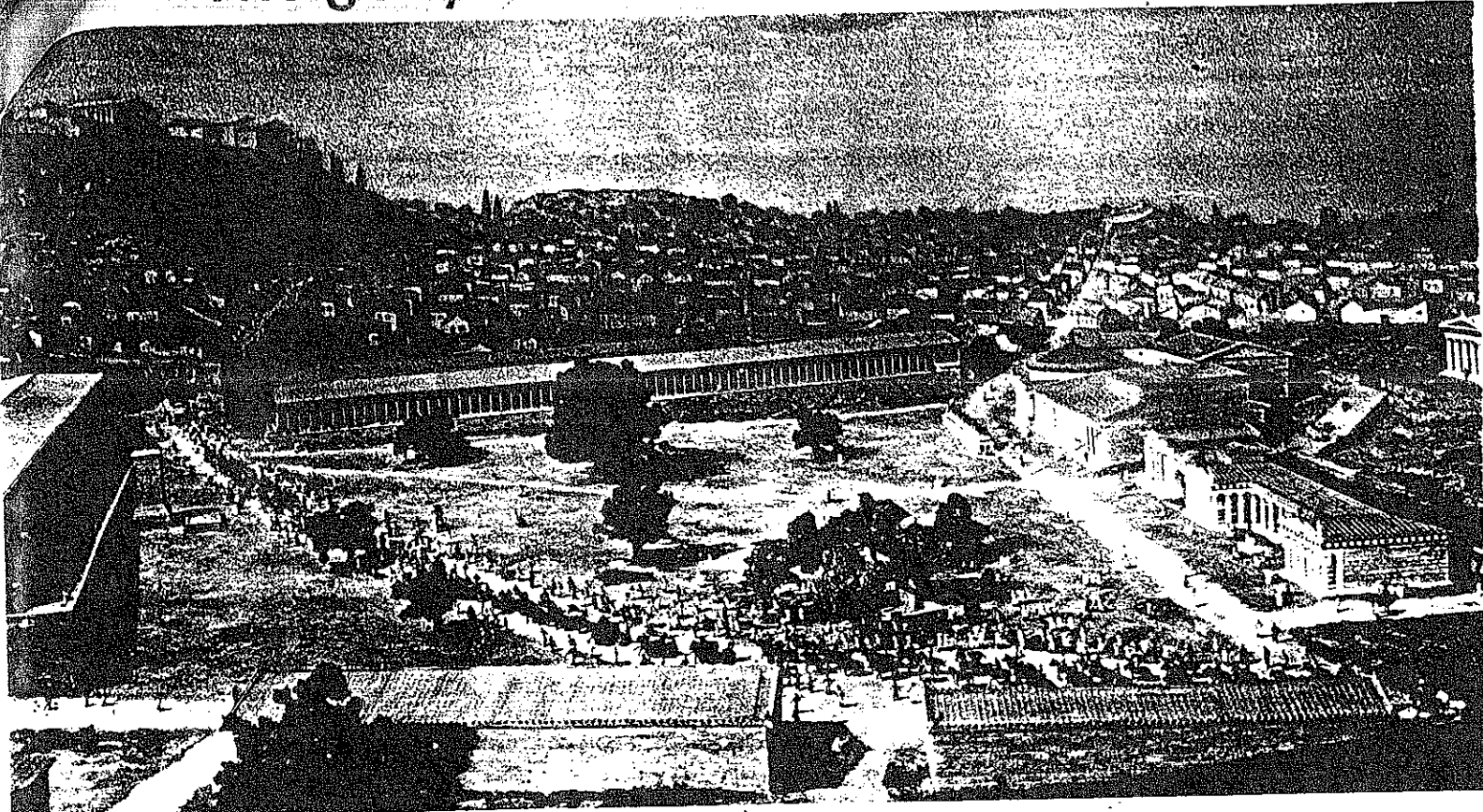


# The glory of Greece

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## Athens and the Athenians

The city of Athens lies on a plain surrounded on three sides by mountains. The plain, which stretches down to the sea, is cut in two by a low ridge which ends abruptly with the flat-topped rock of the Acropolis. It was on the Acropolis (the hill on the left), which commanded the surrounding countryside, that the city first developed. But as Athens grew, the city spread over the plain. By the time of Pericles the Acropolis was used mainly as the site for temples of the gods. Religious processions moved along the Panathenaic Way (as in the model shown here), through the Agora to the temples in the Acropolis.

The city that sprawled at the foot of the Acropolis had a population of 150,000. The city centred on the Agora, or market-place, where the

shops and official government buildings were situated. The streets running off the Agora and through the city would disgrace most slums in the modern world. They were narrow, winding alleys, swarming with flies, vermin and refuse. The body of an unwanted infant, usually female, could often be seen at the crossroads, left there by its parents for the dogs or the slave traders.

The homes were much less attractive than those pictured here. Athenian men spent little time at home, preferring life in the Agora or the bath houses, or at evening parties; they were therefore content to spend their sleeping hours in shabby homes with mud walls and few windows. (Burglars simply bored through the mud walls to remove whatever was of value!) Furniture was limited to simple couches (on

which the men reclined to eat while the women sat in upright chairs), stools, a few chests, and some clay utensils. There were sleeping quarters, but during the hot season the Greeks often slept on the flat roofs. Food was cooked on an open brazier. The smoke escaped through a hole in the roof, or, in the homes of the wealthy, through pipes made of baked clay. Ordinary homes consisted of a few small cubicles, with drapes for the doorways. The wealthier citizens had floors of stone rather than dirt, a main salon for banquets, a kitchen, dining room, bathrooms, store rooms, work rooms for the slaves, and sleeping quarters upstairs. But even these homes were far from the mansions lived in by other peoples of the ancient world. The Athenian lived outdoors and in company with his fellows.

## The engines of prosperity

The trade and commerce of Athens did not rest on the work of the citizens, but on two other classes in society: resident aliens known as metics, and slaves. Only about 40,000 of the 500,000 inhabitants of the state were citizens. There were about 20,000 metics, and the remainder of the population was made up of slaves and women.

The merchant weighing his material (above) was quite possibly a metic, for this group dominated the commercial life of Athens. The metics were important in retailing; they controlled the grain trade and other overseas trading ventures, and they were prominent in building, banking and manufacturing. Many of the most prominent artists, musicians and teachers were also metics. Attracted to Athens by its wealth and its rich culture, the metics were quite prepared to accept the fact that they had no political privileges. This probably did not seem very important to them, for in most other states the people generally lacked any political rights.

Many skilled workers, like this cabinet-maker (below), were slaves. Slaves were equally essential to Athenian prosperity and survival. They provided a large labour force on the farms; they manned the teeming docks at Piraeus and performed the backbreaking work in the mines. A wealthy Athenian might have fifty slaves, and an average citizen from three to a dozen. Slaves did most of the domestic work, cleaning, cooking and waiting on their master.

Slavery was taken for granted in Athens as it was in every ancient society. Slaves had almost no rights. They could be bought and sold. Life in the mines or on the docks could be brutal and short. The slave could be punished severely or tortured, although if he died his master could be brought to trial. On the other hand, many slaves held important positions in society and led decent and prosperous lives. Without slave labour the Athenian economy could not have prospered. Moreover, had not slaves done most of the work, the Athenian citizens would not have developed the world's first democracy or enjoyed the rich cultural and intellectual life that has made the Athens of Pericles one of the wonders of world history.

## The Athenian woman

A modern woman might argue that the lot of the Athenian woman was worse than that of the slave. The Athenian world was a man's world, and the wife seems to have understood that she was neither to be seen nor heard. Her wedding, which usually took place when she was about fifteen, was a great event in her life even though she had little choice in the selection of a husband. Surrounded by guests, she might leave with her new husband on a chariot. But on her return her task was to raise a family and supervise the domestic chores of the slaves. If the family was too poor to afford slaves, she might at least get outdoors to do the shopping; otherwise she remained inside the house most of the time. She did not attend the frequent parties her husband enjoyed, and even if he entertained at home she was not allowed to enjoy the festivities. Not even the death of her husband could set her free, for he could state in his will whom she must marry after his death. However, while this seems dreary, there is evidence to reveal that the bright and attractive Athenian women often exercised as much power over men as women have done before and since!

## Growing up in Athens

The painting of the young boy fishing might suggest that the life of the Athenian child was much like that of children today. But nothing could be further from the truth. The Athenians did not have large families. The poor looked on every child as an extra mouth to feed, while the rich were often too selfish to want to spend their money in bringing up and educating the children. There was also fear that the family lands would have to be divided up among so many people that no child would have enough land or wealth to support himself. The poet Hesiod declared, "Try, if you can, to have an only son, to care for the family inheritance: that is the way wealth multiplies in one's halls." The famous philosopher Plato, drawing up plans for his ideal republic, wrote, "The number of children regarded as adequate by law will be one boy and one girl."

The most dangerous period for the Athenian child, at least until he became a man and went off to war, was his first few days. If the family was unwilling to add to its numbers or if the new-born babe looked weak and sickly or deformed, he was

placed in an earthenware jar with some bracelets or necklaces (by which he could later be identified if he survived) and left in some isolated spot to die. If he was to be kept, the child was officially accepted into the family on the fifth or seventh day, and on the tenth day was given a name.

For six years the Athenian child lived at home, watched over largely by his mother and a nurse, who was usually a slave. Mother and nurse, and sometimes the father, if he had the time, recited the famous myths and legends, much as parents today read their children fairy tales. Most of the Greek myths contained a moral or were designed to frighten or amuse the youngsters. Babies were given rattles. "As long as the child is occupied with a rattle," wrote the renowned philosopher Aristotle, "nothing else in the house will get broken." Excavations and paintings show that as he grew older the Greek child had tiny chariots as go-carts, toy soldiers, horses on wheels and dolls with moveable limbs. He played with marbles, kites, hoops, balls and swings, and at hide and seek.

At six the boys and girls were separated. The girls stayed at home to learn such domestic arts as weaving, cooking and running the house. Athenians saw no value in educating the women. The boys, however, went off to school until they were eighteen. At first probably only the rich could afford to send their children to schools, but by the fifth century it would appear that there were schools for the poor as well. The historian Herodotus tells us of the roof of one school collapsing and killing 120 boys. But despite the value they placed on education the Greeks did not build schools at public expense. All were private schools. Parents paid fees to the masters, most of whom were badly paid and treated with little respect. (The state did, however, pay the masters for the education of the children of men who had died in battle.) Generally only the rich remained in school until they were eighteen. Children of the poor probably only stayed long enough to learn the three R's. By the end of the fifth century, most male citizens of Athens were able to read and write.

## An education for citizenship

The purpose of Athenian education was not to train boys for a job or a profession, but to make of them men who could play their part as citizens in the city-state.

Character-building was of greater importance than professional training. The boys' education consisted of three major parts: the three R's, music and physical training. After the youth had learned to read and write, he was given the great epics of Homer, the *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey*. These great historic poems not only increased his literary ability, but, more important, they provided him with the knowledge a Greek citizen needed. For Homer wrote of war and peace, politics and diplomacy, the value of wisdom and courage, and man's relations with man and the gods. Many a Greek citizen could recite much of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by heart.

The Greeks believed that music was a necessary and basic part of the education of every citizen. Every child had to learn to play the lyre, an instrument with seven strings plucked either with the fingers or a small stick. Less popular was the flute. The children also learned to sing, particularly the ancient ballads. One Greek writer tells us of boys "learning to sing some ancient ballad — in the proper posture, not with the thighs glued together — like 'Pallas, Terrible Stormer of Cities' or 'Fierce Battle-cry from Afar,' keeping to the tune as their fathers knew it. But if anyone started fooling about and putting trills and twiddly bits . . . he would get a sound drubbing for his un-Muse-icality." Music was everywhere in Athens. Men sang on their way to work; poems were recited to music; there was music in the plays. Every Athenian wanted to be able to sing, play or dance.

Only more unfortunate, perhaps, was the Athenian who was not physically fit. All Greeks placed a high value on physical fitness. This was chiefly because every citizen had to defend his city

in time of war. But they also believed that the body as well as the mind had to be fit, strong and alert if a man were to be a good citizen. From the time he was about twelve, the Athenian boy was regularly instructed in athletics. All forms of exercise and sport were included, but the great emphasis was on the five classic sports which made up the *Pentathlon*: wrestling, running, jumping and throwing the discus and the javelin.

For those students who could afford to remain in school, the official end of the Athenian's education came at eighteen. During the following year he received training as a soldier in a city garrison. At the end of the year he was presented with a spear and shield and took a loyalty oath to his city, in which he vowed never to disgrace the sacred arms, never to abandon his comrades in battle and never to let his city down. It was a proud moment in the family's life when the youth then left Athens for a further year at some rougher frontier garrison. Finally, at the end of the year, a man returned to Athens to take up his role as a full-fledged citizen.

## RELIGION

Like early peoples everywhere, the first people who lived in Greece believed in a host of gods, great and small, friendly and hostile, who were usually associated with the elements of nature. When the people we know as Greeks first moved into the Aegean world of these earlier settlers, they brought with them a whole new family of sky gods. The mightiest was Zeus (left), king of gods and men, who ruled heaven

and earth from Mount Olympus. Like his brothers and sisters, Zeus was supposed to have been eaten by his father. But his mother had fed her husband a stone instead. Zeus later forced his father to cough up his brothers and sisters, who joined Zeus in a successful battle for control of the universe. Zeus and his brothers then drew lots for their share of the universe. Poseidon received the sea, and Hades the underworld. Zeus himself was Lord of the Sky, the Rain-god, and the Cloud-gatherer who wielded the awesome thunderbolt. Thunder and lightning were signs of his anger. So real was Zeus to the Greeks that they did not say "It rains," but "Zeus rains" or "Zeus thunders."

With Zeus on Mount Olympus lived the family of gods, twelve of whom are seen in this Roman relief. From left to right they are Hestia, sister of Zeus and goddess of the hearth; Hephaestus, son of Hera and possibly of Zeus, who was thrown out of Olympus because Hera was ashamed of his lameness and who became the god of fire and handicrafts; Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus, and goddess of love and beauty; Ares, son of Zeus, and god of war who was detested by Zeus and Hera but was popular with Hades since he helped to increase the population of the underworld; Demeter, sister of Zeus, and goddess of the crops, who once turned the world into a frozen mass when Hades carried off her daughter, Persephone, into the underworld; Hermes, son of Zeus, messenger between the gods and mortals, and protector of thieves and mischief makers, who on the day he was born stole Apollo's flocks; Hera, wife of Zeus, and protector of marriage and married women, who spent most of the time jealously watching Zeus fall in love with one woman after another; Poseidon, brother of Zeus, and god of the sea and of earthquakes, who had a splendid golden palace under the sea but who usually lived on Olympus; Athena, the goddess of wisdom, who sprang fully grown from the brow of Zeus and who was regarded in Athens as the protectress of culture, art and the rule of law; Zeus, whose bird was the eagle and whose tree was the mighty oak; Artemis, daughter of Zeus, goddess of the moon and guardian of cities, and an expert with the bow and arrow; and Apollo, son of Zeus, god of the sun, god of truth, patron of music, medicine and prophecy. Apollo has been called "the most Greek of all the Gods," for he came the closest to representing the Greek ideal of man and god. It was Apollo who established the famous oracle at Delphi.

Their Olympian religion does not seem to have had much effect on the way the Greeks behaved. Since the gods were more interested in ceremony than in good conduct Greeks like the warrior seen below paid particular attention to the correct performance of such religious ceremonies as offering a sacrifice before leaving for battle. But while the Greeks believed that the gods were powerful, they did not fear them very much. It was difficult to fear gods who were very much like ordinary people and who often showed such human vices as dishonesty, quarrelsomeness and jealousy. And the Greeks did not believe that there was a heaven or paradise to reward those who lived righteously. Whether they had led good or evil lives, Greeks could look forward only to a shadowy kind of existence among the ghosts of Hades' underworld. To the Greeks, the gods were very much like people except that they were larger, stronger, more intelligent and immortal. The gods often interfered in their daily lives, particularly to punish the sin of pride (hubris), but they could generally be kept happy through sacrifices and ceremonies in their honour. Over the centuries, Greek religious ideas changed and developed. In time, many Greeks moved away from the rather shallow beliefs and practices of the Olympian religion and developed ideas that were extremely advanced.

The patron goddess of Athens was Athena whom the citizens honoured with festivals, gifts and sacrifices. Her main festival was the Panathena, a very happy as well as sacred occasion which was held every four years. In return for such honours as they paid Athena, the Athenians expected the goddess to protect their city and to make sure they were victorious in war. Every city had its own Olympian god, and worship was usually a public rather than a personal matter. In a Greek city-state, therefore, it was often difficult to distinguish between government and religion.

