

The Ancient Greeks



Quick summary



The Ancient Greeks were one of the most influential civilisations in history. Their legacy can be seen everywhere today, particularly in Western Europe. The English language has many words that come from Ancient Greek, and our political system was first seen in the Ancient Greek city of Athens. Ancient Greece was made up of separate city-states and conflict between them was frequent. The Peloponnesian War, for example, was between Athens and Sparta. At times these individual city-states came together to fight a common enemy, as they did when fighting the Persian army from the north. Although the Romans eventually conquered the Greeks, Greek culture and language spread far and wide. The army commander Alexander the Great and famous Roman thinkers were all influenced by this great civilisation.



Society

Ancient Greece was not one single nation, but a group of hundreds of city-states. Some cities were small, some much larger, like Athens and Sparta. Often at war with each other, they developed different forms of government. The Athenians invented **democracy**, a system that allows **citizens** to vote on important matters. However, women, children and slaves were not allowed to vote.



Culture and pastimes

The Greek city-states shared many traditions, stories and festivals. Famous myths and legends (like Theseus and the Minotaur) told stories about gods, heroes and how the universe was created. Scenes from these stories were often painted on beautiful pottery. The Ancient Greeks held athletic competitions near Mount Olympus. The Ancient Greeks' love of athletics inspires the modern Olympic Games. The city-state of Athens was famous for its great thinkers, art, architecture and **philosophy**. The ideas developed there have been very influential in many of today's societies.



Main events

776 BCE: First Olympic Games
480 BCE: Athenians defeated the Persian army at the Battle of Salamis
431–404 BCE: The Peloponnesian War (Athens defeated by Sparta)
146 BCE: Greeks defeated by the Romans at the Battle of Corinth



Artefacts

Large amounts of pottery, which have survived thousands of years, are significant **historical sources** from Ancient Greek times. We can use pottery to date archaeological sites and to ask questions about everyday Greek life.



Vocabulary

democracy: a system of government in which people choose who is in charge by voting in elections
citizens: people who belong to a place
philosophy: study of how people think and live
historical sources: things that give information about the past



Settlements



Beliefs



Culture and pastimes



Location



Main events



Food and farming



Travel and exploration



Conflict



Society



Artefacts

The Ancient Greeks – influence and impact



Quick summary



Ancient Greece was one of the earliest major civilisations of Europe, and its culture has had a significant impact on modern society. From art to architecture, systems of government and social organisation, to science and sports, the Ancient Greek way of life can be seen everywhere today. The Ancient Greek city-state of Athens was one of the first to use a democratic system of government. Ancient Greek art and sculpture continues to influence modern ideas of beauty and modern architecture is still heavily influenced by buildings that are over 2000 years old. When we consider the impact of Greek language, architecture, art and culture, it is possible to argue that Ancient Greece was the most influential ancient civilisation in history.



Culture and pastimes

Today's modern ideas of beauty can be traced back to Ancient Greek artworks. The Greeks famously recognised the golden ratio that is commonly seen in nature and applied it to their architecture and art. This precise, mathematical measurement had a major influence on the artists of the Roman Empire, who spread its idea of beauty across their empire. The Greeks admired physical perfection in their art but also in daily life; physical education and competitive sports were a significant part of their culture. The religious festival held every four years, called the Olympics, demonstrated their enthusiasm for physical fitness.



Settlements

The influence of Ancient Greek architecture and design can be seen everywhere in modern life, particularly in the Western world. Libraries, banks, museums and public buildings, sporting arenas, town squares and places of worship all share some of the characteristic features of Ancient Greek buildings. The best known feature, the Greek column, (a large cylindrical post) comes in three styles, or orders; Doric, Ionic and Corinthian.



Society

In the sixth century BCE, an Athenian called Cleisthenes helped to introduce a new political structure of *demokratia* or 'rule by the people'. It was one of the earliest examples of democracy in history and is one of Ancient Greece's most lasting legacies. Nearly every nation in the world now includes some element of democracy in its government. Electing officials to represent us, voting on important decisions and helping to shape new laws are all ideas established almost 3000 years ago. We also have the Ancient Greeks, and people like Pythagoras, Archimedes and Hippocrates, to thank for some of the most significant discoveries in mathematics, science and medicine.



Vocabulary

civilisations: organised groups of humans with their own culture
democratic: based on the idea that everyone has equal rights and is involved in making decisions
characteristic features: particular qualities or aspects that make something recognisable



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