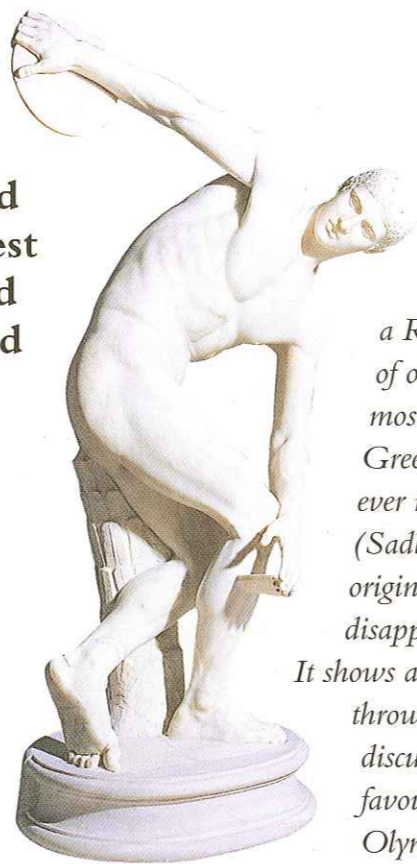


FUN AND GAMES

The Greeks took life very seriously. They loved to discuss important questions, such as 'When did the world begin'. They paid for some of the world's best scientists and cleverest thinkers to come and live in their city-states. But they also enjoyed parties, singing, dancing, going to the theatre, telling stories, laughing at jokes and playing games.

Professional storytellers, called 'song-stitchers', performed in streets and markets and at festivals. They often added their own extra details to bring the stories up to date. Guests at dinner parties also told jokes and stories, and played silly games like kottabos, which involved flicking drops of wine at a target.



◀ This is a Roman copy of one of the most famous Greek statues ever made. (Sadly, the original has disappeared.) It shows an athlete throwing a discus - a favourite Olympic sport.



◀ This picture shows a Greek amphitheatre where plays were performed. The first Greek plays were religious. They retold myths about the gods. But they soon developed into great entertainment that lasted all day long. The audience was mostly men. Greeks believed that tragic plays were too sad for women to watch, and comic plays were too rude.

The Greeks liked music and dancing because they were fun. They were also part of many religious ceremonies. Sometimes, worshippers got carried away by the beat. Stories were told of *maenads*, wild women who left their homes and ran to the mountains, where they tore wild beasts limb from limb.

Sport was the most important entertainment of all. The famous Olympic Games, held in honour of the god Zeus, was just one of many sports festivals open to all Greek athletes. Like football and baseball today, they inspired fierce rivalry and local pride. Champions were sponsored by rich businessmen and were rewarded with free food for life by their home city. Winning athletes wore crowns of laurel leaves, pine branches or wild celery.



FIRST CATCH YOUR TORTOISE

One favourite musical instrument was the lyre. Lyres were used to play solemn, gentle music but they hid a bloodthirsty secret. They had a U-shaped frame, seven strings and a sound box (which increased the volume). At first, their sound boxes were made from tortoiseshells, their frames from cattle horns and their strings from animal gut. Later, lyres were mostly made of wood.

▼ Chariot racing at the Olympics. A charioteer drives a team of four horses (count the legs!) twelve times round a track 1100m long. Chariots often crashed and overturned, and drivers died. The winner was the owner of the chariot and horses, not the charioteer who took part in the race.

