



Ancient Greece Historical Overview

The civilization of Ancient Greece was not controlled by one central government, but instead consisted of hundreds of independent city-states on what is now the Greek mainland and islands of the Aegean Sea. United by a common language, religion, and ethnic

identity, the Greek city-states formed alliances to fight off much stronger foreign powers.

Considered to be the birthplace of democracy, scientific reasoning, and the idea of individualism, ancient Greece is credited with having a greater influence on the western world (our part of the world) than any other ancient culture! Athens, the city-state that dominated all others in cultural accomplishments such as philosophy, drama, architecture, and science, rivaled (was equal to) Sparta in military power. The prolonged warfare between Athens and Sparta left Greece vulnerable to the empire of Alexander the Great.

It was Alexander, and later the Romans, who were responsible for spreading classical Greek culture across much of Europe and Asia.

Vocabulary:

Archaeology – in Greek, “study of beginnings”; the science of studying past cultures by analyzing their remains.

Athens – a leading city-state in ancient Greece known for its culture and democratic system of government.

Acropolis – in Greek, “high hill”; the highest point in a Greek city-state where important monuments and temples were built.

Parthenon – the classic Greek temple built on the Acropolis in Athens to honor the goddess Athena.

Frieze – a series of sculptures carved out of a background panel. An example is the picture above.

City-state – a central city and the surrounding area it rules.

Sparta – Athens’ rival city-state known for its military power.

Democracy – in Greek, “rule of the people”; a system of governing in which citizens vote for representatives and make laws.

Assembly – in Athens, the meeting of citizens held every ten days to discuss and vote on issues related to the democracy

Barbarian – to the Greeks, foreigners of people who were not like them.

Philosophy – the Greek, “love of learning”; a system of thought that examines and tries to explain the purpose of life, and other big important issues.

Oracle – a priest or priestess believed to speak for a god and foretell the future.

Olympics – a festival of athletic games and contests first held by the ancient Greeks in 776 BC.