

Ancient Greece (600 B.C.-323 B.C.)

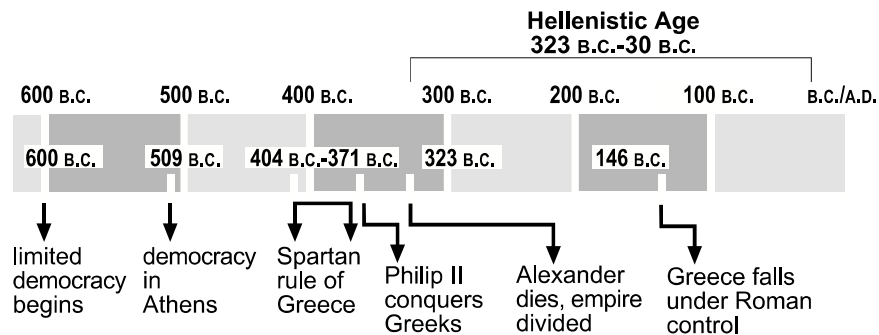
Greece

Greece is a **peninsula** located in the southeast part of Europe. It is surrounded by the Aegean Sea on the east and the Mediterranean Sea on the south and west. Besides its mainland, Greece includes many small islands. Greece is also a very mountainous country. Mount Olympus in the north has always been very important to the Greeks, because it was regarded as the home of the Greek gods.

Because Greece has very little fertile land, Greeks have always been a seafaring people. The economy is based upon fishing, trading, sheep herding, wine making, and some agriculture—mostly olive groves.

Because Greece is so mountainous, cities that developed there have always been **isolated** from each other. As a result, in ancient times, Greek **city-states** developed, each with its own government, economy, and culture. The most important city-states were Athens and Sparta.

Timeline of Ancient Greece



Athens and Sparta

Athens and Sparta represent two very different types of city-states. Before 600 B.C., Athens was a city-state run by a few **aristocrats**. Most Greeks were slaves who lived under very poor conditions. During this period, Athens had to **import** most of its food. To pay for the food, Athens **exported** wine, olive oil, and pottery.



Around 600 B.C., a leader named Solon freed many of the slaves. Solon gave his people a **constitution**. As time went on, all male Athenians were permitted to take part in the government, although women and slaves were not. Nevertheless, the government in Athens was one of the first to create a democratic form of government. That is, at least some of the citizens were allowed to participate in the government.

Athens slowly developed into the leading city-state. It also became the wealthiest due to large deposits of silver nearby. The people of Athens believed in a strong educational system stressing art, literature, and music, although this education was for boys only.



Greek soldier

Sparta, which is located in the southwest of Greece, developed differently. It was ruled by a strong, military government. Only a few Spartans were permitted to be citizens. Most of the people lived as slaves. They made their living by farming. The government was run by a council of five men. All Spartan males were drafted into the army at age seven. Spartans believed that the most important thing a man could be was courageous. They loved to fight in wars. Although they were denied citizenship, Spartan women were also trained in gymnastics and physical endurance and held more legal and social rights than other Greek women of that time.



classic Greek heads

Although all Greeks spoke the same language, believed in the same gods, had common trading partners, and considered any non-Greek to be a **barbarian**, geographical barriers made it difficult for the city-states to unite. As a result of these geographical barriers, different cultures and governments developed in each city-state.

The Persian Wars

During the fifth century B.C. the Greek city-states united because they were being invaded from the north by the Persians. This was the beginning of the Persian Wars. Athens was at first victorious against the Persians. Yet 10 years later the Persians returned, and after a hard-fought battle, the Greeks retreated. The Greeks suffered greatly during the Persian Wars. Athens was burned. As a result, Greek **patriotism** rose to a very high level. In the last Persian war, Athens was once again victorious. This was the beginning of the **Golden Age** when Greece's **democracy** and culture were at their height.



On this copy of a plate, a duel between a Greek and Persian soldier is depicted.

The Peloponnesian Wars

For 50 years, Greeks enjoyed relative peace and **prosperity**. This ended when Sparta, allied with other city-states, attacked Athens. Rather than prepare for war, the Athenians debated whether to fight. Because they could not agree on how to protect Athens, Sparta, other city-states, and the Persians soon defeated them. Athens made peace with its enemies in 404 B.C.

Alexander the Great

The greatest period of ancient Greek history began during the fourth century B.C. when Greek civilization spread around the Mediterranean Sea into western Asia.

The economy was on the rise and trade **flourished**. It was during this period that Greek art, literature, science, philosophy, and mathematics reached a high point. This period of Greek history is known as the *Hellenistic Period*. It lasted about 300 years.



Alexander the Great

The Hellenistic Period began when Philip, the ruler of Macedonia, a section of Greece in the mountainous north, invaded Greece. Philip's army was able to defeat the Greeks. Then Philip set out to unify the country.

Philip sent his son Alexander to school in Athens. While there, Alexander studied under one of the world's greatest teachers, Aristotle. Alexander was 20 years old when he became ruler of Greece. His goal was to spread Greek culture around the known world. With a well-disciplined army, he nearly accomplished his goal.

Alexander introduced Greek civilization to Egypt, where he was welcomed as a god. In Egypt, he founded the port city of Alexandria. Alexander then looked east. He defeated the Persians and took control of Asia from Asia Minor to India.

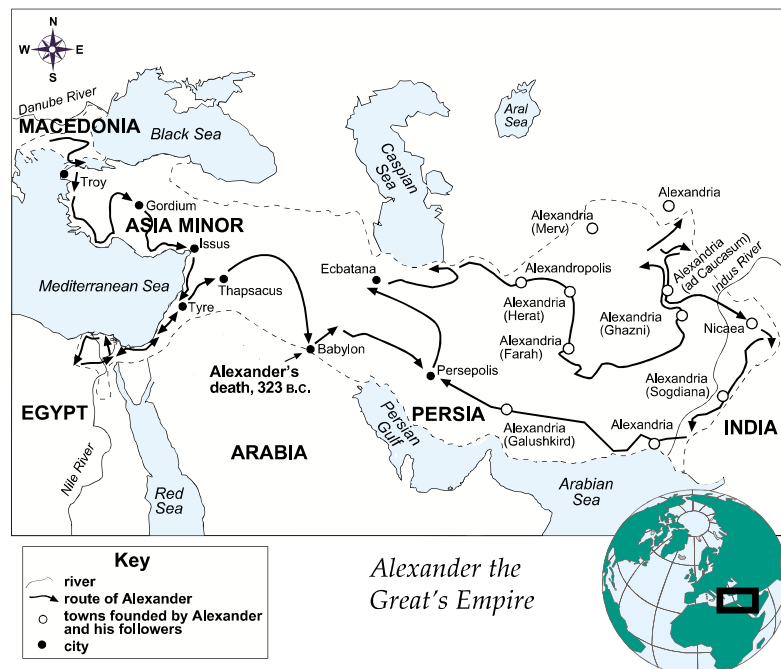
Alexander's policy was to unite the Greek Empire under one government. He believed in a policy of **cultural fusion**. This means that all people living under the Greek Empire would be united through a common culture. One of the ways this can be accomplished is through education. By establishing schools of Greek thought in **foreign** lands, Alexander hoped that the young people would think and act like Greeks.

When Alexander died of malaria at the end of the fourth century in 323 B.C., he was not yet 33 years old, but he had nearly accomplished his goals. Greek colonies were set up throughout the



copy of a Greek teacher

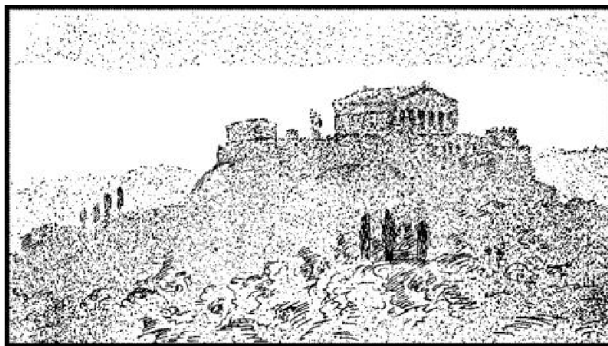
empire. Upon his death, however, the empire was divided into three kingdoms, each ruled by one of his generals. Macedonia, including part of Greece, was ruled by Antigonus. Syria, including most of southwestern Asia, was governed by Seleucus. Egypt was governed by Ptolemy. All of these kingdoms were independent until the second and first centuries B.C. when they came under Roman rule. As time passed, the Hellenistic Period emerged from a blend of Greek and eastern cultures.



Greek Contributions to Civilization

Certainly the ancient Greeks can be given credit for providing the modern world with a great number of cultural ideas. Probably the greatest contribution to the modern world passed on by the ancient Greeks was the foundation of modern democracy. Throughout the empire, Greek democratic principles were passed along to many different people. Democratic expression was carried out through elections, jury trials, and debates. Good citizenship was an important value.

Art and Architecture



"Acropolis" is Greek for high city. The acropolis usually was the center of religious ceremonies. The most famous is the Acropolis of Athens, with its Parthenon.

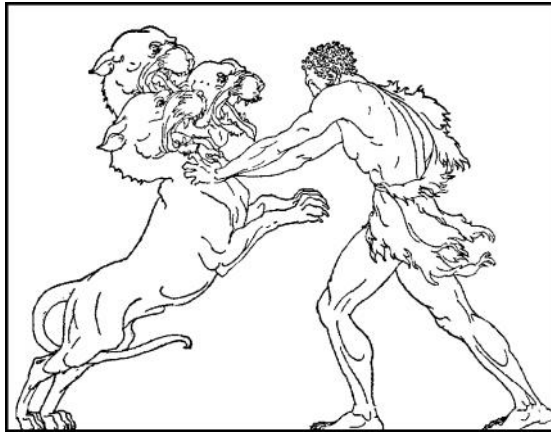
In the area of art and architecture, the Greeks left us magnificent buildings such as the Parthenon, the temple of the goddess Athena, located on top of the **Acropolis** in Athens. Other beautiful examples of Greek architecture are found on the island of Delphi and on the Peloponnesian Peninsula, where Olympia and Corinth are located. The Greeks

mastered the use of mathematics in architecture. This was especially true of the design of the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian columns which surrounded the temples. Another mathematically constructed building is King Agamemnon's large tomb at Mycenae, which resembles a beehive almost to perfection.

Some of the most famous sculpture in the world was left to us by the Greeks. Early Greek sculptors made bronze and marble figures that were very stiff and formal. Later sculptors—Phidias of the fifth century and Praxiteles of the fourth century—used the natural lines of the human body and created figures of much grace and poise.

Religion

The early Greeks believed in many gods who had human qualities. Like tribal chiefs, they were thought to have a great deal of power. The Greeks believed that the gods were responsible for all that happened on Earth. They also believed that the gods lived on Mount Olympus. Zeus was the king of the Greek gods. Even as time went on and Greek thinking became more rational, Greeks maintained their belief in many gods.



The Greek hero Hercules fights a mythical animal. Hercules was a son of Zeus and was known for his strength and courage.

Literature

Greek literature is read by millions of people today. Greek historians such as Herodotus, known as the *Father of History*, and Thucydides provided the modern world with realistic accounts of Greek events. Aeschylus, a writer of tragedies, wrote about human will versus destiny, which is the idea that the gods control events in people's lives. Two other writers of tragedies were Sophocles, who wrote about the fate of humans, and

Euripides, who wrote about social protest. Throughout Greek literature, the gods are portrayed as superhumans who sought control over man's destiny.



The Greek god Apollo driving a chariot. Apollo was a son of Zeus.

Much has been written about the relationship between humans and the gods described in the Greek *myths*. Myths are stories about the relationships between humans and the gods.

Philosophy

Philosophy is a Greek word meaning love of wisdom. The philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are still studied today. While Socrates left no writings, his ideas on reasoning through debate were passed on by his student, Plato. Plato opened the first center for higher learning in Greece, called the *Academy*. In his book *The Republic*, Plato describes a country run by philosopher-kings where the goodness and wisdom of the rulers would be passed on to the people. Aristotle, a student of Plato and the tutor of Alexander the Great, taught how to think logically. Aristotle was the first to classify animals by species.

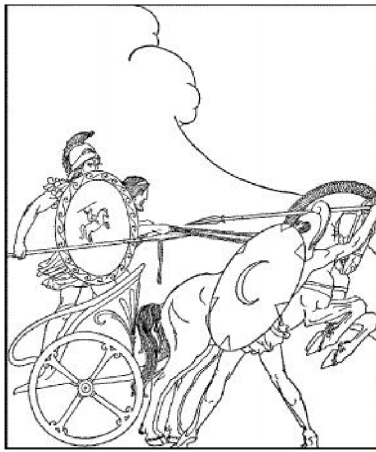
Greek philosophers believed there was a logical (scientific) explanation for every event in nature. They believed that anything could be explained. This led to scientific or logical reasoning.

Science, Mathematics, and Medicine

The Greeks contributed a great deal to our knowledge of science, mathematics, and medicine. In science, the Greeks were the first to begin expressing the idea that Earth moves around the sun and that Earth spins on an axis. Euclid and Pythagorus provided mathematicians with principles of geometry that remain undisputed today. Finally, Greek doctors were the first to dissect human bodies, to make detailed drawings of the brain, and to distinguish between motor and sensory nerves. The most notable medical school was led by Hippocrates. Doctors today still take the Hippocratic Oath.

Review

The development of ancient Greek society was influenced by Greece's geography. Lack of fertile farmland and a long seacoast meant that sea-trading and fishing were more important to the Greeks than farming. A system of isolated city-states developed because of the mountainous terrain of Greece. These mountains acted as geographical barriers between the city-states. As a result, each city-state developed a different culture.



Athens and Sparta were two important, but very different, city-states. Although ruled at first by an aristocracy, Athens adopted a democratic system of government in the sixth century B.C. Athens became the leading city-state, known for its wealth and its strong educational system. Sparta, on the other hand, was ruled by a powerful military government. This government was headed by a council of only five men. Spartan culture stressed military might and courage in battle as chief values.

During the fifth century B.C. the Greek city-states fought a series of wars with the Persians, who invaded Greece from the north. Although each side had victories, the Greeks had the final victory. This victory marked the beginning of Greece's Golden Age.

After only 50 years of peace, another series of wars started when city-states from the Peloponnesian Peninsula, including Sparta, attacked Athens. Because the Athenians debated whether to fight rather than preparing for battle, they were defeated by the Peloponnesian city-states.

In the fourth century B.C. Greek civilization began to spread around the Mediterranean Sea into Asia, thanks to the leadership of Alexander the Great. Alexander's father, Philip, was the ruler of Macedonia, a northern region of Greece. Philip was able



examples of ancient Greek clothing

to conquer and unify the rest of Greece. Philip had his son, Alexander, taught by the great Athenian philosopher, Aristotle. When Alexander became ruler of Greece, he made it his goal to spread Greek culture around the known world. This period, when Greek culture was at its height, is known as the Hellenistic Period. Although Alexander was eventually able to spread his Greek Empire into Asia and Egypt, after his death these new territories were divided into three kingdoms, each ruled by one of Alexander's generals.

Ancient Greek contributions to human civilization are many and various. Athens is full of the remains of beautiful buildings, including the Parthenon located on top of the Acropolis, which have been admired and copied ever since they were built. Greek philosophers thought and reasoned about the nature of knowledge, logic, and government. The ideas of these philosophers are still read today. So are the works of many Greek authors such as Sophocles and Aeschylus, who wrote tragedies.

Greek Gods and Goddesses

The Greeks worshipped many gods and goddesses and had many stories about them. Each god or goddess was a ruler over some part of human life or over some part of nature. The Greek gods and the Roman gods were very much alike, but they had different names. Look in the next chapter on page 152 and compare the Greek gods' names with the Roman gods' names.

Aphrodite The goddess of love, fertility, and beauty. She was the daughter of Zeus and Dione.

Apollo God of sun and light. He was the son of Zeus.

Ares The god of war. He was very violent and was hated by the other gods.

Athena Goddess of wisdom, courage, and victory. She was the daughter of Zeus, and the Parthenon was built in her honor.

Hades Ruled the kingdom of the dead. The brother of Zeus and god of the underworld.

Hera The goddess of marriage and women. She was the sister and one of the wives of Zeus.

Hermes Messenger of the gods. He was the god of travelers and traders.

Poseidon God of the seas and rivers. He was the brother of Zeus.

Zeus The king of the gods. The Olympic Games were held in his honor.

