

Collins Gem

Ancient Greece



David Pickering



**Ancient
Greece**

David Pickering

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INTRODUCTION

At first glance, the civilization of ancient Greece, with its ruined temples, vanished gods and age-old mythology, may seem to belong entirely to the past. Over the centuries, however, the culture forged by the ancient Greeks has had a profound influence upon the development of modern Western civilization, and in many respects their ideas and achievements remain highly relevant in the modern world.

THE INFLUENCE OF ANCIENT GREECE

The ideas of ancient Greek thinkers contributed greatly to the foundation of contemporary philosophy, politics, mathematics, science, architecture, literature and a host of other subjects. Even our modern languages contain thousands of words of Greek origin.

The gods and heroes of Greek mythology, meanwhile, have long been absorbed into the modern literary tradition, and continue to exert a powerful hold on the modern imagination, providing inspiration and material for a plethora of novels, plays and films.

The same may also be said of a small number of real people, such as Alexander the Great, and of the actual historical events of the period, encompassing a wide panorama of history, from the invention of democracy to the many wars that were waged both between Greek city-states and with enemies from beyond the borders of Greece.

THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION

Often described as the cradle of modern European civilization, ancient Greece continues to fascinate everyone, from archaeologists to tourists. We know a surprising amount about ancient Greece and the lives of its varied inhabitants, largely because theirs was one of the first civilizations to leave behind a detailed written and artistic record.

This book aims to summarize what we understand today about the world of the ancient Greeks, including their history, their religion and mythology, their daily lives, their culture and the wars they fought.

The Greek revival

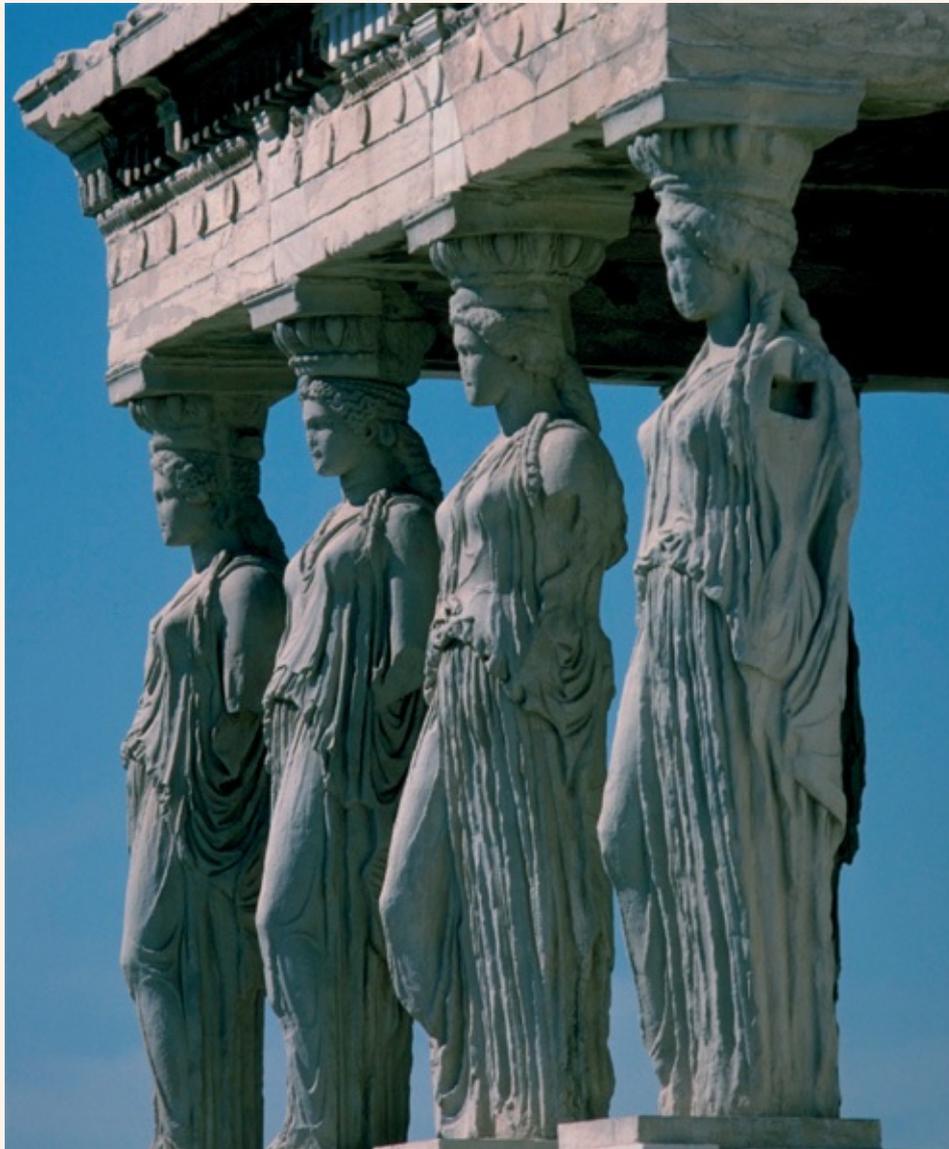
Interest in the world of the ancient Greeks intensified in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,

when it became fashionable for wealthy aristocrats and academics to visit sites in the classical world. Greek ideas were soon taken up with enthusiasm throughout the arts and sciences.

PART ONE

The land of the Greeks

The world of the ancient Greeks extended much further than mainland Greece, with the establishment of Greek colonies throughout the Mediterranean region and the Black Sea. Greece itself was not a single united country, but a host of independent city-states that shared a common culture.



The most powerful city-state

Athens, dominated by the temple of the Acropolis, was the most important of all the Greek city-states.



THE GREEK WORLD

Situated in the central Mediterranean, with easy access by sea to Egypt and north Africa, Asia Minor and what is now modern western Europe, Greece was positioned ideally as a centre of trade and cultural exchange. Its mountainous landscape, meanwhile, made invasion by outsiders difficult and allowed the various small city-states to develop in relative peace and largely independent of their neighbours.

COLONIZATION

Hot, dry and mountainous, mainland Greece offered little good farmland, so from an early date the Greeks explored far afield in search of places where they could grow crops to feed the population. Colonization of coastal areas throughout the Mediterranean and Black Sea region increased from around 750 BC, spreading Greek influence the length and breadth of the known world. By 600 BC, there were some 1,500 Greek colonies around the Mediterranean.

Thriving colonies were also established to the north and east, in what is now modern Bulgaria and Turkey, as well as on numerous islands in the Aegean Sea. There was also a strong Greek presence in north Africa, southern Italy, Sicily and southern France.

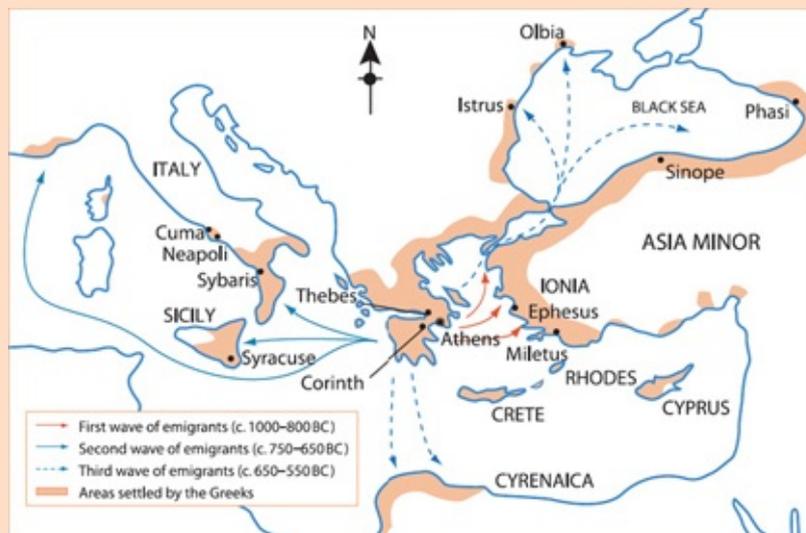
GREEK CULTURE

Everywhere the Greeks went, they took their culture with them, building temples, establishing trade links and communicating their ideas about religion, art, science and philosophy.

The Greek city-states



The Greek World



GREEK CITY-STATES

Greece was not one united country but a collection of independent city-states, all of which had their own patron gods, laws and constitutions. The first communities grew up where there was a good water supply and suitable farmland. These small communities later combined to form the first city-states, which typically included a city (usually a seaport) and the surrounding land with its villages and farms.

FIERCE INDEPENDENCE

Each city-state (or *polis* – hence the word ‘politics’) developed its own distinctive character. Cities were usually separated from their neighbours by mountains, valleys or the sea, which limited contact between them. However, city-states traded enthusiastically with each other and shared the same language, religion and other cultural features. Citizens were fiercely loyal to their particular state and, if called upon, would fight to defend their homeland. If attacked, citizens retreated to the acropolis (a citadel or walled area at the highest point of the city). The development of Greek civilization was regularly interrupted by squabbles between neighbouring states, although on rare occasions they allied to resist invasion by foreign armies (namely, against the Trojans in the late twelfth century BC, the Persians in the fifth and sixth centuries BC and Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC).

Populations

Aristotle believed that city-states had to have more than ten citizens but less than 100,000, as citizens needed to know the people they voted for.

ATHENS

Athens was the largest and most powerful of the ancient city-states. At its peak in the Classical Period, it had over 250,000 inhabitants and was a centre of culture and learning. Named after its patron, the goddess Athena, it developed around a hill called the Acropolis, which was originally a fort but later became the religious heart of the state and the site of the Parthenon and other temples.

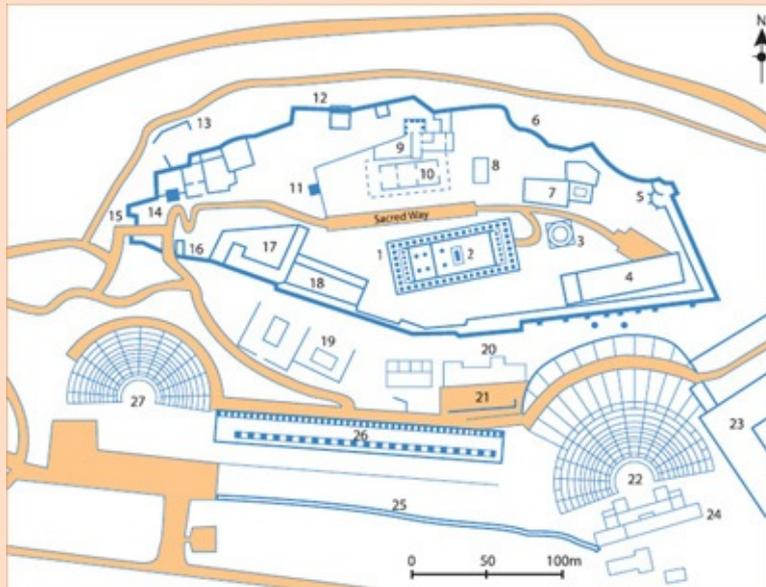
Athenian culture

The Athenians were responsible for many of the great advances of ancient Greek civilization, from democracy to philosophy and the theatre. It was home to celebrated

philosophers, politicians and artists, and was a thriving trading centre, with business being conducted in its marketplace (the *agora*). The funds provided by such trade paid for the construction of many great buildings and other treasures for which Athens became famous.

Classical Athens

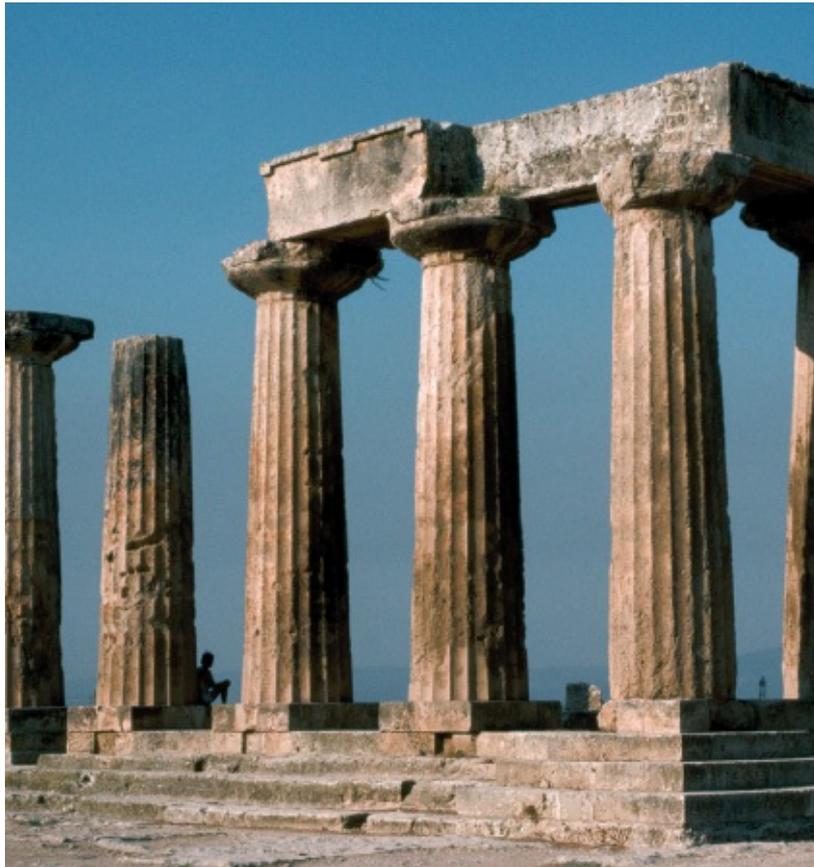
This map shows the layout of classical Athens with the Acropolis and Parthenon.



- 1 Parthenon
- 2 Statue of Athena Parthenos
- 3 Altar of Rome and Augustus
- 4 Acropolis Museum
- 5 Belvedere
- 6 Sanctuary of Eros and Aphrodite
- 7 Boukoleion
- 8 Altar of Athena Polias
- 9 Erechtheion
- 10 Porch of Caryatids
- 11 Statue of Athena Promachos
- 12 House of Arrhephoroi
- 13 Klepsydra (sacred cave)
- 14 Monument of Agrippa
- 15 Beule Gate
- 16 Temple of Athena Nike
- 17 Precinct of Artemis Brauronia
- 18 Chalkotheke
- 19 Temple of Themis
- 20 Sacred Spring
- 21 Incubation area
- 22 Theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus
- 23 Odeum of Pericles
- 24 Sacred Precinct of Dionysus Eleuthereus
- 25 Aqueduct of Peisistratos
- 26 Stoa of Eumenes

Defence

The Athenians possessed a large fleet and forged alliances with other states around the Aegean Sea. Their army was less strong, however, and was run on a part-time basis, with ordinary citizens being expected to help defend the state when it was attacked.



The temple ruins at Corinth, which was second only to Athens among the Greek city-states.

Ancient ruins

The ruins of some of the most important buildings of ancient Athens can still be seen in the heart of the modern city. These include the buildings on the Acropolis and the restored *agora*, which includes the Theseum.

CORINTH

The city-state of Corinth was situated in southern Greece, in the Peloponnese region

on the Isthmus of Corinth. It was first settled some time before 3000 BC and emerged as a thriving centre for trade during the eighth century BC. In due course, it became the second largest and richest of the Greek city-states, after Athens. Rivalry between Corinth and Athens eventually led to the Peloponnesian War. Corinth was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC.

CRETE

Crete, the largest of all the Greek islands, was an independent territory in the eastern Mediterranean. It was colonized around the sixth millennium BC and became home to the powerful Minoan civilization. Many Minoan relics have been found on the island, notably the royal palace at Knossos. Crete traded with many other Greek states but otherwise kept out of their quarrels and had little impact on later Greek civilization, although Cretan pirates were much feared. The island fell to Rome in 67 BC.

EPHESUS

Ephesus was a Greek city-state in Ionia, on the west coast of Asia Minor. An important trading centre, it thrived under the Persians, against whom it had waged war previously, and subsequently under the Romans. Its glories included a huge temple that was dedicated to the goddess Artemis. It was sacked by the Goths in 262 AD.

MILETUS

Miletus was an Ionian city-state that was founded around 1000 BC. Its early wealth was based on the trade in wool. Its enterprising merchants forged many links throughout the region and promoted Greek colonization of the Black Sea area. Having produced many leading thinkers of the sixth century BC, it declined after being sacked by the Persians in 494 BC.

Atlantis

Ancient Greek legend told of a lost island civilization west of Gibraltar. Said to have ruled over much of Europe and Africa, it was either destroyed by an alliance of free cities or else by an earthquake, and vanished forever below the waves. It is thought that the Greeks may have inherited the myth from the ancient Egyptians.

RHODES

The island state of Rhodes was colonized by Dorian Greeks before 1000 BC. It became independent of Macedonia around 408 BC and enjoyed its peak in the third century BC. After successfully resisting a siege in 305–304 BC, the citizens of Rhodes celebrated by building the Colossus of Rhodes, a huge 31-metre-high statue of the sun god Helios bestriding the entrance to the harbour. One of the Seven Wonders of the

World, it was destroyed by an earthquake in 244 BC.

SPARTA

The city-state of Sparta was the capital of Laconia in southern Greece. It grew out of Dorian settlements in the tenth century BC and by 700 BC dominated much of Laconia and Messenia. It was ruled by two hereditary kings, who were assisted by magistrates (the *ephors*) and a council of elders (the *gerousia*), as well as an assembly of citizens (the *apella*).



Overleaf: The Spartans valued military prowess above all other qualities, and their army was the most powerful of all those defending the Greek city-states.

A strict military state, Sparta boasted ancient Greece's strongest army. All males were brought up to serve in the army, young boys being trained as soldiers from the age of seven. Babies thought too weak to become soldiers were left to die in the open. The Spartans clashed frequently with the Athenians in the fifth century BC, finally defeating them in the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC). In 371 BC, however, the Spartans themselves were defeated by the Thebans at Leuctra, triggering the decline of their influence. The Spartans placed little value on education or learning, and thus they had limited impact upon Greek culture. Their city was eventually destroyed by the Visigoths in 396 AD.

SYRACUSE

The seaport of Syracuse was the focus of Greek civilization in Sicily. Founded by Greeks from Corinth in 734 BC, it became an important cultural centre. Notable

people born there included the poet Theocritus and the mathematician and scientist Archimedes. Syracuse fell to the Romans in 212 BC after a three-year siege.

THEBES

Situated in Boeotia in central Greece, the city of Thebes was founded in Mycenaean times and was celebrated as the setting of many legends in Greek drama. It was the most powerful city-state in the region until 480 BC, when it became notorious for siding with the Persian invaders against neighbouring states. It regained its dominant position in 371 BC after its army defeated the Spartans at Leuctra. The Thebans opposed Macedonian expansion and their city was destroyed by Alexander the Great in 336 BC.

THE PELOPONNESIAN LEAGUE

The various states that occupied the southern part of mainland Greece – the peninsula known as the Peloponnese, which was joined to the rest of Greece only by the Isthmus of Corinth – eventually realized that they would stand a much better chance of fending off invasion by the Athenians or other enemies if they formed alliances with each other.

Even the Spartans of Laconia, whose army was the strongest in the region, saw the sense in uniting with their neighbours to defend their homeland. Accordingly, Sparta became the senior partner in an alliance of states known as the Peloponnesian League. The other members included Elis, Arcadia, Corinth and Megara. These states were allowed to maintain their independence from Sparta, as long as they provided military assistance when requested to do so. It was this grouping of states that, after many battles, finally defeated the Athenians during the Peloponnesian War of 431–404 BC.

TOWNS AND CITIES

The majority of the towns and cities of ancient Greece were built very close to the sea, which provided a convenient means of access to the rest of the world. Most settlements were sited on a hill, which made them easier to defend from attack. Many of the most important structures, such as temples and buildings of religious or civic significance, were grouped on the crown of this hill, which was called the *acropolis* (meaning ‘high city’). Further protection was provided by a high wall, which encircled both the acropolis and the surrounding built-up area.

COMMON FEATURES

Certain features were common to most Greek towns and cities. These included one or more temples, an *agora* (the site of the main marketplace and craftsmen’s shops), a theatre, a gymnasium and a prison, as well as numerous private houses of various types and sizes.

Greek towns and cities were busy places, with people from the surrounding countryside and further afield mixing with locals to trade goods, buy slaves and fulfil their various obligations to the state. The streets, which were narrow and often steep, were usually crowded with people going about their daily business.

GREAT CITIES

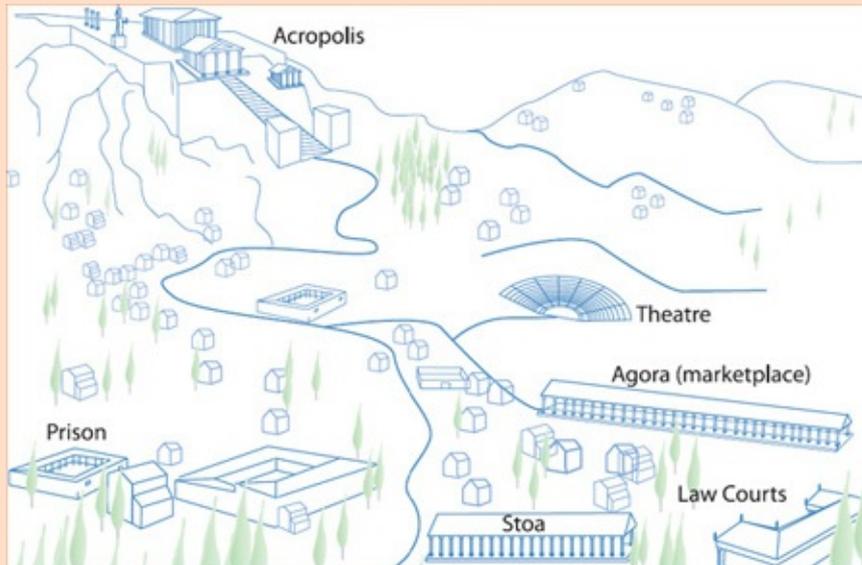
Athens is often thought of as the centre of ancient Greek civilization, but there were many other notable cities through the Greek world that could boast a similar reputation and wealth. Elsewhere in mainland Greece, for instance, the city of Thebes (in Boeotia) was a centre of the ancient Mycenaean culture, while Corinth, with its large acropolis and harbour, could rival Athens as a cultural and commercial hub. Epidaurus (in the northeastern Peloponnese) was remarkable for its great buildings erected in the fourth century BC, when it was the focus of the cult of Asclepius, the god of healing.

The jewel in the crown of the later Hellenistic world was undoubtedly Alexandria, the city that was founded in northern Egypt by Alexander the Great in 332 BC. It was a centre of European culture long after the fortunes of the ancient Greeks had been eclipsed by the rise of the Romans.

Town planning

With so many people living in close proximity, it was fortunate that the Greeks had a sophisticated knowledge of town planning. Excavations of ancient Greek settlements have uncovered extensive drainage systems that ensured relatively healthy living conditions.

A typical Greek town



PART TWO

History of ancient Greece

Ancient Greek civilization had its roots in the Minoan and Mycenaean cultures that emerged during the Bronze Age, around 4,000 years ago. The golden age of ancient Greece followed during the Classical Period, which spanned the fourth and fifth centuries BC, and it ultimately ended with domination by the Macedonians and then the Romans in the first century BC.

