



THE GREEKS: INTRODUCTION

As citizens of the United States of America, we owe a great debt to ancient Greece. Many of the ideals we so highly cherish aren't American; they're Greek. It was in ancient Athens that the citizens stood up and declared that they would no longer be ruled by kings. The people should rule. Americans didn't invent democracy; Greeks did.

The art of storytelling was perfected in ancient Greece. The colorful myths and legends of the land gave the poet Homer plenty to work with. For the first time the plot took a back seat to characterization, language, and presentation. Literature was born in ancient Greece. Theater got its start there, too. The Greeks were the first to stage complex plays that commented on current events. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides pushed the boundaries of drama and showed the world that the pen can be mightier

than the sword.

As for the Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle redefined the way that human beings thought about the universe. Hippocrates founded a school dedicated to the scientific study of the body. Mathematicians such as Pythagoras developed new theories. Herodotus developed a factual approach for recording past events called history. Meanwhile, Aesop wrote his moral-driven fables, and the politician Pericles demonstrated how one man can shape a city.

While all these breakthroughs were happening in Athens, the Greeks in Sparta were working on another development: the art of war. Discipline, strategy, honor were all taken to the extreme in the militaristic environment of Sparta. While the Athenians showed Greece how to think, Sparta showed Greece how to fight.

All of these ideas and insights got their start in the golden age of ancient Greece roughly 2,500 years ago. As you keep this information in mind, follow the links below. They will give you an idea what ancient Greek life was like in the year 500 B.C.

CITY-STATES

During the golden age of Greece the term "Greece" was not yet in use. The area called Greece today was dotted with various city-states who had no desire to be united into a larger country. As their name implies, city-states were large areas of land whose inhabitants fell

under the rule of the city in the midst. Powerful lords built their castle-like keeps on the highest point of the city and surrounded them with high walls. In times of war, those who farmed the surrounding countryside would flee into the city for safety. Because of this, Athens and the Greek cities were more than just a city; they were the law and protection of the surrounding plains.

The heart of every Greek city was the agora, the marketplace. It was the economic, political, and religious lifeblood of the city. Almost every agora was dotted with statues, temples, public buildings, and trees. In Athens, the agora is where the Assembly of the People met to vote on city issues. There were frequent, city-wide festivals to honor various gods. Music, drama, and poetry were often exhibited during these, and a multitude of sacrifices made at the temples.

ANCIENT GREEK BOYS

The first decision of any father was whether or not to keep his child. In Greece (and later in Rome) keeping a child was a conscious choice. In most cases if the child were a boy, he was kept. Girls were not so lucky. Girls were a disappointment, a worry to their fathers. There was an old Greek saying, "If you have a boy, keep it. If you have a girl, expose it." It was perfectly legal for a father to leave his child in some public



place (usually a temple) or even in the wilderness outside the city to die. If a child were to be kept, it would be paraded around the family hearth, the center of the home, and after feasting and sacrificing, named and officially declared a member of the family.

Boys and girls were educated by their mothers until they were seven or eight years old, and then their lives diverged. Girls prepared for a life of domesticity, while boys started to attend the schools. Boys were put under the care of a pedagogue, a male slave or servant who accompanied the boy to and from his classes and beat him if his behavior was less than satisfactory.

At the schools, which were all private in nature, boys were first taught letters: reading, writing, basic arithmetic, and recitation. Homer's works, the Iliad and Odyssey, were the typical tools for instruction. A cultured young man would be expected to quote at length from these epic poems. The Iliad was called the "bible of the Greeks" for the importance they placed on knowledge of the poem.

Around the age of thirteen, boys branched out into musical and athletic training. A music teacher would instruct them in the art of playing the lyre (a six-stringed harp) and singing. Here again, Homer was used, as the boys were expected to put Homeric passages to music. The boys received a separate teacher at the gymnasium, one who developed the boy's bodies and health through exercise.

GREEK ADOLESCENTS

Education ended for most boys in their mid-teens. Only the very wealthy continued their education; their fathers would send them to study with one of the so-called "sophists," who would teach them philosophy and rhetoric. Sophist means "a lover of wisdom," but this group of teachers was heavily criticized by Socrates, a famous Athenian philosopher. Sophists taught young men to argue any point, whether or not they truly believed in it. Rhetoric, they said, could be used to make any argument "true"; therefore, there was no ultimate truth in the

universe. Socrates vehemently disagreed and declared he would accept no money for his wisdom, as the hated sophists did.

Around the middle teen years, a boy's hair, which had always grown long, was ceremoniously cut and dedicated to one of the gods. Now he was officially a man.

Around the age of eighteen, young men left for two years of military duty. The first half was spent learning archery, javelin-throwing, and the uses of heavy armor and weapons. The second half would be spent serving in garrison duty. After this, he was free to return to civilian life, but was subject to "the draft" in times of emergency until he reached the age of sixty.

When he returned home from his tour of duty, the young man (around the age of twenty now) was free to live a free life among his fellow citizens.

GIRLHOOD & MARRIAGE

Girls were a liability and a worry to their fathers. A Greek father's constant concern was his daughter's virginity. Athenian homes were designed with separate quarters for the males and females of the household. With the female portion of the dwelling being either on a second floor or at the rear of a house, the father could maintain an excellent watch on his wife and daughter.

An Athenian woman's life was one of seclusion. Only during certain religious festivals could women go forth from the household and mix freely in the city. Even at these times, a chaperon was necessary. Even at mealtimes in the household, the women were not allowed to dine with the men. A wife's duty was to maintain the household, and her education was limited to domestic training so that she might

"see as little, hear as little, and ask as few questions as possible." Women were viewed as physically, intellectually, and morally inferior to men, requiring constant guidance from their husbands and fathers. Fathers arranged their daughter's marriages when the girls were around the age of fourteen, setting up a dowry for her husband-to-be, who would easily be twice her age. Because of this, love rarely figured into marriage.

If a wife dared to start an affair with another man (which would be extremely hard to achieve in the first place), she was taking an awful risk. A husband who caught his wife and her lover red-handed could legally put the lover to death--no questions asked. In other parts of the Greek world, it was even legal for the husband to take an axe to both the lover and his wife. Needless to say, adultery was frowned upon. Rapists, on the other hand, only received a monetary fine.

The goal of every wife was to produce a male heir for her husband. Women could not own property, and if a family failed to produce a male heir, all their wealth would pass to the nearest male relation upon the death of the father.



DEMOCRACY

Ancient Athens provided the first working model of democracy. In Greek *demos* means "the people." Every Athenian citizen (a group which excluded women, slaves, and free foreigners) could vote on city issues at the assembly of the people. If you were an Athenian male at least eighteen years of age it was your sacred duty to participate in the Assembly. This was a direct democracy, not a representative, because citizens voted in person. Often the voting was done by each citizen placing a certain color of rock into a pot to vote "yes" and another color to vote "no." Afterward the rocks were counted. As Athens was the cultural trendsetter for much of Greece, most of the other city-states soon adopted the Athenian model of democracy.



SLAVERY

Slaves were brought to Greece from "barbarian" nations and sold as servants to the Greeks. Some slaves came from one Greek city-state conquering another and taking away its able-bodied women and children. (The conquered men were typically killed.)

There was a slave market in the midst of the city-state agoras, where citizens could buy or sell slaves. The slave trade was so well developed that even the poorest of citizens had one or two slaves. The extremely wealthy would easily have a hundred. Not all slaves were domestic. Others worked on countryside farms, toiled in the mines, manufactured pottery or armor in the city factories, or rowed on the Athenian war ships.

Slaves had few to no rights. Athenians were noted for being very "humane" toward their slaves. Even though slaves were the property of their master, the master could not kill one of his slaves without suffering a penalty. In order for a slave to die, he or she must be tried before a court of law. During the course of a lawsuit, slaves could be tortured (usually stretched on the rack) in order to obtain information about their masters. But slave evidence was considered highly circumstantial, since most of them would freely admit whatever the torturer wished to know, true or not.

Slaves could visit temples and attend the city festivals, but were barred from the gymnasium and the city assembly. Many slaves were given their freedom in their master's will, and some even managed to buy their freedom.

Even though they were "enlightened," the Greeks saw nothing wrong with owning slaves. They simply believed that some of peoples of the earth were destined to serve others.

GREEK RELIGION

Most of ancient Greece worshiped the same pantheon of gods, but particular city-states selected their favorite god or goddess to honor above all others. In Athens the Goddess of Wisdom, Athena, was the goddess most honored. The Parthenon "The Temple of the Virgin" was built for her.

Greek religion was a buffet-style of worship. An ancient Greek was not expected to worship to every deity. (With dozens of gods, worshipping them all would be too much.) As long as a Greek recognized some higher power, it did not matter which god or goddess he chose. Gods and goddesses had certain demographic groups: unmarried women worshiped Artemis, wives worshiped Hera, sailors favored Poseidon, athletes praised Apollo, etc.

Temples were considered to be the dwelling places of the gods they honored. Typically they included a statue or image of the god or goddess worshiped. Cattle, goats, sheep, and swine were sacrificed by the temple priests. After killing the beasts, the priests would examine its organs. If the organs were still undamaged and healthy, it was considered a good omen. If the organs were corrupted and rotten, it was an unlucky sign. This was one means the Greeks had of determining the future. After the blood had been offered as a sacrifice, the priests took the animal's meat and cooked it. Many sacrifices were followed by a feast, where the cooked meat was served. In Greece the word sacrifice was synonymous with feast.

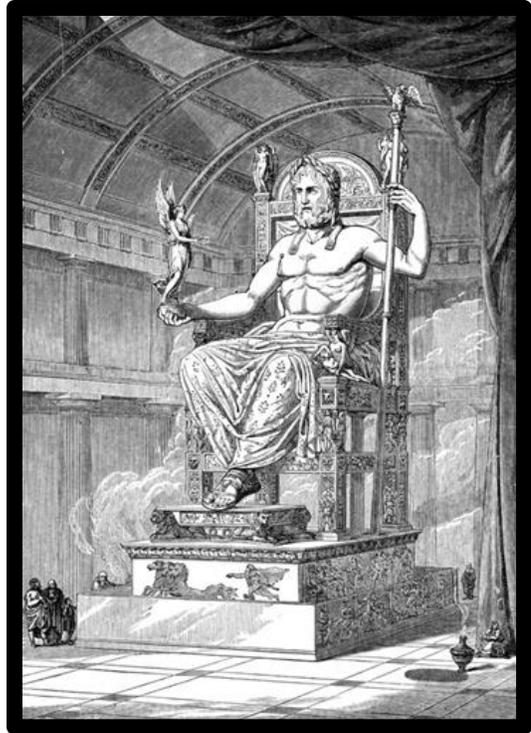
The Greeks also believed in augury, the technique of telling the future by watching the flight patterns of birds. Sighting certain birds was fortuitous, while seeing others was a bad sign. (Spotting an owl in daylight indicated death.)

Two things above all others were sacred to the Greeks: proper burial and hospitality. Anyone who murdered or dishonored a guest in Greece was guilty of a capital offense, as well as anyone who failed to properly bury a dead body.

THE DELPHIC ORACLE

Pythia, also referred to as the Oracle of Delphi, was the most famous prophetess in the ancient Greek world. She was said to receive her prophecies directly from Apollo, the God of Truth. Near Delphi, a city-state built into the slopes of Mount Parnassus, stood her temple. Written in letters of gold over the threshold were many wise sayings, including the two most famous: "Nothing in Excess" and "Know Thyself."

Deep within the temple was the Oracle's sanctuary where she perched on a high, gilded, three-legged stool over a crack in the ground. Strange fumes came up from this crack, and as



the Oracle breathed these fumes, she uttered her prophecies. Some visitors to the Oracle claimed that she spoke in Greek, while others said she babbled incoherently and another priestess translated.

The Delphic Oracle was one of the most influential forces in the ancient Greek world. Kings consulted her before they began a war, and young men consulted her before they sought their fortunes. The last prophecy uttered by the Delphic Oracle was in 393 A.D. when the newly Christianized Roman Empire declared all activity in pagan temples to cease.

GYMNASIUM

The Greeks placed such a high importance on physical training that no Greek city was without a gymnasium. This word comes from the Greek word *gymnos* ("unclothed") since all exercise at this facility was done in the nude. Because of this, women were prevented from attending the gymnasium.

Certain areas of the gymnasium were reserved for particular sports: running, jumping, wrestling. There were special rooms for dressing and bathing. (The gymnasium was the forerunner of the modern workout facility.) Every Greek man was expected to keep in shape in case he was called up to the military. (War in Greece was almost constant.) Over the years, gymnasiums became more advanced, adding more equipment, sculptures, walkways, and secluded spots where discussion could take place.

Athlete, the Greek term for one who participates in physical contests, is still in use today. The pentathlon was a set of five sports that every athlete set out to master. Running, the oldest sport of all, was the first. The second was leaping (high jump, long jump, and jumping downward). Sometimes long-jumpers held round pieces of iron (comparable to modern dumbbells), which they would sling with the momentum of their body to increase their distance. The third and favorite sport was wrestling. Finger-twisting, pushing, and choking were all allowed. Before all gymnastic exercises the body was rubbed with oil to make the limbs supple, but before wrestling it was sprinkled with dust, partly to allow a firm hold and partly to prevent excessive sweat. The fourth sport was the throwing of the discus, an event that has changed very little over time. The fifth and final sport was the throwing of the javelin. The dangerous sport of boxing, which was not included in the big five, was also popular. The four fingers of the combatants were bound together with cloth straps. Many times the athletes would fit the strips with bits of hardened leather, nails, or leaden knobs. All blows were aimed at the upper part of the body, head, and face.



THE OLYMPICS

The first recorded Olympic games occurred in 776 B.C. Every four years, Greeks from all walks of life made their way to Olympia for the Olympic Games in honor of Zeus, the master of Olympus. Spectators and tourists from far and wide packed the large guesthouse there. A huge contest field, complete with a hippodrome for chariot-racing, was built solely for the purpose of hosting the games.

Training for the Olympic games was extensive and required a great deal of money. Most athletes had a professional trainer and traveled from one set of games to another. (The Olympic games were the most popular, but definitely not the only set of games in ancient Greece.) In order to participate athletes had to swear before the gods that they had been in training for at least ten months. They then trained an additional thirty days at the training facilities at Olympia. Athletes could win honors in individual competitions, but their main goal was to win the pentathlon. This was a contest for best all-around athlete and was comprised of five events: running, jumping, wrestling, javelin-throwing, and discus-throwing.

Women, although excluded from participating or even viewing the Olympics, had their own contest in Olympia. It was a series of footraces called the Heraia (in honor of Hera, Zeus' wife).

DEATH & BURIAL

The Greeks viewed the burial of the dead as one of man's most sacred duties. Furthermore, they believed that if a body went unburied, its soul could never find rest in the Underworld, wandering aimlessly in the land of the dead. Any Greek who happened upon a dead body was, at the very least, obligated to throw a handful of dust over it. This would be enough to pacify the spirit. If a general neglected to provide for the burial of the slain (friend or enemy, Greek or barbarian), he was deemed guilty of a capital offense.



It was the duty of women to tend to the dead bodies of family members. The eyes of the body were closed and a coin was placed inside the mouth. (This is the coin that all souls must pay the boatman Charon in the Underworld, so that he will ferry them across the River Styx.) The body was washed, anointed with oil, and dressed in white for viewing.

Professional mourners were sometimes hired to sing dirges for the departed, as family and friends paid their last respects. Before sunrise on the day following the funeral, the body would be carried to the place of burial followed by a procession of family and friends. The females of the family would cut their hair before the procession began to show they were in mourning.

Following the burial there was a meal, where the mourning family and friends remembered the virtues of the deceased and passed over their faults. Speaking evil of the dead was a cultural taboo. For the next twelve days the family would visit the tomb and pour libations of honey, wine, oil, milk, or water over the grave. Most families returned yearly on the anniversary of the person's birth or death to place garlands on the grave.

GREEK WARFARE

The city-states of ancient Greece were in an almost constant state of war with one another. Allies quickly became enemies, and enemies quickly became allies. As the Greek philosopher Plato said, "Only the dead have seen the end of war."

Athens and Sparta, the two most powerful city-states in their day, vied for supreme political influence in Greece. Athenian and Spartan men trained continually to be ready for military duty. Sparta's main strength lay in its ground troops, while Athens's powerful navy controlled the seas. The two rival city-states were forced to put their differences aside when King Xerxes of Persia attempted to conquer Greece (480 B.C.). The tide was turned in the Persian Wars when the legendary 300 Spartans led by King Leonidas slowed Xerxes' advance at Thermopylae. The Persians were later ultimately defeated at the Battle of Salamis by the superior strategy of the Athenian navy. After the Persian Wars, Athens and Sparta went back to their old rivalry and soon were once again warring with one another.

The average Greek soldier was called a hoplite or "one who provides his own armor" since Greek men were expected to provide their own armor. Their weapons consisted of an oval shield suspended from the shoulder-belt and wielded by means of a handle, a bronze breast and back plate, a helmet and greaves of bronze, (sometimes a spear about six feet long) and a short sword. Most hoplites had an attendant slave that carried their armor to and from the battle field.

The phalanx was the dominant formation used by the ancient Greeks in battle. A line of hoplites were placed side-by-side, their shields nearly interlocking and their spears jutting forward. Behind them several other lines were drawn up in a similar fashion. The strength of this formation was its ability to resist an enemy charge. Enemies, racing forward, would practically impale themselves on the extended spears. When the front line of the phalanx fell, the next line would step forward to take its place.

War ships were built long and slender to increase their speed. Also constructed to be light, they were easily carried from one body of water to another. A long line of slave rowers sat on either side and propelled the crafts with long oars. Their strokes were kept in time with the piping of a flute. Most warships had eyes painted or carved onto the bow. Also on the bow, on level with the water, was a iron-clad beak, usually with three spikes sticking out. This was the offensive weapon of the ship. A sea victory was achieved by ramming enemy ships and punching a hole in their sides, driving them onto rock, or disabling their rowers or oars.



LIFE IN SPARTA

The city-state of Sparta was a completely militaristic society. Strength was the goal of every Spartan. After birth children were examined, and sickly or deformed babies were tossed into a nearby chasm. Around the age of six boys were taken away from their mothers and trained to be warriors. In special schools



older boy instructors taught them running, leaping, wrestling, spear and discus throwing, as well as the Pyrrhic war dance. Reading and writing were two skills left up to private tutors. A Spartan only needed to understand enough language for day-to-day living. Their discipline was designed to strengthen and harden the body. "What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger" was more than just a philosophy in Sparta.

The boys-in-training went barefooted and bareheaded wearing only light clothing in all kinds of weather. They slept in a large room with no roof and a hard floor with only straw for bedding. Their food supply was extremely limited. Their instructors wanted their hunger to force them into stealing from the agora, which would teach them stealth. Of course, if they were caught stealing, they were beaten.

One of the most famous stories of Spartan discipline was about a boy who found a fox cub, which he planned to eat. When he saw his instructor approaching, the boy hid the fox inside his garment to avoid being caught. As the instructor questioned the boy, the fox began to claw and bite within the folds of the boy's tunic, yet the boy did not cry out. According to the legend, it was only when the boy fell dead to the ground with his stomach bitten through that the instructor realized what had happened.

Even if they abided by the rules, boys went through a yearly flogging conducted at the altar of Artemis to test their ability to endure bodily pain. Any boy who showed any sign of suffering during the flogging was considered a disgrace.

As teenagers the boys were apprenticed to an older Spartan, who "showed them the ropes." The two were expected to form an intense bond, making them both willing to die for the other. At the age of twenty, young men formally entered the military. They were not released from the active reserve until the age of sixty.

Sparta remains one of the few ancient societies that produced no art.

As opposed to the secluded women of Athens, Spartan women enjoyed enormous freedom. They were trained in gymnastics and music, just as the men were. Women could own property and did not forfeit the rights to their property to their husbands after marriage. Spartan women did not wear the concealing clothes that women wore in every other part of

Greece. They went about in short, revealing dresses wherever they wished, whenever they wished. Their husbands were their equals, not their masters.

At the age of thirty Spartan men were required to take a wife. On their wedding night, servants would shave the bride's head and dress her in men's clothing. The groom would then sneak into the house where she lay and consummate the marriage. Even after the honeymoon, Spartan men were only allowed to visit their wives under the cover of darkness. This separation was designed to increase procreation.