

# Ancient Greek Civilization



## Why study the Ancient Greeks?

Greek culture has influenced Western culture more than any other:

- Democratic Ideals
- Wellspring of Western Philosophy
- Principles of Art & Beauty (Classical)
- Classical Architecture
- The Study of History
- Drama: Comedy and Tragedy
- Religion/Mythology

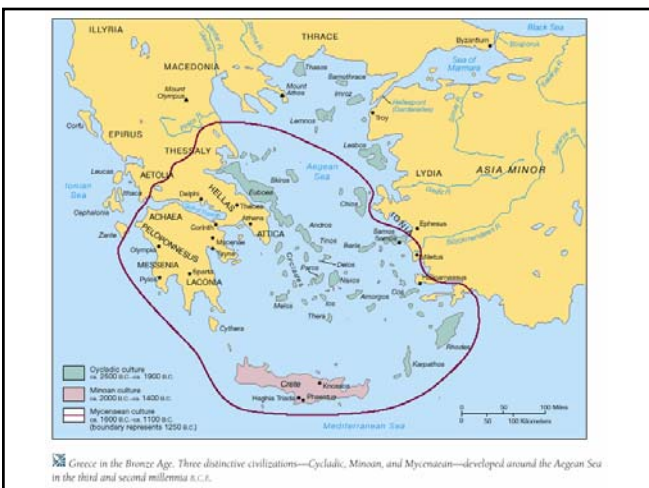


## Ancient Greek History in a Nutshell

- Greek poleis emerge during the Archaic Age, led by Athens and Sparta. Sparta is a military state, politically and culturally conservative. Athens implements a number of political reforms which create democracy; the arts and culture flourish.
- Threatened by Persia, the Greeks unite and win a surprising victory in the Persian Wars. Athens emerges as the dominant polis to lead the Greeks at the beginning of the Classical Age.
- Resentful of Athenian hegemony, Sparta leads an alliance of poleis against Athens in the Peloponnesian War. The Spartan alliance is victorious, but various poleis continue to fight for dominance, further weakening them.
- Alexander the Great conquers Greece, as well as the rest of the known world, and then he dies. His rule is replaced by the Hellenistic kingdoms which last until they are conquered by Rome.

## Timeline of Ancient Greece

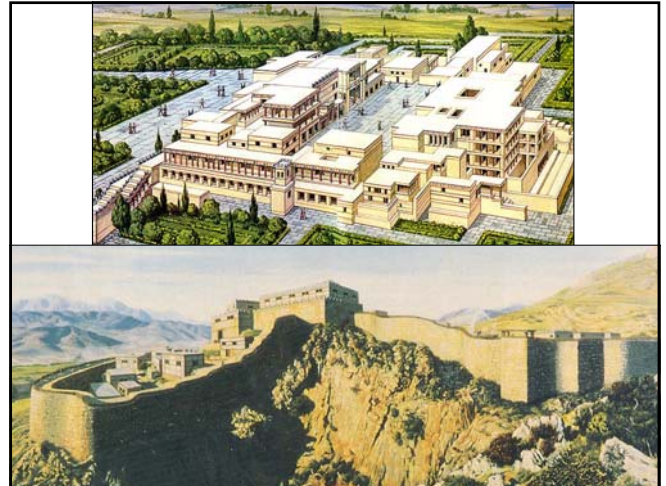
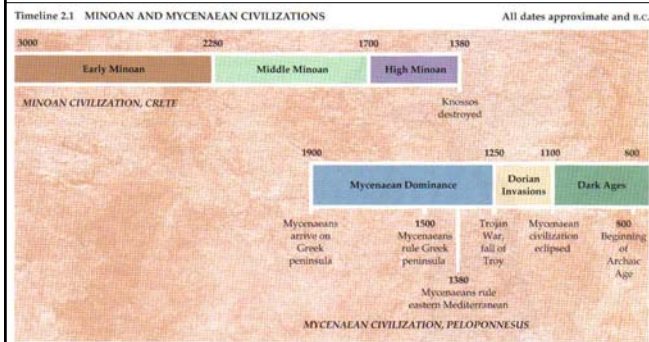
- Greek Dark Ages (c.1100-750 BC)
  - Loss of writing, time of Homer.
- The Archaic Period (c.750-480 BC)
  - Many small self-governing communities rise, a Greek alphabet is adopted from the Phoenicians. Ends with Greek triumph in the Persian Wars, which begins the...
- Hellenic (Classical) Age (c. 480-323 BC)
  - Peak of Greek power and culture, led by Athens until Athens was defeated in the Peloponnesian War, then Sparta and Thebes. This age ends with Alexander's conquest of Greece.
- The Hellenistic Period (323-146 BC)
  - From the death of Alexander to Roman conquest.



## Cycladic Culture, 3000 - 2000 BC.



## Aegean Civilizations: The Minoans and Mycenaeans



## Minoan Civilization

- 3000 – 1300 BC.
- Contemporaneous with Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations.
- Based on the island of Crete.
- Named Minoan after the mythological King Minos.
- By 2000 BC., a prosperous and stable mercantile civilization had emerged.
- Peaked between 1700 and 1400 BC.



The Minoans developed a pictogram form of writing (Phaistos disc) that was replaced by about 1800 BC with a still undeciphered script known as Linear A.

## Minoan Society

- Complex class system included nobles, merchants, artisans, bureaucrats, and laborers.
- Noble life based in palaces. Communities linked in a loose political federation centered at Knossos.
- Peaceful: No fortified walls around the palaces and no weapons found with remains.

## Palace at Knossos

- Large complex of rooms and passageways on several levels.
- Possibly the source of the labyrinth myth.
- Many beautiful frescoes (paint applied directly on wet plaster) on the palace walls
- Impressive plumbing and drainage system.



Palace at Knossos, c. 1750 – 1650 BC.  
(partially restored)



"Throne room" in the palace of Knossos.



Minoan pithoi – large storage vases for grain, olive oil, and wine.



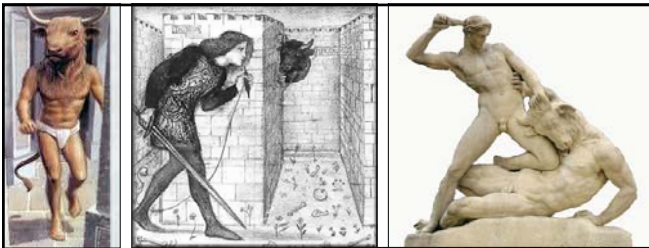
Octopus Vase (Marine Style), c. 1500 BC.



"Toreador Fresco", c. 1500 BC. Fictional scene? Reminiscent of the Minotaur legend, in which 7 youths and 7 maidens were periodically sacrificed to a creature that was half man and half bull, who lived in an underground labyrinth.



Minoan symbolic *labrys* (axe) of gold, 2nd millennium BC.

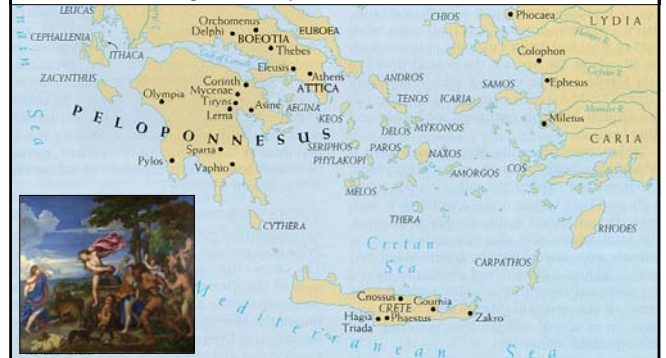


Minotaur: *Minos* + *tauros*

According to Greek myth, Theseus killed the Minotaur and then followed a thread back out of the labyrinth.

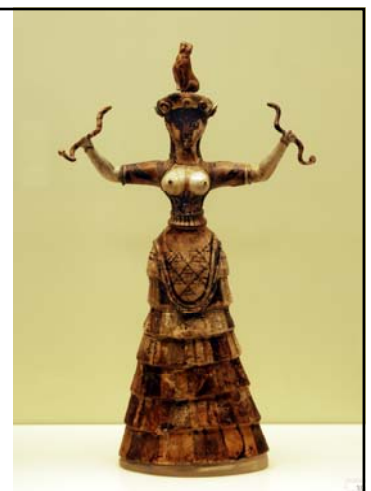


Greek legend has it that after Theseus and Ariadne left Minoa, they visited the island of Naxos . . . where Theseus abandoned her. She was later found by, and married to, the god Dionysus.



## Minoan Religion

- Minoan religion appears to have been matriarchal, centering on the worship of a mother goddess or earth goddess.
- Minoans also honored numerous other household and natural goddesses.
- Near the end of their era, the Minoans began to bury their dead in underground tombs or chambers, but it is unknown why.



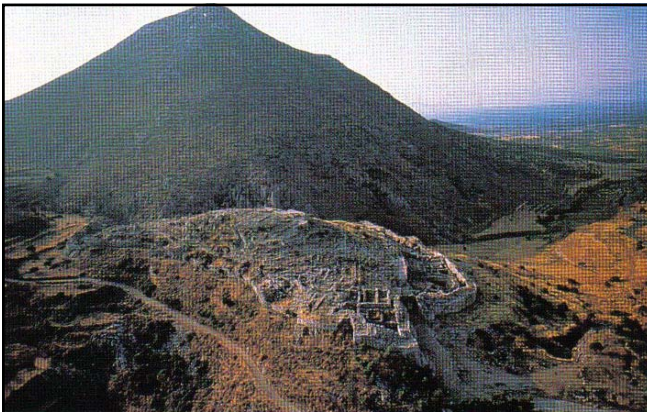
Minoan Snake Goddess figurine, c. 1600 BC.

## End of Minoan Civilization

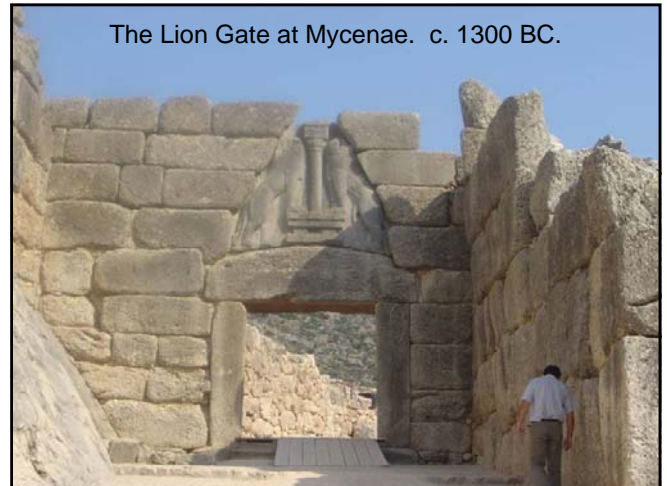
- Minoan trade dominated the eastern Mediterranean until about 1380 BC., when the peaceful civilization suddenly disappeared.
- Although the Greeks had no direct knowledge of Minoan Civilization, elements of Minoan culture lived on in Greek mythology.

## Mycenaean Civilization

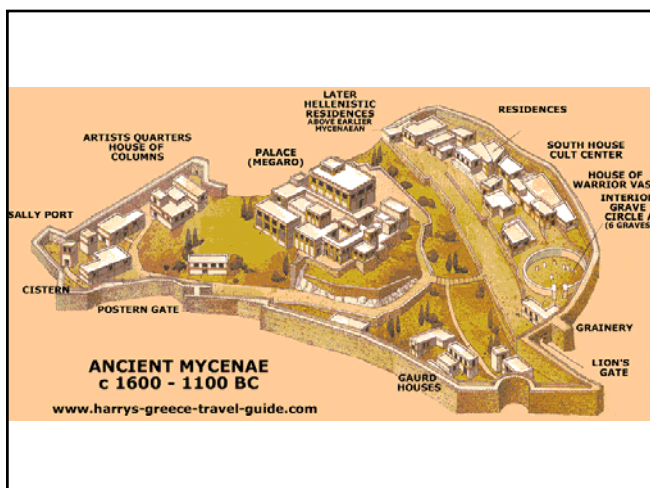
- 1900 – 1100 BC.
- Named by archeologists after Mycenae, one of its most prominent fortress cities.
- An aggressive warrior people, they arrived on the Peloponnesus peninsula around 1900 BC. and ruled it by about 1500 BC.
- Mycenaean culture lives on through the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.



Mycenae. Aerial view of the Acropolis.



The Lion Gate at Mycenae. c. 1300 BC.



## Mycenaean Society

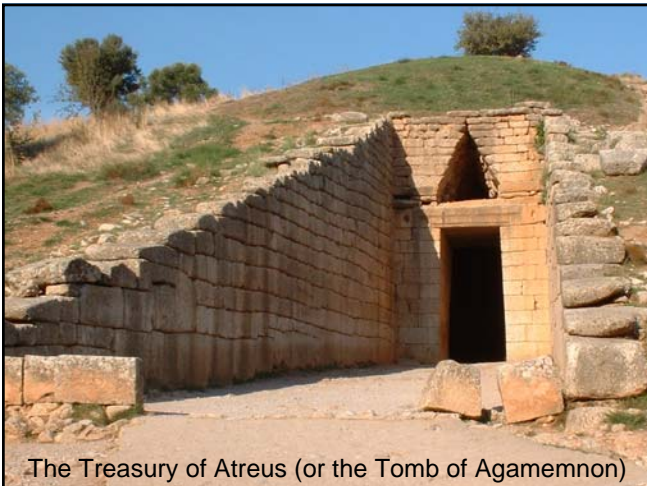
- Evidence of the Mycenaean's militaristic society can be seen in their architecture.
- Their fortress-palaces had massive double walls, narrow escape passages, and wide gateways, and were strategically located.
- Imposing structures, such as the Lion Gate, would have been designed to intimidate as well as protect.

## Mycenaean Religion

- Syncretism: fusion of Minoan and Mycenaean deities.
- Like the Minoans, the Mycenaeans worshipped numerous household goddesses as well as aspects of nature in caves and natural shrines.
- Mycenaean religion also included deities that were the predecessors of the Olympian gods.

## Burial Rites

- Mycenaean graves have yielded fabulous treasures, indicating that they buried their dead with great honor.
- They often buried daggers or other forms of military equipment with the deceased, indicative of a militaristic culture, as well as hero worship.



The Treasury of Atreus (or the Tomb of Agamemnon)



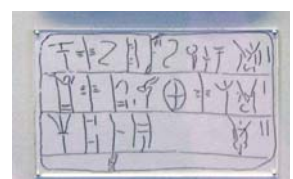
Funeral mask (commonly known as the "Mask of Agamemnon"). Gold, found in grave circle A in Mycenae, c. 16<sup>th</sup> century BC.



Lion Hunt Dagger, c. 16<sup>th</sup> century BC. This dagger was buried alongside its owner, likely a Mycenaean warrior, in a funeral mound.

## Mycenaean Writing

- Linear B was found to be a very archaic form of Greek language.
- Unfortunately, while thousands of samples exist, they were mostly used to record commercial transactions.





Mycenaean tablet inscribed in linear B coming from the House of the Oil Merchant. The tablet registers an amount of wool which is to be dyed.

## End of the Mycenaeans

- The Mycenaeans attacked the wealthy and strategic city of Troy in about 1250 BC. This was a long, exhausting campaign that probably weakened them, leaving them open to conquest. The siege of Troy lives on in myth and Homer's epic tales.
- Around 1100 BC the Mycenaean civilization collapsed and Mycenae was abandoned.



Today Mycenae is a popular tourist destination a few hours from Athens. The site has been well-preserved, and the ruins of the cyclopean walls and the palaces on the acropolis still arouse the admiration of visitors, particularly when it is remembered that they were built a thousand years before the monuments of Classical Greece.

## The Greek Dark Age, 1100-750 BC

- Around 1100 BC, numerous Greek cities were sacked (perhaps by invading Dorians) and the region entered what historians call the Dark Age(s).
- At the beginning of the Dark Age, Greece experienced decreasing population and lost their written language.
- But the Dark Age was relatively peaceful and after about 900 BC, the population began to grow and compete for resources.



## The Emergence of the Polis

- Usually translated as “city-state.”
- A polis, is an urban core and a rural zone:  
Athens + Attica = Athenian polis  
Sparta + Laconia = Spartan polis
- Most Greek poleis were originally oligarchies, a form of government in which a small number of an elite class, “the few”, ruled the state. Social mobility was limited.
- “Man is a political animal.” - Aristotle



## Acropolis and Agora

- Every polis usually had an agora, temples, a building where public decisions were reached, and entertainment facilities, such as theaters and stadiums. Some poleis had an acropolis.
- An agora is an open area marketplace where citizens assembled, political leaders made speeches, and the populace congregated to conduct business and socialize.
- An acropolis is a fortified hilltop where temples or other important buildings were located.



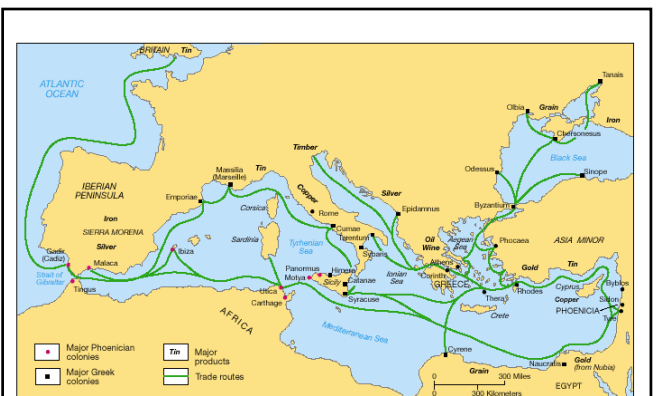
The Acropolis, Athens. The Acropolis was the center of Athenian ceremonial and religious life.

## Three responses to the tensions of the age:

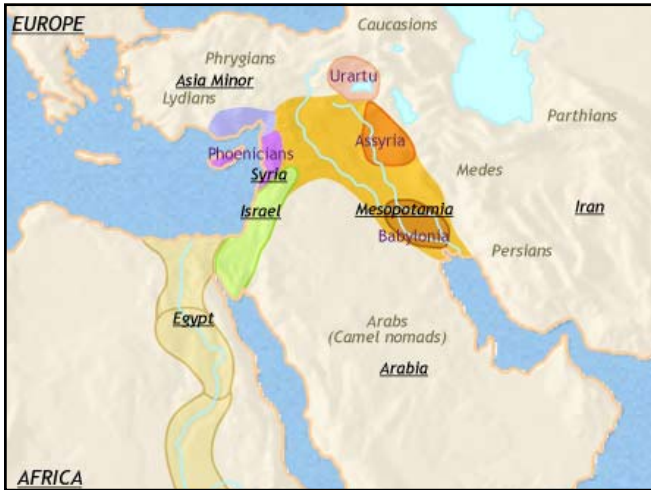
1. Colonization: Some poleis, like Corinth, exported surplus population to colonies around the Mediterranean. "Metropolis" comes from the Greek for "mother city."
2. Trade: Some poleis, like Athens, engaged in widespread commercial ventures (emulating the Phoenicians).
3. Conquest: Sparta conquered and enslaved their neighbors.



Greek Cities and Colonies of the Archaic Age. Greek civilization was never limited geographically but thrived in colonies throughout the Mediterranean and Black Seas.

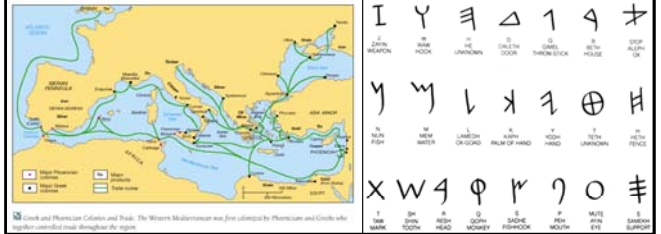


Greek and Phoenician Colonies and Trade. The Western Mediterranean was first colonized by Phoenicians and Greeks who together controlled trade throughout the region.



## Phoenicia (1200 – 539 BC)

- Established trading routes throughout the Mediterranean and beyond.
- Developed the alphabet which was later adopted by the Greeks.



## Geometric Art of the Archaic Period



## Athens and Sparta

- Of all the poleis, Sparta and Athens stand out for their vividly contrasting styles of life and their roles in subsequent Greek history.
- Sparta, the principal symbol of Dorian civilization, governed with stringent and uncompromising policies.
- Athens, the symbol of Ionian civilization, represented the open, artistic, and intellectual society for which the ancient Greeks are most famous.



3 - Conquest

## Sparta

- The earliest Spartans conquered and enslaved the original inhabitants of lower Peloponnesus, who became the *helots*.
- The ruling class of Sparta, obsessed with keeping social order, passed laws forbidding immigration, limiting material possessions, and restricting creativity.
- To prevent rebellions, Sparta created a rigid hierarchical society of tough, loyal, athletic, and well-trained men, women, and children.

## Spartan Education, the *Agoge*

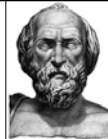
- Babies were inspected at birth and healthy ones were returned to their parents.
- At age seven, boys entered military brotherhoods to which they belonged for the rest of their lives. Rigorous mental, physical, and military training.
- From 18-20, many served in the *Krypteia*, the Spartan secret police.
- Men served in the army until age sixty.

## Women in Sparta

- In Sparta, everyone was needed to maintain strict order, so women were given an education, allowed to own land, and engaged in many activities such as men did, making them strong and independent.
- Although men and women could choose who they wanted to marry, marriage was not companionate; its sole function was the production of more equals.



## Spartan Constitution



- Lycurgus, a semi-legendary figure, gave Sparta its law/constitution, c. 750 BC.
- All Spartan males of age were “equals” who could vote in the *apella*.
- There was a 30 member senate of 60+ year old men that summoned the *apella*, and could veto its decisions.
- There were two kings who could veto each other's decisions and there were 5 *ephors* who oversaw the kings and broke deadlocks.

## The Legacy of Sparta

- By about 550 BC, Sparta had formed the Peloponnesian League, which it used to control the peninsula.
- The Spartan system was still in place when Rome conquered Greece in the second century BC, but there were only a small number of “equals” left by then.
- Sparta was admired for its skilled, loyal, brave soldiers, and its stable social order, but it contributed little to the artistic enrichment of Greece.

## Athens



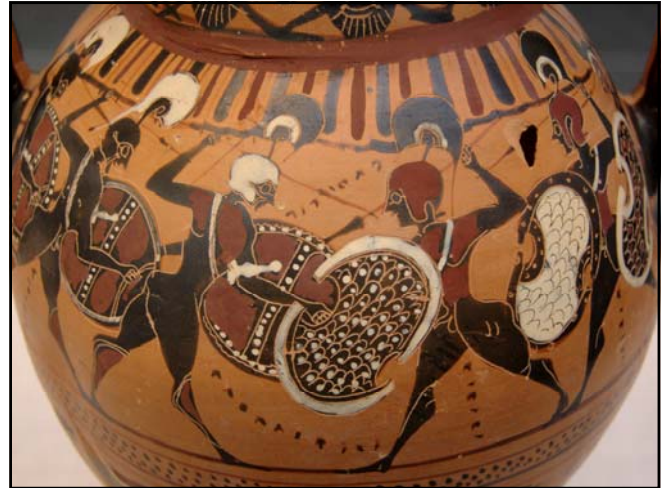
In contrast to Sparta, Athens was the shining leader of the Classical age, reaching greater artistic, intellectual, and literary heights than did any other polis.

## Political Change

- Athens is famous for being the birthplace of democracy, but like all of the other Greek poleis, it was initially ruled by wealthy, landed aristocrats.
- Change was forced by a number of factors:
  - Athenian soldiers were regular citizens who risked their lives for the city, but they had no voice in politics.
  - Successful trade made a wealthy new class of merchants in the city, but they had no voice in politics.
  - Debt slavery destroyed families and caused some Athenians to be sold abroad.

## Citizen Soldiers

- New military tactics depended upon large numbers of foot soldiers, called hoplites, armed with long spears, protected by shields and personal armor, and grouped in close ranks called phalanxes.
- Recruited from independent farmers, merchants, traders, and artisans, these commoners demanded a voice in political decisions as their military value became evident.



## Political Change

- Expanded trade increased the wealth of the new middle class, but the entrenched aristocracy limited their opportunities.
- Frustrated, in the 6th Century BC., Athens, like many poleis, entrusted tyrants with the power to make sweeping economic and political changes.

## Solon – 594 BC

- Solon abolished debts, guaranteed a free peasantry, overhauled the judicial system, and recorded the laws.
- He also changed the government to a form of timocracy, where political power derives from wealth (instead of coming from one of the noble aristocratic families, as before). Citizens were divided into four classes of wealth, and members of the two wealthiest classes could hold political office.

## Cleisthenes

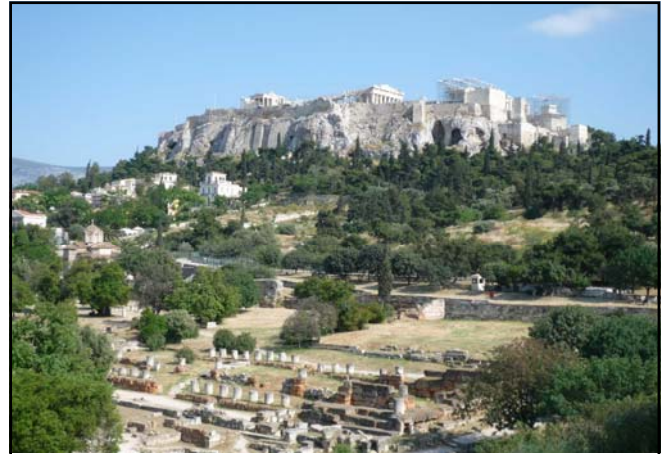
- Solon's principle successor was Cleisthenes, who established democracy in Athens beginning in 508 BC.
- He broadened the governmental base by opening it to all free male citizens (the *demos*) regardless of property or bloodlines. This was especially important for men in the Athenian navy.
- His reforms, which lasted for almost two centuries, created an atmosphere in which civic pride and artistic energy were unleashed, the Hellenic period.

## Athenian Democracy

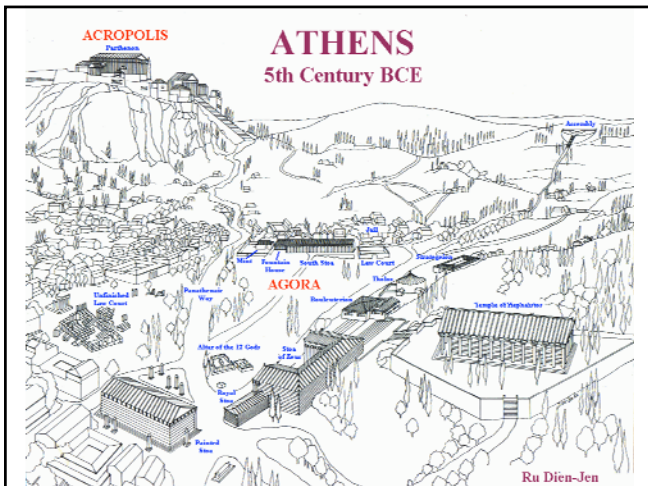
- *demos* = people
- *kratos* = force, power
- *demos* + *kratos* = democracy
- Citizens voiced their opinions in the assembly, sat on civil and criminal juries, and defended their polis in times of war.

## Rights of Others in Athenian Society

- In Athens, women pursued respectability as an ideal, which meant that they were supposed to marry and stay indoors, overseeing their households and performing domestic chores. Women possessed no legal or economic status and were by law under the control of the males in the household.
- Foreigners were placed in special categories that restricted their personal rights and limited their economic opportunities.
- Slaves had no rights and were treated as property, with little hope of future improvement.



A view of the Acropolis over the agora.



The Pnyx was the meeting place of the world's first democratic legislature, the Athenian *ekklesia* (the assembly).

## Entering the Golden Age...

- The emergence of democracy was the *first* of two elements necessary for the creation of the Athenian "Golden Age."
- The *second* element was the Greek victory over Xerxes in the Persian Wars...



In the mid-sixth century BC., the Persians ruled a huge empire that included the Greek poleis in Ionia. Ionian revolts against Persian control sparked the Persian Wars.



## The Persian Wars - Darius

- Darius, king of the Persians in the late sixth century B.C., demanded taxes from the Ionian Greeks. They revolted and were supported by Athens, which sent twenty warships (triremes).
- Darius defeated the Greeks in Ionia and, a few years later, invaded the Greek peninsula.
- In one of the most unlikely victories the world has ever seen, the greatly outnumbered Athenians and their allies (but not the Spartans) defeated the Persians at the battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.



The trireme was the military naval vessel of the ancient Mediterranean.



The Persian Wars. Greeks fought on both sides in the Persian Wars, while many others remained neutral.

## The Battle of Marathon, 490 BC.

Marathon

Plain of Marathon

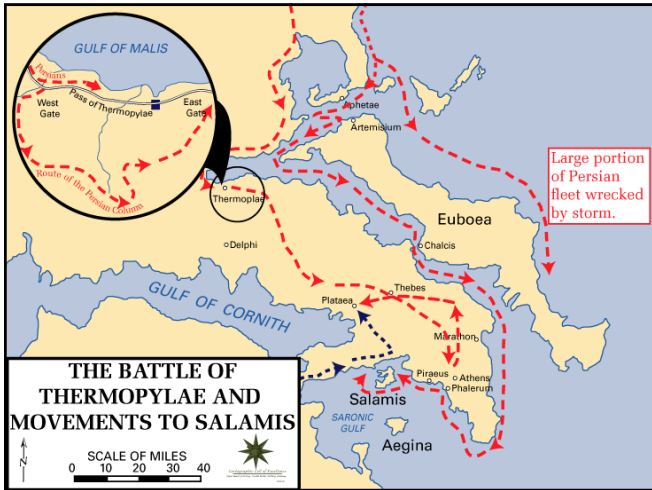
GREECE



The Greeks suffered less than 200 deaths, whereas the Persians lost more than 6,000 men.

## Persian Wars - Xerxes

- Darius' son, Xerxes, invaded Greece again ten years later, defeating the Spartan lead Greeks at Thermopylae, a northern mountain pass.
- With nobody standing between them and the invading Persian army, the Athenians debated whether to defend their city or to abandon it.
- The Delphic oracle told them to "trust in their wooden walls," but what did that mean?



## Delphi and the Oracle of Apollo

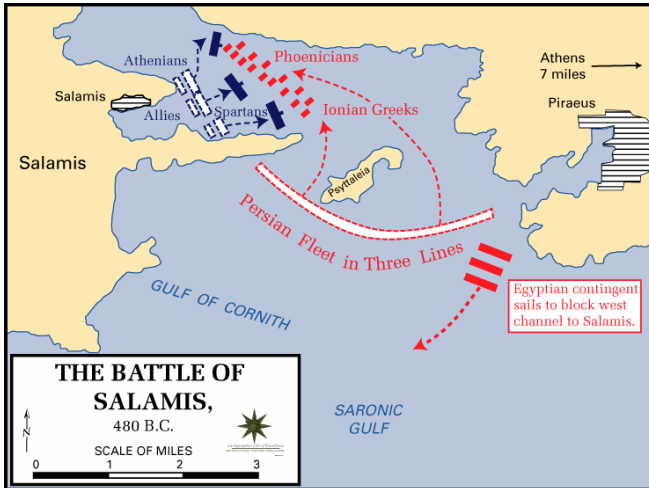


- An oracle is a person or agency considered to be a source of wise counsel or prophetic opinion; an infallible authority, usually spiritual in nature.
- The Pythia was the oracle at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi and the most important oracle in Ancient Greece.



Aegeus, a mythical king of Athens, asks a question of the Pythia, who transmitted the prophesies.



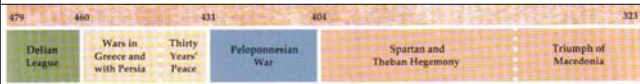


## Persian Wars - Salamis

- The Persians sacked Athens, but the Athenians then destroyed the Persian fleet with their swifter ships at the battle of Salamis. Xerxes fled back to Persia, abandoning his army.
- After the remaining Persian army was routed at Plataea in 479 B.C., the mood in Athens was euphoric and the stage was set for the ensuing Hellenic Age.

## The Hellenic Age

- 479 – 323 BC. Defeating the Persians inaugurated an Golden age in Athens.
- Athenian imperialistic tendencies eventually drove the Greek alliance apart and led to a long, self-destructive civil war, the Peloponnesian War, which Sparta won.
- Decades of fighting between the Greek poleis left them vulnerable. They were all conquered by Alexander the Great, who then went on to conquer Persia and Egypt.



After the Persian War, many Greek city states (but not Sparta) formed the Delian League to defend against the expected return of the Persians.



Over time, Athens, with its strong navy, came to dominate the Delian League. Athenian dominance over its allies is often called the Athenian Empire.

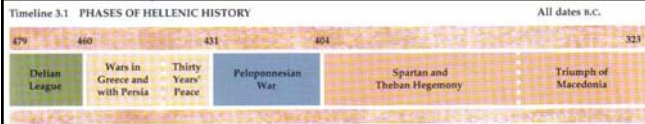
## Pericles (c. 495 – 429 BC)

- A statesman of ancient Greece, who tried to unite Greece under the leadership of his own city, Athens.
- His rule is sometimes known as the Golden Age of Greece.
- Many magnificent buildings, including the Parthenon, were built under his administration.
- He died from plague in Athens early in the Peloponnesian War.



## The Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.)

- Begun when the delicate alliance of Greek city-states fell out of balance.
- Athens and its allies vs. Sparta and the Peloponnesian League.
- Athens, hurt by plague and overextended by fighting abroad, was eventually defeated.



## The Massacre of Melos, 416 BC

- The Athenians offered the Melians an ultimatum: surrender and pay tribute to Athens, or be destroyed.
- "Might makes right."
- Every Melian was either killed or sold into slavery.



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Melian\\_Debate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Melian_Debate)

## Aftermath of the Peloponnesian War

- Athens surrendered to Sparta in 404 BC.
- Sparta ended democracy in Athens and installed a new government known as the "30 Tyrants."
- Sparta was the dominant Greek power for a time, and then Thebes had a turn.
- The result of all the fighting for dominance within the Greek world was that all of the Greek states were weakened and made vulnerable to an outside power...

## Alexander the Great



- A Hellenophile, like his father.
- He was tutored by Aristotle in his youth.
- He conquered most of the ancient world, extending the civilization of Greece east to the Indian subcontinent.
- Alexander founded the city of Alexandria, which became a great center of learning in Egypt.





It was believed that the person who could untie the Gordian knot would rule a vast territory in Asia. After failing in his attempts to find a loose end, Alexander unsheathed his sword and simply sliced it in half.



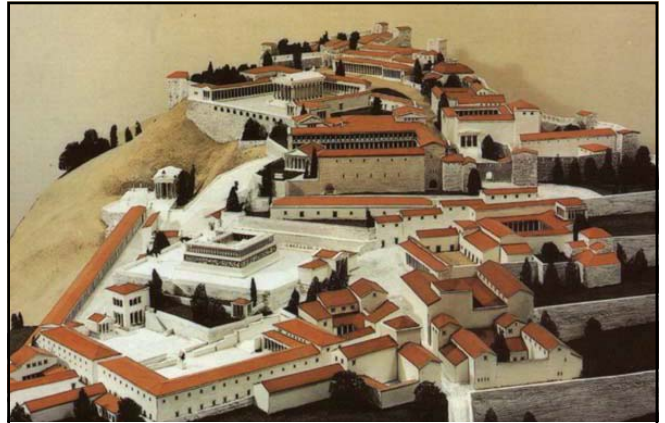
The Empire of Alexander the Great. Alexander's conquests united Eurasia from Greece to India into a cultural and, briefly, a political unity.

Alexander is said to have wept because there were no worlds left to conquer. In 323 BC., he died at the age of 32.

### Hellenistic ("Hellenic-like") Period



The Hellenistic Kingdoms. Alexander's generals split his empire among themselves, creating three major kingdoms sharing a common Greek culture.



Pergamum was modeled after Athens and Athenian culture, except for Athenian democracy.



The Alter of Zeus at Pergamum.



The theater at Pergamum.

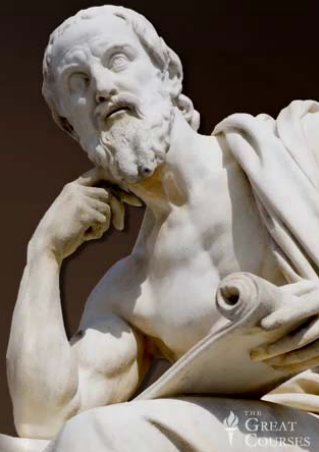
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  - Loss of writing, time of Homer.
- The Archaic Period (c.750-480 BC)
  - Many small self-governing communities rise, a Greek alphabet is adopted from the Phoenicians. Ends with Greek triumph in the Persian Wars, which begins the...
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  - Peak of Greek power and culture, lead by Athens until Athens was defeated in the Peloponnesian War, then Sparta and Thebes. This age ends with Alexander's conquest of Greece.
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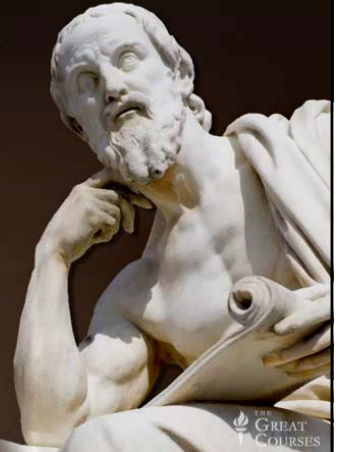
## The Study of History

- What exactly is history?
- What are its purposes and goals?
- How should one do research?
- How and in what form should one present one's findings and conclusions to the reader?

"These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, which he publishes in the hope of preserving for all time the memory of what men have done;

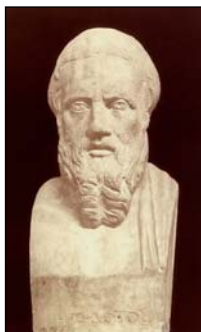


so that the great and noteworthy deeds of both Greeks and non-Greeks shall never lose their proper glory; and to record here the origins of their conflict."



## Herodotus (c. 484 -425 BC)

- The "Father of History"
- Wrote *Histories*, which recorded and analyzed the Persian Wars, which he viewed as West (Europe) vs. East (Asia).
- He has been criticized for bias and inaccuracy, but he laid the groundwork for the future of historical study.



## Thucydides

- Was an Athenian general during the Peloponnesian War
- Wrote the *History of the Peloponnesian War*
- He was much more skeptical and inquiring than Herodotus, writing objectively about Athens and human nature.
- He warned that history could repeat itself if lessons from the past were not learned.

