World History Name:

Mr. Murray Date:

Reading #2 Athens: Urban Landscape Block:

Source: Making of the West Peoples and Cultures

**The Urban Landscape of Golden Age Athens**

The Delian League’s fleet protected seaborne trade, and Athens became a flourishing commercial center for cargo, merchants, and crafts producers from around the Mediterranean world. The city’s new riches flowed mainly into pubic building projects, art, and festivals rather than private luxury. People’s homes in the city and the countryside remained modest. Farmhouses usually clustered in villages, while homes in the city wedged higgledy-piggledy against one another along narrow, winding streets. All residences grouped bedrooms, storerooms, and dining rooms around small, open-air courtyards. Wall paintings or art works were not yet common as decorations, and sparse furnishings were the rule. Sanitary facilities usually consisted of a pit dug outside the front door, which was emptied by collectors paid to dump the contents outside the city at a distance set by law. Poorer people rented small apartments.



Generals who won enormous booty leading Delian League forces against Persian outposts in the eastern Mediterranean used this wealth to beautify the city, not to build themselves mansions. In this way, Athens acquired landscaping with shade trees, running tracks for exercise, and gathering places such as the renowned Painted Stoa. A *stoa* was a narrow building open along one side whose purpose was to provide shelter from sun or rain. One successful general’s family built the Painted Stoa in the heart of the city, on the edge of the central market square, the *agora.* The crowds who came to the agora daily to shop and chat about politics would cluster inside this shelter. There they could gaze on its bright paintings, which depicted the glorious exploits of the general’s family and thus publicized its dedication to the city-state. Wealthy citizens also paid for other major public expenses, such as equipment for warships and entertainment at city festivals. The custom was essential because Athens, like most Greek city-states, had no regular direct taxes on income or property.

Huge buildings paid for by public funds constituted the most conspicuous new architecture in Golden Age Athens. In 447 B.C., Pericles instigated the city’s greatest building project ever, on the rocky hill at the center of the city call the *acropolis.* The project’s centerpieces were a mammoth gate building with columns straddling the western entrance of the acropolis and a new temple of Athena housing a huge statue of the goddess. Comparing the value of a day’s wage then and now, we can calculate that these buildings easily cost more than the modern equivalent of a billion dollars, a phenomenal sum for a Greek city-state. Pericles’ political rivals railed at him for squandering public funds. Scholars disagree about whether the assembly used Delian League dues to help finance the program; it is certain that substantial funds were taken from sales tax, harbor taxes, and the financial reserves of the sanctuaries of the goddess Athena, which derived from private donations and public support.

The vast new temple built for Athena—the Parthenon (“the house of the virgin goddess”)—became Greece’s most famous building. As the patron goddess of Athens, Athena had long had another sanctuary on the acropolis. In focus it was an olive tree regarded as the goddess’s sacred symbol as protector of the city-state’s economic health. The Parthenon honored her in a different capacity: as the diving champion of Athenian military power. Inside the temple stood a gold and ivory statue nearly forty feet high depicting the goddess in battle armor, holding in her outstretched hand a six-foot statue of Victory (Nike in Greek).

Like all Greek temples, the Parthenon was meant as a house for its divinity, not as a gathering place for worshipers. Its design followed standard temple architecture: a rectangular box on a raised platform, a plan the Greeks probably derived from Egyptian temples. The box, which had only one small door at the front, was fenced in by columns all around. The Parthenon’s columns were carved in the simple style called Doric, in contrast to the more elaborate Ionic and Corinthian styles, often imitated in modern buildings. Only priests and priestesses could enter the temple usually; public religious ceremonies took place out front.

The Parthenon proclaimed the self-confidence of Golden Age Athens. Constructed from twenty-thousand tons of Attic marble, it stretched nearly 230 feet in length and 100 feet wide, with eight columns across the ends instead of the six normally found in Doric style and seventeen instead of thirteen along the sides. Its massive size conveyed an impression of power. The temple’s sophisticated architecture demonstrated Athenian ability to construct order that was both apparent and real: because perfectly rectilinear architecture appears curved to the human eye, subtle curves ad inclines were built into the Parthenon to produce an illusion of completely straight lines ad emphasize its massiveness.

The elaborate sculptural frieze of the Parthenon announced the temple’s most innovative and confident message: Athens’s citizens possessed the special goodwill of the gods. The frieze, a continuous band of figures was carved in relief around the top of the walls inside the porch along the edges of the building’s platform. This sort of decoration usually appeared only on the Ionic-style buildings. Adding it to a Doric-style temple was a striking departure meant to attract attention. The Parthenon’s frieze portrayed Athenian men, women, and children in a parade in the presence of gods. Depicting the procession in motion, like a filmstrip in stone, the frieze included youths riding spirited horses and women carrying sacred implements As usual on Greek temples, brightly colored paint and shiny metal attachments enlivened the figures of people and animals.

No other city-state had ever gone beyond the traditional function of temples—glorifying and paying homage to the community’s special deities—by adorning a temple with representations of its citizens. The Parthenon frieze made a unique statement about how Athenians perceived their relationship to the gods. A temple adorned with pictures of citizens being viewed by the gods amounted to a claim of special intimacy between the city-state and the gods. This assertion reflected the Athenians’ interpretation of their success in helping turn back the Persians, in achieving leadership of a powerful naval alliance, and in amassing wealth that made Athens richer than all its neighbors in mainland Greece. Their success, the Athenians believed, proved that the gods were on their side.

Like the Parthenon frieze the changed that the Golden Age artists made in freestanding sculpture broke tradition. Archiac male statues had only one pose: arms pressed to their sides and left leg striding forward, imitating the unchanging posture of Egyptian statuary. This style gave them an appearance of stability; even a hard shove seemed unlikely to budge them. By the time of the Persian Wars, Greek sculptors began to express motion in their art. Male statues could have bent arms and the body’s weight on either leg. Female statues, too, had more relaxed poses and clothing that hung in a way that hinted at the shape of the curves underneath. The faces of Golden Age sculptures were self-confidently calm rather than smiling like Archiac figures. This spirited new style suggested the confident energy of the times but also hinted at the possibility of the instability: Golden Age sculptors took more chanced with the balance of their statues.

Whether private individuals or the city-state paid for statues, they were meant to be displayed in public to broadcast a message. Art was not yet used to decorate homes. Instead, wealthy families would commission statues of gods to be housed in a sanctuary as symbols of devotion. They also places statues od their deceased members, especially if they had died young in war or in childbirth, above their graves as memorials of their virtue.

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Athens Reading #3: Traditions and Innovations of Athens Block:

**Tradition and Innovation in Athens’s Golden Age**

Fifth-Century BC Athens hosted unprecedented accomplishments in architecture, art, drama, and intellectual life, but may central aspects of its social and religious life remained unchanged. The simultaneous love for innovation and for tradition created social tensions, especially concerning religion. Women’s role in public life did not change, and women continued to make essential contributions by managing the household, participating in religious ceremonies, and, if they were poor, working in commerce and agriculture to help support their families. The severest tension arose from the startling ideas of teachers called *sophists* and the ethical views of philosopher Socrates. The most visible response to the tension produced by new developments was the increased importance of tragic and comedic drama as publicly supported art forms examining problems in city-state life.

**Women, Slaves, and Metics in Traditional Society**

The power and status of Athenian women came from their roles in the family and in religion. Upper-class women devoted their lives to running their households, meeting female friends, and participating in the city-state’s religious cults. Poorer women helped support themselves and their families, often as small-scale merchants and crafts producers.

Women’s exclusion from politics meant that their contributions to the city-state might be overlooked by men. In his play *Medea* of 431 B.C., the Athenian dramatist Euripides had his heroine insist that women who bear children are owed respect at least commensurate with that granted hoplites, a plausible claim given the high risks of childbirth under the medical conditions of antiquity:

*People say that we women lead a safe life at home, while men have to go to war. What fools they are! I would much rather fight in the army three times than give birth to a child even once.*

Women, like men, could own property, including land (the most valued possession in Greek society), and they were supposed to preserve it to hand down to their children. A daughter’s share in her father’s estate usually came to her in her dowry at marriage. Husband and wife co-owned the household’s common property, which was apportioned to its separate owners if the marriage dissolved. The husband was legally responsible for preserving the dowry and using it for the support and comfort of his wife and any children she bore. Upon her death, her children inherited the dowry.

Athenian laws concerning heiresses reveal society’s goal of enabling males to establish and maintain households. If a father died leaving only a daughter, his property went to her, but she could not dispose of it as she pleased. Instead, her father’s closest male relative- her official guardian after her father’s death- was required to marry her, with the aim of producing a son. This rule applied regardless of whether the heiress was already married (without any sons) or whether the male relative already had a wife. The heiress and the male relative were both supposed to divorce their present spouses and marry each other (although in practice the rule could be circumvented by legal subterfuge) to preserve the father’s line and keep the property in his family.

Athenian women from the urban propertied class were expected to avoid close contact with men who were not family members or good friends. They were supposed to spend much of their time in their own homes or the homes of women friends. Women dressed and slept in rooms set aside for them, which opened onto a walled courtyard where they could walk in the open air, talk, supervise the family’s slaves, and interact with other members of the household, male and female. Here in her “territory” a woman would spin wool for clothing while chatting with visiting friends, play with her children, and give her opinions on various matters to the men of the house as they came and went. Poor women had little time for such activities because they, like their husbands, sons, and brothers, has to leave their homes, usually crowded rental apartments, to work. They often set small stalls to sell bread, vegetables, simple clothing, or trinkets.

A woman with servants who answered the door herself would be reproached as careless of her reputation. A proper woman left her home only for an appropriate reason. Fortunately, Athenian life offered many occasions for women to get out: religious festivals, funerals, childbirths at the houses of relatives and friends, and trips to workshops to buy shoes or other domestic articles. Sometimes her husband escorted her, but more often a woman was accompanied only by a servant and could act independently. Social protocol required men not to speak the names of respectable women in public conversations or in court speeches unless absolutely necessary.

Because rich women stayed out of the sun, they maintained pale complexions. This pallor was much admired as a sign of an enviable life of leisure and wealth. Women regularly used powdered white lead to give themselves a suitably pallid look. Presumably, many upper-class women viewed their limited contact with men outside the household as a badge of superior social status. In a gender-segregated society such as that of upper-class Athens, a women’s primary personal relationships were probably with her children and other women.

Men restricted women’s freedom of movement partly to reduce uncertainty about the paternity of their children and to protect their daughter’s virginity from seducers and rapists. Since citizenship guaranteed the city-state’s political structure and a man’s personal freedom, Greeks felt it crucial to ensure that a boy truly was his father’s son and not the offspring of a foreigner or slave. Women who bore legitimate children earned higher status and greater freedom in the family, as an Athenian man explained in this excerpt from a court case:

*When I decided to marry and I had brought a wife home, at first my attitude towards her was this: I did not wish to annoy her but neither was she to have too much of her own way… I kept an eye on her as was proper. But later, after my child had been born, I came to trust her. And I handed all my possessions over to her, believing that this was the greatest possible proof of affection.*

Bearing male children brought special honor to a woman because sons meant security for parents. Sons could appear in court in support of their parents in lawsuits and protect them in the streets of Athens, which, for most of it’s history, had no police force. By law, sons were required to support elderly parents. So intense was the pressure to produce sons that stories of women who smuggled in male babies born to slaves and passed them off as their own were common. Such tales, whose truth is hard to gauge, were credible because husbands customarily stayed away at childbirth.

A small number of Athenian women were able to flaunt traditional restrictions because they gave us the usual expectations of marrying or were too rich to be cowed by men. The most renowned of the former group were called companions. Often foreigners, they were physically attractive, witty in conversation, and able to sing and play musical instruments. Thy often entertained at a symposium (a male dinner party without wives), and sometimes, they sold sexual favors for a high price. Their independent existence distinguished companions from citizen women as did the freedom to control their own sexuality. Equally distinctive was their ability to converse with men in public. Companions charmed men with their witty, bantering conversation. Their characteristic skill at clever taunts and verbal snubs allowed companions a freedom of speech denied to “proper women”.

Some companions lived precarious lives subject to exploitation and even violence at the hands of their male customers, but the most accomplished could attract lovers from the highest levels of society and live in luxury on their own. The most famous such woman was Aspasia from Miletus, who became Pericles’ lover and bore him a son. She dazzled Athens’s upper class males with her brilliant conversation and confidence. Ironically, Pericles’ desire to marry her was blocked by his own law in 451 BC restricting citizenship.

Only the very wealthiest citizen women could speak to men publicly with the frankness of companions. One such was Elpinike, A member of a super-rich Athenian family of great military distinction. She once penly rebuked Pericles for having boasted about the Athenian conquest of a rebellious ally. When some other Athenian woman praised Pericles for his success, Elpinike sarcastically remarked, “This really is wonderful, Pericles, …that you have caused the loss of many good citizens, not in battle against Phoenicians or Persians, like my brother Cimon, but in suppressing an allied city of fellow Greeks.” Ancient sources confirm that ordinary women, too, remained engaged and interested in issues affecting the city –state as a whole. They often had strong opinions on politics and public policy, but they had to express their views privately to their husbands, children, and relatives.

In contrast to citizen women, slaves and metics (foreigners granted permanent residency) had no political influence because they were “outsiders” living inside Greek society. Individuals and the city state alike owned slaves, who could be purchased from traders or bred in the household. Unwanted newborns abandoned by their parents ( the practice called infant exposure) were often picked up by other and raised as slaves. Athens’s commercial growth in this period increased the demand for slaves. Although no reliable statistics survive, slaves probably made up 100,000 or more of the city-states’s estimated 250,000 residents in Pericles’ time. Slaves worked in homes, on farms, in crafts shops, and , if they were truly unfortunate, the cramped and dangerous silver mines who’s riches boosted Athens’s prosperity. Unlike Sparta’s helots, Athens’s slaves never rebelled, probably because they originated from too many different places to be able to unite.

Golden Age Athens wealth and cultural vitality attracted numerous metics, who flocked to the city as importers, crafts producers, entertainers, and laborers. By the start of the Peloponnesian War in 431 BC, they constituted perhaps half the free population. Metics had to pay for the privilege of working in Athens through a special foreigners’ tax and military service. Citizens had ambivalent feelings about metics, valuing their contributions to the city’s prosperity but almost never offering them citizenship.

Metics therefore sometimes found themselves relegated to ways of life outside the mainstream, such as prostitution. Men, unlike women, were not penalized for sexual activity outside of marriage. “Certainly you don’t think men beget children out of sexual desire?” wrote the upper class author Xenophon. “Streets and brothels are swarming with ways to take care of that.” Men could have sex with females or male slaves, who could not refuse their masters, or they could patronize various classes of prostitutes, depending on how much money they wanted to spend.