

Module 4 Ancient Greece and Roman civilizations

Ancient Greece history

There were three periods in the history of Ancient Greece: 1/ The Minoan-Mycenaean Age; 2/ The Hellenic Period ; 3/ The Hellenistic Age. The Minoan-Mycenaean Age lasted from about 2,000 years BC to the conquest of the Greek peninsula by invaders around 1,100 BC. The Hellenic period extended from the time of Homer to the conquest of the Greek city-states by the Macedonians around 350 BC. It includes the Classical Age, when Greek philosophical and artistic achievements were most impressive. The Hellenistic Age, lasting from about 300 BC to the first century AD, was the final blossoming of Greek cultural innovation. Emigrant Greeks interacted politically and intellectually with other peoples to produce a hybrid culture.

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Society and culture in Ancient Greece

Ancient Greece was composed of independent city states called *polis*. They were ruled by rich landowners who were called aristocrats. This system was known as 'oligarchy', or the rule by the few. Farming was the major source of wealth. Society was made up of free people and slaves. Women were not allowed to participate in public life and took their social status from their fathers or husbands. The only exception was when they were acting as priestesses at temples. Ancient Greeks ate cheese, vegetables, fish, eggs, fruit and bread made of barley or wheat. Boys played different games.

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Ancient Greek civilization

The civilization of Ancient Greece is one of the most brilliant in history. The Greeks developed the art form of drama – Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides produced the best known tragedies and comedies.

The Greeks were pioneers in writing history and Herodotus is known as the "father of history"

The Greeks developed mathematics and science. They were concerned about the nature of the universe.

The Greeks believed in a pantheon of gods and goddesses with the chief of the gods, Zeus.

Education was a private affair of wealthy families. Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lycaeum in Athens were higher education institutions.

Watch this movie on Ancient Greece:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJ7GNuW4rTI>

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The Ancient Greek contribution to World civilization

The civilization of ancient Greece contributed immensely to world history and civilization. The language, philosophy, the arts and its educational system were inherited by the Roman Empire and founded Western civilization. There are five things of special importance to Western culture: 1/ Olympics; 2/ mythology; 3/ theater; 4/ fashion; 5/ democracy. Every European knows the legend of the Trojan Horse and trial by jury is quite common in contemporary Western legal systems. Aesop's fables are still told today and the fundamentals of Western philosophy go back to the works of Plato and Aristotle. The question, "How do I know?", formulated by Socrates was the beginning of epistemology and his systematic questioning is known as the 'Socratic method' of reasoning.

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Roman history

Rome evolved as a political structure from a city-state into a kingdom and then from a republic into an empire. Rome was founded in 753 BC and fell in 476 AD.

Roman society was hierarchical with slaves at the bottom, and freed men and free-born citizens at the top. There were several social classes and a division based on military service. Women enjoyed limited rights. The power of the father was supreme (*patria potestas* principle). There were private schools for boys and girls. Rome's economy was based on farming and trade.

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Roman culture

The native language of the Romans was Latin, but Greek was the language spoken by a part of the population.

Romans believed in many gods and that every person had its own *genius* or divine soul. The pantheon of Roman gods was associated with the Greek gods.

Roman art, music and literature was highly influenced by Ancient Greek culture. The literary works of Cicero, Polybius, Ovid, Horace, Cato and Catalus are the fundamentals of European patterns of education up until now.

Public games were supported by the elite and the Roman youth practised several forms of athletic games, such as wrestling, boxing, jumping, or racing.

Roman cities had monumental structures like theatres, forums, temples, gymnasiums, bath complexes and fountains. The Romans constructed durable roads and numerous aqueducts to supply water to the population.

Watch this movie about Roman aqueducts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8W96WaobOs>

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Ancient Rome's contribution to world civilization

The most valued Roman contribution to latter day civilized society is its system of law. The basic principles of Roman law are: 1/ precedent as coequal to the letter of law; 2/equity (fairness) is the goal of all law; 3/ interpretation in applying the law to individual cases. (Ph.J. Adler, R.L. Pouwels, *World Civilizations*, p. 135)

Roman law can be characterized by its flexibility and by its effectiveness in controlling social life.

In 313 the AD Roman Emperor Constantine adopted the Edict of Milan announcing an official toleration of Christianity and that was a critical step for the later developments in European history.

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- That's the end of Module 4.
- Please read through Module 5