

Station B: Commerce and Trade (Shop in the Agora)

- 1. Learn about this site.** You are at a shop in the Agora, the place where Athenians gather to buy and sell various goods.
- 2. Read the information about commerce and trade, and take notes.** Carefully read and discuss the information below about commerce and trade in ancient Greece. Then, list three important facts about commerce and trade in Athens in the Station B section of **Student Handout 2.2A**.

Athenians conducted most of their commerce at the *Agora* (pronounced AH-gor-ah), the huge marketplace at the base of the Acropolis. On the eastern side of the Agora, merchants sold their goods from small stands. Citizens could purchase foods such as lettuce, onions, cucumbers, sardines, olive oil, and wine. They could also buy household items such as pottery, furniture—chairs, chests, and sofas—and clay oil lamps, which provided the only source of light in Athenian homes. While most Athenians made their clothes at home, leather sandals and jewelry were popular items at the market. In addition, Athenians bought and sold slaves at the Agora.

In an effort to make commercial transactions more efficient, the Greeks began using coins in the 600s B.C.E. Each city-state had its own system of coinage, though they all used metals such as gold, silver, bronze, and a gold and silver mixture called *electrum* (pronounced eh-LEK-trum). Initially coins were stamped on one side, but later Athenians imprinted images on both sides. The most popular coin in Athens was the *tetradrachm* (pronounced TET-rah-drom), which was worth four drachmas (a unit of Greek currency). It had an image of Athena on one side and Athena's bird, the owl, on the other.

Athenians engaged in a great deal of trade with other Greek city-states and foreign lands to obtain many goods and resources. This was necessary because the Attica plains were not fertile enough to provide sufficient food for the Athenian population. Farmers could raise only olives, so Athenians had to trade for their essential food items. One major Greek trading partner was Egypt, from which the Greeks obtained valuable grains grown in the Nile Valley. Another important trade good, timber, was imported from Sicily, Thrace, and the northern Black Sea coast. In exchange for the goods they imported, the Greeks traded their beautiful painted pottery, their woolen goods, and olives.

3. Complete the task described below.

- Examine the “Catalog of Athenian Goods.”
- Decide what you would like to purchase with the four tetradrachm coins that appear in the Station B section of **Student Handout 2.2A**.
- Once you have decided what to buy, write the name of the item(s) you would purchase below the coins on **Student Handout 2.2A**. Then complete the sentence “I would buy _____ with my coins, because _____.”

4. Respond to the following prompt. On **Student Handout 2.2A**, list other items that you think were exchanged in ancient Athens, in addition to the goods listed in the “Catalog of Athenian Goods.”