

VIDEO STUDY GUIDE:

Constructing a Reading Scenario to Understand the Gender Divided Mediterranean World

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KYPSELI

Men and Women Apart
A Divided Reality
1972

Kypseli is a "traditional peasant" village on the Greek Island of Thera, known to tourists as Santorini. Geographically, this island is one of the southern Sporades and is included among the group known as the Cyclades. (Consult maps of Greece to locate the island in the Mediterranean precisely.)

This forty-minute film (University of San Francisco) asks the questions: "how do people structure daily life? how do people make sense out of life?" In the Mediterranean world both ancient and contemporary, people structure daily life by dividing the world into:

male	female
sacred	profane
clean	polluted

Everything: space, objects, animal, time -- all things are divided by gender.

The value of this film for Bible students is that except for the modern technology in the village (electricity, for instance), Abraham, Jesus, Paul and all the people who populate the pages of the Bible would be quite at home here. Life-styles and cultural values peculiar to Mediterranean peasants have remained unchanged here for thousands of years.

Since all language derives its meaning from culture, if one knows the culture one can more easily and correctly understand the meaning of the words and phrases one reads. Consider, for instance, the word "family."

In the United States, (1) a family consists of a self-selected mother and father; we marry partners we have personally selected and fallen in love with; (2) all children--boys and girls, younger and older, are equally valued and valuable; and (3) our families tend to be the isolated nuclear variety: a mother-father and their 2-4 children live alone in a home that ordinarily does not include other relatives, nor does the home even have to be close to relatives.

In the ancient and modern Mediterranean world, (1) a family consists of a mother and father in an "arranged" marriage (recall the line in the song "Do you love me?" from Fiddler on the Roof: "but my father and my

mother said we'd learn to love each other"); (2) in Mediterranean families, boys have been and still are considered more important than girls, and the oldest boy is the most important of all the boys; (3) families tend to be large and quite extended -- read the commandments in Exodus 20:10// Deut 6:13 on who should keep the Sabbath; and Exodus 20:17// Deut 6:21 concerning the objects a "man" shall not "covet." Notice in these verses what the "extended family" includes; notice also the commandment is directed to adult males.

As you watch this film, pay careful attention to the attitudes and beliefs about men and women in this village. Notice the status and roles of men and women and the importance of gender, age, and social status. Perhaps viewers can make a list of items referring to men and other viewers a list pertaining to women. When the film is ended, the lists can be compared and discussed.

For example,

WOMEN

activity = domestic

place in home = kitchen

place outside home = rarely in village square

kitchen (place for women only)

communal village ovens

kitchen furnishings and milk-goat

women eat early

courtyard of home = morning

no name-day celebration

Marriage not romantic; bride joins two families

girls do chores, have no childhood

MEN

activity = farm and hunt

place in home = living room

place outside home = village square

tavern (place for men only)

wine cave, stables

farm tools and burden-animals

men eat alone and separately

courtyard of home = afternoon

name-day celebration

marriage purchases a son-in-law
to enhance social position

young boys play, allowed to have childhood

What does **contemporary life** on the Greek island of Thera (Santorini) have to do with **biblical times**?

"Eating meals." Read Exod 12:2, 4, 24; 13:8; Gen 19.

Compare Mark 6:35-44; Luke 9:12-17; Matt 14:15-28 (and Mark 8:1-10; Matt 15:32-39). What does the film suggest about Matthew's concluding comment?

QUIZ #2: Write a three page report on Prof. Neyrey's article. In this report make certain you (1) briefly summarize the contents of the article; and (2) offer a critical evaluation of it.

(1) READ: John 4:1-42.

(2) READ: [Jerome H. Neyrey,](#)

**["What's Wrong With This Pictures? John 4, Cultural Stereotypes of Women, and Public and Private Space."](#)
[Biblical Theology Bulletin 24 \(1994\) 77-91.](#)**

(3) READ John Meier,

["The Historical Jesus and the Historical Samaritans: What can be said?", pp. 227 and following](#)

Finally, if you have time and interest, two of my articles

John J. Pilch, *"A Window into the Biblical World: The Samaritan Woman,"*
The Bible Today 44.4 (2006): 251-256.

John J. Pilch, *"A Window into the Biblical World: Naming the Nameless in the Bible,"*
The Bible Today 44.5 (2006): 315-320.

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Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences 268 (1), 382–384.

Susanna M. Hoffman, "The Controversy about Kypseli," pp. 161-169 in Jack R. Rollwagen, editor,
Anthropological Filmmaking: Anthropological Perspectives on the Production of Film and Video for General Public Audiences. Chur/London/Paris/New York/Melbourne: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1988.

Soraya Altorki and Camillia Fawzy El-Solh, editors, *Arab Women in the Field: Studying Your Own Society*.
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Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1993.

John H. Elliott, "The Evil Eye in the First Testament: The Ecology and Culture of a Pervasive Belief," pp. 147-159 in *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis*, David Jobling et al. (Eds). Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1991.

Bruce J. Malina, *Windows on the World of Jesus: Time Travel to Ancient Judea*. Louisville, KY:
Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.

John J. Pilch, *The Cultural World of Jesus Sunday by Sunday: Cycle A (Matthew)*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995. *Cycle B: (Mark)*, 1996. *Cycle C (Luke)*, 1997.

John J. Pilch, The Cultural Dictionary of the Bible. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999.



Photo: National Geographic Magazine, October, 1987, pp. 450-451. Divided by sex and custom a family spend Thursday evening relaxing by the Red Sea.

The photograph illustrates the article by Jerome Neyrey cited above and helps a Bible reader to imagine the appropriate scenario for understanding the feeding of the multitudes stories in the New Testament. The groups were gender-divided: Men and boys older than the age of puberty in one set of groups; and women, girls, and boys younger than the age of puberty in another.

A related question: is this public space? or private space? Does another consideration, for instance, the topics of conversation in these groups, have a bearing on the distinction between public and private space?