

Lykeion: Sanctuary, Suburb, Gymnasium, School

Situated in a verdant suburb of Athens, in Lykeion, possibly named after the Sanctuary of Apollo Lykeios, outside the city walls, between the rivers Ilissos and Eridanos, one of the first gymnasia of the ancient city was founded in the mid-6th c. BC.



View of the archaeological site of Lykeion (ph. G. Asvestas)

It was the period during which the Panhellenic games that were staged in the great sanctuaries, but also local games, such as the Great Panathenaea, were instituted or reorganized. For the Greeks, the athletic competitions posed the challenge of distinguishing the most virtuous of men. Individuals or groups from different social classes made good use of the opportunities which sports provided in order to augment their reputation. Still, the material reward gained that underscored the value of the victor was equally significant. For instance, wrestlers received as a prize 50 to 70 Panathenaic amphorae filled with olive oil that each contained an average of 36 kilos whose worth exceeded a year's wages.



Statuette of Apollo Lykeios
2nd-3rd cent. AD
Athenian Agora Museum



Panathenaic amphora depicting a boxing
contest 336-335 BC
London, British Museum

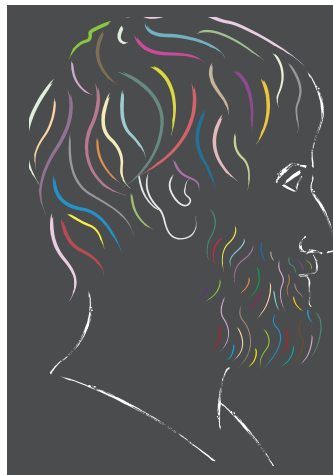
As a rule, males, born to free citizens, namely boys, youths, young men and adults were educated at the gymnasium. Progressively, the gymnasia that were public establishments serving as physical training and military education hubs developed due to the young audience that abounded in the major intellectual centres. Besides, in Athens, at least until the 4th century BC, knowledge was disseminated chiefly by oral tradition. Young men were trained at the gymnasia, the Agora, the residences of the affluent Athenians, in which scholars, mainly philosophers or orators, lectured. In the 4th century BC, a period of turbulence, social contrasts, intellectual and artistic pursuits, the first private philosophical schools that were essentially the first Universities were established near the major gymnasia of Athens.



Aristotle teaching.

From an Illuminated manuscript of a work
by the 11th c. Arab historian
Abu I-Wafa al Mubashir bin Fatik, Kitab Mukhtar
al-Hikam wa-Mahasin al-Kilam
13th (?) century
Constantinople, Topkapi Palace Museum

The place where Aristotle taught

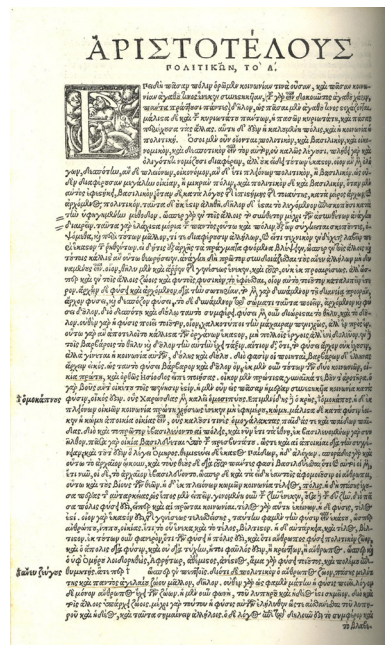


In 335 BC Aristotle founded at the Gymnasium of the Lykeion his School where he taught for about twelve years, the most creative of his life. The members of the School were called Peripatetics or Peripatetikoi (Οἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ Περιπάτου: those who are prone to walking) because, according to the Latin writer Aulus Gellius, Aristotle used to stroll outdoors every morning together with his students discussing the most complex philosophical questions (ἑωθινὸς περίπατος: morning walk). In the evening he considered simpler issues in a popularized manner intended for the general public (δελινὸς περίπατος: evening walk).

Πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι
ὀρέγονται φύσει
All men by nature desire
to know.

The manuscripts: an adventure with a happy ending

Following Aristotle's death, his manuscripts alongside his rich personal library were bequeathed to his successors at the Lykeion and were later transferred to Scepsis in Asia Minor where they remained buried in a cave for more than two hundred years. The manuscripts were rescued by Apellicon, a rich Athenian book collector who searched them out at Scepsis, purchased them and brought them to Athens in the early 1st century BC. After the conquest of Athens by the Roman general Sulla in 86 BC the manuscripts were removed as valuable booty to Rome. Approximately fifty years later they were published by the inspired Alexandrian philologist Andronikos of Rhodes. Andronikos, having classified Aristotle's lectures together with his notes into individual treatises based on their subject, was responsible for the form and the titles by which Aristotle's works are known today.



Aristotle complete works
Basel 1531
© Library of the Hellenic Parliament

Drawing upon Aristotle

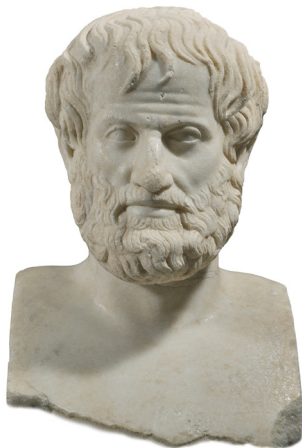
Aristotle begins with the axiom that the deeper human nature is intertwined with the pursuit of knowledge:

All men naturally desire knowledge (*Metaphysics*, 980a: 20*).

Polymathy is the core principle of Aristotelian thought. He laid the foundations for the sciences known today as physics, chemistry, meteorology, geography. He is considered the inventor of biology, logic and rhetoric. He also introduced the literary theory (*Poetics*).

Perhaps the greatest discovery of Aristotle was demonstrative syllogism (reasoning), namely the discourse which is not only deductively valid, but produces irrefutable scientific knowledge and justification. He claimed that a scientist is marked by the fact that he infers by way of syllogism based on proof in order to maintain his argument, thereby drawing indisputable conclusions:

Now reasoning [syllogism] is an argument in which, certain things being laid down, something other than these necessarily comes about through them (*Topics* 100a: 25-27*).



Portrait bust of Aristotle
Athens, Acropolis Museum

He was the first to realize the need to record systematically the intellectual accomplishments of the past. He believed that the study of notions that have endured though time strengthens and validates argumentation. Hence, he approached human thought as a process of accumulating knowledge and solutions and gradual improvement of the answers given to topical and timeless questions. By studying Aristotle, we are faced with an inquirer who conversed with his predecessors, his contemporaries and himself, stating explicitly his sources.

And because he scrutinized the views of earlier thinkers, from Thales who signalled the passage from myth to logos (reason), to Plato and his disciples, Aristotle is considered the first to attempt a documentation of the history of philosophy. In effect, Aristotle organized the history of the discipline and introduced the way by which philosophical questions ought to be approached, by studying the history of the answers given and their supporting arguments. After Aristotle, no one studied philosophy without having delved into its past first.

An ecumenical thinker

He was one of the richest and deepest of all scientific geniuses that have as yet appeared – a man whose like no later age has ever yet produced. G. W. Fr. Hegel

ARISTOTELIS
STAGYRITAE
De Arte Rhetorica Libri Tres,
CVM M. ANTONII MAIORAGII
COMMENTARIIS.

According to Aristotle the proper use of language reflects human reason. When the everyday language, with its ambiguity, is not able to express his philosophical concepts, he feels the need to seek for technical vocabulary:

Most of these qualities also are unnamed, but in these as in the other cases we must attempt to coin names for them ourselves, for the sake of clearness and so that our meaning may be easily followed
(Aristot. Nic. Eth. 1108a.17)*

A typical example is the term entelecheia (ἐντελέχεια), which was coined by Aristotle to describe the vital force that directs the human beings to fulfil their *end* (τέλος), that is their predetermined goal.

VENETIIS, Apud Franciscum de Francis Senensem., M D XCI.

Narrator

Dr Niki Sakka, Archaeologist



Ministry of Culture and Sports - Ephorate of Antiquities of Athens

Selected Bibliography

Kaltsas, N. 2004. Agon: National Archaeological Museum, 15 July–31 October 2004.

Κάλφας, Β. 2015. Η φιλοσοφία του Αριστοτέλη, ΣΕΑΒ (www.kallipos.gr)

Lygouri-Tolia, E. 2002. «Excavating an Ancient Palaestra in Athens» in M. Stamatopoulou and M. Geroulanou (eds.), *Excavating Classical Culture: Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Greece*, Oxford, 203–212.

*Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vol. 19, translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1934. Perseus Digital Library. www.perseus.tufts.edu



European Heritage Days
Journées européennes
du patrimoine



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



European
Commission

This document has been produced using funds of a Joint Project between the European Union and the Council of Europe. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union or the Council of Europe.