

History

Theme II: Founders, Beliefs and Citizenship in the Mediterranean during the Millennium Before Christ

Chapter 4: The World of Greek City States

This chapter is about Ancient Greece and in particular the city-state of Athens where the first democracy in the world developed. The word used to describe a city-state was a **polis** and the city-states or polis operated independently of each other and often fought wars against each other. For example, the **Peloponnesian War** famously opposed Athens against Sparta at the end of the 5th century BC. However, the Greek people were united by their language and literature. Everyone knew **Homer**'s poems and shared the same way of life, cultivating wheat (blé), wines and olives

The Greeks were **polytheist** and believed in the existence of gods and heroes. They constructed temples and organised games in honour of their gods such as the **Olympic Games**. These were held in the **sanctuary** city (a neutral city where no wars or battles were allowed between other city-states) of Olympia and were open to all Greeks. From the 8th century BC onwards, the Greeks established colonies around the Aegean Sea and traded with other places. This allowed some of them, such as Athens, to become very rich.



During the 5th century BC, the city of Athens invented an original form of government called a **democracy**. Citizens met and debated at the **Ecclesia** and voted on laws. Magistrates were also designated to lead the city. Citizens had various **duties** to perform: obey the laws, fight for the city and participate in religious festivals. However, citizens were only a minority of the Athenian population. Women, children, foreigners and slaves were not citizens and were excluded from the democracy.

Ancient Athens

At the centre of the **Acropolis** is the **Parthenon**. This building was dedicated to the goddess Athena and was also used to store gold. Other temples were in the acropolis such as the Temple of Athena Nike and the Erchtheum.

On the slope of the acropolis were theatres where plays and festivals were celebrated. The largest was the Theatre of Dionysus, god of wine and patron of the theatre. There were competitions held here to see who had written the best play. Up to 25,000 people could attend and the design was so good that all could see and hear the play.

The Age of Pericles

The city of Ancient Athens reached its peak during the leadership of **Pericles** from 461 to 429 BC, called the Age of Pericles. During this time, Pericles promoted democracy, the arts, and literature. He also built many of the cities great structures including rebuilding much of the Acropolis and building the Parthenon.

Athens is one of the great cities of the world. During the time of the Ancient Greeks it was the centre of power, art, science, and philosophy in the world. Athens is one of the oldest cities in the world as well, with recorded history going back over 3400 years. It is the birth place of **democracy** and the heart of the Ancient Greek civilization.

Named after Athena

Athens is named after the Greek goddess Athena. She was the goddess of wisdom, war, and civilization and the patron of the city of Athens. Her shrine (temple), the **Parthenon**, sits on top of a hill, called the **acropolis**, in the centre of the city.

The Agora

The **agora** was the centre of commerce and government for ancient Athens. It had a large open area for meetings which was surrounded by buildings. Many of the buildings were temples, including temples built to Zeus, Hephaestus, and Apollo. Some of the buildings were government buildings like the Mint, where coins were made, and the Strategeion, where the 10 military leaders of Athens called the Strategoi met. The agora was a place for people to meet and discuss ideas on philosophy and government. This is the place where the democracy of ancient Greece first came to life.

The Acropolis

The Acropolis was built on a hill in the middle of the city of Athens. Surrounded by stone walls, it was originally built as a citadel and fortress where the people could retreat when the city was attacked. Later, many temples and buildings were built here to overlook the city. It was still used as a fortress for some time, however.