Achievements of Athens

In the 5th Century B.C.E. the Agora was the center of commerce and government for ancient Athens. It had a large open area for meetings which was surrounded by buildings. Many of the buildings were temples, including temples built to Zeus, Hephaestus, and Apollo. Some of the buildings were government buildings like the Mint, where coins were made, and the Strategeion, where the 10 military leaders of Athens called the Strategoi met.

The agora was a place for people to meet and openly discuss ideas on philosophy and government. This is the place where the democracy of ancient Greece first came to life.

Pericles was the leader of Athens from 461 to 429 B.C.E. He promoted the arts, literature, and philosophy and encouraged some of the most inspired writers and thinkers of his time. During the Age of Pericles, Athens blossomed as a center of education, art, culture, and democracy. Artists and sculptors, playwrights and poets, architects and philosophers all found Athens an exciting and enlivening atmosphere for their work. Athens under Pericles saw the building of the Acropolis and the glory of the Parthenon. The playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes (in short, all of the great Greek writers for the stage) invented theater as it is known in the modern-day.

Hippocrates (who inspired the Hippocratic Oath still taken by physicians today) practiced medicine in Athens. The oath he created begins:

“I swear by Apollo, the healer, Asclepius, Hygieia, and Panacea, and I take to witness all the gods, all the goddesses, to keep according to my ability and my judgment, the following Oath and agreement:

To consider dear to me, as my parents, him who taught me this art; to live in common with him and, if necessary, to share my goods with him; To look upon his children as my own brothers, to teach them this art; and that by my teaching, I will impart a knowledge of this art to my own sons, and to my teacher's sons, and to disciples bound by an indenture and oath according to the medical laws, and no others.
I will prescribe regimens for the good of my patients according to my ability and my judgment and never do harm to anyone.”


Sculptors like the famous Phidias (who created the statue of Zeus at Olympia, considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, as well as the statue of Athena Parthenos for the Parthenon) and Myron (who produced the masterpiece Discus Thrower) worked in their marble and stone. The great philosophers Protagoras, Zeno of Elea, Anaxagoras, and Socrates, the man considered the 'father of western philosophy', all lived in Athens at the time.

The Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE) between Athens and Sparta (though involving, directly or indirectly, all of Greece) ended in disaster for Athens after her defeat. Her empire and her wealth gone, her walls destroyed, only her reputation as a great seat of learning and culture prevented the destruction of the city and the enslavement of the populace.

Adapted from Ancient History Encyclopedia. http://www.ancient.eu.com/Athens/