

Greece

Ancient Greek Development and Decline



Foundations of Ancient Greece

Ancient Greek Development and Decline

Ancient Greek Achievements

Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.





Timeline





The time from 500–323 BC is known as the **Classical** period in Ancient Greece. During this time, many of the key features of Greek culture developed, including:



- democracy
- naval warfare
- the **pantheon**
- phalanx formations
- architecture
- theater and the arts.

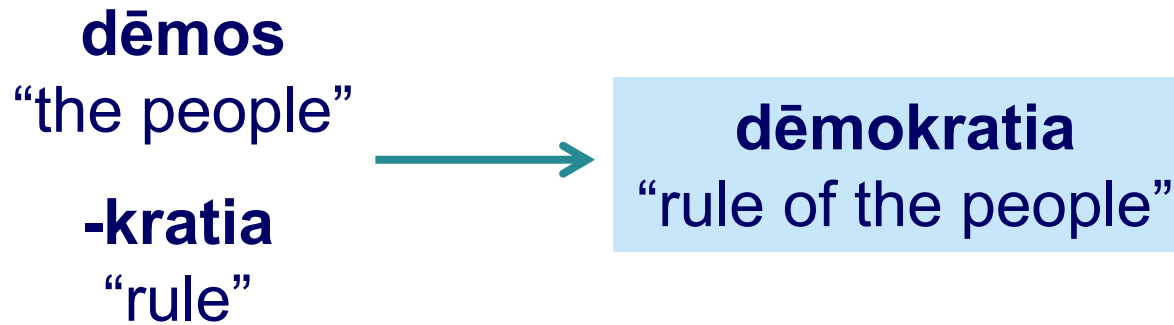
However, it was also a time of war. In the east, the **Persian Empire** threatened to invade, and there were feuds between the Greek city-states, most notably the rivalry between Athens and Sparta.

What impact might this have had on Greek culture?





Athens is known as the birthplace of western **democracy**, a word that comes from the Greek for “rule of the people”.



Athens had previously been ruled by **tyrants**: strong leaders who held all the power and made all the laws themselves. In around 500 BC, Athens became a democracy, allowing citizens to vote on their rulers and laws.

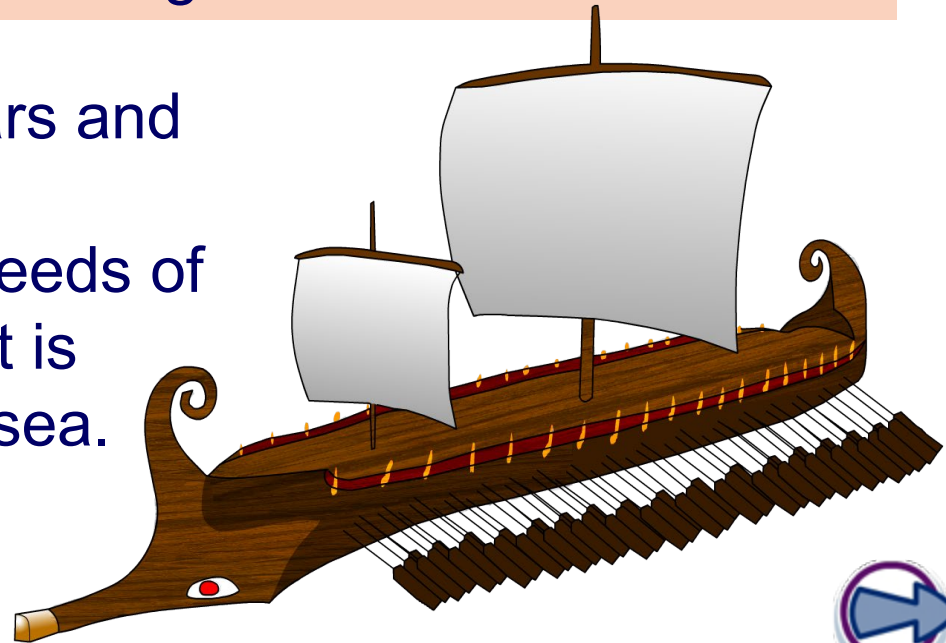
However, only **Athenian men** had democratic rights. Women, slaves and foreigners were not allowed to vote.

How is this different from U.S. democracy today?

Ancient Greece was often at war. As a result, they had to think of new and innovative ways to win battles.

Because so much of Greece is surrounded by sea, their navy was very strong. Greek ships were called **triremes**. They had a long, bronze ram at the front, which was used to punch holes in enemy ships, causing them to sink.

Triremes had three rows of oars and needed 170 men to row them. They could probably reach speeds of up to nine or ten **knots**. A knot is a way of measuring speed at sea. 10 knots is about 11.5 mph.

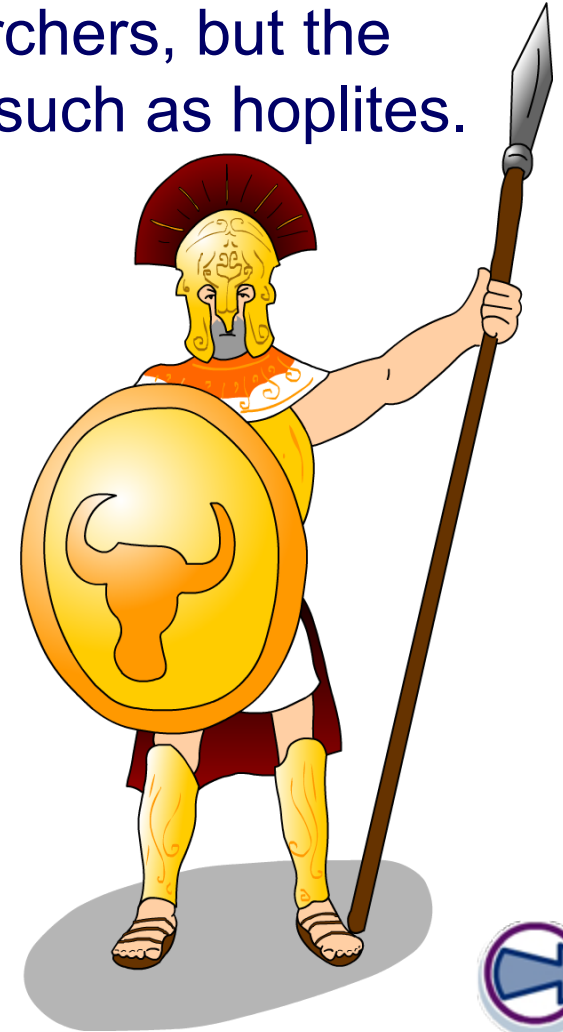




Back on land, Greek soldiers were called **hoplites**. They carried a short sword, a spear, and a shield, as well as all their armor. Greeks also fought using archers, but the bulk of the army was made up of **infantry** such as hoplites.

Sparta was known for its fierce warriors. Soldiers who died in battle were carried home on their shields, and it was seen as shameful to lose your shield in battle.

As a result, Spartan recruits were told by their families to come home with their shields or on them.





In 492 BC, the Persians invaded Greece. Their leader, **Darius I**, landed at Marathon, near Athens, with 15,000 men. The Athenians only had about 11,000 soldiers, but they still managed to win the battle.

A man named **Philippides** ran 26 miles from Marathon to Athens to bring news of the Greek victory before he collapsed and died of exhaustion. Today, people still run marathons: races that are 26 miles long.

This victory was a huge success for Greece, but the threat of Persian invasions continued for another 40 years, as Darius's son **Xerxes** followed his father's lead.



Greek hoplites had to provide their own battle equipment. Weapons and armor were expensive, so soldiers often inherited their father's armor.

This Greek pottery design shows a Persian soldier fighting a Greek **hoplite**.

What do you notice about the two soldiers? How are they positioned in the design? Why do you think they are shown like this?



What evidence can you see that this is an example of Greek propaganda?



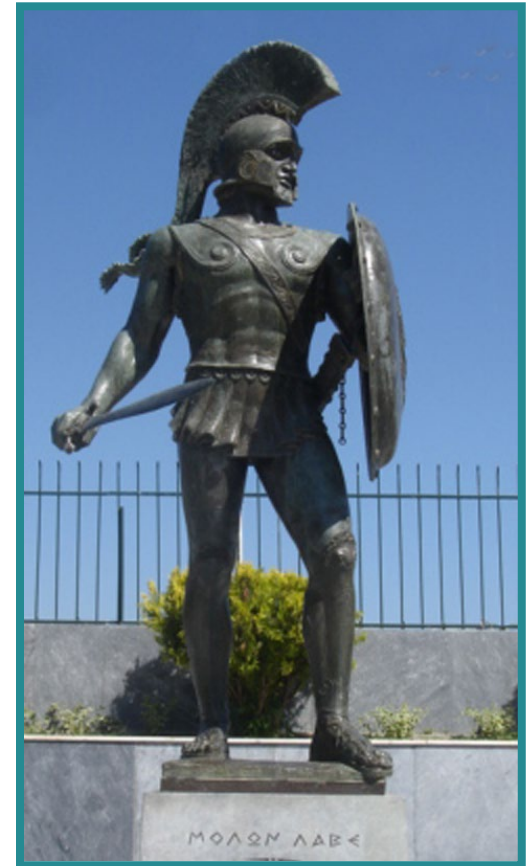
The defeat of the Persians



A key battle against the Persians was at **Thermopylae** in 480 BC. The Spartan king **Leonidas** led an estimated force of 7,000 Greek soldiers, including 300 Spartans. Their aim was to protect the rest of the army as it retreated to safety.

Legend has it that when the Persians sent instructions to the Greeks to surrender their weapons, Leonidas simply replied, “Come and take them.”

The Persians defeated the small Greek force at Thermopylae, but the story of Leonidas’s bravery inspired the rest of the Greek army. They had driven the Persians out of Greece by 449 BC.



Gods and goddesses



The Ancient Greeks worshiped the gods in several ways:

- offerings
- temples
- sacrifices
- festivals.

Offerings were gifts to the gods. People left food, money or flowers at the shrine of a particular god or goddess as thanks or to please them.



Sacrifices were made by priests, but everyone would come to watch. They chose the best animal to sacrifice: often this was a bull, ox or goat. The animal was led to a sacred altar and killed. Afterwards, everyone would share in the feast, and the fat and bones from the animal were left for the gods.



Ancient Greek temples were dedicated to a particular god or goddess, and they were seen as the home of that deity.

The **Temple of Zeus** in Olympia was built between 472 and 456 BC. It contained a huge statue of Zeus: one of the **Seven Wonders of the Ancient World**. However, this statue has been long lost. We only know about it through written descriptions.



Priests and priestesses served the gods by looking after their temples. They could be very powerful. People believed that the **Oracle** at Delphi could tell the future. They would go to hear her speak and try to interpret her words.





People wanted to please the gods by worshiping each of them equally. Some were **patrons** (protectors) of a specific city or city-state. For example, Athena was associated with the city of Athens.

The **Acropolis** is a citadel built on a rocky outcrop above the city. Its name comes from the Greek words *akron* (“high”) and *polis* (“city”).



The most famous building in the Acropolis is the **Parthenon**, which was completed in 432 BC. It took 15 years to build! The Parthenon is a magnificent temple dedicated to Athena.

How different do you think it looked in 432 BC?

Inside the Parthenon



The Greeks also told stories about heroes who triumphed over terrible monsters, often with help from the gods.

One of the most famous Greek heroes was **Heracles** (whom the Romans called Hercules). He was the son of the god Zeus and the mortal Alcmene, making him a **demi-god**.

Being a son of Zeus, Heracles was an immensely strong and powerful warrior. He grew up to perform many great feats, including slaying the many-headed **Hydra** and capturing **Cerberus**, the hound of Hades.



Can you name any Greek heroes?



Live theater was popular in Ancient Greece. Plays were usually tragedies, with comedy being performed at festivals.



There were often only three actors in a single play. They would each play multiple parts, and they wore character masks with wigs attached to them so that the audience could tell them apart.

Greek theaters were in the open air, with a semi-circle of seats around a circular space where the actors would perform. This space was called the **orkhestra**: stages were not raised until much later.

Do you recognize the word orkhestra? If so, why?

In 336 BC, Alexander became king of **Macedonia**, a Greek province, after his father was assassinated. He later became one of the most successful military generals in history.

Alexander used many hoplites in a tight formation known as a **phalanx**. With this technique, the soldiers' large shields overlapped to create an almost impenetrable protective wall. They held long spears with which to attack the enemy.

By the time he died, Alexander had earned himself the title "**the Great**." His empire was the largest in the world and stretched as far as Egypt and the Indus Valley.



Alexander the Great's empire had been so large that Greek (or **Hellenistic**) ways of life had been adopted by many other nations. However, the Greek states were weak from fighting each other and defending themselves from attacks from the new **Roman Republic**.

In one last effort to drive the Romans out of Greece, several city-states formed an alliance – the **Achaean League** – and rose up against them.

They were swiftly defeated at the **Battle of Corinth** in 146 BC. In revenge, the Romans destroyed the city. Greece was now part of the Roman Empire.



Keywords

