



1: Everyday life in the city-states

Welcome to Ancient Greece!

Our civilisation is known for brilliant thinkers, fierce warriors, great poets, wonderful artists, amazing athletes, powerful gods and stories about extraordinary monsters!

Our time is many years before your time - more than two thousand years ago. And our home is, what is in your time, the country of Greece and the hundreds of islands in the seas around it.

But Ancient Greece isn't one big country. Our civilisation has grown from small, rival communities, often cut off from each other by mountains, rivers and the sea, to create the City-states - each like a mini country with its own capital city.

The city-states all have their own governments, kings and queens and customs.

We trade with each other and share ideas and stories. And sometimes we argue with each other and fight wars. But in doing so, we have created one of the most important civilisations of the Ancient World.

I am Aspasia - one of the most important women in the city of Athens. And this is my home, which has become a bit of an intellectual 'place to be' in the city. Famous writers and philosophers are always stopping by.

This is Athens in its Golden Age; the fifth century BCE - two thousand, five hundred years ago - a time when Athens is the most powerful of all the city-states.

Lots of the city-states have a particular god or goddess who is considered a special friend of the city. For Athens it's Athena, the goddess of warfare and wisdom.

Most Athenians - that's the people of Athens - live here: below the Acropolis, a fortress built high up on the hill in the centre of the city.

Not many of the homes are like mine. Most are simply constructed from sun-dried mud bricks, usually built around a central courtyard. The size depends on how wealthy you are. But none of us have loos. We all have to go in pots. Yuck!

Nearby is the great port of Piraeus. Access to the sea is very important for trade and travel and so our main form of transport is by boat.

The sea also gives us a plentiful supply of fish, octopus and squid. So fishing is big business, as long as you live near the water. But it's hard to keep it fresh in a hot climate like ours. Transporting fish over long distances can get pretty smelly!

Farmers work the land around the city. It's a hard life because the soil is dusty and the climate hot and dry.

We grow grapes for wine - which we drink throughout the day - even at breakfast!

And we grow olives for olive oil, which we use for cooking, lighting, and even washing!

The richer citizens might hunt deer and wild boar; but meat, for most people, is only for special occasions. Instead, we eat a lot of bread and porridge made from wheat, often with curdled milk or cheese, prepared and served by a slave. Most of us have them.



Many people make their living at the agora, the main marketplace in the city. Farmers bring their produce, such as grain, or oil, or olives; and craftspeople sell pots, clothing and leather items, like shoes and belts.

And each city-state has its own money, the coins often made from electrum - a mix of silver and gold.

Most people wear simple tunics, made from wool or linen, under a cloak. In fact, men's and women's clothes are quite similar. But the kids wear shorter tunics so they can run around!

Not many women in Ancient Greece are as lucky as me. Women in general are considered less important than men. Girls aren't allowed to go to school. Instead, they're expected to marry young and learn how to look after a household.

Boys from wealthier families do get to go to school from the age of seven and they learn reading, writing, maths, music, poetry and the art of debating. We Ancient Greeks do love a good, heated discussion!

So, home again. And here comes Socrates - another famous philosopher. He doesn't half go on!