**Ancient Greece**

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The [Parthenon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parthenon), a temple dedicated to [Athena](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athena), located on the [Acropolis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acropolis) in [Athens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athens), is one of the most representative symbols of the culture and sophistication of the ancient Greeks.

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| Part of [**a series**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category%3AHistory_of_Greece) on the |
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**Ancient Greece** was a [Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greeks) [civilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilization) belonging to a period of [Greek history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Greece) that lasted from the [Archaic period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaic_Greece) of the 8th to 6th centuries BC to the end of [antiquity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Antiquity) (ca. 600 AD). Immediately following this period was the beginning of the [Early Middle Ages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Middle_Ages) and the [Byzantine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine) era. Included in Ancient Greece is the period of [Classical Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Greece), which flourished during the 5th to 4th centuries BC. Classical Greece began with the repelling of a [Persian invasion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persian_Wars) by [Athenian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Athens) leadership. Because of conquests by [Alexander the Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great), [Hellenistic civilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_civilization) flourished from [Central Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Asia) to the western end of the [Mediterranean Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Sea).

Classical [Greek culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Greece), especially philosophy, had a powerful influence on the [Roman Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Empire), which carried a version of it to many parts of the [Mediterranean region](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_region) and [Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe), for which reason Classical Greece is generally considered to be the seminal culture which provided the foundation of modern [Western culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_culture).

**Chronology**

*Further information:* [*Timeline of ancient Greece*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_ancient_Greece)

There are no fixed or universally agreed upon dates for the beginning or the end of [Classical Antiquity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Antiquity). It is typically taken to last from the 8th century BC until the 6th century AD, or for about 1,300 years.

Classical Antiquity in Greece is preceded by the [Greek Dark Ages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_Dark_Ages) (c. 1100 – c. 750 BC), [archaeologically](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeologically) characterized by the [protogeometric](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protogeometric_art) and [geometric style](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geometric_art) of designs on pottery, succeeded by the [Orientalizing Period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orientalizing_Period), a strong influence of [Syro-Hittite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syro-Hittite_states), [Assyrian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Assyrian_Empire), [Phoenician](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenicians) and [Egyptian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Intermediate_Period_of_Egypt) cultures.

Traditionally, the [Archaic period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaic_Greece) of ancient Greece is taken in the wake of this strong Orientalizing influence during the 8th century BC, which among other things brought the [alphabetic script](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_alphabet) to Greece, marking the beginning of Greek literature ([Homer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homer), [Hesiod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hesiod)). The Archaic period gives way to the [Classical period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Greece) around 500 BC, in turn succeeded by the [Hellenistic period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_period) at the death of [Alexander the Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great) in 323 BC.

The [history of Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Greece) during Classical Antiquity may thus be subdivided into the following periods:

* The [Archaic period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaic_period_in_Greece) (c. 750 – c. 500 BC) follows, in which artists made larger free-standing [sculptures](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_sculpture) in stiff, hieratic poses with the dreamlike '[archaic smile](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaic_smile)'. The Archaic period is often taken to end with the overthrow of the last tyrant of [Athens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athens) in 510 BC.
* The Classical period (c. 500 – 323 BC) is characterized by a style which was considered by later observers to be exemplary (i.e. 'classical')—for instance the [Parthenon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parthenon). Politically, the Classical Period was dominated by [Athens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Athens) and the [Delian League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delian_League) during the 5th century, displaced by [Spartan hegemony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spartan_hegemony) during the early 4th century BC, before power shifted to [Thebes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Thebes_%28Boeotia%29) and the [Boeotian League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boeotian_League) and finally to the [League of Corinth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Corinth) led by [Macedon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macedon).
* The Hellenistic period (323–146 BC) is when Greek culture and power expanded into the [Near](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Near_East) and [Middle East](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_East). This period begins with the death of Alexander and ends with the Roman conquest.
* [Roman Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Greece), the period between Roman victory over the [Corinthians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corinth) at the [Battle of Corinth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Corinth_%28146_BC%29) in 146 BC and the establishment of [Byzantium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantium) by [Constantine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine_I) as the capital of the [Roman Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Empire) in 330 AD.
* the [final phase of Antiquity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late_Antiquity) is the period of [Christianization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decline_of_Greco-Roman_polytheism) during the later 4th to early 6th centuries, taken to be complete with the closure of the [Neoplatonic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neoplatonic) [*Academy*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato%27s_Academy) by [Justinian I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justinian_I) in 529 AD.

**Historiography**

Main article: [Greek historiographers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_historiographers)

The historical period of ancient Greece is unique in world history as the first period attested directly in proper [historiography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historiography), while earlier ancient history or [proto-history](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-history) is known by much more circumstantial evidence, such as annals or king lists, and pragmatic epigraphy.

[Herodotus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herodotus) is widely known as the "father of history", his [*Histories*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Histories_%28Herodotus%29) being eponymous of the entire [field](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History). Written between the 450s and 420s BC, the scope of Herodotus' work reaches about a century into the past, discussing 6th-century historical figures such as [Darius I of Persia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darius_I_of_Persia), [Cambyses II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambyses_II) and [Psamtik III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psamtik_III), and alludes to some 8th-century ones such as [Candaules](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candaules).

Herodotus was succeeded by authors such as [Thucydides](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thucydides), [Xenophon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xenophon), [Demosthenes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demosthenes), [Plato](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato) and [Aristotle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle). Most of these authors were either [Athenians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Athens) or pro-Athenians, which is why far more is known about the history and politics of Athens than of many other cities. Their scope is further limited by a focus on political, military and diplomatic history, ignoring economic and social history.

**History**

*Further information:* [*History of Greece*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Greece)

**Archaic period**

Main article: [Archaic period in Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaic_period_in_Greece)

Dipylon Vase of the late Geometric period, or the beginning of the Archaic period, ca. 750 BC.

Political geography of ancient Greece in the Archaic and Classical periods

In the 8th century BC, Greece began to emerge from the Dark Ages which followed the fall of the Mycenaean civilization. Literacy had been lost and [Mycenaean script](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linear_B) forgotten, but the Greeks adopted the [Phoenician alphabet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenician_alphabet), modifying it to create the [Greek alphabet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_alphabet). From about the 9th century BC written records begin to appear. Greece was divided into many small self-governing communities, a pattern largely dictated by Greek geography, where every island, valley and plain is cut off from its neighbors by the sea or mountain ranges.

The [Lelantine War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lelantine_War) (c.710–c.650 BC) was an ongoing conflict with the distinction of being the earliest documented war of the ancient Greek period. It was fought between the important [poleis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polis) ([city-states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City-state)) of [Chalcis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chalcis) and [Eretria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eretria) over the fertile Lelantine plain of [Euboea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euboea). Both cities seem to have suffered a decline as result of the long war, though Chalcis was the nominal victor.

A [mercantile class](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merchant) rose in the first half of the 7th century, shown by the introduction of [coinage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_coinage) in about 680 BC. This seems to have introduced tension to many city-states. The [aristocratic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristocracy) regimes which generally governed the poleis were threatened by the new-found wealth of merchants, who in turn desired political power. From 650 BC onwards, the aristocracies had to fight not to be overthrown and replaced by [populist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Populism) [tyrants](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyrant). The word derives from the [non-pejorative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pejorative) Greek τύραννος *tyrannos*, meaning 'illegitimate ruler', although this was applicable to both good and bad leaders alike.

A growing population and shortage of land also seems to have created internal strife between the poor and the rich in many city-states. In [Sparta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sparta), the [Messenian Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messenian_Wars_%28disambiguation%29) resulted in the conquest of [Messenia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messenia_%28ancient_region%29) and enslavement of the Messenians, beginning in the latter half of the 8th century BC, an act without precedent or antecedent in ancient Greece. This practice allowed a social revolution to occur. The subjugated population, thenceforth known as [helots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helots), farmed and labored for Sparta, whilst every Spartan male citizen became a soldier of the [Spartan Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spartan_Army) in a permanently militarized state. Even the elite were obliged to live and train as soldiers; this equality between rich and poor served to defuse the social conflict. These reforms, attributed to the shadowy [Lycurgus of Sparta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lycurgus_of_Sparta), were probably complete by 650 BC.

Athens suffered a land and agrarian crisis in the late 7th century, again resulting in civil strife. The [Archon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archon_of_Athens) (chief magistrate) [Draco](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Draco_%28lawgiver%29) made severe reforms to the law code in 621 BC (hence "[draconian](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Draconian)"), but these failed to quell the conflict. Eventually the moderate reforms of [Solon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solon) (594 BC), improving the lot of the poor but firmly entrenching the aristocracy in power, gave Athens some stability.

The Greek world in the mid-6th century BC.

By the 6th century BC several cities had emerged as dominant in Greek affairs: Athens, Sparta, [Corinth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corinth%2C_Greece), and [Thebes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thebes_%28Greece%29). Each of them had brought the surrounding rural areas and smaller towns under their control, and Athens and Corinth had become major maritime and mercantile powers as well.

Rapidly increasing population in the 8th and 7th centuries had resulted in emigration of many Greeks to form [colonies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonies_in_antiquity) in [Magna Graecia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna_Graecia) ([Southern Italy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Italy) and [Sicily](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sicily)), [Asia Minor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatolia) and further afield. The emigration effectively ceased in the 6th century by which time the Greek world had, culturally and linguistically, become much larger than the area of present-day Greece. Greek colonies were not politically controlled by their founding cities, although they often retained religious and commercial links with them.

In this period, huge economic development occurred in Greece and also her overseas colonies which experienced a growth in commerce and manufacturing. There was a large improvement in the living standards of the population. Some studies estimate that the average size of the Greek household, in the period from 800 BC to 300 BC, increased five times, which indicates a large increase in the average income of the population.

In the second half of the 6th century, Athens fell under the tyranny of [Peisistratos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peisistratos_%28Athens%29) and then his sons [Hippias](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippias_%28tyrant%29) and [Hipparchos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hipparchos_%28son_of_Peisistratos%29). However, in 510 BC, at the instigation of the Athenian aristocrat [Cleisthenes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cleisthenes), the Spartan king [Cleomenes I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cleomenes_I) helped the Athenians overthrow the tyranny. Afterwards, Sparta and Athens promptly turned on each other, at which point Cleomenes I installed [Isagoras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isagoras) as a pro-Spartan archon. Eager to prevent Athens from becoming a Spartan puppet, Cleisthenes responded by proposing to his fellow citizens that Athens undergo a revolution: that all citizens share in political power, regardless of status: that Athens become a "[democracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athenian_democracy)". So enthusiastically did the Athenians take to this idea that, having overthrown Isagoras and implemented Cleisthenes's reforms, they were easily able to repel a Spartan-led three-pronged invasion aimed at restoring Isagoras. The advent of the democracy cured many of the ills of Athens and led to a 'golden age' for the Athenians.

**Classical Greece**

Main article: [Classical Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Greece)

Early [Athenian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athens) coin, depicting the head of [Athena](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athena) on the obverse and her owl on the reverse—5th century BC

Attic [red-figure pottery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red-figure_pottery), [*kylix*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kylix_%28drinking_cup%29) by the [Triptolemos Painter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triptolemos_Painter), ca. 480 BC ([Paris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris), [Louvre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louvre))

Delian League ("Athenian Empire"), immediately before the [Peloponnesian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peloponnesian_War) in 431 BC

**5th century**

Main articles: [Greco-Persian Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Persian_Wars) and [Peloponnesian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peloponnesian_War)

Athens and Sparta would soon have to become allies in the face of the largest external threat ancient Greece would see until the Roman conquest. After suppressing the [Ionian Revolt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ionian_Revolt), a rebellion of the Greek cities of [Ionia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ionia), [Darius I of Persia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darius_I_of_Persia), [King of Kings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_of_Kings) of the [Achaemenid Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achaemenid_Empire), decided to subjugate Greece. His invasion in 490 BC was ended by the Athenian victory at the [Battle of Marathon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Marathon) under [Miltiades the Younger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miltiades_the_Younger).

[Xerxes I of Persia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xerxes_I_of_Persia), son and successor of Darius I, attempted his own invasion 10 years later, but despite his larger army he suffered heavy casualties after the famous rearguard action at [Thermopylae](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Thermopylae) and victories for the allied Greeks at the Battles of [Salamis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Salamis) and [Plataea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Plataea). The [Greco-Persian Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Persian_Wars) continued until 449 BC, led by the Athenians and their [Delian League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delian_League), during which time the [Macedon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macedon), [Thrace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thrace), the [Aegean Islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aegean_Islands) and Ionia were all liberated from Persian influence.

The dominant position of the maritime Athenian 'Empire' threatened Sparta and the [Peloponnesian League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peloponnesian_League) of mainland Greek cities. Inevitably, this led to conflict, resulting in the [Peloponnesian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peloponnesian_War) (431-404 BC). Though effectively a stalemate for much of the war, Athens suffered a number of setbacks. The [Plague of Athens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plague_of_Athens) in 430 BC followed by a disastrous military campaign known as the [Sicilian Expedition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sicilian_Expedition) severely weakened Athens. An estimated one-third of Athenians died, including [Pericles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pericles), their leader.

Sparta was able to foment rebellion amongst Athens's allies, further reducing the Athenian ability to wage war. The decisive moment came in 405 BC when Sparta cut off the grain supply to Athens from the [Hellespont](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellespont). Forced to attack, the crippled Athenian fleet was decisively defeated by the Spartans under the command of [Lysander](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lysander) at [Aegospotami](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Aegospotami). In 404 BC Athens sued for peace, and Sparta dictated a predictably stern settlement: Athens lost her city walls (including the [Long Walls](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_Walls)), her fleet, and all of her overseas possessions.

**4th century**

Greece thus entered the 4th century under a [Spartan hegemony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spartan_hegemony), but it was clear from the start that this was weak. A demographic crisis meant Sparta was overstretched, and by 395 BC Athens, Argos, Thebes, and Corinth felt able to challenge Spartan dominance, resulting in the [Corinthian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corinthian_War) (395-387 BC). Another war of stalemates, it ended with the status quo restored, after the threat of Persian intervention on behalf of the Spartans.

The Spartan hegemony lasted another 16 years, until, when attempting to impose their will on the Thebans, the Spartans suffered a decisive defeat at [Leuctra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Leuctra) in 371 BC. The Theban general [Epaminondas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epaminondas) then led Theban troops into the Peloponnese, whereupon other city-states defected from the Spartan cause. The Thebans were thus able to march into Messenia and free the population.

Deprived of land and its serfs, Sparta declined to a second-rank power. The [Theban hegemony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theban_hegemony) thus established was short-lived; at the [Battle of Mantinea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Mantinea_%28362_BC%29) in 362 BC, Thebes lost her key leader, Epaminondas, and much of her manpower, even though they were victorious in battle. In fact such were the losses to all the great city-states at Mantinea that none could establish dominance in the aftermath.

The weakened state of the heartland of Greece coincided with the [Rise of Macedon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rise_of_Macedon), led by [Philip II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_II_of_Macedon). In twenty years, Philip had unified his kingdom, expanded it north and west at the expense of [Illyrian tribes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illyrians), and then conquered [Thessaly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thessaly) and [Thrace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thrace). His success stemmed from his innovative reforms to the [Macedon army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Army_of_ancient_Macedon). Phillip intervened repeatedly in the affairs of the southern city-states, culminating in his invasion of 338 BC.

Decisively defeating an allied army of Thebes and Athens at the [Battle of Chaeronea (338 BC)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Chaeronea_%28338_BC%29), he became *de facto* hegemon of all of Greece, except Sparta. He compelled the majority of the city-states to join the [League of Corinth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Corinth), allying them to him, and preventing them from warring with each other. Philip then entered into war against the Achaemenid Empire but was assassinated by [Pausanias of Orestis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pausanias_of_Orestis) early on in the conflict.

[Alexander](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great), son and successor of Philip, continued the war. Alexander defeated [Darius III of Persia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darius_III_of_Persia) and completely destroyed the Achaemenid Empire, annexing it to Macedon and earning himself the epithet 'the Great'. When Alexander died in 323 BC, Greek power and influence was at its zenith. However, there had been a fundamental shift away from the fierce independence and classical culture of the *poleis*—and instead towards the developing [Hellenistic culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_Greece).

**Hellenistic Greece**

Main articles: [Wars of Alexander the Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wars_of_Alexander_the_Great), [Hellenistic Period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_Period), and [Hellenistic civilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_civilization)

The major [Hellenistic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_civilization) realms included the [Diadochi kingdoms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diadochi):

Kingdom of [Ptolemy I Soter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemy_I_Soter)

Kingdom of [Cassander](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cassander)

Kingdom of [Lysimachus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lysimachus)

Kingdom of [Seleucus I Nicator](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seleucus_I_Nicator)

[Epirus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epirus)

Also shown on the map:

[Greek colonies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_colonies)

[Carthage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carthage) (non-Greek)

[Rome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Rome) (non-Greek)

The orange areas were often in dispute after 281 BC. The [kingdom of Pergamon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Pergamon) occupied some of this area. Not shown: [Indo-Greeks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Greeks).

Territories and expansion of the Indo-Greeks.

The [Hellenistic period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_period) lasted from 323 BC, which marked the end of the [Wars of Alexander the Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wars_of_Alexander_the_Great), to the annexation of Greece by the [Roman Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Republic) in 146 BC. Although the establishment of Roman rule did not break the continuity of Hellenistic society and culture, which remained essentially unchanged until the advent of [Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity), it did mark the end of Greek political independence.

During the Hellenistic period, the importance of "Greece proper" (that is, the territory of modern Greece) within the Greek-speaking world declined sharply. The great centers of Hellenistic culture were [Alexandria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandria) and [Antioch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antioch), capitals of [Ptolemaic Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemaic_Egypt) and [Seleucid Syria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seleucid_dynasty) respectively.

The conquests of Alexander had numerous consequences for the Greek city-states. It greatly widened the horizons of the Greeks and led to a steady emigration, particularly of the young and ambitious, to the new Greek empires in the east. Many Greeks migrated to Alexandria, Antioch and the many other new Hellenistic cities founded in Alexander's wake, as far away as what are now [Afghanistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan) and [Pakistan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan), where the [Greco-Bactrian Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Bactrian_Kingdom) and the [Indo-Greek Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Greek_Kingdom) survived until the end of the 1st century BC.

After the death of Alexander his empire was, after quite some conflict, divided amongst his generals, resulting in the [Ptolemaic Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemaic_Kingdom) (based upon [Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt)), the [Seleucid Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seleucid_Empire) (based on the [Levant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Levant), [Mesopotamia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamia) and [Persia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persia)) and the [Antigonid dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antigonid_dynasty) based in Macedon. In the intervening period, the poleis of Greece were able to wrest back some of their freedom, although still nominally subject to the Macedonian Kingdom.

The city-states formed themselves into two leagues; the [Achaean League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achaean_League) (including Thebes, Corinth and Argos) and the [Aetolian League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aetolian_League) (including Sparta and Athens). For much of the period until the Roman conquest, these leagues were usually at war with each other, and/or allied to different sides in the conflicts between the Diadochi (the successor states to Alexander's empire).

The Antigonid Kingdom became involved in a war with the Roman Republic in the late 3rd century. Although the [First Macedonian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Macedonian_War) was inconclusive, the Romans, in typical fashion, continued to make war on Macedon until it was completely absorbed into the Roman Republic (by 149 BC). In the east the unwieldy Seleucid Empire gradually disintegrated, although a rump survived until 64 BC, whilst the Ptolemaic Kingdom continued in Egypt until 30 BC, when it too was conquered by the Romans. The Aetolian league grew wary of Roman involvement in Greece, and sided with the Seleucids in the [Roman-Syrian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman-Syrian_War); when the Romans were victorious, the league was effectively absorbed into the Republic. Although the Achaean league outlasted both the Aetolian league and Macedon, it was also soon defeated and absorbed by the Romans in 146 BC, bringing an end to the independence of all of Greece.

**Roman Greece**

Main article: [Roman Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Greece)

*Further information:* [*Byzantine Greece*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Greece)

The Greek peninsula came under [Roman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Republic) rule in 146 BC conquest of [Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greece) after the [Battle of Corinth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Corinth_%28146_BC%29). [Macedonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macedonia_%28Roman_province%29) became a [Roman province](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_province) while southern Greece came under the surveillance of Macedonia's prefect; however, some Greek [poleis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polis) managed to maintain a partial independence and avoid taxation. The [Aegean islands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aegean_islands) were added to this territory in 133 BC. [Athens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athens) and other Greek cities revolted in 88 BC, and the peninsula was crushed by the Roman general [Sulla](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucius_Cornelius_Sulla). The Roman civil wars devastated the land even further, until [Augustus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesar_Augustus) organized the peninsula as the province of [Achaea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achaea_%28province%29) in 27 BC.

Greece was a key eastern province of the [Roman Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Empire), as the [Roman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_culture) [culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture) had long been in fact [Greco-Roman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Roman). The [Greek language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koine_Greek) served as a [lingua franca](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lingua_franca) in the [East](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East) and in [Italy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy), and many Greek intellectuals such as [Galen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galen) would perform most of their work in [Rome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rome).

**Geography**

**Regions**

Main article: [Regions of ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regions_of_ancient_Greece)

Map showing the major regions of mainland ancient Greece, and adjacent "barbarian" lands.

The territory of Greece is mountainous, and as a result, ancient Greece consisted of many smaller regions each with its own dialect, cultural peculiarities, and identity. Regionalism and regional conflicts were a prominent feature of ancient Greece. Cities tended to be located in valleys between mountains, or on coastal plains, and dominated a certain area around them.

In the south lay the [Peloponnese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peloponnese), itself consisting of the regions of Laconia (southeast), Messenia (southwest), Elis (west), Achaia (north), Korinthia (northeast), Argolis (east), and Arcadia (center). These names survive to the present day as [regional units of modern Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regional_units_of_Greece), though with somewhat different boundaries. Mainland Greece to the north, nowadays known as [Central Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Greece), consisted of [Aetolia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aetolia) and [Acarnania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acarnania) in the west, [Locris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Locris), [Doris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doris_%28Greece%29), and [Phocis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phocis_%28ancient_region%29) in the center, while in the east lay Boeotia, [Attica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attica), and [Megaris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megaris). Northeast lay [Thessaly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thessaly), while [Epirus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epirus) lay to the northwest. Epirus stretched from the [Ambracian Gulf](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambracian_Gulf) in the south to the [Ceraunian mountains](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceraunian_mountains) and the [Aoos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aoos) river in the north, and consisted of [Chaonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaonia) (north), [Molossia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molossia) (center), and Thesprotia (south). In the northeast corner was Macedonia, originally consisting [Lower Macedonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lower_Macedonia) and its regions, such as [Elimeia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elimeia), [Pieria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieria_%28regional_unit%29), and [Orestis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orestis_%28region%29). Around the time of [Alexander I of Macedon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_I_of_Macedon), the [Argead kings of Macedon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argead_dynasty) started to expand into [Upper Macedonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_Macedonia), lands inhabited by independent Macedonian tribes like the Lyncestae and the Elmiotae and to the West, beyond the [Axius river](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axius_river), into [Eordaia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eordaia), [Bottiaea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bottiaea), [Mygdonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mygdonia), and [Almopia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Almopia), regions settled by Thracian tribes. To the north of Macedonia lay various non-Greek peoples such as the [Paeonians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paeonians) due north, the [Thracians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thracians) to the northeast, and the [Illyrians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illyrians), with whom the Macedonians were frequently in conflict, to the northwest. [Chalcidice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chalcidice) was settled early on by southern Greek colonists and was considered part of the Greek world, while from the late 2nd millennium BC substantial Greek settlement also occurred on the eastern shores of the [Aegean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aegean_Sea), in [Anatolia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatolia).

**Colonies**

Main articles: [Greek colonies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_colonies) and [Magna Graecia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna_Graecia)

Greek cities & colonies c. 550 BC.

During the Archaic period, the [population of Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_demography#Ancient_Greece_and_Greek_colonies) grew beyond the capacity of its limited [arable land](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arable_land) (according to one estimate, the population of ancient Greece increased by a factor larger than ten during the period from 800 BC to 400 BC, increasing from a population of 800,000 to a total estimated population of 10 to 13 million).

From about 750 BC the Greeks began 250 years of expansion, settling colonies in all directions. To the east, the [Aegean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aegean_Sea) coast of [Asia Minor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatolia) was colonized first, followed by [Cyprus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_history_of_Cyprus) and the coasts of [Thrace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thrace), the [Sea of Marmara](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_of_Marmara) and south coast of the [Black Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Sea).

Eventually Greek colonization reached as far northeast as present day [Ukraine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukraine) and Russia ([Taganrog](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taganrog)). To the west the coasts of [Illyria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illyria), [Sicily](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sicily) and Southern Italy were settled, followed by [Southern France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_France), [Corsica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corsica), and even northeastern [Spain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spain). Greek colonies were also founded in [Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Egypt) and [Libya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Libya).

Modern [Syracuse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syracuse%2C_Italy), [Naples](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naples), [Marseille](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marseille) and [Istanbul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istanbul) had their beginnings as the Greek colonies Syracusae *(Συρακούσαι)*, Neapolis *(Νεάπολις)*, Massalia *(Μασσαλία)* and [Byzantion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantium) *(Βυζάντιον)*. These colonies played an important role in the spread of Greek influence throughout Europe, and also aided in the establishment of long-distance trading networks between the Greek city-states, boosting the [economy of ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_ancient_Greece).

**Politics and society**

Cities and towns of ancient Greece

**Political structure**

Ancient Greece consisted of several hundred more or less independent [city-states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City-state) ([*poleis*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poleis)). This was a situation unlike that in most other contemporary societies, which were either [tribal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribe), or kingdoms ruling over relatively large territories. Undoubtedly the [geography of Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Greece)—divided and sub-divided by hills, mountains and rivers—contributed to the fragmentary nature of ancient Greece. On the one hand, the ancient Greeks had no doubt that they were 'one people'; they had the same religion, same basic culture, and same language. Furthermore, the Greeks were very aware of their tribal origins; Herodotus was able to extensively categorize the city-states by tribe. Yet, although these higher-level relationships existed, they seem to have rarely had a major role in Greek politics. The independence of the *poleis* was fiercely defended; unification was something rarely contemplated by the ancient Greeks. Even when, during the second Persian invasion of Greece, a group of city-states allied themselves to defend Greece, the vast majority of *poleis* remained neutral, and after the Persian defeat, the allies quickly returned to infighting.

Thus, the major peculiarities of the ancient Greek political system were; firstly, its fragmentary nature, and that this does not particularly seem to have tribal origin; and secondly the particular focus on urban centers within otherwise tiny states. The peculiarities of the Greek system are further evidenced by the colonies that they set up throughout the [Mediterranean Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Sea), which, though they might count a certain Greek *polis* as their 'mother' (and remain sympathetic to her), were completely independent of the founding city.

Inevitably smaller *poleis* might be dominated by larger neighbors, but conquest or direct rule by another city-state appears to have been quite rare. Instead the *poleis* grouped themselves into leagues, membership of which was in a constant state of flux. Later in the Classical period, the leagues would become fewer and larger, be dominated by one city (particularly Athens, Sparta and Thebes); and often *poleis* would be compelled to join under threat of war (or as part of a peace treaty). Even after Philip II of Macedon 'conquered' the heartlands of ancient Greece, he did not attempt to annex the territory, or unify it into a new province, but simply compelled most of the *poleis* to join his own [Corinthian League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corinthian_League).

*Further information:* [*History\_of\_citizenship#Ancient\_Greece*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_citizenship#Ancient_Greece)

**Government and law**

Main article: [Ancient Greek law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_law)

Inheritance law, part of the [Law Code of Gortyn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gortyn_code), Crete, fragment of the 11th column. Limestone, 5th century BC

Initially many Greek city-states seem to have been petty kingdoms; there was often a city official carrying some residual, ceremonial functions of the king ([*basileus*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basileus)), e.g. the [*archon basileus*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archon_basileus) in Athens. However, by the Archaic period and the first historical consciousness, most had already become aristocratic [oligarchies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oligarchy). It is unclear exactly how this change occurred. For instance, in Athens, the kingship had been reduced to a hereditary, lifelong chief magistracy ([*archon*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archon_of_Athens)) by c. 1050 BC; by 753 BC this had become a decennial, elected archonship; and finally by 683 BC an annually elected archonship. Through each stage more power would have been transferred to the aristocracy as a whole, and away from a single individual.

Inevitably, the domination of politics and concomitant aggregation of wealth by small groups of families was apt to cause social unrest in many *poleis*. In many cities a [tyrant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyrant) (not in the modern sense of repressive autocracies), would at some point seize control and govern according to their own will; often a populist agenda would help sustain them in power. In a system racked with [class conflict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Class_conflict), government by a 'strongman' was often the best solution.

Athens fell under a tyranny in the second half of the 6th century. When this tyranny was ended, the Athenians founded the world's first democracy as a radical solution to prevent the aristocracy regaining power. A [citizens' assembly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_assembly) (the [*Ecclesia*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesia_%28ancient_Athens%29)), for the discussion of city policy, had existed since the reforms of [Draco](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Draco_%28lawgiver%29) in 621 BC; all citizens were permitted to attend after the reforms of [Solon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solon) (early 6th century), but the poorest citizens could not address the assembly or run for office. With the establishment of the democracy, the assembly became the *de jure* mechanism of government; all citizens had equal privileges in the assembly. However, non-citizens, such as [metrics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metic) (foreigners living in Athens) or [slaves](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_ancient_Greece), had no political rights at all.

After the rise of the democracy in Athens, other city-states founded democracies. However, many retained more traditional forms of government. As so often in other matters, Sparta was a notable exception to the rest of Greece, ruled through the whole period by not one, but two hereditary monarchs. This was a form of [diarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diarchy). The [Kings of Sparta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kings_of_Sparta) belonged to the Agiads and the Eurypontids, descendants respectively of [Eurysthenes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurysthenes) and [Procles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Procles). Both dynasty founders were believed to be twin sons of [Aristodemus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristodemus), a [Heraclid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heracleidae) ruler. However, the powers of these kings was trammeled by both a council of elders (the [*Gerousia*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerousia)) and magistrates specifically appointed to watch over the kings (the [*Ephors*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephor)).

**Social structure**

Only free, land owning, native-born men could be citizens entitled to the full protection of the law in a city-state (later [Pericles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pericles) introduced exceptions to the native-born restriction). In most city-states, unlike the situation in [Rome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Rome), social prominence did not allow special rights. Sometimes families controlled public religious functions, but this ordinarily did not give any extra power in the government. In Athens, the population was divided into four social classes based on wealth. People could change classes if they made more money. In Sparta, all male citizens were given the title of equal if they finished their education. However, Spartan kings, who served as the city-state's dual military and religious leaders, came from two families.

Slavery

Main article: [Slavery in ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_ancient_Greece)

Gravestone of a woman with her slave child-attendant, c. 100 BC

Slaves had no power or status. They had the right to have a family and own property, subject to their master's goodwill and permission, but they had no political rights. By 600 BC [chattel slavery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chattel_slavery) had spread in Greece. By the 5th century BC slaves made up one-third of the total population in some city-states. Two-fifths (some authorities say four-fifths) of the population of [Classical Athens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Athens) were slaves. Slaves outside of Sparta almost never revolted because they were made up of too many nationalities and were too scattered to organize.

Most families owned slaves as household servants and labourers, and even poor families might have owned a few slaves. Owners were not allowed to beat or kill their slaves. Owners often promised to free slaves in the future to encourage slaves to work hard. Unlike in Rome, [freedmen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedman) did not become citizens. Instead, they were mixed into the population of [*metrics*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metic), which included people from foreign countries or other city-states who were officially allowed to live in the state.

City-states legally owned slaves. These public slaves had a larger measure of independence than slaves owned by families, living on their own and performing specialized tasks. In Athens, public slaves were trained to look out for [counterfeit coinage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coin_counterfeiting), while temple slaves acted as servants of the temple's [deity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Greek_mythological_figures) and [Scythian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scythian) slaves were employed in Athens as a police force corralling citizens to political functions.

Sparta had a special type of slaves called [*helots*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helots). Helots were [Messenians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messenia_%28ancient_region%29) enslaved during the [Messenian Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Messenian_War) by the state and assigned to families where they were forced to stay. Helots raised food and did household chores so that women could concentrate on raising strong children while men could devote their time to training as [hoplites](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoplite). Their masters treated them harshly (every [Spartiate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spartiate) male had to kill a helot as a right of passage), and helots often resorted to [slave rebellions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slave_rebellion).

**Education**

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Main article: [Education in ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_ancient_Greece)

[Mosaic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosaic) from [Pompeii](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pompeii) depicting [Plato](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato)'s academy

For most of Greek history, education was private, except in Sparta. During the Hellenistic period, some city-states established [public schools](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_school_%28government_funded%29). Only wealthy families could afford a teacher. Boys learned how to read, write and quote literature. They also learned to sing and play one musical instrument and were trained as athletes for military service. They studied not for a job but to become an effective citizen. Girls also learned to read, write and do simple arithmetic so they could manage the household. They almost never received education after childhood.

Boys went to school at the age of seven, or went to the barracks, if they lived in Sparta. The three types of teachings were: grammatistes for arithmetic, kitharistes for music and dancing, and Paedotribae for sports.

Boys from wealthy families attending the private school lessons were taken care of by a *paidagogos*, a household slave selected for this task who accompanied the boy during the day. Classes were held in teachers' private houses and included reading, writing, mathematics, singing, and playing the lyre and flute. When the boy became 12 years old the schooling started to include sports such as wrestling, running, and throwing discus and javelin. In Athens some older youths attended academy for the finer disciplines such as culture, sciences, music, and the arts. The schooling ended at age 18, followed by military training in the army usually for one or two years.

A small number of boys continued their education after childhood, as in the Spartan [agoge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agoge). A crucial part of a wealthy teenager's education was a mentorship with an elder, which in a few places and times may have included [pederastic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pederasty_in_ancient_Greece) love. The teenager learned by watching his mentor talking about politics in the [*agora*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agora), helping him perform his public duties, exercising with him in the gymnasium and attending [symposia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symposium) with him. The richest students continued their education by studying with famous teachers. Some of Athens' greatest such schools included the [Lyceum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyceum) (the so-called [Peripatetic school](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peripatetic_school) founded by [Aristotle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle) of [Stageira](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stageira)) and the [Platonic Academy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platonic_Academy) (founded by [Plato](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato) of Athens). The education system of the wealthy ancient Greeks is also called [Paideia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paideia).

**Economy**

Main articles: [Economy of ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_ancient_Greece), [Agriculture of ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agriculture_of_ancient_Greece), and [Slavery in ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_ancient_Greece)

At its economic height, in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, ancient Greece was the most advanced economy in the world. According to some economic historians, it was one of the most advanced preindustrial economies. This is demonstrated by the average daily wage of the Greek worker which was, in terms of wheat, about 12 kg. This was more than 3 times the average daily wage of an Egyptian worker during the Roman period, about 3.75 kg.

**Warfare**

Main articles: [Ancient Greek warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_warfare) and [Army of Macedon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Army_of_Macedon)

Greek [hoplite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoplite) and Persian warrior depicted fighting, on an ancient kylix, 5th century BC

At least in the Archaic Period, the fragmentary nature of ancient Greece, with many competing city-states, increased the frequency of conflict, but conversely limited the scale of warfare. Unable to maintain professional armies, the city-states relied on their own citizens to fight. This inevitably reduced the potential duration of campaigns, as citizens would need to return to their own professions (especially in the case of, for example, farmers). Campaigns would therefore often be restricted to summer. When battles occurred, they were usually set piece and intended to be decisive. Casualties were slight compared to later battles, rarely amounting to more than 5% of the losing side, but the slain often included the most prominent citizens and generals who led from the front.

The scale and scope of warfare in ancient Greece changed dramatically as a result of the [Greco-Persian Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Persian_Wars). To fight the enormous armies of the [Achaemenid Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achaemenid_Empire) was effectively beyond the capabilities of a single city-state. The eventual triumph of the Greeks was achieved by alliances of city-states (the exact composition changing over time), allowing the pooling of resources and division of labor. Although alliances between city-states occurred before this time, nothing on this scale had been seen before. The rise of [Athens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athens) and [Sparta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sparta) as pre-eminent powers during this conflict led directly to the [Peloponnesian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peloponnesian_War), which saw further development of the nature of warfare, strategy and tactics. Fought between leagues of cities dominated by Athens and Sparta, the increased manpower and financial resources increased the scale, and allowed the diversification of warfare. Set-piece battles during the Peloponnesian war proved indecisive and instead there was increased reliance on attritionary strategies, naval battle and blockades and sieges. These changes greatly increased the number of casualties and the disruption of Greek society. Athens owned one of the largest war fleets in ancient Greece. It had over 200 [triremes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trireme) each powered by 170 oarsmen who were seated in 3 rows on each side of the ship. The city could afford such a large fleet-it had over 34,000 oars men-because it owned a lot of silver mines that were worked by slaves.

**Culture**

**Philosophy**

Main article: [Ancient Greek philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_philosophy)

Ancient Greek philosophy focused on the role of [reason](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reason) and [inquiry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inquiry). In many ways, it had an important influence on modern [philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy), as well as modern science. Clear unbroken lines of influence lead from ancient Greek and [Hellenistic philosophers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_philosophy), to medieval [Muslim philosophers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Islamic_philosophy) and [Islamic scientists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_science), to the European [Renaissance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance) and [Enlightenment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment), to the secular sciences of the modern day.

Neither reason nor inquiry began with the Greeks. Defining the difference between the Greek quest for knowledge and the quests of the elder civilizations, such as the ancient Egyptians and [Babylonians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonia), has long been a topic of study by theorists of civilization.

Some well-known philosophers of Ancient Greece were [Plato](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato), [Socrates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socrates), and many others. They have aided in information about ancient Greek society through writings such as [The Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Republic_%28Plato%29), by Plato.

**Literature and theatre**

Main articles: [Ancient Greek literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_literature), [Ancient Greek comedy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_comedy), and [Theatre of ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre_of_ancient_Greece)

The theatre of [Epidauros](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epidaurus#Theatre), 4th century BC

Ancient Greek society placed considerable emphasis upon literature. Many authors consider the [western](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_culture) literary tradition to have begun with the [epic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_poetry) poems *The* [*Iliad*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iliad) and *The* [*Odyssey*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odyssey), which remain giants in the literary [canon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_canon) for their skillful and vivid depictions of war and peace, honor and disgrace, love and hatred. Notable among later Greek poets was [Sappho](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sappho), who defined, in many ways, [lyric poetry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyric_poetry) as a genre.

A playwright named [Aeschylus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeschylus) changed [Western literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_literature) forever when he introduced the ideas of [dialogue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialogue) and interacting characters to playwriting. In doing so, he essentially invented "drama": his [*Oresteia*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oresteia) trilogy of plays is seen as his crowning achievement. Other refiners of playwriting were [Sophocles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophocles) and [Euripides](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euripides). Sophocles is credited with skillfully developing [irony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irony) as a literary technique, most famously in his play [*Oedipus the King*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oedipus_the_King). Euripedes, conversely, used plays to challenge societal norms and mores—a hallmark of much of Western literature for the next 2,300 years and beyond—and his works such as [*Medea*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medea_%28play%29), [*The Bacchae*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bacchae) and [*The Trojan Women*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Trojan_Women) are still notable for their ability to challenge our perceptions of propriety, gender, and war. [Aristophanes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristophanes), a comic playwright, defines and shapes the idea of [comedy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comedy) almost as Aeschylus had shaped [tragedy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragedy) as an art form—Aristophanes' most famous plays include the [*Lysistrata*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lysistrata) and [*The Frogs*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Frogs).

[Philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy) entered literature in the dialogues of [Plato](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato), who converted the give and take of Socratic questioning into written form. [Aristotle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle), Plato's student, wrote dozens of works on many scientific disciplines, but his greatest contribution to literature was likely his [*Poetics*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetics_%28Aristotle%29), which lays out his understanding of drama, and thereby establishes the first criteria for [literary criticism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_criticism).

**Music and dance**

Main article: [Music of ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_ancient_Greece)

Music was present almost universally in Greek society, from marriages and funerals to religious ceremonies, theatre, folk music and the ballad-like reciting of epic poetry. There are significant fragments of actual Greek musical notation as well as many literary references to ancient Greek music. Greek art depicts musical instruments and dance. The word *music* derives from the name of the [Muses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muses), the daughters of [Zeus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeus) who were patron goddesses of the arts.

**Science and technology**

Main articles: [List of Graeco-Roman geographers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Graeco-Roman_geographers), [Greek astronomy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_astronomy), [Greek mathematics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_mathematics), [Ancient Greek medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_medicine), and [Ancient Greek technology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_technology)

The Antikythera mechanism was an [analog computer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Analog_computer) from 150–100 BC designed to calculate the positions of astronomical objects.

Ancient Greek mathematics contributed many important developments to the field of [mathematics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathematics), including the basic rules of [geometry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geometry), the idea of [formal mathematical proof](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formal_proof), and discoveries in [number theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Number_theory), [mathematical analysis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathematical_analysis), [applied mathematics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Applied_mathematics), and approached close to establishing [integral calculus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integral_calculus). The discoveries of several Greek mathematicians, including [Pythagoras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pythagoras), [Euclid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euclid), and [Archimedes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archimedes), are still used in mathematical teaching today.

The Greeks developed astronomy, which they treated as a branch of mathematics, to a highly sophisticated level. The first geometrical, three-dimensional models to explain the apparent motion of the planets were developed in the 4th century BC by [Eudoxus of Cnidus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eudoxus_of_Cnidus) and [Callippus of Cyzicus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Callippus_of_Cyzicus). Their younger contemporary [Heraclides Ponticus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraclides_Ponticus) proposed that the Earth rotates around its axis. In the 3rd century BC [Aristarchus of Samos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristarchus_of_Samos) was the first to suggest a [heliocentric](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heliocentric) system, although only fragmentary descriptions of his idea survive. [Eratosthenes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eratosthenes), using the angles of shadows created at widely separated regions, estimated the circumference of the [Earth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earth) with great accuracy. In the 2nd century BC [Hipparchus of Nicea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hipparchus) made a number of contributions, including the first measurement of [precession](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precession) and the compilation of the first star catalog in which he proposed the modern system of [apparent magnitudes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apparent_magnitude).

The [Antikythera mechanism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antikythera_mechanism), a device for calculating the movements of planets, dates from about 80 BC, and was the first ancestor of the astronomical [computer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer). It was discovered in an ancient shipwreck off the Greek island of [Antikythera](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antikythera), between [Kythera](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kythera) and [Crete](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crete). The device became famous for its use of a [differential gear](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Differential_gear), previously believed to have been invented in the 16th century, and the miniaturization and complexity of its parts, comparable to a clock made in the 18th century. The original mechanism is displayed in the Bronze collection of the [National Archaeological Museum of Athens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Archaeological_Museum_of_Athens), accompanied by a replica.

The ancient Greeks also made important discoveries in the medical field. Hippocrates was a [physician](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physician) of the Classical period, and is considered one of the most outstanding figures in the [history of medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_medicine). He is referred to as the "[father of medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_persons_considered_father_or_mother_of_a_field#Natural_and_social_sciences)" in recognition of his lasting contributions to the field as the founder of the Hippocratic school of medicine. This intellectual school revolutionized [medicine in ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine_in_ancient_Greece), establishing it as a discipline distinct from other fields that it had traditionally been associated with (notably [theurgy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theurgy) and [philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy)), thus making medicine a profession.

**Art and architecture**

Main articles: [Ancient Greek art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_art) and [Ancient Greek architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greek_architecture)

The Temple of [Hera](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hera) at [Selinunte](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selinunte), Sicily

The art of ancient Greece has exercised an enormous influence on the culture of many countries from ancient times until the present, particularly in the areas of [sculpture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sculpture) and [architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Architecture). In the West, the art of the [Roman Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Empire) was largely derived from Greek models. In the East, [Alexander the Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great)'s conquests initiated several centuries of exchange between Greek, Central Asian and [Indian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India) cultures, resulting in [Greco-Buddhist art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Buddhist_art), with ramifications as far as [Japan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan). Following the [Renaissance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance) in Europe, the [humanist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanism) aesthetic and the high technical standards of Greek art inspired generations of European artists. Well into the 19th century, the classical tradition derived from Greece dominated the art of the western world.

**Religion and mythology**

Main articles: [Religion in ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_ancient_Greece), [Hellenistic religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_religion), and [Greek mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_mythology)

Greek mythology consists of stories belonging to the ancient Greeks concerning [their gods](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_tree_of_the_Greek_gods) and [heroes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hero), the nature of the world and the origins and significance of their religious practices. The main Greek gods were the twelve Olympians, [Zeus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeus), his wife [Hera](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hera), [Poseidon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poseidon), [Ares](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ares), [Hermes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermes), [Hephaestus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hephaestus), [Aphrodite](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aphrodite), [Athena](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athena), [Apollo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollo), [Artemis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artemis), [Demeter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demeter), and [Dionysus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysus). Other important deities included [Hebe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebe_%28mythology%29), [Hades](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hades), [Helios](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helios), [Hestia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hestia), [Persephone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persephone) and [Heracles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heracles). Zeus's parents were [Cronus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cronus) and [Rhea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhea_%28mythology%29) who also were the parents of Poseidon, Hades, Hera, Hestia, and Demeter.

**Legacy**

*Further information:* [*Classics*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classics)

The civilization of ancient Greece has been immensely influential on language, politics, educational systems, philosophy, science, and the arts. It became the [*Leitkultur*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leitkultur) of the [Roman Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Empire) to the point of marginalizing native [Italic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Age_Italy) traditions. As [Horace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace) put it,

*Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes / intulit agresti Latio* ([*Epistulae*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistles_%28Horace%29) 2.1.156f.)

"Captive Greece took captive her fierce conqueror and instilled her arts in rustic [Latium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latium)."

Via the Roman Empire, Greek culture came to be foundational to [Western culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_culture) in general. The [Byzantine Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Empire) inherited Classical Greek culture directly, without Latin intermediation, and the preservation of classical Greek learning in medieval Byzantine tradition further exerted strong influence on the [Slavs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavs) and later on the [Islamic Golden Age](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Golden_Age) and the Western European [Renaissance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance). A modern revival of Classical Greek learning took place in the [Neoclassicism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neoclassicism) movement in 18th and 19th century Europe and the Americas.

**See also**

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| --- | --- |
|  | [***Ancient Greece portal***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal%3AAncient_Greece) |

* [Outline of ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_ancient_Greece)
	+ [Regions of ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regions_of_ancient_Greece)
* [Outline of ancient Rome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_ancient_Rome)
* [Outline of ancient Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_ancient_Egypt)
* [Outline of classical studies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_classical_studies)
	+ [Regions in Greco-Roman antiquity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_adjectival_and_demonymic_forms_of_place_names#Regions_in_Greco-Roman_antiquity)
	+ [Classical demography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_demography)
	+ [History of science in classical antiquity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_science_in_classical_antiquity)
	+ [Citizenship in ancient Greece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_citizenship#Ancient_Greece) (article section)
* [Macedonia (ancient kingdom)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macedonia_%28ancient_kingdom%29)

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**Further reading**

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