

Publication: The Straits Times

Date: Feb 10 2008

Headline: Life in Ancient Athens

LIFE IN ANCIENT ATHENS

The Greeks in the Classical period of the 5th-4th century BC lived a life rich with strong social, political, hierarchical and religious overtones. The structure of daily life segmented activities for men, women and children. Their stories are told in an exceptional exhibition of Greek masterpieces now on at the National Museum. Straits Times journalists ANGELINA CHOY, MIEL and QUEK HONG SHIN bring you these stories.

RELIGION

- Every aspect of family and public life placed under gods' protection
- Mainly rituals of performing prescribed rites, festivals and sacrifices
- Every house has its own altar
- Every city has its own patron deity (Athens named after Athena)
- Two categories of sacred beings - gods and heroes
- Gods immortal, with supernatural powers and in human form most of the time
- 14 Olympian gods, the main deities, dwelling on Mount Olympus
- Heroes generally men and often mortal
- Exploits of many like Heracles, Ulysses, Achilles and Paris made famous in epics

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

- Theatre not just a pastime but also a component of religious and civic life
- An outlet for questions about public life to be raised
- Spectators paid a salary to attend these plays, sometimes lasting for days
- Competitive in nature, prizes for best chorus, poet and actor

Actors wear masks depicting the characters they play.



SPORTS

- Training starts from age of 12
- Linked to military exercise
- Sporting competitions belong to aristocratic rivalry
- Olympic Games (in honour of Zeus) and Pythian Games (in honour of Apollo) held every four years
- Four-horse chariot race the most prestigious event

A bronze scraper called a strigil is used to remove sweat and sand from the athlete's oiled body.

WOMEN

- Considered minors, and placed under the control of a "lord" (father, husband or even son)
- Cannot instigate legal action or inherit land
- Live shut away, weaving wool to make clothes for the family
- Raise children, educate the girls

Women wear gold bracelets with twisted loops ending in animal heads.



CHILDREN

- Infant mortality is high. Newborns not given much regard and not given names till they are 10 days old
- Live in women's quarters till they are seven (for boys), and till marriage for the girls
- Boys take part in drinking competitions from the age of three. They have to finish the wine contained in a miniature jug (left) as quickly as possible



Sculpted animals and monsters are installed on top of tombs.



How well do you know your Greek gods? Match these gods to their names below. (Answers at the bottom of the page)

- A Heavenly King of the gods and ruler of mankind
- B Brother of Zeus, god of the seas
- C Brother of Zeus, god of the underworld
- D Goddess of marriage
- E Goddess of wisdom and the arts
- F Goddess of beauty
- G God of the sun and music
- H Goddess of hunt and untamed nature
- I God of warlike frenzy
- J God of wine
- K God of blacksmiths
- L God of trade
- M Goddess of harvest
- N Goddess of hearth

Athena, Demeter, Hades, Dionysus, Apollo, Hera, Aphrodite, Artemis, Zeus, Hestia, Ares, Hephaestus, Hermes, Poseidon

LEND ME YOUR EARS

- Held to celebrate the introduction of youths into aristocratic society. Also held to celebrate special occasions like victories
- Wine drunk according to strict rules laid down by the banqueting master
- Verbal exchanges of poetry and music. Games of skill played

WARFARE

- Athens at war at least half of the time
- Usually waged in spring and autumn
- Different roles for different men based on social standings:
 - Aristocrats - Have their own horses and equipment and served in cavalry
 - Well-to-do landowners - Equipped with own bronze and leather armour
 - The poor - Oarsmen in navy



Earrings are the most common type of jewellery.

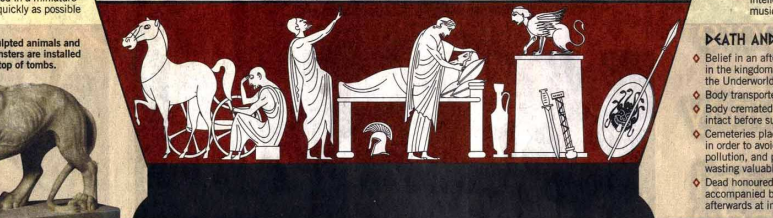
- Women were allowed to leave the house only when veiled and accompanied (except for courtesans, musicians and dancers)
- Public fountains a main meeting place for women

- Toys of wood, clay and bone include yoyos, marbles, hoops, spinning tops and articulated dolls (right)
- Many keep small animals like dogs and rabbits as pets
- Boys from the age of seven receive an education in three areas: intellectual matters, music/poetry and sports



DEATH AND BURIAL

- Belief in an after-life or under-life, in the kingdom of the dead, called Hades, the Underworld
- Body transported to place of burial in cart
- Body cremated before burial or buried intact before sunrise
- Cemeteries placed outside the city walls in order to avoid disease and religious pollution, and perhaps even to avoid wasting valuable urban space
- Dead honoured by feasts, first at burial, accompanied by animal sacrifice, and afterwards at intervals



GREEK MASTERPIECES FROM THE LOUVRE

WHAT:

- First time showcased in South-east Asia
- 130 artefacts, many out of the Louvre for the first time

WHEN:

Till March 16
National Museum of Singapore Exhibition Galleries

ADMISSION:

\$8 for adults
\$4 for children, the elderly and NSFs

HOURS: 10am to 6pm daily
Check for times of free guided tours.

Answers to Greek gods quiz:

A Zeus B Poseidon C Hades D Hera
E Athena F Aphrodite G Apollo H Artemis
I Ares J Dionysus K Hephaestus L Hermes
M Demeter N Hestia