



## The Acropolis & the Parthenon

*The Panathenaia and the Panathenaic way*

### **NARRATOR:**

Every year, in the month of Hekatombaion, roughly modern July, the Athenians celebrated the Panathenaia.

The Athenian year was crammed full with festivals in honour of various gods. There were no weekends – rather, it was these festivals that gave their year its structure.

Among these numerous festivals, the Panathenaia – in honour of the city's goddess Athena – was one of the most important, perhaps the most important.

The Panathenaia stretched over several days, and the programme included a whole host of different activities, including musical contests, sporting competitions and sacrifices, as well as the great procession, in which many Athenians took part.

The procession gathered at one of the entrances to the city, the Dipylon Gate. Dipylon means 'double gate', a name which refers to the two arches that formed this important structure. At one point, this was the largest gate in the ancient world, covering 1800 square meters. Today, though, there are only a few traces left.

The Dipylon Gate was positioned next to what is today the best-preserved ancient cemetery in Athens, the Kerameikos. This cemetery was located just outside the city limits and many of the tombstones still survive, dating from different periods.

After gathering at the Dipylon Gate, the participants in Panathenaic procession would set off towards the Acropolis. After half a kilometre, they would reach the agora, Athens' market place and the centre of a great deal of civic activity.

In the agora, traders would sell their goods and Athenians would do their shopping. Many of the most important Athenian civic and religious buildings were also placed around the agora. Even today, the temple of the god Hephaestus, the Hephaisteion, dominates the site.

The Panathenaic Way crosses the agora diagonally, making the procession cut right through the heart of ancient Athens.

Remnants of foundations still reveal that at times temporary stands were erected for spectators to watch. Probably the Panathenaic horse races took place here.