The Acropolis

The Athenian Acropolis is a flat-topped rock that rises 150 metres above sea level with a surface area of about 3 hectares. It was the highest point in Athens, and originally had been the citadel of the city. By the fifth century BCE, it had developed into the religious centre of Athens, dominated by the Parthenon, a temple devoted to the city’s patron, the goddess Athena.

Citizens

Athenian citizenship was hereditary – a citizen had to be descended from an Athenian citizen on both sides of the family, which excluded the children of Athenian men and foreign women. Only adult male Athenian citizens who had completed their military training (two years after the age of 18) had the right to vote in the Assembly in Athens. This excluded a majority of the Athenian population, namely women, slaves, freed slaves, children and metics (foreigners). Also disallowed were citizens whose rights were under suspension (often for failure to pay a debt to the city). Citizenship could be granted by the ekklēsia and was sometimes given to large groups, especially in time of war (for example, the Plateans in 427 BCE and the Samians in 405 BCE). By the fourth century BCE, it could only be granted to individuals and then by a special vote of the Assembly with a minimum attendance of 6000.
Activity 4.5

1. What qualified a person to vote in Athens?
2. How did the function of the Acropolis change over time?
3. Draw up a table with two columns. In the left column, list groups of people who could not vote in Athens. Next to each, in the right column, give reasons why they could not.

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<th>SOCIAL GROUP</th>
<th>WHY THEY COULD NOT VOTE</th>
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4. What was the ekklesia?
5. Explain how Athens practised 'direct democracy'.

Social structure

The male citizenry of Athens was divided into four tiers, as suggested by reforms of Solon in the early sixth century BCE, when political rights were allocated in proportion to the income of each man. The four ranks were:

- **pentecosiomediimnoi** — those who produced approximately 8000 kilograms of grain per year, and could serve as strategoi or generals in the army (about 5 per cent of the citizenry)
- **bipeds** — those who could equip themselves and one cavalry horse for war, valued at 5000 kilograms per year (about 10 per cent)
- **zeugitai** — tillers, owners of at least one pair of beasts of burden, valued at 3000 kilograms per year, who could serve as **hoplites** (about 25 per cent)
- **thetes** — manual labourers and poor farmers (about 60 per cent).

Population estimates for Athens in the mid-fifth century BCE range between 120,000 and 150,000 people, of whom up to 40,000 were citizens.

Clothing

The clothing worn by men and women was universal, with slaves and citizens in similar dress. Clothes were fastened with brooches or pins (**fibulae**), and a belt or girdle (**zone**) might secure the waist. The fundamental clothing for Greek men was a tunic, called a **cbiton**. These came in two versions:

- **exomis** — a short **cbiton** with the right arm left free for activity. This was often used by workers or slaves.
- **xystis** — a longer **cbiton**-like garment covering the whole body all the way to the ankles.

Men also wore a long cloak called a **bimattion**, which could be draped around the body, or a **chlamys**, a shorter version that was used for travel or riding. It was fastened in front or on one shoulder.

Women mainly wore a **peplos**, made from two rectangles of cloth or one large rectangular piece of cloth (equivalent to the two) with the top edge folded down and the folded edges pinned together at the shoulders. The woman's arms went through the opening on either side. The overhanging fabric could end above the waist to show the material that was bloused over
a zone. The peplos was usually a heavier woollen garment, while the chiton was a lighter linen one and might be worn underneath. For warmth or modesty, women could also wear a stola, a mantle draped around the shoulders or placed over the head. Children wore the chiton.

Men and women wore sandals, slippers, soft shoes or boots, depending on the circumstance. At home they usually went barefoot.

Families usually shared meals. Dinner parties were a social expectation of those holding public office, but such gatherings were for men only. Women and girls were confined to homemaking and child-rearing. However, women in less wealthy families often had to go out of the house to help with the work of the family.

Family
Married men were seen as the head of the family; however, they took very little part in the direct running of the household on a daily basis. Farmers and craftsmen spent most of the time working. Wealthier men employed managers to run their properties or businesses so they could be involved with the political institutions of the polis or socilaise.

Education
Schooling was not a legal requirement in ancient Athens; however, scenes on painted vases from as early as 500 BCE show that schooling of boys was quite widespread. Girls were not commonly educated in a formal way. Boys began their education aged seven. The wealthy employed private teachers or tutors, and teachers could sometimes be slaves.
Pupils studied under three types of teachers:
- *grammatistes*, who taught reading, writing, arithmetic and literature
- *patoerites*, who coached wrestling, boxing and gymnastics
- *kitaristes*, who taught music — especially singing and playing the lyre.

Boys had to undergo two years of military training at the age of 18, after which those from wealthier families often returned to higher education to prepare themselves for public life. One of the first of these places of higher learning was the Academy, a school of philosophy founded by Plato around 385 BCE. Aristotle ran a similar establishment, called the Lyceum, where the curriculum was broader.

**Women**

Women in Athens had limited freedom and power. A woman could own personal property, including slaves; however, she was not permitted to buy anything, to own land or to enter into contracts. A male guardian controlled all aspects of her life until she married. Athenian citizenship enabled her to marry another citizen or to participate in religious ceremonies. Girls in Athens got married soon after puberty, usually to much older men. Marriages were often arranged between families, either for the consolidation and management of property or for the production of future heirs. Women lived at home with their mothers until marriage, and unmarried women were the property of their father or guardian. Property protection was such a concern that if a married woman became an heiress of her father (because she had no living brothers), she was required to divorce and then remarry her closest paternal relative to ensure that her inheritance remained in the family. Lower class women had to go out and help with shopping and so on. A wife's duty was to bear legitimate children and to manage work in the household in an economical way. A respectable woman was expected to remain inside her home; women seen in the street were prostitutes, slaves or poor, and had to work to contribute to their family's well-being. The most important activities of a good wife were childcare, spinning and weaving.
**Activity 4.6**

1. Outline the four social levels Athenian citizens could occupy.
2. Approximately what percentage of the Athenian population were citizens in the mid-fifth century BCE?
3. Give two reasons why men were not involved in the daily running of their households.
4. Ordinarily, when were all members of an Athenian family most likely to be together?

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**Metics and slaves**

*Metics* were resident aliens with no political rights. They were not allowed to own land, and could not obtain citizenship. However, many were involved in trade and industry, and became very wealthy. Although not possessing political rights, *metics* enjoyed similar privileges to citizens in some areas. Estimates of the *metic* population in Athens by the mid-fifth century BCE are between 30000 and 50000.

Slaves constituted the lowest level of Athenian society, but made up at least half of the population of 70000 to 100000. Slaves could be owned either privately or by the state. State-owned slaves worked on the roads, in the dockyards and on public buildings. The lowest class of slaves worked in the silver mines at Laurium.

Privately owned slaves were treated better. They worked in wealthy houses where many held positions of trust. In Athens, slaves worked in every capacity imaginable, and were as familiar a sight as free members of the society.

Slaves came from a variety of origins: some were prisoners of war, others were unwanted children, some had been sold into slavery alongside their fathers for the payment of their fathers' debts, and still others had been born into slavery.

Privately owned slaves could be freed by their masters' oral pronouncement, in the sight of witnesses at the theatre or before a public tribunal. However, between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE this practice was outlawed in Athens to protect public order. A slave was often required to pay an amount at least equivalent to his market value to free himself. To do this, he could use his savings or take a loan (*eranos*) from his master, a friend or a client. Freedom could be either total or partial, at the master's whim. A totally emancipated slave was legally protected against all attempts at re-enslavement, particularly by the former master's inheritors. Freed slaves acquired a status similar to *metics*, but did not have the rights of a citizen.

**Sparta: A unique society**

Sparta was a *polis* in the region called *Lakonia* in the southeastern Peloponnese, about 250 kilometres from Athens. It was unique in all Hellas because its social system was completely focused on military training and excellence in the art of warfare. The descendants of the Dorians who had settled Lakonia at the end of the Mycenaean period, the Spartans had invaded and conquered neighbouring Messene in the eighth century BCE and the Messenian population had become *belots*, a *serf* class distributed to Spartan masters.

Spartan society was divided into the following ranks:

- *Spartiates* – with the exception of the royal families, they were native-born male citizens over the age of 30, who had passed all stages of the *agoge* (the Spartan education system). They belonged to a *systation* (a military group that supported its members, who were...