

## Station E: Law (Pnyx)

- 1. Learn about this site.** You are at the *Pnyx* (pronounced NIX), a hillside west of the Acropolis where the Athenian Assembly meets to vote and to make legal decisions.
- 2. Read the information about law, and take notes.** Carefully read and discuss the information below about Athens' legal system. Then, list three important facts about the Athenian legal system in the Station E section of **Student Handout 2.2A**.

The Greeks had a well-established legal system. In the days before the Greeks invented their alphabet, they handed down their laws by oral tradition. This meant that officials and their assistants had to memorize entire legal codes. However, by 600 B.C.E., writing had spread throughout the Greek world, and laws were written down for easy reference. Law codes covered both *civil* and *criminal* cases.

Civil cases between citizens could involve disputes about inheritance and land boundaries, while criminal cases might involve charges of murder or theft. Legal codes were different in each of the Greek city-states.

The main lawmaking body of the Athenian democracy was the Citizens Assembly, which was open to all adult male citizens. A smaller executive body, the Council of 500, was responsible for proposing laws and for voting on important political issues. Many people considered politics so important that they walked as far as 20 miles to participate in the debates.

In Athens there were no lawyers. Any male citizen could bring criminal or civil charges against another citizen. Each citizen argued his own case, but he could ask for help from a friend who had better speaking skills. Large juries—numbering anywhere from 201 to 2,501 members—heard the cases. Jury members were chosen by lottery and were paid for their services. The jury used small tokens to cast their innocent or guilty verdicts. Since there were no judges in the Athenian courtroom, the jury was responsible for interpreting the law and for deciding on a verdict. Athens did not have prisons, so other punishments were enforced. The punishments for civil cases included fines or *confiscation* (removal) of property. In serious criminal cases, the guilty person could be *exiled* (sent from the city) or sentenced to death.