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Geography & Travel Languages Greek language, Indo-European language spoken primarily in Greece. It has a long and well-documented history—the longest of any Indo-European language—spanning 34 centuries. There is an Ancient phase, subdivided into a Mycenaean period (texts in syllabic script attested from the 14th to the 13th century bce) and Archaic and Classical periods (beginning with the adoption of the alphabet, from the 8th to the 4th century bce); a Hellenistic and Roman phase (4th century bce to 4th century ce); a Byzantine phase (5th to 15th century ce); and a Modern phase.Separate transliteration tables for Classical and Modern Greek accompany this article. Some differences in transliteration result from changes in pronunciation of the Greek language; others reflect convention, as for example the χ (chi or khi), which was transliterated by the Romans as ch (because they lacked the letter k in their usual alphabet). In Modern Greek, however, the standard transliteration for χ is kh. Another difference is the representation of β (bēta or víta); in Classical Greek it is transliterated as b in every instance, and in Modern Greek as v. The pronunciation of Ancient Greek vowels is indicated by the transliteration used by the Romans. Y (upsilon) was written as y by the Romans, indicating that the sound was not identical to the sound of their letter i. Modern Greek υ (ípsilon) is transliterated as i, indicating that the sound used today differs from that of the ancient υ. While it is possible that speakers of Hellenic or pre-Hellenic arrived earlier, there is no linguistic evidence of Hellenic prior to the first half of the 2nd millennium bce on what is now the Greek peninsula, where the language brought by the relevant people(s) developed into Greek. Later, Greek-speaking people occupied most of the islands of the Aegean and, about 1000 bce, the west coast of Anatolia. With few exceptions that is still the area occupied by the Greek language today. In the second quarter of the 1st millennium bce, a vast “colonial” movement took place, resulting in establishments founded by various Greek cities all around the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, especially in southern Italy and Sicily. This extension of the linguistic area of Greek lasted only a few centuries; in the Roman period, Latin, more or less rapidly, took the place of Greek in most of these ancient colonies. After the conquest of Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt by Alexander the Great, Greek was the standard language of the rulers in the new urban centres of these countries until the invasions of the Arabs and the Turks. “Colonial” Greek survived longest at Byzantium, as the official language of the Eastern Empire. Click Here to see full-size tableAncient Greek is, next to Hittite, the Indo-European language with documents going furthest back into the past. By the time it emerged in the second half of the 2nd millennium bce, it had already acquired a completely distinct character from the parent Indo-European language. Its linguistic features place it in a central region on the dialect map that can be reconstructed for Proto-Indo-European; the ancient languages with which it has the most features in common are little-known ones such as Phrygian. In the study of Indo-European dialectology, phonetic data are the most readily available and provide the most information. In this respect the position of Ancient Greek is as follows. The vowels of a and o quality, both short and long, remain distinct, whereas they are completely or partially confused in Hittite, Indo-Iranian, Baltic, Slavic, and Germanic. Greek is the only language that distinguishes by three different qualities (ĕ, ă, ŏ) the secondary short vowels resulting in certain positions from the three laryngeal sounds, *H1, *H2, *H3, of Indo-European. (An asterisk preceding a sound or word indicates that it is not an attested, but a reconstructed, hypothetical form. For a discussion of these laryngeal sounds, see Indo-European languages.) Greek keeps the distinction between the original voiced stops and voiced aspirated stops of Indo-European (e.g., Indo-European *d becomes Greek d, and Indo-European *dh becomes Greek th), whereas Iranian, Slavic, Baltic, and Celtic confuse them. (Some linguists, however, assume that Greek th continues Indo-European th and that Greek d goes back to an Indo-European glottalized stop.) Greek avoids the general shifts of stop consonants that are displayed, independently, by Armenian and Germanic, as well as the change of palatal stops (k, etc.) into affricates (ts, etc.) or spirants (s, etc.) in Indo-Iranian, Armenian, Baltic, and Slavic. In these respects Ancient Greek is conservative, as are, generally speaking, the western Indo-European languages (Italic and Celtic). On the other hand, it does show innovations. One of these, the devoicing of the original voiced aspirated stops, is shared with Italic, although it is realized in different ways (*dh- yields Greek th-, Latin f-, Osco-Umbrian f-), but others are foreign to Italic. The latter include, for example, the weakening of spirants and semivowels at the beginning of words before a vowel, the evolution of *s- to h- (pre-Mycenaean), and *y- to h- (contemporary with Mycenaean). Morphological criteria must, of course, be taken into account in defining the position of a language. It should be noted that there are few grammatical innovations shared by Greek and Italic, apart from the extension to nouns of the pronominal ending of the genitive feminine plural *-āsōm (Greek -āōn; Latin -ārum, Umbrian -aru, Oscan -azum) and of the pronominal ending of the nominative masculine plural *-oi (Greek -oi; Latin -ī). The last innovation, however, is not shared with Osco-Umbrian but is found instead in Germanic (in the strong declension of adjectives) and partly in Celtic. The dialectal individuality of Greek is very clearly marked in the organization of the verb, which is without parallel except for an approximation in Indo-Iranian. Starting from a foreign script known as Linear A (used in Crete to record a native language known as Minoan), the Greeks devised, toward 1500 bce at the latest, a syllabic script to record their own language. Known as Linear B, this script was deciphered in 1952 by the British architect Michael Ventris and the British classicist and linguist John Chadwick. At present more than 100 very short Linear B inscriptions painted on vases have been found in Crete and in continental Greece (e.g., Thebes), where they were imported from Crete. The major source of Linear B inscriptions are some 4,500 unbaked clay tablets found at Knossos (1400–1350 bce—this date has been questioned) and at Thebes, Tiryns, Mycenae, Pylos, and Chania (1250–1200 bce). There are no literary texts and hardly any continuous texts (only a small number of complete sentences exist); the tablets contain accounts of the great Mycenaean palaces and their dependencies, written in the Greek language, in a very concise style. The Linear B syllabary consists of about 90 signs. In principle, each sign represents a syllable beginning with one consonant and ending with a vowel. Thus, there are five different signs for ta, te, ti, to, tu, but there is no sign for the consonant t without a following vowel. As an initial syllable may be formed by just a vowel, there are also signs for a, e, i, o, u. The script does not distinguish r and l, unvoiced and voiced consonants (except for /d-/), and nonaspirated and aspirated consonants, so the sign pa can be read in Greek as pa, ba, or pha. Final consonants are omitted, and consonants followed by other consonants are either omitted or expressed by means of the sign corresponding to the next vowel (e.g., pe-ma for sperma, ta-to-mo for stathmos). Consequently, the spellings are often ambiguous, such as pa-te for pantes and patēr, pa-si for pansi and phāsi. This inconvenient script and the nature of the documents make Mycenaean inscriptions harder to exploit and less rich in data than the later alphabetic inscriptions, but the information that can be gathered on the state of Greek five centuries before Homer, incomplete as it may be, is of capital importance. Another syllabary, distantly related to Linear B, was in use in Cyprus. From the 11th to the 3rd century bce it was used to record a native language of the island (Eteocypriot) as well as Greek. Greek Kitchen is a must-go.Their gyros are some of the best, and definitely the freshest in the city. Greek belongs to the Hellenic branch of the Indo-European language family. It is spoken mainly in Greece and Cyprus, and also in Australia, Albania, Italy, Ukraine, Turkey, Romania and Hungary. It is an official language in Greece and Cyprus, and is recognised as a minority language Albania, Armenia, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine [source]. In 2012 there were about 13.1 million speakers of Greek worldwide, including 10.7 million in Greece, 1.1 million in Cyprus, and 15,200 in Albania. There were about 238,000 Greek speakers in Australia in 2016, and in 1987 there were about 20,000 Greek speakers in Italy [source]. Greek at a glance Native name: ελληνικά (elinika) [elini'ka] Language family: Indo-European, Hellenic Number of speakers: c. 13 million Spoken in: Greece, Albania, Cyprus, and a number of other countries First written: 1500 BC Writing systems: Linear B, Cypriot syllabary, Greek alphabet Status: official language of Greece, an official language of Cyprus, officially recognized as a minority language in parts of Italy, and in Albania, Armenia, Romania and Ukraine. [top] A Brief History of Written Greek Greek was first written in Mycenae with a script known as Linear B, which was used between about 1500 and 1200 BC. This variety of Greek is known as Mycenaean. On Crete another script, known as the Cypriot syllabary, was used to write the local variety of Greek between about 1200 and 300 BC. Greek alphabet (Ελληνικό αλφάβητο) The Greek alphabet has been in continuous use since about 750 BC. It was developed from the Canaanite/Phoenician alphabet and the order and names of the letters are derived from Phoenician. The original Canaanite meanings of the letter names was lost when the alphabet was adapted for Greek. For example, alpha comes for the Canaanite aleph (ox) and beta from beth (house). When the Greeks adapted the Phoenician alphabet to write their language they used five of the Phoenician consonants to represent vowel sounds: yodh () [j] became I (iota), waw () [w] became Y (upsilon), 'aleph () [ʔ] became A (alpha), 'ayin () [ʕ] became O (omicron), and he () [h] became E (epsilon). New letters were also devised: Φ (phi), X (chi) and Ψ (psi). The result was the world's first fully phonemic alphabet which represented both consonant and vowel sounds. At first, there were a number of different versions of the alphabet used in various different Greek cities. These local alphabets, known as epichoric, can be divided into three groups: green, blue and red. The blue group developed into the modern Greek alphabet, while the red group developed into the Etruscan alphabet, other alphabets of ancient Italy and eventually the Latin alphabet. By the early 4th century BC, the epichoric alphabets were replaced by the eastern Ionic alphabet. The capital letters of the modern Greek alphabet are almost identical to those of the Ionic alphabet. The minuscule or lower case letters first appeared sometime after 800 AD and developed from the Byzantine minuscule script, which developed from cursive writing. Today the Greek alphabet is used only to write Greek, however at various times in the past it has been used to write such languages as Lydian, Phrygian, Thracian, Gaulish, Hebrew, Arabic, Old Ossetic, Albanian, Turkish, Aromanian, Gagauz, Surguch and Urum. Notable features Type of writing system: alphabet - the first one to include vowels. Writing direction: Originally written horizontal lines either from right to left or alternating from right to left and left to right (boustrophedon/βουστροφηδόν). Around 500 BC the direction of writing changed to horizontal lines running from left to right. Diacritics to represent stress and breathings were added to the alphabet in around 200 BC. In 1982 the diacritics representing breathings, which were not widely used after 1976, were officially abolished by presidential decree. The letter sigma has a special form which is used when it appears at the end of a word. Used to write: Arvanitic, Bactrian, Cypriot Arabic, Greek, Griko, Karamanli Turkish, Tsakonian [top] Ancient Greek alphabet This alphabet is based on inscriptions from Crete dated to about 800 BC. Greek was written mainly from right to left in horizontal lines at this time. It is uncertain what names were given to the letters, and some letters had more than one form. Source: [top] Greek alphabet (Classical Attic pronunciation) Note Σ = [z] before voiced consonants Archaic letters Learn the Classical Greek alphabet [top] Greek numerals and other symbols The Ancient Greeks had two numeric systems: the Acrophonic or Attic system used the letters iota, delta, gamma, eta, nu and mu in various combinations. These letters were used as they represented the first letters of the number names, with the exception of iota: Γέντε (gente) for 5, which became Πέντε (pente); Δέκα (Deka) for 10, Hἑκατόν (Hektaton) for 100, Χίλιοι (Khilioi) for 1,000 and Μύριον (Myrion) for 10,000. This system was used until the first century BC. The Acrophonic system was replaced by an alphabetic system that assigned numerical values to all the letters of the alphabet. Three obsolete letters, digamma, koppa and sampi, were used in addition to the standard Greek letters, and a apostrophe-like numeral sign was used to indicate that letters were being used as numerals. [top] Modern Greek alphabet Hear the Modern Greek alphabet by Vasiliki Baskos of learn-greek-online.com Hear a recording of Modern Greek pronunciation by Vasiliki Baskos of learn-greek-online.com Greek alphabet learning game Notes Γ = [ɣ] before back vowels [a, o, u]. Before front vowels [e, i], it is pronounced [ʝ] and transliterated y K = [k] before back vowels [a, o, u], and [c] before front vowels [e, i] Λ = [ʎ] before an unstressed i followed by another vowel, e.g. λιώμα [ʎóma] N = [ɲ] before an unstressed i followed by another vowel, e.g. νιώθω [ɲóθo] When the sound [i] is preceded by a voiced consonant and followed by another vowel, it becomes [ʝ], e.g. διάκος [ðjákos]. When it is preceded by a voiceless consonont and followed by another vowel it is pronounced as [ç], e.g. φωτιά [fotçá]. In both cases it is not stressed. Σ = [z] before voiced consonants X = [χ] before back vowels [a, o, u], and [ç] before front vowels [e, i] Download Greek alphabet charts in Excel, Word or PDF format Notes αυ = [av] before vowels and voiced consonants; [af] elsewhere. ευ = [ev] before vowels and voiced consonants; [ef] elsewhere. ηυ = [iv] before vowels and voiced consonants; [if] elsewhere. ντ = [nd] in the middle of words; [d] at the beginning. μπ = [mb] in the middle of words; [b] at the beginning. γγ & γκ = [ŋk] in the middle of words; [g] or [ʝ] at the beginning of words and in some loanwords, and [ŋg] or [ɲʝ] elsewhere, although in informal speech they are often pronounced [g] or [ʝ] elsewhere. A dieresis is used to indicate that vowels are pronounced separately, e.g. Αϊτή [aití]. However, when the first of the two letters is stressed, the dieresis sign is not necessary, e.g. γάιδαρος [ɣáiðaros]. When κ, π, τ, ξ, ψ and σ are preceded by a word that ends in ν they become voiced and the final N turns into the corresponding nasal sound, e.g. τον πατέρα [tombatéra]. [top] Sample text in Greek Transliteration Óli i ánthropi yeniúnde eléftheri ke ísi stin aksioprépia ke ta dhikeómata. Íne prikizméni me loyikí ke sinídhisi, ke ofílun na simberiféronde metaksí tus me pnévma adhelfosínis. A recording of this text by Ευτυχία Παναγιώτου (Eftychia Panayiotou) Another recording of this text by Χρήστος Παπαδόπουλος (Christos Papadopoulos) Sample text in Polytonic Greek Sample text in handwritten Greek Font from: Translation All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. (Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) Corrections and notes on pronunciation provided by Δημήτρης Χριστούλιας (Dimitris Christoulias) [top] Sample videos in Greek Information about Greek | Phrases | Numbers | Family words | Time | Idioms | Proverbs | Tongue twisters | Tower of Babel | Articles | Links | Learning materials | Books about the Greek alphabet Information about Ancient Greek Information about Greek (Ancient and Modern) | Phrases | Numbers | Tower of Babel [top] Links Information about the Greek language Information about Greek numbering systems Online Greek lessons (Modern) (Modern) (Modern) (Modern) (Modern) (Modern) (Modern) (Modern) (Modern) (Modern) (Modern/Ancient) (New Testament) ancgreek/ (Ancient) (Ancient) Ask Greek - the place to ask questions about the Greek language Learn Greek Online via Skype - Learn Greek online with GreekPod101 - Learn Greek with Glossika - Greek Electronic talking dictionaries - Greek learning software - Find Greek Tutors with LanguaTalk More Greek links ALPHABETUM - a Unicode font for ancient scripts, including Classical & Medieval Latin, Ancient Greek, Etruscan, Oscan, Umbrian, Faliscan, Messapic, Picene, Iberian, Celtiberian, Gothic, Runic, Old & Middle English, Hebrew, Sanskrit, Old Nordic, Ogham, Kharosthi, Glagolitic, Anatolian scripts, Phoenician, Brahmi, Imperial Aramaic, Old Turkic, Old Permic, Ugaritic, Linear B, Phaistos Disc, Meroitic, Coptic, Cypriot and Avestan. Hellenic languages Greek, Griko, Pontic Greek, Tsakonian, Yevanic Languages written with the Greek alphabet Arvanitic, Bactrian, Cypriot Arabic, Greek, Griko, Karamanli Turkish, Tsakonian Alphabets A-chik Tokbirim, Adinkra, ADLaM, Armenian, Avestan, Avoiuli, Bactrian, Bassa (Vah), Beitha Kukju, Beria (Zaghawa), Borama / Gadabuursi, Carian, Carpathian Basin Rovas, Chinuk pipa, Chisoi, Coorgi-Cox, Coptic, Cyrillic, Dalecarlian runes, Elbasan, Etruscan, Faliscan, Fox, Galik, Georgian (Asomtavruli), Georgian (Nuskhuri), Georgian (Mkhedruli), Glagolitic, Global Alphabet, Gothic, Greek, Hurûf-ı munfasıla, Irish (Uncial), Kaddare, Kayah Li, Khatt-i-Badí’, Khazarian Rovas, Koch, Korean, Latin, Lepontic, Luo Lakeside Script, Lycian, Lydian, Manchu, Mandaic, Mandombe, Marsiliana, Medefaidrin, Messapic, Mongolian, Mro, Mundari Bani, Nag Chiki, Naasioi Otomaung, N'Ko, North Picene, Novo Tupi, Nyiakeng Puachue Hmong, Odùduwà, Ogham, Old Church Slavonic, Oirat Clear Script, Ol Chiki (Ol Cemet' / Santali), Old Italic, Old Nubian, Old Permic, Ol Onal, Orkhon, Osage, Oscan, Osmanya (Somali), Pau Cin Hau, Phrygian, Pollard script, Runic, Székely-Hungarian Rovás (Hungarian Runes), South Picene, Sutton SignWriting, Sunuwar, Tai Viet, Tangsa, Todhri, Toto, Umbrian, (Old) Uyghur, Wancho, Yezidi, Zoulai Other writing systems Page last modified: 08.06.25 [top] You can support this site by Buying Me A Coffee, and if you like what you see on this page, you can use the buttons below to share it with people you know. If you like this site and find it useful, you can support it by making a donation via PayPal or Patreon, or by contributing in other ways. Omniglot is how I make my living. Note: all links on this site to Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk and Amazon.fr are affiliate links. This means I earn a commission if you click on any of them and buy something. So by clicking on these links you can help to support this site. [top] Subscribe to topic Subscribe to author Print Article PDF The Greek City-states c. 500 BCE Greece is a country in southeastern Europe, known in Greek as Hellas or Ellada, and consisting of a mainland and an archipelago of islands. Ancient Greece is the birthplace of Western philosophy (Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), literature (Homer and Hesiod), mathematics (Pythagoras and Euclid), history (Herodotus), drama (Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes), the Olympic Games, and democracy. The concept of an atomic universe was first posited in Greece through the work of Democritus and Leucippus. The process of today's scientific method was first introduced through the work of Thales of Miletus and those who followed him. The Latin alphabet also comes from ancient Greece, having been introduced to the region during the Phoenician colonization in the 8th century BCE, and early work in physics and engineering was pioneered by Archimedes, of the Greek colony of Syracuse, among others. Mainland Greece is a large peninsula surrounded on three sides by the Mediterranean Sea (branching into the Ionian Sea in the west and the Aegean Sea in the east) which also comprises the islands known as the Cyclades and the Dodecanese (including Rhodes), the Ionian islands (including Corcyra), the isle of Crete, and the southern peninsula known as the Peloponnese. The Greeks became skilled seafaring people & traders who built some of the most impressive structures in antiquity. The geography of Greece greatly influenced the culture in that, with few natural resources and surrounded by water, the people eventually took to the sea for their livelihood. Mountains cover 80 percent of Greece and only small rivers run through a rocky landscape which, for the most part, provides little encouragement for agriculture. Consequently, the early ancient Greeks colonized neighboring islands and founded settlements along the coast of Anatolia (also known as Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey). The Greeks became skilled seafaring people and traders who, possessing an abundance of raw materials for construction in stone, and great skill, built some of the most impressive structures in antiquity. Etymology of Hellas The designation Hellas derives from Hellen, the son of Deucalion and Pyrrha who feature prominently in Ovid's tale of the Great Flood in his Metamorphoses. The mythical Deucalion (son of the fire-bringing titan Prometheus) was the savior of the human race from the Great Flood, in the same way Noah is presented in the biblical version or Utnapishtim in the Mesopotamian one. Deucalion and Pyrrha repopulate the land once the floodwaters have receded by casting stones which become people, the first being Hellen. Contrary to popular opinion, Hellas and Ellada have nothing to do with Helen of Troy from Homer's Iliad. Ovid, however, did not coin the designation. Thucydides writes, in Book I of his Histories: I am inclined to think that the very name was not as yet given to the whole country, and in fact did not exist at all before the time of Hellen, the son of Deucalion; the different tribes, of which the Pelasgian was the most widely spread, gave their own names to different districts. But when Hellen and his sons became powerful in Phthiotis, their aid was invoked by other cities, and those who associated with them gradually began to be called Hellenes, though a long time elapsed before the name was prevalent over the whole country. Of this, Homer affords the best evidence; for he, although he lived long after the Trojan War, nowhere uses this name collectively, but confines it to the followers of Achilles from Phthiotis, who were the original Hellenes; when speaking of the entire host, he calls them Danãans, or Argives, or Achaeans. Early History of Ancient Greece Ancient Greek history is most easily understood by dividing it into time periods. The region was already settled, and agriculture initiated, during the Paleolithic era as evidenced by finds at Petralona and Franchthi caves (two of the oldest human habitations in the world). The Neolithic Age (c. 6000 - c. 2900 BCE) is characterized by permanent settlements (primarily in northern Greece), domestication of animals, and the further development of agriculture. Archaeological finds in northern Greece (Thessaly, Macedonia, and Sesklo, among others) suggest a migration from Anatolia in that the ceramic cups and bowls and figures found there share qualities distinctive to Neolithic finds in Anatolia. These inland settlers were primarily farmers, as northern Greece was more conducive to agriculture than elsewhere in the region, and lived in one-room stone houses with a roof of timber and clay daubing. The Cycladic Civilization (c. 3200-1100 BCE) flourished in the islands of the Aegean Sea (including Delos, Naxos, and Paros) and provides the earliest evidence of continual human habitation in that region. During the Cycladic Period, houses and temples were built of finished stone and the people made their living through fishing and trade. This period is usually divided into three phases: Early Cycladic, Middle Cycladic, and Late Cycladic with a steady development in art and architecture. The latter two phases overlap and finally merge with the Minoan Civilization, and differences between the periods become indistinguishable. Cycladic Figurine c. 2400 BCE The Minoan Civilization (2700-1500 BCE) developed on the island of Crete, and rapidly became the dominant sea power in the region. The term 'Minoan' was coined by the archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans, who uncovered the Minoan palace of Knossos in 1900 CE and named the culture for the ancient Cretan king Minos. The name by which the people knew themselves is not known. The Minoan Civilization was thriving, as the Cycladic Civilization seems to have been, long before the accepted modern dates which mark its existence and probably earlier than 6000 BCE. The Minoans developed a writing system known as Linear A (which has not yet been deciphered) and made advances in shipbuilding, construction, ceramics, the arts and sciences, and warfare. King Minos was credited by ancient historians (Thucydides among them) as being the first person to establish a navy with which he colonized, or conquered, the Cyclades. Archaeological and geological evidence on Crete suggests this civilization fell due to an overuse of the land causing deforestation though, traditionally, it is accepted that they were conquered by the Mycenaeans. The eruption of the volcano on the nearby island of Thera (modern-day Santorini) between 1650 and 1550 BCE and the resulting tsunami is acknowledged as the final cause for the fall of the Minoans. The isle of Crete was deluged and the cities and villages destroyed. This event has been frequently cited as Plato's inspiration in creating his myth of Atlantis in his dialogues of the Critias and Timaeus. The Mycenaeans & Their Gods The Mycenaean Civilization (approximately 1900-1100 BCE) is commonly acknowledged as the beginning of Greek culture, even though we know almost nothing about the Mycenaeans save what can be determined through archaeological finds and through Homer's account of their war with Troy as recorded in the Iliad. They are credited with establishing the culture owing primarily to their architectural advances, their development of a writing system (known as Linear B, an early form of Greek descended from the Minoan Linear A), and the establishment, or enhancement of, religious rites. The Mycenaeans appear to have been greatly influenced by the Minoans of Crete in their worship of earth goddesses and sky gods, which, in time, become the classical Greek pantheon. Greek mythology provided a solid paradigm of the creation of the universe, the world, and human beings. An early myth relates how, in the beginning, there was nothing but chaos in the form of unending waters. From this chaos came the goddess Eurynome who separated the water from the air and began her dance of creation with the serpent Ophion. From their dance, all of creation sprang and Eurynome was, originally, the Great Mother Goddess and Creator of All Things. By the time Hesiod and Homer were writing (8th century BCE), this story had changed into the more familiar myth concerning the titans, Zeus' war against them, and the birth of the Olympian Gods with Zeus as their chief. This shift indicates a movement from a matriarchal religion to a patriarchal paradigm. Whichever model was followed, however, the gods clearly interacted regularly with the humans who worshipped them and were a large part of daily life in ancient Greece. Prior to the coming of the Romans, the only road in mainland Greece that was not a cow path was the Sacred Way which ran between the city of Athens and the holy city of Eleusis, the birthplace of the Eleusinian Mysteries celebrating the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone. Greater Propylaea of Eleusis By 1100 BCE, around the time of the Bronze Age Collapse, the great Mycenaean cities of southwest Greece were abandoned and, some claim, their civilization destroyed by an invasion of Doric Greeks. Archaeological evidence is inconclusive as to what led to the fall of the Mycenaeans. As no written records of this period survive (or have yet to be unearthed) one may only speculate on causes. The tablets of Linear B script found thus far contain only lists of goods bartered in trade or kept in stock. It seems clear, however, that after what is known as the Greek Dark Ages (approximately 1100-800 BCE, so named because of the absence of written documentation) Greek colonization was ongoing in much of Asia Minor, and the islands surrounding mainland Greece and began to make significant cultural advances. Beginning in c. 585 BCE the first Greek philosopher, Thales of Miletus, was engaged in what, today, would be recognized as scientific inquiry on the Asia Minor coast, and this region of Ionian colonies would make significant breakthroughs in Greek philosophy and mathematics. From the Archaic to the Classical Periods Greece reached the heights in almost every area of human learning during the Classical Period. The Archaic Period (800-500 BCE) is characterized by the introduction of republics instead of monarchies (which, in Athens, moved toward democratic rule) organized as a single city-state or polis, the institution of laws (Draco's reforms in Athens), the great Panathenaic Festival was established, distinctive Greek pottery and Greek sculpture were born, and the first coins minted on the island kingdom of Aegina. This, then, set the stage for the flourishing of the Classical Period of ancient Greece given as 500-400 BCE or, more precisely, as 480-323 BCE, from the Greek victory at the Battle of Salamis to the death of Alexander the Great. This was the Golden Age of Athens, when Pericles initiated the building of the Acropolis and spoke his famous eulogy for the men who died defending Greece at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE. Greece reached the heights in almost every area of human learning during this time and the great thinkers and artists of antiquity (Phidias, Plato, Aristophanes, to mention only three) flourished. Leonidas and his 300 Spartans fell at Thermopylae and, the same year (480 BCE), Themistocles won victory over the superior Persian naval fleet at Salamis leading to the final defeat of the Persians at the Battle of Plataea in 479 BCE. Democracy (literally Demos = people and Kratos = power, so power of the people) was established in Athens allowing all male citizens over the age of twenty a voice in the Greek government. The Pre-Socratic philosophers, following Thales' lead, initiated what would become the scientific method in exploring natural phenomena. Men like Anaximander, Anaximenes, Pythagoras, Democritus, Xenophanes, and Heraclitus abandoned the theistic model of the universe and strove to uncover the underlying, first cause of life and the universe. Their successors, among whom were Euclid and Archimedes, continued to advance Greek science and philosophical inquiry and further established mathematics as a serious discipline. The example of Socrates and the writings of Plato and Aristotle after him have influenced western culture and society for over two thousand years. This period also saw advances in architecture and art with a movement away from the ideal to the realistic. Famous works of Greek sculpture such as the Parthenon Marbles and Discobolos (the discus thrower) date from this time and epitomize the artist's interest in depicting human emotion, beauty, and accomplishment realistically, even if those qualities are presented in works featuring immortals. All of these developments in culture were made possible by the ascent of Athens following the victory over the Persians in 480 BCE. The peace and prosperity which followed the Persian defeat provided the finances and stability for culture to flourish. Athens became the superpower of the day and, with the most powerful navy, was able to demand tribute from other city-states and enforce its wishes. Athens formed the Delian League, a defensive alliance whose stated purpose was to deter the Persians from further hostilities. The city-state of Sparta, however, doubted Athenian sincerity and formed their own association for protection against their enemies, the Peloponnesian League (so named for the Peloponnese region where Sparta and the others were located). The city-states which sided with Sparta increasingly perceived Athens as a bully and a tyrant, while those cities which sided with Athens viewed Sparta and its allies with growing distrust. The tension between these two parties eventually erupted in what has become known as the Peloponnesian Wars. The first conflict (c. 460-445 BCE) ended in a truce and continued prosperity for both parties while the second (431-404 BCE) left Athens in ruins and Sparta, the victor, bankrupt after her protracted war with Thebes. Sign up for our free weekly email newsletter! This time is generally referred to as the Late Classical Period (c. 400-330 BCE). The power vacuum left by the fall of these two cities was filled by Philip II of Macedon (382-336 BCE) after his victory over the Athenian forces and their allies at the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 BCE. Philip united the Greek city-states under Macedonian rule and, upon his assassination in 336 BCE, his son Alexander assumed the throne. Alexander the Great & the Coming of Rome Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE) carried on his father's plans for a full scale invasion of Persia in retaliation for their invasion of Greece in 480 BCE. As he had almost the whole of Greece under his command, a standing army of considerable size and strength, and a full treasury, Alexander did not need to bother with allies nor with consulting anyone regarding his plan for invasion and so led his army into Egypt, across Asia Minor, through Persia, and finally to India. Tutored in his youth by Plato's great student Aristotle, Alexander would spread the ideals of Greek civilization through his conquests and, in so doing, transmitted Greek art, philosophy, culture, and language to every region he came in contact with. Alexander the Great [Profile View] In 323 BCE Alexander died and his vast empire was divided between four of his generals. This initiated what has come to be known to historians as the Hellenistic Period (323-31 BCE) during which Greek thought and culture became dominant in the various regions under these generals' influence. After the wars of the Diadochi ('the successors' as Alexander's generals came to be known), Antigonus I established the Antigonid Dynasty in Greece which he then lost. It was regained by his grandson, Antigonus II Gonatas, by 276 BCE who ruled the country from his palace at Macedon. The Roman Republic became increasingly involved in the affairs of Greece during this time and, in 168 BCE, defeated Macedon at the Battle of Pydna. After this date, Greece steadily came under the influence of Rome. In 146 BCE, the region was designated a Protectorate of Rome and Romans began to emulate Greek fashion, philosophy and, to a certain extent, sensibilities. In 31 BCE Octavian Caesar annexed the country as a province of Rome following his victory over Mark Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium. Octavian became Augustus Caesar and Greece a part of the Roman Empire. Did you like this definition? This human-authored article has been reviewed by our editorial team before publication to ensure accuracy, reliability and adherence to academic standards in accordance with our editorial policy. Brendan Nagle, D. The Ancient World. Pearson, 2009. Durant, W. Caesar and Christ. Simon and Schuster, 1972. Durant, W. The Life of Greece. Simon & Schuster, 2011. Graves, R. The Greek Myths. Penguin, NY, 1993 The Internet Classics Archive | The History of Herodotus by Herodotus, accessed 1 Dec 2016. Thucydides Book I, accessed 1 Dec 2016. Waterfield, R. The First Philosophers. Oxford University Press, USA, 2009. World History Encyclopedia is an Amazon Associate and earns a commission on qualifying book purchases. World History Encyclopedia is a non-profit organization. Please support free history education for millions of learners worldwide for only $5 per month by becoming a member. Thank you! Become a Member Donate Submitted by Joshua J. Mark, published on 13 November 2013. The copyright holder has published this content under the following license: Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike. This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon this content non-commercially, as long as they credit the author and license their new creations under the identical terms. When republishing on the web a hyperlink back to the original content source URL must be included. Please note that content linked from this page may have different licensing terms. Add Event Visual Timeline Neolithic Age settlements in Greece, beginning of agriculture. The Cycladic Civilization in Greece. Bronze is used in the Aegean. The Minoan Civilization flourishes on Crete, Greece. King Minos establishes the first navy in the region. Early Greeks settle the Peloponnese. Minoan civilization in Crete and the Aegean. Mycenaean civilization in Greece and the Aegean. Eruption of Thera and consequent tidal waves, destruction of Akrotiri and other Aegean centres. Greeks implement use of individual tombs and graves. Dorian peoples occupy Greece. The first distinctive Greek pottery is produced, the Proto-geometric style. Sparta is founded. The Geometric style of Greek pottery is first produced. Homer of Greece writes his Iliad and Odyssey. Greek colonization of the Mediterranean and Black Sea. Archaic period of Greece. Greek poleis or city-states establish colonies in Magna Graecia. Corinth founds the colony of Syracuse in Sicily. List of annual archons at Athens begins. Pheidon is tyrant in Argos. The Kypselidai are tyrants of Corinth. Sparta crushes Messenian revolt. Earliest large scale Greek marble sculpture. Age of law-givers in Greece. Black-figure pottery created in Corinth. The orientalizing style of Greek pottery becomes popular in Corinth. In Athens the archon Solon lays the foundations for democracy. Carthage and Greece fight for dominance in Sicily. Pisistratos becomes tyrant in Athens for the first time. Peloponnesian League alliance between Sparta, Corinth, Elis and Tegea which establishes Spartan hegemony over the Peloponnese. Persian conquest of Ionian Greek city-states. Etruscan & Carthaginian alliance expels the Greeks from Corsica. Polycrates rules as tyrant of Samos. The Andokides Painter invents red-figure pottery. Red-figure pottery style takes precedent over black-figure. Life of Greek tragedy poet Aeschylus. Darius I (Darius the Great) succeeds to the throne of Persia after the death of Cambyses II. Fall of the Peisistratid tyranny in Athens. The tyrant of Athens Hipparchos is killed by Harmodios and Aristogeiton - the 'tyrannicides'. Reforms by Cleisthenes establishes democracy in Athens. Ionian cities rebel against Persian rule. Ionians and Greek allies invade and burn Sardis (capital of Lydia). Alexander I reigns as king of Macedon. Birth of Pericles. Darius I of Persia invades Greece. A combined force of Greek hoplites defeat the Persians at Marathon. Archons begin to be appointed by lot in Athens. Xerxes succeeds to the throne of Persia after the death of Darius I. Life of Greek tragedy poet Euripides. Themistocles persuades the Athenians to significantly expand their fleet, which saves them at Salamis and becomes their source of power. The Classical Period in Greece. Xerxes I makes extensive preparations to invade mainland Greece by building depots, canals and a boat bridge across the Hellespont. The indecisive battle of Artemision between the Greek and Persian fleets of Xerxes I. The Greeks withdraw to Salamis. Battle of Thermopylae. 300 Spartans under King Leonidas and other Greek allies hold back the Persians led by Xerxes I for three days but are defeated. Battle of Salamis where the Greek naval fleet led by Themistocles defeats the invading armada of Xerxes I of Persia. Xerxes' Persian forces are defeated by Greek forces at Plataea effectively ending Persia's imperial ambitions in Greece. The period of Thucydides' Pentecontaetia in ancient Greece. Sparta withdraws from alliance against Persia. The Delian League in Greece, led by Athens. Life of Socrates. Pericles introduces democratic institutions in Athens. First Peloponnesian War. Life of Greek comic poet Aristophanes. Period of full and direct citizen democracy in Athens. Hegemony of Athens over central Greece. Thirty years peace between Argos and Sparta. Life of Athenian statesman and general Alcibiades. Peace is agreed on by Athens and Persia, sometimes referred to as the Peace of Callias. Ionian cities become independent from Persia under the Peace of Callias. Peace between Greece and Persia. The construction of the Parthenon in Athens by the architects Iktinos and Kallikrates under the direction of Phidias. Thirty years peace between Athens and Peloponnesians. The 2nd Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta (the Delian League and the Peloponnesian League) which involved all of Greece. The Histories of Herodotus is published. The work is divided into nine chapters, each dedicated to one of the Muses. Life of Plato. Peace of Nicias, a truce between the Delian and Peloponnesian Leagues. Democritos develops an atomic theory of matter. Sparta allies with Persia. End of the Peloponnesian war, Athens defeated By Sparta at Aigospotamoi, Rule of the Thirty Tyrants in Athens. Pepper is known in Greece. The Late Classical Period in Greece. Trial and death of the philosopher Socrates, who taught in the court of the Agora. Plato travels in Egypt, Cyrene, Italy, Syracuse and Sicily. The Corinthian Wars between Sparta and an alliance of Athens, Corinth, Argos, Boeotia and Thebes. Life of Aristotle. Life of Athenian statesman Demosthenes. Plato founds his Academy outside of Athens. Thebes, led by Epaminondas, defeats Sparta in the Battle of Leuctra. Thebes is the dominant city-state in Greece. Reign of Philip II of Macedon. Third Social War in Greece. Life of Alexander the Great. The Scythians have absorbed a lot of Greek culture; Scythian artefacts show Greek-style depictions. Plato dies at his Academy. King Philip II of Macedon summons Aristotle to tutor his young son Alexander (later 'The Great'). Reign of Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great invades the Persian Achaemenid Empire. Egypt is conquered by Alexander the Great without resistance. Hellenistic civilization in Greece, the Mediterranean and Asia. The Hellenistic Age. Greek thought and culture infuses with indigenous people. Last recorded examples of Attic Red-Figure Pottery. Assassination of Roxanne and Alexander IV, wife and son of Alexander the Great. Founding of the Achaean League in the Peloponnese of Greece. Aristarchus of Samos proposes a heliocentric world view. Rome defeats Macedon at Battle of Pydna. Rome sacks