

THE GOLDEN AGE OF ATHENS

This period from about 500 to 336BC is known as the Classical period in Greek history. For much of this time, the city-states were dominated by the great city of Athens.

CITY OF CULTURE

Athens prospered in the years of peace following the end of the Persian Wars. The city was magnificently rebuilt, and became the focus for business and culture. At its peak - from about 479 to 431BC - Athens attracted the best artists and scholars of the time. They developed ideas about art, architecture, literature, politics, philosophy, science and history that laid the basis for modern European civilization.

THE EARLY YEARS

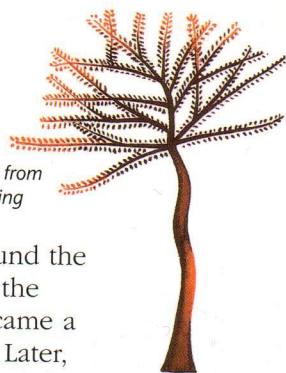
The earliest settlement, known as the Acropolis, or 'high city', was built high on a rocky hill. The first Athenians settled there because it was easy to defend and there was a freshwater spring.

NAMING THE CITY

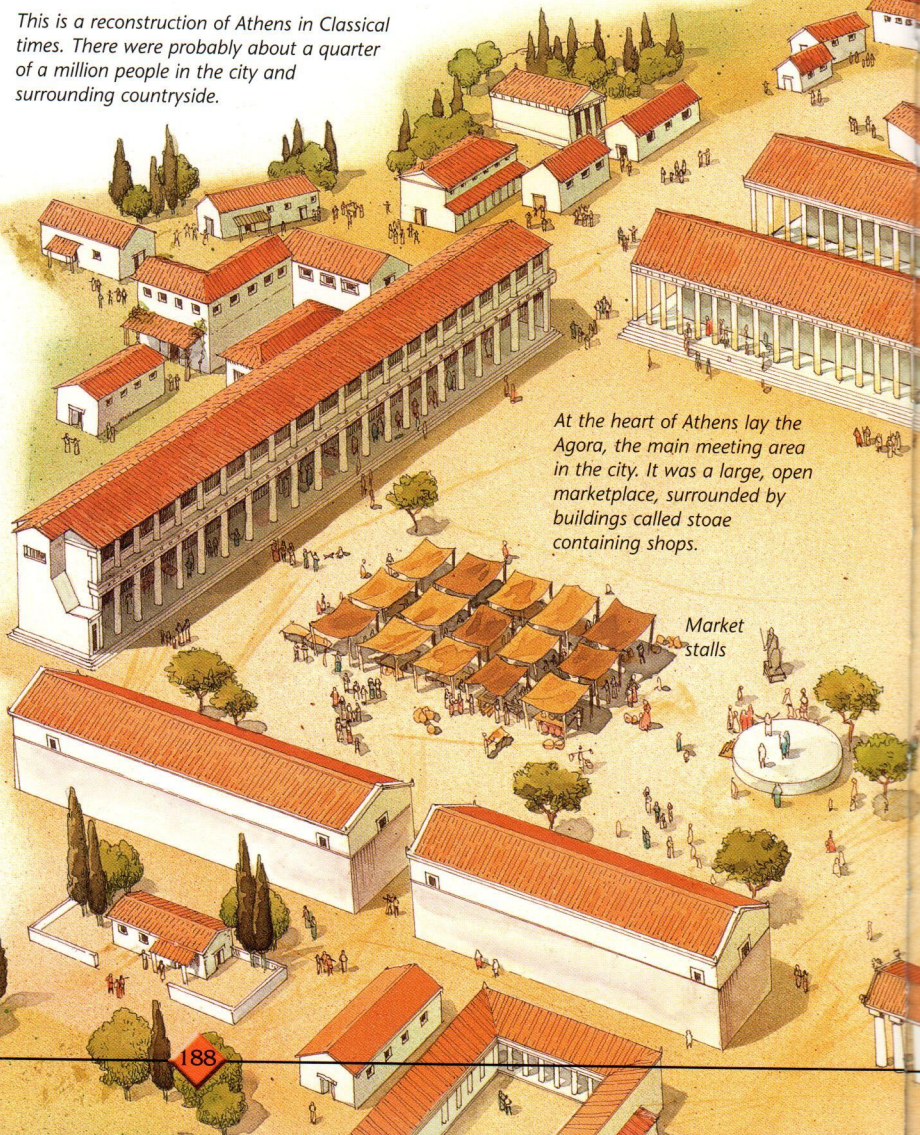
According to legend, Poseidon, god of the seas, and Athene, goddess of wisdom and war, fought over the naming of the greatest city in Greece. Poseidon promised the people riches through trade, but Athene planted an olive tree. The people decided that this was the more valuable gift, so the city was named Athens after her.

This is a reconstruction of Athens in Classical times. There were probably about a quarter of a million people in the city and surrounding countryside.

Athene's olive tree, from a Greek vase painting



The area around the olive tree on the Acropolis became a sacred place. Later, when the city grew, people built their homes around the base of the hill, reserving the Acropolis for temples and shrines.



At the heart of Athens lay the Agora, the main meeting area in the city. It was a large, open marketplace, surrounded by buildings called stoa containing shops.

Market stalls



INTERNET LINK

For links to websites where you can explore ancient Athens with an interactive map and discover what it was like to live there, go to www.usborne-quicklinks.com