

Ancient Greece

Ancient Greece is called 'the birthplace of Western civilisation' for many reasons. The Greeks gave our current form of government (democracy), the Olympic games, language, math, arts, science and the origins of western philosophy. The Romans were so impressed they copied Greek art and gods.

The ancient Greeks lived in current mainland Greece, parts of what is now Turkey and throughout the Mediterranean. They were great traders and took their food and way of life with them to many places. The Greek civilisation evolved from earlier tribes the Aeolians, Ionians, Dorians and Arcado-Cypriots. The Athenians derived from the Ionians and the Spartans form the Dorians.

Ancient Info

- The first Olympics were in 776 BC and there was one event, a short 200 meter sprint called a stade.
- Greek boxers would wind soft leather around their hands. Later it became a more brutal sport and they would use harder leather and weight their hands with wood.
- Pankration (wrestling) was a brutal sport there were only two rules: no eye gouging and no biting (the referees carried sticks to beat those who

cheated). Wrestlers could use choke holds, break fingers, arms and even necks. There was no weight division or time limits: the fight continued until one wrestler surrendered, lost consciousness, or died.

- The first two letters of the Greek alphabet are alpha and beta these have given us the word “alphabet”.
- English has fifty thousand words that derive from the Greek language
- Philosophy comes from the ancient Greek and means “love of wisdom”.
- Socrates was the first of the three great Athenian philosophers the other two were Plato and Aristotle.
- Socrates tried to teach people to think better by asking them lots of questions. He ended up upsetting many people. He was eventually arrested and convicted of religious crimes. He was sentenced to death. Soon after in prison he died from drinking a cup of Hemlock (poisonous plant) drink.

Gods, Myths and Legends

Myths or legends are generally thought of as imaginative stories. Many are based in history and the product of folk tales. The Greeks tales however are used to describe how their world was created and included their Kings and Gods. The Greeks believed in many Gods and Goddesses whom

they thought watched over them. The Gods lived in a cloud-palace above Mount Olympus the highest mountain in Greece.

In the beginning there was nothing and it was called Chaos, out of this came Mother Earth and she created the world. She had a son called Uranus and he was the sky. Together they had children. Rain fell and formed plants, rivers and seas from these animals and later monsters appeared. Three of these monsters were the Cyclopes whom Uranus hated and sent them to the underworld (like Hell). When Mother Earth later gave birth to human shaped giants called the Titans she encouraged them to revolt against her son Uranus for his vile treatment of the Cyclopes. The Titans were led by Cronos who took power and married his sister becoming the King of the Titans.

Cronos was warned that one of his children would one day kill him. So as each of his children were born he swallowed them. Rhea his wife after losing five children hid the sixth and fed Cronos a rock dressed like a baby. This baby who survived was called Zeus. When he grew up he poisoned his father and Cronos coughed up the other children who were whole and safe. Then Zeus freed the Cyclopes (they made thunderbolts for him) and he started a war between the younger gods and the Titans. Zeus and the younger gods won and he became ruler of the sky and the King of the Gods.

Ancient Info

- Homer wrote the Iliad and the Odyssey two of the greatest tales from

ancient Greece, the Iliad tells of the Trojan War.

- Medusa was the daughter of the sea-god Phorcys, she unfortunately offended the Goddess Athena who turned her and her sisters into Gorgons. They snakes for hair, tusks, flared nostrils and beards.
- Hades was the god of the dead and ruler of the underworld, he is often seen with Cerberus a giant three headed dog with lion's feet, a mane of serpents and the tail of a viper who guarded the gates to the underworld.
- Achilles was the most famous Greek warrior, he was one of seven sons. His mother (Thetis) made six of her sons immortal by burning away their mortal half. She was doing the same to Achilles when Peleus the father came in stopped her (thinking she was harming his son). This left one place on his body where he could be killed, the heel.
- Poseidon was god of the sea, when sailors prayed to Poseidon for a safe voyage, they would sometimes drown horses as a sacrifice.
- Heracles was a great hero who was very brave and strong. When he was a baby Hera sent two deadly serpents to kill him in his cradle. The baby Heracles grabbed one with each hand and strangled them.
- Helen of Troy was a daughter of Zeus and Leda (Queen of Sparta). Zeus came down to earth disguised as a swan to seduce Leda. Leda produced a blue egg from which four children came two for Zeus and two for her King.

- Perseus was a Greek hero who killed the Gorgon Medusa and claimed Andromeda a beautiful princess by rescuing her from a sea monster sent by Poseidon. He used Medusa's head to turn the monster to stone.
- Ares is the Greek god of war. He was the son of Zeus and Hera.

Living in Greece

Ancient Greece wasn't one country as it is today, then the Greeks lived in separate city states (called polis). There were many of these and they had different ways of ruling themselves. Some had Kings others had governments and some were ruled by an elite few men alongside Kings. These states sometimes cooperated with each other and at other times they fought against one another. There were five main city states Athens, Sparta, Corinth, Megara and Argos.

Athens

Athens was the shining star of ancient Greece (this is what they thought). Their patron god was Athena, goddess of wisdom. Athens was the first democracy and was ruled by their citizens (men) who came together to discuss problems facing their city. Each year a lottery took place and 500 hundred men's names were drawn out, these 500 men organized and ran the state they were the citizens who voted on the important issues of the day. One man one vote, Women, children and slaves weren't considered citizens so didn't vote. Women were taught at home by their mothers and learnt how to run the home. Boys were sent to school to learn po-

etry and music, then math, science, government and finally they had two years military service.

Sparta

Sparta was ruled over by two kings and a group of elders. All Spartans men and women were warriors. Men lived in army barracks but they were allowed home to visit their families. Boys were taken away from their families when they were seven and sent into the army. They were treated very badly and often beaten (but they weren't allowed to cry). The boys were given very little to eat and had to lie, cheat and steal to feed themselves, these were seen as good traits in a boy. Girls too had army training although they still lived at home during this time. It sounds harsh but Spartan women had a lot more freedom than other women in Greece they could run businesses and could see friends and neighbors without needing their husbands permission.

Corinth and Megara

These were both coastal city states and conducted a lot of trade with other countries. They both had their own coinage which they made traders use and charged a fee for exchanging their money. They were ruled by kings and had education systems very similar to that of Athens. These states boasted beautiful temples and excelled in literature, arts and drama.

Argos

Argos was not a coastal city state it was based on the plains. This land is very fertile and they grew wonderful food especially citrus fruits like

lemons. Argos was ruled over by kings and was famed for its musicians and poets. They also excelled in sculptures and monuments the greatest being the Heraion of Argos a temple dedicated the Goddess Hera.

Ancient Info

- Ancient Greek doctors believed that people were made out of four substances: blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm. To be healthy they all had to be in balance.
- If you had a fever the doctor back then would often “cure” you by blood letting. This would mean either cutting your arm and letting the blood flow or use leeches to suck it out.
- There is an old Greek legend about a young Spartan boy who once stole a live fox. He planned to kill it and eat it later. His plan didn’t quite work out though. He saw some Spartan soldiers walking towards him so he hid the fox under his shirt so he would not be punished. Soon the fox started chewing his stomach but the boy’s face showed no pain.
- Girls went to school when they were seven they were taught wrestling, gymnastics and combat skills.
- Most of the work in ancient Greece was done by slaves. Most slaves were either free born children sold by their poor parents or prisoners of war.
- The Greeks would only eat meat from a domesticated animal (sheep or

goat) if it had been first sacrificed to a god.

- The Greeks started making their own coins around 600BC each Polis (city state) had their own coins Athens had a picture of Athena's owl on theirs.