

**"A Brief History of Ancient Greece"**  
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**Description:** Ancient Greece is a fascinating success story of a small population that created one of the world's most remarkable cultures. It is known for its thinkers and philosophers, the Olympics, the conquests of Alexander the Great, the building of the Parthenon at Athens and the temple of Zeus at Olympia. Its literary accomplishments include the Homeric epics (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*), the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and the comedies of Aristophanes. Ancient Greece left a rich record of achievements in art, literature, politics, philosophy, mathematics, science, and war, and its legacy is still alive. This series traces this remarkable chapter of the world's history.

### **Week 1**

#### **From the Dark Age to the Renaissance**

Greece, a stateless society of farmers and shepherds in the Stone and Bronze Ages, made a sudden leap into civilization around 1600 BC. The Mycenaean states with their Near Eastern type of social and economic organization reached their height around 1300 BC. But the Mycenaean civilization began to disintegrate and by 1100 BC had fallen completely. The subsequent Dark Age was the cradle of the city-state society and culture.

### **Week 2**

#### **Archaic Greece**

Greece emerged in the eighth century BC from its Dark Age into the turbulent history of the early city-states. The eighth-century "renaissance" turned into the "Greek miracle" of the seventh and sixth centuries with the formation of the *polis* where the people, not just the elite, had a stake in its governance. This *polis*-citizen bond made the Greek city-state unlike any other form of state in the ancient world. Admired in peace and dreaded in war, Sparta, was the most powerful and unique Greek city.

### **Week 3**

#### **The Persian Wars and Athenian Democracy**

Athenian democracy, the second most powerful Greek *polis*, played a major role in the great war in the fifth century BC. Athens and Sparta faced the might of Persia. Their unanticipated success gave birth to a civilization of extraordinary brilliance and originality. Athens became a major cultural center. The cultural achievements of Greece were substantial, but the difficulties of the city-states to get along with one another divided the Greek world into Spartan and Athenian spheres of influence.

### **Week 4**

#### **The Peloponnesian War**

The same diversity that fostered the dynamic creativity of the Greeks also fragmented their world. In 431 BC, fighting broke out between the Athenian and Spartan alliances and Greece found itself consummated by a debilitating war of unprecedented scope. The Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC), won by Sparta, transformed the Greek world, but it did not destroy it. The War opened the door to inquire how it could be that the gods would allow Greece to be consumed by a war of this scope.

### **Week 5**

#### **The Rise of Macedon**

The postwar Greeks were more prone to question their relationship to the world around them. The fourth century BC witnessed an explosion of creative energy in philosophy, political theory, mathematics and biology. The inability of the Greeks to work together had dramatic consequences with the rise of Philip of Macedon. It is one of the great paradoxes of ancient history that the Greeks could escape from Persian conquest, but the insignificant kingdom of Macedon could defeat the Greek states.

## Week 6

### Alexander the Great and His Legacy

Alexander the Great's conquests created the *cosmopolis*, a city-state comprising the world, unified by using Greek as the common language. Historians have cast Alexander in many roles: as an idealistic believer in the unity of mankind, as the main factor in the spread of Hellenism, and as a brutal conqueror. The popularity of his remarkable story continues to the present, inspiring films and novels. Alexander's successors ruled the Hellenistic world from 323 BC to the death of Cleopatra of Egypt in 30 BC.

### Recommended readings for continued learning:

Austin, Michel. *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to the Roman Conquest. A Selection of Ancient Sources in Translation*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Kearns, Emily. *Ancient Greek Religion: A Sourcebook* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

Lefkowitz, Mary R., and Maureen B. Fant. *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation*. 3rd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

Robinson, Eric W. *Ancient Greek Democracy: Readings and Sources* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

Briant, Pierre. *Alexander the Great and His Empire: A Short Introduction*. Trans. Amélie Kuhrt (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

Castleden, Rodney. *Mycenaeans* (London: Routledge, 2005).

Cosmopoulos, Michael B., ed. *The Parthenon and Its Sculptures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Dowden, Ken, and Niall Livingstone. *A Companion to Greek Mythology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

Guthrie, W. K. C. *A History of Greek Philosophy*. 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962–1981).

Hansen, Mogens Herman. *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Hanson, Victor Davis. *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece*. 2nd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

Herrmann, John J., and Christine Kondoleon. *Games for the Gods: The Greek Athlete and the Olympic Games* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2004).

Manning, J. G. *The Last Pharaohs: Egypt Under the Ptolemies, 305– 30 B.C.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

Marincola, John, ed. *Greek and Roman Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Martin, Richard P. *Myths of the Ancient Greeks* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

Ober, Josiah. *Democracy and Knowledge: Innovation and Learning in Classical Athens* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

Pritchard, David M., ed. *War, Democracy and Culture in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

**Other interesting resources:**

The Paul F. McCullagh Photo Archive (McGill): <https://mcgill.ca/classics/mccullagh-archive/greek-world>