

Fact file about

## ANCIENT GREECE

### Government and law

Ancient Greece consisted of several hundred relatively independent city-states (poleis), dominated by bigger cities like Athens or Sparta. It was a democratic country. As we know the word 'democracy' derives from two words- demos (people) and kratos (rule), which means 'the rule of majority' that's why regular citizens' assemblies were organized. These gatherings called 'ecclesia' were held at least once a month on the Pnyx hill. The participants of the meetings discussed every aspect of life both public and private, from financial to religious matters. They decided about wars, public festivals or treaties with other nations.

Every citizen was treated equally by law. Yet, only free land owning native-born men could be citizens entitled to the full protection of the law in a city-state.

### Society

Greek society consisted of four main groups

- citizens
- Greek women
- the metics
- slaves.



Only free land-owning native-born male adults who had completed their military training could become Citizens. Citizens had political rights and could not only be present and discuss matters at the assembly (like other groups), but they had the right to vote and decide about the matters in question.



Women, on the other hand, had no political rights, they couldn't decide about their own lives, either. In the beginning of a woman's life she was obliged to comply with the decisions of her father or

brother, then her husband, and in case of his death- her son. Women often married relatives, especially when they had no brothers whose nearest male relative was usually given the priority. Girls didn't attend schools like their brothers, they stayed at home with their mothers who taught them domestic skills necessary for running a household.



The members of the third social group were called metics -*Metoiikoi*.. They were foreigners living in Athens , they were free yet didn't have political rights. Although they shared the burdens of citizenship, they were given no privileges. Like citizens they had to do their military service and if they were wealthy- they paid special tax contributions (*eisphora*) and tax services ('liturgies') contributed by well-to-do Athenians.



Most free citizens avoided wage labour as working for others was perceived as something negative (only state employment was free from this prejudice). Who did all the work? Slaves. One could become a slave due to war (as a prisoner of war), piracy or slave trade. Even a child might end up as a slave since if a newly born infant had an imperfection, the parents either killed or abandoned it. Wealthy families adopted such children, but in most cases they served as slaves. In various regions at different times up to 40 percent of the ancient Greek population were slaves, who worked i.e. in agriculture, stone quarries, mines and households (with average of 3 or 4 slaves per household). Having no slaves was a sign of poverty.



## Clothes

Since the weather was warm, most of the time the Ancient Greeks used loose pieces of linen as clothes. Men's main item of clothing was a knee-long tunic, called 'chiton' which was a square of material held in place with pins at the shoulders and a belt round the waist. Women's dresses were also made of linen squares pinned at random to cover the whole body down to the ankles. Only wealthy people had colourful tunics, whereas the poor had them plain. People usually went barefooted, if they used shoes- they wore leather sandals.



## Food

### *Ancient Greeks' breakfast*

Most ancient Greeks had the same thing for breakfast- bread dipped in wine. The bread was made from barley, which was the main source of all kind of bread in ancient times. It was probably hard, so wine would soften it up and make it easier to eat. Sure, they could have used water, but where's the fun in that?

The Greeks also ate something called a *teganites* (τηγανίτης), which resembled pancakes and were made of wheat flour, olive oil, honey and curdled milk. They were usually topped with honey or cheese.

## *Lunchtime*

*They had more of bread and wine!*

*What a surprise! But they were drinking a bit more wine. Lunch was considered a midday snack, so it was common for the Greeks to dine on relatively light things like figs, salted fish, cheese, olives and more bread.*

## *Dinner*

*In ancient times, dinner time was an occasion to meet with friends and discuss philosophy or just daily events. Yes, "friends," not "family" just because men and women normally ate separately. If a family had slaves, they would serve the men first, then the women, and later they could help themselves. If the family didn't have slaves, the women of the house served the men first, and they had their dinner only after the men had finished theirs.*

*The ancient Greeks would eat quail and hen eggs, fish, legumes, olives, cheese, bread, figs and any vegetables they could grow. They might serve arugula, asparagus, cabbage, carrots and cucumbers. Meat was reserved for the wealthy. Dinner was over when most of the food was consumed.*

*Here are some fruit that have always been a part of Greek diet.*



## Education

*Education differed in each city-state. The ability to read and write was not so important for Spartans, who wanted their citizens to be good fighters, whereas in Athens it was vital since citizens there were expected to vote and discuss issues in the Assembly.*

*Only boys attended schools, where they learnt how to read, write and count in the morning and practiced sport in the afternoons. The students learnt most of the things by heart, but sometimes they 'wrote' with sharp sticks on wooden boards covered with wax, after being used the wax was melted and the boards could be used again.*

## Ancient Gods

Ancient Greeks had a polytheistic theology, they believed that various gods and goddesses controlled every aspect of people's lives and the environment. They took part in religious festivals specific to a particular deity or even the region. They built temples to keep the statues of gods in, however the festivals were performed outside next to the altars of a particular deity. Mount Olympus in the northern Greece was believed to be the home of the 12 most important gods and goddesses. The list of most well-known Greek gods includes:

- Zeus (the king of all gods, the ruler),
- Hera (queen of gods and goddess of marriage, women, families)
- Poseidon (god of seas, water, storms)
- Demeter (goddess of the harvest, fertility)
- Athena (goddess of wisdom, knowledge)
- Apollo (god of light, sun, art)
- Artemis (goddess of the hunt and virginity)
- Ares (god of war)
- Aphrodite (goddess of love)
- Hephaestus (god of craftsmen and fire)
- Hermes (god of travel and commerce)
- Hestia (the goddess of the family and domesticity)
- Dionysus (god of wine and festivity- patron of the art. and theatre)



## Theatre

The majority of cities in Ancient Greece had a theatre since plays were used in religious festivals. The theatres were built on hills in a semi-circle shape in the open air with rows of stone seats that could hold even more than 18 000 spectators. The actors didn't need any loudspeakers since the acoustics was perfect. In the very centre of the theatre there was a circular floor (orchestra) with an altar dedicated to Dionysus. Only men were allowed to perform on stage so the male actors played the roles of women, they wore huge masks with exaggerated facial features and emotions.



*Epidauros theatre today*

## Sport- Olympic Games

Ancient Greeks loved sport so in most cities and villages there were gymnasiums where boys and men could exercise. They wanted to be fit and have perfect bodies, but practising sport also prepared them for war. They had to be fit enough to be able to march long distances, carry equipment and later fight in case of need. They loved competing so they organised a lot of sport festivals, the most important of all were Olympic Games (held from 776 BC till 393 AD) took place every 4 years in Olympia. They lasted only 5 days but

two-month peace was announced each time to allow the people to get to the event, enjoy it and come back home safely. The Olympic Games originally comprised 6 sports disciplines

- ◇ *Dromos* - a short run (600 feet); considered the most important
- ◇ *Díauolos* - a medium run covering the distance of 2 stadiums (1200 feet);
- ◇ *Dolichos* - a long run (24 stadiums which equals 14 400 feet);
- ◇ *Wrestling* - rather freestyle, the fighters could break the opponent's fingers, pull their noses and lips;
- ◇ *Pentathlon* which included javelin, discus throwing, long jump, one stadium run, and wrestling;
- ◆ *Pankration* - wrestling with fist fighting, no rules; the competitors fought till one of them surrendered

What may be surprising not only women were not allowed to participate or even watch the games, but also married men! On the first day of the Games, each participants, along with their fathers and siblings, had to swear an oath and promise to play fair.

Ancient Greeks were great architects- we can admire their skills thanks to the buildings, tombs and temples, but they managed to build a heated swimming pool in Olympia, too. It was a two-storey building with a fireplace situated underneath the pool.



*The Olympic Stadium in Olympia today*

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