

# Athens

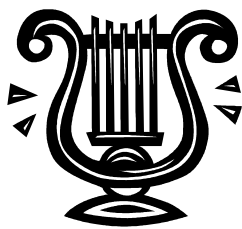


Greece was a civilization made up of many city-states. Each one had their own separate communities, laws, and traditions. Each city-state also contributed something different to Greek society. Two of the greatest and most powerful city-states in all of Greece were Athens and Sparta. Athens valued intelligence and thinking, while Sparta valued fighting and physical strength. While both of these city-states were rivals, they played important roles in Ancient Greece.

## Daily Life in Athens

### Education:

In ancient Athens, the purpose of education was to produce people trained in the arts and to prepare citizens for both peace and war. Girls were not educated at school, but many learned to read and write at home, in the comfort of their own courtyard. Until age 6 or 7, boys were taught at home by their mother or by a male slave. From ages 6 to 14, they went to a neighborhood primary school or to a private school. They were taught how to read, how to speak, and even how to think properly. Books were very expensive and rare,



so subjects were read out-loud, and the boys had to memorize everything. In primary school, they learned two important things: the words of Homer, a famous Greek poet, and how to play the lyre, a musical instrument. Their teacher, who was always a man, could choose what additional subjects he wanted to teach. He might choose to teach drama, public speaking, government, art, reading, writing, math, and another favorite ancient Greek instrument—the flute. Following that, boys attended a higher school for four more years. When they turned 18, they entered military school for two years. At age 20, they graduated.

### Men and Boys:

Men ran the government, and spent a great deal of their time away from home. When not involved in politics, the men spent time in the fields, overseeing or working the crops, in manufacturing, or in trade. Men enjoyed hunting, sailing, drinking, wrestling, horseback riding, and the famous Olympic Games.

In most Greek city-states, when young, the boys stayed at home, helping in the fields, sailing, and fishing. At age 6 or 7, they went to school.

### Women and Girls:

Women in Athens had very limited freedom outside the home. They could attend weddings, funerals, some religious festivals, and visit female neighbors. They could not buy anything, nor could they disobey their husbands or fathers!

In the home though, women were in charge! Their job was to run the house and to bear children. Most wealthy Greek women did not do housework themselves. Female slaves cooked, cleaned, and worked in the fields. Male slaves watched the door, to make sure no one came in when the man of the house was away (except for female neighbors), and acted as tutors to the young male children.

In Athens, as in most Greek city-states, young girls stayed at home until they were married. Like their mothers, they could attend certain festivals, funerals, and visit neighbors for brief periods of time. Their job was to help their mother, and to help in the fields or in the family business if necessary.

### Babies:

The ancient Greeks considered their children to be "youths" until they reached the age of 30! When a child was born, a father carried his child, in a ritual dance, around the household. Friends and relatives sent gifts. The family decorated the doorway of their home with a wreath of olives (for a boy) or a wreath of wool (for a girl).

### Slaves:

Slaves were very important to ancient Greek daily life. Slaves cleaned and cooked, worked in the fields, factories, shops, in the mines, and on ships. Even the police force in ancient Athens was made up of slaves! Most slaves' lives were not that different from a poor Greek citizen's life. There were things a slave could not do. They could not go to school, or enter politics, or use their own name. The citizen who owned them gave them a name. They were the property of their owner, not citizens of the city-state.

People became slaves in many ways. Some people became slaves when captured in battle. Some were the children of slaves. Some were Greek infants, abandoned on a hill or at the gates of a town, left to die, only to be rescued by someone passing by. Poor families sold some children into slavery, and some children were even kidnapped for slaves.

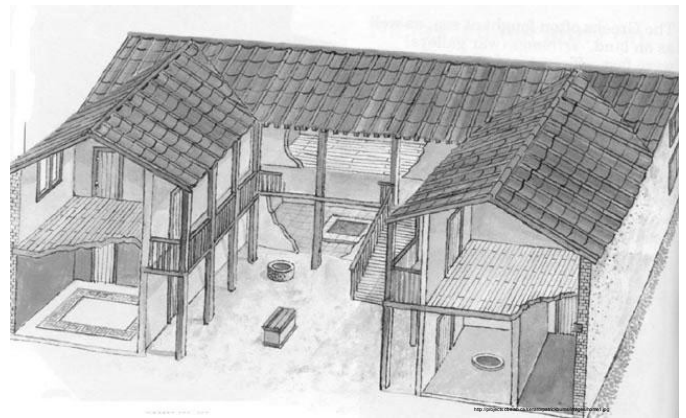
### Toys and Pets:

Ancient Greek children played with many toys, including rattles, little clay animals, and horses on 4 wheels that could be pulled on a string, yo-yos, and terra-cotta dolls.

Birds, dogs, goats, tortoises, and mice were all popular pets! Cats, however, were not!

### Houses:

Greek houses, in the 6th and 5th centuries BCE were made up of two or three rooms, built around an open air courtyard, made of stone, wood, or clay bricks. Larger homes might also have a kitchen, a room for bathing, a men's dining room, and perhaps a woman's sitting area. Although the Greek women were allowed to leave their homes for only short periods of time, they could enjoy the open air in the privacy of their courtyard. Much of ancient Greek family life centered on the courtyard.

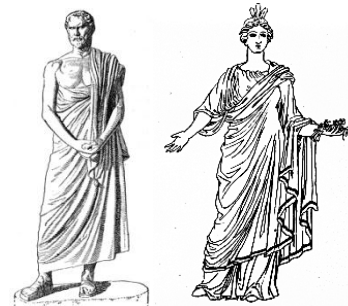


### Food:

Along the coastline, the soil was not very fertile, but the ancient Greeks used systems of irrigation and crop rotation to help solve that problem. They grew olives, grapes, and figs. They kept goats, for milk and cheese. In the plains, where the soil was richer, they also grew wheat to make bread. Fish, seafood, and homemade wine were very popular food items. In some of the larger Greek city-states, like Athens, meat could be purchased in cook shops. Meat was rarely eaten; it was usually used for religious sacrifices.

### Clothing:

Greek clothing was very simple. Men and women wore linen in the summer and wool in the winter. The ancient Greeks could buy cloth and clothes in the *agora*, or marketplace, but that was expensive. Most families made their own clothes, which were simple tunics and warm cloaks, made of linen or wool, dyed a bright color, or bleached white. Clothing was often decorated to represent the city-state in which they lived. The ancient Greeks were very proud of their home city-state.



### Perfume and Jewelry:

Now and then, people might buy hairpins, rings, or earrings from a traveling peddler, but only the rich could afford much jewelry. Both men and women used perfume, made by boiling flowers and herbs.

### Hats:

The ancient Greeks invented the first real hat, the broad-brimmed petasos! It was worn only for traveling. A chinstrap held it on, so when it was not needed as protection from the weather, it could hang down ones back.



### Hair Styles:

Both men and women enjoyed using mirrors and hairbrushes. Hair was curled, arranged carefully, and held in place with scented waxes and lotions. Women kept their hair long, in braids, arranged on top of their head, or wore their hair in ponytails. Headbands, made of ribbon or metal, were very popular. Blond hair was rare. Greeks admired the blonde look and many tried bleaching their hair. Men cut their hair short and, unless they were soldiers, wore beards.

Barbershops first became popular in ancient Greece, and were an important part of the social life of many ancient Greek males. In the barbershops, the men exchanged political and sports news, philosophy, and gossip, much like today.

### Dance:

Dance was very important to the ancient Greeks. They believed that dance improved physical and emotional health. Rarely did men and women dance together. There were more than 200 ancient Greek dances; comic dances, warlike dances, dances for athletes, for religious worship, plus dances for weddings, funerals, and celebrations. Dance was accompanied by music played on lyres, flutes, and percussion instruments such as tambourines, cymbals, and castanets.

### Weddings:

In ancient Athens, wedding ceremonies started after dark. The veiled bride traveled from her home to the home of the groom while standing in a chariot. Her family followed the chariot on foot, carrying the gifts. Friends of the bride and groom lit the way, carrying torches and playing music to scare away evil spirits. During the wedding ceremony, the bride would eat an apple, or another piece of fruit, to show that food and other basic needs would now come from her husband. Gifts to the new couple might include baskets, furniture, jewelry, mirrors, perfume, and vases filled with greenery.

### Stories:

The ancient Greeks loved stories. They created many marvelous stories, myths, and fables that we enjoy today, like "Odysseus and the Terrible Sea" and "Circe", a beautiful but evil enchantress. *Aesop's Fables*, written by Aesop, an ancient Greek, are still read and enjoyed all over the world today!

One favorite family activity was to gather in the courtyard to hear these stories, told by the mother or father. In their courtyard, Greek women might relax, chat, and sew. Most meals were enjoyed in the courtyard. Greek cooking equipment was small and light and could easily be set up there. On bright, sunny days, the women probably sheltered under a covered area of their courtyard, as the ancient Greeks believed a pale complexion was a sign of beauty.

# Athenian Government: The First Democracy

The city-state of Athens went through many different changes in its government before it became the world's first democracy. At first, the city-state of Athens was a **monarchy**, or ruled by a king. However, the king was eventually overthrown, and rich people called aristocrats took over next. Athens then became an **oligarchy**, or a government in which only a few people have power. After a few more rebellions and changes in government, Athens finally became a **democracy**, or a government in which the people have the power. Around 500BCE, Athens, Greece had the first democratic government in the entire world.

In a democracy, all **citizens**, or people who have the right to participate in government, take part in running the government. All citizens vote on laws, and all citizens have the opportunity to serve (at different times) in the government. In a democracy, the citizens are the government—all the people, by the people, for the people. All citizens have the right to speak their opinion.

Athens, during the time of the democracy, had a city population of about 300,000 people. Some of these people, about 35,000 of them, were called metics. Metics were people from places other than Athens. Metics could **not** be citizens. Children under the age of 18 could not vote or hold office or take part in the government. There were about 95,000 children living in Athens. Slaves were not citizens. They had no rights. There were about 75,000 slaves in Athens.

We started with 300,000 people. After removing metics, children, and slaves, we're down to about 95,000 people. However, women could not be citizens either. Women had few rights. There were about 50,000 women living in Athens. The only people who could be citizens were men over the age of 18, and – there was one more restriction—your father had to be a citizen for you to be a citizen. So about 45,000 men, or 15% of the population, actually made up the Athenian democracy.

Not everyone was treated equally in Athens. There were four major groups:

- **Citizens:** Only men could be citizens.
- **Families of citizens** (wives and children)
- **Metics:** These were foreigners living in Athens -- usually traders or craftsmen.
- **Slaves:** People captured in war or purchased in slave markets. Slaves could be freed by their owners or sometimes purchase their own freedom.

For major decisions to be made in Athens, at least 6,000 citizens were required to vote. Sometimes they actually had to pull random people from the **agora**, or marketplace. This was done by having a servant walk through the marketplace with a rope covered in wet red paint. If the servant brushed past you and you were marked with red paint, you were required to vote.

This sometimes created some problems. Because every person was allowed to express his opinion when voting, it could take a long time to reach a decision! Eventually, Athens created a council to help run things a little more smoothly.

In the 330SBCE, a group of people called the Macedonians conquered Athens and started eliminating democracy. Within 10 years of being conquered, Athens was under the rule of a king again and was back to being a monarchy.

Democracy in Athens was not the same as democracy practiced in the United States. But it was the beginning of democracy, and one of the most important gifts from the ancient Greeks.