

The Ancient Greeks



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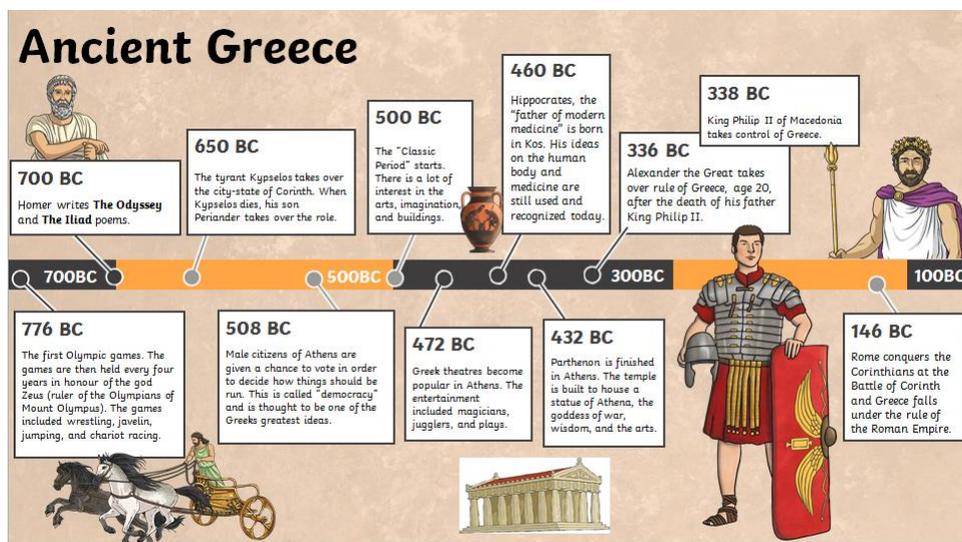
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Greek Olympic Games - 776 B.C.

Olympic Games

The Olympic Games began over 2,700 years ago in Olympia, in southwest Greece. The Games were part of a religious festival and thought to have begun in 776 before Christ (B.C.); this in turn inspired the modern Olympic Games - which began in 1896. The games were held in honour of Zeus, King of the Gods, and were staged every four years at Olympia, a valley near a city called Elis. People from all over the 'Greek world' came to watch and take part.



Events at the games

At the first one-day Olympic Games, the only event was a short sprint from one end of the stadium to the other. Gradually more events were added to make four days of competitions. They included wrestling, boxing, long jump, javelin, discus and chariot racing. One major event was the pentathlon which had five events in one competition: running, wrestling, javelin, discus and long jump. The toughest event was the race for Hoplites (men wearing armour and carrying shields) - imagine doing this in the hot Greek sun! Winners were given a wreath of olive leaves, and a hero's welcome back home. They might marry rich women; enjoy free meals, received invitations to parties and they had the best seats in the theatre. The running track was much wider than a modern one; twenty people could run at once.

The nastiest event

The most brutal event was the pankration or all-in wrestling. There were hardly any rules; biting and poking people's eyes were 'officially' banned, but some competitors did both and a lot worse, when they believed they could get away with it! Think about W.W.E. wrestling but with no padded ring, no acting and no protective gear. While it does not seem very sporting to us, all-in wrestling was very popular.

Boxing was a tough event that was included too. The fighters wore leather gloves and a boxer was allowed to go on hitting his opponent even after he'd knocked him to the ground!

Anyone caught cheating in the games, trying to bribe an athlete for instance, had to pay for a bronze statue of Zeus, as a punishment.

Greek culture - 750 B.C.

Ancient Greece is called 'the birthplace of Western civilisation'. About 2,500 years ago, the Greeks created a way of life that other cultures admired and copied. The Romans copied their art and gods - although they named them slightly differently, for example. The Ancient Greeks tried out democracy (an equal way of life), started the Olympic Games, as mentioned before, and explored new ideas in science and art.

The earliest known Greek civilizations thrived nearly 4,000 years ago. They lived in not only Greece but also the countries that we now call Bulgaria and Turkey. The 'Empire' spread over Europe as far as France in the East. It was most powerful between 2000 BC and 146 B.C.; they developed new ideas for government, science, philosophy, religion, and art. It was split into many different states; each one was ruled in its own way. Each state had its own laws, government and money but they shared the same language and religion. The two most important city states were Athens and Sparta.

The Greek gods

The Greeks believed that gods and goddesses watched over them. The gods were like humans, but immortal (they lived for ever) and much more powerful with supernatural abilities.

A family of gods and goddesses lived in a cloud-palace above Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece. They looked down to watch what people were doing, and from time to time, interfered with what went on.

The gods did not always behave very well. Their king, Zeus, was always being unfaithful to his wife Hera. He appeared on Earth as a human or an animal to trick women he had fallen in love with. He could control the weather. The Ancient Greek poet, Hesiod, called him the 'cloud-gatherer' and the 'thunderer'. His most powerful weapon was the thunderbolt. The Ancient Greeks believed that when lightning struck earth, it was a sign of Zeus being present.



Battle of Marathon - 490 B.C.

Who did the Greeks fight?

The Greek states often fought each other. Sparta and Athens fought a long war, called the Peloponnesian War, from 431 to 404 B.C. Sparta won. Only the threat of invasion by a foreign enemy made the Greeks forget about each other and fight on the same side. Their main enemy was Persia.



The wars against Persia lasted on and off from 490BC to 449 BC. The Persian kings tried to conquer Greece and make it part of the Persian Empire. In the end, it was Greece which defeated Persia, when Alexander the Great defeated them in the 330's BC.

The Battle of Marathon

The Battle of Marathon was a famous Greek victory against the Persians. About 10,000 Greeks, mostly from Athens, fought an army of 20,000 Persians led by King Darius. The Greeks surprised their enemies by charging downhill straight at the enemy.



Marathon is remembered for the heroism of a Greek man named Pheidippides. Before the battle, he'd run for two days and nights - over 150 miles (240 km) - from Athens to Sparta to fetch help. Then he fought at Marathon. After the battle, he ran 26 miles (42 km) non-stop to Athens, but died as he gasped out the news of victory. The modern Marathon race is over the same distance as his epic run from Marathon to Athens.

The Athenians were led by Miltiades, a soldier who had fought in the Persian army and knew how to beat them. He led the Athenians to victory.

Greek Theatre - 440 B.C.

Greek theatre

Most Greek cities had a theatre. It was in the open air, and was usually a bowl-shaped arena on a hillside. Some theatres were very big, with room for more than 15,000 people in the audience.

All the actors were men or boys. Dancers and singers, called the chorus, performed on a flat area called the orchestra. Over time, solo actors also took part, and a raised stage became part of the theatre.



The actors changed costumes in a hut called the "skene". Painting the walls of the hut made the first scenery. The plays were comedies (funny, often poking fun at rulers) or tragedies (sad and serious, with a lesson about right and wrong).

What were Greek plays like?

Greek actors wore masks, made from stiffened linen, with holes for the eyes and mouth, and sometimes had wigs attached to them. They wore thick-soled shoes too to make them look taller and padded costumes to make them look fatter or stronger. The masks showed the audience what kind of character an actor was playing (sad, angry or funny etc.). Some masks had two sides, so the actor could turn them round to suit the mood for each scene.

The best actors and play writers were awarded prizes - a bit like the Hollywood Oscars and B.A.F.T.A.'s today. The most famous writers of plays were Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides for tragedy and Aristophanes for comedy.

Arts festivals and the Oracle

The arts (such as music, singing and poetry) played a part in Greek festivals. The Pythian Games took place near Delphi every four years. Winners got prizes, just like winning athletes.

Delphi was famous for its Oracle. Here Greeks believed the sun-god Apollo answered questions about the future. People came to put these questions to the priestess of Apollo, she was called the Pythia. She gave Apollo's answers in a strange muttering voice. What she said often had two or more meanings, so it was hard to say the Oracle was ever wrong.

Athens - 450 B.C.

Why Athens was great.

Athens was the largest city in Greece, and controlled a piece of land called Attica. Between the many mountains were fertile valleys, with many farms. Athens became rich because Attica also had valuable sources of silver, lead and marble. It also had the biggest navy in Greece.

Athens was a beautiful and busy city; people came to visit from all over Greece, and from other countries, to study and to trade. The city's most famous building was a temple called the Parthenon. It stood on a rocky hill called the Acropolis. Inside the Parthenon stood a statue of the city's protector-goddess: Athena.



Athena was the Greek goddess of wisdom, Athens was her city. This is a Roman copy of a Greek statue of her.

Life in Athens

Athens had yearly festivals for athletics, drama and religious occasions. The city taxes paid some of the cost, but rich citizens had to pay extra. Important people in Athens were the strategoi, who were ten generals chosen from each of the ten "tribes" of citizens. There were also nine archons. Their jobs were mostly ceremonial, to do with festivals and family matters. One of the archons had to organize the Dionysian Festival, for the god Dionysus, every year. It was a time for fun, wine-drinking, parties and plays.

Every man aged 20 to 50 or more could be "called up" for military service. A rich man might have to serve as captain of a warship for a year. He paid the crew and made repairs.

The busiest part of the Athens was the market, known as the 'agora'. This was a large square where people set up stalls to sell goods from pots and lamps, to food and slaves.

Parthenon - 432 B.C.

The Goddess City

Athens was built around a high, rocky stronghold, or Acropolis. On top of this was the Parthenon, a great temple to the goddess Athena, who protected the city - it had a statue of her made from ivory and gold, which was almost 13 metres high. The city spread out below, a sea of tiled roofs and white walls. It was one of the largest and most decorative buildings in the whole of Greece at that time. In fact it still stands on a hill above modern Athens today.



When was it built?

It was built between 447 and 432 B.C.. The older shrines and temples were destroyed by the Persians when they hit Athens in 480 B.C.. When the Athenians returned to their city after the war, it was agreed that this would be built as it reminded them of the victory over the Persians.

What was in and on the Parthenon building?

The huge statue of Athena was placed inside with painted sculptures outside. The west of the building shows Athena and Poseidon's contest for support of Athens. The east side depicted Athena's birth from the head of Zeus. On the southern face of the temple were symbols which show the battle between Greeks and centaurs (half man- half horse). The other faces portrayed Greeks versus Amazons, Trojans and the battle of the gods and the giants.



What happened to it later?

It was used as a church, mosque and ammunition store over the many hundreds of years. It suffered a lot of damage in 1687 when it was hit by Venetian artillery during a battle between the Venetians and the Ottoman Turked who ruled Greece at the time. It is now one of Greece's most visited tourist destinations; it is a marvel of ancient architecture.

Athenian and Spartan war: 431 B.C. - 404 B.C.

War

In ancient Greece, the great rival of Athens was Sparta. The city-state and its surrounding area were located on the Peloponnesus, southwest of Athens. The Spartan armies, though usually quite small, were well-trained and all but unbeatable in combat. Each citizen soldier lived to fight or die. The Spartan mother, when she gave her son his shield, would say: "Bring back this shield yourself or be brought back upon it," referring to the manner in which the dead were carried on their shields from the battlefield. Sparta's powerful side naturally brought rivalry with Athens, the leader of the northern states and for a time of all Greece. This rivalry culminated in the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.), which resulted in Athens' ruin and Sparta's supremacy.

Soldier state

Although, every Spartan man had a farm, he spent a lot of his time preparing for war. He became a soldier when he was 20. However, a boy's training began much earlier, when he left his family home at the age of seven, and went to live in an army school. Discipline was tough. He was allowed only one tunic, and had to walk barefoot even in cold weather. He was taught how to live rough and steal food and was warned that it was foolish to get drunk, like some other Greeks did. Men lived in army camps even after they got married.



Growing up in Sparta

It was tough being a Spartan. Sickly babies were killed. Children ran around naked. Boys practised fighting and competed in athletics. Girls also did physical exercises. Spartan women had more freedom than other Greek women - a wife ran the family farm and gave orders to the helots or slaves. Old people too were shown more respect in Sparta than in other Greek states.

End of Greek empire - 146 B.C.

What happened?

In 146 BC, Greece was made part of the Roman Empire after they lost in war. The Greeks fought against the invading Romans but were eventually conquered because they were too strong and powerful. At the time Greece was very fragile for a number of reasons:



- *Conflict and competition between cities broke down a sense of community in Greece*
- *The poor people did not trust the people who ruled the country anymore*
- *Slavery became prevalent and this took work (and money) away from the Greek people*

Just another day

For some people, the decline of the Ancient Greece civilization did not make much of a difference to everyday life. Some Greek warriors fought as soldiers for the Roman army and many others returned to the jobs they had done when they were not fighting. The Romans greatly admired many aspects of Greek life and copied such things as their alphabet and architecture.



Difference between Ancient Romans and Ancient Greeks:

The Ancient Romans are often described as 'doers'. This means that they tended to act rather than talk or think about it. This is what made them strong to begin with. The Romans believed in honesty, you can see this in their statues. The Greeks made statues of perfect people. The Romans created real life statues. A statue of one of the Roman emperors is a good example; his nose is huge! The Ancient Greeks would never have done that to their leaders.

The Romans built roads all over the Empire, and all roads led to Rome! The Ancient Greeks had roads, but they were not built nearly as well, and the Greek's roads did not connect in any particular order. Connect to what? Each Greek city-state was its own unit. In Ancient Rome, Rome was the heart of the Empire!

End of Roman Empire - 455 Anno Domini (A.D.)

Anno Domini means 'in the year of our Lord'.

The Roman Empire was closely linked to the Ancient Greeks; they copied much of their culture and teachings.

The fall of Rome

Rome had quite a run. First a monarchy, then a republic, then an Empire - all roads led to Rome for over 1,200 years. In the Mediterranean, Rome was in charge. During the Imperial period, Rome had some wonderful Emperors but it also suffered from a series of bad, corrupt and just plain crazy Emperors! There were one of the main reasons why Rome fell.

Problems towards the end of the Empire included:

- *The empire was too big to manage*
- *The army was not what it used to be. The generals were found to be dishonest and only interested in profiting*
- *Wars between each other broke out*
- *The amount of slaves increased, putting many Romans out of work (just like in the Ancient Greek civilization)*
- *The rich became lazy and did not want to help to solve the Roman problems*

The Ancient Romans tried to solve some of their problems by splitting the Empire in half, hoping that would make it easier to manage. Each side had an Emperor, but the leader in charge was the emperor of the western half, the half that included the city of Rome which caused jealousy between them.

The Western Roman Empire did not do well. Instead of getting stronger, they became weaker. By 400 A.D., it was pretty much over. The Huns, Franks, Vandals, Saxons, Visigoths, all took over parts of the Roman Empire. In 455 A.D., the Roman Empire ended.



Modern Olympic Games - 1896 A.D.

What is it?

The Olympic Games is an international athlete's competition which is held every four years in a different country. The modern Olympic Games began in the spring of 1896 by a group called the International Olympics Committee (I.O.C.). The I.O.C. decided that lots of people should be able to take part from all over the world and selected Athens, Greece, as the first place of the Olympic Games to honour the founders.

Organisation

The site of the games is chosen usually six years in advance. In 2000 the Summer Olympics was held in Sydney, Australia, but it was decided in 1994.



History

The first modern games, held in April 1896, attracted athletes from the United States, Great Britain and 11 other countries. Over 42 events in nine sports were scheduled for these games. The Olympic Games scheduled for Berlin in 1916 was cancelled due to World War 1 and this happened again in 1940 and 1944. And in 2020 Japan rescheduled the games because of a pandemic.

Ceremonies

A decorative ceremony traditionally opens the Olympic Games. The athletes walk around the stadium, led by the Greek team, in honour of founding the Olympic Games. The host nation marches in last. The Olympic Hymn is then played and the official Olympic flag (five interlocking rings on a white background) is raised. A runner enters the stadium bearing the Olympic torch, originally lit by rays of the sun at Olympia, Greece. The torch is then taken to the site of the games by a relay of runners. The ceremony closes with the release of doves, symbolising the spirit of the games.

