BBC iWonder

Leaky vessels

[Dr Amanda Foreman]

In ancient Greece women were veiled in public to ensure they were kept under control and subservient to men. Women were seen as incapable of reason - they did not know their limits and had to be controlled by 'rational' men.

For what may come as a surprise is that Athens adopted the custom of veiling from ancient Assyria… and it would be from here that it would later end up in Rome, Byzantium and Christianity.

Formerly the right of only royal women, by the 5th century BC, the wife of almost every citizen wore a veil. Again it was a way of making the status of women more discernible so as to better *regulate them.*

[Evgenia Dimitropoulous]

There's no equality between a man and a woman. A woman is always down from a man… Women are something like property for a man so he has to have his wife only for himself and in the house…

[Dr Amanda Foreman]

The best evidence for how widespread veiling was in Ancient Greece is a collection of votive statues called Tanagras now housed in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

Found in sacred shrines, they depict women in everyday costume; and they reveal the wide variety of veils worn outside the home.

There are *pharos* veils, both covering the hair as well as the lower face…

…but the most striking is the *tegidion*, a full face veil with eye-holes, which literally meant 'little roof', a symbol of the male house under which married women and daughters were protected.

Like in ancient Assyria, the veil was a marker of class, but in Greece it embraced something much darker that would leave an even greater legacy: a deep phobia of the female body and the idea that women's inferiority wasn't man-made but rooted in nature.