

Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks



**BEFORE
YOU
READ**

Reach Into Your Background

Ask yourself the following questions about your daily life at home and at school. How

does the climate of your region affect your daily life? Who does the work in your home to keep things running?

Questions to Explore

1. What was life like during the Golden Age of Greece?
2. What was the difference between the daily lives of men, women, and slaves in Athens?

Key Terms

agora

Key Places

Athens

The light from the courtyard was still gray when the young boy awoke. The boy sat up on his hard bed and felt the air on his face. He had to get up for school. The boy swallowed his breakfast, pulled his cloak around him, and left the house. Others inside were just beginning to stir. Soon, the household would be starting the day's weaving and other chores.

On the way to school, the boy met other students. All were carrying wooden tablets covered with wax. They would write their lessons on the tablets. They talked about their lesson, a long passage of history that they had to memorize.

The best part of the day came after school. Then, the boy spent the afternoon at the training ground. All the boys exercised and practiced wrestling and throwing a flat plate called a discus. They might watch older athletes training to compete in the Olympic Games, held in honor of Zeus.

In the Marketplace

On their way to school, the boys passed through the Agora (AG uh ruh) of Athens. The Acropolis was the center of Athens' religious life, and the Agora was the center of its public life. It was not far from the Acropolis, which rose in splendor above it. All Greek

▼ This statue captures a Greek athlete as he throws a discus. This event is still part of the Olympic Games.



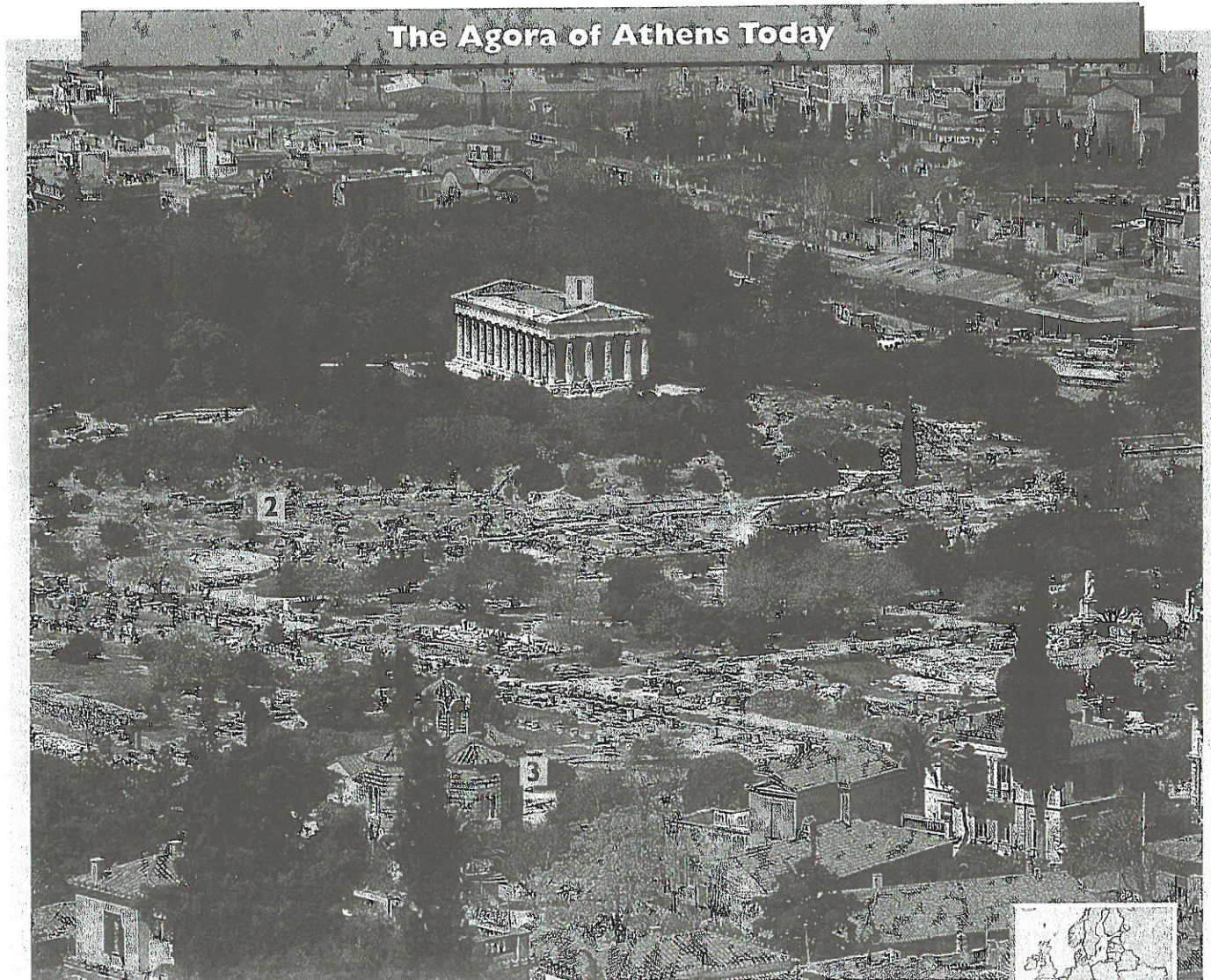


Visualize Try to visualize people talking and carrying on their business in the Athenian Agora.

cities had agoras, or public market and meeting places. Athens' Agora was probably the busiest and most interesting of them all.

In the morning, many Athenian men wandered to the Agora. They liked being outdoors. The mild climate of Athens made it possible to carry on business in the open. In the Agora, the men talked of politics and philosophy. Sometimes they just gossiped.

As they talked, they heard the cries of vendors, or sellers of goods, and the haggling over prices. Some people came eager to find bargains. The streets were lined with shops. Farmers and artisans also sold their



The Agora of Athens Today

For archaeologists, the Agora is a rich source of information about ancient Athens.

1. The temple of Hephaistos, god of metalworking
2. Buildings important to Athenian democracy. They include the Bouleterion, where laws were written, and the round Tholos, the workplace for citizens who ran the government.
3. The Middle Stoa. Stoaes (STOH eye) were long buildings lined with columned walkways. Behind the columns were shops and offices.

wares from stands set up under shady trees. Just about any food an Athenian would want could be found in the Agora. Everyday goods were also for sale—sheep's wool, pottery, hardware, cloth, and books.

Temples and government buildings lined the Agora. One building was headquarters for Athens' army. Another was a prison. A board displayed public notices such as new laws and upcoming court cases.

Life at Home

The splendor of public buildings in Athens contrasted with the simplicity of people's houses, even in the Golden Age. Throughout Greece, private homes were plain. Made of mud bricks, they consisted of rooms set around an open courtyard hidden from the street. The courtyard was the center of the household. Other rooms might include a kitchen, storerooms, a dining room, and bedrooms. Some homes even had bathrooms. But water had to be carried from a public fountain.

Like homes, Greek food was simple. Breakfast might be just bread. For midday meals, the Athenian might add cheese or olives to the bread. Dinner would be a hot meal that was more filling. It might consist of fish and vegetables followed by cheese, fruit, and even cakes sweetened with honey. Most Athenians ate little meat. Even wealthy families only ate meat during religious festivals.

Slavery in Ancient Greece

It was the job of Greek women to spin thread and weave it into cloth. If these women were wealthy, they owned slaves to help them. Slaves did a great deal of work throughout the city-states of Greece. No one knows for sure, but historians



Greek Vase Painting The Athenians were known for their beautiful pottery. They decorated vases, jars, and cups with black or reddish-tan figures. Many scenes were mythological, but others showed Athenian daily life.

► In this school scene, a teacher holds a scroll showing the first words of the *Odyssey*. The boy may be reciting them from memory.



READ ACTIVELY

Connect If you were a ruler, how would you change Greek society so everyone had equal rights?

estimate that as many as 100,000 slaves may have lived in Athens. That is almost one third of the population. Today, we consider slavery a crime. But almost no one questioned it in ancient times, even in democratic Athens.

Many free people became enslaved when they were captured by armies during war or by pirates while traveling on ships. Some slaves were the children of slaves. A large number in Greece were foreigners, because some Greeks were uncomfortable owning other Greeks. Enslaved people did many kinds of work. Some provided labor on farms. Others dug silver and other metals in the mines. Still others assisted artisans by making pottery, constructing buildings, or forging weapons and armor. Most Greek households could not run without slaves. They cooked and served food, tended children, and wove cloth.

It is hard to make general statements about how enslaved people were treated. Household slaves may have had the easiest life. Often they

► This carved grave marker, or stele, shows Hegeso, an Athenian woman, choosing a jewel from a box held by an enslaved girl.



were treated like members of the family. The slaves who worked in the mines suffered the most. The work was not only physically tiring, but also extremely dangerous. Slaves in the mines did not live long.

Women in Athens

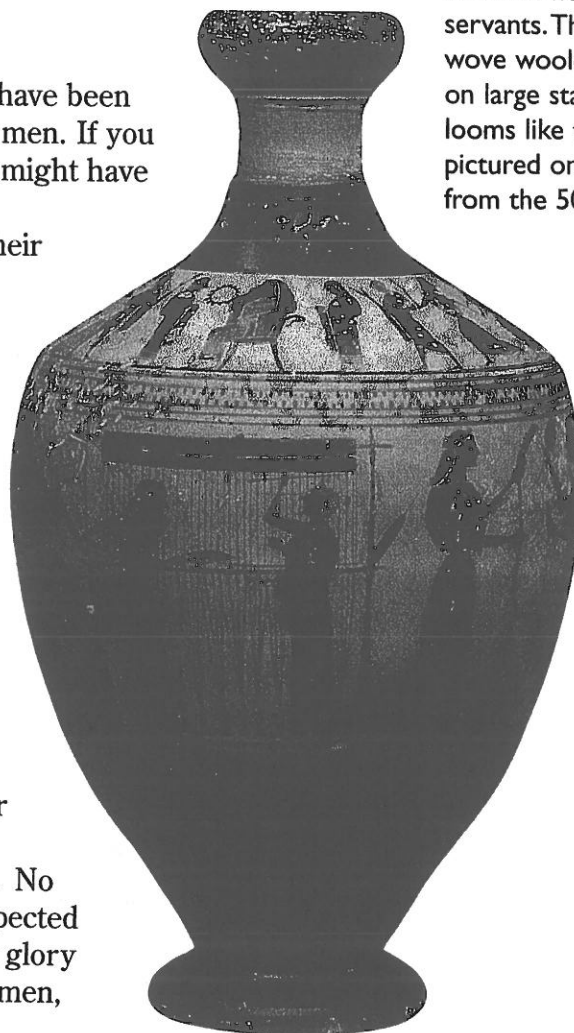
If you had walked through the Agora, you might have been surprised to see that most of the people there were men. If you had asked where the women were, an Athenian man might have replied, "At home."

Home was where most Athenian women spent their days. They had almost none of the freedom their husbands, sons, and fathers took for granted. They could not take any part in politics. Nor could they vote. They could not own property. About the only official activity allowed them was to be priestesses in religious groups.

Running the home and family was the job of women. In some wealthy families, men and women had completely separate quarters. Women organized the spinning and weaving, looked after supplies of food and wine, and cared for young children. They also kept track of the family finances. If a family was wealthy enough to have slaves, they were the woman's responsibility as well. She directed them, trained them, and cared for them when they were sick.

Women throughout Greece did important work. No Greek man would have denied it. Yet women were expected to be almost invisible. As Pericles said: "The greatest glory will belong to the woman who is least talked about by men, whether they praise her or find fault with her."

▼ Making clothing for the family was the job of the Greek wife and her enslaved servants. The women wove woolen cloth on large standing looms like the one pictured on this vase from the 500s B.C.



SECTION 3 REVIEW

1. Define agora.
2. Identify Athens.
3. What place was the center of activity for men during the Golden Age?
4. How did the lives of men, women, and slaves in Athens differ?

Critical Thinking

5. **Identify Central Issues**
What do you think was the most important aspect of life in Athens? Why?

Activity

6. **Writing to Learn** Write a journal entry about your day at school that covers the same events as those discussed in this section. Discuss who wakes you up, what you eat for breakfast,

and what you do after school. How does your day compare with that of the Greek boy you read about at the beginning of this section?

