

## ANCIENT GREECE

Ancient Greece is the civilization belonging to the period of Greek history lasting from the Archaic period of the 8th to 6th centuries BC to 146 BC and the Roman conquest of Greece after the Battle of Corinth. At the center of this time period is Classical Greece, which flourished during the 5th to 4th centuries BC, at first under Athenian leadership successfully repelling the military threat of Persian invasion. The Athenian Golden Age ends with the defeat of Athens at the hands of Sparta in the Peloponnesian War in 404 BC.

*Chronology.* There are no fixed or universally agreed upon dates for the beginning or the end of Classical Antiquity. It is typically taken to last from the 8th century BC until the 6th century AD, or for about 1300 years.

Classical Antiquity in Greece is preceded by the Greek Dark Ages (c.1100-c.750 BC), archaeologically characterised by the proto-geometric and geometric style of designs on pottery, succeeded by the Orientalizing Period, a strong influence of Syro-Hittite, Assyrian, Phoenician and Egyptian cultures.

Traditionally, the Archaic period of Ancient Greece is taken in the wake of this strong Orientalizing influence during the 8th century BC, which among other things brought the alphabetic script to Greece, marking the beginning of Greek literature (Homer, Hesiod). The Archaic period gives way to the Classical period around 500 BC, in turn succeeded by the Hellenistic period at the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC.

The history of Greece during Classical Antiquity may thus be subdivided into the following periods [1]:

- The Archaic period (c.750-c.500 BC) follows, in which artists made larger free-standing sculptures in stiff, hieratic poses with the dreamlike “*archaic smile*”. The Archaic period is often taken to end with the overthrow of the last tyrant of Athens in 510 BC.

- The Classical period (c.500-323 BC) is characterised by a style which was considered by later observers to be exemplary (i.e. “*classical*”) - for instance the Parthenon. Politically, the Classical Period was dominated by Athens and the Delian League during the 5th century, displaced by Spartan hegemony during the early 4th century BC, before

power shifted to Thebes and the Boeotian League and finally to the League of Corinth led by Macedon.

- The Hellenistic period (323-146 BC) is when Greek culture and power expanded into the near and middle east. This period begins with the death of Alexander and ends with the Roman conquest.

- Roman Greece, the period between Roman victory over the Corinthians at the Battle of Corinth in 146 BC and the establishment of Byzantium by Constantine as the capital of the Roman Empire in 330 AD.

- the final phase of Antiquity is the period of Christianization during the later 4th to early 6th centuries, taken to be complete with the closure of the Neoplatonic Academy by Justinian I in 529 AD.

*History.* In the 8th century BC, Greece began to emerge from the Dark Ages which followed the fall of the Mycenaean civilization. Literacy had been lost and Mycenaean script forgotten, but the Greeks adopted the Phoenician alphabet, modifying it to create the Greek alphabet. From about the 9th century BC written records begin to appear [2]. Greece was divided into many small self-governing communities, a pattern largely dictated by Greek geography, where every island, valley and plain is cut off from its neighbours by the sea or mountain ranges [3].

The Lelantine War (c.710 - c.650 BC) was an ongoing conflict with the distinction of being the earliest documented war of the ancient Greek period. It was fought between the important poleis (city-states) of Chalcis and Eretria over the fertile Lelantine plain of Euboea. Both cities seem to have suffered a decline as result of the long war, though Chalcis was the nominal victor.

A mercantile class rose in the first half of the 7th century, shown by the introduction of coinage in about 680 BC. This seems to have introduced tension to many city states. The aristocratic regimes which generally governed the poleis were threatened by the new-found wealth of merchants, who in turn desired political power. From 650 BC onwards, the aristocracies had to fight not to be overthrown and replaced by populist tyrants. The word derives from the non-pejorative Greek τύραννος tyrannos, meaning “*illegitimate ruler*”, although this was applicable to both good and bad leaders alike [4-5].

A growing population and shortage of land also seems to have created internal strife between the poor and the rich in many city states. In Sparta, the Messenian Wars resulted in the conquest of Messenia and enslavement of the Messenians, beginning in the latter half of the 8th

century BC, an act without precedent or antecedent in ancient Greece. This practice allowed a social revolution to occur [6]. The subjugated population, thenceforth known as helots, farmed and laboured for Sparta, whilst every Spartan male citizen became a soldier of the Spartan Army in a permanently militarized state. Even the elite were obliged to live and train as soldiers; this equality between rich and poor served to diffuse the social conflict. These reforms, attributed to the shadowy Lycurgus of Sparta, were probably complete by 650 BC.

Athens suffered a land and agrarian crisis in the late 7th century, again resulting in civil strife. The Archon (chief magistrate) Draco made severe reforms to the law code in 621 BC (hence Draconian), but these failed to quell the conflict. Eventually the moderate reforms of Solon (594 BC), improving the lot of the poor but firmly entrenching the aristocracy in power, gave Athens some stability.

By the 6th century BC several cities had emerged as dominant in Greek affairs: Athens, Sparta, Corinth, and Thebes. Each of them had brought the surrounding rural areas and smaller towns under their control, and Athens and Corinth had become major maritime and mercantile powers as well.

Rapidly increasing population in the 8th and 7th centuries had resulted in emigration of many Greeks to form colonies in Magna Graecia (Southern Italy and Sicily), Asia Minor and further afield. The emigration effectively ceased in the 6th century by which time the Greek world had, culturally and linguistically, become much larger than the area of present-day Greece. Greek colonies were not politically controlled by their founding cities, although they often retained religious and commercial links with them.

In this period, huge economic development occurred in Greece and also her overseas colonies which experienced a growth in commerce and manufacturing. There was a large improvement in the living standards of the population. Some studies estimate that the average size of the Greek household, in the period from 800 BC to 300 BC, increased five times, which indicates a large increase in the average income of the population.

In the second half of the 6th century, Athens fell under the tyranny of Peisistratos and then his sons Hippias and Hipparchos. However, in 510 BC, at the instigation of the Athenian aristocrat Cleisthenes, the Spartan king Cleomenes I helped the Athenians overthrow the tyranny. Afterwards, Sparta and Athens promptly turned on each other, at which point Cleomenes I installed Isagoras as a pro-Spartan archon. Eager to

prevent Athens from becoming a Spartan puppet, Cleisthenes responded by proposing to his fellow citizens that Athens undergo a revolution: that all citizens share in political power, regardless of status: that Athens become a “*democracy*”. So enthusiastically did the Athenians take to this idea that, having overthrown Isagoras and implemented Cleisthenes’s reforms, they were easily able to repel a Spartan-led three-pronged invasion aimed at restoring Isagoras [7]. The advent of the democracy cured many of the ills of Athens and led to a “*golden age*” for the Athenians.

*Classical Greece.* Athens and Sparta would soon have to become allies in the face of the largest external threat ancient Greece would see until the Roman conquest. After suppressing the Ionian Revolt, a rebellion of the Greek cities of Ionia, Darius I of Persia, King of Kings of the Achaemenid Empire, decided to subjugate Greece. His invasion in 490 BC was ended by the heroic Athenian victory at the Battle of Marathon under Miltiades the Younger.

Xerxes I of Persia, son and successor of Darius I, attempted his own invasion 10 years later, but despite his overwhelmingly large army he was defeated after the famous rearguard action at Thermopylae and victories for the allied Greeks at the Battles of Salamis and Plataea. The Greco-Persian Wars continued until 449 BC, led by the Athenians and their Delian League, during which time the Macedon, Thrace, the Aegean Islands and Ionia were all liberated from Persian influence.

The dominant position of the maritime Athenian “*Empire*” threatened Sparta and the Peloponnesian League of mainland Greek cities. Inevitably, this led to conflict, resulting in the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC). Though effectively a stalemate for much of the war, Athens suffered a number of setbacks. The Plague of Athens in 430 BC followed by a disastrous military campaign known as the Sicilian Expedition severely weakened Athens. An estimated one-third of Athenians died, including Pericles, their leader [8].

Sparta was able to foment rebellion amongst Athens’s allies, further reducing the Athenian ability to wage war. The decisive moment came in 405 BC when Sparta cut off the grain supply to Athens from the Hellespont. Forced to attack, the crippled Athenian fleet was decisively defeated by the Spartans under the command of Lysander at Aegospotami. In 404 BC Athens sued for peace, and Sparta dictated a predictably stern settlement: Athens lost her city walls (including the Long Walls), her fleet, and all of her overseas possessions.

Greece thus entered the 4th century under a Spartan hegemony, but it was clear from the start that this was weak. A demographic crisis meant Sparta was overstretched, and by 395 BC Athens, Argos, Thebes, and Corinth felt able to challenge Spartan dominance, resulting in the Corinthian War (395-387 BC). Another war of stalemates, it ended with the status quo restored, after the threat of Persian intervention on behalf of the Spartans.

The Spartan hegemony lasted another 16 years, until, when attempting to impose their will on the Thebans, the Spartans suffered a decisive defeat at Leuctra in 371 BC. The Theban general Epaminondas then led Theban troops into the Peloponnese, whereupon other city-states defected from the Spartan cause. The Thebans were thus able to march into Messenia and free the population.

Deprived of land and its serfs, Sparta declined to a second-rank power. The Theban hegemony thus established was short-lived; at the battle of Mantinea in 362 BC, Thebes lost her key leader, Epaminondas, and much of her manpower, even though they were victorious in battle. In fact such were the losses to all the great city-states at Mantinea that none could establish dominance in the aftermath.

The weakened state of the heartland of Greece coincided with the Rise of Macedon, led by Philip II. In twenty years, Philip had unified his kingdom, expanded it north and west at the expense of Illyrian tribes, and then conquered Thessaly and Thrace. His success stemmed from his innovative reforms to the Macedon army. Phillip intervened repeatedly in the affairs of the southern city-states, culminating in his invasion of 338 BC.

Decisively defeating an allied army of Thebes and Athens at the Battle of Chaeronea (338 BC), he became de facto hegemon of all of Greece. He compelled the majority of the city-states to join the League of Corinth, allying them to him, and preventing them from warring with each other. Philip then entered into war against the Achaemenid Empire but was assassinated by Pausanias of Orestis early on in the conflict.

Alexander, son and successor of Philip, continued the war. Alexander defeated Darius III of Persia and completely destroyed the Achaemenid Empire, annexing it to Macedon and earning himself the epithet "*the Great*". When Alexander died in 323 BC, Greek power and influence was at its zenith. However, there had been a fundamental shift away from the fierce independence and classical culture of the poleis-and instead towards the developing Hellenistic culture.

*Hellenistic Greece.* The Hellenistic period lasted from 323 BC, which marked the end of the Wars of Alexander the Great, to the annexation of the Greece by the Roman Republic in 146 BC. Although the establishment of Roman rule did not break the continuity of Hellenistic society and culture, which remained essentially unchanged until the advent of Christianity, it did mark the end of Greek political independence.

During the Hellenistic period, the importance of "*Greece proper*" (that is, the territory of modern Greece) within the Greek-speaking world declined sharply. The great centers of Hellenistic culture were Alexandria and Antioch, capitals of Ptolemaic Egypt and Seleucid Syria respectively.

The conquests of Alexander had numerous consequences for the Greek city-states. It greatly widened the horizons of the Greeks and led to a steady emigration, particularly of the young and ambitious, to the new Greek empires in the east [9]. Many Greeks migrated to Alexandria, Antioch and the many other new Hellenistic cities founded in Alexander's wake, as far away as what are now Afghanistan and Pakistan, where the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom and the Indo-Greek Kingdom survived until the end of the 1st century BC.

After the death of Alexander his empire was, after quite some conflict, divided amongst his generals, resulting in the Ptolemaic Kingdom (based upon Egypt), the Seleucid Empire (based on the Levant, Mesopotamia and Persia) and the Antigonid dynasty based in Macedon. In the intervening period, the poleis of Greece were able to wrest back some of their freedom, although still nominally subject to the Macedonian Kingdom.

The city states formed themselves into two leagues; the Achaean League (including Thebes, Corinth and Argos) and the Aetolian League (including Sparta and Athens). For much of the period until the Roman conquest, these leagues were usually at war with each other, and/or allied to different sides in the conflicts between the Diadochi (the successor states to Alexander's empire).

The Antigonid Kingdom became involved in a war with the Roman Republic in the late 3rd century. Although the First Macedonian War was inconclusive, the Romans, in typical fashion, continued to make war on Macedon until it was completely absorbed into the Roman Republic (by 149 BC). In the east the unwieldy Seleucid Empire gradually disintegrated, although a rump survived until 64 BC, whilst the Ptolemaic Kingdom continued in Egypt until

30 BC, when it too was conquered by the Romans. The Aetolian league grew wary of Roman involvement in Greece, and sided with the Seleucids in the Roman-Syrian War; when the Romans were victorious, the league was effectively absorbed into the Republic. Although the Achaean league outlasted both the Aetolian league and Macedon, it was also soon defeated and absorbed by the Romans in 146 BC, bringing an end to the independence of all of Greece.

*Roman Greece.* The Greek peninsula came under Roman rule in 146 BC, Macedonia becoming a Roman province, while southern Greece came under the surveillance of Macedonia's praefect. However, some Greek poleis managed to maintain a partial independence and avoid taxation. The Aegean islands were added to this territory in 133 BC. Athens and other Greek cities revolted in 88 BC, and the peninsula was crushed by the Roman general Sulla. The Roman civil wars devastated the land even further, until Augustus organized the peninsula as the province of Achaea in 27 BC.

Greece was a key eastern province of the Roman Empire, as the Roman culture had long been in fact Greco-Roman. The Greek language served as a lingua franca in the East and in Italy, and many Greek intellectuals such as Galen would perform most of their work in Rome.

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