

1. Ancient Greece: Before The Empire

Around 800 BCE on a peninsula in the Mediterranean, one of history's greatest civilizations began to emerge: Ancient Greece. Before the rise of the Greek Empire, people had lived in the area for thousands of years - more than 40,000, to be exact! Between 2200-1450 BCE, a group named the Minoans inhabited the island of Crete. In northern Greece, the Mycenaeans thrived from 1650-1200 BCE. They were the first civilization to speak the Greek language. However, their empire fell into ruin around 1100 BCE, and Greece experienced a period known as the Dark Ages.

During the Dark Ages, all written language disappeared. We do not know much about this time period, but we do know that around 800 BCE, the Greeks started to gain strength as a society again. This was the beginning of a time known as the Archaic Period to historians and scholars. Throughout this period, the Greeks became a people of trade, culture, and art, rather than just agrarian farmers. They called themselves the "Hellenes," and their land was Hellas.

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2. The Rise of the City-State

The Ancient Greek Empire was divided into urban clusters known as "city-states." Although each city-state was a part of Greece in theory, many of them had their own cultural identities and differences. Historically, two of the most important city-states were Athens and Sparta.

The transition from farming to urban life took place once the Greek people began trading homegrown goods with nearby civilizations like the Persians, Egyptians, Etruscans, and Romans. Some of these goods included wheat, wine, olives, cheese, honey, meat millet, barley, chickpeas, lentils, figs, pomegranates, cucumbers, onions, and garlic.

In order to make money off of these products, Greek citizens had to have land. Those who did possess land were known as the "aristocrats," and they held a lot of power in their respective city-states. Many others were not lucky enough to own land themselves, so they worked as craftsmen. The population of each city-state lived either in the city and the farmland around it.

For many centuries, city-states were ruled by king-like rulers. Then, at the beginning of the 6th century, the Greeks developed the political system known as "democracy." The adoption of democracy helped lead Greek people to make great intellectual, artistic, and political advancements.

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3. The First Olympics

One of the things that brought the Ancient Greek people together was the way that they combined entertainment with religious worship. They were a very religious civilization, and they often held festivals, contests, and other city-wide events to honor the gods. One such event was the ancient Olympic Games.

The first Olympics were held in 776 BC in the at the Sanctuary of Zeus. The sanctuary was located in a city-state called Olympia, which was in the western Peloponnesos region of Greece. At the first Olympic

festival, there was only one event, a 180-meter foot race. Male citizens from every city-state in the Greek empire came to watch other male athletes compete. After that first year, the Olympic Games, that is, the race, was held every four years to honor Zeus. By the mid-7th century, the games had expanded to include other events and competitions. Eventually, all participants and spectators began to attend the games nude! The Olympic Games contributed greatly to the Greek people's sense of cultural belonging.

4. Archaic Art: Theater, Poetry, Pottery, and Homer

The Archaic Period was also a time when art, literature, and the theater began to flourish. During this time, painters began to depict human figures on vases, which were fired in the kiln so that they came out in deep red and black hues. Sculptures also became more natural. Around the 9th century, artists began making life-size human figures called "kouroi", which were placed on grave sites and family tombs as memorials to the dead.

Two of the most famous works of literature in history also came from this time, The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These were epic poems that were often delivered orally, accompanied by a *lyre*, or small harp, at parties and gatherings. If you have ever heard of Troy, Trojan War, or the Trojan Horse, it is likely because of the author of these works, Homer. To this day, scholars know very little about the author, nor are they even sure that Troy even existed. However, his epic poems have impacted authors for thousands of years.

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5. Archaic Science and Technology

Many brilliant scholars made great scientific discoveries during the earliest centuries of the Ancient Greek Empire. They studied mathematics, astronomy, medicine, biology, and metaphysics. In general, these scholars made keen observations about the way the world worked. One of the most important scientists and mathematicians of the Archaic Period was Thales of Miletus, who developed theories about triangles, circles, and lines. Pythagoras, another scholar of geometry, developed the Pythagorean Theorem, which we still use today to measure the sides of a right triangle.

During the Archaic Period, Greek thinkers also started looking toward the heavens, contemplating how our solar system worked. The Archaic Greeks started making technological advancements in agriculture, commerce, politics, and engineering as well. Although such thinkers were not yet classified as professional "philosophers", these first few hundred years of Ancient Greece marked the beginning of the importance of thought, questioning, and discovery in Greek society.

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6. Democracy Begins: The Power of the People

For hundreds of years, a few wealthy aristocrats held all of the power while peasants and low-class farmers lived in general poverty. They never saw the wealth that the city-states had gained over the years. Then, in 527 BC, a tyrant named Hippias took control of Athens. He was paranoid and ruthless, and he eventually started executing his political enemies. By the time the next tyrant, Isagoras, assumed power in the city, the peasant class was furious.

By 508 BC, the people had finally had enough. They revolted and forced Isagoras to go into hiding before he and his followers eventually surrendered. Any Athenian male citizen who wanted to attend gathered for a meeting to talk about the future of the city. An aristocrat named Cleisthenes, who at that point was widely respected in Athens, suggested that each citizen cast a vote on every issue by putting either a white pebble, for yes, or a black pebble, for no, in a basket. From that point on, Athenian citizens held assemblies every 9 days. They were given the chance to speak, defend their ideas, discuss taxes, trade laws, and political decisions for the entire city. This was the beginning of democracy.

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7. The Persian Wars: Part I

After Cleisthenes helped his people liberate themselves from political tyranny, Athens quickly became one of the strongest powers in the Mediterranean. The city-state became so powerful that they attracted attention from one of their political rivals, the Persians. By the early 5th century BCE, the Persian Empire had spread across most of the Middle East, Asia Minor, and parts of North Africa, including Egypt. In 490 BCE, they also set their sights on Greece.

That year, the Persians landed at Marathon, a town on the southern coast of Greece and began moving toward Athens. It was clear they were going to attack Athens. This forced a man named Phidippides to run 140 miles in two days to ask the Spartans for help against the great empirical power, but they refused. The great distance he ran eventually inspired modern runners to partake in 26-mile races called "marathons."

When the Persian army arrived outside of Athens, the Athenian citizens had all democratically agreed to take up arms and defend themselves. They were outnumbered by the Persians 2 to 1. Nonetheless, in a shocking turn of events, the Greeks won the battle! Their victory had an enormous impact on the future of Athens. The world began recognizing the city-state as a global power.

8. The Persian Wars: Part II

After their first defeat, the Persian king, Darius, led his army back home. They retreated from Athens embarrassed, angry, and swearing revenge. 10 years later, his son, Xerxes, rallied his soldiers to return to Greece. The Athenian citizens began panicking again, so they asked their gods to send them a message. During this time period, the Greek people depended on a seer at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi to communicate with the gods and deliver the oracles to the people. She did not have good news; the oracle predicted defeat.

After hearing from the oracle, the Athenians abandoned the city and retreated to Salamis to the south. Xerxes and his soldiers invaded Athens and burned the Acropolis to the ground. The Acropolis was an enormous sacred rock that stretched across the city with a temple to Athena built on top. Its destruction was devastating.

However, the Greek ruler at the time, Themistocles, had a plan. He sent a fake message to Xerxes, encouraging him to come to the Athenians' refuge and overtake them. Xerxes sailed south with his entire naval fleet to a narrow strait. The Athenians, with their highly advanced torpedo-like naval boats, were waiting. They defeated the Persians again then and there, and the war was finally over.

9. The Beginning of the Classical Period

After the Athenians finally triumphed over the Persians, the Greek empire became an international superpower. They had the strongest navy in the Mediterranean, and other empires were eager to trade with them. Athens came to be regarded as a center of great prosperity. The quality of life of the citizens of the powerful city-state vastly improved, and democracy continued to give equal say to all those who wanted to take part in the Assembly votes. Many scholars believe democracy also allowed many individuals to focus on their own talents. Artists, writers, thinkers, scientists, mathematicians, and politicians began to produce new ideas that contributed to Greek society as a whole. For this reason, historians and scholars now think of the period between 480 BCE-323 BCE as the “Classical Period” of Ancient Greece.

10. Pericles and the Acropolis

By 460 BCE, a new man had risen to prominence in Athens. His name was Pericles, and he helped lead the city into its Golden Age. He believed that what Athens needed most was a center that represented the Greek gods and the accomplishments these gods helped the Greek people achieve. He hired the best architects, sculptors, and artists to design a building that would be constructed on top of the Acropolis, which had been burnt 20 years beforehand by the Persians.

When Pericles’s building project was completed, the Athenians named it the Parthenon. This majestic, Doric-style building had a rectangular base with 17 columns on either side supporting a massive triangular pediment, or the top of the building. This section was lined with glorious statues that together made up various “friezes” Friezes were long, three dimensional depictions of stories from Greek mythology, including the gods and goddesses, war heroes, everyday citizens, and more.

Once completed, the Parthenon became the most important building in Athens. People travelled from all over Greece and the Mediterranean to get a glimpse of the stunning temples and ivory statues covered in gold that had been erected on the Acropolis.

11. The Peloponnesian Wars

For many years, the city of Athens buzzed with intellectuals, traders, entertainers, and everyday citizens enjoying the high quality of life. However, in 431 BC, their ruler, Pericles, decided that the city needed a new project. This time, he wanted to wage war with Sparta. Sparta was another city-state located on the southern peninsula of Peloponnisos. They were a very militaristic society. All Spartan men were expected to train as soldiers from a very young age. For many centuries, Sparta was one of Athens primary enemies, even more so than the Persians.

Pericles believed that the Athenian navy was powerful enough to defeat the Spartans, if he could trick them into fighting at sea. He wanted the Athenian citizens to gather behind the city walls to protect themselves until the fighting was over. However, his plan did not work, and within one year, Athens and Sparta were still at war. Some of the ships also returned from sea carrying a dangerous disease: the plague. The disease spread quickly behind the city walls, and many people got sick and died. Even Pericles himself eventually contracted the plague. In 404 BCE, after having been weakened by years of war, the Athenians were forced to surrender to the Spartans.

12. The First Philosopher: Socrates

Throughout the Peloponnesian Wars, one man continued to voice his disapproval. That man was Socrates. Socrates was a brilliant scholar who spent his days wandering the streets of Athens, observing and questioning the people who passed him. He developed many theories about humanity and society. He challenged the traditions of Athenian life, and believed that the war was a pointless fight over the issue of pride. His observations and theories made many people uncomfortable, but he never held back from speaking at public assemblies, or to anyone who would listen.

Socrates also began to tutor pupils, like Plato and Xenophon. These men wrote down many of the debates and conversations that Socrates had with his fellow thinkers, as Socrates himself rarely wrote anything down. Tragically, Socrates was eventually put on trial for “corrupting the youth of Athens” in 399 BCE. He was found guilty, and executed.

Despite Socrates’ treatment by the Athenians, today he is thought of as the father of Western Philosophy. His ideas on language, nature, spirituality, politics greatly impacted many of our traditions and ideas today.

13. Alexander the Great

In 356 BCE, one of the most important men in the history of Ancient Greece was born. His name was Alexander. He was born the son of King Philip II and his wife, Queen Olympia, in the kingdom of Macedonia. At the time of his birth, the Macedon kingdom was a part of Ancient Greece, located to the west of Athens on the Mediterranean Sea.

When Alexander was young, his father hired a tutor to train him in culture, philosophy, science, politics, and poetry. His tutor was Aristotle, a great thinker who had studied under Plato after the death of Socrates. Then, when Alexander was a teenager, he became a soldier. He helped his father defeat the Athenian and Theban armies to create a united Greek kingdom under Macedonian rule. Then, in 336 BCE, King Philip was murdered, leaving Alexander to seize the throne by force.

When Alexander first became king, many city-states tried to free themselves from the Corinthian League, or the united empire ruled by the King of Macedon. However, they did not succeed. Alexander led his troops on a mission to conquer the revolts at Thebes as a warning to other rebellious city-states. Alexander the Great then went on to conquer Persia, Egypt, eastern Iran, and parts of India. He established the city of Alexandria in Egypt and became the King of Babylon, King of Asia, and the King of the Four Quarters of the World.

His death in June of 323 BCE is considered to be the end of the Classical Period of Ancient Greece.

14. Classical Art and Architecture

The Classical Period of Ancient Greece was a time of great cultural sophistication. In the Archaic Period, Greek artists, poets, playwrights, and sculptors had already begun to focus on human nature and the human form. From 480-323 BCE, Greeks used these foundations to create great works of art.

Playwrights like Sophocles and Aristophanes formed the modern theater. They wrote dramas, which later inspired comedies. Another playwright, Aeschylus, introduced the use of dialogue between characters. Greek sculptors, meanwhile, began perfecting their interpretations of the human body. They used perspective, proportion, and harmony to create some of the most beautiful statues of all time. These statues were placed in temples, city halls, or served as important monument markers throughout the empire.

Classical Greek Architecture also advanced rapidly during this period. They had three separate “orders” or types of buildings: Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian. Architects used domes and arches to create balance and symmetry. Greek engineers also realized that they could support their buildings using intricately carved columns. These structures were built to last many, many centuries.

15. Classical Science: Modern Inventions Still Used Today

Many of the inventions, mathematical principles, and rules of physics that we still use today came from the golden age of Ancient Greece. For example, the Greek physician Hippocrates is now regarded as the Father of Medicine. He taught other students at his famous Hippocratic School of Medicine, where they were encouraged to describe and define diseases and various medical conditions.

Astronomers also began to create models to describe planetary movement. Although many, such as Ptolemy and Aristotle, believed that the earth was at the center of the solar system, others believed that the earth was in orbit around the sun. Technologically, the Greeks developed high-powered naval ships that could ram into other ships and destroy them during battle. Aristotle, one of the greatest philosophers in history, also classified animals and developed the basis of zoology. Other inventions of the Classical Period included water mills, a water clock that functioned as a timer, the odometer, and cartography.

Shortly after the death of Alexander the Great, a man named Euclid wrote one of the most important textbooks of all time, *Elements*. It is still considered one of the best-selling textbooks of all time.

16. The Hellenistic Period

Alexander the Great's death in 323 BCE is widely recognized as the end of the Classical Period. After that, Greek civilization entered a 300-year long era known as the Hellenistic Period. Alexander had greatly expanded the Greek kingdom under Macedonian rule, but the empire was fragile. Eventually, three of the regions that Alexander had conquered broke off and became their own dynasties. These included the Seleucids in Syria and Persia, the Antigonids of Greece and Macedonia (to the east of Athens) and the Ptolemies of Egypt. While Athens was once the center of commerce and intellectualism, the center of Greek culture moved during this period, to cities like Ephesus and Antioch in Turkey, as well as Alexandria in Egypt.

Unlike the Classical Period when democracy gave all citizens power, the Hellenistic states were ruled by kings. They led their kingdoms to become important participants in global trade. They exported wine, papyrus, linen, glass, olive oil, dates, prunes, silver, copper, and tin to kingdoms and empires throughout the Mediterranean and in East Asia.

People also began speaking “koine,” or the common tongue. This language united people in some ways, but many felt alienated now that they were no longer members of a democratic city-state. Art and philosophy became more inward-focused. Thinkers like Diogenes directly opposed commercial

expansion, while Epicurus was focused on personal pleasure. This was a great shift away from the philosophical and political values of the Classical Greek city-states.

17. The Romans Conquer the Greeks

The Greek civilization was in decline for many years before they finally fell into ruin. After their war with the Spartans, Athens was never quite the same. The city-state system created too much animosity between the urban centers, and the cultural differences made it difficult for the city-states to align with one another. In the 4th century, the empire that Alexander the Great had built split off into smaller kingdoms that constantly fought with each other. Members of the peasant class were once again unhappy with their powerless situation. Meanwhile, to the west, a new empire was becoming stronger. This civilization was what would become the Roman Empire.

The Romans declared war on the Greeks in 215 BCE. They won two important battles against Carthage and Macedonia in the 3rd century. The Greek army was already struggling to hold them back when the Romans attacked again, this time in 146 BCE. They plundered the city of Corinth, and established their rule over the Greeks. Many Greek centers survived to the east in Egypt, up until 31 BCE. This was the year when the Romans finally conquered the Egyptians in the Battle of Antioch.

Despite the shifts in power, Romans respected and honored Greek culture. They adopted many of their traditions and practices into their own society, and over time came to resemble the Greeks greatly.

18. Greek Mythology: Gods, Goddesses, and Pagan Worship

Religion was a very important part of Greek citizens' daily lives. They were a polytheistic society, which meant that they worshipped many gods. There were 12 core deities at the center of their mythology, including Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Ares, Aphrodite, Haphaestus, Hermes, Hestia, Dionysius. The Greeks believed that their gods and goddesses lived on Mount Olympus, but that they frequently descended from the mountain to engage in Greek people's lives. The Greeks told elaborate legends about their gods to explain how certain elements of the world came to be. These stories were passed down orally until they were eventually written down. One of the first written accounts of the Greek Mythology can be found in Hesiod's *Theogony* from around 700 BCE.

The Greeks worshipped their deities in elaborate, beautifully constructed temples. These were regal structures built in one of the three architectural orders. They were adorned with statues, frescos, and offerings to the gods. Some of the most famous temples include the Parthenon on the Acropolis, the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, and the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. Every city-state also had a patron god, such as Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war, who served as the patron of Athens.

19. Daily Life in Ancient Greece

People's lives changed dramatically throughout the rise and fall of Ancient Greece. During the Archaic age, wealthy people lived in luxury, while peasants and farmers worked constantly with very little control over their lives. People also owned slaves, who were often prisoners of war or born into the lowest class.

During the Classical Period, a middle class emerged. Men with some wealth could afford leisure time, so they went to markets, festivals, plays, and athletic competitions. Men could also attend democratic

assemblies, where they voted with stones on political decisions for their city-state. Women were expected to stay at home and tend the household.

Greek homes were constructed around a central courtyard. These courtyards contained wells, religious altars, and open spaces where children could play. Their homes also consisted of their bedrooms, a workshop, and an andron, where men could gather and discuss business.

The Greek diet consisted of wine, cheeses, fish, olives, vegetables, and bread. Today, we call this the "Mediterranean diet." People ate meat on special occasions, but they loved to have dinner parties. Women were not allowed to attend these parties, however. All Greek people wore tunics, or chitons, which were made out of cloth that was belted at the waste. Nicer chitons were made of silk or linen.

20. Children in Ancient Greece

In Ancient Greece, fathers had the choice to either keep or abandon their newborn babies. If the baby was deformed or female, many fathers left the child on the doorstep of their homes. Many of these children were taken by others and raised to become slaves. Once accepted by the father, however children were generally treated very well. Greek mothers and nurses took care of children at home until they were old enough to start school or train with their fathers. Boys in high class families started studying philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, politics, poetry, and music. They were oftentimes taught by educated slaves. Boys in lower class homes learned a certain trade, like pottery, farming, fishing, carving, building, or metalworking. Girls were not allowed to go to school, so they learned to sew, weave, and cook with their mothers.

In Sparta, life was a bit different. Young boys learned to become soldiers from very early on. They wrestled, ran, jumped, threw spears and discus, and learned battle strategy during their trainings. Girls had more freedom, and were even encouraged to take part in athletic competitions. Children in Sparta grew up much earlier than other Greek children.

21. Women in Ancient Greece

Women in Ancient Greece did not have complete independence. They were usually controlled by their fathers or husbands. Women did not have the right to vote, as they were not considered citizens of the empire. They were also prohibited from receiving an education. Women were expected to stay at home and raise the children.

However, the roles women played in society changed from city-state to city-state. For example, in city-states like Delphi, Sparta, Megara, and Thessaly, some women were able to own property. In other places, only men had rights to land. Sparta was particularly different as it emphasized military power above all else. Men were often at war, so women were given more rights to keep the city-state running. They were highly educated, could wear what they wanted, and they had a high status in society.

Despite their limitations, there were many important women who contributed to Greek history. For example, Aspasia of Miletus, the long-term partner of Pericles, was often consulted for important decisions. She was an intellectual, and established her own school for women after Pericles' death. Agnodice of Athens was the first female midwife, who started practicing medicine disguised as a man. Arete of Cyrene, who lived in modern-day Libya, is known as the first female philosopher. She studied under her father, who studied under Socrates. She eventually led the School of Cyrene.

22. Philosophers in Ancient Greece

One of the most important accomplishments of the Ancient Greek civilization was their foundation of the field of philosophy. During the Archaic Period, some of these influential thinkers included Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes. They belonged to the Milesian school, where they studied cosmology and developed theories about the world. Pythagoras also developed his theorems during this time. Other men, like Leucippus and Democritus theorized about atoms and the rules of nature.

In Athens, the rise of democracy encouraged people to think about politics, society, and culture. The Sophist School was founded to educate young men in philosophy, politics, and rhetoric, or the art of public speaking. Socrates, or the Father of Philosophy, was among the Sophist teachers. One of his students, Plato, followed in his teacher's footsteps. He eventually opened his own Academy, where he taught ethics, politics, metaphysics, and epistemology. Plato's pupil Aristotle then went on to make great contributions to astronomy, psychology, biology, physics, ethics, and more during his time.

Hellenistic philosophy was divided between four schools: The Cynics, the Sceptics, the Epicureans, and the Stoics. They were more focused on "individual" life than politics and society. Many of them rejected traditional practices like marriage, religion, and manners.

23. Entertainment in Ancient Greece

Ancient Greeks were famous for their love of entertainment, and it came in many forms. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are two examples of epic poems that were delivered orally to a crowd, often accompanied by music. Many of these poems were later adapted for the stage, where they were performed for an audience. A man named Sophocles was known as the first playwright, but many others followed him. Then, at the beginning of the Classic Period, a man named Euripides wrote the first prize-winning play in Athens. From that point forward, the theater played a very important role in the lives of Greek citizens. Some of the best tragedies and comedies ever written came from this era. Greeks also enjoyed music and dancing. Although we do not know what their music sounded like exactly, we know they used harp-like lyres, kitharas, or an early type of guitar, and the tambourine.

People also attended religious festivals and competitions like the Olympics. The Greeks constructed amphitheaters and stadiums that could fit 40,000 spectators. Like most plays and acts of theater, only men could attend.

24. The Cultural Impact of Ancient Greece

Ancient Greece was a highly sophisticated society, and many of their cultural developments formed the basis of Western civilization. For example, the Greek system of democracy is now seen as the cornerstone of political freedom and equality in the modern world. The Greeks also established the concept of a trial by jury. This meant that regular citizens helped make the final verdict in a court of law. Greek advancements in astrology, biology, zoology, engineering, medicine, mathematics, linguistics, art, ethics and philosophy were also crucial to our knowledge of the earth today. Some of these advancements include standardized medicine, the theater, models of the solar system, the Olympics, architectural elements like the pediment and column, libraries, and epic poems. Greek mythology has also greatly impacted artists, writers, poets, and scholars, and we still use the structures and ideas in these mythologies in our artforms currently. When the Romans eventually conquered the Greeks, they

continued to observe and deepen Greek traditions. This resulted in a culture that spread throughout the West for more than 4,000 years.

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