ATHENS VERSUS SPARTA

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| **Population &** [**Map**](http://www.princeton.edu/~markwoon/Myth/myth-maps.html) | Approximately 140,000; Approximately 40,000 men were citizens; and slaves (about 40,000). By 432 BC, Athens had become the most populous city-state in Hellas. In Athens and Attica, there were at least 150,000 Athenians, around 50,000 aliens, and more than 100,000 slaves. | Approximately 8,000 Spartiates (adult male citizens) ruled over a population of 100,000 enslaved and semi-enslaved people. |
| **Government & Political organizations** | [Athenian Government](http://members.home.net/georgefrank/War/Athens.html#Democracy) Usually classified as a "direct democracy" (because everyone, not just politicians attended the Assembly), Athens claims to be the "birthplace of democracy".  **Elected officials** including 10 **generals** (strategos), **magistrates** (archons), and others.  **Council of 500** was charged with administering decisions made by the Assembly.  **The Assembly** open to all citizens (all citizens were eligible to attend such meetings and speak up). They passed laws and made policy decisions. The Assembly met on the Hill of the Pnyx at the foot of the Acropolis.  During time of Pericles citizens were paid for **jury service** so not only the wealthy could participate.  Women did not participate in the political life of Athens. | [Spartan Government:](http://members.home.net/georgefrank/War/Sparta.html#Monarchy) Usually classified as an "oligarchy" (rule by a few), but it had elements of monarchy (rule by kings), democracy (through the election of council/senators), and aristocracy (rule by the upper class or land owning class).  **Two kings** who were generals in command of the armies and with some religious duties.  **Five overseers** (ephors) elected annually ran the day-to-day operations of Sparta. They could veto rulings made by the council or assembly.  **Council or Senate** (apella) of 28 councilmen (men over 60 and elected for life by the citizens) and the 2 kings. They acted as judges and proposed laws to the citizens' assembly.  The **Assembly** of all Spartan males aged 30 or over could support or veto the council's recommendations by shouting out their votes.  Women did not participate in the political life of Sparta. |
| **Social Structure** | [Social Structure of Athens:](http://www.anthro.mankato.msus.edu/prehistory/aegean/culture/classesofathens.html) **Freemen** were all male citizens: divided into numerous classes: **at the top** were **aristocrats** who had large estates and made up the cavalry or captained triremes; **middle** ranks were **small farmers; lowest** class was the **thetes** (urban craftsmen and trireme rowers). **Metics** - those who came from outside the city; they were not allowed to own land, but could run industries and businesses. **Slaves** were lowest class, but less harshly treated than in most other Greek cities. Slaves had no rights, and an owner could kill a slave. Slaves varied in status: some were given important roles in Athens, like policemen. Women were rarely seen outside the home and had no rights in the Athenian democracy. | [Social Structure of Sparta:](http://www.anthro.mankato.msus.edu/prehistory/aegean/culture/spartaculture.html)  Three classes: **Spartiates** (military professionals who lived mostly in barracks and whose land was farmed by serfs; they served in the army and could vote).  [**Perioeci**](http://members.home.net/georgefrank/War/Sparta.html) or "neighbors/outsiders" who were freemen; they included artisans, craftsmen, merchants; they could not vote or serve in the army; foreigners could be in this class.  **Helots** (serfs descended from those peoples who had resisted subjugation by Sparta and who were constantly rebelling. They were treated like slaves and gave 1/2 of their produce to the Spartiate citizens who owned the land.  Women had few rights, but were more independent in Sparta than elsewhere in Greece. |
| **Allies** | Delian League (with Athens clearly the most powerful); Athens taxed and protected other city-states. | a Peloponnesian League (with Sparta clearly the most powerful). |
| **Military strength** | Strong navy. | Strong army, best and most feared fighters on land. |
| **Life style and values** | Democratic values for citizens. They believed in participation in government as a civic responsibility. Athenians believed in their cultural superiority and in their role in an empire and benefiting from trade. (See [Pericles' Funeral Oration](http://lilt.ilstu.edu/drjclassics/texts/pericles/pericles.shtm) showing these values.) "Further, we provide many ways to refresh the mind from the burdens of business. We hold contests and offer sacrifices all the year round, and the elegance of our private establishments forms a daily source of pleasure and helps to drive away sorrow. The magnitude of our city draws the produce of the world into our harbor, so that to the Athenian the fruits of other countries are as familiar a luxury as those of his own." | [Spartan culture:](http://www.anthro.mankato.msus.edu/prehistory/aegean/culture/spartaculture.html) Militaristic values. Children of citizens were raised to be "Spartan", taught to get along with almost nothing. Spartiate citizens were not permitted to own gold or silver or luxuries. Spartan children were taught to respect elderly, women, and warriors. [The strict separation of classes and militaristic system was put into place by [Lycurgus](http://www.csun.edu/~hcfll004/sparta-a.html) in the 7th century BC.]  Spartan mothers would say to their sons, "Either come back with your shield or on it" (meaning return victorious or die fighting).  This lifestyle was praised by [Xenophon](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/xeno-sparta1.html), an ancient historian c. 375 BCE. |
| **Education** | [**Boys:**](http://www.greekciv.pdx.edu/dailylife/education/philip2.htm) Schools taught reading, writing and mathematics, music, poetry, sport and gymnastics. Based upon their birth and the wealth of their parents, the length of education was from the age of 5 to 14, for the wealthier 5 - 18 and sometimes into a student's mid-twenties in an academy where they would also study philosophy, ethics, and rhetoric (the skill of persuasive public speaking). Finally, the citizen boys entered a military training camp for two years, until the age of twenty. Foreign metics and slaves were not expected to attain anything but a basic education in Greece, but were not excluded from it either.  [Girls:](http://www.greekciv.pdx.edu/dailylife/women/lives.htm) Girls received little formal education (except perhaps in the aristocrats' homes through tutors); they were generally kept at home and had no political power in Athens. The education of a girl involved spinning, weaving, and other domestic art. | [**Boys:**](http://www.greekciv.pdx.edu/dailylife/education/philip3.htm) Boys were taken from parents at age seven and trained in the art of warfare. They were only give a cloak - no shoes or other clothes, and not enough food so they had to steal (to learn survival skills). At [age 20](http://members.home.net/georgefrank/War/Sparta.html#Education) they were placed into higher ranks of the military. To age 30 they were dedicated to the state; then they could marry but still lived in barracks with other soldiers. They were educated in choral dance, reading and writing, but athletics and military training were emphasized. [**Girls:**](http://www.greekciv.pdx.edu/dailylife/education/philip3.htm) Girls were educated at age 7 in reading and writing, gymnastics, athletics and survival skills. Could participate in sports; treated more as equals. |
| **Role of women** | [Athenian women:](http://www.anthro.mankato.msus.edu/prehistory/aegean/culture/womenofathens.html) Athenian women and girls were kept at home with no participation in sports or politics. Wives were considered property of their husbands. They were were responsible for spinning, weaving and other domestic arts. Some women held high posts in the ritual events and religious life of Athens (where the goddess Athena was the patron). Prostitutes and courtesans were not confined to the house. Some became influential such as Aspasia (see the 'Character Stories section of this Web site). | [Spartan women](http://www.anthro.mankato.msus.edu/prehistory/aegean/culture/womenofsparta.html) and the [role of Spartan women](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/7849/): Girls were educated in reading and writing and could participate in sports; they were treated more as equals to men. The goal was to produce women who would produce strong healthy babies. At age 18 she would be assigned a husband and return home. Citizen women were free to move around and enjoyed a great deal of freedom. Domestic arts (weaving, spinning, etc.) were usually left to the other classes. Spartan women could own and control their own property. In times of war the wife was expected to oversee her husband's property and to guard it against invaders and revolts until her husband returned. |
| **Cultural achievements and legacy** | Art, architecture, drama and literature, philosophy, science, medicine, etc. Government (democracy, trial by jury) | Military supremacy and simple lifestyle are the major inspiration behind the philosopher Plato's book 'The Republic' - the first attempt to formulate an 'ideal' community. |
| **Other** | **Food:** Athenians enjoyed luxuries and foods from all over their empire. Wealthy Athenian **homes** were quite nice with an inner courtyard. | **Food**: Spartan Broth consisted of pork, blood, salt and vinegar. Spartans were trained to dislike luxuries and fancy foods. The men lived most of their lives in **military barracks**. |

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| **Put a check in the correct box.**  **Note: Some may be found in both.** | | **ATHENS** | **SPARTA** |
| POPULATION | Which had the largest population? |  |  |
| GOVERNMENT | Which was a limited democracy? |  |  |
| Which was a military oligarchy? |  |  |
| Which had two kings? |  |  |
| Which had an assembly? |  |  |
| SOCIAL STRUCTURE | Which had citizens as the upper class? |  |  |
| Which had foreigners as a working class? |  |  |
| Which had slaves? |  |  |
| ALLIES | Which was the leader of the Delian League? |  |  |
| Which was the leader of the Peloponnesian League? |  |  |
| MILITARY STRENGTHS | Which had the strongest navy? |  |  |
| Which had the strongest army on land? |  |  |
| LIFE STYLE AND VALUES | Which had militaristic values? |  |  |
| Which had democratic values? |  |  |
| ROLE OF WOMEN | Which limited women’s roles in politics? |  |  |
| Which gave the most freedom to women? |  |  |
| EDUCATION | Which valued choral dance and music? |  |  |
| Which valued athletics? |  |  |
| Which gave more education to girls? |  |  |
| What gave the most education to boys? |  |  |

1. If you were a teenage girl of the citizen class, in which city-state would you rather live? Why?
2. If you were a slave, in which would you rather live? Why?
3. If you were a boy of the citizen class, in which would you rather live? Why?
4. If you were a young soldier, in which would you rather live? Why?
5. If you were a very wealthy person of the citizen class, in which would you rather live? Why?
6. Which is the best place to live? Answer how ever you’d like, but make sure you support your opinion with several detailed reasons.

**SPARTA**

**Origins**

Sparta was unique among the Greek city-states because of the rigid program of military indoctrination it instilled in its citizens.

Legend dates the founding of the city to Mycenean times, when the legendary King Menelaus, who helped defeat Troy, supposedly ruled the city. Archaeologists put the date of its origin later, around 1000 BC, when a tribe called the Dorians migrated to the region.

Around the year 650 BC Sparta was thoroughly reorganized by Lycurgus, who came to power after the city was humiliatingly defeated by its neighbor Argos. Lycurgus turned Sparta from a city ruled by an aristocratic elite into a far broader oligarchy dedicated solely to warfare. By 500 BC it had conquered almost all of the surrounding territory and dominated the Peloponnese region of southwest Greece.

**Sparta- Government and Classes**

Sparta had a highly unusual system of government.

Two kings ruled the city, but a 28-member 'council of elders' limited their powers.

These men were recruited from the highest social class, the aristocratic Spartiates. Rather like medieval knights, the Spartiates were a class of military professionals who lived most of their lives in communal barracks. Rarely seeing their wives and children, their lands were farmed by slaves, leaving them free to pursue to the arts of war.

Beneath this highest class was a middle class, called the Perioeci. Made up of a farmers and artisans who were the descendants of those peoples whom the Spartans had first conquered, the Perioeci paid taxes and could serve in the army, but had no real political rights.

At the bottom were the helots: a slave class descended from those peoples who had resisted subjugation by Sparta. Because the helots were constantly rebelling, the Spartans attempted to control them by forming a secret society that annually murdered any helot suspected of encouraging subversion.

**Sparta- Famous Quotes about Spartan Life**

Inward-looking and self-sufficient, the Spartans were the most feared hoplites (infantrymen) in all Greece. They lived an austere life, despising any sort of luxury, in a city that contained neither walls, nor grand buildings.

Famous quotes and anecdotes associated with the Spartans:

Herodotus reports that just before the Battle of Thermoplyae, a Spartan warrior named Dienekes was told that the Persian archers could blank out the sun with their arrows. He replied "Good, then we shall have our battle in the shade."

A Sybarite, who ate at a public mess, once remarked: "Now I know why the Spartans do not fear death."

Asked what was the greatest benefit Lycurgus conferred on his countryman, King Agesilaus replied "Contempt of pleasure."

"Come back with your shield - or on it" (Plutarch, Mor.241) was supposed to be the parting cry of mothers to their sons. Mothers whose sons died in battle openly rejoiced, mothers whose sons survived hung their heads in shame.

Asked why it was dishonorable to return without a shield and not without a helmet, the Spartan king, Demaratos (510 - 491) is said to have replied: "Because the latter they put on for their own protection, but the shield for the common good of all." (Plutarch, Mor.220)

An old man wandering around the Olympic Games looking for a seat was jeered at by the crowd until he reached the seats of the Spartans, whereupon every Spartan younger than him, and some that were older, stood up and offered him their seat. The crowd applauded and the old man turned to them with a sigh, saying "All Greeks know what is right, but only the Spartans do it."

**ATHENS**

**The Reforms of Cleithenes- The Tribes**

The 'democratic' reforms of Cleisthenes were a highly complicated revision of tribal and religious associations that had endured for centuries. Above all else, they were an attempt to make the different factions and regions of Athens into one people, with a popular assembly, and the necessary institutions to make that assembly work.

Cleisthenes accomplished this by reorganizing the four tribal groups all Athenians belonged to. Though he didn't abolish the old tribes, he divided them into 10 new groups, called phyle, each of which adopted a mythological hero as its patron and founder.

Next he revised the way neighborhoods were organized, creating local councils called demes which consisted of either several small hamlets, a village, or a city district. Like the reorganization of the tribes, these demes were a modification of older community organizations, but each now had a local assembly and a leader resembling a mayor.

Finally, in order to encourage unity between the different parts of Attica - the city of Athens, the inland farms and the coastal villages - Cleisthenes ensured that each of the 10 tribes were composed of two demes from each of these three areas (a total of six demes per tribe). This must have required some sophisticated reorganization since the demes varied greatly in size (between 100 and 1000 citizens) and each of the tribes needed to be roughly the same size (about 3,500 citizens each).

**The Reforms of Cleithenes- The Council of 500**

What linked this complex tribal reform to Athenian democracy was the Council of Five Hundred, or Boule. Each tribe selected 50 council members for the 500-member Boule, usually chosen by lot. It formed an absolutely vital role in the new 'democracy' because it carried out the everyday work of the assembly and provided a permanent council that could make decisions when the assembly was not in session.

This was important because the popular assembly met on average only every nine days, and sometimes didn't meet for several weeks. It was also prone to being dominated by people living in and close to the city of Athens. In contrast, the council members of the Boule came from all over Attica and because they were duty-bound to remain in the city for a certain period of the year, they could ensure the affairs of the whole region were not neglected.

Furthermore, at least 50 of the Boule's members had to be on duty in Athens at all times. As such, they could make sure things discussed at the assembly actually got done, as well as act as a safeguard against any would-be tyrant trying to seize power.

Academics sometimes call the form of government Cleisthenes established isonomy (meaning a government of equals) because it would take until the time of Pericles before democracy really came into own.

**The Populace of Athens**

In 478 the walls erected around Athens enclosed an area of 3.5 square kilometers, including the Piraeus, or harbor district. The full population of the city was over 140,000, but only 40,000 of these were full (male) citizens.

Athenian society was composed of four main social classes - slaves, metics (non-citizen freepersons), women, and citizens, but within each of these broad classes were several sub-classes (such as the difference between common citizens and aristocratic citizens).

**The Populace of Athens- Slaves**

Slaves were the lowest class in Athenian society, but according to many contemporary accounts they were far less harshly treated than in most other Greek cities. Indeed, one of the criticisms of Athens was that its slaves and freemen were difficult to tell apart.

A fundamental part of economy, the most prized slaves worked as tutors and police officials, and one group of elite slaves was even empowered to herd citizens to the assembly with a long rope dipped in paint! Next in status were domestic slaves who, under certain circumstances, might be allowed to buy their own freedom. Often looked upon as 'one of the family', during certain festivals they would be waited upon by their masters. Lowest of all slaves were those who worked in the nearby Laurium silver mines - where most quickly perished.

**The Populace of Athens- Metics**

Metics were a class of free non-citizens, often employed on more menial, but nevertheless vital, tasks - including trireme building, rowing and maintenance. Metics were usually Greeks from other city-states. Women of non-Athenian origin could often rise to positions of considerable influence as courtesans.

**The Populace of Athens- Women**

Women had few rights in male-dominated Athens, and their treatment was sometimes scarcely better than that of domestic slaves. Unless they were prostitutes or courtesans, most wealthy women were largely confined to staying at home and running the household. Poorer women seem to have enjoyed greater freedom, though this was largely due to necessity - their husbands would have spent their days working, forcing their wives to take on a number of responsibilities that wealthier women would have had servants or husbands to do.

**The Populace of Athens- Freemen**

Freemen encompassed all male citizens of the city. They were divided into numerous classes whose status reflected the degree to which they were self-reliant or autarkic. Ideally the Greeks believed professions that relied on the payment of others were less favorable than professions in which a citizen was seen to be self-sufficient, such as farming. At the lowest end were the thetes, mainly composed of urban craftsmen and trireme rowers. In the middle ranks were primarily small farmers, who had enough money to buy hoplite infantry armor. At the top of the hierarchy were the aristocrats who owned large estates and traditionally made up the cavalry, though many actually fought as hoplites. There were however, numerous 'in-between' ranks based on old tribal affiliations, past acts of heroism, family and religious connections, and so on.

**Pericles Funeral Oration**

In 431, shortly after the Peloponnesian War had broken out, Pericles delivered his famous Funeral Oration to commemorate those troops who had already fallen in battle. Recorded, and probably rewritten by the historian Thucydides, it is one of the primary sources on which our understanding of ancient Athens is based and provides a unique insight into just how Athenian democracy understood itself.

In the speech Pericles relates the special qualities of the Athenians, redefining many traditional Greek virtues in a radical new light.

The idea that the Athenians are able to put aside their petty wants and strive for the greater good of the city is a central theme of the speech. Bound together by bonds of mutual trust and a shared desire for freedom, the people of Athens submit to the laws and obey the public officials not because they have to, as in other cities, but because they want to. Athenians had thus achieved something quite unique - being both ruled and rulers at one and the same time. This had forged a unique type of citizen. Clever, tolerant, and open minded, Athenians were able to adapt to any situation and rise to any challenge. They had become the new ideal of the Greek world.

Pericles' view was obviously a very idealized one, and it ignored the realities of party factionalism, selfishness, and arrogance that were to soon manifest after his death.

**Ostracism**

The institution of ostracism, believed to have been created by Cleisthenes, was not actually used until 487 BC; some 20 years after his reforms.

Designed as a safeguard for protecting democracy, it was a harsh and unforgiving punishment, often meted out to individuals who were becoming too personally powerful, or who threatened the positions of those who already had great influence.

Ostracism literally means 'judgement by shards' because shards of pottery, the cheapest writing material, were used for the voting. Once a year, the popular assembly would take a vote to decide whether ostracism was to be held that year. If so, two months later the question would be put to the people in a strictly supervised meeting within the agora, or marketplace. Citizens would scratch on to their pottery shard - or have scratched for them - the name of the person they wanted ostracized. The top name on the list would then be exiled from Athens for 10 years.

A quorum, or minimum number, of 6000 citizens was required for the vote to be valid

**The Great Playwrights in Athens Golden Age**

Aeschylus, the father of Greek tragedy, died in 456 BC, relatively early in Pericles' long career as Athens' leading politician. He left a number of important plays that still survive today, including The Persians and The Oresteia.

His mantle was taken up by the playwrights Sophocles, who wrote Antigone, Oedipus at Colonus, and Oedipus Rex; and Euripides, who wrote The Trojan Trilogy, of which only The Trojan Women survives, as well as two other important plays about the roles of women: The Phoenician Women and The Bacchae.

The leading comic author of Athens, Aristophanes, did not produce his first play until 427 BC, two years after Pericles' death. He specialized in what we would call political satire, and of his eleven surviving plays Lysistrata, The Acharnians, and The Clouds are the most famous.

**The Delian League**

The spectacular defeat of the Persians at Salamis in 480 led to the formation of a more permanent alliance. Three years later negotiations, led by Aristides of Athens, began on the Greek island of Delos. The result was the Delian League, a sort of ancient equivalent to NATO.

Few records remain of this initial meeting and historians are not even clear which city-states, apart from Athens, were the founders of the League. We do know that within a few years, almost all of the Ionian Greek cities had joined it as a way of guaranteeing their freedom from Persian domination.

At its height the Delian League numbered some two hundred members which met annually on Delos. Athens was its undisputed leader and gradually used the alliance as a springboard for its own imperial ambitions. By 454, when the League's treasury was transferred to Athens and used to fund monuments of imperial splendor such as the Parthenon, it had become an empire in all but name. Five years later a permanent peace was made with the Persians and its very reason for existing was no longer valid, but by then most of the alliance had already lost its autonomy to Athens.

The League and the power it gave Athens over the rest of Greece were to become one of the major reasons for the Peloponnesian War against Sparta and its allies.

**The Buildings of the Acropolis**

The winding rocky path that led up to the Acropolis was surrounded by numerous small shrines, including one to the god Pan, who had appeared to the runner Phidippides before the battle of Marathon.

At its top was the Propylaeum, an entryway and façade that formed the gateway to the Acropolis. Once inside the 'sacred precinct' the most fabulous building was the Parthenon, the surviving ruins of which are what most people associate with Ancient Greece.

The Parthenon was started in 447 BC and completed some fifteen years later. It housed both a treasury and a sanctuary to Athena, in which was placed a fantastic 12-meter high ivory and gold statue of the goddess Athena, called the Athena Parthenos.

Numerous smaller temples and shrines dedicated to both mythical ancestors and Greek gods were also to be found on the Acropolis. These included the Temple of Athena Nike, as well as the huge imposing statute of Athena Promachos, which stood 10 meters tall and could be seen from some 5 kilometers out to sea.

Combining three buildings into one structure, the other great building of the Acropolis was the Erechtheum. It contained shrines and sites whose origin stretched back to Mycenean times, and it was here, according to Ancient Greek mythology, that the goddess Athena had defeated the sea-god Poseidon in her battle to win possession of the city. Within the temple also dwelt the goddess' sacred snake.

**The Parthenon**

Started in 447, the Parthenon was masterminded by Pericles who took personal responsibility for the whole project.

It featured numerous architectural innovations, and sat on a base 70 meters long and 26 meters wide. Constructed in the 'Doric' style it had 17 columns along its length and eight columns along its width, each of which was over 10 meters high and 2 meters in diameter.

Right-angled buildings tend to create an optical illusion that can make them look top heavy. To compensate for this effect, the Parthenon's columns utilise an architectural effect called entasis, and get gradually thinner from the middle up.

The magnificent figures carved into the space between the top of the columns and the rooftop are some of the finest ever example of ancient sculpture. Lord Elgin, a British diplomat, removed many of these from the ruins in 1801. Shipped back to Britain, they are now housed in the British Museum, whose ownership of them has been disputed ever since.

Other striking parts of the temples that have survived include the Parthenon Frieze. Only two and a half inches thick at its maximum depth it depicts a procession of 360 noble Athenians, as well as numerous animals and gods. A pinnacle of art, barely visible in its original position, the Parthenon Frieze stood 1 meter tall and would have encircled almost the whole building's upper walls, making its total length 160 metres.

A master sculpture named Phidias was responsible for several of the elements of the Parthenon Frieze, as well as the overall design of the Parthenon itself. Sadly, his most glorious sculpted figure no longer survives. A fantastic figure of the goddess Athena, decorated in gold and ivory, stood over 12 meters high in the very center of the building. Such was the wealth on this statue (it cost as much to create as the Parthenon itself) it had the dual role of providing an emergency treasury for Athens if money run low.

The Parthenon was completed around 438 BC, well ahead of schedule. Despite this Pericles' opponents tried to prosecute Phidias for embezzlement of funds, and he was later forced into exile. The charge does not appear to have blighted his later career: he went on to build an even greater statue in the same style as his Athena. Although it too has been lost to history, Phidias' Statue of Zeus at Olympia was even more glorious, becoming one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

**Sophists**

The first major thinker to move to Athens from abroad was Anaxagoras. Arriving in 464 BC, he became a friend of Pericles and outraged religious opinion by claiming (correctly) that the moon was lit by reflected sunlight.

He was followed nearly 20 years later by Protagoras, who also became an associate of Pericles, as well as the leading figure of a loose collection of thinkers called (by their opponents) the Sophists.

Arguing that 'man is the measure of all things', the Sophists were skeptical about the existence of the gods and taught a variety of subjects, including mathematics, grammar, physics, political philosophy, ancient history, music, and astronomy. However, they were best known for teaching rhetoric, the skill of arguing with conviction. Because of this their talents were much in demand by aspiring politicians.

The Sophists did not all believe or follow the same things. For instance, some Sophists believed in democracy, while others argued that 'might is right' and advocated rule by oligarchies and tyrants. Most of what we know of the Sophists comes from Socrates' pupil, Plato, who portrays them in a very negative light because they accepted fees and claimed that virtues could be taught.

Nevertheless some of the Sophists, like Protagoras, were very idealistic. During the Peloponnesian War, he defied new laws restricting what could be taught and as a result many of his books were destroyed in the first known book burning. Sent into exile, he was lost at sea in 411 BC.

**The Houses of Athens**

Athenian houses were, for the most part, fairly simple. Many of them would have been attached to workshops and stores, and built around a courtyard in which the family's religious shrine would be set up. A typical house would have had a kitchen, a storage room, an animal shed, possibly a bathroom, and a lounge-type room for men's gatherings. The upstairs rooms (if they had them) would have housed women, children and, if they were reasonably wealthy, slaves. Because of the demand for space there would have been only minor differences in size between a commoner's and an aristocrat's house, though a commoner's house might be home to more than one family as well as his animals (including chickens, goats, donkeys, pigs and cows).

The main difference between the houses of commoners and the houses of aristocrats is that the latter would be located in the city's wealthier districts. However, because art was seen as a public and not a private activity, their houses tended not to be lavishly decorated. Instead aristocratic wealth was expressed in clothing, jewelry, the number of slaves they owned, and the lavishness of the dinner parties they held.

Different parts of the city tended to be occupied by different tradesmen. For example, potters lived in Ceramicus, near the market, while tanners lived in Cydathen.

**The Theatre**

In the shadow of the Acropolis, on its south western side, was the Sanctuary of Dionysus, the world's first theatre. Plays were performed here regularly, probably on a monthly basis, but during the six-day annual festival in honor of the god Dionysus (called the 'City Dionysia') huge audiences would cram into the building to witness and judge the dramatic competitions that were at the center of Athenian public life.

Built in 490 BC, the Sanctuary of Dionysus replaced a wooden theatre stand in the agora after it collapsed killing many spectators. It was later rebuilt in marble, and then partially rebuilt again by the Romans in the second century BC.

**Intellectual Life in Athens During it’s Height**

Because of its democracy and reputation for openness, Athens became a magnet for new thinking during the 5th century BC, playing host to a remarkable collection of individuals whose unique contributions to learning have formed much of the foundation of Western civilization.

Thinkers, called Sophists, migrated to the city from their traditional homes on the coast of Western Turkey. Historians, such as Herodotus, moved to the city to complete their researches. Athens' homegrown talent, its playwrights, used the new theatres to examine what it really meant to be human.

Whereas the traditional center of intellectual life in Ancient Greece had been the symposium, the drinking parties held by wealthy aristocrats, in Athens the focus of intellectual enquiry began to shift. Places such as the agora (marketplace) and theatre also became important - and less exclusive - venues for new thinking and discussions, especially after the philosopher Socrates took to the streets in his never-ending pursuit of the truth.

Thus by the time Athens had reached its height in the 430's BC, its greatest democratic leader, Pericles, could quite reasonably declare:

'Our whole city is an education, for our citizens excel all men in versatility, resourcefulness and brilliance'.

**The Historians**

Herodotus was born in the city of Halicarnassus. He wrote The Histories, the world's first history book, probably during the last few years of Pericles' life. Primarily an account of Greece in the 6th and early 5th centuries BC, Herodotus' Histories is the foundation on which much of our present-day understanding of the era is based.

Twenty-five years Herodotus' junior, the general and historian Thucydides began his account of the Peloponnesian War in about 424 BC. Probably written after he was exiled from Athens for failing to capture the city of Amphipolis, Herodotus' work differs significantly from that of Herodotus.

More interested in methodology and expressing history's complex processes, his writings had the stated purpose of giving an accurate portrayal of events so that people might avoid repeating past mistakes. Because he was writing about his present, or very recent past, Thucydides is often credited with being the world's first journalist rather than an historian.

**GENERAL**

**Greek Women; Marriage and Divorce**

Most young Greek women would be married at about the age of fourteen to a man roughly twice their age. Prior to the marriage ceremony the couple would probably have met only a few times, and while the bride would normally be a virgin, the husband almost certainly was not.

Whether the couple found each other attractive was only of secondary importance, and the young bride would have been selected mainly for her dowry (the payment her father would give her husband), her fertility, and her skills at such things as weaving. Despite this, the marriage ceremony was itself rather romantic and would be sealed when the husband lifted his bride's veil and stared into her eyes.

Once married a respectable Greek wife would be confined primarily to the household since even shopping was a husband's job. Her opportunities for socializing were therefore quite restricted, though wives might meet their friends at the local water fountain, during major festivals, and for the performance of cult ceremonies.

Divorce was not uncommon and had little of the stigma that later Christian civilization would attach to it, and women could, and frequently did, remarry.

**Hetaira and Courtesans**

The one major area of commerce not exclusively in the hands of men was prostitution. Unlike today, their was little social stigma in a man visiting a brothel, and prostitutes were often hired for symposia, or dinner parties.

Ordinary prostitutes were called pornai, a word from which we get the modern term pornography and which literally means 'the depiction of prostitutes'. Such women would be slaves who worked for a brothel. The brothel's owner, usually a man but sometimes a woman, paid tax directly to the city for the 'work' undertaken in it.

Above these normal prostitutes, who were paid very little for their services, was a superior class of courtesans, called hetairai (meaning 'female companion'). These women often charged as much as 100 times more than their pornai counterparts because they were refined women of style and cultivation, rather like Japanese Geisha girls. Most courtesans were foreigners or non-Athenian Greeks (called metics) and it was rare indeed for an Athenian woman of any status to engage in such a profession, despite the potential riches it offered.

**Women and Myth**

The stories and myths associated with women tell us a lot more about the preoccupations of Greek men than they do the about the opinions and imaginations of Greek women. Women were the givers of life in an age when the processes of conception, fertility and childbirth were still deeply mysterious and little understood. As a result, many of the mythical stories about women manifest signs of a deep male anxiety about feminine power.

The ancient Greek equivalent of Eve is Pandora. She lifts the lid of a forbidden box and brings to an end a 'Golden Age' of gods and men. However, Pandora is only the first in a long tradition of female villains that includes Helen of Troy, who caused the legendary Trojan War; Medea, the woman who murdered her own children after being abandoned by Jason (of the Argonauts); and most famous of all, the savage Amazons.

By the 5th century BC, attitudes toward female power had become rather less damning, and in some of the plays of the era women play genuinely positive roles. A prime example is Sophocles' tragedy Antigone, where a woman becomes history's first conscientious objector, and in Aristophanes' comedy Lysistrata, where the heroine leads a successful 'sex strike' forcing the men of Athens and Sparta to abandon a senseless war.

However, by far the most striking play of the period is Euripides' tragedy The Bacchae, a psychologically complex tale of how the women of Thebes become possessed by the irrational power of the god Dionysus.

**The Olympic Games- The Events**

Boxing was fought without rounds until one side was either knocked out or admitted defeat. There were no weight divisions, and opponents were selected by random lot. Boxers did not wear gloves, but instead wore himantes, pieces of leather tied around the hands and wrists leaving the fingers free.

Chariot racing was a sport that only the wealthiest contestants could take part in since the cost of maintaining a chariot was prohibitively expensive. Chariot racers competed in various courses, some of which involved potentially lethal obstacles.

Horse racing was divided into separate competitions for adult horses and foals. They took place away from the athletic stadium in a large arena called the hippodrome. Stirrups were not used and the usual distance run was 1200 meters.

Pankration was a form of single combat that combined boxing, wrestling and judo. The only banned moves were biting and gouging the eyes, nose or mouth with fingernails.

Running was organised into several events. Chief among them was the stadion, which was a 192 metre sprint the length of the stadium, though there were also distance running competitions.

The hoplite race was originally conducted in full hoplite armour weighing 50-60 lbs, but by the 5th century BC competitors wore only a symbolic helmet and shield.

Wrestling required three throws of one's opponent. Biting was not allowed and neither were genital holds, but breaking an opponents' fingers was acceptable.

The pentathlon was the event from which the modern Olympics derives many of its events, including the discus, javelin, long jump, running and wrestling. Aristotle said of it "a body capable of enduring all efforts, either of the racecourse or of bodily strength... This is why the athletes in the pentathlon are most beautiful."

**Oracle at Delphi**

Dating back to 1400 BC, the Oracle of Delphi was the most important shrine in all Greece, and in theory all Greeks respected its independence. Built around a sacred spring, Delphi was considered to be the omphalos - the center (literally navel) of the world.

People came from all over Greece and beyond to have their questions about the future answered by the Pythia, the priestess of Apollo. And her answers, usually cryptic, could determine the course of everything from when a farmer planted his seedlings, to when an empire declared war.

Arguments over the correct interpretation of an oracle were common, but the oracle was always happy to give another prophecy if more gold was provided. A good example is the famous incident before the Battle of Salamis when the Pythia first predicted doom and later predicted that a 'wooden wall' (interpreted by the Athenians to mean their ships) would save them.

The lack of a strict religious dogma associated with the worship of Greek gods also encouraged scholars to congregate at Delphi, and it became a focal point for intellectual enquiry, as well as an occasional meeting place where rivals could negotiate.

Delphi became a fantastic showcase of art treasures and all Greek states would send rich gifts to keep the Oracle on their side. It finally came to an end in the 4th century AD when a newly Christian Rome proscribed its prophesying.

**Hoplites**

Hoplite infantrymen were the military ideal of ancient Greece and were recruited from the wealthy middling ranks of society, particularly the farmers.

They wore bronze armor breastplates, helmets, shin guards, shoulder pads, and sometimes foot protectors, thigh guards and forearm guards. With an eight-foot long spear, a short sword, and a bronze-covered shield, the total weight of their equipment was therefore in the region of 60 to 70 lbs: almost half their own bodyweight!

They fought primarily in a phalanx, a tightly packed shield and spear formation that might be several ranks deep and many soldiers wide. A highly successful 'war machine', the phalanx was used primarily against other Greeks who obeyed the same honor-bound rules of warfare. Initially it was also extremely successful against foreign opponents, such as the Persians, though in time they adopted tactics to overcome the close combat favored by Greek armies.

During the 5th century BC, swords became increasing shorter as tactics changed in favor of less armor, increased agility, and closer combat. This was partly in response to the threat of Persian archers, who had forced the Greeks to run at them in full armor during the battles of Marathon in 490 and Plataea 479. These hoplite runs were celebrated in the Olympics as the hoplitodromos, or 'armed race'.

**The Tactics Used at Marathon**

The Athenians set up camp on the southern edge of the plain of Marathon and from the Sanctuary of Heracles, a position on nearby Mount Agriliki, they could keep a watchful eye on the road to Athens. The approach to this position was narrow, preventing a flanking maneuver by the Persian cavalry and keeping their forces stuck on the edge of the plain.

As the Athenians waited, a thousand additional men arrived from the town of Plataea, a closely allied town. Ionian Greek conscripts, drafted into the Persian army, are believed to have further aided the Athenian cause by passing on information about the Persian cavalry which, after a four day standoff, set off on a separate expedition to reach Athens by sea.

Soon after dawn the next day the Athenians advanced 'at the double', running in their heavy hoplite armor against Persian bowmen, whose arrows became increasingly effective within the last two hundred meters. Once the gap was narrowed, however, the superior skills and armor of the Greeks quickly became apparent...

The most important of the Athenian war leaders was Miltiades, a powerful and fabulously wealthy aristocrat who had once been tyrant of several Greek colonies on the coast of Turkey. It was probably he, more than anyone else, who persuaded the other Athenian generals of the need to confront the Persians in open battle.

The Athenian force was strongest on its two flanks and weakest in its middle. So when the flanks routed the Persians they were facing, instead of pursuing them, they returned to assist the weakened center. In this way they achieved victory along the whole front, thanks to superior discipline. The figure of 192 Athenian casualties is probably accurate, though this does not take into account the casualties among the Plateans, nor the (probably) small number of slaves who fought in the battle in exchange for their freedom. It is thought that the reported figure of 6400 Persian slain was probably an exaggeration, but not excessively so.

Despite their overwhelming victory the Athenians had little time for celebration. Almost immediately they were forced to return to Athens to thwart the cavalry force sent against the city. In the event it fled back to Persia.

**The Different Types of Greek Drama**

The Ancient Greeks took their entertainment very seriously and used drama as a way of investigating the world they lived in, and what it meant to be human.

The three genres of drama were comedy, satyr plays, and most important of all, tragedy.

Comedy: The first comedies were mainly satirical and mocked men in power for their vanity and foolishness. The first master of comedy was the playwright Aristophanes. Much later Menander wrote comedies about ordinary people and made his plays more like sit-coms.

Tragedy: Tragedy dealt with the big themes of love, loss, pride, the abuse of power and the fraught relationships between men and gods. Typically the main protagonist of a tragedy commits some terrible crime without realizing how foolish and arrogant he has been. Then, as he slowly realizes his error, the world crumbles around him. The three great playwrights of tragedy were Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

Aristotle argued that tragedy cleansed the heart through pity and terror, purging us of our petty concerns and worries by making us aware that there can be nobility in suffering. He called this experience 'catharsis'.

Satyr Plays: These short plays were performed between the acts of tragedies and made fun of the plight of the tragedy's characters. The satyrs were mythical half-human, half-goat figures and actors in these plays wore large phalluses for comic effect. Few examples of these plays survive. They are classified by some authors as tragicomic, or comedy dramas.

**The Agora**

The agora, or marketplace, was the major focus of everyday affairs in the city and was particularly spacious - about 100 meters by 200 meters. Trade of all kinds took place here, including not just 'ordinary' goods, but barbershops, bathhouses, perfume vendors, drinking establishments and brothels.

Custom dictated that respectable women and young men should be absent from the agora until after midday, though in fact lower class women would often be present from the early morning, selling such things as food and bread. Bread-sellers were notoriously loud-mouthed and vulgar.

**The Gymnasia**

The word gymnasium is derived from gumnazo, meaning exercise, and gumnos, meaning naked or loin-clothed. The gymnasia were the ancient Greek equivalent of a sports centre, and several were located just outside Athens' city walls. The ancient Greeks regarded a healthy body almost as highly as a good education, and young men of wealthy background would spend a good portion of each day exercising there. Favourite sports included wrestling, javelin and discus throwing, and boxing.

Gymnasia usually consisted of a large exercise yard surrounded by a series of outhouses including changing rooms, practice rooms and baths. Athletes wore no clothes and it was common practice for them to oil or dust their bodies before and after taking part in sports activities.

**What the Olympic Games were actually Like**

The games were held every fourth year, with the four year span being called an Olympiad. From what we know of them they were brutal spectacles, with few rules and a strong emphasis on proving the participants' masculinity. Women were not even allowed to be spectators, and the penalty if they were caught was to be thrown off a nearby cliff!

Athletes competed in the games as individuals, not as members of a national or city-state team, and evidence suggests that the highly individualistic and heroic ethos of Greek culture encouraged a sizeable number of the participants to cheat. Those competitors or event officials who were caught cheating or accepting bribes were heavily fined and the money was used to build statues of Zeus, called the Zanes (eventually there was a row of 16 of them).

At first most competitors were drawn from the wealthiest, aristocratic class of Greeks since the time required for training precluded participation in everyday work. As time went on the Olympics became less exclusive, and poorer athletes were able to find 'sponsorship' in order that they might also compete.