

Women in Ancient Greece



In this unit we will look at the lives of women in ancient Greece by comparing two very different places: Athens and Sparta. Both were important places in ancient Greece but they were very different culturally. Before we look at what life was like in these places for women, we will look at the geography of Greece.

Use the map in your learning pack to find and mark the following on the map above:

Athens Sparta Crete Aegean Sea Ionian Sea Olympia Delphi

Women in Ancient Greece

Ancient Greece is famous for being the birth place of **democracy** – rule by the people.

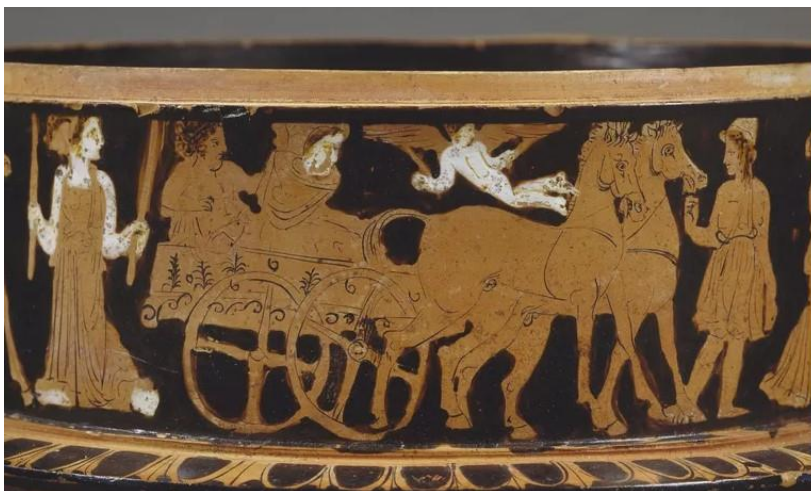


However, if you look closely at the above picture, you won't see many women! Democracy really meant – rule by men (specifically, free-born Athenian men).

Not only were women not allowed to vote in Athens, they were barely allowed to leave the house!

Athens Women in Ancient Athens were second class citizens to men. This was true even for female Athenian citizens – female slaves basically had no rights at all, but even women from rich Athenian families did not have it easy.

Before getting married, girls had to obey all of their father's commands. Once they were of an age to get married (usually somewhere between 12-15 years old) most Athenian girls would get married to someone chosen by their family - many marriages were arranged. In some cases, the bride would not even meet her husband until the day she married!



An Athenian bride being taken in a chariot to her wedding

After getting married, wives were subject to their husbands. Women were looked down upon by many men (not all men) and were considered by many to be no smarter than children.

In Athens, women had few legal rights. They generally couldn't own property, couldn't vote, and weren't allowed to participate in the government.

Women were expected to stay at home and manage the household – this included managing the slaves, food and education of the children. Many women lived in a separate area of the home from the men and even ate their meals separately from the men. Wealthy families would have servants who helped with raising the children, doing household chores, and running errands. Most women, even wealthy women, helped to weave cloth for the family's clothing.

Poor women often had **more** freedom than wealthy women because they couldn't afford as many slaves. Because they didn't have a lot of slaves, poor women needed to leave the house.

Female slaves were at the very bottom of the social hierarchy – not only were they slaves, but they were women.



Sparta Life was different for the women of the city-state of Sparta. In Sparta, women were respected as the "mother's of warriors." Although they were not considered equal with men, they had more rights and freedom than the women of Athens. They were educated, played sports, allowed to walk around the city freely, and were also able to own property.

More Facts About Women in Ancient Greece

Women were not allowed to participate in the Olympic Games. Married women were strictly forbidden to attend and could be put to death if they were caught at the games!

In all of the Greek city-states, except for Sparta, women had very little freedom. They could not leave their house without their husband's permission. They could not even visit a temple without their husband's permission.

In Sparta, women had a great deal more freedom. They did not need their husband's permission to leave the house. They could run a business. They were trained warriors and would attend military school outside the home. However, even in Sparta, women still had to obey their husband or father.

Even in Ancient Greece, some people didn't like the way women were treated. Stoic philosophers argued that women and men should be treated equally.

Some of these ideas about women persisted for a long time. Even in the UK, women did not get the right to vote until 1928!

Try this quiz

1. True or False: Women were considered equal with men in Ancient Greece.
 - a. TRUE
 - b. FALSE

2. Who were Ancient Greek women subject to before they were married?
 - a. Mother
 - b. Sister
 - c. Father
 - d. No one

3. What rights did women have in the city of Athens?
 - a. Right to vote
 - b. Right to own property
 - c. Right to conduct business deals
 - d. All of the above
 - e. None of the above

4. What would happen to a married woman if she was caught at the Olympic games?
 - a. She would be sent home
 - b. She would be allowed to stay
 - c. She could be put to death
 - d. Nothing

5. What was the lowest class in Ancient Greece?
 - a. Farmers
 - b. Poor women
 - c. Slave men
 - d. Slave women
 - e. Soldiers

6. In what Greek city-state did women have the most rights and freedoms?

- a. Athens
- b. Corinth
- c. Sparta
- d. Thebes
- e. Argos

7. In what way were poor women more free than wealthy women?

- a. They could leave the house
- b. They could have jobs
- c. They went to the marketplace
- d. All of the above
- e. None of the above

8. True or False: Some ancient Greek philosophers/thinkers said that men and women should be treated as equals?

- a. TRUE
- b. FALSE

Women in Ancient Greece on YouTube

There are lots of videos online with information about the lives of women in Ancient Greece. Click the links below to watch:

Horrible Histories: Groovy Greeks

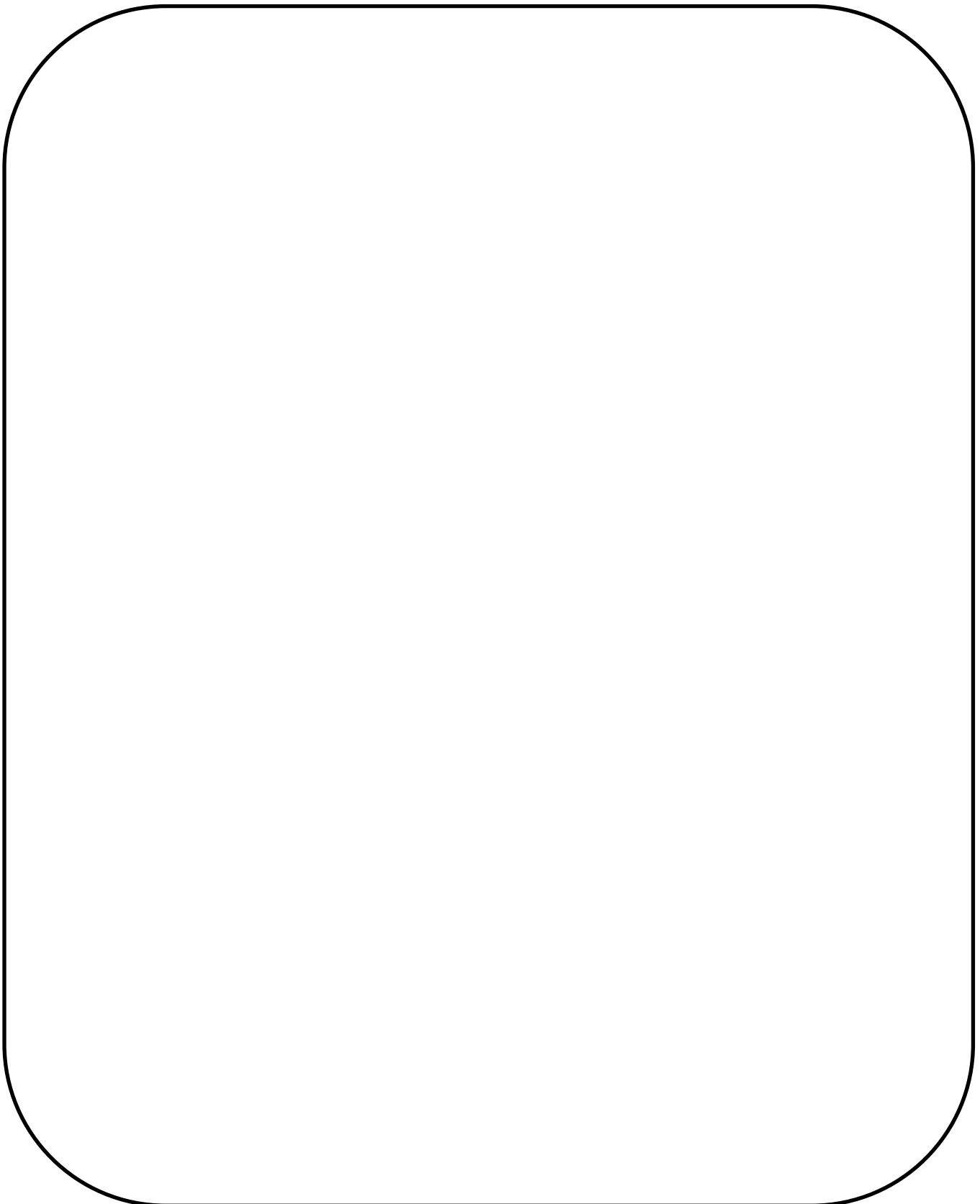
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lupmstn7FiI>

The Women of Sparta (a little bit more difficult, but lots of good info)

<https://www.ancient.eu/article/123/the-women-of-sparta-athletic-educated-and-outspoke/>

Poster Task

Design a poster for either Athens or Sparta to encourage women to come and live in your city. Try to think of the advantages of living in your city. For example, rich Athenian women did not have to work very hard because they had lots of slaves to help. Spartan women had much more freedom compared to other women in the ancient world and could go out without their husband's permission. Your poster design should show the **positive** things about living in your city.

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a black border, intended for drawing a poster. The box is centered on the page and occupies most of the lower half of the document.

Map of Ancient Greece



Classics: February 2021 Tasks

- Read the information sheet about 'Women in Ancient Greece'
- Do some of your own research – use Google and Wikipedia to find out more about Ancient Athens and Sparta and the life of women in those cities
- complete the blank map with place names
- Answer the quiz questions
- Design a poster for either Athens or Sparta to encourage women to live in your city.