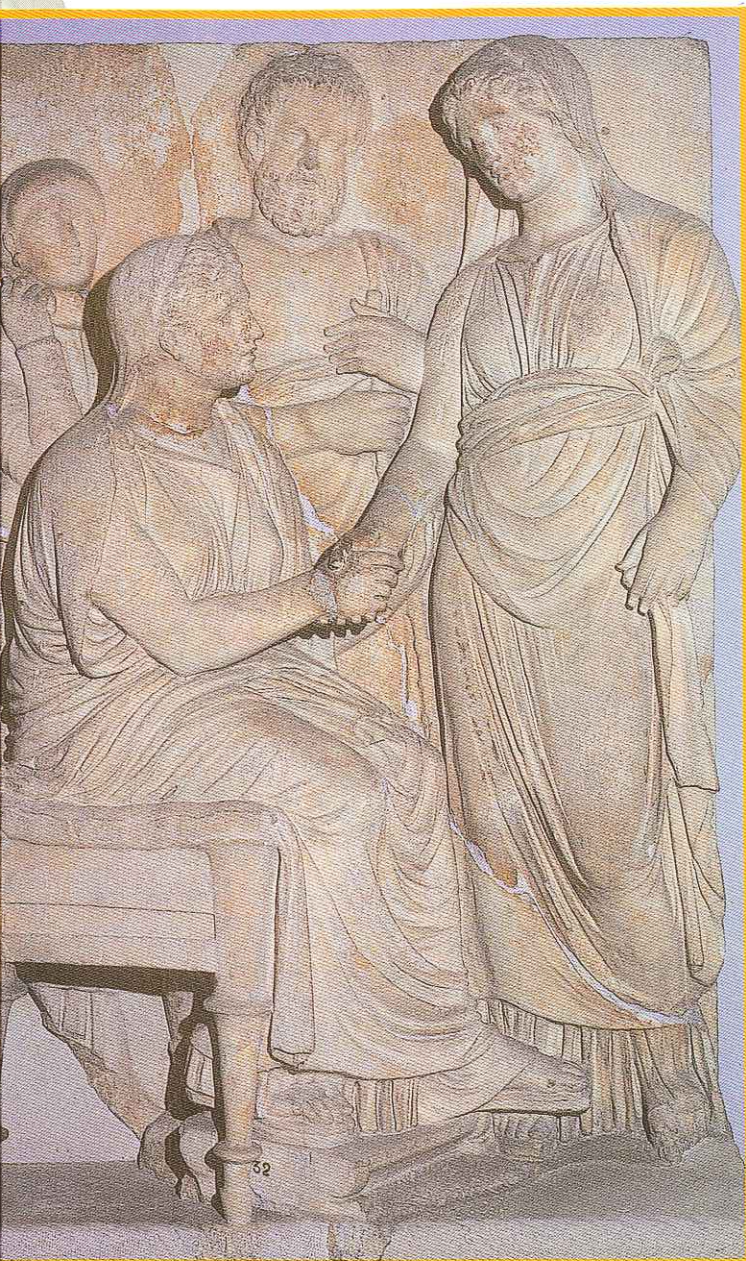


family life

Father knows best

The Greeks had no word for family in the common modern sense. Instead they referred to the group of related people who lived together as an ***oikos*** – a household. A Greek household included not only a married couple and their children but also their slaves, animals, land, house, buildings and sometimes other relatives, such as aged grandparents and unmarried female relatives. In big cities, it might also include lodgers or temporary residents. All came under the authority of the male head of the household.



In this farewell scene, a mother (seated) says goodbye to her daughter. Girls would leave the family home to be married.

Tribes and brotherhoods

Athens, like many city-states, began as a society made up of tribes; each led by a warrior chief. To remind Athenians of their past, they kept these tribes as an important part of society. Each household belonged to one of the tribes (***phylae***). Each tribe was made up of brotherhoods (***phratrai***) headed by an aristocratic family. Each family was also a member of one of the *phratrai*. A young boy was presented publicly to his *phratry* by his father and uncles, knowing that when he grew up and headed a household of his own he could look to its members for support in disputes or times of trouble.

One, big, happy family

Greeks liked large families. Family members could help each other in work and politics, so the bigger a family the richer and more powerful it could become. The more children one had, the better chance there was that some would survive to look after their parents when they were old. If a married couple failed to have children of their own, or lost them through illness or accident, they often adopted others so that there was someone to **inherit** their property, carry on the family name and look after their tomb when they died. Fathers who only had daughters might adopt a son-in-law for these reasons, as in ancient-Greek times, a daughter would not inherit the family property.

Mother dearest

The duty of the mother was to have children, bring them up and organize the household. Girls married in their early teens, often to men who might be twenty years older. As a result of repeated childbirth and possibly because they were sometimes not as well fed as men, many wives died in their twenties or thirties. As a result, husbands might have remarried two or three times. This meant many children were brought up by stepmothers and, among the rich, by nurses or nannies. When a woman was left a widow she usually went to live with a male relative. If she was still young she would be encouraged to remarry.