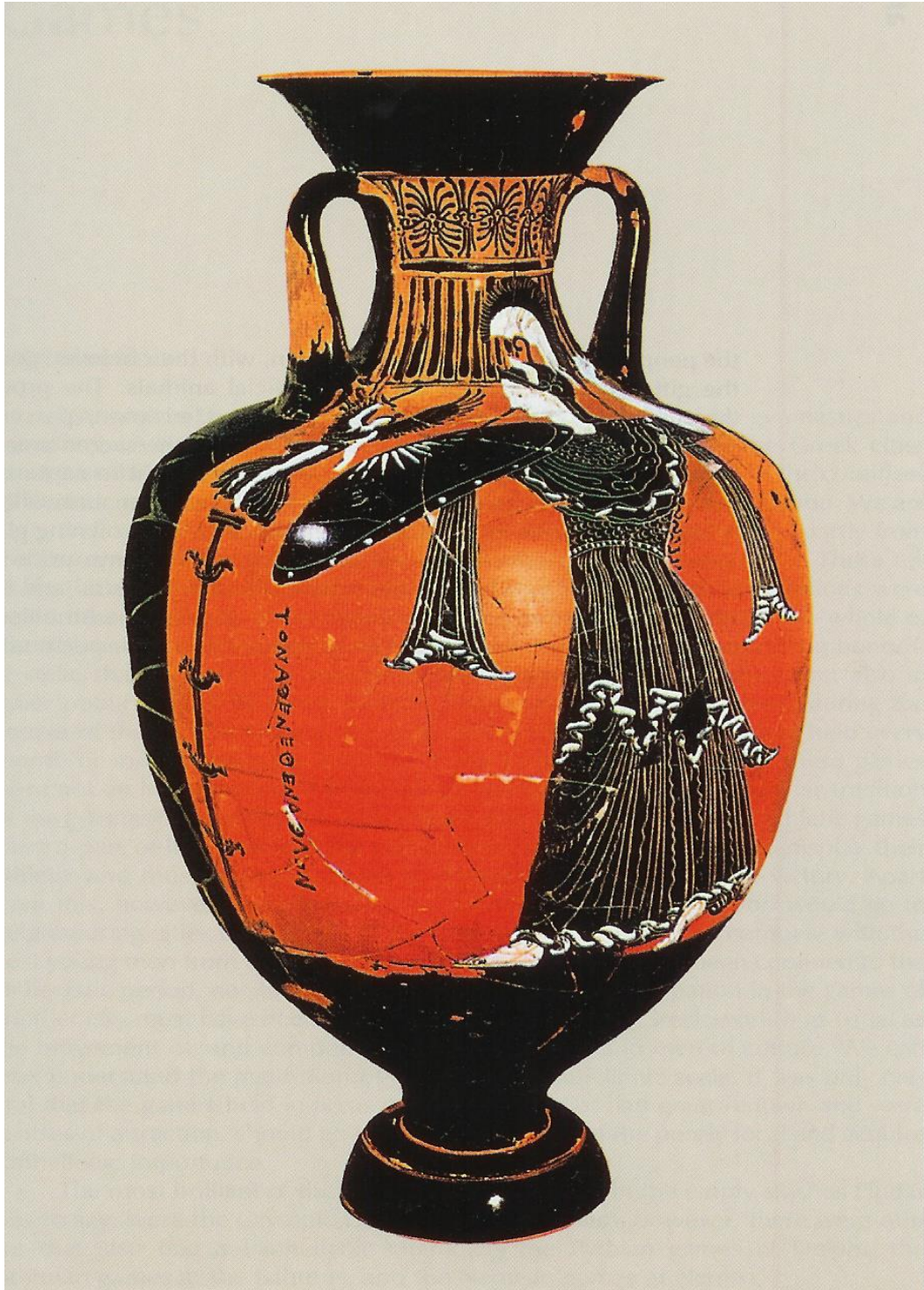


# Strand 1:

## Part II: Athens Daily-Life



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## 5. Athens



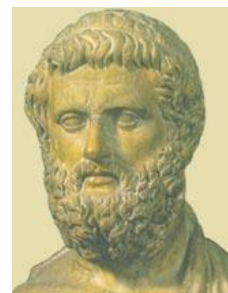
### The Beginning of Democracy

Besides these famous myths and legends, the Ancient Greeks have had such a huge influence on our languages, cultures and societies today. Take politics, which comes from the Ancient Greek word *polis*, meaning city-state or community. Many of the other basic political terms in our everyday vocabulary are borrowed from the ancient Greeks: monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, tyranny and of course democracy.

Throughout history, people have recognised the need for a system of governing. Mostly there were absolute rulers, chieftains, kings or Pharaohs who have all the power. In earliest times the Athenians were ruled by kings and aristocrats called the Eupatrids. Their laws favoured the rich, the poor could be sold as slaves if they did not pay their debts. Kings gradually disappeared and power was in the hands of a small number of families, who maintained their position by ownership of the best land and restricting membership of the council. This type of government is called an oligarchy i.e. rule of the few, which comes from two Ancient Greek words, *oligos*, few, and *archon*, ruler.

**Draco** introduced written law in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The ordinary people now had a constitution, which gave them the right to judge their grievances. Magistrates now did not have to be Eupatrids. The lives of the common people were improved but the laws were still very harsh. He punished trivial and serious crimes with death. We use the term “draconian” today to describe a severe law.

**Solon** was a Eupatrid and a very wise man. Solon’s great contribution was his new code of laws. He became dictator, and changed every law except that on homicide. He also helped the poor, as no longer could a man be enslaved for being in debt. A man could be on the Council now by his own virtue and not just by birth. After Solon made the laws he left Athens to allow them be tested. He visited Croesus, King of Lydia. Croesus asked him, “Who was the happiest man on earth?” Solon replied that one could not call oneself happy until after one had had a peaceful death.

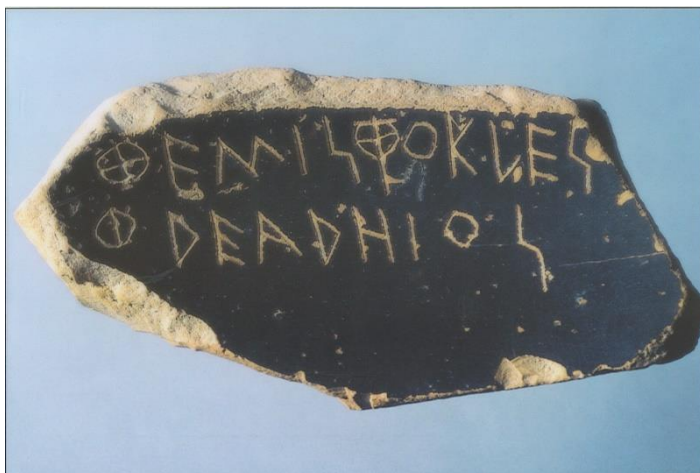




**Pisistratus** also was a Eupatrid. He was a Tyrant becoming absolute ruler by seizing the Acropolis and the government. He allowed existing laws to remain and administered the city well. He was driven out by the other nobles but he got back in by a trick. He dressed a beautiful, tall woman in armour to look like Athena. He gave her a chariot in which she drove him to the Acropolis. The Athenians believed it was Athena and accepted Pisistratus back again. He was important because he continued the movement towards democracy started by Solon.



**Cleisthenes** was a member of the famous Alcmaeonidae family. He realised that the *polis* (state) was being threatened by the aristocratic tribes who were becoming too powerful. So he created ten new tribes and each tribe received an equal number of parishes. He also divided Attica into, city, inland and coast and gave the tribes parishes from each area.



If someone was becoming too powerful he could be “ostracised”. His name could be written on a broken piece of pottery (*Ostrakon*) and the man whose name appeared most often was ostracised and banished from Athens for ten years.

# Athens and Democracy

## The Agora

The Agora or market place was also the political and legal centre of Athens. Here were located the government offices and the law courts but also shops and stalls of the traders. There was also the fountain where the women came each morning to draw water, to do their washing and to meet and gossip. There were stoas, open fronted covered buildings where business could be done, where friends could meet and would philosophers come together to discuss their views. The Agora was planted with plane trees to give shade. Each summer, at the time of the festival of Athena, the Agora was turned into a sports stadium, with a racetrack running down the centre.

## Pericles 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.



By the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC there was a democracy in Athens. All the adult male citizens of Athens could vote on every law – like a referendum today. It was possible to run the country in this way because the country was so small. As only men could be full citizens, there may have been no more than about 50,000 people allowed to vote. If you weren't born a citizen it was very difficult to become one. Being a citizen meant you had to help run the country – it was seen as your duty. This assembly of citizens was called the *Ekklesia*.

## The Ekklesia

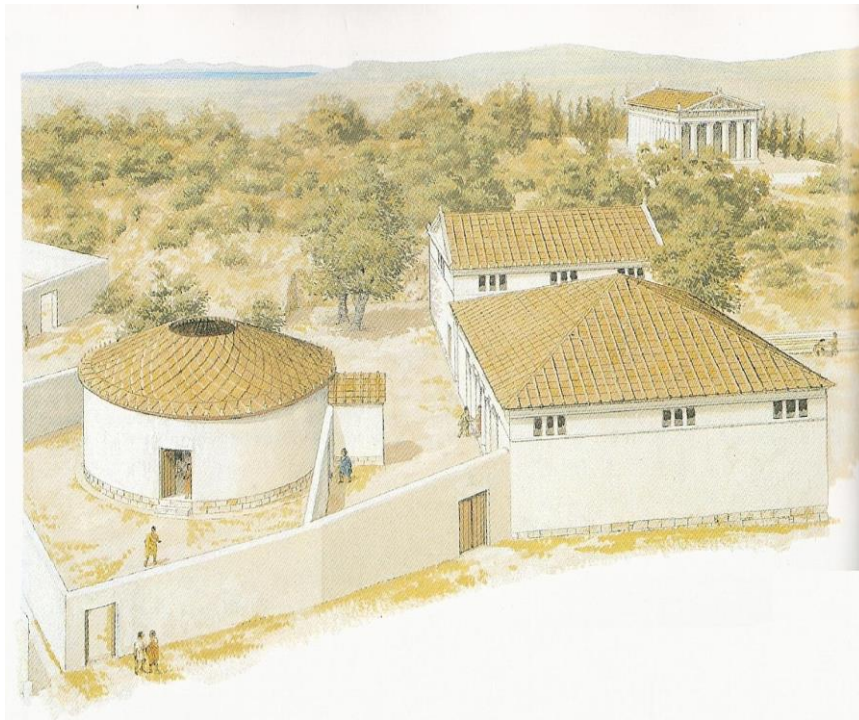
A minimum of 6,000 citizens had to be present before an assembly could take place. The *Ekklesia* met once every nine days. It was held out in the open, on a great artificial platform on the slopes of the Pnyx, a hill to the west of the Acropolis. Not all citizens could be bothered to go to meetings and sometimes the council sent out a pair of slaves carrying between them a long rope covered in wet red paint, to round up the people to vote. Red paint on clothes could result in a person being fined for showing lack of public spirit. When enough citizens had gathered on the Pnyx, anyone over 18 who wanted to say something about the proposed law could climb up on to the speaker's platform and made a speech. The laws were generally very sensible, enabling the citizens to live peacefully together. For example, if your dog bit people, you had to chain him up on a chain no longer than two and a half metres. If you were caught hitting your parents, you could lose your vote in the Assembly. There were laws to protect children too, for example, no school could start before dawn or go on after sunset.



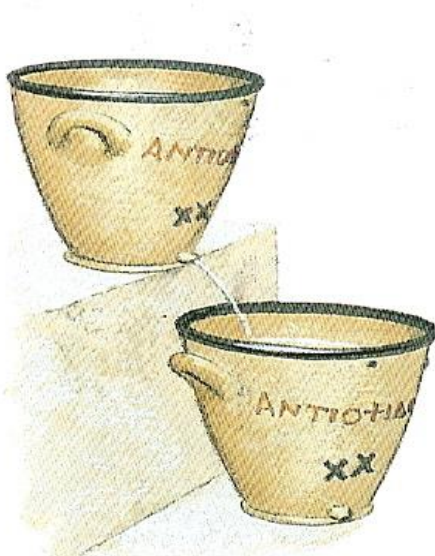
*The Pnyx where the Ekklesia met. It had an artificial platform built in 404/3 BC. It had two stairways leading up to it.*

## The Boule or Council

The *Boule* was a council made up of 500 citizens selected by lot from each of the ten tribes and held office for a year. A member could only hold office twice, and not in successive years. Each tribal group was on duty for thirty-six days at a time. They had to call a meeting at least four times during their thirty-six days and had to prepare the agenda. The members of the *Boule* were paid and those on duty were fed at public expense in the *tholos*, a round building. The *Boule* was in charge of deciding what matters should be put before the *Ekklesia*, they scrutinised candidates for coming elections, and they checked accounts and were also in charge of the navy, dockyards and cavalry.



## Courts and Juries



Water clock

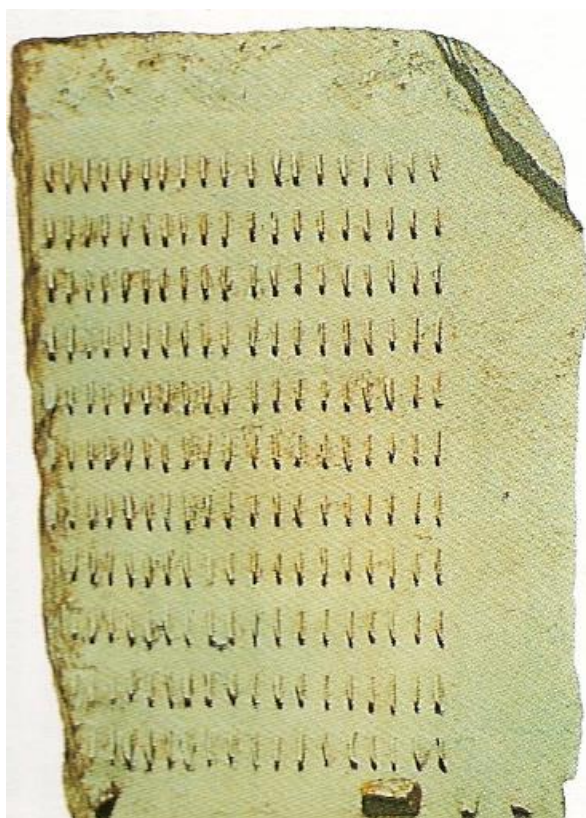
If you were accused of breaking a law, you would be tried in court by a jury. The Athenians really seemed to have enjoyed starting law-suits. There were sometimes as many as ten courts sitting at once, each with a jury of not less than 200 men. Any citizen could volunteer to sit on a jury, which was chosen by lot. The final members were always chosen at the last moment, by lot so that they couldn't be bribed to favour one side or the other. Professional lawyers wrote the speeches, but it was the people involved in the case that read them out. They were timed by a water-clock called a *klepsydra*. A slave pulled the plug out of the upper bowl when the speech began, and the speaker had to finish when the water did.



### The Selection of juries

The method of selecting jurors and judges was extremely complicated. Its aim was to prevent the accused identifying the jurors in advance and bribing them. Each citizen was on jury service for a year. He was issued with a bronze ticket (*pinakion*) with his full name, father's name and his tribe and an official stamp. On the day of the trial those on jury duty gathered at dawn in the Agora. The magistrate placed their tickets in a basket according to tribe.

Next the magistrate placed the tickets in the allotting device. It was a rectangular stone block with ten vertical columns and many horizontal rows of tiny slots, into which the tickets were fitted. Alongside this grid was a bronze tube with its top in the form of a funnel and with a handle at the bottom.



Part of an allotting machine found in the Agora.

The tickets of the first tribe were placed in the first column, and then the second tribe's tickets were placed in the second and so on. Then a number of white marbles equal to one tenth of the number of jurors required was mixed with black marbles up to the total number of complete horizontal rows of tickets. The marbles were then put in the funnel and the magistrate released them one at a time. If a white marble came out first the candidates represented by the tickets on that row were selected. If the marble was black these candidates were dismissed. This process was continued until the required number of jurors was selected. In this way all the tribes were equally represented.



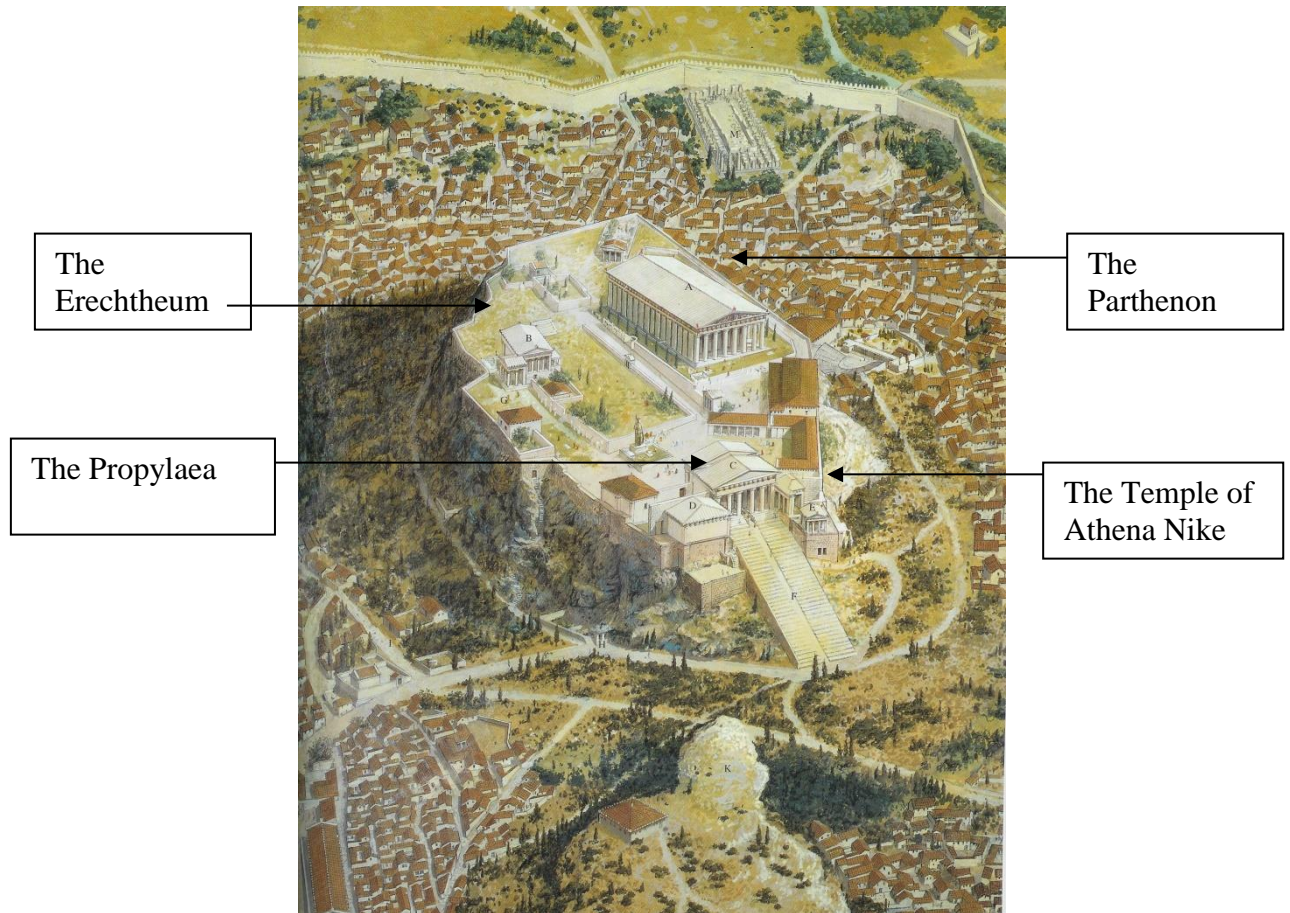
After this each juror was given a bronze disc telling him which court he must attend, he returned this after the trial and was paid for his jury service. Judges were selected in a similar way.

The juries voted with little bronze ballots shaped like spinning tops. Each juryman was given two. One had a hollow shaft and one was solid. The hollow one meant 'guilty' and the solid one 'innocent'. At the end of the trial each juryman dropped one of his ballots in a box, and the other into a discard-bin.

The most severe punishment was death, by beheading or being made to take poison. The next worse were banishment or a heavy fine.

A reconstruction of the funnel for the black and white marbles, the ballot box, and the bronze ballots.

## The Acropolis and its Buildings

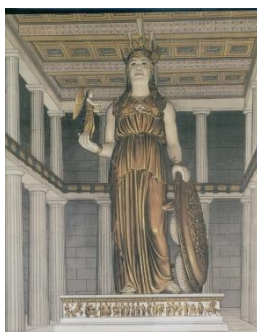


### The Acropolis

Acropolis means 'high city' and is a rocky plateau that rises seventy metres and levels to a flat top 300 metres long by 170 metres wide.

### Greek Temples

The purpose of the temple was not, as in a Christian church, to hold large congregations. The altar was outside, and any gathering of worshippers would take place there. The purpose of the temple was to house the statue of the god or goddess in the rectangular room called the *naos*. The Parthenon was built in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. and was commissioned by Pericles.



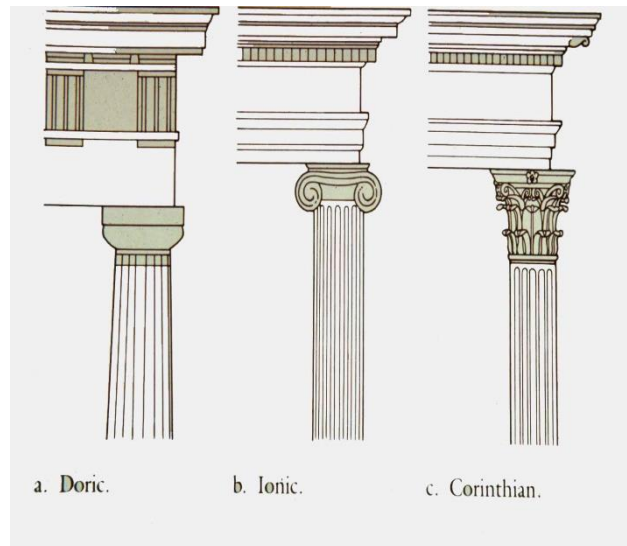
The temple is dedicated to Athena Parthenos (Athena the Maiden), as she was the patron goddess of Athens. The Architects are Ictinus and Callicrates and the man in charge of all of the sculpture was Phidias. He made the magnificent gold and ivory statue of Athena, which was placed in the *naos*.



## The Architectural orders

Temples were built in a particular Architectural order. The Parthenon is unusual because it is built in the Doric order but has features belonging to the Ionic order.

The easiest way to distinguish the order is by the top or capital of the columns. The Doric order is plain, the Ionic has a ram's horns pattern, and the Corinthian is more decorative, with carvings of acanthus leaves as though they were growing from the top.



Columns from the three orders have always been much used in architecture, right up through modern times.

Between the top of the columns and the roof was an area called the frieze and was usually decorated by stone carvings. If the temple was Doric the frieze had a set of panels called metopes, these were separated by stone slabs called triglyphs. If the Temple was in the Ionic order the frieze was continuous. The triangular pediments formed by the shape of the roof at the ends of the temples were also filled with sculptures.

## The Propylaea - The Great Gateway

This was the great roofed gateway and entrance to the Acropolis. The path up to the Acropolis follows a zig-zag course until it enters the Propylaea. This gateway was approached by a massive ramp. The annual procession, celebrating the birthday of Athena, would pass through the Propylaea on its way up to onto the Acropolis. The architectural order is Doric and the architect was Mnesicles. It was built with Pentelic marble.

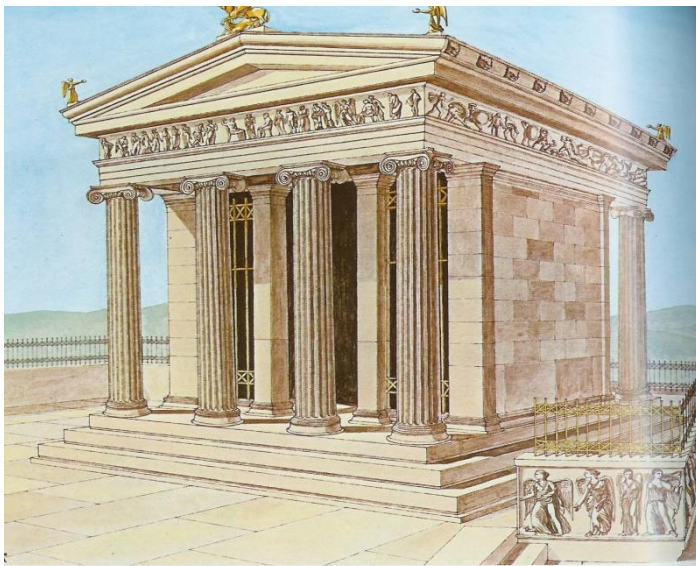
## The Erechtheum

It was built in the Ionic order and was dedicated to Athena Polias (Protector of the city), Poseidon, and Erechtheus. Erechtheus was the first king of Athens. Many other gods were also worshipped here. The Pandroseum or Sacred Enclosure was an open-air area. This is where the sacred olive tree given by Athena grew. The ground nearby had the marks from Poseidon's trident.

The Erechtheum consisted of two semi-detached temples, one facing east and the other larger one facing north. Because of the steep slope of the ground, the east-facing temple was over 3 metres (10 feet) higher than the other. Each temple had a porch supported on elaborately decorated ionic columns. There was also a Caryatid porch. Caryatids are columns in the shape of women.



### Temple of Athena Nike



This temple was built in the Ionic order. *Nike* is the Ancient Greek word for victory. This temple was built to commemorate the Greek victory over the Persians in 5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE.

The architect is Callicrates and it is built with Pentelic marble. The *naos* had a statue of Athena Nike with a pomegranate and helmet.

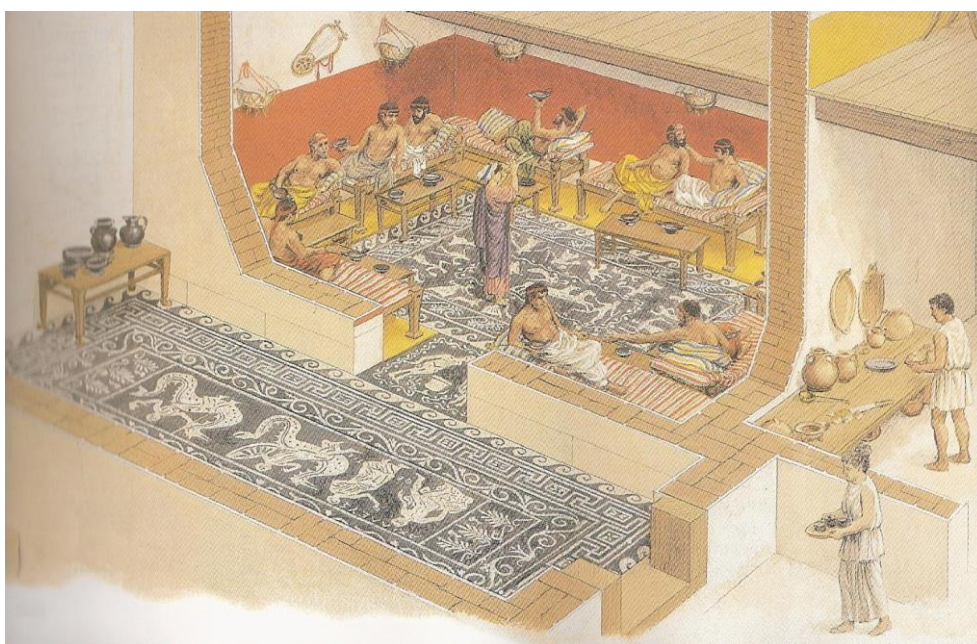


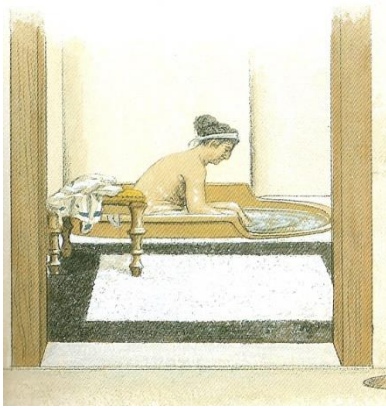
## The Houses of Athens

If you visited a Greek house first thing you would come to would be a very solid, impressive front door with metal hinges and bolts. It would be made of heavy, carved wood faced with thin marble. Inside, all the rooms opened on to the central courtyard, and some of them also connected with each other.



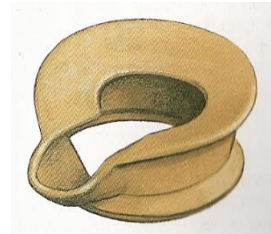
The Greek word for house is *oikia*. The first rooms you would come to in the house were called the *andron*, or 'men's quarters'. These consisted of a large dining room, the master bedroom and the guest rooms. The women's rooms, the *gynaikon*, were usually nearer the back of the house. The wife often had a bedroom of her own, and a room for spinning and weaving. Nearby would be rooms for the children and slaves, several store rooms and if the owner of the house was wealthy a kitchen and bathroom. The Greeks did not cook much, except for important dinner parties.





Some houses had a special bathroom with a large stone or terracotta bath in it. Most bedrooms had a jug and basin, and you washed in cold water. There was no drainage or running water. If you were lucky you might have a well in the garden. If not, the slaves would have to fetch water from the nearest public spring or fountain.

The sanitary arrangements were quite primitive. There was a large pot, which the slaves had to empty several times a day usually into the gutter outside. There was



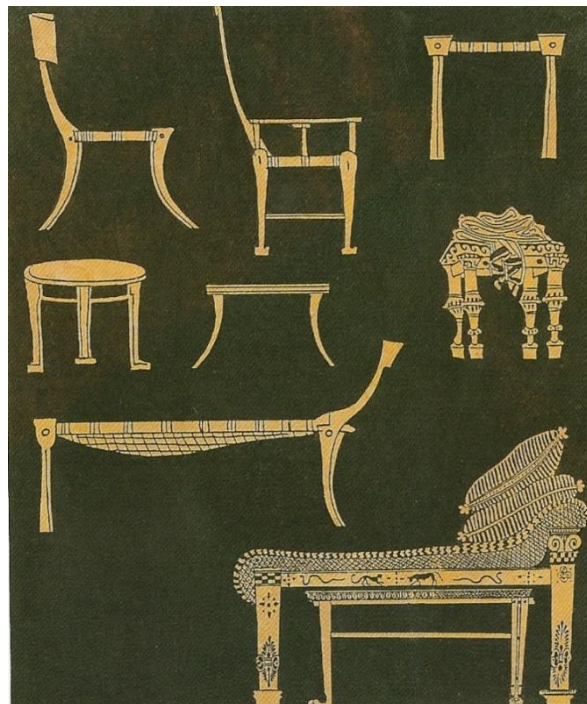
no sewage system in Athens. Instead, there were special officials whose job was to keep the city clean.

*Portable lavatory seat*

Their unfortunate slaves would wash the streets down every day from a watercart and remove the sewage, to dump it either in the sea or on farms outside the city.

The rooms in a Greek house were cool and dark, even on the hottest day. This was because the windows were so small and high up. In cold weather the windows were covered with curtains. The Athenians did not have much furniture but looked after it very well. There were two reasons for this. One was the dust, and the other was that every piece of furniture was hand-made, and therefore unique – no two pieces were identical. A good piece of carving or decorated work was valuable, and would be looked after very carefully.

The dining room furniture was the most important. At dinner-parties, the master of the house and his friends lay round the table on couches, facing inwards. They propped themselves up on their elbows and leaned against cushions. Tables were either round with three legs or rectangular with four. When the dinner party was over, the couches might be used in a different part of the house, as beds. They would be covered with fleeces and mattresses, to make them more comfortable. The Greeks covered themselves at night with quilts stuffed with feathers, just like ones today.



Various articles of furniture shown in Athenian vase paintings. Chairs have seats made of webbing. Similar webbing is used for beds and couches. A dining couch with table is also shown.

In each bedroom there would be a chair or a bench, a jug and basin, a chest and perhaps a polished metal mirror. There was no wardrobe, in fact there were very few cupboards anywhere in the house. Instead, there were plenty of chests and boxes, and hooks and shelves on the walls.



## The Symposium



The symposium or drinking party was very popular in Athens. It was for men only, and was more for drinking than eating, the guests often became so drunk that they had to be carried home by slaves. The woman of the house of course was not invited, but she and her slaves had to prepare garlands to give to the guests and decorate the *andron* with flowers. Usually a rose was hung above the table: a rose meant silence and reminded the guests that what they heard at dinner must go no further. The symposium appears to have been a rather casual affair, and gate-crashers were welcome. Slaves removed the guests' sandals, and they took their places on the couches along the walls. Finger bowls were placed on the small tables in front of the couches, most food was eaten with the fingers.

The Athenians were not great eaters. Bread formed a major part of the diet and was eaten at all meals. Thick soup made from beans and lentils was popular. Cheese, onions, olives, figs and garlic also formed a substantial part of the Athenian diet. Fish was eaten much more often than meat, which was expensive. After eating the guests washed their hands, wiping them on scraps of bread, which were then thrown on the floor, together with any bones for the dogs.

Undiluted wine was now brought round so that the guests could offer a libation to Dionysus, the wine god. The guests drank most of the wine in their cups and sprinkled the remaining drops on the ground, calling the god's name as they did so. They sang a hymn to the god and elected a *symposiarchos*, a lord of the feast who decided the proportion of wine to water in the bowl. Greeks normally drank wine diluted with water.

The Athenians loved a drinking game called *kottabos*. The player leant on his left elbow, hooked his right index finger into the handle of his wine cup, which had a few dregs left in the bottom. He then swung the cup round to send the dregs flying across the room. The object was to hit a tiny disc balanced on top of the lamp-stand. Players were judged by the elegance of their throwing as much as by its accuracy. Musicians were also hired to play the *diaulos* (double flute) and *lyre* (harp/guitar). Often there were dancers and acrobats as well.



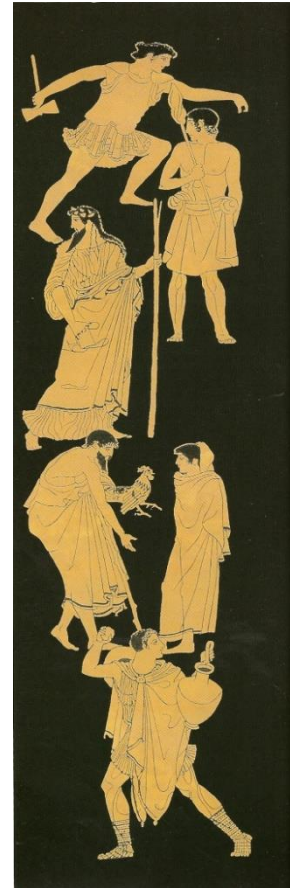
## Men's Dress and Grooming

Most Greek clothing was made of wool, but flax was also used, as was a coarse cloth called *sakkos* made from animal hair. Greek clothing was made from rectangular pieces of cloth. The basic article of clothing was the tunic. There were two types, the *exomis*, worn by slaves and those doing manual work. It was fastened at the left shoulder with a pin or a knot, leaving the right shoulder bare, and was tied at the waist with a girdle.

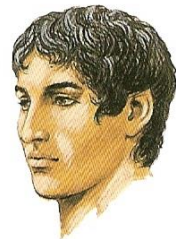
The Greek man also wore a *himation*, a large rectangular piece of woollen cloth, which he draped over his left shoulder, bringing the back end round under his right arm and across his front. It was then either passed back over his left shoulder or draped over his left arm. The surplus material hung down, covering his body right down to the lower leg. In cold weather it could be wrapped completely round the body, even covering the head.

There was also a cloak called a *chlamys*, often worn by soldiers. This was made of thicker material. It was draped round the shoulders and fastened at the throat with a clasp.

Athenian men's hair styles based on vases and sculptures. Young men usually wore their hair fairly short. Older men often had long hair and beards.

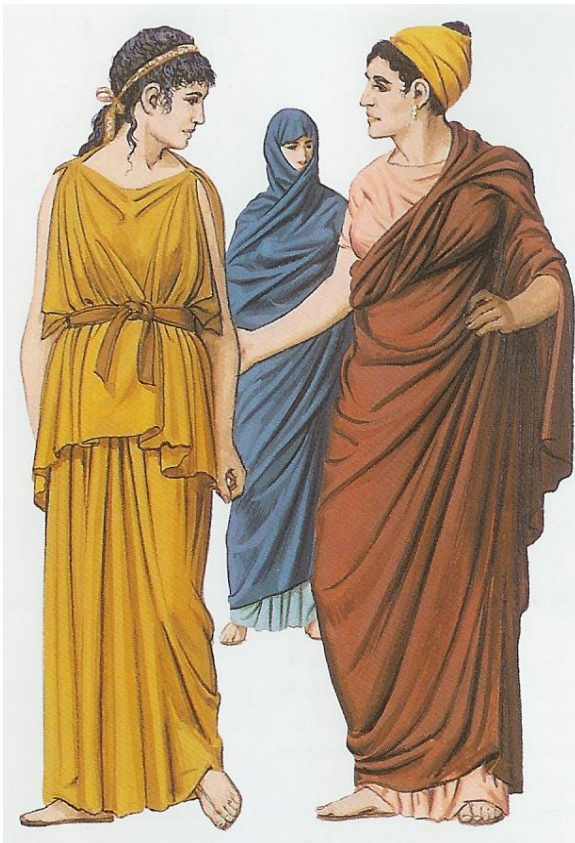


### Men's Hairstyles





## Women and Children in Greek society



### *A reconstruction of women's dress.*

The figure on the left is wearing the long tunic. The figure on the right is wearing a long tunic covered by a *himation* and a headscarf.

The figure in the centre has her *himation* wrapped round her.

The life of a typical Athenian woman seems restricted by modern western standards. She was not only largely confined to the house, but at times also to her own part of the house, an area known as the *gynaikon*. A wife's duty was to cook, weave and raise children. She was not expected to have a social life with her husband. Women were not specifically forbidden to go out, and could visit women friends in their homes. But respectable women would not make such visits alone and would be accompanied by at least one female slave.

It was customary for women to collect the water from the fountain and this was a popular place for women to socialise. However, in wealthier homes female slaves collected the water. Poorer women could also work by keeping stalls in the market.

## **From birth to marriage.**

The women of the family delivered babies. A Midwife was called only in emergencies. When the baby was born the father hung an olive branch on the front door of the house to announce the birth of a boy, or a strip of cloth for a girl.

The Athenians did not favour large families. A father would regard it as his civic duty to bring up all his sons but he might dispose of an unwanted daughter. Killing a baby was illegal in Athens but exposing a newborn baby (placing the baby out on a mountainside to die) was not forbidden. A child would be put into a clay pot and abandoned to the elements. Sometimes they were rescued and brought up by a childless couple.

About a week after the birth there was a ritual cleansing of the mother and any members who might have come in contact with her during her labour. Once she was purified she could return to her normal duties as a wife. At this stage too, the baby was formally recognised by its father and it now became illegal for the family to reject the child.

Poor women had to care for their own children but if a couple were reasonably well off they might have two or three slaves to care for the child. Boys would go off to school at about age seven where they would learn reading writing and arithmetic. They would also engage in physical education in the palaestra.

We do not know much about how much education Athenian girls received. If they came from a wealthy family it is likely that they were taught to read, write and play the lyre from a tutor. They only performed physical exercises at festivals for women and never in public as Spartan girls did. The Athenians were shocked at such a public display.

## **Marriage**

The marriage was a verbal contract between the father of the girl and the prospective groom. In many cases the couple would not have met, as Athenian girls led very sheltered lives. Most men were in their twenties but a girl was usually fourteen or fifteen – sometimes even younger! The girl had no say in whom she was to marry; she had to obey her father's wishes. The betrothal took place by a verbal contract – the bride did not even attend.

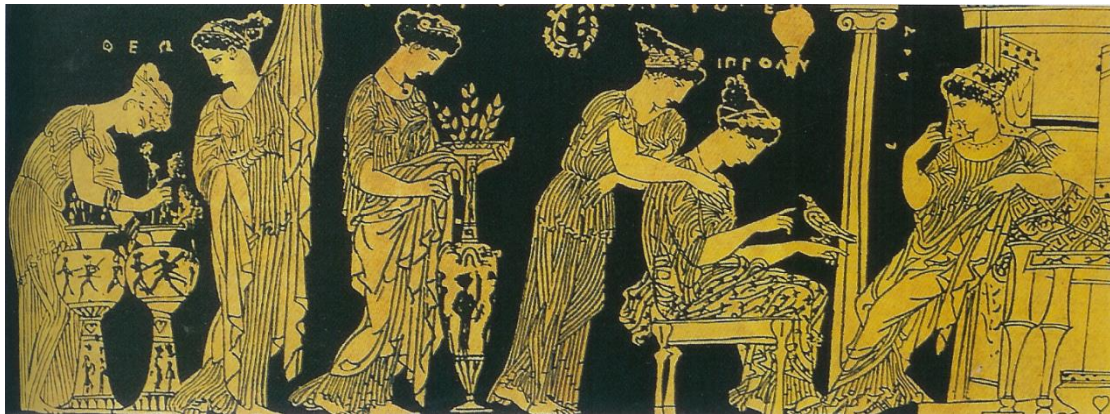
A girl was legally married from the day of her betrothal. Marriages usually took place at the time of the full moon. January or Gamelion (month of marriage) as it was known was the most popular as it was sacred to Hera queen of the gods and patroness of marriage. Ceremonies started on the eve of the wedding and sacrifices were made to Zeus, Hera, Artemis, Apollo and Peitho protector of the marriage



The bride collected mementoes of her childhood, dolls, toys and her clothes and offered them to one of the wedding goddesses. The women of the bride's family went in torchlight procession to the Fountain of Callirhoe to bring back water for her ritual bridal bath to cleanse her but also as a religious purification. There was a similar ritual in the groom's house.

## The wedding day

Both houses were decorated with branches of olive and laurel for the wedding day. The groom went with his family to the bride's house in the afternoon. A sacrifice was offered to the wedding gods, which was followed by a banquet. The bride sat with her friends and matron of honour. She wore her best clothes and a veil crowned with a wreath. The men sat separately. After the banquet the guests presented their gifts to the bride.



*An Athenian vase painting showing the bride after wedding accompanied by the women of the two families. The woman at the far left is arranging flowers in two wedding bowls, received as presents for the bride. Another woman is arranging flowers in a loutrophoros, the tall vase in which the water for the bride's ritual bath was carried.*

At night the bride's father gave his daughter to the groom. The veil was removed and the groom saw her face perhaps for the first time! This was followed by a procession to the groom's house. The bride and groom went in an open carriage, the bride carrying a sieve a symbol of her domestic duty. The groom helped his bride down from the carriage and the crowd showered her with nuts and dried figs as she entered the house.

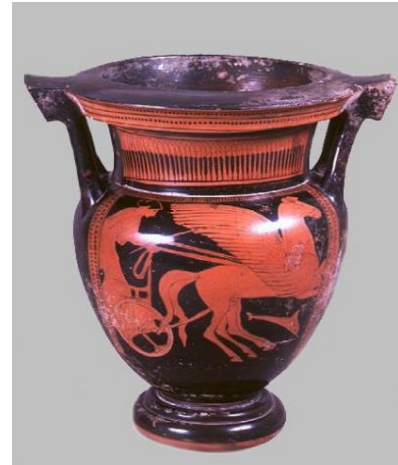
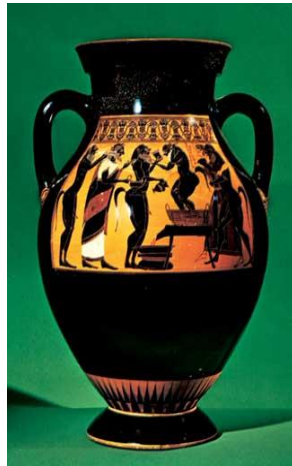
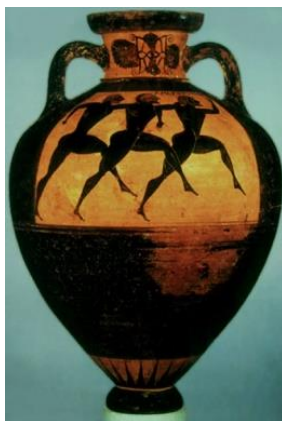
The groom led the bride to the bridal chamber while the guests sang a nuptial hymn to ward off evil influences. The following day the bride's parents brought gifts and a dowry was presented. We have very little evidence of what Athenian women thought of their position within marriage. The bride would now begin her new life knowing that she was expected to cook, weave and raise children. It was her duty to be as unobtrusive as possible. Women did not own property, were not allowed to vote or make major decision within their family.

## Greek Pottery

Greek pottery is an important visual source of information for our understanding of Greek culture. The scenes painted on the pots give us great insight into the Greek world, their world of myth, religious beliefs, everyday life and their social concerns. They made a lot of pottery because clay was easily available and cheap. They used pots for every occasion: for cooking, drinking and eating at parties or at home, as prizes at religious festivals and athletic contests, to hold perfumed oil and water at weddings, funerals and other occasions, and for the storage and transportation of all foodstuffs.

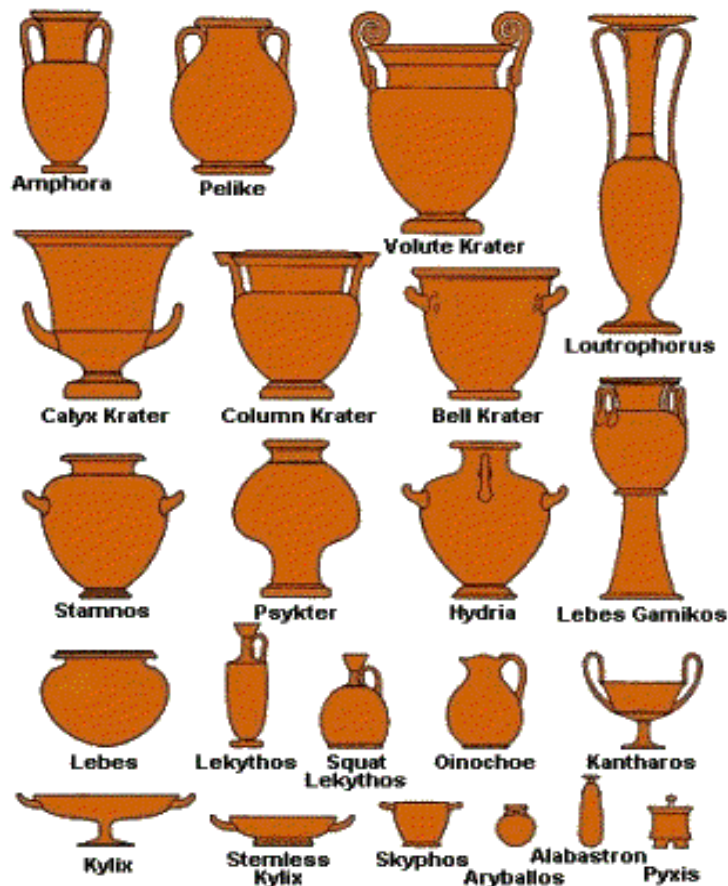
Greek pots are the work of professional craftsmen, the potters usually worked in family groups in small workshops. The area to the northwest of the Agora, the Kerameikos (from the work 'ceramic' is derived) was famous as the Potters' Quarter. The quality of Athenian vase painting is amazing. Some of the figured scenes are among the finest pieces of drawing ever produced. Most of the pots were wheel-made, although some types of pots, or parts of them, were made on a mould. The handles were formed by hand. The pots were mostly made in sections, which were assembled when the clay was still wet. Greek potters made a large number of shapes, and the shape of a Greek vase was related to its function. We know the function of most shapes, for example the amphora was used for the storage of wine or oil and the *oinochoe* or wine jug for pouring wine into the drinking cup.

Figures were etched out on the pots using incision tools. The clay used in Athens contained a high level of iron, so that it produced a reddish colour when fired in the kilns. At first this was left in the background to figures drawn in black. From about 52 B.C this was reversed. The background was glazed black and the figures left in the red colour, with details shown by black lines. In some cases the painter or potter signed the vase, and writing on the vase was also commonly used to indicate the names of figures shown, the subject matter, or words spoken by the figures.





## Common Shapes and Comparative Sizes



*Amphoras and pelikes: storage-jars*

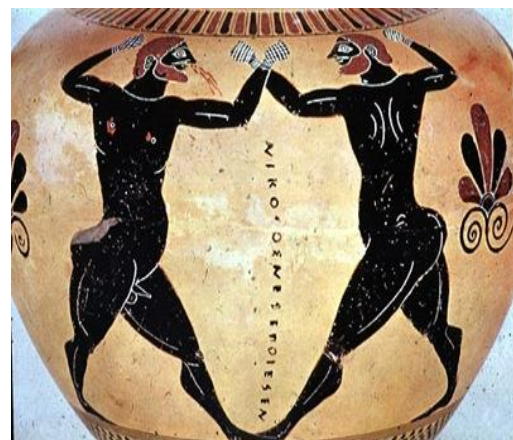
*Kraters and hydrias: bowls for mixing wine and water.*

*Oinochoe: a jug for pouring*

*Lekythos, aryballos and alabastron: used to hold perfume*

*Kylix and kantharos: drinking cups*

*Pyxis: used by Athenian women to hold their cosmetics*



## The Theatre



The invention of drama is one of the most important Greek contributions to civilization. One of the greatest events of the Athenian year was the festival of the City Dionysia, held in March and attracting many visitors to the city. The main dramatic competition, lasted four days taking and took place in the open-air theatre, which can still be seen, on the southern slope of the Acropolis.

The theatre had its origins in the religious festival in honour of the god Dionysus and its religious aspect was highly important. There was a procession every year where the ancient wood statue of the god was carried from the Academy and then placed in a tiny temple below the southern slope of the Acropolis. The procession included sacrificial animals and young men dressed as satyrs, the mythical half-human, half-animal companions of Dionysus. Wearing masks, they danced along as a choir sang. There were also dramatic scenes played out in public by a chorus. The animals were sacrificed, and the people feasted on the meat, the wine flowed and the night was spent in dancing and singing drunkenly in the streets to the music of harps and flutes.



Then in 534 BC a new element was added, a man called *Thespis* had the idea of actually talking to the chorus, he probably wore different masks and played several different parts. This was the beginning of Greek drama. Originally the plays were performed in the Agora, but at some time in the first half of the fifth century plays were performed just north of the temple of Dionysus, where the southern slope of the Acropolis formed a natural auditorium. Gradually this area developed into the world's first theatre.

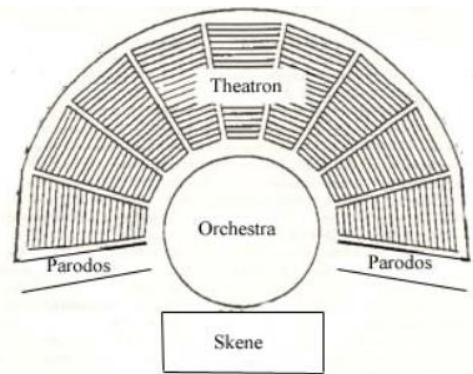
### Tragedies and Comedies

Common themes in Tragedies are bloody revenge, agonizing problems of conscience and disasters such as plagues and famines. *Agamemnon*, by the playwright Aeschylus is the story of the murder of Agamemnon when he returns to Mycenae after the Greek expedition to Troy. He is killed by his own wife Clytemnestra and her lover. Other plays describe the revenge taken on these two by Agamemnon's children, Orestes and Electra.

Another playwright is Sophocles, and is most famous for *Oedipus the King*. This tragedy involves the gradual discovery of terrible facts about Oedipus, which are not

entirely his fault. Euripides is another famous playwright who wrote *Medea*, which tells the story of a foreign princess Medea, who killed her own children when her husband Jason takes a new wife. She also kills his new bride and father-in-law. The fifth-century Athenian comedies were satirical and relied heavily on poking fun at politicians and well-known personalities. Aristophanes was well known for his comedies such as *The Frogs*, *The Wasps*, and *The Birds*.

The chorus performed in the circular area in the middle of the theatre, originally just of earth, but later paved with stone. It was called the *orchestra*, or 'dancing-place', the chorus danced as well as sang. They were fifteen in number and were accompanied by a flute player. They could be cast as a group of local citizens, slaves, and women or perhaps as a group of sailors, according to the story of the play. They sang and danced throughout the play as well as conversing with the actors on stage.



Parts of a Greek Theater

### The stage

To the rear of the orchestra stood a low stage and a stage building called the *skene*. Inside this building the actor could change, and props could be stored. The stage building had a central door and probably others to the sides, and usually represented a palace or a house or a temple. Some use seems to have been made of painted screens and backdrops to suggest, for instance rocks and the sea, or a city in the distant background. Portable statues of gods and goddesses could also be used to indicate a setting for example, Apollo for the temple at Delphi or Athena for Athens. Generally the use of props was kept to a minimum, what was said in the theatre was more important than what was seen.



Early in the fifth century a crane was introduced to bring gods down and carry them off stage again. This piece of equipment *mechane* was designed for tragedies but was also used to great effect in comedies. A platform on wheels the *eccyclema* was used to show what was going on within a building. For example when Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon and Cassandra inside the palace, she and the two bodies were then wheeled out onto stage through the central door so that the audience could see what had happened.

### Costume

Actor's costumes were generally based on everyday dress, the tunic (*chiton*) and cloak (*himation*). Sleeves were added, perhaps because the weather was inclined to be cold at the Dionysiac festival. The actors in many of the tragedies were portraying heroes of legend, gods or people from ancient history, so to do justice to these roles they wore majestic flowing robes, richly coloured and patterned. They wore special boots called *kothornoi*. In comedies the costumes of the actors were intentionally ridiculous.



A great deal of padding was used to distort their figures. Comic actors wore flat slippers. Satyrs generally wear only a hairy loincloth and a tail plus a bearded mask with pointed ears.

### **Masks**

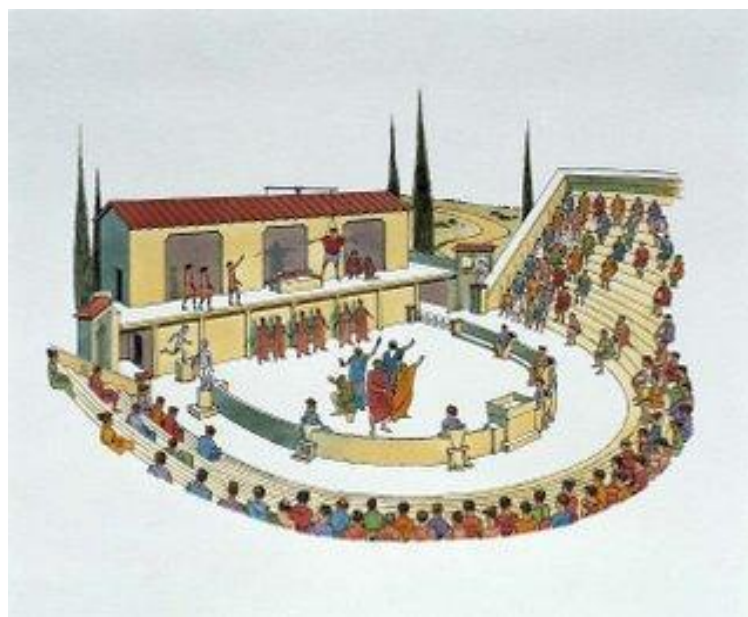
All the actors wore masks made of linen, cork, or wood. There were only three actors, and since the leading actor only played one part, the other two had to take all the remaining roles, including those of females; women were not allowed to act.

It was a hundred metres or more from the back row to the stage at Athens so facial expressions would have been lost to a great part of the audience, but the exaggerated features of a mask could be seen. Hair was attached to the masks, so there were no separate wigs. The masks would have been of standard appearance for a certain type of character such as a hero, a priest, a slave and so on. In comedies the masks were much more distorted and exaggerated than in tragedies. As a further help to the audience in identifying characters, appropriate symbols were used, for example, Hercules would carry his club and Poseidon his trident.



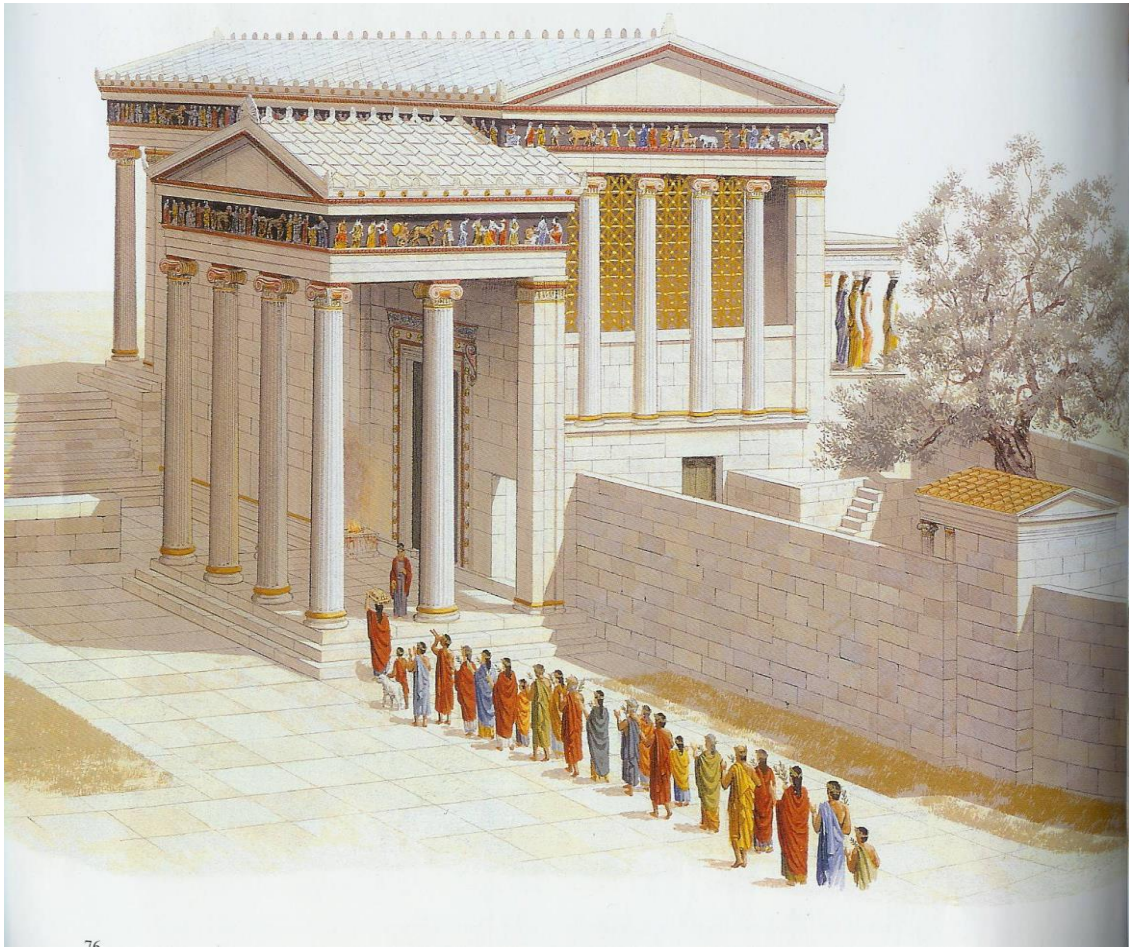
### **The audience**

An entry ticket cost two obols, the equivalent of a day's wage for the poor. The audience were generally male. Women seemed to have attended the theatre in the fourth century B.C, but it is unclear whether they had been allowed to attend in the fifth century. Wine and sweetmeats were available and the audience ate and drank while the performances were on.





## A Festival for Athena



**The Great Panathenaic Festival**

**The Panathenaea** was held every summer in Athens. This festival celebrated the birthday of Athena, the city's patron goddess.

A **Great Panathenaea** was held every **four** years, which was the most important of all the Athenian festivals. The Panathenaic Games were held before the Great Panathenaea and all the games were for men only. When the games were completed after five days, there was a procession to the altar of Athena on the Acropolis where a wooden statue of Athena was given a new dress called a *peplos*. This was Athena's birthday present. After she had been presented with her gift there was a feast of cooked meat from the sacrificial animals and bread and cakes.

In Athens, the competitions began five days before the Panathenaic feast, starting with the swearing-in-ceremony for both contestants and judges. This was then followed by the poetry and music contests. The poetic contests were judged on the recitation or singing of an extract from poets such as, Homer.

The musical contests were held in the Odeon the covered theatre next to the Theatre of Dionysus, which Pericles had built especially for these contests. The two main musical instruments were the double flute (*diaulos*) and the lyre.

The athletic events were originally intended as a form of training for war. Athletes were all male, and performed naked. These events included running, the pentathlon, boxing, wrestling and *pankration* 'all-in-wrestling'.

**Running** started with the *Stadion*, which was a 184-metre sprint. This was followed by a long distance race of twenty or twenty four lengths of the track. After this was the *hippios*, a middle distance of 1000 metres. The winners of the finals won vases containing expensive olive oil. The oil was contained in special decorated containers called Panathenaic amphorae.

**The Pentathlon** was a combined event consisting of discus, long jump, javelin, sprinting and wrestling.



**The Greek discus** varied in weight but all the contestants used the same one. They were made of bronze, marble or lead.

**The long jump** was jumping contest in athletics and was quite different from the modern long jump. The contestant carried special weights which he swung forward to give himself greater forward motion.



the only Greek different jump. The weights, to give

**Boxing** was even more dangerous than the *pankration*. The contestants had their hands bound with leather thongs, could hit with their hands in any way they chose. Only gouging with the thumbs seems to have been forbidden. The contests were decided by a knockout, and often lasted for hours and sometimes resulted in the death of one of the contestants. Boxers received such damage to their faces that their profession became a byword for ugliness.



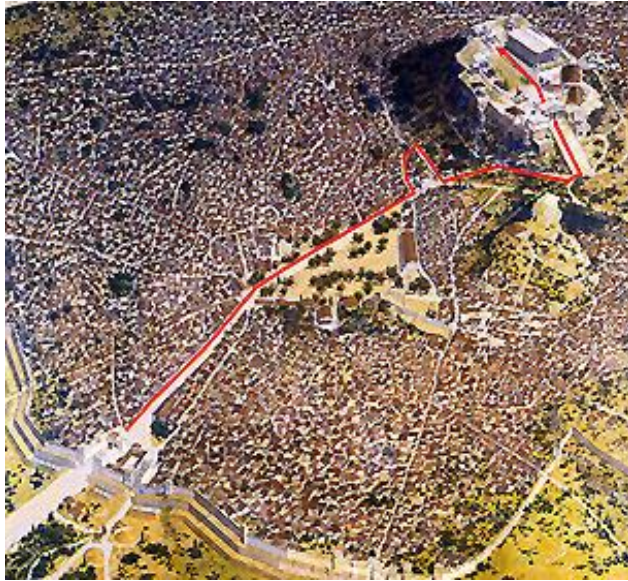
**Wrestling** involved throwing one's opponent to the ground. There were no rounds; the contest continued until one of the contestants had gained three falls. All-in wrestling (*pankration*) was decided by submission, which the beaten contestant signalled by raising an extended finger. Almost anything was allowed, including punching, kicking and strangleholds; only biting and gouging were banned!

### **Equestrian events**

On the fourth day of the Panathenaic festival the games moved outside the city walls to a field near the coast. Several horse racing contests took place here. There were chariot races with two and four horses and horseback races.



A **nocturnal festival** was held on the fifth night of the Panathenaea, with music, singing and dancing. Sacrifice was offered to Athena and Dawn and the sacred fire was carried in a torch race, a relay race that went up to the great altar of Athena on the Acropolis. The first to reach the altar with his torch alight was the winner. The prize was a bull and 100 drachmae.



The *peplos* was the dress specially made by the women and young girls of Athens for Athena's birthday present. They were specially chosen for this job. The Procession assembled at the **Dipylon Gate** at dawn. The new *peplos* was carried at the head of the procession, with the priestess of Athena and a long train of women bearing gifts. The leaders of the sacrifices followed with the sacrificial animals, cows and sheep. Then came the foreigners wearing purple cloaks carrying trays of honey and cakes, Holy water carriers followed, musicians playing *aulos*

and lyre, there was also a large *peplos* suspended from the mast of a ship on wheels, bearded old men, commanders of the army, all carrying olive branches, armed warriors on horses, cavalry, then all the population of Athens.

### The Procession Route

The procession moved all along the Panathenaic way through the agora to the steps of the Acropolis. It was a festive occasion and all sang hymns to Athena.

At the bottom of the steps, the foreigners were forbidden to go any further, but the procession went up onto the top of the Acropolis.

At the Erechtheum they all stood around a great altar. The girls handed over the *peplos*. Sacrifices were held and the women took Athena's old *peplos* from the wooden statue of Athena and replaced it with the new one. The ceremony ended with a great feast.





