

# The role of women

Women in most states in ancient Greece led very sheltered lives and were not allowed to play an active role in society. They couldn't inherit or own property, or bring cases in the law courts.

They could not even buy anything that cost over a certain amount of money. They were always under the control of a male relative: first their father, then their husband, brother or son.

## Marriage

A girl was around 15 when she was married, but the bridegroom was older. One writer thought that 30-35 was the best age for a man to marry.

A girl's father chose her husband and gave her money and goods, known as a dowry. This returned to her father if her husband divorced her, or died.



On the day before her wedding a bride bathed in water from a sacred spring, brought in a special vase called a *loutrophorus*.

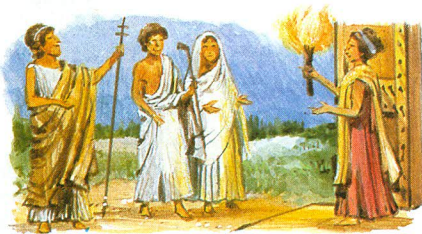


Servants dressing the bride

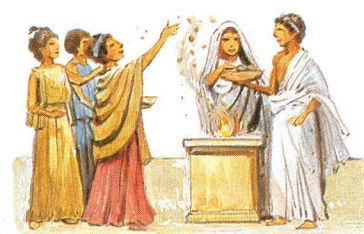
On the wedding day, the bride wore white. Both families made sacrifices and feasted. In the evening, the groom went to the bride's house.



The bride and groom then rode to his house in a cart, or in a chariot if they were rich. Torchbearers and musicians led the procession.



The groom's mother met the procession. The bride was then led to the hearth, to join the religious life of her new family.



The bride and groom shared some food before the hearth. The guests showered them with nuts, fruits and sweets for luck and prosperity.



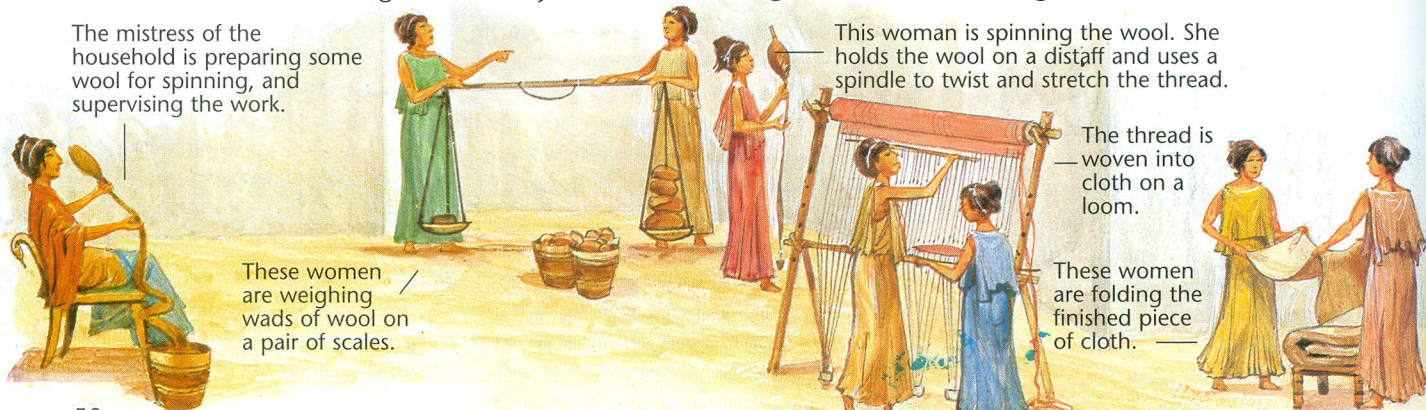
The next day a party was held at the husband's house, and guests gave presents to the couple, as they began their new lives together.

## A wife's duties

In a wealthy household, a bride had many duties. She inspected the stores and ensured that the house was clean and that meals were ready on time. She looked after the children and any sick members of the household, and managed the family finances.

The women of the household produced all the cloth needed for clothes and furnishings. This reconstruction, based on a 6th century vase painting, shows a wife supervising the various stages involved in making cloth.

The mistress of the household is preparing some wool for spinning, and supervising the work.



These women are weighing wads of wool on a pair of scales.

This woman is spinning the wool. She holds the wool on a distaff and uses a spindle to twist and stretch the thread.

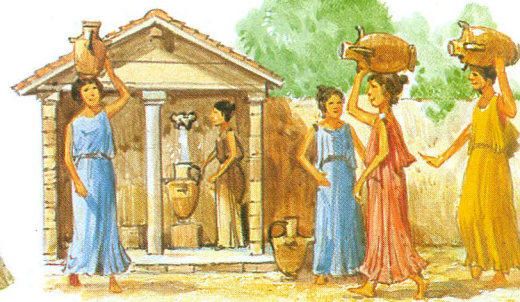
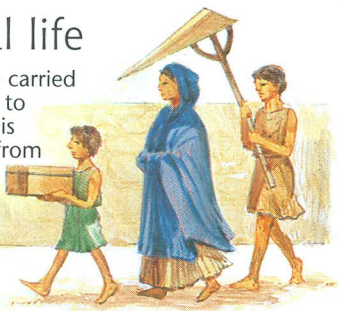
The thread is woven into cloth on a loom.

These women are folding the finished piece of cloth.



## Social life

The slave carried a parasol to protect his mistress from the Sun.



In Athens, married women from wealthy families didn't often leave the house. They only went out for religious festivals and family celebrations, or to do small bits of personal shopping. When they did go out, a slave accompanied them.

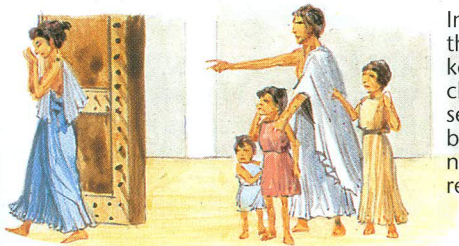
Sometimes they were allowed to visit their women friends. This terracotta statue shows two ladies chatting. Women also gave dinner parties for their female friends. Men and women only mixed at strictly family parties.

Generally, the richer the family, the less freedom the wife had. In poor families, the women did the housework themselves. This involved going shopping and fetching water from the fountain, which were both good opportunities to meet friends.

## Divorce

Though men could do more or less as they liked, women had to behave according to strict rules: at any suspicion of scandal, they might face divorce.

To divorce his wife, a man just made a formal statement of divorce in front of witnesses. It was much more difficult for a woman to end her marriage, as she could not take legal action herself. She had to go to an official called an *archon* (see page 61) and persuade him to act on her behalf.



In a divorce, the husband kept the children and sent his wife back to her nearest male relative.

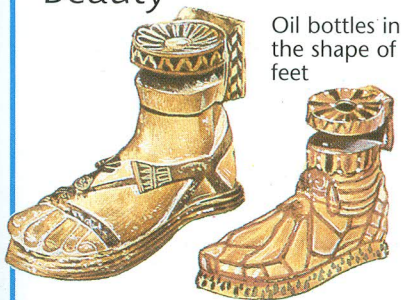
## Hetairai

*Hetairai* could join men's dinner parties. They were trained to join in the conversation.



Some girls, usually from the lower classes or foreigners, would become *hetairai*, or companions. They had to be pretty and clever, and were carefully trained to be skilled musicians and witty, interesting speakers. They took wealthy lovers who could support them in comfort.

## Beauty



Oil bottles in the shape of feet



This vase painting shows a woman washing her hair. Oil was also used to make the hair shine. Some women dyed their hair or used wigs. Others used padding to improve their figure, or wore thick-soled sandals to make themselves taller.



Many women used rouge to make their cheeks pink, and darkened their eyebrows. Pale skin was fashionable and makeup was used to make the skin look white. This vase painting shows a woman admiring herself in a mirror.

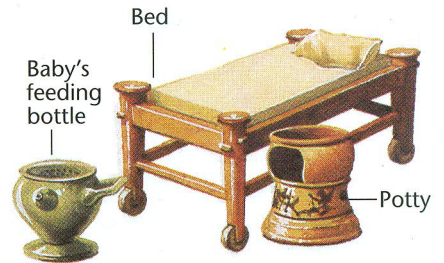


# Childhood and education

Greek people were encouraged to have sons to provide citizens and soldiers. Parents also benefited from having a son, as it ensured there would be someone to support them in their old age.

Daughters could not support their parents because they were not allowed to inherit property or money. If a man did not have a son, he could adopt a boy who would inherit from him.

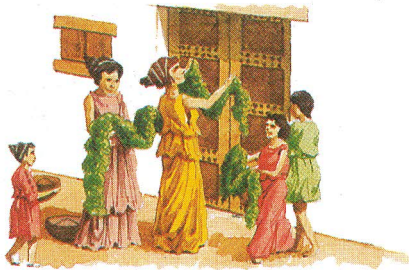
## Babies



When a baby was born, the mother presented it to her husband. If he did not believe that it was his child, or if the baby was not in perfect health, he could reject it. The baby would then be left to die.

People who didn't want another child might also abandon their babies. In some states unwanted babies were left in a specific place. People could go there and adopt a child to be their slave.

Rich families would hire a poor person or a slave as a nurse for the baby. They also had special furniture made for their children, some of which has been found on the sites of excavated houses.



Seven days after the birth of a baby, the front door of the house was decorated with garlands of olive leaves for a boy or wool for a girl. The family made a sacrifice to the gods and held a party.

A ceremony called the *amphidromia* took place at the party. The women of the house carried the baby around the hearth to bring it into the religious life of the family. The baby was usually named as well.

At the age of three, a child's infancy was thought to be over. In Athens this was marked at the *Anthesteria* festival (see page 67). On the second day of the festival, three-year-olds were given small jugs like this one.

## Education in Sparta

The state of Sparta was very worried about being attacked, so its education was all about toughness and physical fitness. The most important subjects were athletics, dancing and weapon training. Some music, Spartan law and poetry were also taught, although they were not considered very important. The Spartans aimed to produce tough, healthy adults to become warriors and mothers of warriors.

At seven, a boy was sent to live in a barracks, supervised by a teacher known as a *paidonome*.

Each boy belonged to a group, and several groups made up a class. Group leaders organized the work.

Boys had to make their own beds from rushes. They weren't allowed to have covers.

From the age of 12, boys went bareheaded and barefooted.



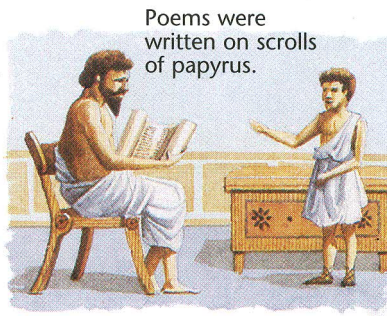
# School

A boy's education usually began at the age of seven, and could go on until he started his military training at 18 (see page 36). In Greek education, physical fitness was considered to be as important as learning.

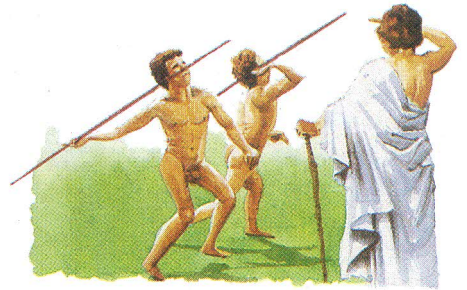
As education had to be paid for, it is unlikely that poor children received more than a basic schooling. Girls were usually taught by their mothers at home. A rich family often hired a slave known as a *paidagogos* to supervise their son's schooling.



A boy attended three schools. The first was run by a teacher known as a *grammatistes*, who taught reading, writing and arithmetic. Pupils wrote with a stylus on wooden tablets covered in wax.



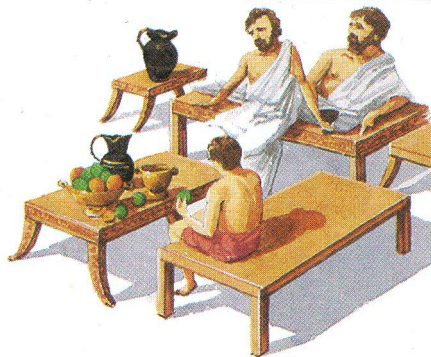
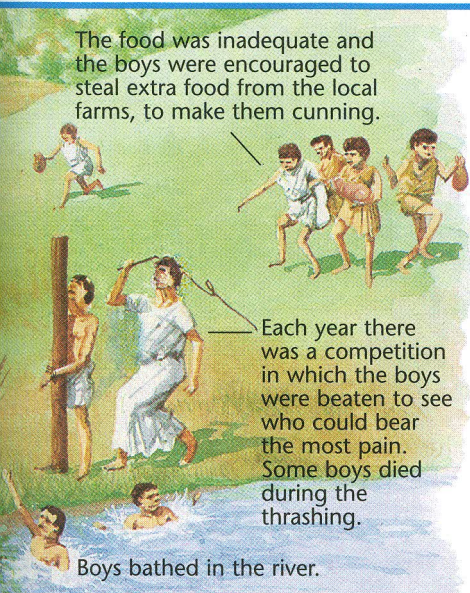
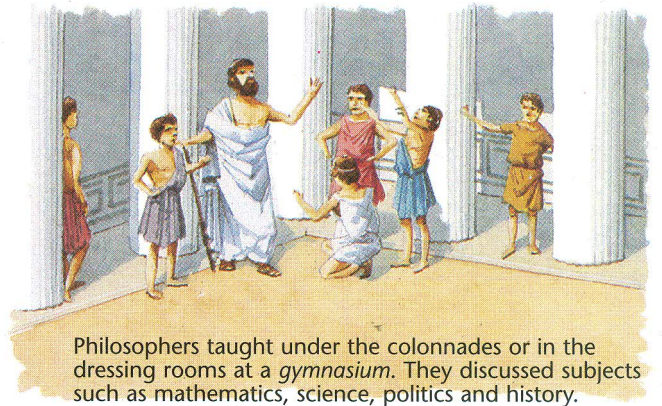
A boy was taught music and poetry by a *kitharistes*. He also learned to play the lyre and the pipes. He had to learn poetry by heart, as an educated man was expected to quote poetry in his conversation.



The third type of school was run by a *paidotribes*, who taught dancing and athletics. He probably took his pupils to a *gymnasium* (a training ground) or a *palaistra* (a wrestling school) to train.

## Higher education

There was no formal higher education, but from the 5th century BC, teachers called *sophists* went from place to place instructing young men in the art of public speaking. Philosophers like Socrates often taught informally at a *gymnasium* and attracted groups of devoted young followers. In the 4th century BC, Plato, Aristotle and others set up permanent schools at *gymnasia* in Athens. By the Hellenistic Period, it was common for *gymnasia* to provide lecture rooms and libraries as part of their facilities.



Boys were allowed to attend the men's meals in the barracks. They listened and took part in the discussions, but absolute respect and obedience to their elders was expected.



A Spartan dancing class

Spartan girls were also educated in order to produce physically fit and disciplined women. They were trained in gymnastics, music, singing and dancing, and took part in athletic competitions.