

City of Athens

The city was an amazing place, the largest in Greece. Athens controlled the land around it, a large region called Attika. Between the many mountains were fertile valleys, where farmers grew olives, grain, fruit and grapes. Athens became rich and powerful, helped by Attika's valuable sources of silver, lead and marble.



This is how the Parthenon in Athens looks today. A famous general called Perikles had this huge temple built in 432BC, for the glory of the city. Roll your mouse over the picture for another view.

Not everyone lives in the city. Lots of people farm in the countryside or live by the sea, fishing or working in the navy.



I'm glad I live in the city though! Athens has some of the most beautiful buildings in all of Greece.

The People Rule

In 510BC a new way of government was invented in Athens. 'Demokratia', from which we get our word 'democracy', means 'rule by the people'. Any man with full citizen rights could go to the assembly, where they could speak and vote freely. Public debates like this decided how the city was run.



One day I'll serve in the council. I'll put things straight then!

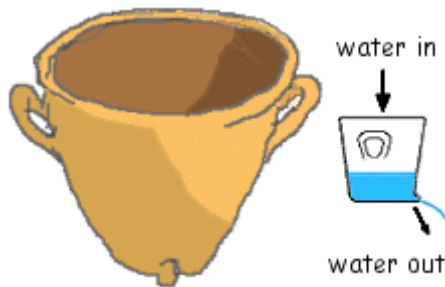


Lucky you. I wish women were allowed to be citizens!



Guilty or Not Guilty?

Athens had law courts with trial by jury. Juries were much larger than today, with several hundred members. After listening to the evidence judges voted by placing metal discs into one of two jars - one for guilty, one for not guilty. Punishments were decided by the court, and included the death penalty.



Water clocks like this were used in court.
Why do you think they timed the speakers?

Women

Women did not have citizen rights. They could not take part in the assembly, or vote, or serve on juries.

In wealthy families girls were educated to run the household of servants and slaves, and were usually married by the age of 13. In poorer families women worked alongside men, farming in the fields or running the family business.



Slaves

Between a quarter and a third of Athens 300,000 population were slaves. These were men and women captured in wars or born into slavery.

Many slaves had special skills, such as nurses and teachers, while others had the hardest and most unpleasant work to do. It was common for a rich household to have many slaves.



Some slaves were owned by the state.

For example archers from Scythia were used as a kind of police force by the Athenian government.

Some skilled slaves worked as pottery painters. It was possible for them to save their wages and eventually buy their freedom.

This scene from a wine cup shows a slave dancing to entertain party guests.