

GREEK HISTORY INTRODUCTION



Introduction

Ancient Greece has contributed much to the West-ern world: the philosophy of Socrates, the literature of Homer, the math of Pythagoras, the history of Herodotus, the drama of Sophocles, the physics of Archimedes, the medicine of Hippocrates, the Olympic Games and democracy.

The earliest traces of civilization in Greece date back to the Paleolithic Era (2.5 million years ago) and evidence of permanent settlements dates back to the Neolithic Age (6000 BC).

Minoan Civilization (2700 to 1500 BC) devel-

oped on the island of Crete and quickly became the dominant sea power in the region.

The Minoans are named for the ancient Cretan King Minos; the name they gave themselves is not known. King Minos colonized many nearby islands and is considered to be the first person to establish a navy.

Though the Minoans probably warred with the Mycenaeans, the eruption of the volcano on the island of Thera (now Santorini) caused a tsunami that flooded Crete and destroyed its cities and villages.

Mycenaean Civilization (1900 to 1100 BC)

is considered the beginning of Greek culture. It was under the Mycenaeans that the classical pantheon of Greek gods and goddesses evolved. It is unclear what led to the fall of the Mycenaeans. One theory is that their civilization may have been destroyed by invading Doric Greeks.

The Greek Dark Ages (1100 to 800 BC)

are so-named for the absence of any written records. During this time, people lived scattered throughout Greece in small farming villages. As the villages grew, they began to evolve, and most added walls, a marketplace and a community meeting place.

Next follows the **Archaic Period (800 to 500 BC)** and the emergence of the city-state, or polis, when governments were developed and cit-

izens were held to a set of laws. They raised armies and collected taxes, and the first coins were minted. It also saw the birth of Greek pottery and sculpture. The Greeks also colonized most of Asia Minor and the islands surrounding mainland Greece during this period.

Though they shared the same language, gods, customs and religious rituals, every city-state was different.

The Classical Period (482 to 323 BC) saw the Golden Age of Athens, when the Acropolis was built. Democracy was established, and all male citizens over the age of 20 had a voice in government.

After defeating the Persians in 480 BC, Athens flourished and became a superpower. It had the most powerful navy and demanded tributes from other city-states. Athens formed an alliance with other city-states to deter the Persians from further hostilities.

Sparta, however, was wary of Athens and formed its own alliances. Each side mistrusted the other and tension between the two parties erupted in the Peloponnesian Wars in the fifth century BC. The first ended in a truce, the second with Athens in ruins and Sparta bankrupt.

In the **Late Classical Period (402 to 330 BC)**, with the fall of Greece's two greatest cities, Philip II of Macedon stepped in and united the Greek city-states under Macedonian rule. Upon

his death, they passed to his son, Alexander the Great. Alexander invaded Egypt, Asia Minor, Persia and India, spreading Greek philosophy, culture, language and art to every region he passed through. Upon his death, his vast empire was broken up among his generals.

In 168 BC, the Romans defeated Macedon at the Battle of Pydna and Greece steadily came under their influence. It was designated a Protectorate of Rome, but 100 years later it became **part of the Roman Empire**.

In 395 AD, Greece came under the new **Eastern Roman Empire**, ruled from Constantinople, where it became a powerful player within the Orthodox Christian Byzantine world. During this time, some of Greece's old enemies, such as the Persians and the Slavs, invaded and settled in parts of the country. But in the late 8th century, the Empire began to recover and Greeks from Sicily and Asia Minor were brought back to Greece to resettle it, driving out the Slavs.

In 1453, the Ottomans captured Constantinople and the **Greek mainland fell to Turkish rule for the next 350 years**. Under the Ottoman Empire, many Christians left Greece for Western Europe, others declared themselves Muslims to avoid heavy taxes but secretly continued to practice Christianity.

During this time, Crete and the Ionian islands

were invaded at various points by the Franks and the Venetians, but they always reverted back to Turkish rule.

By 1821 the desire for independence was common among Greeks of all classes. **The War of Independence** began in Moldavia in an unsuccessful attack on the Turks, but by March of that same year, revolts had broken out in the Peloponnese (the peninsula joined to the rest of mainland Greece by the Isthmus of Corinth), north of the Gulf of Corinth, and on many of the islands.

Within a year the rebels had control of the Peloponnese. The Turks attempted three invasions but were unable to regain the area. Unfortunately, infighting led to **Civil War** in 1823 and 1824.

In 1825 the Turks, with help from the Egyptian navy, were able to take back much of Greece, including Athens. The European powers intervened on the side of the Greeks, favoring an autonomous Greek state over the extended borders of the Ottoman Empire.

Great Britain, France and Russia sent their naval fleets to fight the Egyptians. Finally, in 1832 the Turkish Sultan recognized **Greek independence** in the Treaty of Constantinople.

During the 19th century, the Greeks continued to expand their national territory and reassert

Greek sovereignty in many of the islands.

Nearly a century of territorial gains came to an end in 1922, when millions of Greeks were expelled from Smyrna in Turkish Anatolia, ending thousands of years of Greek presence in Asia Minor.

In World War II, Greece suffered Italian, German and Bulgarian occupation.

From 1946 to 1949, a Civil War fought between the Greek government of the Greek communist army left thousands dead or homeless. The war left Greece polarized politically and strained relations with pro-Soviet neighbors.

In 1967, the Greek military seized power in a coup d'état and the military junta ruled until 1974.

Democracy was restored in 1981 and with it, Greece joined the European Union.

In the late 2000's, Greece faced a serious debt crisis when it was discovered that the government had underreported the country's debt by half. The crisis still plagues Greece today. The country is in a constant struggle with the European Central Bank over the conditions for repaying its debt, specifically the implementation of harsh austerity measures on its people.



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