

FAMILY LIFE

The Greeks did not have a word for 'family'. They had 'clans' and 'households' instead. A 'clan' meant people descended from one ancestor. A 'household' meant people living together, and might include a married couple, their children, grandparents, servants and slaves.

Greek marriages were often arranged. Brides had no chance to choose a partner or say 'no'. Husbands and wives may never have met before their wedding day. Once married, they were not equal. Husbands had almost total power over money and legal matters, though wives were in charge of running the home.

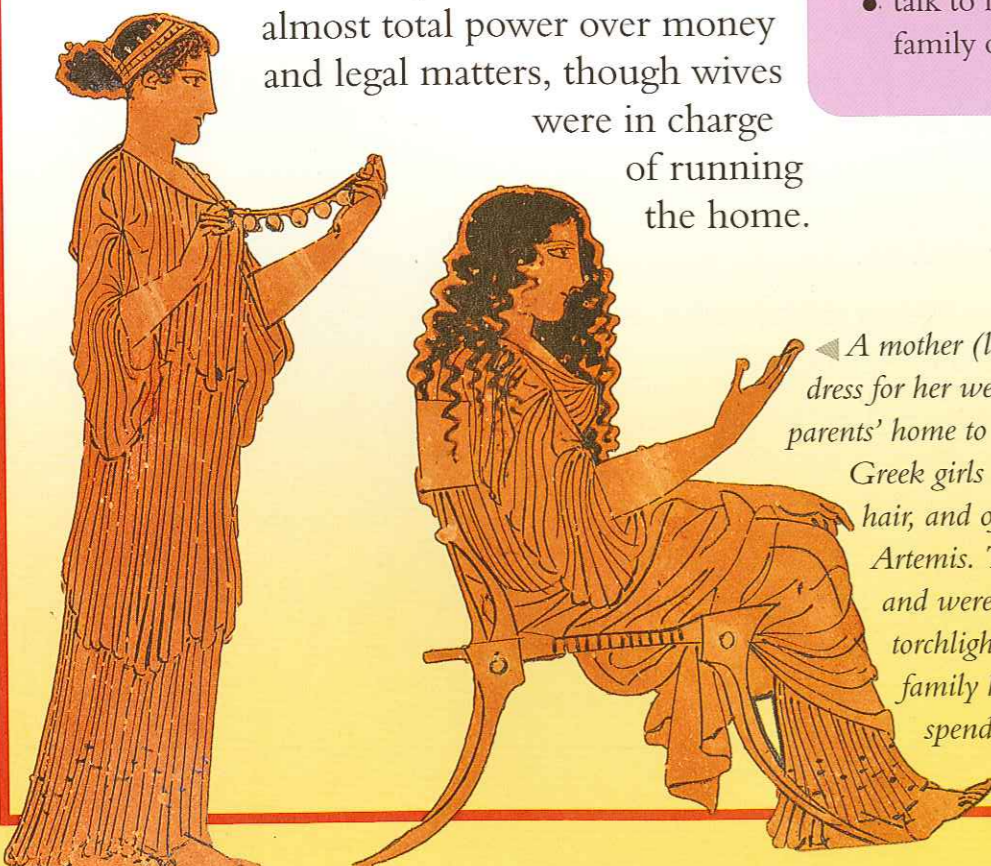


NO RIGHTS FOR WOMEN

In ancient Greece, most women could not:

- vote
- serve on juries
- be doctors, lawyers or teachers
- take part in government
- run big businesses
- own houses and land
- ask for a divorce
- leave their house alone
- talk to men except their close family or slaves

◀ A mother (left) helps her daughter (right) dress for her wedding. Before leaving their parents' home to live with their new husbands, Greek girls cut off some or all of their hair, and offered it to the goddess Artemis. Then they veiled their faces, and were carried at night in a torchlight procession to their groom's family home, where they would spend the rest of their married lives.



◀ Parents, grandparents and children sharing a family meal. Greek households were often large, so poor peoples' small homes were cramped and crowded. To escape, men and boys spent much of their time outside.

The Greeks were fond of children. But babies born to Greek families did not always survive. Their father had the power to decide their fate. He might not want too many boys, since family land would have to be split between them when he died. And girls had to take money to their husband's family when they married. Unwanted babies were abandoned or given to childless couples.

If a father chose to keep a baby, it was welcomed with special rituals. Slaves pinned strands of wool (for a girl) or olive twigs (for a boy) to the street door to announce the birth. Then, seven days later, the baby's father picked it up and ran round the hearth with no clothes on! The rest of the household sang hymns. Three days after that, the baby was given a name.

► This Greek statue of a mother and child was made around 300 BC. A wife's main task was to produce a son. If she failed to do this, her husband might divorce her. Greek doctors also thought that having children was good for women's health, even though many Greek women died in childbirth.

