

Athenian Society — Syllabus Revision Questions

Where was Athens? What natural advantages did it have? What disadvantages? Athens was a Greek city-state located in Attica. It had a deep natural harbour which allowed for the maintenance of its fleet, as well as natural stores of silver at Laurium, where the mine was later established. The surrounding soils were infertile, sandy and rocky, making them unsuitable for the growing of cereal crops but ideal for olives and grapes (Athenian wine and olive oil were highly prized as exported goods). This meant that Athens had to import goods such as wheat and barley in order to feed its population.

What was the Piraeus? The Piraeus was Athens' port. It was connected to Athens by the Long Walls, which allowed safe travel to and from the city, and was fortified for fear of an attack from the Persians. Its population was mostly comprised of metics. The Piraeus was a natural, deep harbour, making it ideal for trade and the maintenance of the navy. The town itself was based on a grid system and was planned by Hippodamus, an architect appointed by Pericles. Storehouses were built to house goods for shipping, and dry docks were used to prevent water logging and to allow maintenance on ships. The Piraeus was the main port of the eastern Mediterranean.

What was the polis? The polis was a Greek city-state, e.g. Athens, Sparta, Corcyra. The city-states would often unite against a common enemy, as in the Persian Wars, but if there was no external threat, they were almost always at war with each other, Sparta and Athens remaining the prime example. They governed themselves independently of each other and had both differing and similar political structures.

Explain the social structure of Athens. There were four main citizen classes in Athens, as described below. In order to qualify as a citizen, a man had to fulfil certain criteria: both parents were citizens and legally married; he was freeborn; he was registered on the deme roll; and he had spent two years serving in the army prior to becoming a member of the ekklesia.

- *Pentakosiomedimnoi*: the richest class, extremely wealthy as they were expected to provide a fully crewed ship for the navy (as part of their taxes), and were encouraged, though not expected, to provide liturgies for the people, (the provision of public performances and plays). They often owned a lot of land, and their status and wealth were determined based on the amount of land they could produce. Women of this class often had little rights or responsibilities, as their families employed slaves to do much of the housework. They were expected to be fully covered and not allowed out of the house without a chaperone.
- *Hippeis*: the second-highest social class, reasonably wealthy as they were able to provide and maintain a horse and thus served as part of the Athenian cavalry. The fact they owned horses inferred they were very wealthy, as a lot of land was needed for a horse and Athens was mountainous.
- *Zeugitai*: the equivalent of modern middle class, they were not wealthy but well off and could afford to pay for their own armour; therefore, they served in the army as hoplites (foot soldiers).
- *Thetes*: the poorest class, served as rowers in the navy. They were one of the main contributing factors to Athens' increasing greed for war and imperial nature, as the more Athens fought, the more the thetes rowed, and thus the more they got paid. They also served as light-armed troops and archers.

Explain the role of women in Athens. Women were considered wild and in need of the controlling influence of a man. They remained under the influence of their *kyrios* their entire life — began with

her father, uncle, or brother, and once she married her husband would fill the role. The *kyrios* had to represent the woman in their care in legal matters and was responsible for caring for her. He could incur a fine if found to have been shirking his duties. Marriage was generally a business arrangement for the benefit of both families rather than the result of any romance. The object of marriage was to produce legitimate children so that inheritance and property could be passed down from generation to generation. Virginity in a wife was expected and prized as a way of ensuring that any children were legitimate heirs. Women were not permitted to vote, hold office, choose their husbands or attend meetings of the *ekklesia*. The term *epikleros* was used to describe a woman whose was the inheritor of her father's property. They were considered part of this property rather than the owners of it and were expected to make a suitable marriage in order to pass it on to their children. If a woman was caught in adultery, her husband was legally required to divorce her or risk losing his citizenship rights. Women could act as concubines for wealthy men, and in this circumstance were considered part of that man's property. Concubines were not looked down upon and were often publicly acknowledged. The ideal woman was quiet, modest, dignified, passive and submissive. Wealthy women often had no reason to leave the house other than to participate in festivals or family rituals, whereas metic and slave women of the poorer classes were often required to help run the family business or their master's estate. Wealthy women did, however, have a role in the home. They were often permitted to manage the household, sometimes because their husband — twice their age — had died, but often because the husband was engaged in other activities. Women could also be employed as wet nurses, midwives, wool workers, professional mourners or prostitutes. Hetaerae were educated, cultured prostitutes who often engaged in intellectual debates with their companions. They are noted for wearing transparent clothing, indicating their differences from the respectable, modest women of high classes. Women could serve as priestesses, a position considered the most prestigious for a woman in ancient Greece. Many priestesses were paid officials of the state, and seemed to enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as their male counterparts. They were given a place of honour at the theatre or stadium. They could also serve as prophetesses, a revered position as it was thought they had direct contact with a particular god. Pericles is quoted as saying that if a woman is out in public, she should be old enough for people to ask "whose mother is that" rather than "whose wife or daughter". Women were sometimes depicted on pots with keys on their hip, indicating they were the mother of the household.

What was the role of metics? Metics were foreigners who had come to Athens to live and work. They were usually involved in commerce, as Athens at the time was a thriving economy. Metics were not eligible for citizenship and could not own land or a house. They often had to pay an annual tax, of which women had to pay half of the rate of men. Metics were required by Athenian law to nominate a 'protector', an Athenian citizen who served as a guarantor of the metic's suitability to become a permanent Athenian resident. Some metics became prominent business owners who earned a lot of money for themselves. The Piraeus had the highest concentration of metics in Athens. They were often easily assimilated into Athenian society and took part in most aspects of everyday life; the only difference was that they were not official citizens. However, they were required to serve in the army, often as hoplites.

What was the role of slaves? The number of slaves in Athens often outnumbered the civilian population. They had no rights and were considered the property of their masters. They could be bought and sold in the Agora, or bequeathed or confiscated, much as land could be. Slaves were used in many aspects of Athenian life, both in private homes and in the employment of the state. Most notably, slaves were used in the mines at Laurium as the labour was dangerous and difficult. They were used primarily in manufacturing, agriculture and domestic service, as well as loading

and unloading cargo at the Piraeus. State-owned slaves often operated as modern-day policeman, keeping order in the assembly, courts, and other public places, guarding prisoners in jail, carrying out executions and arresting criminals. Female slaves were often used as sexual objects by their masters, as were male slaves, although these instances were not as common. Slaves were sometimes used in the operation of a business and therefore had sound literacy and numeracy skills. Private slaves were often treated better than public slaves, especially those who had positions in a household. Athenian slaves were rarely Greek, as the Greeks did not think it was right to enslave a fellow Greek. Generally, slaves came from other parts of the Mediterranean, whether as prisoners of war or slaves sold in international markets by their masters.

Explain how the Athenian political system worked.

- *ekklesia*: the Athenian democratic assembly, comprised of all citizen males at least 18 years old. It was open to all societal classes and met regularly on the *prytaneis* at dawn. Citizens could call for the assembly to meet at any time, but quick decisions were often made by the *prytaneis* at the *tholos*. Anyone present was allowed to speak, but the length of their speech was limited by the *clepsydra* (water clock). In order to ensure that everyone was present and nobody left early, the congregation was often roped in with a rope painted red. If someone tried to leave, they would most likely get red paint on their clothing and be publicly identified as trying to leave the proceedings. The assembly typically voted on legislation presented by the *boule*, and a majority vote was required in order for any legislation to be passed. The assembly was responsible for declaring war, dictating military strategy, revising laws, enacting taxes, receiving embassies from foreign states, and electing *strategoi* and other officials. Coloured balls were used for voting instead of a show of hands, as there were often thousands of people present. Black balls symbolised a “no” vote, white balls symbolised a “yes” vote.
- *boule*: the council of 500. Members were selected by lot from every class except the *thetes*. 50 members from each tribe served for one year, in which they were banned from participating in other business activity. This meant that they had to be paid a wage by the state. Each month, one tribe was “in charge” of the *boule* and was referred to as the *prytaneis*, housed and fed at public expense at the *tholos*. The council was responsible for setting the agenda for the *ekklesia*, meaning they had considerable power to put forward proposed legislation, etc.
- *strategia*: the headquarters of the 10 *strategoi*. They were the few officials elected rather than chosen by lot and were considered positions of great power. They were paid only while on campaign. They were under the influence of the *ekklesia*, who voted on military strategies and could dismiss or appoint the *strategoi*. They were continually held accountable by the *ekklesia*. Pericles served as *strategoi* for nearly 30 years. One *strategoi* was elected from each *deme*, thus why there were 10. They served for one year and could be elected an indefinite number of times. They generally came from the *pentakosiomedimnoi* as these citizens would be better educated with a greater understanding of military matters. They had to be male and over the age of 30. They were some of the most powerful individuals in Athens.
- *heliaea*: the name given to the *ekklesia* when it sat as a court. All citizens, including *thetes*, were included, and served as the final court of appeal.
- *ostracisms*: if an Athenian had committed a serious crime, such as when Thucydides failed to defeat Brasidas in the Peloponnesian War, they were exiled for a period of 10 years. The Athenian assembly would vote by writing the name of the citizen to be ostracised on a piece of broken pottery, called the *ostrakon*. The fact that these citizens had to be able to write down a name indicates that at least the majority of the male population was literate.
- *kleroterion*: this device was used to select by lot the citizens who would be serving as jurors. It was a device made of stone into which holes were cut in several vertical lines. A series of black

and white balls were funnelled into the device, and if one of these colours landed next to the name of a citizen, they would serve as juror. We are not certain whether the Athenians used black or white as the affirmative colour to indicate who had been chosen. The device was a safeguard against corruption and a method of guaranteeing complete chance and democracy in the system of government. It ensured that bribing would be impossible and ineffective, and that any decisions made by the jury were made based on the arguments presented rather than any personal affiliations or motives.

What happened in the Agora? The Agora originally served as the designated area in the city where citizens would gather to hear announcements concerning civilian life, the military or politics, which was often discussed amongst the public here. Later, the Agora grew into the marketplace of Athens, where merchants and craftsmen sold their wares in tents, much like the modern markets we experience today. In Athens, the Agora was below the Acropolis, and is still the site of open-air markets today. *Kapeloι* (retail traders) often operated between the craftsmen and the consumer, much as is the case in modern society. They were generally mistrusted and considered unnecessary. They mostly came from the metic class, whereas craftsmen could come from any tier of society, including metics, citizens and skilled freedmen. The potters market was established separately from the rest of the stalls, as the buying and selling of cookware was considered appropriate only for women, and was thus frequented by female slaves, or women of a poor class. Famous philosophers such as Socrates and Plato often visited the Agora, where their speaking was likely to be heard by a large audience. Socrates is particularly famous for asking those in the Agora what they felt was the meaning of life. Buildings in the Agora include the basilica, Temple of Ares, Altar of the Twelve Gods, Statue of the Eponymous Heroes, the tholos, the heliaea and the strategion.

What was the tribute? Why did Athens maintain a fleet and how was this maintained? The tribute was an annual sum of 460 talents paid to Athens by each member of the Delian League in return for naval protection. For many city-states, this was a mutually beneficial arrangement, as some were too small to maintain their own fleet and therefore found it easier to have Athens do it for them. Athens maintained a fleet because it allowed them to keep control of trade routes and increased their power over other city-states. The *pentakosiomedimnoi* were expected to provide a fully crewed ship to the navy as part of their taxes, and Athens had a thriving timber industry.

Why was trade important? Trade was one of the major factors contributing to the success of the Athenian Empire. It was situated very close to the Piraeus, a natural harbour which controlled much of the eastern Mediterranean's trade routes. Athens' mountainous terrain was suitable only for the growing of olives and grapes; therefore, Athens needed to import almost all of its grain in order to feed the population. In order to fund these imports, Athens exported its pottery, olive oil, wine and silver, all of which were internationally renowned as being of the highest quality. A tax of 2% was imposed on all goods leaving or entering the Piraeus. Most trade was conducted via this port, as sea was the safer and more efficient method of travel. However, some merchants and paddlers travelled by land to places including Megara and Boeotia.

What were "Athenian owls" and how did they facilitate trade? Athenian owls were the silver coins mined at Laurium. Their name came from the fact that they were stamped with the owl, one of Athena's main symbols. They were trusted currency and were generally accepted in most areas of Greece. This made trade more efficient because there was usually no need to exchange currencies. It also made the coins more valuable and gave Athens a greater air of prestige. Athenian coins have been found in Syria, Egypt, Italy, the Aegean Islands and Asia Minor, indicating widespread trade.

Coins were generally carried in small purses or the folds of one's clothing.

Who were the gods?

- *Zeus*: king of the gods, Zeus controlled the weather and was Athena's father. It was believed that when lightning struck earth, Zeus was present. It was also believed that if you treated a guest or stranger badly, Zeus would be offended. His symbol is the thunderbolt, and he is sometimes depicted as seated on a throne. He was the son of Rhea and Kronos, king of the Titans who ate his children for fear that they would grow up and kill him just as he had done to his own father. Rhea tricked Kronos into eating a stone instead of Zeus, his sixth child, and hid Zeus in a cave where he was brought up by a goat. Later, Zeus poisoned Kronos and caused him to vomit up all his children and the stone he had been tricked into swallowing. Zeus and his siblings went into battle against Kronos and the Titans and were victorious.
- *Hera*: Zeus's wife and queen of the gods, Hera is responsible for weddings and marriage. As such, she was incredibly jealous of the many affairs Zeus had and achieved vengeance against her husband's mistresses and illegitimate children. Her main symbols are a *polos* (high crown) and a sceptre, a royal symbol of office. Samos was believed to be her birthplace, and the Heraion, Greece's oldest temple, was built there.
- *Athena*: she is the goddess of war, wisdom, pot-making and wool-working. She is credited with the invention of the chariot, bridle and Athenian ships. Almost every polis in Greece had a sanctuary dedicated to Athena. She is also depicted as Athena Nike (Athena in Victory), wearing full armour and holding a spear and shield. Her main symbols are the moon, an olive sprig and owls, which feature on Athenian coins. The legend is that Athena was born fully formed from Zeus's head, thus why she can be considered the goddess of wisdom while Athenian human women were considered wild and in need of the control of a man. The Parthenon is dedicated to her, and the Panathenaia was held every year in honour of her birthday.
- *Apollo*: he was the god of the sun, truth, music, poetry, dance and healing. Poets would pray to him for protection. In times of war, he was symbolised by the bow; during times of peace, he was symbolised by the lyre and kithara. Apollo was shot with a golden arrow by Eros, causing him to fall in love the nymph Daphne who rejected his advances. Delos, the original headquarters of the Delian League, is considered his birthplace.

What were the temples on the Acropolis?

- *Erechtheum*: this temple was dedicated to the earth gods, including Zeus, Hephaestus (father of Erechtheus), Poseidon and Athena. The building was home to Athena's olive tree and Poseidon's spring, as described in Athens' origin story. It was designed to hold the cleansing festival and the Panathenaia, when omens were taken at the altar in the north porch. It was not part of Pericles' building program, as he died before it was finished. It had four main statues and had a porch of six caryatids. Its construction began during the Peace of Nicias but was interrupted by the Sicilian expedition. It was built using marble and iron, and features an Ionic frieze, most of which has been damaged over time. During the Panathenaia, the peplos for Athena was made for her wooden cult statue kept in the temple.
- *Parthenon*: this temple was the grandest in Athens and was dedicated to Athena. Built as part of Pericles' building program, its decorations depict the Athenians' defeat over the Persians. It also features a frieze depicting the Panathenaia. It features Doric columns which were curved to prevent the illusion of a sagging building. It was used as the treasury of the Delian League as well as a temple, and housed a statue of Athena 12 metres high and made of ivory and gold. It was situated on the highest point of the Acropolis. The greatest volume of marble ever in a Greek temple was used in its construction, and it had large wooden entrance doors embellished with

bronze, ivory and gold.

- *the Temple of Athena Nike*: the smallest structure on the Acropolis, this temple is dedicated to Athena in Victory and houses a wooden cult statue of her. The building had actually been there since 480 BC, but the Athenians rebuilt it in 420 BC. Due to its position on the edge of the Acropolis, a rail had to be constructed to prevent people falling off the edge.

Revise the festivals.

- *Great Dionysia*: this festival was formed from a series of traditional rural festivals held in honour of Dionysus, the god of high spirits, strong emotions and wine, which were then turned into a large-scale urban festival. It lasted for 4 days and began when the ancient wooden image of Dionysus was taken through a procession from the temple in the theatre district to the Dionysian temple. Sacrifices were made and hymns were sung. Later, plays were performed at the theatre and citizens were encouraged to party, drink and let loose.
- *Panathenaia*: Athens' most important festival, held for three days in honour of Athena's birthday. All Athenian residences and citizens were invited to take part, excluding slaves; it was one of the few times many women were permitted to leave the house and take an active role in a social event. Every year, young girls from prominent Athenian families were chosen to weave a new peplos for Athena's statue in the Erechtheum. The peplos and the girls who made it featured prominently in the festival's main procession along the Panathenaic Way to the Acropolis. The girls were revered and respected among society, and it was considered an honourable thing to be asked to sew the peplos. The procession was led by four girls and the peplos, followed by the priestesses of Athena and other Athenian women who carried gifts for Athena. They were followed by sacrificial animals (cows and sheep), metics and musicians. After these were old men carrying olive branches, four-horse chariots, the girls who had woven the peplos, the infantry and cavalry, victors in Athenian sports games, and finally ordinary Athenian citizens arranged by deme. The procession began at dawn. The Panathenaia include athletic, musical and speaking contests, and winners were awarded incredibly valuable prizes, indicating the importance of these games to the Athenians.
- *Great Panathenaia*: a version of the Panathenaia held every four years. It lasted for 8 days instead of three and involved the weaving of a peplos for the statue of Athena held in the Parthenon rather than the Erechtheum. This festival is the basis of the modern Olympic Games, as it involved, like the normal Panathenaia, athletic contests, the winners of which were highly respected and viewed with admiration.
- *Thesmophoria*: devoted to Demeter, the goddess of grain, and her daughter Persephone (or Kore). The festival was celebrated by women throughout the whole of Greece and lasted for three days in November, and focused on agriculture, marriage and fertility. Only the legitimate wives of citizens were allowed to attend. During the celebration, a pig was slaughtered and buried, and the pig from last year was exhumed. Sacrifices were made to Demeter, as well as dances honouring her and Persephone. Each night, celebrations were held in the temple, but on the last day fasting was undertaken.
- *Eleusinian Mysteries*: one of many secret religious rites, it was held in honour of Demeter and Persephone. It began with a solemn procession of the initiates from Athens to Eleusis, after which rites were performed that are still a secret. It is thought that something was recited, something was revealed and acts were performed, but specific details elude historians. The Mysteries were held annually, and began with purification rites held outside of Athens. The Lesser Mysteries were held earlier in the year, while the Greater Mysteries were held later and involved a ritual bath in the sea, three days of fasting and more secret rites.

Revise the role of priests and priestesses. These were men and women, usually wealthy or from an influential family, who ensured that the correct religious ceremonies and sacrifices were properly and appropriately carried out. Some priestesses had to be virgins, and they were typically not allowed to make blood sacrifices as priests were permitted to do. Some priests and priestesses were paid officials of the state, e.g. the priestess of Athena Nike. Both religious positions were given places of honour in the theatre or stadium and were accorded great respect and admiration in society. Many were considered to have direct contact with a particular god or goddess and Athenians viewed them as people who could help them earn the favour of the gods. Only religious officials were permitted to enter the altars in temples and were in charge of the various religious festivals that took place throughout the year.

Explain funerary arrangements. Death was considered a part of life and therefore regarded differently to the way it is regarded today. It was the role of the mother of the household to wash and dress the body before it could be presented to the rest of the family. The body would be washed, anointed, dressed, crowned and covered by the women, after which the males' only interaction with it would be observation. The Athenians believed that if a person died, they went to the Underworld, ruled by Hades. A deceased soul would pay a fee to cross the River Styx and enter the shadow world. From there they entered the shadow world and either went to the Elysian Fields or Tartarus. The death of a family member was acknowledged in a private funeral, while Athenians who died in war were publicly commemorated. It was believed that without a burial, a person's soul would be unable to find eternal rest. There were three main stages of an Athenian funeral. The body was laid out and washed, then left for two days, during which the women of the household sang ritual laments. All members of the family would wear black. Before dawn on the third day, the body was taken to the burial site, where it was buried with gifts and personal possessions which were considered necessary in the afterlife. A funeral dinner was held after the burial, and a month of mourning followed. (mention *lekythoi* and *libations*)

Know the buildings of the Agora.

- *Tholos*: the only round building in the Agora, named as such because "tholos" is the Greek word for circle. The building was used to house and feed the prytaneis, groups of the boule, at public expense. Markings on cutlery excavated reveals that even the utensils and plates the prytaneis ate with were owned by the state. The roof was a cone shape, supported by six internal columns. It was situated south of the bouleterion and formed part of the administrative centre of Athens.
- *Statue of the Eponymous Heroes*: situated near the tholos, it contained ten bronze statues which stood on a long base. Each statue was representative of an individual deme, and it was here that notices or announcements could be posted, indicating that the population of ancient Athens was literate. Notices posted could range from anything to military conscription and public honours, to upcoming legal events and proposed legislation.
- *Altar of the Twelve Gods*: this altar was situated almost in the very centre of the Agora, as it was from here that all distances in Athens were calculated. It was rectangular in shape and enclosed by a low wall, unimpressive to the eye but crucial to Athenian society. Archaeological evidence suggests it was reconstructed several times, emphasising its significance to the Athenians.
- *Panathenaic Way*: the main road through the Agora which marked the route of the annual procession in the Panathenaia. It was mostly unpaved, aside from the area where it began its ascent to the Acropolis where it was paved with large stone slabs by the Romans. It was also used for chariot races during the Panathenaia, and as a running track prior to the construction of a proper stadium.

Why were painted vases important?

- *red-figure and black-figure pottery*: red-figure pottery emerged around halfway through the 5th century BC, and featured a black background with figures and details in red. A 3D perspective was added by using black to highlight certain features. Detail was more easily achieved on red-figure pottery than black figure-pottery, as lines could be carefully drawn on rather than scraped out. In black-figure pottery, figures were usually shown in profile, but red-figure pottery allowed for frontal, back and three-quarter views. Pots were usually decorated with scenes indicating the way in which they were to be used, e.g *amphora* (transporting goods) and *hydria* (drawing water) depicted scenes from everyday life, while *lekythoi* (pouring libations) were decorated with religious scenes. Red-figure vases became very famous around Greece and the Mediterranean and were a very valuable export.

Daily life: The main comparisons lie between the rich and poor, and males and females. For women it was probably better to be born into a poorer family, as they would be expected to work and go outside, which women of the middle and upper classes were not allowed to do. Rich women lived very restricted lives. The *symposium*, married women vs unmarried married, *hetaerae*, military training, *agoge* (education) —> stories of Homer, rhetoric, maths (only for the rich), people enjoyed plays but actors were considered the lowest of the low

How were boys and girls educated?

- *boys*: Education differed between the rich and poor. Boys from rich family were taught to read and write by writing on wax tablets. They were also taught to recite passages from “the Iliad” and “the Odyssey”, as Homer’s works were considered of great cultural importance. They were taught to play the lyre or the flute, or to sing. They were also given a physical education in running, wrestling, discus, jumping, etc which was undertaken at a *palaistra*. Many young boys had an older mentor with whom a romantic relationship often developed. This was considered an integral part of education and was accepted as long as the relationship ended when the mentor got married or the boy began growing a beard. Sophists were employed to teach boys the skills of oratory, politics, logic, ethics and literature, and were often metics.
- *girls*: the education of girls was not considered of the same importance as the education of boys. Girls were typically taught the necessities of running a household and were usually illiterate, unless taught to read at home. Rich Athenian girls would have been educated in music and dancing, but the most common form of education for girls was cooking, cleaning, caring for younger children and managing the household.