



Ancient Greece

MAIN IDEA

The ancient Greeks developed a complex society, with remarkable achievements in the arts, sciences, and government.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The achievements of the ancient Greeks continue to influence culture, science, and politics in the world today.

TERMS & NAMES

city-state
polis
Aegean Sea
oligarchy
Athens
philosopher
Aristotle
Alexander the Great

DATELINE

ATHENS, GREECE, FEBRUARY 2, 1997—

Five years after construction workers began building the new Athens subway, artifacts from ancient Greek civilization are still being discovered. When completed, the new subway will reduce traffic and air pollution in the capital. Historians and archaeologists, however, have been the first to benefit from this massive public works project.

Workers have discovered statues, coins, jewelry, and gravesites from ancient Greece. Recently, workers digging the foundation for a downtown Athens station found an ancient dog collar decorated with gemstones. Local officials have promised to create



Place • Building the subway in Athens led to spectacular discoveries of ancient artifacts. ▲

permanent displays of some artifacts in stations throughout the new subway system.

The Land and Early History of Greece

The Greek Peninsula is mountainous, which made travel by land difficult for early settlers. Most of the rocky land also contains poor soil and few large trees, but settlers were able to cultivate the soil to grow olives and grapes. The greatest natural resource of the peninsula is the water that surrounds it. The ancient Greeks depended on these seas for fishing and trade, and they became excellent sailors.

Vocabulary

cultivate:
to prepare land for growing crops



The Formation of City-States As the ancient Greek population grew, people created city-states. A **city-state** included a central city, called a **polis**, and surrounding villages. Each ancient Greek city-state had its own laws and form of government. The city-states were united by a common language, shared religious beliefs, and a similar way of life.

The Growth of Colonies By the mid-eighth century B.C., the Greeks were leaving the peninsula in search of better land and greater opportunities for trade. During the next 200 years, they built dozens of communities on the islands and coastline of the **Aegean Sea** (ih•JEE•uhn). Some Greeks settled as far away as modern-day Spain and North Africa.

Once established, these distant Greek communities traded with each other and with those communities on the Greek Peninsula. This made a great variety of goods available to the ancient Greeks, including wheat for bread, timber for building boats, and iron ore for making strong tools and weapons.

Connections to Language

Metropolis When ancient Greeks moved away from a large polis to a distant community, they referred to their former city-state as their "metropolis." In Greek, this means "mother-city." Today, we use the word *metropolis* to mean any large urban area, such as Los Angeles, London, Tokyo, or Athens, shown below.



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Map

- Place** • What was the value to the Greeks of controlling Byzantium?
- Location** • What was the southernmost Greek territory at this time?



Strange but TRUE

Spartan Soldiers Sparta was the only city-state with a permanent army. At age seven, Spartan boys were sent by their families for military training. They had to remain in the army until they were 30 years old.



Individual Forms of Government Some ancient Greek city-states were oligarchies (AHL•ih•GAHR•kees). An **oligarchy** is a system in which a few powerful, wealthy individuals rule. The word *oligarchy* comes from an ancient Greek word meaning “rule by the few.” Other city-states were ruled by a tyrant, a single person who took control of the government against the wishes of the community. Still other ancient Greek city-states developed an early form of democracy. The word *democracy* comes from an ancient Greek word meaning “rule by the people.” In a democracy citizens, take part in the government.

Athens and Sparta

Athens, centrally located on the Greek Peninsula, was one of the largest and most important ancient Greek city-states. By the end of the sixth century B.C., Athens had developed a democratic form of government. Athenian citizens took part in political debates and voted on laws, but not everyone who lived in Athens enjoyed these rights. Participation in govern-

ment was limited to free, adult males whose fathers had been citizens of Athens. Women, slaves, and foreign residents could not be citizens and could not take part in government.

Athens’s chief rival among the other Greek city-states was Sparta. Located in the southernmost part of the Greek Peninsula, Sparta was an oligarchy. It was ruled by two kings, who were supported by other officials. Sparta, like Athens, had a powerful army. Each city-state’s army helped protect it from slave rebellions, guard against attack by rival city-states, and defend it from possible foreign invaders.

Learning and the Arts

In 480 B.C., the Persians, who controlled a large empire to the east, tried to conquer the Greek Peninsula. Several Greek city-states, including Athens and Sparta, joined forces to defeat the Persians. In the years following this victory, the ancient Greeks made remarkable achievements in literature, learning, and architecture.

Reading Social Studies

A. Comparing
Compare the three forms of government most common in ancient Greek city-states.

BACKGROUND

After the defeat of Persia, Athens became the most powerful Greek city-state. The most important Athenian leader of the time was Pericles (PEHR•uh•kleez), who lived from c. 495 to 429 B.C.



Literature To honor their gods and goddesses, the ancient Greeks created myths and wrote poems and plays. Some of the greatest Greek plays were written during the fifth century B.C. During that time, the playwrights Aeschylus (ES•kuh•luhs), Sophocles (SAHF•uh•kleez), and Euripides (yoo•RIP•uh•deez) wrote tragedies, which are serious plays that end unhappily. Many of these stories have been the basis for modern films and operas.

In addition to using the gods as characters, ancient Greek playwrights sometimes poked fun at important citizens, including generals and politicians. Aristophanes (ar•uh•STOF•uh•nees) was a popular writer of comedies of this type.

Philosophy Ancient Greece was the birthplace of some of the finest thinkers of the ancient world. Socrates (SOK•ruh•tees) was an important philosopher of the fifth century B.C. A **philosopher** studies and thinks about why the world is the way it is. Socrates studied and taught about friendship, knowledge, and justice. Another great philosopher, Plato (PLAY•toh), was a student of Socrates who studied and taught about human behavior, government, mathematics, and astronomy.

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus (heh•ruh•KLY•tuhs) wrote the following lines.

Reading Social Studies

B. Making Inferences Why do you think philosophers felt the need to teach?

A VOICE FROM ANCIENT GREECE

One cannot step twice into the same river, for the water into which you first stepped has flowed on.

Heraclitus

Many people continue to study and write about the same philosophical questions that these, and other, ancient Greek philosophers explored.



Ancient Greek Architecture

Ancient Greek builders created some of the world's most impressive works of architecture. They built several beautiful temples atop the Acropolis (uh•KRAH•puh•lis) in Athens, shown at right. The most famous of the temples is the Parthenon (PAHR•thuh•non).

In the United States and elsewhere, government buildings, such as courthouses and post offices, have been built similar in style to the Parthenon. This use of ancient architecture echoes the democratic ideals of ancient Greece.





Region • In this mosaic Alexander the Great is shown riding into battle on his beloved horse, Bucephalus (byoo•SEF•ah•lus). ▲

Biography

Aristotle At the age of 17, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) began studying philosophy with Plato. After Plato died, Aristotle received his most important assignment—to teach Alexander, the teenage son of King Philip II of Macedonia.

After teaching Alexander, Aristotle returned to Athens. There he taught and wrote about poetry, government, and astronomy. He started a famous school called the Lyceum (lie•SEE•uhm). Aristotle also collected and studied plants and animals. The work of this brilliant philosopher continues to greatly influence scientists and philosophers today.



The Spread of Greek Culture

The city-states of ancient Greece were constantly at war with one another. By the fourth century B.C., this fighting had weakened their ability to defend themselves against foreign invaders.

In 338 B.C., King Philip II of Macedonia conquered the land. After Philip died, his son, Alexander—who had been taught by **Aristotle**—took control.

Alexander the Great was an excellent military leader, and his armies conquered vast new territories. As Alexander's empire expanded, Greek culture, language, and ideas were spread throughout the Mediterranean region and as far east as modern-day India. Upon Alexander's death, however, his leading generals fought for control of his territory and divided it among themselves. This marked the end of one of the great empires of the ancient world.

SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

- 1. Identify:** (a) city-state (b) polis (c) Aegean Sea (d) oligarchy
(e) Athens (f) philosopher (g) Aristotle (h) Alexander the Great

Taking Notes

- 2.** Use a chart like this one to list and describe the ancient Greek achievements in government, literature, and architecture.

Government	Literature	Architecture

Main Ideas

- 3. (a)** Why were the surrounding areas of water an important natural resource of the Greek Peninsula?
(b) Which people were allowed to participate in the government of ancient Athens?
(c) How did Alexander the Great help to spread Greek culture?

Critical Thinking

4. Summarizing

Why was the fifth century B.C. a remarkable time in ancient Greek history?

Think About

- ♦ warfare
- ♦ leaders
- ♦ literature and philosophy

ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Reread the information about the individual forms of government common in ancient Greece. Present an **oral report** to the class that compares and contrasts two of the forms.