unlike Helen, Briseis is bound in her status as a woman of mortal parentage. In contrast to the assertions made by Roisman,⁵⁵ Helen's divine parentage is a distinguishing factor that sets her apart from the other women depicted in the *Iliad*.

⁴⁴ Hans van Wees, *Status Warriors: War, Violence and Society in Homer and History* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben Publisher, 1992), 299-310.

⁴⁵ Schwartz, *Il*, I; Wilson, *Il*, I; van Wees, *Status Warriors*, 299-310.

⁴⁶ Schwartz, *Il*, I.131-220; Wilson, *Il*, I.140-200.

⁴⁷ Schwartz, *Il*, I.310-351; Wilson, *Il*, I.320-351.

⁴⁸ Schwartz, *Il*, I; Wilson, *Il*, I.

⁴⁹ Schwartz, *Il*, I; Wilson, *Il*, I; Wilson, "Introduction," chapter 1; van Wees, *Status Warriors*, 299-310.

⁵⁰ van Wees, *Status Warriors*, 299-310; Howard Jacobson, "Ovid's Briseis: A Study of *Heroides* 3," *Phoenix*, 25 (1971): 340.

⁵¹ Schwartz, *Il*, III, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, III, XXIV.

⁵² Hanna M. Roisman, "Helen in the 'Iliad' "Causa Belli" and Victim of War: From Silent Weaver to Public Speaker," *The American Journal of Philology*, 1 (2006): 1-36.

⁵³ Roisman, "Helen in the 'Iliad'," 4; Schwartz, *Il*, III.395-442; Wilson, *Il*, III.410-530.

⁵⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, III.443-461; Wilson, *Il*, III.380-490, IX.

⁵⁵ Roisman, "Helen in the 'Iliad'," 4

After Book I, Briseis is mentioned again in Book IX.⁵⁶ The loss of Briseis prompted Achilles' refusal to fight, resulting in the death of many Greek soldiers.⁵⁷ The name Briseis is related to the word for martial strength, which is connected to the narrative as when Briseis is taken from him, he refuses to use his martial strength.⁵⁸ Agamemnon then sends an envoy to Achilles, proposing the return of Briseis on the condition that Achilles agrees to fight again.⁵⁹ Agamemnon also offers to swear that he never had sexual relations with Briseis.⁶⁰ However, Achilles declines this offer. Consequently, Briseis remains under Agamemnon's possession, and the conflict persists.⁶¹ It should be noted that Briseis does not take part in this discussion.⁶² She is a pawn in the game between the two kings and has no agency in the matter of her fate.⁶³

During the negotiations, Achilles expresses his love for Briseis in a manner akin to that of a spouse. He acknowledges that he won Briseis through force, yet maintains his belief that he loves her.⁶⁴ This assertion is further reinforced by the depiction of Briseis and Achilles sleeping next to each other in Book XXIV.⁶⁵ However, Briseis is not present in Book IX to support or contradict his statements. Achilles believes that Agamemnon's removal of Briseis was unjust. However, he does not inquire about her well-being, whether she might be afraid in her new situation or if she misses him.⁶⁶ Consequently, while the external circumstances of Briseis are discussed, her internal emotional state remains unaddressed in this dialogue.⁶⁷

In Book XIX Achilles expresses desire for Artemis to have killed Briseis on the day he chose her as his prize.⁶⁸ Furthermore, by admitting that he won Briseis with his spear, Achilles admits that he has committed or threatened violence against her.⁶⁹ In addition, when Briseis' return is rejected by Achilles, he says Agamemnon should sleep with her and enjoy her company.⁷⁰ Here Achilles gives Agamemnon permission to enter into a sexual relationship with Briseis. Achilles does not name whether he knows that Briseis is interested in a sexual relationship with Agamemnon.⁷¹ Achilles is

⁵⁶ Schwartz, *Il*, IX; Wilson, *Il*, IX.

⁵⁷ Schwartz, *Il*, IX.127-168, 254-300; Wilson, *Il*, IX.

⁵⁸ Dué, "Briseis," 144.

⁵⁹ Schwartz, *Il*, IX.127-168, 254-300; Wilson, *Il*, IX.

⁶⁰ Schwartz, *Il*, IX.127-168, 254-300; Wilson, *Il*, IX, note 19.389.

⁶¹ Schwartz, *Il*, IX.127-168, 254-300; Wilson, *Il*, IX.

⁶² Schwartz, *Il*, IX.301-473; Wilson, *Il*, IX.330-490.

⁶³ Schwartz, *Il*, IX; Wilson, *Il*, IX; Jacobson, "Ovid's Briseis: A Study of Heroides 3," 340.

⁶⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, IX.301-382; Wilson, *Il*, IX.330-450.

⁶⁵ Schwartz, *Il*, XXIV.657-700; Wilson, *Il*, XXIV.660-840.

⁶⁶ Schwartz, *Il*, IX; Wilson, *Il*, IX.

⁶⁷ Schwartz, *Il*, IX; Wilson, *Il*, IX.

⁶⁸ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.40-82; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.40-82.

⁶⁹ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.40-82; Wilson, *Il*, IX.340-450.

⁷⁰ Schwartz, *Il*, IX.301-341; Wilson, *Il*, IX.330-430.

⁷¹ Schwartz, *Il*, IX.301-341; Wilson, *Il*, IX.330-430.

also depicted as sleeping next to Achilles in Book XXIV.⁷² From a modern perspective, it can be argued that, due to her enslavement, Briseis could not consent to a sexual relationship with either Agamemnon or Achilles.⁷³ This is further supported by Briseis not wanting to go with Agamemnon.⁷⁴ This suggests that Briseis was a character who experienced the threat of violence and possibly unwanted sexual advances in the *Iliad*.

Following Patroclus' death, Achilles chooses to resume fighting in the Trojan War and Briseis is returned to him in Book XIX.⁷⁵ Agamemnon issues a public declaration as promised stating that he has not had sexual intercourse with Briseis.⁷⁶ Wilson adds a note to this, that this is more about perception than truth, because if Briseis had slept with Agamemnon, her worth as human property of Achilles would have been diminished, and Achilles honor could not have properly been restored.⁷⁷ Achilles' decision to continue fighting marks the conclusion of his dispute with Agamemnon.⁷⁸

As previously outlined, the fate of Briseis is determined by Achilles and Agamemnon, with no agency being granted to her and no involvement in the negotiations.⁷⁹ However, during a conversation between Achilles and Agamemnon, Achilles holds Briseis responsible for their ongoing dispute. He believes that if he had not chosen her as a war prize, fewer Greeks would have died. While Achilles and Agamemnon are the primary instigators of the conflict, Achilles thus claims the conflict is Briseis' fault.⁸⁰

In Book XIX, Briseis speaks for the first time in the *Iliad* when she is lamenting Patroclus.⁸¹ She then goes on to describe her past and family, mentioning her parents, brothers and that she was married.⁸² Through her discourse, the reader gains insight into Briseis' complexity as a character, with a rich history and interpersonal connections.⁸³

Book XIX also provides further insight into Briseis' inner life.⁸⁴ In Book I, it is stated that Briseis accompanied Agamemnon against her will.⁸⁵ However, her feelings are largely overlooked in the *Iliad*. Briseis expresses that she has endured numerous misfortunes. She witnessed the conquest of

⁷² Schwartz, *Il*, XXIV.657-700; Wilson, *Il*, XXIV.660-840.

⁷³ "Rape," Sharon James, Oxford Classical Dictionary, April 30, 2020, <https://oxfordre.com/classics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-8365>.

⁷⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, I.310-351; Wilson, *Il*, I.340-450.

⁷⁵ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.40-82; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.40-82.

⁷⁶ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.172-251; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.170-260.

⁷⁷ Schwartz, *Il*, Note 19:232.

⁷⁸ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.40-82; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.40-82.

⁷⁹ Schwartz, *Il*, IX; Wilson, *Il*, IX.

⁸⁰ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.40-82; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.40-82.

⁸¹ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.262-303; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.290-390.

⁸² Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.262-303; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.290-390.

⁸³ "Briseis and Andromache Enslaved: Sleeping with the Enemy in Greek and Roman Epic," William M. Owens, *Classics@Journal*, accessed January 3, 2024, <https://classics-at.chs.harvard.edu/briseis-and-andromache-enslaved-sleeping-with-the-enemy-in-greek-and-roman-epic/>.

⁸⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.

⁸⁵ Schwartz, *Il*, I.310-351; Wilson, *Il*, I.340-450.

her city and the deaths of her brothers and husband, stating that she wept constantly, but that Patroclus comforted her. Briseis expresses deep respect for her mother and affection for her brothers, lamenting the loss of her family and weeping for Patroclus.⁸⁶

Briseis and Patroclus shared a friendly relationship, with Patroclus being pleasant towards her. Patroclus had promised to make her Achilles' κούριδιῆ, his lawful wife.⁸⁷ She expresses her love for Patroclus and that she will mourn him forever.⁸⁸ Interestingly, Homer describes that the other women present weep for their own fate, but Briseis weeps for Patroclus. Homer also acknowledges in this passage that the situation of Briseis and the other women present in the tent with Patroclus is undesirable because they are lamenting their fate.⁸⁹

Achilles' depiction of Briseis differs from that of Homer.⁹⁰ As previously mentioned, Achilles does not inquire about Briseis' well-being or take into account her emotional state and inner life.⁹¹ In Homer's depiction in Book XIX, Briseis is portrayed as a character with a rich inner life, her own voice and a rich past. Homer portrays her as a person who loves her family and Patroclus, and with relationships beyond just Agamemnon and Achilles.⁹² While Briseis is depicted primarily through the perspectives of Agamemnon and Achilles in the *Iliad*, she also expresses herself in her own words independently from both figures.⁹³ This creates an intriguing contrast between the depictions of Briseis by Achilles and Homer, highlighting the different perspectives on her character.

In the *Iliad*, the character Briseis is depicted as lacking agency. This can be attributed to Briseis being a female character, most likely written by a male author for a male audience. Had she been written for a female audience; it is likely that her character would have been depicted differently.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.262-303; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.290-390.

⁸⁷ Homer, *Homeri Opera in five volumes* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1920; Perseus Digital Library), 19.276-308, accessed November 3, 2024,

<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0133%3Abook%3D19%3Acard%3D276>;

Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.297-298; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.290-390; Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-*

English Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889; Perseus Digital Library), κούριδιῆ, accessed January 20, 2025,

https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0058%3Aalphabetic+letter%3D*k%3Aentry+group%3D48%3Aentry%3Dkouri%2Fdios.

⁸⁸ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.262-303; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.290-390.

⁸⁹ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.262-303; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.290-390; Marilyn B. Skinner, "Briseis, The Trojan Women, and Erinna," *The Classical World*, 75 (1982): 265-269; Casey Dué, "Men's songs and Women's Songs" in *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 30-56.

⁹⁰ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX.301-382, XIX; Wilson, *Il*, IX.330-450.

⁹¹ Schwartz, *Il*, IX; Wilson, *Il*, IX.

⁹² Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.262-303; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.290-390.

⁹³ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX, XIX.262-303, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX, XIX.290-390, XXIV.

⁹⁴ "Avoiding Gender Stereotypes in Fiction Writing," Rosemount, accessed January 14, 2025,

<https://rosemountediting.com/avoiding-gender-stereotypes-in-fiction-writing/>; "Men & Women Writing Each Other Badly," Shelby Sullivan, Medium, May 26, 2021, <https://medium.com/inspired-writer/men-women-writing-each-other-badly-9c0f46aeac5c>;

"30 Times Male Authors Showed They Barely Know Anything About Women," Jonas Grinevičius, Justinas

Keturka and Rutuja Dumbre, Boredpanda, last updated January 3, 2024, <https://www.boredpanda.com/male-authors-writing-about-women/>;

"Bechdel test," Jordana Rosenfeld, Britannica, last updated December 11, 2024,

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bechdel-test>; Aeschylus, "The Texts of the Oresteia;" Seneca, *Oedipus ; Agamemnon ;*

Thyestes ; Hercules on Oeta ; Octavia; Doyle, "Cassandra - Feminine Corrective in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*," 57-75;

1.3. Briseis and the social position of women and enslaved people in early Archaic Greece

The following section will test the working hypothesis that mythological narratives to some extent reflect the societies in which they are told is tested in this section. This investigation takes into consideration the discussed information regarding the author and the intended audience of the *Iliad*. The society depicted by Homer is then compared with the society of early Archaic Greece, and the social position of women and enslaved people at the time is discussed. The conclusion will determine whether Briseis as a character reflects the social position of women and enslaved people of the early Archaic Greek period, and thus whether the proposed hypothesis is correct.

The archaeology of the Homeric world and early Archaic Greece

Homer sketches an alternative world, which researchers refer to as the Homeric world.⁹⁵ Greek authors have dated the Trojan War to the 12th or 13th century BC,⁹⁶ dating the mythological event in the late Bronze Age (1700-1000 BC).⁹⁷ Homer's poems had to be comprehensible to his early Archaic Greek audience⁹⁸ and therefore share similarities with the time period.⁹⁹ These similarities and differences can be used to determine whether or not the *Iliad* faithfully depicts the time and culture, and the social position of women and enslaved people of early Archaic Greece.

The *Iliad* exhibits notable parallels with the Archaic Greek period.¹⁰⁰ One such parallel is the depiction of funeral plays in the *Iliad*, which were a common feature of early Archaic Greece.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the political and ethnic characteristics, societal structure outlined in the Homeric society and the number of settlements that developed from the 8th century BC onwards corresponds to those of Archaic Greece.¹⁰² However, Homeric society also includes elements corresponding with the late Bronze Age, in which the Trojan War is set.¹⁰³ This is evidenced by a parallel example of a burial

"Finding women in Greek literature," Sam Newington, OpenLearn, March 10, 2021, <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history/classical-studies/finding-women-greek-literature>.

⁹⁵ Charles Stocking, "Athletic Competition," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 297.

⁹⁶ "Trojan War," Britannica, last updated January 11, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Trojan-War>.

⁹⁷ "Bronze Age Aegean," Kelly Macquire, World History Encyclopedia, September 17, 2021, https://www.worldhistory.org/Bronze_Age_Aegean/.

⁹⁸ Jenny Strauss Clay, "Homeric Religion," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 245.

⁹⁹ Stocking, "Athletic Competition," 297.

¹⁰⁰ Adrian Kelly, "Homer and History: 'Iliad' 9.381-4," *Mnemosyne*, 59 (2006): 321-333.

¹⁰¹ Stocking, "Athletic Competition," 297.

¹⁰² Finkelberg, *Homer and Early Greek Epic*, 321; Jean Paul Crielaard, "Homeric Communities," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 244.

¹⁰³ Kelly, "Homer and History: 'Iliad' 9.381-4," 321-333.

mound from Heroön Lefkandi (950 BC).¹⁰⁴ The grave contains the remains of a male soldier, a woman and four horses.¹⁰⁵ In Homer's works, all heroes, with one exception in the *Odyssey*, are cremated, exemplified by the burial of Patroclus. Their bones are placed in silver or gold containers, with a mountain over them.¹⁰⁶ This corresponds to practices of the late Bronze Age.¹⁰⁷

An additional illustration of the alignment between Homer's works and the Bronze Age is the archeological discovery of a cup similar to the described cup of Nestor, dated to the late Bronze Age in Mycenae.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, in the *Iliad* warriors fight in chariots, this was part of battle tactics employed in the Bronze Age.¹⁰⁹ Yet scenes of chariots in battle are depicted on vases from the late Bronze Age and late Geometric period, categorised under the early Archaic period. Researchers are unsure if these scenes depict actual battle, or scenes from the *Iliad*.¹¹⁰

The depiction of Achilles in the *Iliad*, can possibly be based on Archaic Greece. Achilles is depicted as an individualistic hero, driven by his own personal honour, refusing to fight when Briseis is taken.¹¹¹ Michael Silk views Achilles' actions, which cause men to die, as a criticism of the heroic code.¹¹² It could be argued that Achilles is a representation of the individualism shared by the Greek city states at 800 BC, for the city states often shared conflicts between them.¹¹³ In contrast, Agamemnon, often referred to as the king of kings, leads the armies of united Greek kings as a unifying figure. This could be seen as a representation of a more collective-oriented hero and a more unified Greece.¹¹⁴ According to Thucydides, the mythological Trojan War marked the first time that the city states united as a front.¹¹⁵ This dynamic would later be repeated in historical conflicts such as the Persian wars (492–449 BC).¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁴ Whitley, "Homer and History," 262; M. R. Popham, P. G. Calligas, L. H. Sackett, J. Coulton and H. W. Catling, "LEFKANDI II. The Protogeometric Building at Toumba. PART 2: The Excavation, Architecture and Finds," *The British School at Athens. Supplementary Volumes*, 23 (1993): 22.

¹⁰⁵ Whitley, "Homer and History," 262; Popham, Calligas, Sackett, Coulton and Catling, "LEFKANDI II. The Protogeometric Building at Toumba. PART 2: The Excavation, Architecture and Finds," 2.

¹⁰⁶ Whitley, "Homer and History," 262; Schwartz, *Il*, XXIII.209-294; Wilson, *Il*, 230-340.

¹⁰⁷ Whitley, "Homer and History," 262; Popham, Calligas, Sackett, Coulton and Catling, "LEFKANDI II. The Protogeometric Building at Toumba. PART 2: The Excavation, Architecture and Finds," 22.

¹⁰⁸ Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan and Roberts, red., *A Brief History of Ancient Greece*, 65; Whitley, "Homer and History," 260; Stephanie Aulsebrook, "MATERIALIZING MYTHOLOGY: THE CUP OF NESTOR FROM SHAFT GRAVE IV AT MYCENAE," *Symposium Egejskie: Papers in Aegean Archaeology*, 2 (2019): 79-89.

¹⁰⁹ Schwartz, *Il*, XVI, Wilson, *Il*, XVI; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 25.

¹¹⁰ Whitley, "Homer and History," 261-262; George J. Stagakis, "Charioteers and Παλαίμαχοι of the "Iliad"," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 29 (1980): 142-164.

¹¹¹ Schwartz, *Il*, I, Wilson, *Il*, I.

¹¹² Silk, *Homer: The Iliad*, 96-97.

¹¹³ "Peloponnesian War," *Britannica*, last updated December 21, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Peloponnesian-War>; Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, edited by Thomas Hobbes (London, Bohn, 1843; Perseus Digital Library), 1.3., accessed January 23, 2025, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0247%3Abook%3D1%3Achapter%3D3>.

¹¹⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, I, Wilson, *Il*, I.

¹¹⁵ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.3.

¹¹⁶ "Greco-Persian Wars," *Britannica*, last updated December 19, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Greco-Persian-Wars>.

Archaeological and textual evidence indicates that the *Iliad* contains numerous elements indicative of the late Bronze Age, long before the lifetime of Homer.¹¹⁷ Conversely, numerous elements are also evident from Homer's own time, specifically the Archaic period. This must also inform our understanding of the character of Briseis. That the Homeric world does not fully reflect the Archaic Greek world is a reason to doubt the historicity of Briseis' character, exemplifying the importance of comparing her to other historical sources.

Women in Archaic Greece and Briseis

This section draws the social position of Briseis in the *Iliad* and that of women in early Archaic Greece. The following topics are discussed: economic and legal position, division of labour and marriage. It is important to note that a lot of information regarding women's lives in Archaic Greece is relatively unknown¹¹⁸ because there are no historical texts from this period available. However, there are texts written about this period by authors from a later time.¹¹⁹ Briseis is from Lyrnessus and thus a non-Greek woman.¹²⁰ However, as previously discussed, the account of Briseis is written from a Greek perspective aimed at a Greek audience. This study therefore compares Briseis to the social position of early Archaic Greek women.

In Archaic Greece, the majority of women were economically and politically dependent on men.¹²¹ While there were rich women, men typically wielded political authority and were responsible for the majority of economic transactions.¹²² Women were not permitted to participate in public affairs and therefore had less political authority.¹²³ This dynamic is reflected in myths of the Archaic period, including the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. The myth recounts the reaction of the goddess Demeter when she learns that her daughter Persephone has been abducted by Hades, the god of the underworld.¹²⁴ This myth illustrates the restricted political and economic influence of women in the early Archaic period, as they required their husbands' consent to construct a temple for Demeter.¹²⁵

¹¹⁷ Schwartz, *Il*, I; Wilson, *Il*, I; van Wees, *Status Warriors*, 261-264; Kelly, "Homer and History: "Iliad" 9.381-4," 321-333.

¹¹⁸ Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan, and Roberts, red., *A Brief History of Ancient Greece*, 65.

¹¹⁹ Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan and Roberts, red., *A Brief History of Ancient Greece*, 6.

¹²⁰ Schwartz, *Il*, IX.301-341, XIX.40-82; Wilson, *Il*, IX.330-430, XIX.40-82.

¹²¹ Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 24; "Prostitution in Ancient Athens," Joshua J. Mark, World History Encyclopedia, July 2, 2021, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/28/prostitution-in-ancient-athens/>.

¹²² Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 24; "Prostitution in Ancient Athens," Joshua J. Mark, World History Encyclopedia, July 2, 2021, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/28/prostitution-in-ancient-athens/>.

¹²³ Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan and Roberts, red., *A brief History of Ancient Greece*, 70.

¹²⁴ Anonymous, *The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (London, Harvard University Press 1914; Perseus Digital Library), Demeter, accessed January 20, 2025, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0138%3Ahymn%3D2>; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 17-18, 24.

¹²⁵ Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 24; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Anonymous, *The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, Demeter.

The *Iliad* portrays women as having no political authority. This is illustrated when Andromache begs Hector to stop fighting, but Hector declines to do so.¹²⁶ Given that this is a decision about the Trojan War, it can be seen as political. This failure to heed her counsel further underscores the absence of her authority.¹²⁷ Hector's decision could be seen as reflecting his prioritisation of city-wide interests over familial commitments, suggesting that the issue at hand is not necessarily a lack of authority on Andromache's part. Yet, the decisions regarding Briseis' fate are made by Achilles and Agamemnon, with no input from Briseis herself.¹²⁸ Consequently, Briseis' powerlessness does not appear to be exclusively determined by her status as a prisoner of war. Instead, it is relevant to other women depicted in the *Iliad* and in Archaic Greece. This underscores the notion that Briseis' position of authority reflects the prevailing social dynamics of Archaic Greece, such as the free woman Andromache,¹²⁹ where women were dependent on the decisions of men.

In Archaic Greece, the division of labour was gender-based,¹³⁰ with outdoor work such as agriculture, trade, warfare and ruling being the domain of men. Conversely, women were responsible for indoor tasks such as spinning, weaving, cooking, storage, and caring for the sick and children.¹³¹ Women were expected to manage the household.¹³² Textiles and working with wool were female duties done by both free(d) and enslaved women.¹³³ This practice is referenced in Book VI, where Hector informs Andromache that upon her abduction to Greece by the Greeks, she will resume her weaving.¹³⁴ Besides Andromache, Chryseis and Helen are also described as weavers.¹³⁵

Remarkably, Briseis is not described as a weaver in the *Iliad*. Even when Briseis and seven other women are given to Achilles, the seven women are described as skilled weavers, but Briseis is not.¹³⁶ However, Chryseis is described as a weaver by Agamemnon.¹³⁷ Agamemnon's view of Briseis

¹²⁶ Schwartz, *Il*, VI.445-489; Wilson, *Il*, VI.400-590.

¹²⁷ Johannes Heinrichs, "'Royal' Women in the Homeric Epics," in *The Routledge Companion to Women and Monarchy in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (London: Routledge, 2020), 56

¹²⁸ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV.

¹²⁹ Schwartz, *Il*, VI.445-489; Wilson, *Il*, VI.400-590.

¹³⁰ Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 25-26; "Spinning and Weaving in Ancient Greece," *Women In Antiquity*, April 2, 2017, <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2017/04/02/spinning-and-weaving-in-ancient-greece/>; Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan and Roberts, red., *A Brief History of Ancient Greece*, 12, 72; Shelmerdine, "Women in the Mycenaean economy," 625.

¹³¹ Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 25-26; "Spinning and Weaving in Ancient Greece," *Women In Antiquity*, April 2, 2017, <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2017/04/02/spinning-and-weaving-in-ancient-greece/>; Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan and Roberts, red., *A Brief History of Ancient Greece*, 12, 72; Shelmerdine, "Women in the Mycenaean economy," 631; Lyons, "Dangerous Gifts: Ideologies of Marriage and Exchange in Ancient Greece," 93-134; "Consent and Rape Culture in Ancient Greece," *Women in Antiquity*, December 6, 2017, <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2017/12/06/consent-and-rape-culture-in-ancient-greece/>; Doyle, "Cassandra - Feminine Corrective in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*," 57-75; Blundell, *Women in ancient Greece*, 69.

¹³² Blundell, *Women in ancient Greece*, 71.

¹³³ Edward E. Cohen, "The Athenian businesswoman," in *Women in Antiquity: Real women across the Ancient World* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 721; Lyons, "Dangerous Gifts: Ideologies of Marriage and Exchange in Ancient Greece," 93-134.

¹³⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, VI.445-489; Wilson, *Il*, VI.400-590.

¹³⁵ Schwartz, *Il*, I.1-37, III.84-171; Wilson, *Il*, I.1-50, III.120-160.

¹³⁶ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.219-261; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.240-350.

¹³⁷ Schwartz, *Il*, I.29-31; Wilson, *Il*, I.30-50.

as a suitable replacement for Chryseis suggests that she may be a skilled weaver.¹³⁸ Researchers have identified parallels between Chryseis and Briseis, including their similarities in status.¹³⁹ Furthermore, both women are named after their fathers, Chryseis meaning daughter of Chryses, and Briseis meaning daughter of Brises, suggesting that the author intended to create a parallel.¹⁴⁰ However, the *Iliad* does not directly depict Briseis as a working or weaving woman. Nor is there any mention in the *Iliad* of whether Briseis was a working or weaving woman before her capture.¹⁴¹ Briseis' character therefore does not reflect the archaic Greek female duties depicted in the *Iliad*.

In Archaic Greece, no verbal consent was needed from the bride for marriage.¹⁴² This is evident on Greek wedding vases, which often depict a bride and groom in a chariot, with the groom forcibly holding the bride by her wrist.¹⁴³ It is also notable that in many cases, the groom was a person unknown to the bride. It was considered important for women to remain virgins before marriage.¹⁴⁴ The customary practice involved the bride being escorted from her home to the groom's residence.¹⁴⁵ This description aligns with the account provided by Briseis in Book XIX. She asserts that Achilles would escort her to Phthia, his home, and hold a wedding feast, thereby making her his legal wife.¹⁴⁶ This assertion is further substantiated by the interpretation of Briseis as a war bride by researchers.¹⁴⁷ This aspect of Briseis' situation reflects elements of ancient marriage practices. However, Briseis is a widow and therefore probably not a virgin.¹⁴⁸ The potential marriage between Briseis and Achilles is discussed further below in the section Briseis and Slavery.

That Briseis does not fully reflect this range of female characteristics of the Archaic period can be explained by a number of factors. It is possible that Homer's gender and the intended audience of the *Iliad* resulted in less emphasis on faithful portrayals of female characters. Conversely, there are other female characters, such as Andromache who is depicted as a good, devoted wife, in a manner more consistent with their time and culture.¹⁴⁹ However, because Briseis was regarded as a prize of

¹³⁸ Schwartz, *Il.* I; Wilson, *Il.* I.

¹³⁹ Heinrichs, "'Royal' Women in the Homeric Epics," 271.

¹⁴⁰ Dué, "Briseis," 144; "Homeric Variations on a Lament by Briseis. In the series "Greek Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches," Stephen Evans, BMCRC, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://bmcrc.brynmawr.edu/2003/2003.01.36/>; Casey Dué, "Girl," in *Homeric Variations on a Lament by Briseis* (Washington: Center for Hellenistic Studies, 2006), 49-67.

¹⁴¹ Schwartz, *Il.* I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il.* I-XXIV.

¹⁴² Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 25; "Women in Classical Greece," Colette Hemingway, The Met, accessed January 12, 2025, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wmna/hd_wmna.htm.

¹⁴³ Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 25; "The Ancient Greek Wedding Ceremony," marinanelson27, Women in Antiquity, December 1, 2020, <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2020/12/01/the-ancient-greek-wedding-ceremony/>.

¹⁴⁴ Blundell, *Women in ancient Greece*, 69.

¹⁴⁵ Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 25.

¹⁴⁶ Schwartz, *Il.* XIX.262-303; Wilson, *Il.* XIX.290-390; Homer, *Homeri Opera in five volumes*, 19.276-308; Skinner, "Briseis, The Trojan Women, and Erinna," 265-269

¹⁴⁷ Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 27.

¹⁴⁸ Schwartz, *Il.* XIX; Wilson, *Il.* XIX.

¹⁴⁹ Schwartz, *Il.* VI.445-489; Wilson, *Il.* VI.400-590. Roisman, "Helen in the "Iliad"," 9; Heinrichs, "'Royal' Women in the Homeric Epics," 56.

war and enslaved, this might have influenced her depiction in the *Iliad*. Alternatively, the myth may be regarded as a work of fiction, in which case there would be less emphasis on historical accuracy.¹⁵⁰

Briseis and Slavery

Briseis is notable for being both a woman and an enslaved person, her status as an enslaved person determining her position in the Greek camp.¹⁵¹ Slavery was widespread in Archaic Greece,¹⁵² and until the late Archaic period, all Greek states were oligopolistic, allowing citizens to use violence against foreigners for their personal gain.¹⁵³ This dynamic was evident among both the elite and the commoners, who frequently engaged in piracy and other forms of violence to amass wealth and acquire enslaved individuals, as it was common practice to enslave defeated enemies.¹⁵⁴ Slavery in ancient times was not based on race.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, enslaved individuals were subjected to various forms of violence as a means of punishment or to exert control.¹⁵⁶ Torture, for instance, was employed as a method to compel enslaved individuals to confess, and it was illegal to commit violence against another's enslaved person.¹⁵⁷ The *Iliad* does not record any physical violence against Briseis, but Achilles' indignation when Briseis is claimed by Agamemnon¹⁵⁸ may be related to the prohibition against using violence against another's enslaved individual. It is evident that enslavement of women, such as Briseis and Chryseis, was prevalent in both Homeric society and Archaic Greek society, indicating the widespread existence of slavery during this era.¹⁵⁹

There are four categories in which people were forced into slavery: 1) internal slavery within a community, such as through debt; 2) violent slavery through state war or piracy; 3) the slave trade; and 4) inheriting slave status through the natural reproduction of enslaved populations.¹⁶⁰ In Archaic Greece, interactions between Greeks and non-Greeks on the outskirts of Greek territory frequently

¹⁵⁰ Jacqueline Klooster, interview organised by Yona Siero, email, April 25, 2024.

¹⁵¹ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV.

¹⁵² Deborah Kamen, *Greek Slavery* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), 18; Kostas Vlassopoulos, "Slavery in Ancient Greece," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 71; W. L. Westermann, "Slavery and the Elements of Freedom in Ancient Greece", in *Slavery in Classical Antiquity: Views and Controversies* (London: Lowe and Brydone Ltd, 1968), 17-33.

¹⁵³ Vlassopoulos, "Slavery in Ancient Greece," 71.

¹⁵⁴ Vlassopoulos, "Slavery in Ancient Greece," 71; Blundell, *Women in ancient Greece*, 69.

¹⁵⁵ Westermann, "Slavery and the Elements of Freedom in Ancient Greece", 17-33.

¹⁵⁶ Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 59; Robert Schlaifer, "Greek Theories of Slavery from Homer to Aristotle", in *Slavery in Classical Antiquity: Views and Controversies* (London: Lowe and Brydone Ltd, 1968), 53-73.

¹⁵⁷ Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 59-60; MacLachlan, *Women in Ancient Greece: A Sourcebook*, 77.

¹⁵⁸ Schwartz, *Il*, I; Wilson, *Il*, I.

¹⁵⁹ Vlassopoulos, "Slavery in Ancient Greece," 71; Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 59; Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan and Roberts, red., *A brief History of Ancient Greece*, 69; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

¹⁶⁰ Vlassopoulos, "Slavery in Ancient Greece," 70; M. I. Finley, "Was Greek Civilization Based on Slave Labor," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 8 (1959): 152; Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 18, 34; Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan and Roberts, red., *A brief History of Ancient Greece*, 69; A. H. M. Jones, "Slavery in the Ancient World", in *Slavery in Classical Antiquity: Views and Controversies* (London: Lowe and Brydone Ltd, 1968), 1-16; Westermann, "Slavery and the Elements of Freedom in Ancient Greece", 17-33; Schlaifer, "Greek Theories of Slavery from Homer to Aristotle", 53-73.

resulted in enslavement. These interactions could be peaceful, involving the exchange of goods, or violent, resulting from raids. During the Archaic period, the majority of enslaved individuals were sourced from the regions northeast of Greece, around the Black Sea.¹⁶¹ The *Iliad*, for example, highlights the prevalence of warfare-related slavery, as exemplified by the abduction of Briseis from Lyrnessus by Achilles following the conquest of the city.¹⁶²

Enslaved individuals were employed in a variety of ways. These individuals were utilised for maintenance tasks, such as cleaning, cooking and taking care of children, as well as for external labour, including agriculture and mining operations.¹⁶³ This form of slavery is depicted in the *Iliad*, as it describes enslaved people preparing and serving drinks and being instructed to perform household chores.¹⁶⁴ However, in the *Iliad*, Briseis does not perform similar tasks.¹⁶⁵

Another category of slave labour is gratification, in which enslaved people were used for sensual pleasure. Examples include musicians and dancers, but enslaved people were often used for sex, as prostitutes. The term ‘prostitute’ is used in the literature,¹⁶⁶ yet in modern times, prostitutes are people who choose to have this profession consensually.¹⁶⁷ This was probably not the case for the men and women in Greek or Roman slavery, as masters held complete control over the fate of their enslaved.¹⁶⁸ These individuals were subjected to exploitation, and girls and women captured in war were often subjected to rape, a practice that continued during their captivity.¹⁶⁹

The *Iliad* depicts the possibility of sexual violence against enslaved women, though it is important to note that the ancient Greek language did not include a specific term for rape. However, there is evidence that the Court of the Areopagus considered rape a crime in the Archaic period.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶¹ Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 33.

¹⁶² Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.40-82; Wilson, *Il*, IX.340-450.

¹⁶³ Vlassopoulos, “Slavery in Ancient Greece,” 76; Finley, “Was Greek Civilization Based on Slave Labor,” 150; Schlaifer, “Greek Theories of Slavery from Homer to Aristotle”, 53-73; Blundell, *Women in ancient Greece*, 71; MacLachlan, *Women in Ancient Greece: A Sourcebook*, 77.

¹⁶⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, I.440-483; Wilson, *Il*, VI.490-670.

¹⁶⁵ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

¹⁶⁶ Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 67; Cohen, “The Athenian businesswoman,” 721; Vlassopoulos, “Slavery in Ancient Greece,” 77; “Prostitution in Ancient Athens,” Joshua J. Mark, World History Encyclopedia, July 2, 2021, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/28/prostitution-in-ancient-athens/>; Schlaifer, “Greek Theories of Slavery from Homer to Aristotle”, 53-73; MacLachlan, *Women in Ancient Greece: A Sourcebook*, 98; Jonathan Edmondson, “Slavery and the Roman Family,” in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery: The Ancient Mediterranean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 352.

¹⁶⁷ “prostitution,” John Philip Jenkins, Britannica, last updated December 6, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/prostitution>; “Sex Trafficking vs Sex Work: Understanding The Difference,” Stop The Traffik, accessed January 16, 2025, <https://stopthetraffik.org/sex-trafficking-vs-sex-work-understanding-difference/>.

¹⁶⁸ Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 59; Schlaifer, “Greek Theories of Slavery from Homer to Aristotle,” 53-73.

¹⁶⁹ Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 66-67; Schlaifer, “Greek Theories of Slavery from Homer to Aristotle”, 53-73; “Consent and Rape Culture in Ancient Greece,” Women in Antiquity, December 6, 2017, <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2017/12/06/consent-and-rape-culture-in-ancient-greece/>.

¹⁷⁰ “Rape,” Sharon James, Oxford Classical Dictionary, April 30, 2020, <https://oxfordre.com/classics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-8365>; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Bonnie MacLachlan, *Women in Ancient Greece: A Sourcebook* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 74-75; Lysias, *On the Murder of Erastosthenes*, translated by W.R.M. Lamb (London, Harvard University Press 1930; Perseus Digital Library), section 32, accessed January 23, 2025, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0154%3Aspeech%3D1%3Asection%3D32>;

Consequently, such acts are not explicitly mentioned in the text.¹⁷¹ However, Agamemnon expresses that he loves Chryseis more than his own wife, and he would rather take her to his home than return her to her father, and that Chryseis will share his bed.¹⁷² As outlined previously, Briseis' circumstances indicate a risk of sexual violence. As she is depicted sleeping next to Achilles, and Achilles' encouragement of Agamemnon to engage in sexual relations with Briseis despite her reluctance to accompany him, are notable.¹⁷³ Andromache and Hector also discuss the potential for sexual violence against Andromache should Troy fall.¹⁷⁴ The absence of a word for rape does not indicate an absence of rape in the *Iliad*.

Researchers have established through analysis of manumission inscriptions, that some freed women were the sexual partners of their former owners.¹⁷⁵ Women were more frequently manumitted than men.¹⁷⁶ In some cases, women were freed to become concubines. However, concubines were not considered official wives.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, individuals had the option of purchasing the freedom of another person, thereby gaining exclusive sexual access.¹⁷⁸ In some cases, these women were expected to bear a child into slavery as a replacement.¹⁷⁹ Achilles is an example of this, as he owned Briseis and made decisions about her as if she were a sexual object, when he granted Agamemnon, a free man, permission to have sex with his enslaved lover.¹⁸⁰ This practice aligns with the historical status of enslaved individuals during the Archaic Greek period.

Contemporary interpretations of the relationship between Achilles and Briseis often view them as rapists and victims,¹⁸¹ contrasting with the Archaic Greek perspective, which suggests a more romantic view. This theory is elaborated on by Casey Dué, who proposes that Briseis's narrative can be classified under one of two traditional story patterns: 1) that of an unmarried girl whose city is sacked and whose father is killed, with the young woman helping the hero in some way and often a romance. 2) Or the story of a queen or princess whose husband is killed in defense of the city, and

"Areopagus," Britannica, last updated September 23, 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Areopagus-Greek-council>.

¹⁷¹ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

¹⁷² Schwartz, *Il*, I.1-37, 86-130; Wilson, *Il*, I.1-50, 110-160.

¹⁷³ Schwartz, *Il*, I.310-351, IX.301-341; Wilson, *Il*, I.340-450, IX.330-430; "Rape," Britannica, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rape-crime>.

¹⁷⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, VI.445-489; Wilson, *Il*, VI.400-590.

¹⁷⁵ Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 67; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>.

¹⁷⁶ Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 63-64; John Madden, "Slavery in the Roman Empire Numbers and Origins," *Classics Ireland*, 3 (1996): 109-128.

¹⁷⁷ Wolff, "MARRIAGE LAW AND FAMILY ORGANIZATION IN ANCIENT ATHENS, 45.

¹⁷⁸ MacLachlan, *Women in Ancient Greece: A Sourcebook*, 68; Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 63-64.

¹⁷⁹ Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 64.

¹⁸⁰ Schwartz, *Il*, IX.301-341; Wilson, *Il*, IX.330-430.

¹⁸¹ "Just a Girl: Being Briseis," *Sententiae Antiquae*, August 7, 2021, <https://sententiaeantiquae.com/2021/08/07/just-a-girl-being-briseis/>; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 27; Casey Dué, "Learning Lessons from the Trojan War: Briseis and the Theme of Force," *College Literature*, 34 (2007): 235.

who is then awarded as a prize to the conqueror.¹⁸² In some Lesbian traditions, Briseis is depicted as an unmarried queen, who falls in love with her father's enemy, aligning with the first pattern.

Similarly, in Homer's version, Briseis appears to fit the second category. Although there are ongoing discussions about her status, as it is not mentioned in the *Iliad*.¹⁸³ Suggesting that pattern wise, there were Archaic Greek interpretations of the Trojan War narrative as a romance between Achilles and Briseis.¹⁸⁴

This is further supported by depictions of Briseis in Greek art, as found in the *LIMC* (1986).¹⁸⁵ There are multiple scenes in which Briseis is depicted, such as the return of Briseis, Briseis with Achilles at the event of Hector's corpse being released, Briseis lamenting Patroclus, Achilles and Briseis in uncertain scenes, Briseis and Phoenix, along with several other undetermined portrayals possibly featuring her. Furthermore, a late Archaic amphora depicts both Achilles and Briseis, with Briseis offering Achilles a flower. The flower in the scene is frequently used in depictions of courtship, suggesting an iconographic tradition in which Achilles and Briseis fall in love.¹⁸⁶ This scene is not depicted in the *Iliad*, but it could be an episode in local Lesbian poetry. The iconographic tradition also provides further evidence for a love relationship.¹⁸⁷

Briseis asserts that Patroclus had promised that she would become Achilles' lawful wife, not a concubine.¹⁸⁸ It was not commonplace in Archaic Greece for individuals to marry their prisoners of war. Instead, individuals typically chose to marry others of a similar social status.¹⁸⁹ Achilles and Briseis occupy different social positions, with Achilles being a king and Briseis an enslaved person.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, both parties had to be citizens of the state for a legal marriage in Greece.¹⁹¹ Given that Briseis is a foreign woman, it would not be possible for them to be legally married in Greece.¹⁹² It is possible that her hope of marrying Achilles is based on wishful thinking. If this is the case, it could

¹⁸² Casey Dué, "Briseis and the Multiformality of the *Iliad*," in *Homeric Variations on a Lament by Briseis* (Washington: Center for Hellenistic Studies, 2006), 43-72.

¹⁸³ Dué, "Briseis," 145; Dué, "Briseis and the Multiformality of the *Iliad*," 43-72; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

¹⁸⁴ Dué, "Briseis and the Multiformality of the *Iliad*," 43-72.

¹⁸⁵ Kossatz-Deissmann, "Briseis," 158-165.

¹⁸⁶ Kossatz-Deissmann, "Briseis," 158-165; Dué, "Briseis and the Multiformality of the *Iliad*," 43-72; "Briseis and Andromache Enslaved: Sleeping with the Enemy in Greek and Roman Epic," William M. Owens, *Classics@ Journal*, accessed January 3, 2024, <https://classics-at.chs.harvard.edu/briseis-and-andromache-enslaved-sleeping-with-the-enemy-in-greek-and-roman-epic/>; "amphora" The British Museum, accessed January 22, 2025, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1836-0224-126.

¹⁸⁷ Dué, "Briseis and the Multiformality of the *Iliad*," 43-72; Kossatz-Deissmann, "Briseis," 158-165.

¹⁸⁸ Homer, *Homeri Opera in five volumes*, 19.276-308.

¹⁸⁹ Hans Julius Wolff, "MARRIAGE LAW AND FAMILY ORGANIZATION IN ANCIENT ATHENS: A Study on the Interrelation of Public and Private Law in the Greek City," *Traditio*, 2 (1944): 43-95; Lena Larsson Lovén, *Marriage in Ancient Greco-Roman Sources and Societies* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 1-10.

¹⁹⁰ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

¹⁹¹ Wolff, "MARRIAGE LAW AND FAMILY ORGANIZATION IN ANCIENT ATHENS," 43-95; Lovén, *Marriage in Ancient Greco-Roman sources and Societies*, 1-10.

¹⁹² Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

explain why Briseis is not directly depicted as a weaver in the *Iliad*.¹⁹³ Roisman concludes that weaving is a typical activity of free women and chaste wives in Homer's works.¹⁹⁴ Given that other enslaved individuals are depicted as weavers,¹⁹⁵ it is possible that Briseis is not described as a weaver to emphasise that the possibility of a marriage between her and Achilles is merely wishful thinking. This could be a deliberate writing choice by Homer, to emphasise her status as a captive, rather than an active participant in household or cultural activities. This theory is further substantiated by a note provided by Wilso, who points out that Thetis has already told Achilles, he will never return home, and therefore Briseis will never be able to be his lawful wife.¹⁹⁶

That Briseis reflects the position of enslaved people to an extent can be explained by considering the intended Greek audience of the *Iliad*. Given the prevalence of slavery during the Archaic period, it is plausible that the narrative incorporates details that resonate with the historical events, thereby grounding the account in reality. The differences can be explained by that it may have been seen as a fictional work,¹⁹⁷ and that non-Greek enslaved people had no high social status in Greek society, which might have led to them being viewed more as a side note in the work, and therefore not being accurately depicted in all aspects.

1.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, the question of whether Briseis reflects the social position of women and enslaved individuals from early Archaic Greece was examined. While the *Iliad* is often attributed to Homer, he is more likely to be a symbol of a literary tradition.¹⁹⁸ As a result, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the author's social status or gender, and therefore about the author's influence on the *Iliad*. If he were a historical figure, he would likely be a man, which would make Briseis a female character written from a male perspective.¹⁹⁹ The intended audience of the *Iliad* were elite Greek men, as they

¹⁹³ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

¹⁹⁴ Roisman, "Helen in the "Iliad",," 9.

¹⁹⁵ Schwartz, *Il*, I.29-31, XIX.219-261; Wilson, *Il*, I.30-50, XIX.240-350.

¹⁹⁶ Wilson, *Il*, note 19.389; "Briseis and Andromache Enslaved: Sleeping with the Enemy in Greek and Roman Epic," William M. Owens, *Classics@ Journal*, accessed January 3, 2024, <https://classics-at.chs.harvard.edu/briseis-and-andromache-enslaved-sleeping-with-the-enemy-in-greek-and-roman-epic/>.

¹⁹⁷ Jacqueline Klooster, interview organised by Yona Siero, email, April 25, 2024.

¹⁹⁸ Koning, *Mythologie*, 14; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 24-26; Pache, "General Introduction," xxvii; Dué and Marks, "The Homeric Question," 585-589; Silk, *Homer*, 5.

¹⁹⁹ "Avoiding Gender Stereotypes in Fiction Writing," Rosemount, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://rosemountediting.com/avoiding-gender-stereotypes-in-fiction-writing/>; "Men & Women Writing Each Other Badly," Shelby Sullivan, Medium, May 26, 2021, <https://medium.com/inspired-writer/men-women-writing-each-other-badly-9c0f46aeac5c>; Aeschylus, "The Texts of the Oresteia;" Seneca, *Oedipus ; Agamemnon ; Thyestes ; Hercules on Oeta ; Octavia*; "30 Times Male Authors Showed They Barely Know Anything About Women," Jonas Grinevičius, Justinas Keturka and Rutuja Dumbre, Boredpanda, last updated January 3, 2024, <https://www.boredpanda.com/male-authors-writing-about-women/>; "Bechdel test," Jordana Rosenfeld, Britannica, last updated December 11, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bechdel-test>; Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV.

were the segment of society that had access to an education and could hence read the work.²⁰⁰ Given the *Iliad's* enduring popularity, it is possible that the values expressed therein align with those that prevailed in early Archaic Greece.²⁰¹ Researchers may thus be able to ascertain how elite men viewed women in Archaic Greek society through the *Iliad*.²⁰²

Briseis' role in the *Iliad* is that she is central to the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles.²⁰³ She is depicted as Achilles' war prize and lover and is threatened with violence.²⁰⁴ According to literary traditions and ancient artistic representations, Briseis and Achilles were regarded as lovers.²⁰⁵ However, from a modern standpoint, it could be regarded as sexual violence.²⁰⁶ Achilles holds Briseis responsible for the conflict, and consequently for his own missteps.²⁰⁷ While Achilles portrays Briseis as a character lacking agency, Homer has endowed her with a rich inner life and a detailed backstory. She is portrayed as having loving familial relationships and a positive relationship with Patroclus. Despite the limitations imposed on her, Homer depicts Briseis as a multifaceted character, who occupies a central role in the *Iliad*.²⁰⁸

The Homeric poems offer a partial depiction of early Archaic Greek society,²⁰⁹ with Briseis representing certain aspects of the social position of women and enslaved individuals in early Archaic Greece. It can be concluded that archaic Greek women and Briseis share their political, economic

²⁰⁰ "The Education System in Ancient Greece," Duncan Howitt-Marshall, Greece Is, September 14, 2023, <https://www.greece-is.com/the-education-system-in-ancient-greece/>; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 47-48, 96; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures>; "The Life of Athenian Women in Ancient Greece: A Comprehensive List," Anisia Iacob, The Collector, September 18, 2021, <https://www.thecollector.com/athenian-women-in-ancient-greece>.

²⁰¹ "Homer Before Print," UChicago Library, accessed July 16, 2024, <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/homer-print-transmission-and-reception-homers-works/homer-print/>; Pache, "General Introduction," xxvii; Finkelberg, *Homer and Early Greek Epic*, 154; Morford and Lenardo, *Classical Mythology*, 55; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 23; Kossatz-Deissmann, "Briseis," 158-160; Bandinelli, *Hellenistic-Byzantine Miniatures of the Iliad*, picture list 4, 12, 117-118.

²⁰² Doyle, "Cassandra - Feminine Corrective in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*," 57-75; "Finding women in Greek literature," Sam Newington, OpenLearn, March 10, 2021, <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history/classical-studies/finding-women-greek-literature>.

²⁰³ Schwartz, *Il*, I; Wilson, *Il*, I.

²⁰⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX.301-382, XIX.40-82; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX.330-450, XIX.340-450; Emily Wilson, "Introduction," in *The Iliad* (New York: W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2024), chapter 1; Hans van Wees, *Status Warriors: War, Violence and Society in Homer and History* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben Publisher, 1992), 261-264.

²⁰⁵ Dué, "Briseis and the Multiforimity of the *Iliad*," 43-72; Kossatz-Deissmann, "Briseis," 158-160.

²⁰⁶ "Rape," Sharon James, Oxford Classical Dictionary, April 30, 2020, <https://oxfordre.com/classics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-8365>.

²⁰⁷ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.40-82; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.40-82.

²⁰⁸ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.

²⁰⁹ Finkelberg, *Homer and Early Greek Epic*, 321; Jean Paul Crielaard, "Homeric Communities," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 244; Kelly, "Homer and History: 'Iliad' 9.381-4," 321-333; Whitley, "Homer and History," 262; Popham, Calligas, Sackett, Coulton and Catling, "LEFKANDI II. The Protoegeometric Building at Toumba. PART 2: The Excavation, Architecture and Finds," 22; Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan and Roberts, red., *A Brief History of Ancient Greece*, 65; Aulsebrook, "MATERIALIZING MYTHOLOGY: THE CUP OF NESTOR FROM SHAFT GRAVE IV AT MYCENAE," 79-89; Silk, *Homer: The Iliad*, 96-97; "Peloponnesian War," Britannica, last updated December 21, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Peloponnesian-War>; Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.3; Schwartz, *Il*, XVI; Wilson, *Il*, XVI; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 25.

position and agency over their marriage.²¹⁰ However, it should be noted that Briseis' circumstances diverge from the historical position of enslaved individuals and women in Archaic Greece, particularly in terms of her lack of involvement in domestic work, which was customary for women and enslaved individuals.²¹¹ This deviation can be attributed to the possibility that the *Iliad* was considered a fictional work,²¹² to bias introduced by the author,²¹³ and to the intended audience of the work.²¹⁴ Like the Homeric poems, the Briseis narrative certain aspects of early Archaic Greek society, aligning with the hypothesis that stories reflect the societies in which they are born to some extent. Researchers may thus learn about the social position of women and enslaved people from Archaic Greece through Briseis. However, the research shows that it is a complicated matter, the reader cannot directly adopt the information presented in the *Iliad* as true for the Archaic Greek period. While researchers can utilize Briseis as a supplementary source, they should support their research with other historical sources, instead of directly assuming the information presented in the *Iliad* as true.

²¹⁰ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 24-25; "Prostitution in Ancient Athens," Joshua J. Mark, World History Encyclopedia, July 2, 2021, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/28/prostitution-in-ancient-athens/>; Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan and Roberts, red., *A brief History of Ancient Greece*, 70; Anonymous, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, Demeter; "Women in Classical Greece," Colette Hemingway, The Met, accessed January 12, 2025, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wmna/hd_wmna.htm; "The Ancient Greek Wedding Ceremony," marinanelson27, Women in Antiquity, December 1, 2020, <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2020/12/01/the-ancient-greek-wedding-ceremony/>; Blundell, *Women in ancient Greece*, 69.

²¹¹ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 25-26; "Spinning and Weaving in Ancient Greece," Women In Antiquity, April 2, 2017, <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2017/04/02/spinning-and-weaving-in-ancient-greece/>; Pomeroy, Burstein, Donlan and Roberts, red., *A Brief History of Ancient Greece*, 12, 72; Shelmerdine, "Women in the Mycenaean economy," 631; Lyons, "Dangerous Gifts: Ideologies of Marriage and Exchange in Ancient Greece, 93-134;" "Consent and Rape Culture in Ancient Greece," Women in Antiquity, December 6, 2017, <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2017/12/06/consent-and-rape-culture-in-ancient-greece/>; Doyle, "Cassandra - Feminine Corrective in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*," 57-75; Blundell, *Women in ancient Greece*, 69; Cohen, "The Athenian businesswoman," 721.

²¹² Jacqueline Klooster, interview organised by Yona Siero, email, April 25, 2024.

²¹³ "Avoiding Gender Stereotypes in Fiction Writing," Rosemount, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://rosemountediting.com/avoiding-gender-stereotypes-in-fiction-writing/>; "Men & Women Writing Each Other Badly," Shelby Sullivan, Medium, May 26, 2021, <https://medium.com/inspired-writer/men-women-writing-each-other-badly-9c0f46aeac5c>; Aeschylus, "The Texts of the Oresteia;" Seneca, *Oedipus ; Agamemnon ; Thyestes ; Hercules on Oeta ; Octavia*; "30 Times Male Authors Showed They Barely Know Anything About Women," Jonas Grinevičius, Justinas Keturka and Rutuja Dumbre, Boredpanda, last updated January 3, 2024, <https://www.boredpanda.com/male-authors-writing-about-women/>; "Bechdel test," Jordana Rosenfeld, Britannica, last updated December 11, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bechdel-test>.

²¹⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; "The Education System in Ancient Greece," Duncan Howitt-Marshall, Greece Is, September 14, 2023, <https://www.greece-is.com/the-education-system-in-ancient-greece/>; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 47-48; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures>.

Chapter 2: Briseis in the early Roman imperial period

This chapter examines Briseis in the *Heroides*, to ascertain whether she reflects the position of women and enslaved people in the early Roman imperial period. To this end, section 2.1. discusses the *Heroides* in the early imperial period through the following questions: Who is the intended audience of the *Heroides*? What insights can researchers gather from this analysis in relation to the research question? Then, in 2.2., Briseis' role in the *Heroides*, and how she is described will be analysed. Section 2.3 examines the question of whether Briseis' position corresponds to the position of women and enslaved people in the early imperial period.

2.1. The author and audience of the *Heroides*

In this section, the author and the intended audience of the *Heroides* are explained. To this end, Ovid's life is first examined, and the role of literacy in the Roman imperial period is considered. As previously discussed, the author and the intended audience of the *Heroides* have influence on the depictions of characters in the literary work, and on what values, or social classes they truthfully depict. Therefore, to better understand Briseis as an enslaved woman and depiction of the early imperial period, this information is of importance.

Author of the *Heroides*

The *Heroides* is a collection of letters from mythical heroines, written by Ovid in the period from 10-3 BC.¹ For example, Penelope writes a letter to Ulysses, and Dido to Aeneas.² One of the myths Ovid based this work on, was the Trojan War myth from the *Iliad*.³ The work shares a notable linguistic similarity with the *Iliad*, reflecting the influence of Homer's poetry.⁴ By retelling these myths from a female perspective, Ovid adds a new dimension to the narrative of the Trojan War, illustrating intertextuality.⁵

In contrast to Homer, Publius Ovidius Naso (43 BC-17 AD) is a historical figure about whom more is known.⁶ He was a renowned poet whose works include the *Metamorphoses* and *Ars*

¹ Ovidius, *Legendarische vrouwen: Heroides*, translated by W.A.M. Peters (Amsterdam: Ambo, 1994), 15.

² Peters, *Her*, I, VII; Ovid, *Ovid's Heroides: A New Translation and Critical Essays*, translated by Paul Murgatroyd, Bridget Reeves and Sarah Parker (New York: Routledge, 2017), I, VII.

³ Howard Jacobson, "Ovid's Briseis: A Study of Heroides 3," *Phoenix*, 25 (1971): 332-341.

⁴ Jacobson, "Ovid's Briseis: A Study of Heroides 3," 333; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Homer, *Iliad & Odyssey*, translated by M. A. Schwartz (Amsterdam: Athenaeum - Polak & Van Genneep, 1982), I-XXIV; Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2024), I-XXIV.

⁵ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; "Spilling Over: Ovid's Heroides and the Mythological Female Voice," Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed 11 January, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>.

⁶ Adrian Goldsworthy, *Augustus: First Emperor of Rome* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014), 509; Christiaan Caspers, Jacqueline Klooster, Inger N.I. Kuin and Bram van der Velden, *Muze, vertel: De Griekse en Latijnse literatuur van de oudheid* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), 315; Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, "Ancient

Amatoria.⁷ Ovid had access to a good education and studied the Homeric epic. All well-educated Romans, irrespective of gender, received a thorough education in Greek literature.⁸ He was admitted to a rhetoric school in Rome.⁹ During his education, he studied the rhetoric assignment of *ethopoeia*, which involves writing from the perspective of a character.¹⁰ Students had to answer questions such as: What would Andromache say after the death of Hector? This is similar to the *Heroides*, where Briseis' letter provides the answer to the question: in what words would Briseis write to Achilles, after being taken by Agamemnon?¹¹ Ovid's education has thus influenced the *Heroides*.¹²

Ovid enjoyed a high social status,¹³ and lived during the Augustan imperial period. Emperor Augustus and Ovid were personally acquainted.¹⁴ The *Ars Amatoria*, a handbook for men and women on how to find and win a lover outside of marriage, was written around 2 BC. Ovid asserts that the work does not celebrate cheating because the women depicted are mistresses and not married women. Furthermore, many of the women depicted were formerly enslaved individuals, thus not constituting a threat to the marital values encouraged by Augustus.¹⁵ The intricacies of Augustus' legislation are elaborated upon in section 2.3.

Ovid emphasised that this handbook was not intended to be a threat to Roman marriage, which Augustus preached.¹⁶ However, Augustus was displeased with the *Ars Amatoria*.¹⁷ The relationship between Ovid and Augustus further deteriorated when Ovid was implicated in the disgrace of Augustus' granddaughter Julia. The emperor preached the importance of Roman marriage and having children.¹⁸ Enforcing laws such as the *Augustus Lex Julia de Adulteriis*,¹⁹ which

Religious Texts and Intertextuality: Plato's and Plutarch's Myths of the Afterlife," in Religion as relation: Studying Religion in Context (South Yorkshire: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2021), 134-139.

⁷ Gareth Williams, "Ovid's exile poetry: *Tristia*, *Epistulae ex Ponto* and *Ibis*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 233; Andrew Feldherr, "Metamorphosis in the *Metamorphoses*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 163-197.

⁸ Edward D. Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women; With an Introductory History of their Legal Condition in the Hebrew, Roman and Feudal Civil Systems* (Cincinnati: William H. Moore & CO, 1845), 74-75.

⁹ Peters, *Her*, 7-17.

¹⁰ Martina Björk, *Ovid's Heroides and the Ethopoeia* (Lund: Lund University (Media-Tryck), 2016), 324-325.

¹¹ Björk, *Ovid's Heroides and the Ethopoeia*, 189.

¹² Peters, *Her*, 11.

¹³ Williams, "Ovid's exile poetry," 233; Feldherr, "Metamorphosis in the *Metamorphoses*," 177; Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 509.

¹⁴ Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 444, 509; "Did Ovid's erotic poetry lead to his exile from Rome?" National Geographic, November 26, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/history-magazine/article/exiled-roman-poet-ovid>.

¹⁵ Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 397; "Legacy of Ovid," Edward John Kenney, Britannica, last updated January 1, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ovid-Roman-poet/Legacy>.

¹⁶ Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 396-397; "Legacy of Ovid," Edward John Kenney, Britannica, last updated January 1, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ovid-Roman-poet/Legacy>.

¹⁷ Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 509; "Did Ovid's erotic poetry lead to his exile from Rome?" National Geographic, November 26, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/history-magazine/article/exiled-roman-poet-ovid>; Edward E. Best, "Cicero, Livy and Educated Roman Women," *The Classical Journal*, 65 (1970): 203.

¹⁸ Eve D'Ambra, *Roman Women* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 50; Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 79.

¹⁹ Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (London: Routledge, 1986), 7; Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 325.

criminalised adultery with married or single women, but not with prostitutes.²⁰ Consequently, Julia was convicted of adultery and exiled by Augustus. Ovid was involved in her adultery, though the specifics are not known. He was not formally charged or tried, but was exiled to Tomis in 8 AD, where he died during his exile.²¹

Given Ovid's status as an elite man who was personally acquainted with Emperor Augustus, it is reasonable to assume that his work would reflect the values of the emperor.²² While Ovid frequently praises the emperor in his work, his *Ars Amatoria* demonstrates an exception to this, dealing with extramarital affairs.²³ Additionally, the letter from Briseis does challenge Augustus' marital legislation. The emperor had made it illegal for people of senatorial rank to marry freedwomen.²⁴ While Achilles is a king and not a senator, during Augustus's reign, individuals in higher positions were not permitted to marry former enslaved individuals such as Briseis.²⁵ Therefore, despite Ovid's high social status, his work does not reflect the social values of the Roman Emperor Augustus.

Furthermore, Ovid's own gender plays a part in his depiction of female characters, for Briseis is a female character written from a male perspective. Briseis' depiction by Ovid will be explored in more detail in section 2.2. Given Ovid's gender, it is crucial to compare Briseis with the historical position of women in the early imperial period. Male authors can sometimes portray female characters in a one-sided way and create a false image. However, it could be argued that by introducing a new female perspective on myths that were previously centred on male figures, such as the *Iliad*, Ovid is a pioneering figure in the 21st-century trend of retellings of myths from a female perspective, whether he shared similar intentions to current writers or not.²⁶ This trend will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

²⁰ Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 79; Eve D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 50; Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 160, 192; David Wheeler-Reed, "AUGUSTUS AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE: The Birth of an Ideology," in *Regulating Sex in the Roman Empire: Ideology, the Bible and the Early Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 12.

²¹ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 34; Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 444, 509; "Legacy of Ovid," Edward John Kenney, Britannica, last updated January 1, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ovid-Roman-poet/Legacy>; Best, "Cicero, Livy and Educated Roman Women," 203.

²² Williams, "Ovid's exile poetry," 237; Feldherr, "Metamorphosis in the *Metamorphoses*," 177; Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 444, 509.

²³ Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 396-397; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 50; "Legacy of Ovid," Edward John Kenney, Britannica, last updated January 1, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ovid-Roman-poet/Legacy>.

Kenneth Scott, "Emperor Worship in Ovid," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 61 (1930): 43-69

²⁴ Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 7-32.

²⁵ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 195.

²⁶ "Spilling Over: Ovid's Heroides and the Mythological Female Voice," Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>; Jacqueline Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze: Recente hervertellingen van klassieke mythen vanuit een vrouwelijk perspectief," *Lampas: Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse classicis*, 3 (2023): 202.

The intended audience for the *Heroides*

This section discusses the intended audience of the *Heroides*. The letter of Briseis was written in the period of 10-3 BC,²⁷ which falls under the early imperial era, namely the reign of Augustus from 27 BC to 14 AD.²⁸ In order to ascertain the intended audience of the *Heroides*, it is first discussed if there is an academic background required in order to read the *Heroides*. The discussion then moves on to consider the limited level of literacy in the Roman Empire under Emperor Augustus,²⁹ distinguishing between both free(d), and enslaved men and women, and finally arriving at a conclusion.

As previously discussed, the *Heroides* are an exercise in *ethopoeia*, which is part of a rhetoric education.³⁰ The text highlights the prominent role of several Greek heroines in Ovid's *Heroides*.³¹ All educated Romans were familiar with these women, as they were taught Greek literature when they had access to an education.³² However, women were often excluded from rhetorical education.³³ Men studied with philosophers and rhetoricians outside the home.³⁴ Roman children attended a *litterator*, where they learned to read and write, although access to this education was not universal, particularly among poorer segments of the population.³⁵ Given the likely high level of education of the intended audience of the *Heroides*, it is assumed that they would have both the knowledge of Greek myths and a rhetorical background, and thus be educated Roman men.

However, the *Heroides* are accessible to readers without a rhetorical background. Therefore, the question arises as to whether women and enslaved individuals could be part of the intended audience, based on the general level of literacy within the Roman Empire. During the initial two centuries of the imperial period, there was a notable increase in the number of educated women, including upper-class women and those from the urban sub-elite, despite having no access to

²⁷ Peters, *Her*, 15.

²⁸ Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 6-8, 465; "Augustus Timeline," Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica, accessed October 24, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/summary/Augustus-Timeline>.

²⁹ Carol G. Thomas, "Reviewed Work(s): Ancient Literacy by W. V. Harris," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 111 (1991): 241.

³⁰ Peters, *Her*, 11.

³¹ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

³² Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women*, 74-75.

³³ Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated women in the Roman elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 57.

³⁴ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 70; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures>.

³⁵ J. J. Eyre, "Roman Education in the Late Republic and Early Empire," *Greece and Rome*, 1 (1963): 53; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures>.

rhetorical training.³⁶ Many women were taught at home.³⁷ Most, if not all, upper-class girls received a basic education, and many of them participated in grammar courses.³⁸ This education enabled upper-class women to engage in the intellectual pursuits of their male.³⁹ Some Roman men expressed admiration for women who were artistic, talented and highly educated, which could positively impact a woman's marriage prospects.⁴⁰

Roman women exhibited a certain degree of literacy, with adult women possessing the ability to read and write.⁴¹ They engaged in literary pursuits, including poetry, yet their income derived from this activity was non-existent.⁴² Archaeological evidence has been found which indicates the presence of women in this practice, with pottery depicting women engaged in reading or studying.⁴³ Poets such as Ovid also composed poetry specifically for their female partners, who were literate and able to appreciate these compositions.⁴⁴ This suggests that under Emperor Augustus, there were many literate women in the Roman Empire, although the number was far lower than in today's Western society.⁴⁵

It is important to note that not only men and women from the upper social class had access to education; there were exceptions to this.⁴⁶ For instance, some enslaved people received a high level of education with the aim of assuming positions in households and businesses, for example as leaders or teachers.⁴⁷ Another example is that female enslaved people of affluent Patrician women in Rome were also instructed in reading and writing to compose correspondence on behalf of their mistresses.⁴⁸

³⁶ Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 25, 57; Richard Leo Enos and Terry Shannon Peterman, "Writing Instruction for the "Young Ladies" of Teos: A Note on Women and Literacy in Antiquity," *Rhetoric Review*, 1 (2014): 7; Best, "Cicero, Livy and Educated Roman Women," 202; "A List of Women Authors from Ancient Greece and Rome for #InternationalWomensDay," *Sententiae Antiquae*, March 8, 2021, <https://sententiaeantiquae.com/2021/03/08/a-list-of-women-authors-from-ancient-greece-and-rome-for-internationalwomensday/>; Judith P. Hallett, "Ancient Roman Women's Writings: Sub Specie XXV Annorum," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 26 (2007): 61-65.

³⁷ Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 25; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 170.

³⁸ Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 57; Best, "Cicero, Livy and Educated Roman Women," 202.

³⁹ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 170.

⁴⁰ Enos and Peterman, "Writing Instruction for the "Young Ladies" of Teos," 7.

⁴¹ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 135; Enos and Peterman, "Writing Instruction for the "Young Ladies" of Teos," 16; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 57; Jane McIntosh Snyder, *The Woman and the Lyre: Women Writers in Classical Greece and Rome* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 54, 123.

⁴² D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 135; "A List of Women Authors from Ancient Greece and Rome for #InternationalWomensDay," *SENTENTIAE ANTIQUAE*, March 8, 2021, <https://sententiaeantiquae.com/2021/03/08/a-list-of-women-authors-from-ancient-greece-and-rome-for-internationalwomensday/>; Hallett, "Ancient Roman Women's Writings: Sub Specie XXV Annorum," 61-65.

⁴³ Enos and Peterman, "Writing Instruction for the "Young Ladies" of Teos," 16; "VI.17 and VII.16 Pompeii Insula Occidentalis. Miscellaneous paintings and unprovenanced items: Sappho or young woman with tablet and stylus," Pompeii in Pictures, accessed January 15, 2025, <https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R6/6%2017%2000.htm>; "Woman with Stylus: What a Portrait Can Tell Us About Women in Ancient Rome," Natalia Iacobelli, *Daily Art Magazine*, December 10, 2024, <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/woman-with-stylus-women-in-ancient-rome/>.

⁴⁴ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 172; Best, "Cicero, Livy and Educated Roman Women," 202.

⁴⁵ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 135; "Literacy rate (%)," World Bank Group, accessed January 15, 2025, <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/se-adt>.

⁴⁶ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 23; John J. Phillips, "Book Prices and Roman Literacy," in *The Classical World* 79 (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 36-38.

⁴⁷ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 23; S. L. Mohler, "Slave Education in the Roman Empire," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 71 (1940): 262-280.

⁴⁸ Enos and Peterman, "Writing Instruction for the "Young Ladies" of Teos," 7.

Consequently, it was probably not unexpected to Ovid's contemporaries that Briseis, an enslaved woman of a high-status man, was able to write a letter.⁴⁹

Given the influence of rhetoric on the work, it could be argued that the intended audience is people who can understand the rhetorical nature of the work, namely people who have studied rhetoric, and thus Roman elite men.⁵⁰ However, given the text's capacity to be appreciated by the general reader, it is also necessary to consider the level of literacy of other layers of the Roman population.⁵¹ It is evident that elite men of the Roman Empire had access to an education that emphasised literacy. Given the literacy rate of some women and enslaved people, coupled with Ovid's employment of the female and enslaved perspective,⁵² it can be deduced that the intended audience might extend beyond the elite, and possibly include literate women and enslaved people.

The content of the *Heroides* lends support to the hypothesis that it was a book written for a mixed audience of literate men, women and enslaved people. The letter focuses on Briseis' perspective, and mentions a small number of female characters, such as the women of Lesbos who were to be gifted to Achilles. Yet despite Briseis' perspective, the letter is still predominantly focused on male characters.⁵³ Given its rhetorical nature, it is aimed at literate men who had access to rhetorical education.⁵⁴ The increased focus on women and the female perspective in the mythological retelling lends further support to the conclusion that the *Heroides* were also aimed at women. The perspective of Briseis, an enslaved individual, lends further support to the hypothesis that the book may also be directed towards enslaved individuals.⁵⁵

2.2. Briseis in the *Heroides*

In this section, the role of Briseis in the *Heroides* is discussed and compared to the Homeric Briseis.⁵⁶ This letter, written entirely from Briseis' perspective, differs from the *Iliad*, where Briseis appears

⁴⁹ Björk, *Ovid's Heroides and the Ethopoeia*, 248-249.

⁵⁰ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 70; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 57; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III. Peters, *Her*, 11; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures>.

⁵¹ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

⁵² D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 23, 135; Enos and Peterman, "Writing Instruction for the "Young Ladies" of Teos," 7, 16; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 57; Best, "Cicero, Livy and Educated Roman Women," 202.

⁵³ Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Peters, *Her*, III.

⁵⁴ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 70; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 57; Peters, *Her*, 11, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures>.

⁵⁵ Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Peters, *Her*, III.

⁵⁶ The passages from the *Heroides* are discussed based on the translation by W.A.M. Peters and Paul Murgatroyd, Bridget Reeves and Sarah Parker. Once again, a Dutch and English translation of respected translators have been selected in order to further my understanding of the text. Peters is renowned for his numerous translations of ancient books into Dutch such as: Cicero, *Over het voorspellen van de toekomst*, translated by W.A.M. Peters (Amsterdam: Ambo, 1992); Ovidius, *Tristia: Ballingschapsgedichten*, translated by W.A.M. Peters (Amsterdam: Ambo, 1995) and Propertius, *Elegieën*, translated by W.A.M. Peters (Amsterdam: Ambo, 1991). Paul Murgatroyd, Bridget Reeves and Sarah Parker, are all Doctors, and respected researchers within their field of classical studies. Ovid, "Preface," in *Ovid's Heroides: A New Translation and Critical Essays*, translated by Paul Murgatroyd, Bridget Reeves and Sarah Parker (New York: Routledge, 2017); "Ovid's

only four times. Briseis is depicted once more as a spoil of war, abducted from her city of Lyrnessus.⁵⁷ The motivations behind Briseis' decision to compose the letter are rooted in Achilles' rejection of Agamemnon's offer of reconciliation and her subsequent return to Achilles. Notably, Briseis does not feature in either conversation.⁵⁸ The purpose of the letter is to persuade Achilles not to leave, but to fight in the Trojan War and return to her. This reaction of Briseis in the *Heroides* serves as a valuable addition to the *Iliad*, as it provides a deeper understanding of her emotions and actions, which are not depicted in the *Iliad*. The letter is instrumental in providing a more nuanced understanding of Briseis' character, facilitating a subsequent comparison with the social position of women and enslaved people in the early imperial period.

In the *Heroides*, Briseis is portrayed as having a greater degree of freedom compared to her depiction in the *Iliad* and the other women in the *Heroides*. In the *Iliad*, Briseis only speaks on one occasion,⁵⁹ whereas in the *Heroides* she is the author of an entire letter. This letter is written in her own name and demonstrates her freedom to write during her captivity.⁶⁰ Furthermore, she addresses Achilles directly.⁶¹ In the *Iliad*, Briseis' only audience is the deceased Patroclus,⁶² whereas in the *Heroides*, she directly confronts and criticises Achilles.⁶³ A parallel can be drawn with the women presented as gifts to Achilles, who also find themselves in a similarly constrained position. However, it is noteworthy that criticising a master directly is an uncommon action for an enslaved person, suggesting that Briseis likely enjoys a greater degree of agency compared to the other women she addresses in her letter.⁶⁴

The focus of this correspondence is the relationship between Briseis and Achilles.⁶⁵ Briseis characterises their relationship as romantic.⁶⁶ This perspective is an addition to the *Iliad*, where Achilles expresses his love for Briseis, yet she never expresses if she reciprocates his sentiments.⁶⁷ In this letter, Briseis refers to Achilles as both her master and husband.⁶⁸ She goes on to express that he loves her with great passion.⁶⁹ She asserts her fidelity to Achilles, but concedes that the same cannot

Heroides," Routledge, accessed January 20, 2025, <https://routledge.com/Ovids-Heroides-A-New-Translation-and-Critical-Essays/Murgatroyd-Reeves-Parker/p/book/9781138722163?>.

⁵⁷ Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Peters, *Her*, III; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXI; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXI.

⁵⁸ Schwartz, *Il*, IX; Wilson, *Il*, IX; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

⁵⁹ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV.

⁶⁰ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

⁶¹ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

⁶² Schwartz, *Il*, XIX.262-303; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.290-390.

⁶³ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

⁶⁴ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

⁶⁵ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

⁶⁶ Peters, *Her*, III.5-6; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.1-5.

⁶⁷ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

⁶⁸ Peters, *Her*, III.5-6; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.1-5.

⁶⁹ Peters, *Her*, III.33; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.25-30.

be said for him. According to her he would rather have sexual relations with other women than provide her with assistance and engage in combat.⁷⁰

At the time of this correspondence, Briseis and Achilles are separated and she is concerned that his love for her has diminished.⁷¹ She expresses her belief that he does not take her feelings into consideration.⁷² This viewpoint is consistent with the *Iliad*, where Achilles refers to Briseis as his lover, yet never expresses whether she reciprocates his sentiments.⁷³ Briseis expresses in her letter that it is only the hope of Achilles' rescue that provides her with the motivation to endure.⁷⁴ She expresses that she does not want to live without him, and requests that he either rescues or kills her.⁷⁵ She informs him that she does not even require to be his bride, that he can marry someone else, and that she would be willing to go with him as a prisoner.⁷⁶ She articulates her concerns regarding the potential consequences of her escape in order to return to him, emphasizing the risk of her becoming property of a Trojan madam possibly from Priam's household, away from Achilles. Briseis is clearly alarmed by this situation, emphasizing the challenges she faces in terms of personal safety and agency.⁷⁷

Briseis does not express anger at having been taken, but rather at having been taken without protest.⁷⁸ She expresses her grief, crying for days when she was taken away against her will, and also writes that she cried when she wrote this letter,⁷⁹ pulling her hair and describing herself as deeply unhappy.⁸⁰ Upon hearing of Achilles' departure for his homeland without her, Briseis experiences a profound sense of desperation, perceiving herself as both pathetic and orphaned. She expresses concern for her future well-being, uncertain who will provide for her.⁸¹ Additionally, she reproaches Achilles for his inaction.⁸²

In her writings, Briseis recounts her experiences as a captive, stating that she has frequently shared a bed with Achilles upon his orders.⁸³ This practice is corroborated by Book XXIV of the *Iliad* where Briseis is sleeping alongside Achilles.⁸⁴ She elaborates that he is the man that loves her

⁷⁰ Peters, *Her*, III.100-125; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.105-120.

⁷¹ Peters, *Her*, III.42; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.35-45.

⁷² Peters, *Her*, III.40-42, 100-125; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.30-45, 105-120.

⁷³ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

⁷⁴ Peters, *Her*, III.140-154; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.140-154.

⁷⁵ Peters, *Her*, III.140-154; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.140-154.

⁷⁶ Peters, *Her*, III.62-65, 75-80; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.55-85.

⁷⁷ Peters, *Her*, III.15-20; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.15-20.

⁷⁸ Peters, *Her*, III.7-10; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.7-10.

⁷⁹ Peters, *Her*, III.3, 15-16; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.3, 15-16.

⁸⁰ Peters, *Her*, III.15-16, 44; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.15-16, 43.

⁸¹ Peters, *Her*, III.57-70; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.57-70.

⁸² Peters, *Her*, III.90-140; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.90-140.

⁸³ Peters, *Her*, III.100; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.100-110.

⁸⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, XXIV.657-700; Wilson, *Il*, XXIV.660-840.

ardently and that they have been intimate.⁸⁵ In the *Iliad*, Achilles encouraged Agamemnon to sleep with Briseis. However, the *Iliad* does not provide any evidence that he acted on this encouragement. In the *Heroides*, Briseis swears that she never had intimate relations with Agamemnon,⁸⁶ unless she were to lie, for example out of fear that Achilles would not wish to return to her. However, there is no textual evidence for that.⁸⁷ This correspondence highlights that Briseis harboured romantic sentiments for Achilles. From a modern perspective, it is difficult to view their relationship as consensual. As Achilles ordered her to share his bed.⁸⁸ This relationship is characterised by a significant imbalance in power. However, Briseis' appears to be enthusiastic',⁸⁹ which is not unheard of in regards to victims of sexual assault, but this is from a modern point of view.⁹⁰ The possible Roman interpretations of their relationship will be discussed in section 2.3.

In the *Heroides*, Briseis is shown to have more agency than in the *Iliad*. This is evident in her boldness in expressing herself to Achilles. She directly calls on Achilles to fight,⁹¹ instructing him to kill Hector.⁹² Furthermore, she aspires to be the catalyst for resolving the ongoing conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles.⁹³ She also has the confidence to reprimand Achilles, stating that he is not taking any action.⁹⁴ Briseis accuses Achilles of avoiding combat to pursue other women,⁹⁵ asking if he had only pursued the campaign to conquer her and if his ambition had cooled.⁹⁶ The letter she wrote in a precarious situation, illustrates the greater degree of agency Briseis has in the *Heroides*.

Briseis provides a detailed account of her past and family background, which bears a striking resemblance to the narrative depicted in Book XIX of the *Iliad*.⁹⁷ Ovid's response to Briseis' lament of Patroclus serves to further enrich the narrative.⁹⁸ The account includes the destruction of her city, Lyrnessus, and her first-hand observation of the subsequent devastation. She eulogises her deceased husband as a hero and recounts his death, emphasising that he was half buried and that she still

⁸⁵ Peters, *Her*, III.33, 100; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.25-30, 100-110.

⁸⁶ Peters, *Her*, III.105-110; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.108-110.

⁸⁷ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

⁸⁸ Peters, *Her*, III.100; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.100-110.

⁸⁹ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

⁹⁰ "Why Some Rape Victims Continue to Date Their Rapist," Wendy L. Patrick, Psychology Today, May 28, 2021, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/why-bad-looks-good/202105/why-some-rape-victims-continue-to-date-their-rapist>; "Common Reactions to Sexual Assault," Counseling Center, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://www.loyola.edu/department/counseling-center/services/students/concerns/sexual-assault/reactions.html>; "What Does Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn Mean?," Martin Taylor, WebMD, June 24, 2024, <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/what-does-fight-flight-freeze-fawn-mean>.

⁹¹ Peters, *Her*, III.155; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.150-155.

⁹² Peters, *Her*, III.125-126; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, 125-126.

⁹³ Peters, *Her*, III.90; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.89-90.

⁹⁴ Peters, *Her*, III.20-21; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.20-21.

⁹⁵ Peters, *Her*, III.115-120; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.115-120.

⁹⁶ Peters, *Her*, III.123-124; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.123-124.

⁹⁷ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.

⁹⁸ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX; Wilson, *Il*, XIX; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

honours him.⁹⁹ During the capture, Briseis also witnessed the corpses of her three brothers. She characterises them as fighting for and devoted to their country. She further suggests that Achilles is responsible for the death of her family, stating that his sword is intimately familiar to her family. This has shaped her perception of Achilles, leading her to regard him as her master, husband, and a substitute brother.¹⁰⁰

Briseis and Patroclus have a good relationship in the *Heroides*. When she was taken away from Patroclus and Achilles by Agamemnon's company, it was Patroclus who comforted her, not Achilles. Patroclus told her not to cry because she would soon be reunited with him and Achilles, trying to comfort her in a moment of sadness.¹⁰¹ This approach aligns with Patroclus' subsequent reassurances to Briseis in the *Iliad*, where he pledges to make her Achilles' official wife, underscoring the amicable nature of their relationship despite the evident power disparity.¹⁰²

There are several similarities between the Briseis depicted by Homer and Ovid. Firstly, both are non-Greek enslaved women. Secondly, both versions of Briseis were Achilles' prisoners of war and had a relationship with him. Thirdly, Homer's Briseis had a rich inner life and a relationship with her family, which is also depicted in Ovid's version. In both cases, Briseis also had a good relationship with Patroclus, as in Homer's version, and both versions of Briseis were threatened with violence.¹⁰³

The primary distinction between Ovid's Briseis and Homer's Briseis lies in the former's agency and the presence of more dialogue. In the *Heroides*, Briseis' personality is well-defined, while in the *Iliad*, her personality is less pronounced.¹⁰⁴ A notable distinction is that in the *Heroides*, Briseis is proactive in articulating her emotions, a trait that is absent in the Homeric version. In the *Heroides*, Briseis is portrayed as having her own ideology, as illustrated by her direct address to Achilles, a feature absent in the Homeric version. Additionally, Briseis is depicted as having more agency and freedom in the *Heroides* than in the *Iliad*, as previously noted. A noteworthy aspect of Briseis' character in the *Heroides* is her repeated emphasis on her non-Greek status,¹⁰⁵ a detail that was not emphasised in Homer's account.¹⁰⁶ In the *Heroides*, Briseis stands out because of her distinct personality, her articulation of her feelings, her own ideology, her emphasis on her non-Greek status, and her higher degree of agency. These traits can be attributed to that Ovid's work was intended for a male audience as well as a female one, and possibly even enslaved individuals.

⁹⁹ Peters, *Her*, III.45-56; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.45-55.

¹⁰⁰ Peters, *Her*, III.45-56; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.45-65.

¹⁰¹ Peters, *Her*, III.20-24; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.20-24.

¹⁰² Schwartz, *Il*, XIX; Wilson, *Il*, XIX; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹⁰³ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹⁰⁴ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹⁰⁵ Peters, *Her*, III.1-55; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.1-55.

¹⁰⁶ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

2.3. Briseis and the social position of women and enslaved people in the early Roman imperial period

This section retests the working hypothesis that myths depict the societies they are told in to some extent. This is informed by the discussed information regarding the intended audience and the author. In contrast to the approach taken in section 1.3., where the society depicted by Ovid was compared to the early imperial period, this section does not make such a comparison. In Briseis' letter, no clear picture of a society is drawn, unlike in the *Iliad*. The social position of Briseis as an enslaved woman is compared to the social position of women and enslaved people in the early Roman imperial society, in order to ascertain the validity of the working hypothesis.

Women in the early Roman imperial period and Briseis

This section compares Briseis in the *Heroides* with the position of women in the early imperial period. This refers to the period from 27 BC to 100 AD, with a specific focus on Augustus' ruling period from 27 BC to 14 AD.¹⁰⁷ The following topics will be covered: the financial and legal situation of women, including guardianship, women's economic agency and political authority, social status, Livia's authority, women's professions, wool work and spinning, Roman marriage, marriage depicted in the story of the Sabine Virgins, and the influence the *ius trium liberorum*. These themes will be analysed in relation to Briseis' position in the *Heroides*.¹⁰⁸

In the early imperial period, women were often financially and legally dependent on the men in their lives.¹⁰⁹ A daughter was under the authority of the *pater familias*, who was often the father.¹¹⁰ Following the death of the father, the daughter was assigned a male guardian or tutor, who would then act on her behalf in relation to financial and legal matters.¹¹¹ Women required the consent of their tutor for significant transactions, such as the acceptance of an inheritance, the creation of a will, the signing of a contract, or freeing enslaved people. In the event of a disagreement, the woman had the

¹⁰⁷ "Military successes of Augustus," Michael Grant, Britannica, last updated January 27, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Augustus-Roman-emperor/Military-successes>.

¹⁰⁸ There is more information known about the *matronas* than of women with lesser social status, as presented in Emily Hemelrijk *Verborgten levens, publieke figuren: Romeinse vrouwen buiten Rome* (Amsterdam: Polak & van Gennep, 2021).

¹⁰⁹ Judith P. Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 36; D'Ambra, *Roman Women* 3, 16.

¹¹⁰ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 150; "Homeric Variations on a Lament by Briseis. In the series "Greek Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches"," Stephen Evans, BMCR, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://bmc.brynmawr.edu/2003/2003.01.36/>; Cornelis Willem van Galen, *Women and Citizenship: In the Late Roman Republic and the Early Empire* (Beuningen: Print Rendement, 2016), 83-97; Phyllis Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," in *The Cambridge Companion to: The Roman Republic* (Online: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 151.

¹¹¹ Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 49; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 13; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 151; van Galen, *Women and Citizenship*, 107.

right to appeal.¹¹² Even adult women who were independent after the death of their husband or father were typically assigned a tutor.¹¹³

Besides tutorship, marriage significantly impacted a woman's economical standing, as women became subject to the authority of her husband following marriage.¹¹⁴ Women could earn money through inheritance, dowries, pocket money, and work.¹¹⁵ Upon marriage, a woman's property became the possession of her husband, and upon the death of her husband, she inherited his property. However, in the event of the couple having children, the inheritance was to be shared equally amongst them.¹¹⁶ Matrons, lawfully wedded respectable women of high social standing,¹¹⁷ could gain legal and financial agency by outliving their fathers or husbands.¹¹⁸ However, wealthy women were seen as a threat.¹¹⁹ The financial situation of Briseis is not described in detail in the *Heroides*.¹²⁰ She does mention that Agamemnon offers Achilles not only her but also a treasure of wealth,¹²¹ or a dowry,¹²² but Achilles rejects the treasure as well as the return of Briseis. Thus, the sole economic transaction discussed in the letter of Briseis is an exchange between men, reminiscent of the early imperial period.¹²³

Briseis' legal status in the *Heroides* is contingent on the actions of Achilles and Agamemnon. While she is the property of Agamemnon, she wishes to return to Achilles.¹²⁴ Briseis is not legally able to change her situation. The decision must be made by the men involved. Furthermore, Briseis refers to Achilles as her surrogate husband and father.¹²⁵ The individuals in the Roman Empire who wield significant influence over the legal and economic status of women.¹²⁶ So Briseis' legal position is that she, like Roman women, is dependent on the men in her life.

The most significant factor in a Roman woman's life was her social status. Women were valued according to their age, status and moral character.¹²⁷ Older women had more social and

¹¹² Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 151; van Galen, *Women and Citizenship*, 107.

¹¹³ Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 14; van Galen, *Women and Citizenship*, 107.

¹¹⁴ van Galen, *Women and Citizenship*, 100; Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women*, 49; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 13.

¹¹⁵ Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 66; Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 150; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 31; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 69.

¹¹⁶ Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women*, 49; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 3.

¹¹⁷ Emily Hemelrijk "Romeinse vrouwen buiten Rome," in *Verborgten levens, publieke figuren: Romeinse vrouwen buiten Rome* (Amsterdam: Polak & van Genneep, 2021), chapter 1.

¹¹⁸ Emily Hemelrijk, "Voortleven na de dood," in *Verborgten levens, publieke figuren: Romeinse vrouwen buiten Rome* (Amsterdam: Polak & van Genneep, 2021), chapter 5; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 13.

¹¹⁹ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 31.

¹²⁰ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹²¹ Peters, *Her*, III.25-45; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.25-45.

¹²² Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.55.

¹²³ Peters, *Her*, III.25-45; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.25-45.

¹²⁴ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹²⁵ Peters, *Her*, III.45-55; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.45-55.

¹²⁶ Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society*, 36; D'Ambra, *Roman Women* 3, 16.

¹²⁷ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 10-16.

political influence than younger women.¹²⁸ The status of a woman was determined by her father and husband if she was born free. The status of enslaved people was determined by their owner. Matrons could gain authority in their families and communities, by participating in religious rights which gave them high visibility and social status.¹²⁹ Women could also become patronesses of male guilds, join religious and funeral guilds, where they could exert influence.¹³⁰ They could also be priestesses or join cults such as the Mystery cults for Cybele and Dionysus.¹³¹ If a woman came from a prominent family, it did not necessarily mean that she had political or social influence, however it was more likely.¹³²

In the *Heroides*, Briseis' social status as a free woman is not explicitly mentioned.¹³³ However, she did own enslaved people, which may indicate a higher status.¹³⁴ However, there is too little information in the *Heroides* about this period of her life to draw any further conclusions about her political influence.¹³⁵ It is known that at the time of the letter, she was an enslaved person whose status depended on her owner, Agamemnon or Achilles, both Greek kings.¹³⁶

In the imperial era, there were a few prominent women who held great authority in the imperial era because of their family connections. Their involvement in politics was often largely indirect and behind the scenes.¹³⁷ A notable example of a woman who amassed great political power during Augustus's reign was Livia. She was Augustus' wife and he trusted her.¹³⁸ Livia was a priestess in several cults, and she sponsored many sacrifices and festivals in Augustus' honour. She was even deified after her death.¹³⁹ Livia also exercised influence over imperial politics, speaking on behalf of and helping women throughout the empire.¹⁴⁰ Briseis and Livia have in common that they were partners of powerful men: Briseis to a Greek king and Livia to a Roman emperor. Both women sought

¹²⁸ Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society*, 38.

¹²⁹ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 16, 142; Hemelrijk "Priesteressen," chapter 3; "Vestal Virgins," Britannica, last updated, January 24, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Vestal-Virgins>.

¹³⁰ Emily Hemelrijk "Patronessen en moeders van steden en verenigingen," in *Verborgene levens, publieke figuren: Romeinse vrouwen buiten Rome* (Amsterdam: Polak & van Gennep, 2021), chapter 4; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 200; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 142.

¹³¹ Hemelrijk "Patronessen en moeders van steden en verenigingen," chapter 4; Emily Hemelrijk "Weldoesters," in *Verborgene levens, publieke figuren: Romeinse vrouwen buiten Rome* (Amsterdam: Polak & van Gennep, 2021), chapter 2.

¹³² Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society*, 36; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 142.

¹³³ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹³⁴ Peters, *Her*, III.100-105; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.100-105; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>.

¹³⁵ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹³⁶ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹³⁷ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 142.

¹³⁸ David Wheeler-Reed, "AUGUSTUS AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE: The Birth of an Ideology," in *Regulating Sex in the Roman Empire: Ideology, the Bible and the Early Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 10; Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 507; Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 63; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 149.

¹³⁹ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 152.

¹⁴⁰ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 34, 153-154.

to exert influence through their partners, as discussed in the next paragraph. However, Livia is married to Augustus,¹⁴¹ and Briseis does not have the status of a married woman.¹⁴²

Like women in the early imperial period, Briseis attempts to gain political influence behind the scenes,¹⁴³ as evidenced by her advice to Achilles. The conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles is a political conflict between two Greek kings.¹⁴⁴ Briseis' written communication expresses her desire to play a dual role, as both catalyst and solution to the issue at hand. She criticises Achilles and requests his assistance, suggesting he kills Hector. Briseis attempts to persuade Achilles of her own agenda, drawing parallels with the influential wife of Meleager, as she was able to convince him. She hopes to achieve the same with Achilles.¹⁴⁵

During Roman imperial times, women occupied a variety of professions.¹⁴⁶ The majority of these women were from the lower social classes.¹⁴⁷ They were employed in businesses, (work)shops and in roles such as babysitters, governesses and childcare workers.¹⁴⁸ Enslaved and formerly enslaved women were active participants in the healthcare sector, working as nurses and midwives. Other women from lower social backgrounds were also engaged in crafts and trade.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, women assumed roles such as secretaries, scribes, doctors, masseuses, dressers, hairdressers, servants, singers, dancers, musicians, teachers, wool workers, seamstresses, and waitresses.¹⁵⁰ Notably, women also assumed the responsibility for the most difficult and significant aspect of raising children.¹⁵¹

In the *Heroides*, Briseis is not described as a working woman.¹⁵² Briseis' status before she became a captive is not mentioned in the *Heroides*. However, she does state that she owned enslaved people when she was a free woman.¹⁵³ This suggests that she may have had a high status. However, it should be noted that her former status is no longer applicable given her current circumstances as a prisoner of war and enslaved individual. Briseis' former status has disappeared now that she is a

¹⁴¹ Wheeler-Reed, "AUGUSTUS AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE: The Birth of an Ideology," 10; Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 507.

¹⁴² Peters, *Her*, III.95-100; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.95-100.

¹⁴³ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 142.

¹⁴⁴ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹⁴⁵ Peters, *Her*, III.85-105; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.85-105.

¹⁴⁶ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 137; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 201; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 106.

¹⁴⁷ Hemelrijk "Voortleven na de dood," chapter 5; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 31; Susan Treggiari, "Lower Class Women In The Roman Economy," in *Florilegium 1* (Toronto: UTPress, 1979): 65-86.

¹⁴⁸ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 201; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 106, 137; Treggiari, "Lower Class Women In The Roman Economy," 65.

¹⁴⁹ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 137; Treggiari, "Lower Class Women In The Roman Economy," 65.

¹⁵⁰ Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 240-246; Treggiari, "Lower Class Women In The Roman Economy," 67; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 99-10; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 201; Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 154.

¹⁵¹ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 106; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures>; Best, "Cicero, Livy and Educated Roman Women," 201.

¹⁵² Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹⁵³ Peters, *Her*, III.100-105; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.100-105.

prisoner of war and enslaved. In her letter, however, Briseis does not specify whether she is performing labor for Achilles or Agamemnon. Consequently, Briseis' depiction in the *Heroides* does not reflect the social position of lower-class women in the Roman Empire, but rather that of individuals with a higher social status, as it was predominantly lower-class women who performed labour.¹⁵⁴

Spinning wool was considered a feminine task in the Early Empire. When a woman married, she was even given a sheepskin as a symbol of the bride's role in fulfilling domestic tasks, including spinning wool.¹⁵⁵ In her conversation with Achilles regarding their future, Briseis portrays herself as a skilled spinner.¹⁵⁶ This underscores her aspiration to marry Achilles and her commitment to fulfilling traditional feminine roles. Briseis' depiction in the *Heroides* aligns with the historical practice of women in the early imperial period, who were also engaged in spinning.¹⁵⁷

In the Roman Empire, it was customary for young Roman women to marry a man chosen for them by their parents,¹⁵⁸ as parental consent was required for marriage.¹⁵⁹ The chosen man was often older than the bride. Brides were typically young women in their late teens or early twenties. Elite girls may have married earlier, in their younger teens.¹⁶⁰ Upon marriage, women would be taken to their new home, often remaining under the supervision of their fathers.¹⁶¹ As previously mentioned, a sheepskin was placed in the new home as a symbol of the traditional female roles the bride would undertake, such as spinning.¹⁶² Spinning and weaving wool was considered a feminine occupation in Roman and Greek society, reflecting virtues such as modesty, chastity, a reserved lifestyle and love, loyalty and obedience to one's husband.¹⁶³ It was believed that marriage completed Roman women, who became mothers and matrons with a social presence, dignity and public voice.¹⁶⁴ The impact of marriage on Roman women was therefore significant.

¹⁵⁴ Treggiari, "Lower Class Women In The Roman Economy," 65-67; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹⁵⁵ Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women*, 49; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 199; Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 153.

¹⁵⁶ Peters, *Her*, III.70; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.70.

¹⁵⁷ Peters, *Her*, III.70; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.65-75; Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women*, 49; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 199; Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 153.

¹⁵⁸ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 2; Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women*, 49.

¹⁵⁹ Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women*, 49; "Roman Law," Maurice Alfred Millner, Mary Ann Glendon, Paolo Carozza, Herbert Felix Jolowicz, Peter G. Stein, John N. Hazard, Raphael Powell, Max Rheinstein and Albert Roland Kiralfy, Britannica, last updated December 9, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-law>.

¹⁶⁰ van Galen, *Women and Citizenship*, 103; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 10, 46; "Roman Law," Maurice Alfred Millner, Mary Ann Glendon, Paolo Carozza, Herbert Felix Jolowicz, Peter G. Stein, John N. Hazard, Raphael Powell, Max Rheinstein and Albert Roland Kiralfy, Britannica, last updated December 9, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-law>.

¹⁶¹ Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women*, 49; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 199; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 13; "Roman Law," Maurice Alfred Millner, Mary Ann Glendon, Paolo Carozza, Herbert Felix Jolowicz, Peter G. Stein, John N. Hazard, Raphael Powell, Max Rheinstein and Albert Roland Kiralfy, Britannica, last updated December 9, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-law>.

¹⁶² Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women*, 49; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 199.

¹⁶³ Hemelrijk "Romeinse vrouwen buiten Rome," chapter 1; Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 150.

¹⁶⁴ Hemelrijk, "Romeinse vrouwen buiten Rome," chapter 1; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 10-12.

The available evidence on Briseis' first marriage is inconclusive regarding the question of whether she was given away by her parents to her husband.¹⁶⁵ The letter does not provide any indication as to whether Briseis' father survived the siege of Lyrnessus, thus precluding any possibility of him having given her to Achilles in marriage.¹⁶⁶ Additionally, the age of Briseis remains unmentioned, preventing any meaningful comparison with the historical situation of the Roman Empire. However, she does discuss her ability to spin wool in relation to marriage, which is supported by the historical tradition of sheepskin. The situation in this letter from Briseis about marriage is thus not entirely faithful to the many historical factors concerning marriage in the Early Empire.

Abduction and marriage were not unheard of in the Roman Empire.¹⁶⁷ This is evident in the myth of the Sabine Virgin Robbery. In this myth, Romulus required women for the first citizens of Rome. To this end, he invited the Sabines to a feast. During the feast, he abducted the Sabine women. He then proceeded to articulate the merits of matrimony within Roman society. He emphasized that women would be entitled to share property with their husbands, gain citizenship, and that their children would be valued and cherished. The women were delighted.¹⁶⁸ The promises made by Romulus align with the rulings of Augustus in the early imperial Roman period.¹⁶⁹ The women in the myth are depicted as outsiders who assimilate with the Romans.¹⁷⁰ The position of women in this myth in relation to marriage is similar to that of Briseis, as both are non-Greek, kidnapped by a king and were enthusiastic about the promise of marriage after their abduction.

It is evident that the social position of women underwent a transformation during the reign of Emperor Augustus. This transformation might have been influenced by Livia, who wielded significant political influence and was trusted by Augustus. One influential law Augustus passed during his reign was the *ius trium liberorum*.¹⁷¹ Prior to the reign of Emperor Augustus, the only women not subject to the guardianship of a male relative were the six Vestal Virgins. The *ius trium liberorum* granted women the autonomy to liberate themselves from the formal supervision of male guardians.¹⁷² The requirements were as follows: freeborn women who had three children and freed women who had

¹⁶⁵ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹⁶⁶ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹⁶⁷ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 10; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 144.

¹⁶⁸ Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 141; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 144; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 9; "De Sabijnse Maagdenroof," *Historiek*, last updated February 6, 2024, <https://historiek.net/de-sabijnse-maagdenroof/79789/>.

¹⁶⁹ Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 144; Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women*, 49; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 69; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 3; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 5, 20; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 197; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 52.

¹⁷⁰ Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 141; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 144; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 9-10; "De Sabijnse Maagdenroof," *Historiek*, last updated February 6, 2024, <https://historiek.net/de-sabijnse-maagdenroof/79789/>.

¹⁷¹ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 151; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 52.

¹⁷² Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 151; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 52; van Galen, *Women and Citizenship*, 100-103, 187; "Vestal Virgins," *Britannica*, last updated, January 24, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Vestal-Virgins>.

four children were exempt from having a guardian.¹⁷³ When a woman remarried her children from her previous marriage were still counted towards the *ius trium liberorum*.¹⁷⁴ However, there is a debate whether the courts included stillborn children. This could have a significant impact on the number of women who qualify for the *ius trium liberorum*, given the high infant mortality rates in ancient times. In certain instances, the *ius trium liberorum* was granted to couples unable to have children.¹⁷⁵

Emperor Augustus created a system of rewards by establishing the *ius trium liberorum*, encouraging people to follow his ideals of marriage and family.¹⁷⁶ This system offered certain benefits to fathers, such as exemption from certain societal obligations. For instance, fathers granted the *ius trium liberorum*, were possibly exempt from civic obligations such as inclusion on the *album iudicum*, a register of all male citizens between the ages of 25 and 60, from which judges were drawn.¹⁷⁷ The *ius trium liberorum* provided mothers with access to legal, economic and social independence, and a heightened status.¹⁷⁸

Augustus' legislation, combined with the intended audience of the *Heroides*, may explain the change in Briseis' character from the *Iliad* to the *Heroides*. Ovid's familiarity with the *Iliad* allowed him to craft a narrative that incorporated Briseis' lament for Patroclus, exemplifying intertextuality.¹⁷⁹ In the *Heroides*, Briseis is portrayed as having more agency and a clear agenda, reflecting an evolution in the depiction of female characters.¹⁸⁰ This shift in Briseis' character can be attributed to the evolving status of women during the early imperial period under Emperor Augustus,¹⁸¹ with them being a demographic within the intended audience.¹⁸²

In summary, women were predominantly economically and legally dependent on male guardians.¹⁸³ This is also the case with Briseis, who, as an enslaved woman, is financially and legally

¹⁷³ Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 49; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 5, 20; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 197; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 52; van Galen, *Women and Citizenship*, 102-103, 187.

¹⁷⁴ Leanne Bablitz, "Judging Ovid," *The Classical Journal*, 104 (2008): 35-36.

¹⁷⁵ Hemelrijk "Romeinse vrouwen buiten Rome," chapter 1.

¹⁷⁶ Wheeler-Reed, "AUGUSTUS AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE: The Birth of an Ideology," 9.

¹⁷⁷ Bablitz, "Judging Ovid," 34-36.

¹⁷⁸ Hemelrijk, "Voortleven na de dood," chapter 5; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 5, 20; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 197; Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 79; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 52; van Galen, *Women and Citizenship*, 102-103, 187.

¹⁷⁹ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Schwartz, *Il*, XIX; Wilson, *Il*, XIX; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 315; Lanzillotta, "Ancient Religious Texts and Intertextuality: Plato's and Plutarch's Myths of the Afterlife," 134-139.

¹⁸⁰ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Schwartz, *Il*, XIX; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.

¹⁸¹ Hemelrijk, "Voortleven na de dood," chapter 5; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 5, 20; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 197; Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 79; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 52; van Galen, *Women and Citizenship*, 102-103, 187.

¹⁸² D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 135; Enos and Peterman, "Writing Instruction for the "Young Ladies" of Teos," 16; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 57.

¹⁸³ Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society*, 36; D'Ambra, *Roman Women* 3, 16; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 150; "Homeric Variations on a Lament by Briseis. In the series "Greek Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches", Stephen Evans, BMCR, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://bmc.brynmaur.edu/2003/2003.01.36/>; van Galen, *Women and Citizenship*, 83-97; Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 151; Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 49.

dependent on Achilles and Agamemnon.¹⁸⁴ While women could accumulate political or public power, their influence was often exerted behind the scenes.¹⁸⁵ Briseis, akin to women in the early imperial period, tries to gain political influence behind the scenes.¹⁸⁶ Women had a variety of occupations in the Roman imperial period,¹⁸⁷ but Briseis is depicted solely as a spinner, indicating her marriageability.¹⁸⁸ Briseis' aspiration to marry Achilles aligns with the role of the mythical Sabine Virgins.¹⁸⁹

The disparities between Briseis and the historical status of Roman women can be attributed to the author's perspective,¹⁹⁰ the intended audience,¹⁹¹ the possibility it may have been seen as a work of fiction¹⁹² or related to Briseis being a non-Greek widow.¹⁹³ The change in Briseis' personality may be explained by the change in the position of women during the reign of Augustus, including the *ius liberorum*,¹⁹⁴ and that women constituted a part of the intended audience.¹⁹⁵

Briseis and Slavery

This section compares the position of Briseis in the *Heroides* with the position of enslaved individuals in the early imperial period. First, some general information about slavery in the Roman Empire will be given. The enslavement of Briseis will then be examined to determine if it occurred in a similar manner. The application of slave labour and its relevance to Briseis will subsequently be examined. The application of slave labour and its relevance to Briseis will subsequently be examined. The risk of sexual violence against enslaved people and romantic relationships between enslaved people and their

¹⁸⁴ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹⁸⁵ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 142-149; Wheeler-Reed, "AUGUSTUS AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE: The Birth of an Ideology," 10; Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 507; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 63.

¹⁸⁶ Peters, *Her*, III.85-105; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.85-105.

¹⁸⁷ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 137; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 201; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 31, 106; Hemelrijk "Voortleven na de dood," chapter 5; Treggiari, "Lower Class Women In The Roman Economy, 65-86; Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women*, 49; Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 153.

¹⁸⁸ Hemelrijk "Romeinse vrouwen buiten Rome," chapter 1; Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 150; Peters, *Her*, III.70; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.70.

¹⁸⁹ Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 141; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 144; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 9; "De Sabijnse Maagdenroof," Historiek, last updated February 6, 2024, <https://historiek.net/de-sabijnse-maagdenroof/79789/>; Peters, *Her*, III.70; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.70.

¹⁹⁰ Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 444, 509; "Did Ovid's erotic poetry lead to his exile from Rome?" National Geographic, November 26, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/history-magazine/article/exiled-roman-poet-ovid>.

¹⁹¹ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 23; Phillips, "Book Prices and Roman Literacy," 36-38; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 70; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 57; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III. Peters, *Her*, 11; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures>.

¹⁹² Jacqueline Klooster, interview organised by Yona Siero, email, April 25, 2024.

¹⁹³ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹⁹⁴ Hemelrijk, "Voortleven na de dood," chapter 5; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 5, 20; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 197; Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 79; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 52; van Galen, *Women and Citizenship*, 102-103, 187.

¹⁹⁵ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 23; Phillips, "Book Prices and Roman Literacy," 36-38; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 70; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 57; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III. Peters, *Her*, 11; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures>.

owners will also be discussed. This information will be used to infer whether Briseis reflects the position of enslaved people in the early imperial period.

Slavery was widespread in the Roman Empire.¹⁹⁶ These enslaved individuals formed a part of the Roman *familia*.¹⁹⁷ In the laws of the Roman Empire, enslaved people were defined as objects, talking tools.¹⁹⁸ Punishments such as violence and flogging were common.¹⁹⁹ Owners wielded absolute authority over the lives and deaths of their enslaved subjects.²⁰⁰ For example, Vedius Pollio, a wealthy associate of Emperor Augustus, who was known to feed his enslaved individuals to carnivorous eels.²⁰¹ One of his slaves accidentally broke expensive drinking cups and Vedius Pollio ordered his death. The intervention of Emperor Augustus ensured the individual's survival. This illustrates that in the ancient world, masters had the right to life or death over their slaves.²⁰² Similar to Briseis, who pleaded with Achilles to either save her or kill her, because she does not want to live without him,²⁰³ Achilles had the legal right to take her life, if she still belonged to him. It also shows that Briseis' position in rebuking Achilles does not align with the social position of enslaved individuals in the Roman Empire, where breaking cups could result in capital punishment.²⁰⁴

In the Roman Empire, a person could become enslaved in a number of ways, similar to the Archaic Greek period.²⁰⁵ 1) Enslaved people could be bought and sold.²⁰⁶ 2) People could end up enslaved as a punishment for crimes or debts.²⁰⁷ 3) A person could also be born into slavery. If a person had a free born mother, that person was born a free person. However, if a person's mother was

¹⁹⁶ Noel Lenski, "Slavery in the Roman Empire," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 87; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 10-31.

¹⁹⁷ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 191; Edmondson, "Slavery and the Roman Family," 339.

¹⁹⁸ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 22; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>; Sandra R. Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman world* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 38.

¹⁹⁹ K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and masters in the Roman Empire: a study in social control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 117-118; Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman world*, 40.

²⁰⁰ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 22-23; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 27-28; Dari-Mattiacci, "Slavery and Information," 83-84.

²⁰¹ Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 327, 384; Piotr Berdowski, "E x Amicis Divi Augusti: P. Vedius Pollio," *Palamedes A Journal of Ancient History*, 12 (2017/2018): 93-140.

²⁰² Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 327; Berdowski, "E x Amicis Divi Augusti: P. Vedius Pollio," 93-140.

²⁰³ Peters, *Her*, III.140-154; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.140-150.

²⁰⁴ "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>.

²⁰⁵ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 22; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>.

²⁰⁶ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 192; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 36.

²⁰⁷ "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>.

enslaved, that person was born enslaved.²⁰⁸ It was encouraged that enslaved people were to reproduce in order to create more enslaved people.²⁰⁹ 3) It was also common for the Romans to enslave their enemies, the citizens of the territories they conquered or piracy.²¹⁰

In the *Heroides*, Briseis refers to herself as an enslaved woman who was abducted from Lyrnessus.²¹¹ Briseis writes that Achilles stole her.²¹² This aligns with the Roman practice of condemning their enemies, the citizens of their conquered territories, to slavery through captivity or abduction.²¹³ This perspective provides a valuable insight into the practices surrounding slavery in the early imperial period.

Roman slaves were employed in a variety of sectors.²¹⁴ They were employed in agriculture, (work)shops, industry, serving and education.²¹⁵ In some cases, enslaved individuals managed to gain status, as evidenced by the practice of enslaved persons employed by the emperor and prominent Roman families occupying senior administrative positions, thereby ensuring their economic security. Women coerced into slavery were frequently assigned to domestic services. They often had no formal position through which they could exert influence. The roles available to free(d) and enslaved women were diverse, including spinners, garment makers, weavers, child nurses, kitchen helpers, actresses, prostitutes and midwives, though these opportunities were often dependent on their level of education. However, the majority of women had received no more than the traditional household education.²¹⁶ Within affluent Roman households, these women fulfilled roles such as secretaries, servants, garment folders, barbers, mirror holders, masseuses, readers, entertainers, midwives, infirmity attendants, or parasol bearers.²¹⁷ In the *Heroides*, Briseis does not write about similar duties she has performed,

²⁰⁸ Lenski, "Slavery in the Roman Empire," 88; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 22-23; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>.

²⁰⁹ Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 206; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 27; "Slavery and the Roman Family," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery: The Ancient Mediterranean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 352-353.

²¹⁰ Lenski, "Slavery in the Roman Empire," 88; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 191; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 27, 37-39.

²¹¹ Peters, *Her*, III.1-16; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.1-16.

²¹² Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

²¹³ Lenski, "Slavery in the Roman Empire," 88; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 191.

²¹⁴ "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>; Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman world*, 21.

²¹⁵ Lenski, "Slavery in the Roman Empire," 87; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 58-60; Hemelrijk, "Romeinse vrouwen buiten Rome," chapter 1; Giuseppe Dari-Mattiacci, "Slavery and Information," *The Journal of Economic History*, 73 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 97.

²¹⁶ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 191-196; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 58-60; Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman world*, 21; Dari-Mattiacci, "Slavery and Information," 97.

²¹⁷ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 191-196; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 58-60; Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman world*, 21.

though she does say she is good at spinning wool.²¹⁸ Thus, our knowledge of Briseis is limited, but what we do know of her is consistent with the social norms of the Roman Empire.

Another category of slave labour is sexual labour.²¹⁹ An enslaved person could be employed as a prostitute in the Roman Empire.²²⁰ The majority of evidence for this type of slave labour is from the period from 100 BC to 300 AD, which includes Emperor Augustus' ruling period.²²¹ During this period sexual relations outside of marriage were illegal, yet having sex with free(d) or enslaved prostitutes was legal. These women worked in locations such as brothels or public baths.²²² Prostitution was a lucrative business, with owners exploiting the bodies of enslaved women.²²³ Even babies and daughters were sold by their parents and raised for sex work. In addition, women were sometimes trained to work as entertainers or actresses. These actresses would also perform naked or sexually on stage.²²⁴

Briseis is not a prostitute, but from a modern point of view she experiences sexual violence. This occurred not at the hands of Agamemnon,²²⁵ but of Achilles.²²⁶ She states that he loves her ardently²²⁷ and that she has slept with him several times on his orders.²²⁸ This represents a form of sexual violence that aligns with the historical position of enslaved individuals in the Roman Empire.²²⁹ Masters could take sexual pleasure from their slaves, regardless of their gender. These people could not refuse their master's advances.²³⁰ In the Roman Empire, rape was a criminal offence that could result in death.²³¹ The existence of such laws serves as historical evidence of the prevalence of rape in the Roman Empire. Enslaved survivors of sexual assault were often unable to voice their grievances due to the power imbalance inherent in their relationship with their owners. The rape of an enslaved person by their owner was not considered a crime. However, the owner of the enslaved

²¹⁸ Peters, *Her*, III.70; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.65-75.

²¹⁹ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 192; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 28.

²²⁰ Lenski, "Slavery in the Roman Empire," 97; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 132; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 41; Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 154.

²²¹ Lenski, "Slavery in the Roman Empire," 97.

²²² Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 160, 192.

²²³ Lenski, "Slavery in the Roman Empire," 97; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 132; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 192.

²²⁴ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 192.

²²⁵ Peters, *Her*, III.105-115; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.100-120.

²²⁶ Peters, *Her*, III.33; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.25-30.

²²⁷ Peters, *Her*, III.33; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.25-30.

²²⁸ Peters, *Her*, III.100; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.105-120.

²²⁹ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 25-26; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 192; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 221.

²³⁰ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 25-26; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 192; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 221; Bradley, *Slaves and masters in the Roman Empire*, 117-118.

²³¹ Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 118.

person could initiate legal action for damage to property.²³² The historical account of Briseis' situation reflects the risk of sexual violence faced by enslaved people in early imperial Rome.

In the *Heroides*, Briseis is in love with Achilles.²³³ Historically, it is difficult to prove that some enslaved people, like Briseis, were in love with their owners. Simone Weil has argued that enslaved people could feel love for their masters in part because all other outlets for their emotions were barred, and because the master could free them, offering them a chance to become a person again.²³⁴

There is evidence of relationships between enslaved people and their masters.²³⁵ In Pompeii, the body of a woman approximately 30 years of age was found.²³⁶ This woman was wearing a gold bracelet at the time of her death. The inscription on the bracelet read *dom(i)nus ancillae suae* or the master to his own slave girl. The inscription and the bracelet's value suggest a romantic relationship between the master and this woman. This bracelet is dated 79 AD, relatively recently after the *Heroides*.²³⁷ The question remains, whether this woman could consent to this relationship, considering the power imbalance.²³⁸ The archaeological evidence suggests that interpersonal relationships between enslaved people and masters existed. The relationship between Briseis and her owner is therefore historically substantiated.

According to Roman law, masters were legally permitted to free enslaved women and marry them. This was accepted in the lower classes.²³⁹ These unions were a result of the owners' control over their enslaved person's bodies.²⁴⁰ Enslaved women could gain their freedom through their relationship with their masters, and if they married their masters, they gained greater social status and became mistresses of the houses where they worked as enslaved women.²⁴¹ There are more than 300 funerary monuments found in different regions of the Roman empire, that offer further evidence of men liberating women for the purpose of matrimony.²⁴² One example is a funerary altar (first century

²³² Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 125; "Rape," Sharon James, Oxford Classical Dictionary, April 30, 2020, <https://oxfordre.com/classics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-8365>.

²³³ Peters, *Her*, III.3-6, 140-154, 62-65, 75-80; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.1-7, 140-154, 60-95; Philips, *In Her Own Voice: Examining the Portrayal of Briseis Across Ancient Sources and Modern Retellings*, 13.

²³⁴ Casey Dué, "Learning Lessons from the Trojan War: Briseis and the Theme of Force," *College Literature*, 34 (2007): 246.

²³⁵ Bradley, *Slaves and masters in the Roman Empire*, 117-118.

²³⁶ J. A. Baird, "On Reading the Material Culture of Ancient Sexual Labor," *Helios* 42, 1 (2015): 164; Edmondson, "Slavery and the Roman Family," 352-353.

²³⁷ Baird, "On Reading the Material Culture of Ancient Sexual Labor," 352-353; Edmondson, "Slavery and the Roman Family," 352-353.

²³⁸ Baird, "On Reading the Material Culture of Ancient Sexual Labor," 352-353; Edmondson, "Slavery and the Roman Family," 352-353; "Rape," Britannica, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rape-crime>.

²³⁹ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 195.

²⁴⁰ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 25-26; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>.

²⁴¹ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 26; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>.

²⁴² Katharine P.D. Huemoeller, "Freedom in Marriage? Manumission for Marriage in the Roman World," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 110 (2020): 126; Bradley, *Slaves and masters in the Roman Empire*, 117-118.

AD in Rome). It describes part of the life of Acte, who was enslaved and subsequently freed by her owner for the purpose of marriage.²⁴³ Another example is a marble funerary relief (30 BC - 10 BC), which bears the following inscription:

*L(ucius) Antistius Cn(aei) f(ilius) Hor(atia) Sarculo Antistia Salius Albanus, idem Mag(ister) Saliorum L(ucii) l(iberta) Plutia Rufus l(ibertus), Anthus l(ibertus), imagines de suo fecerunt patrono et patronae, pro meritis eorum.*²⁴⁴

It is stated that Lucius Antistius Sarculo, and his wife Antistia Plutia were buried there. Antistia Plutia was a freedwoman, and a former enslaved person of Lucius. The funerary relief was created by their freedmen Rufus and Anthus.²⁴⁵ This suggests that marriages between enslaved people and their owners were not uncommon during the imperial period,²⁴⁶ making Briseis' desire to marry Achilles a plausible scenario.

From a modern perspective, the relationship between Achilles and Briseis can be interpreted as that of a rapist and victim. However, the Romans might have viewed the relationship differently. Jacobson's argument is that Ovid used the story of Briseis and Achilles to write about the power of love, and the concept of a man loving his social inferior. In his later work *Ars Amortentia*, Ovid writes that even great heroes were susceptible to love and points to Achilles as an example.²⁴⁷ Horace's advice is that one should not be ashamed of loving a servant, because even Achilles fell in love with one.²⁴⁸ This perspective is particularly noteworthy in light of Emperor Augustus' prohibition of sexual relations outside of marriage, while it was legal for men to engage in sexual activities with free(d) or enslaved prostitutes.²⁴⁹ This is further exemplified by Ovid's use of the same argument to excuse his own love for an enslaved person.²⁵⁰ This suggests that Ovid may have authored Briseis' letter as a story of romance, with the aim of further substantiating this point.

Due to the popularity of the *Iliad* in Roman times, it is difficult to determine whether the *Iliad* or the *Heroides* are being depicted in Roman art. For instance, the LIMC states that the return of Briseis is depicted on a Roman mural. However, it is not based on Ovid's *Heroides*, as the mural was

²⁴³ Huemoeller, "Freedom in Marriage?," 126.

²⁴⁴ "relief; funerary equipment," The British Museum, accessed January 21, 2025, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1858-0819-2.

²⁴⁵ "relief; funerary equipment," The British Museum, accessed January 21, 2025, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1858-0819-2.

²⁴⁶ Bradley, *Slaves and masters in the Roman Empire*, 117-118.

²⁴⁷ Jacobson, "Ovid's Briseis: A Study of *Heroides* 3," 337; P. Ovidius Naso, *Ovid's Art of Love (in three Books), the Remedy of Love, the Art of Beauty, the Court of Love, the History of Love, and Amours*, edited by Anne Mahoney (New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1855; Perseus Digital Library), II, accessed January 20, 2025, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0069%3Atext%3DARS%3Abook%3D2>.

²⁴⁸ Jacobson, "Ovid's Briseis: A Study of *Heroides* 3," 337.

²⁴⁹ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 160, 192.

²⁵⁰ Jacobson, "Ovid's Briseis: A Study of *Heroides* 3," 337.

dated to 30 BC, which was before the *Heroides* was published.²⁵¹ Similar scenes featuring Briseis are depicted in both Greek and Roman art, however, Roman versions tend to feature more metalwork, sarcophaguses, a terracotta plate, arretina, gemstones, glass, mosaic, relief and a lamp.²⁵² Roman depictions of Briseis have been found in greater numbers than Greek depictions.²⁵³

The position of Briseis and Achilles as lovers, and Briseis as Achilles' bride is supported by the first century AD mural *The Delivery of Briseis to the Messenger of Agamemnon*.²⁵⁴ This mural was discovered in the *Casa del Poeta Tragico* in Pompeii,²⁵⁵ and depicts Briseis being handed over to Agamemnon by Achilles.²⁵⁶ While it is difficult to ascertain whether or not this depiction is based on the *Heroides* or the *Iliad*, it is produced in the time of the Roman imperial period, which influences Briseis' depiction. Briseis is depicted in a yellow dress and veil. At Roman weddings it was customary for the bride to wear a flammeum.²⁵⁷ A flammeum is a veil of a deep yellow colour. These veils were seen as a sign of lifelong fidelity to a man.²⁵⁸ This concept is reflected in Briseis' letter, where she pledges her fidelity to Achilles and that she swears she did not sleep with Agamemnon.²⁵⁹ In the mural she is depicted being led away from Achilles' tent in wedding attire, suggesting she was or was about to be Achilles' bride.²⁶⁰ The words of Briseis in the *Heroides*, where she refers to Achilles as her husband and their relationship as one of romance, further reinforce this option.²⁶¹ This suggests that Achilles' anger was driven by the loss of his wife, rather than the perceived dishonour. This viewpoint is further reinforced by Briseis' assertion of her proficiency in spinning, which was a notable skill in the ancient world.²⁶² In the *Iliad*, Briseis' absence of spinning skills could be interpreted as indicating an unrealistic expectation of being with Achilles.²⁶³ However, in the *Heroides*, this absence supports the idea of their romance.

²⁵¹ Anneliese Kossatz-Deissmann, "Briseis," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC): III 1 Atherion-Eros* (Switzerland: Publisher, 1986), 160.

²⁵² Kossatz-Deissmann, "Briseis," 160-163.

²⁵³ Kossatz-Deissmann, "Briseis," 158-165.

²⁵⁴ A picture of *The delivery of Briseis to the messenger of Agamemnon*, is available on Pompeii In Pictures: <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R6/6%2008%2005%20p2.htm>; "VI.8.5 Pompeii. Casa del Poeta Tragico or House of the Tragic Poet," Pompeii in Pictures, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R6/6%2008%2005%20p2.htm>.

²⁵⁵ "Achilles and Briseis Fresco, Pompeii," Dickinson College Commentaries, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://dcc.dickinson.edu/achilles-and-briseis-fresco-pompeii>.

²⁵⁶ Schwartz, *Il*, I.290-351; Wilson, *Il*, I.340-460.

²⁵⁷ Liubov Ben-Nun, *The Roots of Clothing: From Ancient Times to the Present* (Israel: B.N. Publication House, 2018), 44.

²⁵⁸ Ben-Nun, *The Roots of Clothing*, 44.

²⁵⁹ Peters, *Her*, III.105-110; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.108-110.

²⁶⁰ "VI.8.5 Pompeii. Casa del Poeta Tragico or House of the Tragic Poet," Pompeii in Pictures, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R6/6%2008%2005%20p2.htm>.

²⁶¹ Peters, *Her*, III.5-10; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.1-10.

²⁶² Peters, *Her*, III.70; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.70; Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women*, 49; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 199; Hemelrijk "Romeinse vrouwen buiten Rome," chapter 1; Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 150.

²⁶³ Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV, note 19.389; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; "Briseis and Andromache Enslaved: Sleeping with the Enemy in Greek and Roman Epic," William M. Owens, *Classics@ Journal*, accessed January 3, 2025, <https://classics-at.chs.harvard.edu/briseis-and-andromache-enslaved-sleeping-with-the-enemy-in-greek-and-roman-epic/>.

However, Augustus had already made it illegal for people of senatorial rank to marry freedwomen.²⁶⁴ As previously mentioned, Achilles is a king, not a senator. Had Achilles been a historical figure, he would not have been permitted to marry Briseis under Emperor Augustus' rule because of his status.²⁶⁵ Consequently, the depiction of Briseis as Achilles' wife does not accurately reflect the social status of enslaved women in the Roman Empire under Augustus. Instead, Briseis is based on some aspects of the historical social position of women and enslaved people in the Roman Empire. However, artistic liberties may have been taken, possibly due to the author's high social status compared to enslaved individuals of low status, and because the work may have been intended as fiction.²⁶⁶ Briseis is therefore not an entirely faithful representation of the position of women or enslaved people.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined whether Briseis reflects the social position of women and enslaved people in the early imperial period. The *Heroides* were written by Ovid, a historical figure whose perspective and values are evident in his work and influenced by his social position.²⁶⁷ However, despite his high social position, his work does not reflect the values of the Emperor Augustus.²⁶⁸ Briseis is a female character written from a male perspective.²⁶⁹ While the Briseis in the *Heroides* does exhibit a greater degree of agency, the focus of her correspondence remains Achilles, a male figure.²⁷⁰ The *Heroides* were intended for an elite male audience, likely including educated women and enslaved individuals.²⁷¹ The shift in the intended audience of the *Heroides* from the *Iliad*, coupled with the evolution of Briseis' character, carries significant implications. This shift may be indicative of the evolving status of women and enslaved individuals during Roman imperial society and the early Archaic Greek society.

Briseis' role in the *Heroides* is that she is the author of her own letter. The letter is written from her perspective and illustrates her agency. Briseis is depicted as an enslaved woman in a

²⁶⁴ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 195; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 7-32.

²⁶⁵ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 195.

²⁶⁶ Jacqueline Klooster, interview organised by Yona Siero, email, April 25, 2024.

²⁶⁷ Williams, "Ovid's exile poetry," 233; Feldherr, "Metamorphosis in the Metamorphoses," 177; Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 509; Peters, *Her*, III, 11; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

²⁶⁸ Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 509; "Did Ovid's erotic poetry lead to his exile from Rome?" National Geographic, November 26, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/history-magazine/article/exiled-roman-poet-ovid>; Best, "Cicero, Livy and Educated Roman Women," 203.

²⁶⁹ Williams, "Ovid's exile poetry," 233; Feldherr, "Metamorphosis in the Metamorphoses," 177; Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 509; Peters, *Her*, III, 11; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

²⁷⁰ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

²⁷¹ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 70; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 57; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III. Peters, *Her*, 11; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures>; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Peters, *Her*, III; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 135; Enos and Peterman, "Writing Instruction for the 'Young Ladies' of Teos," 16; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 57; Mohler, "Slave Education in the Roman Empire," 262-280.

romantic relationship with Achilles. She is depicted as someone who would prefer to perish than live without him. The narrative provides insight into her emotions, circumstances, her deceased husband, her family, and Patroclus.²⁷² There are several similarities between Homer's Briseis and Ovid's Briseis. Both are non-Greek enslaved women who have a relationship with Achilles and are taken away from him by Agamemnon. Both have rich inner lives and elaborate back stories. The primary distinction between the two versions of Briseis lies in her agency and personality, which are more pronounced in the *Heroides*.²⁷³ Based on other Roman writings referring to the relationship between Achilles and Briseis as a romantic one, and Roman art, Briseis and Achilles were considered to be lovers in the Roman imperial period.²⁷⁴

Briseis' position is partly consistent with the position of women and enslaved people in the early imperial period. However, the evidence is insufficient to draw firm conclusions. In order to reach this conclusion, Briseis' economic, legal, social, political, labour and marital position have been compared. In addition, the enslavement of Briseis, her communication, potential sexual exploitation, relationship with Achilles, the tasks she performs and her marital position as an enslaved person have been compared with the historical position of enslaved people.²⁷⁵ The resulting data show both commonalities and distinctions between Briseis' circumstances and those of enslaved individuals in the period under study. A possible explanation for the change in the character of Briseis in the *Heroides* compared to Briseis in the *Iliad* is the laws of the Emperor Augustus²⁷⁶ and that women were part of the intended audience.²⁷⁷ This suggests that Briseis accurately depicts some aspects of the historical social position of women or enslaved people in early imperial Rome. However, it should be noted that Ovid took artistic liberties.

²⁷² Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

²⁷³ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV.

²⁷⁴ "VI.8.5 Pompeii. Casa del Poeta Tragico or House of the Tragic Poet," Pompeii in Pictures, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R6/6%2008%2005%20p2.htm>; Jacobson, "Ovid's Briseis: A Study of *Heroides* 3," 337; Ben-Nun, *The Roots of Clothing*, 44; Kossatz-Deissmann, "Briseis," 158-165.

²⁷⁵ Hemelrijk, "Voortleven na de dood," chapter 5; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 5, 20; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 197; Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 79; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 52; van Galen, *Women and Citizenship*, 102-103, 187; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>; Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman world*, 38-40; Bradley, *Slaves and masters in the Roman Empire*, 117-118; Lenski, "Slavery in the Roman Empire," 88; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Dué, "Learning Lessons from the Trojan War: Briseis and the Theme of Force," 246; Baird, "On Reading the Material Culture of Ancient Sexual Labor," 352-353; Huemoeller, "Freedom in Marriage?," 126; "relief; funerary equipment," The British Museum, accessed January 21, 2025, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1858-0819-2; Jacobson, "Ovid's Briseis: A Study of *Heroides* 3," 337

²⁷⁶ Hemelrijk, "Voortleven na de dood," chapter 5; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 5, 20; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 197; Dixon, *The Roman Family*, 79; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 52; van Galen, *Women and Citizenship*, 102-103, 187.

²⁷⁷ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 135; Enos and Peterman, "Writing Instruction for the 'Young Ladies' of Teos," 16; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 57; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; "A List of Women Authors from Ancient Greece and Rome for #InternationalWomensDay," SENTENTIAE ANTIQUAE, March 8, 2021, <https://sententiaeantiquae.com/2021/03/08/a-list-of-women-authors-from-ancient-greece-and-rome-for-internationalwomensday/>; Hallett, "Ancient Roman Women's Writings: Sub Specie XXV Annorum," 61-65.

Chapter 3: Briseis in 21st-century America

This chapter examines how Briseis is portrayed in *The Silence of the Girls* and then considers whether she represents the position of women or enslaved people in twenty-first-century America. To explore this, section 3.1. discusses the author and intended audience of *The Silence of the Girls* and what scholars can learn in regards to the research question. Section 3.2. examines the role of Briseis in *The Silence of the Girls* and how she is described. Section 3.3. examines whether Briseis' position corresponds to the position of women and enslaved people in 21st-century America.

3.1. The author and audience of *The Silence of the Girls*

This section examines who the author and intended audience of *The Silence of the Girls* are, and what researchers can learn from this in relation to the research question. To this end, information in regards to Barker's life is discussed, how Barker responds to the ancient works by adding new elements, literacy in 21st-century America, and the recent trend of mythological retellings from the perspective of women.

Author of *The Silence of the Girls*

The author of *The Silence of the Girls* is Pat Barker, and more information is available about her life and writing process than about Homer's and Ovid's.¹ This is partly due to the increased visibility of authors through online promotion.² She was born in Yorkshire on May 8, 1943, and was not born into a high social status, as she describes growing up poor. However, she later had access to a good education, studying at the London School of Economics, and went on to teach History and Politics at

¹ Adrian Goldsworthy, *Augustus: First Emperor of Rome* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014), 509; Christiaan Caspers, Jacqueline Klooster, Inger N.I. Kuin and Bram van der Velden, *Muze, vertel: De Griekse en Latijnse literatuur van de oudheid* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), 24-26, 315; Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, "Ancient Religious Texts and Intertextuality: Plato's and Plutarch's Myths of the Afterlife," in *Religion as relation: Studying Religion in Context* (South Yorkshire: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2021), 134-139; Pat Barker, *The Silence of the Girls* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), 1-324; Hugo Koning, *Mythologie* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 14; Corinne Ondine Pache, "General Introduction," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), xxvii; Casey Dué, Jim Marks, "The Homeric Question," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) 585-589; Michael Silk, *Homer: The Iliad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5; Casey Dué, "Conclusion: Tradition and Innovation," in *Homeric Variations on a Lament by Briseis* (Washington: Center for Hellenistic Studies, 2006), 83-91; "The Waterstones Interview: Pat Barker on The Silence of the Girls," Aitken Alexander Associates, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://aitkenalexander.co.uk/the-waterstones-interview-pat-barker-on-the-silence-of-the-girls/>; "Pat Barker." British Council, accessed April 10, 2024, <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/pat-barker/>; "Pat Barker," Women's Prize, accessed October 10, 2024, <https://womensprize.com/book-author/pat-barker/>.

² "The Waterstones Interview: Pat Barker on The Silence of the Girls," Aitken Alexander Associates, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://aitkenalexander.co.uk/the-waterstones-interview-pat-barker-on-the-silence-of-the-girls/>; "Pat Barker." British Council, accessed April 10, 2024, <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/pat-barker/>; "Pat Barker," Women's Prize, accessed October 10, 2024, <https://womensprize.com/book-author/pat-barker/>.

Durham University.³ While she does not have a classical background, she first read the *Iliad* as an adult.⁴

Ancient authors such as Ovid could face repercussions if they wrote against the ideals of rulers, such as Emperor Augustus.⁵ In modern America, there is a right of freedom of speech and the press, meaning people have the right to express their opinions and to be informed on political matters.⁶ Signalling authors and journalists today have more freedom to express themselves without repercussions from the governing body compared to authors in ancient times.

Barker, as a writer, differs from many ancient writers in that she is not born into a high social status. Her academic background may have influenced her decision to retell the story of the *Iliad*, an academic work that continues to be studied.⁷ The social status of authors often affects the focus on different societal groups, with lower classes, such as enslaved people and women, often underrepresented in ancient texts.⁸ Barker has chosen to focus her interpretation of the *Iliad* on these previously underrepresented people. However, I would argue that her social status is unlikely to be a significant factor in her decision to focus on these underrepresented groups, as her writing is part of a broader trend that has emerged since 2017 of addressing these issues.⁹ Instead, her gender may play a more substantial role in her choice to depict the voices of silenced women.

The Silence of the Girls is the first telling of the Trojan War in this thesis that is written by a woman. In this case, Briseis is a female character, written by a woman, which influences her depiction in the work. It explains Briseis' point of view and depicts the horrifying reality of war, rather than the romanticisation of the relationship between Achilles and Briseis. However, there are still books being published, such as dark romance, written by women, that romanticise sexual relationships without

³ "Pat Barker," Women's Prize, accessed October 10, 2024, <https://womensprize.com/book-author/pat-barker/>; "Pat Barker," British Council, accessed April 10, 2024, <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/pat-barker>.

⁴ "Pat Barker | 'I didn't read 'The Iliad' until I was more than adult'," Alice O'Keeffe, The Bookseller, May 25, 2018, <https://www.thebookseller.com/author-interviews/profile-pat-barker-i-didn-t-read-iliad-until-i-was-more-adult-793771>.

⁵ Eve D'Ambra, *Roman Women* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 34; Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 444, 509; "Legacy of Ovid," Edward John Kenney, Britannica, last updated January 1, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ovid-Roman-poet/Legacy>.

⁶ "Censorship," Britannica, last updated December 9, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/censorship#ref358885>.

⁷ "Pat Barker | 'I didn't read 'The Iliad' until I was more than adult'," Alice O'Keeffe, The Bookseller, May 25, 2018, <https://www.thebookseller.com/author-interviews/profile-pat-barker-i-didn-t-read-iliad-until-i-was-more-adult-793771>; "Pat Barker," Women's Prize, accessed October 10, 2024, <https://womensprize.com/book-author/pat-barker/>; "Pat Barker," British Council, accessed April 10, 2024, <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/pat-barker>; Homer, *Ilias & Odyssee*, translated by M. A. Schwartz (Amsterdam: Athenaeum - Polak & Van Gennep, 1982), I-XXIV; Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2024), I-XXIV.

⁸ Susan Treggiari, "Lower Class Women In The Roman Economy," in *Florilegium* 1 (Toronto: UTPress, 1979): 65.

⁹ Jacqueline Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze: Recente hervertellingen van klassieke mythen vanuit een vrouwelijk perspectief," *Lampas: Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse classici*, 3 (2023): 208-210; "Spilling Over: Ovid's Heroides and the Mythological Female Voice," Hazel Atkinson, Retrospect Journal, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>.

consent.¹⁰ The depiction of rape in *The Silence of the Girls* is influenced by contemporary societal attitudes towards rape and feminism.¹¹

In interviews, Barker only mentions the *Iliad*, but not her knowledge of Ovid's *Heroides*.¹² Interestingly, her work seems to be a reaction to the *Heroides*. The *Heroides* discuss events from the *Iliad* from Briseis' perspective.¹³ In contrast to the *Heroides*, which focuses on specific events, *The Silence of the Girls* encompasses all the events of the *Iliad*, including additional scenes contributed by Barker herself.¹⁴ The reinterpretation of existing works is a common literary practice, driven by the response of readers to the original content.¹⁵ Barker's decision to narrate from Briseis' perspective is noteworthy, because she experiences the most significant shift in circumstances.¹⁶ The author elects to portray Briseis as the Queen of Lyrnessus,¹⁷ a choice that introduces an additional layer to both the *Iliad* and the *Heroides*, as her status remains undefined in either. Furthermore, Barker opts to augment the narrative of the *Iliad* with additional scenes, shedding light on Briseis' life before and after the events of the *Iliad*. Barker adds a new layer to the story by giving a voice and personality to the nearly silent characters of the *Iliad*.¹⁸

The intended audience for *The Silence of the Girls*

This section examines the intended audience of *The Silence of the Girls*, based on its academic background, the level of literacy in America and the current literary trend of mythological retellings. In previous chapters, the literacy rate of a time and society has been shown to play a role in determining the intended audience. The 21st century has seen a significant increase in literacy rates

¹⁰ "What is Dark Romance and Why is BookTok Obsessed With It?," Kayleigh Donaldson, Paste, November 29, 2023, <https://www.pastemagazine.com/books/romance/what-is-dark-romance-booktok-trend/>; "30 Dark and Twisted Romance Books," Danielle Perreault, BookBub, December 20, 2024, <https://www.bookbub.com/blog/dark-romance-books>.

¹¹ "Rape," Britannica, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rape-crime>; "The Third Wave of Feminism," Brunell, Laura, Elinor Burkett, and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica, last updated December 15, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>; "Feminism: The Fourth Wave," National Women's History Museum, December 3, 2021, <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-fourth-wave>; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹² "Pat Barker | 'I didn't read 'The Iliad' until I was more than adult'," Alice O'Keeffe, The Bookseller, May 25, 2018, <https://www.thebookseller.com/author-interviews/profile-pat-barker-i-didn-t-read-iliad-until-i-was-more-adult-793771>; "Pat Barker on The Silence of the Girls: 'The Iliad is myth – the rules for writing historical fiction don't apply'," Pat Barker, The Guardian, August 7, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/aug/07/pat-barker-on-the-silence-of-the-girls-the-iliad-is-myth-the-rules-for-writing-historical-fiction-dont-apply>.

¹³ Ovidius, *Legendarische vrouwen: Heroides*, translated by W.A.M. Peters (Amsterdam: Ambo, 1994), III; Ovid, *Ovid's Heroides: A New Translation and Critical Essays*, translated by Paul Murgatroyd, Bridget Reeves and Sarah Parker (New York: Routledge, 2017), III.

¹⁴ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹⁵ Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 315; Lanzillotta, "Ancient Religious Texts and Intertextuality: Plato's and Plutarch's Myths of the Afterlife," 134-139; Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 201-218.

¹⁶ Pat Barker, The Guardian, August 7, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/aug/07/pat-barker-on-the-silence-of-the-girls-the-iliad-is-myth-the-rules-for-writing-historical-fiction-dont-apply>.

¹⁷ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-13.

¹⁸ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 47-49; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

compared to the Greek and Roman eras, partly due to greater access to education regardless of social status.¹⁹ In 2018, the literacy skills of American men and women were not measurably different.²⁰ By 2024, the literacy rate for individuals over 15 in America is expected to be 86.3%, with both men and women included.²¹ The literacy rate for men is 90%, compared to 82.7% for women,²² suggesting that American society as a whole has a high level of literacy, which is evident in both men and women. This indicates that men and women can read the novel written by Barker.

Despite being a retelling of the *Iliad*, and an unintentional reaction to the *Heroides*, it is not necessary to have read the *Iliad* or the *Heroides* in order to understand the story. While the *Iliad* could be relatively challenging to read without a classical background, the *Heroides* and *The Silence of the Girls* are relatively easier to read. Consequently, the intended audience of *The Silence of the Girls* is not limited to a specific social class of people, with access to an education in the classics.

In addition to the level of literacy and the academic background of *The Silence of the Girls*, literary trends also play a role in determining the target audience. Since 2017, there has been an increase in English retellings of Greek and Roman myths from a female perspective, by female authors.²³ These retellings have garnered significant popularity among young female readers.²⁴ Alongside the retelling of Greek-Roman myths, there has been a resurgence in the retelling of myths from other cultures, such as Norse and Asian myths.²⁵ However, Greek-Roman myths continue to dominate the market, potentially due to their deep cultural and societal roots, which serve as a common frame of reference.²⁶

¹⁹ “When Do Kids Learn to Read? Explore Reading Milestones by Age.” Dr. Jody Sherman LeVos, BEGIN, May 24, 2023, <https://www.beginlearning.com/parent-resources/when-do-kids-learn-to-read/>; “Literacy Statistics 2024- 2025 (Where we are now),” National Literacy Institute, accessed on October 5, 2024, <https://www.thenationalliteracyinstitute.com/post/literacy-statistics-2024-2025-where-we-are-now>; William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 47-48; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated women in the Roman elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 57; Carol G. Thomas, “Reviewed Work(s): Ancient Literacy by W. V. Harris,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 111 (1991): 241.

²⁰ Data Point U.S. Department of Education, *Literacy and numeracy Skills of U.S. Men and Women* (Online: National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

²¹ “Literacy Statistics 2024- 2025 (Where we are now),” National Literacy Institute, accessed on October 5, 2024, <https://www.thenationalliteracyinstitute.com/post/literacy-statistics-2024-2025-where-we-are-now>.

²² “Literacy Statistics 2024- 2025 (Where we are now),” National Literacy Institute, accessed on October 5, 2024, <https://www.thenationalliteracyinstitute.com/post/literacy-statistics-2024-2025-where-we-are-now>.

²³ Klooster, “De Revisionistische Muze,” 201-202; “Spilling Over: Ovid’s *Heroides* and the Mythological Female Voice,” Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovid-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>.

²⁴ Klooster, “De Revisionistische Muze,” 202.

²⁵ Klooster, “De Revisionistische Muze,” 207; “Norse Mythology Books,” Goodreads, accessed January 19, 2025, <https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/norse-mythology>; “Chinese Mythology Books,” Goodreads, accessed January 19, 2025, <https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/chinese-mythology>.

²⁶ Casey Dué, “Learning Lessons from the Trojan War: Briseis and the Theme of Force,” *College Literature*, 34 (2007): 230; Klooster, “De Revisionistische Muze,” 207; “‘We recognise it in this very primal way’: Stephen Fry, Brie Larson, Chris Ofili and more on why we can’t get enough of Greek mythology,” *The Guardian*, November 24, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2024/nov/24/greek-classics-pat-barker-brie-larson-hunger-games-moulin-rouge>.

The retelling of myths from a female perspective is a recent development, as illustrated by Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*, which retells the *Iliad* from the perspective of Briseis.²⁷ Retellings themselves are not new, as evidenced by Ovid's *Heroides*.²⁸ In ancient times, retellings were an integral part of the mythological tradition.²⁹ Modern retellings from the female perspective offer a different genre and perspective,³⁰ as demonstrated by Jennifer Saint's *Ariadne*,³¹ Madeline Miller's *Song of Achilles*³² and Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*.³³ Trans evaluation is a common feature in these retellings, where certain actions are viewed differently by shifting the perspective of the perpetrator and victim.³⁴ A recent example of this is the trans evaluation of the myth of Perseus, where Perseus has lost his hero status, and Medusa is the victim of sexual assault. Please refer to the poem written by Trista Mateer, from the perspective of Aphrodite which illustrates this point:

*"Athena and I wailed with grief on the day news came of Medusa's death. That man held her head up like a trophy and I wanted to smite him for it. I wanted his head for my own. I wanted to open up the earth up and let it swallow everything. The world was full of men who called themselves heroes for crossing boundaries, claiming bodies like prizes. The world still is."*³⁵

The poem is based on an ancient myth, but still speaks to the contemporary situation of victims of (sexual) violence and abuse.³⁶ The same can be said of *The Silence of the Girls*, where the traditional hero, Achilles, is depicted as an abuser from the perspective of Briseis.³⁷ Modern researchers have

²⁷ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

²⁸ Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 206-208. Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; "Spilling Over: Ovid's *Heroides* and the Mythological Female Voice," Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>.

²⁹ Peters, *Her*, III. Pache, "General Introduction," xxvii; Margalit Finkelberg, *Homer and Early Greek Epic: Collected Essays* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 154; Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardo, red., *Classical Mythology: Eighth Edition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, translated by Gilbert Murray (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1905); Virgil, *The Aeneid*, translated by Robert Fagles (London: Penguin Classics, 2012).

³⁰ Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 202-208; "Spilling Over: Ovid's *Heroides* and the Mythological Female Voice," Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>.

³¹ Jennifer Saint, *Ariadne* (London: Headline Publishing Group, 2021).

³² Madeleine Miller, *The Song of Achilles* (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2017).

³³ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; "Spilling Over: Ovid's *Heroides* and the Mythological Female Voice," Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>.

³⁴ Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 209-210; "The Enduring Popularity of Mythological Retellings," Ainsley Atinon, Grattan Street Press, September 17, 2024, <https://grattanstreetpress.com/2024/09/17/the-enduring-popularity-of-mythological-retellings/>.

³⁵ Trista Mateer, *Aphrodite made me do it* (Canada: Central Avenue Publishing, 2019), 113.

³⁶ Statistics, "me too," accessed November 27, 2024, <https://metoomvmt.org/learn-more/statistics/>.

³⁷ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

identified Briseis as a war bride, a victim of war and rape, offering a fresh perspective on a well-known mythological figure.³⁸

The popularity of these books can be attributed to a number of factors, including the enduring popularity of classical mythology, contemporary social interest in gender issues and feminism (particularly in the #MeToo era),³⁹ and the rise in the number of women with academic degrees in antiquities, leading to a greater number of female authors. This is in response to the representation of women in ancient texts written by men,⁴⁰ as people seek out narratives that have withstood the test of time, especially in a rapidly changing world.⁴¹

These books also provide access to the classical world for readers without a classical background, who may become interested in classical texts as a result.⁴² In addition, these books are very popular with young female readers, given the female perspective.⁴³ Given the literacy rates, academic requirements, the literary trends of the book and its focus on female characters, it can be concluded that both men and women are the intended audience of *The Silence of the Girls*, with a possibly greater focus on the female audience.

3.2. Briseis in *The Silence of the Girls*

This paragraph will discuss the modern depiction of Briseis in *The Silence of the Girls*, including the role and level of agency Barker has attributed to her, and how this compares to the *Iliad* and the *Heroides*. As most of the book is written from her perspective, Briseis' role is that of the narrator, which is similar to Ovid's *Heroides*.⁴⁴ While Ovid's *Heroides* portrays Briseis story as one of

³⁸ Dué, "Learning Lessons from the Trojan War: Briseis and the Theme of Force," 235; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 27; Emily Wilson, "Introduction," in *The Iliad* (New York: W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2024), chapter 1.

³⁹ Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 215.

⁴⁰ Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 215; "Found in translation: how women are making the classics their own," Emily Wilson, *The Guardian*, July 7, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/07/women-classics-translation-female-scholars-translators>; "Interview: Madeline Miller, turning the camera to female in classics," Devina Heriyanto, *The Jakarta Post*, April 25, 2018, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2018/04/25/interview-madeline-miller-turning-the-camera-to-female-in-classics.html>.

⁴¹ "Pat Barker: 'You could argue that time's up: we're at the end of patriarchy'." Claire Armitstead, *The Guardian*, January 4, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jan/04/pat-barker-women-carry-the-can-long-term>.

⁴² Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 216-217; "From Hero to Zero - Why are Greek mythology retellings so popular right now and why are the straight males being pushed from centre stage?" Ellie Rees, *The Everyday Magazine*, accessed January 5, 2025, <https://theeverydaymagazine.co.uk/fictionandpoetry/fromherotzero>.

⁴³ "Spilling Over: Ovid's *Heroides* and the Mythological Female Voice," Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>; "The Enduring Popularity of Mythological Retellings," Ainsley Atinon, Grattan Street Press, September 17, 2024, <https://grattanstreetpress.com/2024/09/17/the-enduring-popularity-of-mythological-retellings/>; Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 202; "From Hero to Zero - Why are Greek mythology retellings so popular right now and why are the straight males being pushed from centre stage?" Ellie Rees, *The Everyday Magazine*, accessed January 5, 2025, <https://theeverydaymagazine.co.uk/fictionandpoetry/fromherotzero>; "Pat Barker's Classical Tradition," Catherine Sorrentino, *Discentes*, July 24, 2022, <https://web.sas.upenn.edu/discentes/2022/07/24/pat-barkers-classical-tradition/>.

⁴⁴ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

romance,⁴⁵ Barker's work introduces a modern perspective, exploring themes of sexual violence, the horrors of war, and survival as resistance within captivity.⁴⁶

Notably, while the *Iliad* commences with the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon, *The Silence of the Girls* begins with a new scene that Barker has added to the existing cycle of the Trojan War. It depicts Briseis as Queen of Lyrnessus, married to King Mynes.⁴⁷ This is interesting, because Briseis may have played a more significant role in the tragic and epic traditions. Sophocles is believed to have composed a tragedy centring on Briseis and the other women captured by Achilles.⁴⁸ Additionally, other sources suggest that she was not taken from Lyrnessus but from the city of Pedasos. In these sources, her husband may have been King Mynes.⁴⁹ Barker's account is thus informed by historical research.

During the siege of Lyrnessus by the Greeks, Briseis and the other women are awaiting their fate. Women are raped, children are killed and one woman chooses suicide to avoid captivity.⁵⁰ The siege of Lyrnessus is not depicted in the *Heroides* and the *Iliad*.⁵¹ Instead, the *Heroides* and the *Iliad* feature Briseis' lament, in which she expresses that she saw her family and husband die during the siege.⁵² Barker's decision to expand upon Briseis' lament, by depicting the siege of Lyrnessus, is influenced by its profound impact on Briseis as a character.

In contrast to the depiction of Achilles as a hero in the *Iliad* and the *Heroides*, *The Silence of the Girls* portrays him in a different light.⁵³ This appears to be a continuation of the *Heroides*, where Achilles is a hero, but Briseis already dares to criticize him, and in *The Silence of the Girls* her thoughts are filled with defiance. Briseis witnesses Achilles committing atrocities in the siege of Lyrnessus, and says that the Trojans do not call Achilles godlike, great or brilliant, but that they call him the butcher.⁵⁴

Following the siege, Briseis and the other women are subjected to inspection and subsequently divided among the men. The army awards Briseis to Achilles as a prize for his feat of killing 60 men.⁵⁵ That same night, Achilles rapes Briseis.⁵⁶ In contrast to some modern adaptations,

⁴⁵ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III

⁴⁶ "Reading Consent Into the Iliad," Rachel Herzog, Medium, December 10, 2018, <https://eidolon.pub/reading-consent-into-the-iliad-e2c42ae0b221>; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁴⁷ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 3.

⁴⁸ Casey Dué, "Athenians and Trojans," in *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), chapter 3; Due, *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy*, note 97.

⁴⁹ Dué, "Briseis," 145.

⁵⁰ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 3-16.

⁵¹ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

⁵² Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

⁵³ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

⁵⁴ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 3.

⁵⁵ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 19-22.

⁵⁶ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 28.

such as the film *Troy* (2004),⁵⁷ *The Silence of the Girls* does not depict a romantic relationship between Briseis and Achilles.⁵⁸ Rape is a central theme in *The Silence of the Girls*,⁵⁹ exploring the undescribed possible perspectives of the women in the *Iliad*, and their possible experiences.⁶⁰

As previously discussed with the *Iliad* and the *Heroides*, while the ancient readers might not have interpreted these themes, modern readers can read themes such as Stockholm syndrome or an enslaved girl lying in order to survive, because of historical bias.⁶¹ *The Silence of the Girls*, is a response to the discussed ancient works by exploring this modern perspective.⁶² This is illustrated with Wilson's notes on the *Iliad*, where she states that the women in the Greek camp are raped for almost ten years, yet there is no presence of kids.⁶³ This is something that Barker changes in her narration, for she depicts rape and families living in the Greek camp.⁶⁴ Hence, it can be concluded that Barker is not the sole individual who perceives this theme in the *Iliad* narrative. Other researchers and survivors of sexual trauma may also find resonance with Briseis.⁶⁵

Following the traumatic event of her rape, Briseis develops a habit of bathing in the sea, expressing a desire to wash Achilles out of her.⁶⁶ A common response to sexual violence is a feeling of dirtiness and a desire to wash oneself excessively.⁶⁷ On one occasion, she neglects to wash the seawater off her body, and Achilles smells it and is reminded of his mother, the sea goddess Thetis. Thetis was forced into a marriage with Peleus, and one day returned to the sea leaving Achilles behind. Achilles recollects that Thetis did not desire to be touched by his father. Interestingly, Achilles himself engages in similar behaviour to Briseis. Despite Briseis' desire to return home, Achilles detains her in the Greek camp against her will, referring to her as his wife, exploiting and taking advantage of her while she refuses his advances.⁶⁸

⁵⁷ *Troy*, directed by Wolfgang Petersen (2004; Shepperton Studios), film, 0:00:00-2:43:00.

⁵⁸ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁵⁹ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁶⁰ Paige Philips, *In Her Own Voice: Examining the Portrayal of Briseis Across Ancient Sources and Modern Retellings* (Connecticut: Trinity College, 2024), 12.

⁶¹ "Briseis in Troy and Stockholm syndrome," The F word contemporary UK feminism, June 29, 2011, https://thefword.org.uk/2011/06/briseis_in_troy/; "Stockholm Syndrome," Britannica, last updated November 17, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/science/Stockholm-syndrome>; Philips, *In Her Own Voice: Examining the Portrayal of Briseis Across Ancient Sources and Modern Retellings*, 11.

⁶² Anastasia Bakogianni and Ricardo Apostol, "Introduction: Face to Face - Locating Classical Receptions on Screen," in *The New Antiquity Locating Classical Receptions On Screen: Masks, Echoes, Shadows* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 1-16; "Standplaatsgebondenheid," Histoforum, accessed January 3, 2025, <https://histoforum.net/2011/standplaatsgebondenheid.html>.

⁶³ Wilson, "Introduction," chapter 1.

⁶⁴ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁶⁵ "Just a Girl: Being Briseis," Sententiae Antiquae, August 7, 2021, <https://sententiaeantiquae.com/2021/08/07/just-a-girl-being-briseis/>; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 27; Dué, "Learning Lessons from the Trojan War: Briseis and the Theme of Force," 235.

⁶⁶ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 30-32.

⁶⁷ "Common Reactions to Sexual Assault," Counseling Center, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://www.loyola.edu/departments/counseling-center/services/students/concerns/sexual-assault/reactions.html>.

⁶⁸ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 32-60, 92.

The other women taken at Lyrnessus have either been distributed among the other Greek kings or are deemed for public use; they also experience sexual and physical violence. The women discuss the sexual violence they have suffered and its consequences among each other, joking about their situation in order to survive.⁶⁹ Due to the trauma of rape and the siege of her city, Briseis has resorted to self-harm and has attempted suicide.⁷⁰ However, the narrative also features characters with contrasting viewpoints, such as Uza, who expresses contentment with her circumstances, having secured a stable life for herself.⁷¹ Another notable figure is Tecmessa, who developed romantic feelings for her captor, resulting in the birth of her children. She perceives her situation as a loving family unit, despite experiencing physical abuse at the hands of her husband.⁷² Such varied reactions to sexual violence are not uncommon, as individuals respond differently to trauma.⁷³

The Trojan Tecmessa expresses that her Greek husband has nightmares and attacks her in the midst of the night, believing her to be a Trojan enemy.⁷⁴ The author might be alluding to the phenomenon of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁷⁵ In response to Tecmessa, Briseis acknowledges her husband's perspective, asserting that their status as Trojans and the enemy is valid.⁷⁶ In a manner similar to the *Heroides*, Briseis underscores the significance of her non-Greek identity, maintaining a strong cultural identity in *The Silence of the Girls* and refraining from developing a deep fondness for the Greeks, in light of their actions against her and her family.⁷⁷

Following Agamemnon's transgression of neglecting to return Chryseis, Apollo responds by sending a plague to the Greek camp.⁷⁸ In this version, both Chryseis' father and Briseis pray for the plague.⁷⁹ The women in the Greek camp discuss how the plague affects them, as more Greek soldiers die, than the women taken from the besieged cities. This causes the Greek soldiers to treat them with more contempt.⁸⁰ This plague prompts Achilles to take action, as he summons an oracle to demand the

⁶⁹ "Reading Consent Into the Iliad," Rachel Herzog, Medium, December 10, 2018, <https://eidolon.pub/reading-consent-into-the-iliad-e2c42ae0b221>; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 46-49.

⁷⁰ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 3-16, 46-47.

⁷¹ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 47, 98.

⁷² Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 47-49.

⁷³ "Why Some Rape Victims Continue to Date Their Rapist," Wendy L. Patrick, Psychology Today, May 28, 2021, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/why-bad-looks-good/202105/why-some-rape-victims-continue-to-date-their-rapist>; "Common Reactions to Sexual Assault," Counseling Center, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://www.loyola.edu/departments/counseling-center/services/students/concerns/sexual-assault/reactions.html>.

⁷⁴ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 47-49.

⁷⁵ "Ik heb iets ergs meegemaakt" Thuisarts, last updated February 2, 2021, <https://www.thuisarts.nl/posttraumatische-stressstoornis/ik-heb-iets-ergs-meegemaakt>.

⁷⁶ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 47-52.

⁷⁷ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁷⁸ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 80.

⁷⁹ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 62-63, 65, 67-69, 78.

⁸⁰ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 75-90.

return of Chryseis from Agamemnon.⁸¹ Agamemnon, in turn, takes Briseis as compensation, and Achilles refuses to fight in the Trojan War.⁸²

Agamemnon rapes and assault Briseis, further degrading her by prying her jaws open and spitting in her mouth.⁸³ When she becomes Agamemnon's prize, the other women see it as a promotion. Briseis describes that when she was Achilles' trophy, she was on display to showcase his prowess. Now that she is Agamemnon's trophy, she displays that Agamemnon is powerful enough to win against Achilles.⁸⁴ When Agamemnon later attempts to reconcile with Achilles by offering to return Briseis, he lies and tells him that he never touched her. However, Briseis ensures that Achilles knows that this is a lie.⁸⁵ This is a change from the *Iliad*, in which Briseis is not present for this conversation.⁸⁶ Subsequently, Achilles refuses to accept Briseis saying the following: 'Tell him he can fuck her till her back breaks.'⁸⁷ As a result, Briseis is regarded as the catalyst for the conflict rather than a prize to be cherished.⁸⁸

Briseis is the property of two Greek kings, yet there are women who are not under anyone's protection. She describes them as hungry and wounded. At various points in the narrative, Briseis fears that Achilles or Agamemnon will grow tired of her and that she will experience the fate of being shared among their men.⁸⁹ Achilles and Agamemnon do not view Briseis as a person, but as an object. This opinion is shared by most of the Greeks in the camp, with the possible exception of Patroclus. Patroclus is a kinder individual compared to the other men, but he still contributed to the siege of Lyrnessus and to a system that enslaves and abuses women.⁹⁰ Wilson offers a modern perspective of Briseis' character, suggesting that her description of Patroclus as kind in the *Iliad*, serves to highlight the absence of kindness in her life. By describing Patroclus as kind, the text conveys more about Briseis' circumstances than Patroclus' personal characteristics.⁹¹ This interpretation aligns with my understanding of *The Silence of the Girls*.

Following Patroclus' death, Achilles expresses his desire for Briseis to have died and holds her responsible for the ongoing conflict.⁹² Barker employs Briseis' lament in Book XIX of the *Iliad* and the *Heroides*, depicting her as mourning for Patroclus.⁹³ The author, similar to Ovid, based a lot

⁸¹ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 90-98.

⁸² Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 98-111.

⁸³ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 119.

⁸⁴ Philips, *In Her Own Voice: Examining the Portrayal of Briseis Across Ancient Sources and Modern Retellings*, 26; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 37, 120.

⁸⁵ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 150-156.

⁸⁶ Schwartz, *Il*, IX; Wilson, *Il*, IX.

⁸⁷ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 156.

⁸⁸ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 123.

⁸⁹ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁹⁰ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 71, 91, 160, 180-181.

⁹¹ Wilson, "Introduction," chapter 1.

⁹² Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 188-198.

⁹³ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 209-213

of Briseis' past relationships on Briseis' lament in the *Iliad*. Such as Briseis' relationship with Patroclus, her parents, and brothers. Yet, Barker adds to the lament, adding new relationships that Briseis did not have in the ancient works. Briseis now has friendships in the Greek camp with the other abducted women, a sister, and a close relationship with Helen and Priam.⁹⁴ Barker has possibly chosen to give Briseis, Helen and Priam a relationship, based on her choice to depict Briseis as royalty.

The Silence of the Girls changes the narrative from both the *Heroides* and the *Iliad* by continuing the narrative beyond Book XXIV,⁹⁵ incorporating new scenes, including Briseis' pregnancy. Briseis gets pregnant with Achilles' child, and fears she will start to consider herself as one of the Greeks.⁹⁶ She tells Achilles, who, aware of his impending death, arranges a marriage for her with Alcimus, another Greek warrior, without consulting Briseis.⁹⁷ Intending that after his death, Briseis can be a freed woman, and his son can grow up close to Peleus.⁹⁸

Following Achilles' death, Briseis returns to Greece with Alcimus and announces the commencement of her own narrative.⁹⁹ The book concludes with the following assertion:

*'What will they make of us, the people of those unimaginably distant times? One thing I do know: they won't want the brutal reality of conquest and slavery. They won't want to be told about the massacres of men and boys, the enslavement of women and girls. They won't want to know we were living in a rape camp. No, they'll go for something altogether softer. A love story, perhaps?'*¹⁰⁰

This is an example of intertextuality and historical bias, where *The Silence of the Girls* reacts to the ancient texts in which the story of Achilles and Briseis was considered one of love.

In the *Iliad*, Briseis is depicted as having less agency than in Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*, and does not speak to Achilles as she does in Ovid's *Heroides*. Barker has added numerous new scenes to the *Iliad* and *Heroides* to illustrate Briseis agency such as the account of Briseis praying for a plague and her inner dialogue showcasing a desire for revenge.¹⁰¹ When Achilles kills Hector and mutilates his corpse, it is Briseis who draws a sheet over Hector, and the gods then protect and restore his corpse.¹⁰² When the envoy informs Achilles that Agamemnon never lay with Briseis, Briseis

⁹⁴ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; "Reading Consent Into the Iliad," Rachel Herzog, Medium, December 10, 2018, <https://eidolon.pub/reading-consent-into-the-iliad-e2c42ae0b221>; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁹⁵ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

⁹⁶ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 295-304.

⁹⁷ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 304.

⁹⁸ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 304-306.

⁹⁹ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 308-324.

¹⁰⁰ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 324.

¹⁰¹ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 62-63, 65, 67-69, 78.

¹⁰² Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 227-236.

makes it clear to Achilles that Agamemnon is not telling the truth.¹⁰³ Additionally, Briseis' cultural identity is stronger in this version than in the *Iliad*, as she repeatedly asserts her non-Greek identity and expresses her enmity towards the Greeks.¹⁰⁴ Despite being powerless to control her fate, she demonstrates agency in her thoughts and actions within the limits of her situation.¹⁰⁵

3.3. Briseis and the social position of women and enslaved people in 21st-century America

The Silence of the Girls is a retelling of the *Iliad* that examines the sexual exploitation of women in times of war. This is interesting because war was considered a fundamental and even sacred part of Greek culture, as reflected in the *Iliad* not being anti-war. However, Barker uses the ancient work to express an anti-war message.¹⁰⁶ In other chapters, women's legal, economic rights and their position in marriage and labour are discussed. In modern day America, women have access to their own money and bank accounts,¹⁰⁷ they are allowed to perform the same jobs as men (even if they are underrepresented in some fields),¹⁰⁸ and they do not need their parents' consent to marry. Neither status or gender are factors in determining marriageability.¹⁰⁹

In order to ascertain whether *The Silence of the Girls* can offer any insights into the social position of women in 21st-century American society, the following aspects will be discussed: fourth-wave feminism, the literary trend of mythological retellings, statistics on sexual violence, stories of women in war, and reviews of *The Silence of the Girls*. This analysis will shed light on why the modern reader perceives the relationship between Briseis and Achilles as abusive, highlighting the societal shifts between Archaic Greece and the early Roman Empire to the present era.

Briseis and #MeToo

The Silence of the Girls was published in 2018, during the fourth wave of feminism, which emerged in 2012 and focuses on raising awareness of sexual harassment, rape culture and body shaming.¹¹⁰ The

¹⁰³ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 150-156.

¹⁰⁴ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹⁰⁵ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹⁰⁶ Dué, "Learning Lessons from the Trojan War: Briseis and the Theme of Force," 235.

¹⁰⁷ "The History of Women and Money in the United States in Honor of Women's History Month," Ron Sanders, One Advisory Partners, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.oneadvisorypartners.com/blog/the-history-of-women-and-money-in-the-united-states-in-honor-of-womens-history-month>.

¹⁰⁸ "Why Women Can't Work the Same Jobs as Men: *Examining the Inequity of Women in the American Labor Force*," Corinne Berger, Medium, January 15, 2024, <https://medium.com/@cberger2/why-women-cant-work-the-same-jobs-as-men-examining-the-inequity-of-women-in-the-american-labor-ad3bea41cc95>.

¹⁰⁹ "The Journey to Marriage Equality in the United States," HRC, accessed January 7, 2025, <https://www.hrc.org/our-work/stories/the-journey-to-marriage-equality-in-the-united-states>; "Details on State Marriage Age Requirements," FindLaw, June 20, 2016, <https://www.findlaw.com/state/family-laws/details-on-state-marriage-age-requirements.html>.

¹¹⁰ "The Third Wave of Feminism," Brunell, Laura, Elinor Burkett, and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica, last updated December 15, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>;

media plays a significant role in this regard, as evidenced by the #MeToo movement. Initially founded in America in 2006, the #MeToo movement gained significant traction on social media in 2017 following the revelation of Harvey Weinstein's sexual assault of women.¹¹¹ Survivors of sexual harassment and assault from various ethnic groups regardless of gender worldwide began sharing their experiences on social media using the #MeToo, contributing to the movement's growth and leading to the condemnation of numerous perpetrators.¹¹²

The Me Too organisation has provided several statistics regarding sexual violence: according to several US surveys ranging from 1987 to 2000, 1 in 4 women in America had experienced rape or an attempted rape, and in 2018 nearly 2.9 million American women have had a rape-related pregnancy in their lifetime, this also applies to Briseis. Unfortunately, gender identity, migration status, sexual orientation and disabilities can also affect these statistics. As in 2012 it was concluded that 50% of deaf girls have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime compared to 25% of hearing girls. In 2007, 90% of young people who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBT) had reported harassment or assault compared to 62% of heterosexual students. Furthermore, in 2010 it was stated that 6 in 10 migrant women and girls experience sexual violence.¹¹³ This issue is not exclusive to America; a 2023 survey conducted by Sexual Health in the Netherlands found that 24% of women and 5% of men have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.¹¹⁴

Sexual violence is more prevalent than is generally acknowledged, and the MeToo movement has encouraged individuals to come forward with their experiences.¹¹⁵ The resurgence of narratives

"Feminism: The Fourth Wave," National Women's History Museum, December 3, 2021, <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-fourth-wave>.

¹¹¹ "The Third Wave of Feminism," Brunell, Laura, Elinor Burkett, and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica, last updated December 15, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>; "Feminism: The Fourth Wave," National Women's History Museum, December 3, 2021, <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-fourth-wave>; "MeToo en mensenrechten," Amnesty International, accessed October 17, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.nl/encyclopedie/metoo-en-mensenrechten>; "Harvey Weinstein timeline: How the scandal has unfolded," BBC, February 24, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-41594672>.

¹¹² "The Third Wave of Feminism," Brunell, Laura, Elinor Burkett, and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica, last updated December 15, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>; "MeToo en mensenrechten," Amnesty International, accessed October 17, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.nl/encyclopedie/metoo-en-mensenrechten>; "Harvey Weinstein timeline: How the scandal has unfolded," BBC, February 24, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-41594672>; "Feminism: The Fourth Wave," National Women's History Museum, December 3, 2021, <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-fourth-wave>; "Let's Get Comfortable With Being Uncomfortable: A Discussion About Rape and Sexual Assault," Skylar Washington, Medium, March 28, 2018, <https://medium.com/gendered-violence/lets-get-comfortable-with-being-uncomfortable-a-discussion-about-rape-and-sexual-assault-937f8fc15dac>; "Statistics," me too, accessed November 27, 2024, <https://metoomvmt.org/learn-more/statistics/>; "Feiten en cijfers seksueel geweld," Rutgers, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://rutgers.nl/themas/seksueel-geweld/feiten-en-cijfers-seksueel-geweld/>.

¹¹³ "Statistics," me too, accessed November 27, 2024, <https://metoomvmt.org/learn-more/statistics/>; "People with Disabilities and Sexual Assault," Thomas C. Weiss, Disabled World, last updated August 8, 2023, <https://www.disabled-world.com/disability/sexuality/assaults.php#ixzz2SXMEQWra>; "Mexico: Invisible victims. Migrants on the move in Mexico," Amnesty International, April 28, 2010, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr41/014/2010/en/>.

¹¹⁴ "Feiten en cijfers seksueel geweld," Rutgers, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://rutgers.nl/themas/seksueel-geweld/feiten-en-cijfers-seksueel-geweld/>.

¹¹⁵ "The Third Wave of Feminism," Brunell, Laura, Elinor Burkett, and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica, last updated December 15, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>; "Feminism: The Fourth Wave," National Women's History Museum, December 3, 2021,

centring on mythological women is not a recent phenomenon; it signifies a shift in societal discourse, with people feeling more confident in sharing their experiences of sexual violence.¹¹⁶ In my interview with Klooster, she highlighted the following points: Women are more cognisant of gender-power structures and the underlying violence they entail. They recognise something in the ancient stories but see that they are often not written from a female perspective or by a female author. Women's experiences in myths are predominantly characterised by sexual violence, reflecting a societal demand for authentic portrayals of the horror of sexual violence, rather than romanticised versions.¹¹⁷ The character of Briseis' experience of sexual violence and subsequent pregnancy, resulting from rape, thus serves as a reflection of the prevailing social circumstances concerning women, particularly their heightened vulnerability to sexual violence.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, Briseis' sexual violence is a contemporary concern that is unfortunately relevant in times of war.¹¹⁹ A recent example of this is the war between Palestine and Israel, where the UN reported that detained Palestinian girls and women were sexually abused. At least two female Palestinian detainees were raped, and others were threatened with rape and sexual violence. The Israeli army also took photos of the female detainees in degrading conditions and published them online.¹²⁰ This kind of sexual violence draws parallels with the experiences of Briseis during the Trojan War, and it is crucial to recognise that the issue of sexual violence persists in times of war. The contemporary example of sexual abuse of Palestinian girls and women during the conflict with Israel is a clear example of this.¹²¹

Although the practice of enslavement has been formally abolished, with Mauritania being the last country to ban slavery in 1981,¹²² it persists in various forms, such as human trafficking in America.¹²³ A historical example of sexual slavery in a war setting was the abduction of Korean women by Japanese soldiers during and in the aftermath of World War II, who were known as

<https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-fourth-wave>; "MeToo en mensenrechten," Amnesty International, accessed October 17, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.nl/encyclopedie/metoo-en-mensenrechten>.

¹¹⁶ "Statistics," me too, accessed November 27, 2024, <https://metoomvmt.org/learn-more/statistics/>; "The Third Wave of Feminism," Brunell, Laura, Elinor Burkett, and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica, last updated December 15, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>; "Feminism: The Fourth Wave," National Women's History Museum, December 3, 2021, <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-fourth-wave>.

¹¹⁷ Jacqueline Klooster, interview organised by Yona Siero, email, April 25, 2024.

¹¹⁸ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹¹⁹ "Contrasting 'The Iliad' and 'The Silence of the Girls': Women as Objects in Patriarchal Status Struggles of Men," Rosamund, Medium, July 22, 2023, <https://medium.com/modern-women/contrasting-the-iliad-and-the-silence-of-the-girls-women-as-objects-in-patriarchal-status-f6c2bb7aa5>;

¹²⁰ "Israel/oPt: UN experts appalled by reported human rights violations against Palestinian women and girls," United Nations, February 19, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/israelopt-un-experts-appalled-reported-human-rights-violations-against>.

¹²¹ "Israel/oPt: UN experts appalled by reported human rights violations against Palestinian women and girls," United Nations, February 19, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/israelopt-un-experts-appalled-reported-human-rights-violations-against>.

¹²² "Slavery's last stronghold," John D. Sutter, CNN, accessed May 18, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2012/03/world/mauritania.slaverys.last.stronghold/index.html>.

¹²³ "2024 Trafficking in Persons Report," US Department of State, accessed January 19, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

comfort women.¹²⁴ Kim Bok-Dong was just 14 years old when she was abducted, having been promised a position in a factory. She describes how she and other women and girls were coerced into sexual slavery,¹²⁵ as they were raped by Japanese soldiers in a systematic fashion. At the age of 14, she attempted to take her own life, but now, at a later age, she has decided to speak out about her experiences.¹²⁶ While these examples do not take place in America, there have been multiple instances where American soldiers have committed sex crimes in times of war.¹²⁷ The discussed issues are of particular concern, as it underscores the persistent threat to women's safety in conflict zones, as highlighted by the book *The Silence of the Girls*.¹²⁸

Briseis reviewed

Apart from the direct parallels between the book and historical events, it is also possible to gain insights into the social status of women by examining the reviews of the book. The reviews I have consulted are from the Goodreads platform. This platform is inclusive, welcoming reviews from a diverse range of individuals, including women from various backgrounds, and not limited to reporters or academics familiar with the *Iliad*. Goodreads offers a representative sample of the book's reception from multiple social classes.¹²⁹

On the 24th of April 2024, *The Silence of the Girls* had 91,165 ratings, with an average rating of 3,9 stars out of 5. This indicates a generally positive reception. The book has received 10,566 written reviews, and for this paper, the most popular reviews from each rating have been analysed to reflect what the modern reader appreciates from the work. The points that resonated with the readers included Briseis' agency, her powerful voice, her ability to speak for herself and the women in the war, the representation of women and them finding strength in each other.¹³⁰ The book has also been praised for its realistic depictions of cruelty, including rape, war and violence, which are not used as a plot device or romanticised. It has been suggested that rape as a plot device is rejected in modern times, but that rape as a depiction of the reality of war is better received.¹³¹

¹²⁴ Keun-Joo Christine Pae, "Factory Girls and 'Comfort' Girls: A Feminist Theo-Ethical Reflection on Korean Girl Soldiers in Japanese Empire," in *Female Child Soldiering, Gender Violence, and Feminist Theologies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 116-118;

¹²⁵ Asian Boss, "Life As A "Comfort Woman": Story of Kim Bok-Dong," October 28, 2018, video, 00:00-18:14, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsT97ax_Xb0.

¹²⁶ Asian Boss, "Life As A "Comfort Woman," 00:00-18:14.

¹²⁷ "US army major faces rape and sexual assault charges involving 20 victims," Maya Yang, *The Guardian*, November 8, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/nov/08/army-major-sexual-assault-jonathan-batt>; "My body was not mine, but the US military's'," David Vine, *POLITICO*, November 3, 2015, <https://www.politico.eu/article/my-body-was-not-mine-but-the-u-s-militarys/>.

¹²⁸ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹²⁹ "Home page," Goodreads, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://www.goodreads.com/>.

¹³⁰ "Reviews: The Silence of The Girls," Jennifer ~ TarHeelReader, Goodreads, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37969723-the-silence-of-the-girls>.

¹³¹ "Reviews: The Silence of The Girls," Khanh, first of her name, mother of bunnies, Goodreads, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37969723-the-silence-of-the-girls>.

A point of criticism is that some parts of the book are from Achilles' perspective, whereas the book is marketed to be about the women and Briseis. Another point of criticism is that the focus remains on Briseis, with less attention given to the other women, such as the concubines, washerwomen, enslaved women, and notable figures like Chryseis, Helen, and Thetis.¹³² Some have argued that the narrative is mostly a rehashing of the *Iliad* and that Briseis feels like a footnote.¹³³ These reviews indicate a demand for a greater range of female perspectives and a focus on the experiences and viewpoints of female characters.

There is an increasing demand for women's stories that focus on women's agency and inner lives, as well as stories of survival. Sexual violence is recognised as being prevalent in society and people are more willing to discuss it. This societal shift is also reflected in the book, with the sexual violence perpetrated against Briseis depicted as a negative and unheroic act, and the actions of Achilles and the other Greeks were viewed negatively.¹³⁴ In summary, we live in an era where such behaviour towards women is deemed unacceptable, and *The Silence of the Girls* mirrors this shift by depicting women as individuals with inner lives and the capacity to act on their own volition. It underscores the societal consensus that instances of sexual violence must no longer be concealed, reflecting a collective acknowledgement of the heinous nature of such behaviour.

The depiction of Briseis in *The Silence of the Girls* appears to be a response to societal changes, building on the work of Ovid in the imperial period. Similar to Ovid's version, Briseis has her own agenda, emphasizing her non-Greek status and her status as the enemy.¹³⁵ In the current era, ancient works such as the *Iliad* and the *Heroides* are viewed through a different lens, influenced by societal changes and the evolution of feminist thought. Modern readers, for instance, can interpret a theme of rape and objectification of women when reading the *Iliad*.¹³⁶ With a modern view readers can interpret Briseis as a victim of sexual violence in times of war, which is addressed in this book, partly due to historical bias.¹³⁷ This illustrates how societal influences shape our perceptions of the stories we hear, with readers applying their own cultural norms, as suggested in the working hypothesis. Briseis in *The Silence of the Girls* reflects the position of women in 21st-century America.

¹³² "Reviews: The Silence of The Girls," Emily May, Goodreads, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37969723-the-silence-of-the-girls>; "Reviews: The Silence of The Girls," Marquise, Goodreads, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37969723-the-silence-of-the-girls>.

¹³³ "Reviews: The Silence of The Girls," Puck, Goodreads, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37969723-the-silence-of-the-girls>; "Reviews: The Silence of The Girls," Marquise, Goodreads, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37969723-the-silence-of-the-girls>.

¹³⁴ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹³⁵ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324, Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹³⁶ "Contrasting 'The Iliad' and 'The Silence of the Girls': Women as Objects in Patriarchal Status Struggles of Men," Rosamund, Medium, July 22, 2023, <https://medium.com/modern-women/contrasting-the-iliad-and-the-silence-of-the-girls-women-as-objects-in-patriarchal-status-f6c2bb7aa5>; "Just a Girl: Being Briseis," Sententiae Antiquae, August 7, 2021, <https://sententiaeantiquae.com/2021/08/07/just-a-girl-being-briseis/>; "Briseis and Andromache Enslaved: Sleeping with the Enemy in Greek and Roman Epic," William M. Owens, Classics@ Journal, accessed January 3, 2024, <https://classics-at.chs.harvard.edu/briseis-and-andromache-enslaved-sleeping-with-the-enemy-in-greek-and-roman-epic/>.

¹³⁷ "Reading Consent Into the Iliad," Rachel Herzog, Medium, December 10, 2018, <https://eidolon.pub/reading-consent-into-the-iliad-e2c42ae0b221>.

3.4. Conclusion

The Silence of the Girls is a modern retelling of the *Iliad*, and an unintentional reaction to the *Heroides*, written by American author Pat Barker.¹³⁸ Barker differs from many ancient writers in that she is a woman and not born into a high social status.¹³⁹ The social status of ancient authors frequently results in the underrepresentation of women and enslaved people of the lower classes.¹⁴⁰ Barker's decision to focus her retelling on these underrepresented figures may be influenced by her own social status, though it is likely that the subject fits into a literary trend that began in 2017 and may be more indicative of her own gender.¹⁴¹ In this retelling, Briseis is a female character written by a woman.¹⁴² *The Silence of the Girls* can be read independently from the *Iliad* and the *Heroides*, combined with its focus on female characters,¹⁴³ the high literacy rates in America,¹⁴⁴ and the trends popularity with young female readers,¹⁴⁵ suggests that its intended audience is both male and female, regardless of social status.

Briseis' role in the narrative is that of the narrator, and the events are presented from her perspective. The narrative explores themes of sexual violence and survival, Briseis is portrayed as a resilient character, a non-Greek woman with familial relationships and friendships. She harbours a deep animosity towards Achilles and attempts to survive her captivity and rape, having no control over her destiny. Briseis prays for revenge, covers Hector's corpse with a sheet, and makes sure Achilles knows that Agamemnon is lying about never having raped her. Despite her inability to control her fate, Briseis expresses agency in her thoughts and actions as far as she can.¹⁴⁶

In the 21st century, women are no longer economically and legally dependent on men, and have a relatively more equal position.¹⁴⁷ Briseis' narrative illustrates the profound challenges faced by

¹³⁸ Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 315; Lanzillotta, "Ancient Religious Texts and Intertextuality: Plato's and Plutarch's Myths of the Afterlife," 134-139; Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 201-218; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹³⁹ "Pat Barker," Women's Prize, accessed October 10, 2024, <https://womensprize.com/book-author/pat-barker/>; "Pat Barker." British Council, accessed April 10, 2024, <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/pat-barker/>; Gareth Williams, "Ovid's exile poetry: *Tristia*, *Epistulae ex Ponto* and *Ibis*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 233; Andrew Feldherr, "Metamorphosis in the *Metamorphoses*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 177; Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 509.

¹⁴⁰ Treggiari, "Lower Class Women In The Roman Economy," 65; Schwartz, *II*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *II*, I-XXIV.

¹⁴¹ Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 208-210; "Spilling Over: Ovid's *Heroides* and the Mythological Female Voice," Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>.

¹⁴² Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹⁴³ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹⁴⁴ "Literacy Statistics 2024- 2025 (Where we are now)," National Literacy Institute, accessed on October 5, 2024, <https://www.thenationalliteracyinstitute.com/post/literacy-statistics-2024-2025-where-we-are-now>.

¹⁴⁵ Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 208-210; "Spilling Over: Ovid's *Heroides* and the Mythological Female Voice," Hazel Atkinson, *Retrospect Journal*, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>.

¹⁴⁶ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹⁴⁷ "The History of Women and Money in the United States in Honor of Women's History Month," Ron Sanders, One Advisory Partners, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.oneadvisorypartners.com/blog/the-history-of-women-and-money-in-the-united-states-in-honor-of-womens-history-month/>; "Why Women Can't Work the Same Jobs as Men: Examining the Inequity of Women in the American Labor Force," Corinne Berger, *Medium*, January 15, 2024,

women in conflict settings.¹⁴⁸ Women regularly face the risk of rape and violence, and while slavery has been abolished,¹⁴⁹ they were subjected to sexual slavery during World War II.¹⁵⁰ In essence, Briseis' character embodies the prevailing social circumstances of women. While we perceive sexual violence as a negative occurrence,¹⁵¹ it remains a persistent threat to women, both in peacetime and during periods of war.¹⁵²

There is a growing demand for literary works with multiple female perspectives, focusing on their experiences. The depiction of rape as a plot device is generally rejected, as it should not be romanticised. The sexual violence perpetrated against Briseis is depicted as a negative and unheroic act.¹⁵³ In summary, we now live in an era where such behaviour towards women is deemed unacceptable. *The Silence of the Girls* mirrors this shift, depicting women as individuals with inner lives and the capacity to act on their own volition.¹⁵⁴ It underscores the imperative for addressing and preventing instances of sexual violence, reflecting a collective societal recognition of the horrendous nature of such behaviour.¹⁵⁵ Briseis thus reflects aspects of the female experience in 21st-century America, as suggested by the working hypothesis.

<https://medium.com/@cberger2/why-women-cant-work-the-same-jobs-as-men-examining-the-inequity-of-women-in-the-american-labor-ad3bea41cc95>.

¹⁴⁸ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹⁴⁹ "Slavery's last stronghold," John D. Sutter, CNN, accessed May 18, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2012/03/world/mauritania.slaverys.last.stronghold/index.html>.

¹⁵⁰ Pae, "Factory Girls and 'Comfort' Girls," 116-118.

¹⁵¹ "Rape," Britannica, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rape-crime>; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹⁵² "Statistics," me too, accessed November 27, 2024, <https://metoomvmt.org/learn-more/statistics/>; "Israel/oPt: UN experts appalled by reported human rights violations against Palestinian women and girls," United Nations, February 19, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/israelopt-un-experts-appalled-reported-human-rights-violations-against>; "2024 Trafficking in Persons Report," US Department of State, accessed January 19, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/>; "My body was not mine, but the US military's'," David Vine, POLITICO, November 3, 2015, <https://www.politico.eu/article/my-body-was-not-mine-but-the-u-s-militarys/>; "US army major faces rape and sexual assault charges involving 20 victims," Maya Yang, The Guardian, November 8, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/nov/08/army-major-sexual-assault-jonathan-batt>;

¹⁵³ "Reviews: The Silence of The Girls," Khanh, first of her name, mother of bunnies, Goodreads, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37969723-the-silence-of-the-girls>; "Reviews: The Silence of The Girls," Emily May, Goodreads, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37969723-the-silence-of-the-girls>; "Reviews: The Silence of The Girls," Marquise, Goodreads, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37969723-the-silence-of-the-girls>; "Reviews: The Silence of The Girls," Puck, Goodreads, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37969723-the-silence-of-the-girls>; "Reviews: The Silence of The Girls," Marquise, Goodreads, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37969723-the-silence-of-the-girls>; "Reviews: The Silence of The Girls," Jennifer ~ TarHeelReader, Goodreads, accessed April 24, 2024, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/37969723-the-silence-of-the-girls>.

¹⁵⁴ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹⁵⁵ "Rape," Britannica, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rape-crime>; "Just a Girl: Being Briseis," *Sententiae Antiquae*, August 7, 2021, <https://sententiaeantiquae.com/2021/08/07/just-a-girl-being-briseis/>; Wilson, "Introduction," chapter 1; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; "Reading Consent Into the Iliad," Rachel Herzog, Medium, December 10, 2018, <https://eidolon.pub/reading-consent-into-the-iliad-e2c42ae0b221>.

Conclusion and Discussion

This section revisits the information covered in order to address the following question: *Do the mythical women of classical literature reflect the social position of women and enslaved people, and if so, how has this evolved across cultures and time?* To answer this, a case study was conducted of the myth of the Trojan War and Briseis. This involved a study of the *Iliad*, the *Heroides* and *The Silence of the Girls*¹ to ascertain whether Briseis reflected the social position of women and enslaved people in the early Archaic Greek period (800-500 BC),² the early Roman imperial period (27 BC - 100 AD, with a particular focus on 27 BC - 14 AD),³ and 21st-century America.⁴ By studying these works in relation to their time and culture, more insight can be gained about the position of women and enslaved people in the societies in which these myths were written.

The working hypothesis proposed in this study is that myths are an image of their societies and are not separate from them; they develop in tandem with their portrayal.⁵ This suggests that researchers can gather information about antiquity based on myths, and that other truths can be learned from different mythological narratives. A narrative may reflect one truth, while others may reflect different truths. In today's world, there is diversity of opinion and experience and the same was true in antiquity.⁶ Hence, by being aware of the malleable nature of myths, researchers can possibly find out information about antiquity and modern times based on mythological narratives, in relation to the research question.

Furthermore, it is essential to consider the author and intended audience of the mythological narratives when conducting this research. The *Iliad* and the *Heroides* were probably both written by men. Ovid, a Roman of high social standing, is known for his literary works, while Homer, often

¹ Ovidius, *Legendarische vrouwen: Heroides*, translated by W.A.M. Peters (Amsterdam: Ambo, 1994), III; Ovid, *Ovid's Heroides: A New Translation and Critical Essays*, translated by Paul Murgatroyd, Bridget Reeves and Sarah Parker (New York: Routledge, 2017), III; Pat Barker, *The Silence of the Girls* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), 1-324; Homer, *Ilias & Odyssee*, translated by M. A. Schwartz (Amsterdam: Athenaem - Polak & Van Gennep, 1982), I-XXIV; Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2024), I-XXIV.

² "Ancient Greece - Timeline," World History Encyclopedia, July 17, 2024, <https://www.worldhistory.org/timeline/greece/>.

³ Adrian Goldsworthy, *Augustus: First Emperor of Rome* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014), 6-8, 465; "Augustus Timeline," Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica, accessed October 24, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/summary/Augustus-Timeline>; "Military successes of Augustus," Michael Grant, Britannica, last updated January 27, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Augustus-Roman-emperor/Military-successes>.

⁴ "The 21st Century and the 3rd Millennium," Astronomical Applications Department, accessed January 19, 2025, <https://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/millennium>.

⁵ Fritz Graf, *Greek mythology: an introduction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardo, red., *Classical Mythology: Eighth Edition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 3, 11-12; Lilian E. Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 102; Sue Blundell, *Women in ancient Greece* (London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 14; Christiaan Caspers, Jacqueline Klooster, Inger N.I. Kuin and Bram van der Velden, *Muze, vertel: De Griekse en Latijnse literatuur van de oudheid* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023) 315; Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, "Ancient Religious Texts and Intertextuality: Plato's and Plutarch's Myths of the Afterlife," in *Religions as relation: Studying Religion in Context* (South Yorkshire: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2021), 134-139.

⁶ "Different people, different opinions?Huh?," Anjali Udasi, Medium, September 21, 2022, <https://anjaliu9994.medium.com/different-people-different-opinions-huh-3e4fa2a69b7c>.

regarded as a symbol, is not a figure with a clearly defined historical existence.⁷ Consequently, it is important to note that Briseis, a female character, is portrayed from a male perspective, which may have contributed to her sometimes unfaithful depiction. By contrast, *The Silence of the Girls* is a contemporary work by a woman, which can be situated within a broader literary tradition of feminist retellings of myths. This tradition affords Briseis greater agency and personality.⁸

The audience of the *Iliad* was probably composed of elite men.⁹ By contrast, the *Heroides* were probably intended for a mostly elite audience, including rhetorically trained men, educated women and enslaved people.¹⁰ This shift in intended audience demographics provided insight on the increased agency observed in Briseis as a woman and an enslaved person in the *Heroides* compared to her depiction in the *Iliad*.¹¹ The audience of *The Silence of the Girls* are women and men, with a bigger focus on women. Explaining the focus on female characters in contrast to the *Iliad*.¹² Consequently, it can be posited that the author and gender of a work can influence the portrayal of female characters such as Briseis.

⁷ Koning, *Mythologie*, 14; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 24-26; Corinne Ondine Pache, "General Introduction," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), xxvii; Casey Dué, Jim Marks, "The Homeric Question," in *The Cambridge Guide to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) 585-589; Caspers, Klooster, Kuin and van der Velden, *Muze, vertel*, 24-26; Gareth Williams, "Ovid's exile poetry: *Tristia*, *Epistulae ex Ponto* and *Ibis*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 233; Andrew Feldherr, "Metamorphosis in the *Metamorphoses*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 177; Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 509.

⁸ "The Third Wave of Feminism," Brunell, Laura, Elinor Burkett, and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Britannica, last updated December 15, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism/>; "Feminism: The Fourth Wave," National Women's History Museum, December 3, 2021, <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-fourth-wave/>; Jacqueline Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze: Recente hervertellingen van klassieke mythen vanuit een vrouwelijk perspectief," *Lampas: Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse classici*, 3 (2023), 202; Hazel Atkinson, Retrospect Journal, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>; Almost-Barbara Renger and Jon Solomon, "Introduction," in *Ancient worlds in film and television: gender and politics* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 1-14; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁹ "The Education System in Ancient Greece," Duncan Howitt-Marshall, Greece Is, September 14, 2023, <https://www.greece-is.com/the-education-system-in-ancient-greece/>; William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 47-48, 96; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures/>; "The Life of Athenian Women in Ancient Greece: A Comprehensive List," Anisia Jacob, The Collector, September 18, 2021, <https://www.thecollector.com/athenian-women-in-ancient-greece>.

¹⁰ Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 70; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated women in the Roman elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 57; Peters, *Her*, 11, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures/>; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 135; Richard Leo Enos and Terry Shannon Peterman, "Writing Instruction for the 'Young Ladies' of Teos: A Note on Women and Literacy in Antiquity," *Rhetoric Review*, 1 (2014): 16; S. L. Mohler, "Slave Education in the Roman Empire," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 71 (1940): 262-280.

¹¹ Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹² Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; "Literacy Statistics 2024- 2025 (Where we are now)," National Literacy Institute, accessed on October 5, 2024, <https://www.thenationalliteracyinstitute.com/post/literacy-statistics-2024-2025-where-we-are-now/>; Klooster, "De Revisionistische Muze," 208-210; "Spilling Over: Ovid's *Heroides* and the Mythological Female Voice," Hazel Atkinson, Retrospect Journal, accessed January 11, 2025, <https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/03/28/spilling-over-ovids-heroides-and-the-mythological-female-voice/>.

Briseis' role in the works changed dramatically with the narratives and societies. In the *Iliad*, Briseis appears in the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles.¹³ In the *Heroides*, she is the author of her own letter, which illustrates her agency.¹⁴ In the *Iliad*, Briseis speaks only once and only appears in four books.¹⁵ In the *Heroides*, Briseis is the sole author of her letter and takes centre stage as a character, a role she only had a supporting role in in the *Iliad*.¹⁶ Briseis' role in *The Silence of the Girls* is once again the one of narrator, but where it differs from the *Heroides*, is that Briseis is the focus of *The Silence of the Girls*, instead of Achilles in the *Heroides*.¹⁷ This demonstrates how Briseis' character evolves in different mythic retellings depending on the society and time in which she is placed.

Notable similarities exist between the Briseis depicted by Homer, Ovid and Barker, including her status as a non-Greek enslaved woman, her depiction alongside Achilles, and her removal from his presence against her will by Agamemnon. All authors portray Briseis as a character with a rich inner life and an intricate backstory, and she exhibits a close relationship with Patroclus. In conclusion, the portrayal of Briseis in these versions and societies, both modern and in antiquity, showcases notable similarities.¹⁸

The mythological narratives also portray Briseis differently. In the early Archaic Greek version, Briseis is depicted by Achilles as his spoils of war and his lover, yet wishes she had died and blames her for the conflict and his mistakes.¹⁹ Based on literary patterns and depictions of Achilles and Briseis in Greek art, it can be concluded that the Greek audience saw their relationship as romantic.²⁰ In Book XIX, the reader is only able to access Briseis' own words, as recorded by Homer, and this provides evidence of her as a character with a rich inner life, a family and a positive relationship with Patroclus.²¹

In the early Roman imperial period, the reader learns about Briseis in the *Heroides*, in her own words. Briseis describes herself as an enslaved woman who has a romantic relationship with Achilles and expresses a preference for death over life without him.²² Based on other Roman written references and depictions of Achilles and Briseis in Roman art, it can be concluded that the Roman

¹³ Schwartz, *Il*, I; Wilson, *Il*, I.

¹⁴ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹⁵ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV.

¹⁶ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

¹⁷ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

¹⁸ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

¹⁹ Schwartz, *Il*, I, IX.301-382, XIX.40-82; Wilson, *Il*, I, IX.330-450, XIX.340-450; Emily Wilson, "Introduction," in *The Iliad* (New York: W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, 2024), chapter 1; van Wees, *Status Warriors*. 261-264.

²⁰ Casey Dué, "Briseis and the Multiformality of the *Iliad*," in *Homeric Variations on a Lament by Briseis* (Washington: Center for Hellenistic Studies, 2006), 43-72; Anneliese Kossatz-Deissmann, "Briseis," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC): III 1 Atherion-Eros* (Switzerland: Publisher, 1986), 158-160.

²¹ Schwartz, *Il*, XIX; Wilson, *Il*, XIX.

²² Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.

audience viewed their relationship as romantic.²³ Briseis talks about her feelings, her capture, her late husband, family and Patroclus. Briseis' narrative also demonstrates her attempts to utilise Achilles as a means to achieve her own political objectives, akin to the influence wielded by women in Roman imperial times.²⁴

In Barkers' *The Silence of the Girls*, Briseis' perspective is presented from her own viewpoint, and she does not harbour romantic feelings for Achilles, who is depicted as her rapist. Instead, she focuses on survival and refers to herself as the enemy.²⁵ The major difference between the three versions of Briseis is that in the *Heroides* and in *The Silence of the Girls* Briseis dares to speak out, has more dialogue and agency, with a clear personality, and an ideology of her own, contrasting with the Briseis from the *Iliad*.²⁶ In the 21st century interpretations of Briseis and Achilles' relationship have shifted from the romantic perspective seen in ancient times, to an interpretation of rapist and victim.²⁷

It is important to note that there is a greater abundance of information available on the early imperial period and the early 21st century than on the early Archaic Greek period, because no historical texts have been found from the latter.²⁸ In the versions of Briseis in the *Heroides* and the *Iliad*, she is portrayed as a figure who represents the economic and legal situation of women in her respective period and society. For instance, Briseis' social status, similar to that of women in the Roman Empire, is dependent on men such as Agamemnon and Achilles. In both empires, women were engaged in various forms of work, including caring for the sick and children, although Briseis does not showcase this in either work.²⁹ She is depicted as a spinner only in the *Heroides*, possibly

²³ "VI.8.5 Pompeii. Casa del Poeta Tragico or House of the Tragic Poet," Pompeii in Pictures, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R6/6%2008%2005%20p2.htm>; Howard Jacobson, "Ovid's Briseis: A Study of *Heroides* 3," *Phoenix*, 25 (1971): 332-341; Liubov Ben-Nun, *The Roots of Clothing: From Ancient Times to the Present* (Israel: B.N. Publication House, 2018), 44; Kossatz-Deissmann, "Briseis," 158-165.

²⁴ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 142-149; David Wheeler-Reed, "AUGUSTUS AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE: The Birth of an Ideology," in *Regulating Sex in the Roman Empire: Ideology, the Bible and the Early Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 10; Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 507; Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 63.

²⁵ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

²⁶ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; Schwartz, *II*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *II*, I-XXIV.

²⁷ "Just a Girl: Being Briseis," *Sententiae Antiquae*, August 7, 2021, <https://sententiaeantiquae.com/2021/08/07/just-a-girlbeing-briseis/>; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; "Reading Consent Into the *Iliad*," Rachel Herzog, Medium, December 10, 2018, <https://eidolon.pub/reading-consentinto-the-iliad-e2c42ae0b221>; Wilson, "Introduction," chapter 1.

²⁸ Sarah B. Pomeroy, Stanley M. Burstein, Walter Donlan, and Jennifer Tolbert Roberts, red., *A Brief History of Ancient Greece: Politics, Society, and Culture* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6

²⁹ Emily Hemelrijk, "Voortleven na de dood," in *Verborgen levens, publieke figuren: Romeinse vrouwen buiten Rome* (Amsterdam: Polak & van Gennep, 2021), chapter 5; Jane F. Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (London: Routledge, 1986), 5, 20; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 197; Eve D'Ambra, *Roman Women* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 50; Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 52-79; Cornelis Willem van Galen, *Women and Citizenship: In the Late Roman Republic and the Early Empire* (Beuningen: Print Rendement, 2016), 102-103, 187; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>; Sandra R. Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman world* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 38-40; Noel Lenski, "Slavery in the Roman Empire," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 88; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Casey Dué, "Learning Lessons from the Trojan War: Briseis and the Theme of Force," *College Literature*, 34 (2007): 246; J. A. Baird, "On Reading the Material Culture of Ancient Sexual Labor," *Helios*

emphasising the romantic relation between her and Achilles.³⁰ The *Heroides* and the *Iliad* both feature a similar marriage ceremony, with the former providing more detailed information on this topic.³¹ In the *Heroides*, little information is given regarding this subject. In the *Heroides* Briseis' position aligns with the Sabine Virgin Robbery.³² Consequently, both portrayals of Briseis illustrate distinct facets of their respective societies' matrimonial traditions. Briseis in both periods reflects the circumstances faced by women in these societies, contributing to a sense of historical authenticity.

The position of women in the three societies changes over time, as is evident by the portrayal of Briseis. In the *Iliad*, Briseis is a passive character who rarely speaks, whereas in the *Heroides*, she is active, independent and has a clear agenda. In *The Silence of the Girls*, she is similar to the Briseis of the *Heroides*, with the difference that she harbours no sympathy towards Achilles or the Greeks.³³ This represents a significant shift in her character. This transformation in Briseis' persona can be attributed to the shifting autonomous position of women in the early imperial period under Emperor Augustus and fourth wave feminism in the 21st century, as well as the targeted audience of the *Heroides* and *The Silence of the Girls*.³⁴ In contrast to the early Archaic Greek period, when women

42, 1 (2015): 352-353; Katharine P.D. Huemoeller, "Freedom in Marriage? Manumission for Marriage in the Roman World," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 110 (2020): 126; "relief; funerary equipment," The British Museum, accessed January 21, 2025, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1858-0819-2; Jacobson, "Ovid's Briseis: A Study of *Heroides* 3," 337

Schwartz, II, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; Wilson, II, I, IX, XIX, XXIV; "Prostitution in Ancient Athens," Joshua J. Mark, World History Encyclopedia, July 2, 2021, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/28/prostitution-in-ancient-athens/>; "Women in Classical Greece," Colette Hemingway, The Met, accessed January 12, 2025, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wmna/hd_wmna.htm; "The Ancient Greek Wedding Ceremony," marinanelson27, Women in Antiquity, December 1, 2020, <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2020/12/01/the-ancient-greek-wedding-ceremony/>; "Spinning and Weaving in Ancient Greece," Women In Antiquity, April 2, 2017, <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2017/04/02/spinning-and-weaving-in-ancient-greece/>; Cynthia W. Shelmerdine, "Women in the Mycenaean economy," in *Women across the Ancient world* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 631; Deborah Lyons, "Dangerous Gifts: Ideologies of Marriage and Exchange in Ancient Greece," in *Classical Antiquity*, 22 (California: University of California Press 2003): 93-134.

³⁰ Peters, *Her*, III.70; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.70.

³¹ Schwartz, II, IX, XIX; Wilson, II, IX, XIX; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 25; "The Ancient Greek Wedding Ceremony," marinanelson27, Women in Antiquity, December 1, 2020, <https://womeninantiquity.wordpress.com/2020/12/01/the-ancient-greek-wedding-ceremony/>; Marilyn B. Skinner, "Briseis, The Trojan Women, and Erinna," *The Classical World*, 75 (1982): 265-269; Edward D. Mansfield, *Legal Rights, Liabilities and Duties of Women; With an Introductory History of their Legal Condition in the Hebrew, Roman and Feudal Civil Systems* (Cincinnati: William H. Moore & CO, 1845), 74-75; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 199; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 13; "Roman Law," Maurice Alfred Millner, Mary Ann Glendon, Paolo Carozza, Herbert Felix Jolowicz, Peter G. Stein, John N. Hazard, Raphael Powell, Max Rheinstejn and Albert Roland Kiralfy, Britannica, last updated December 9, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-law>.

³² Phyllis Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," in *The Cambridge Companion to: The Roman Republic* (Online: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 141; Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, 144; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 9; "De Sabijnse Maagdenroof," Historiek, last updated February 6, 2024, <https://historiek.net/desabijnse-maagdenroof/79789/>.

³³ Schwartz, II, I-XXIV; Wilson, II, I-XXIV; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

³⁴ "Rape," Britannica, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rape-crime>; "The Third Wave of Feminism," Brunell, Laura, Elinor Burkett, Britannica, last updated December 15, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>; "Feminism: The Fourth Wave," National Women's History Museum, December 3, 2021, <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-fourth-wave>; Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; Hemelrijk, "Voortleven na de dood," chapter 5; Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society*, 5, 20; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 70, 197; Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta*, 57; Enos and Peterman, "Writing Instruction for the 'Young Ladies' of Teos," 7; D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 23.

held less agency and the intended audience of the *Iliad* comprised elite men, the social status of women in the early imperial period significantly influences the narratives of the Trojan War myth.³⁵

While there are some similarities between Briseis and the historical record, it would be unwise to conclude that Briseis in the three works is an entirely accurate portrayal of women from this period. While she does depict certain aspects, her reliability as a source for the position of women in their societies can be inconsistent.

Briseis has been compared to the social position of enslaved people in the early Archaic Greek Empire, the early imperial period, and shortly to those in World War II. Given the prevalence of slavery in the periods of antiquity discussed, Briseis' situation as an enslaved person was not without precedent. In both societies, enslaved people were exposed to violence. In the *Iliad* and the *Heroides*, Briseis is not directly subjected to violence, yet she is threatened, suggesting that her experiences align with those of enslaved individuals.³⁶ Yet Briseis' role in the *Heroides*, which was intended to rebuke Achilles, did not reflect the actual experiences of enslaved individuals in the Roman Empire, where minor infractions could result in execution.³⁷ Both the *Iliad* and the *Heroides* demonstrate that enslavement could be initiated through warfare, aligning with the broader historical status of enslaved populations.³⁸ In *The Silence of the Girls*, Briseis enslavement is depicted in order to show the dangers of war for women, as she does experience violence and rape at the hands of her captors, which is grounded in modern reality.³⁹

In ancient Greece, enslaved people were employed for labour; however, Briseis is not depicted in this way in either work, Briseis in *The Silence of the Girls* is.⁴⁰ During the early Archaic

³⁵ "The Education System in Ancient Greece," Duncan Howitt-Marshall, Greece Is, September 14, 2023, <https://www.greece-is.com/the-education-system-in-ancient-greece/>; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 47-48; "Education in classical cultures," Britannica, accessed January 25, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education/Education-in-classical-cultures>; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

³⁶ K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and masters in the Roman Empire: a study in social control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 117-118; Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman world*, 40; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Deborah Kamen, *Greek Slavery* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), 59; Robert Schlaifer, "Greek Theories of Slavery from Homer to Aristotle", in *Slavery in Classical Antiquity: Views and Controversies* (London: Lowe and Brydone Ltd, 1968), 53-73.

³⁷ Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>.

³⁸ Lenski, "Slavery in the Roman Empire," 88; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 191; "Slavery in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 27, 37-39; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Kostas Vlassopoulos, "Slavery in Ancient Greece," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 70; M. I. Finley, "Was Greek Civilization Based on Slave Labor," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 8 (1959): 152; Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 18, 34.

³⁹ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; "Israel/oPt: UN experts appalled by reported human rights violations against Palestinian women and girls," United Nations, February 19, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/israelopt-un-experts-appalled-reported-human-rights-violations-against>; "Statistics," me too, accessed November 27, 2024, <https://metoomvmt.org/learn-more/statistics/>.

⁴⁰ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Vlassopoulos, "Slavery in Ancient Greece," 76; Finley, "Was Greek Civilization Based on Slave Labor," 150; Schlaifer, "Greek Theories of Slavery from Homer to Aristotle", 53-73; Blundell, *Women in ancient Greece*, 71; Bonnie MacLachlan, *Women in Ancient Greece: A Sourcebook* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 74-75; Lenski, "Slavery in the Roman Empire," 88; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 191; "Slavery

and imperial periods, enslaved women could also be employed for sexual labour.⁴¹ The possibility for sexual violence against enslaved women is interpreted in the *Iliad* and the *Heroides*. It is evident that sexual violence against enslaved women was a common occurrence in both empires.⁴² For instance, in the *Iliad*, Achilles remarks that Agamemnon is free to engage in intimate relations with Briseis, and in the *Heroides*, Briseis conveys that Achilles instructed her to engage in sexual activities.⁴³ In *The Silence of the Girls*, multiple rapes are discussed and depicted.⁴⁴ Consequently, Briseis' role is not confined to domestic labour, but encompasses sexual exploitation, thereby illustrating the risk enslaved people faced in antiquity.

In antiquity, relationships between enslaved people and their masters were a common occurrence. A notable example of this can be found in the *Iliad*, where Achilles and Briseis are involved in a relationship. While Achilles expresses his love for Briseis and refers to her as his wife, Briseis' feelings towards him are not explicitly stated. Manumission inscriptions have been discovered in Ancient Greece, which indicate that enslaved individuals had relationships with their former owners. As a result, some women were freed and allowed to become concubines.⁴⁵ In the *Heroides*, Briseis expresses a desire to marry Achilles, referring to him as both her master and husband. This narrative is further substantiated by historical evidence of marriages between former enslaved people and their former owners in the Roman Empire. However, the historical accuracy of Briseis' situation is called into question due to the high status of Achilles, which would have made such a union permissible in the early imperial period, as per the laws of Emperor Augustus. Consequently, Briseis serves as a poignant representation of enslaved individuals in the early Archaic period and early imperial Rome.⁴⁶

However, it should be noted that Briseis' situation in relation to enslaved people of antiquity is not so similar that it can be concluded that she is a completely faithful depiction of enslaved people in the early Archaic Greek period and the early imperial period. Instead, she depicts aspects of their situation in these societies, and therefore offers an enriching perspective and can again be used as a

in ancient Rome," British Museum, accessed January 2, 2025, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome>; Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman world*, 21.

⁴¹ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 192; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 28; Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 67; Edward E. Cohen, "The Athenian businesswoman," in *Women in Antiquity: Real women across the Ancient World* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 721; Vlassopoulos, "Slavery in Ancient Greece," 77.

⁴² Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 192; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 28; Kamen, *Greek Slavery*, 67; Cohen, "The Athenian businesswoman," 721; Vlassopoulos, "Slavery in Ancient Greece," 77.

⁴³ Schwartz, *Il*, I.310-351, IX.301-341; Wilson, *Il*, I.340-450, IX.330-430; "Rape," Britannica, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rape-crime>; Peters, *Her*, III.100; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III.100-110.

⁴⁴ Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324.

⁴⁵ Hans Julius Wolff, "MARRIAGE LAW AND FAMILY ORGANIZATION IN ANCIENT ATHENS: A Study on the Interrelation of Public and Private Law in the Greek City," *Traditio*, 2 (1944): 45; Deborah Kamen, *Greek Slavery* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), 63-64; John Madden, "Slavery in the Roman Empire Numbers and Origins," *Classics Ireland*, 3 (1996): 109-128; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

⁴⁶ Bradley, *Slaves and masters in the Roman Empire*, 117-118; "relief; funerary equipment," The British Museum, accessed January 21, 2025, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1858-0819-2; Huemoeller, "Freedom in Marriage?," 126; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, And Slaves*, 195.

supporting source. However, it is important to note that Briseis is not a source that can be adopted for historical research as direct evidence without critical reading, because it is a one-sided depiction of enslaved people.

In this way, Briseis can be seen to represent aspects of the social position of women and enslaved people in these three societies, her character changing in line with society and myth. The case study indicates that, to a certain extent, mythical women reflect the social position of women and enslaved people in antiquity and modern times, evolving alongside it by culture and time.

This lends further support to the working hypothesis that myths are representations of their respective societies. However, Briseis' depictions are not sufficiently precise to be adopted directly as watertight sources without critical scrutiny. Briseis does not depict every discussed aspect of Greek and Roman societies, which can be explained by, that a male author such as Ovid, in a high status position, might pay less attention to portraying a faithful depiction of an enslaved character of lower status.⁴⁷ Furthermore, an author's gender can influence the depiction of female characters, and when the intended audience is male, this can be a contributing factor to the less attention paid to enslaved female characters, as illustrated by the contrast with the modern work of *The Silence of the Girls*.⁴⁸ These differences can also be explained by that people may have previously regarded these works as interesting fictions, rather than direct truths.⁴⁹ Consequently, there are several explanations for why Briseis does not always faithfully portray the social position of women and enslaved people.

Research findings support the working hypothesis, but the case study provided does not provide definitive evidence. Further research is necessary to draw definitive conclusions. As previously mentioned, one narrative may reflect one truth, while other narratives may reflect different truths. Consequently, I extend an invitation to subsequent researchers to examine alternative portrayals of the Trojan War and Briseis, with the objective of ascertaining divergent conclusions and unveiling additional truths. Furthermore, I urge this same investigative approach to be adopted in the study of other myths, with the aspiration of progressively approaching a definitive conclusion on the proposed research question: *Do the mythical women of classical literature reflect the social position of women and enslaved people, and if so, how has this evolved across cultures and time?*

⁴⁷ Goldsworthy, *Augustus*, 444, 509; "Did Ovid's erotic poetry lead to his exile from Rome?" National Geographic, November 26, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/history-magazine/article/exiled-roman-poet-ovid>.

⁴⁸ "Avoiding Gender Stereotypes in Fiction Writing," Rosemount, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://rosemountediting.com/avoiding-gender-stereotypes-in-fiction-writing/>; "Men & Women Writing Each Other Badly," Shelby Sullivan, Medium, May 26, 2021, <https://medium.com/inspired-writer/men-women-writing-each-other-badly-9c0f46aeac5c>; "30 Times Male Authors Showed They Barely Know Anything About Women," Jonas Grinevičius, Justinas Keturka and Rutuja Dumbre, Boredpanda, last updated January 3, 2024, <https://www.boredpanda.com/male-authors-writing-about-women/>; "Bechdel test," Jordana Rosenfeld, Britannica, last updated December 11, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bechdel-test>; Aeschylus, "The Texts of the Oresteia," in *The Oresteia Agamemnon, Women at the Graveside, Orestes at Athens*, translated by Oliver Taplin, edited by Oliver Taplin and Joshua Billings (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 1-130; Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Oedipus ; Agamemnon ; Thyestes ; Hercules on Oeta ; Octavia*, translated by John G Fitch (London: Harvard University Press, 2018); Barker, *The Silence of the Girls*, 1-324; Peters, *Her*, III; Murgatroyd, Reeves and Parker, *Her*, III; Schwartz, *Il*, I-XXIV; Wilson, *Il*, I-XXIV.

⁴⁹ Jacqueline Klooster, interview organised by Yona Siero, email, April 25, 2024.

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