

Life in Athens

What made Athens powerful? What was daily life like in Athens?

Athens was located near the sea, and the surrounding area had little quality farmland. However, it was easy for Athenians to travel by boat to trade for food and other resources that they needed. As a result, Athenians found their strength in sea trade and their naval fleet. Athens became wealthy based on its trade with Greek city-states and other civilizations around the Mediterranean Sea.



Athens is the capital city of modern-day Greece and continues to be a commercial and cultural center.

Athenian Culture

As a result of this wealth and the ability to secure their basic needs through trade, Athenians could spend less time working and could focus on cultural pursuits. Athens became a center of culture. Athenian artists sculpted, made and decorated pottery, wrote plays, danced, played music, and designed elaborate temples and other large buildings. Athenian philosophers also debated and discussed the great ideas of the time. This environment of debate and discussion was fostered by the democratic system of Athens, because all citizens were expected to participate in government and needed to be knowledgeable on the important issues of the time.

Societal Roles

Much of the daily life of Athens centered on the business of trade and the arts. Men took care of all of the daily responsibilities of their businesses. They took care of tasks for their homes, such as shopping at the market, as well. Men also spent much of their time meeting in the public squares to discuss business and politics. This free time was available to the men of Athens because members of the enslaved class took care of many of their responsibilities at home and with their crops.

Because the men took charge of most of the business outside of the home, the women of Athens rarely entered public spaces. They were expected to stay home to complete domestic chores and raise children. These roles were reinforced in the education of children in Athens.

Education

Boys were taught to read, write, and participate in cultural life. As they grew up, they became traders, artisans, and merchants who actively participated in the culture and politics of Athens. When they reached the age of 18, they took the oath of citizenship and became full participants in the daily life of Athens.

Girls had fewer options and opportunities in their lives. They did not go to school. They stayed home and were instructed by their mothers in how to keep a home and raise children. Despite their limited ability to participate in government, women were important to the religious life of Athens. They could become priestesses and often led the daily religious ceremonies that took place in the **city-state**.