



The Groovy Greeks

The Minoans and the Myceneans were really just a prelude for even greater things to come. The Mycenean civilization was to be shattered by invasion of a barbaric people known as the Dorians. Greece entered a period of time known as the “dark ages” for 400 years. Dark, not because they

couldn't see, but rather because there was little or no learning. However, out of this darkness, emerged a new vibrant people around 500 B.C.E. They called themselves the Hellenes, we refer to them as the Greeks. The Greek civilization is arguably the greatest of all cultures that we discuss, greater than Egypt or of Rome which we discuss later. For now, on with the Greeks!

I. Why were they great? One word, four syllables: Democracy

In a world of pharaohs, emperors, kings, queens and priest-kings, it was in Greece that something revolutionary was attempted. Something we take so for granted that today most fail to appreciate its significance.

Democracy: rule by the people.

Now before we get too carried away, it wasn't like ours. It was better in some ways and worse in many others. It wasn't practiced in all of Greece. Like the Myceneans before them the Greeks were divided into innumerable city-states. Each city-state had its own type of government and many of them had kings. In one, however, one special little city-state, our world was changed forever.

Athens: powerful city-state in Greece where democracy was born.

It didn't happen overnight and it would be totally unrecognizable to us, but the Athenians invented something new due to the failures of the old ways. The Athenians for many, many years were ruled by powerful, wealthy families and later by one man rule. This rule by one is often referred to as

Dictatorship: one person holding complete power

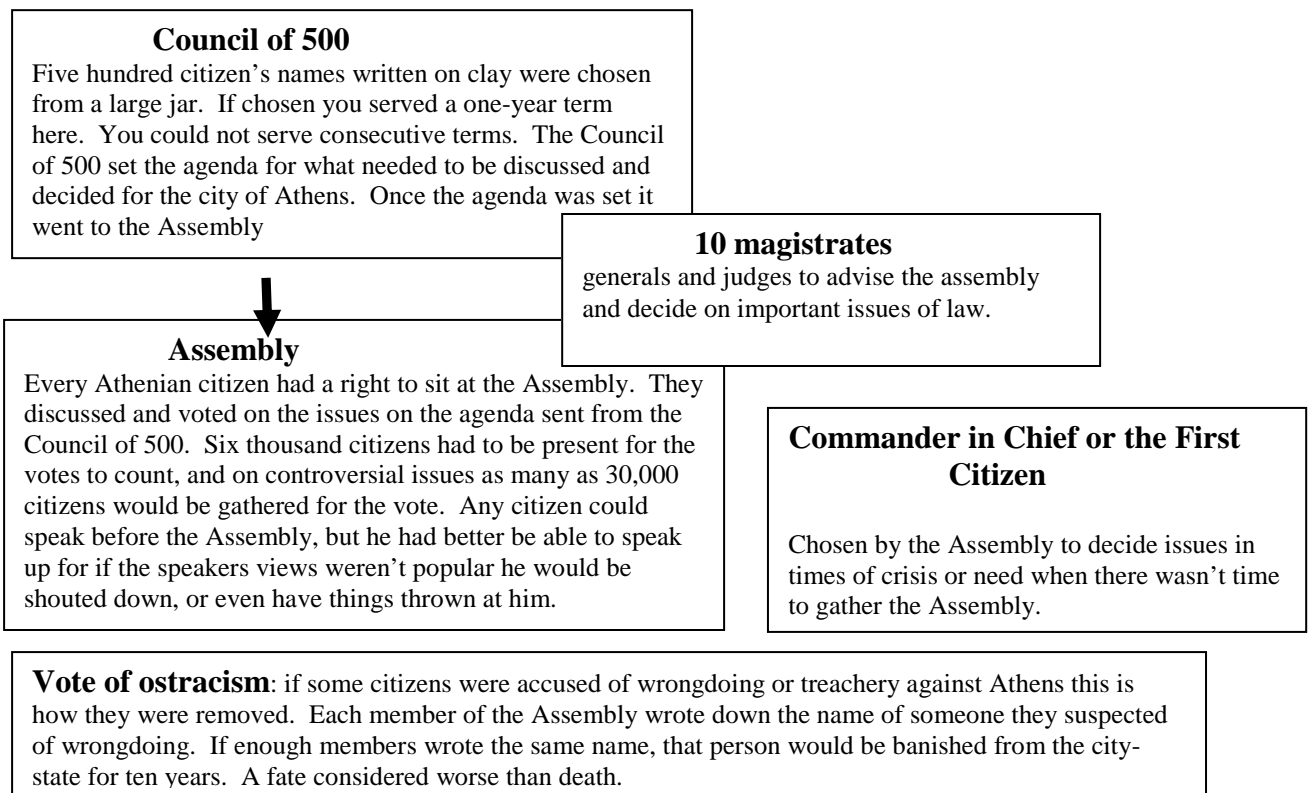
However, the Athenians often referred to them as **tyrants**: brutal and evil rulers who follow no law. One such tyrant was the Athenian ruler named Draco.

Draco: early Athenian dictator whose laws were harsh and unfair. “*Death for stealing an apple.*” From his rule the Greeks made a new word – draconian – which is used to describe anything that is harsh or unfair.

Draco was a spectacular failure and the Athenians ran him and all other tyrants out of town. It was the lawgiver Solon, who first described the new form of government democracy.

Solon: wrote the Athenian constitution.

Constitution: laws and principles for governing a community. We have one too! This is how their constitution describes their democracy.

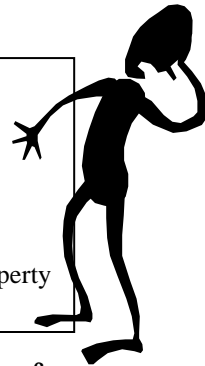


Hmmm, does this look a little familiar? Our Congress has two bodies also. They aren't the Council of 500 and the Assembly, but rather they are the House of Representatives and the Senate. While the names are different their purpose is the same, to pass law for our country. While in Athens their magistrates decided issues of law, we have the Supreme Court for the same reason. And in Athens they had a commander in chief, well we do too, he's the President of the United States. Now today we don't ostracize politicians although it sounds pretty cool. Instead we have something known as impeachment which is a way to remove bad politicians from office.

II. *Why is our democracy so similar to that of Athens.*

When our Founding Fathers – Jefferson, Washington, Madison, Monroe, Adams, Hamilton – were looking to start our country in 1776 C.E. most of the world was ruled by Kings. We didn't want Kings, like the Athenians, we wanted something different and better. So our Founding Fathers copied the democracy of Athens and attempted to improve upon it for our nation. There are some serious differences in our democracy today with that of Athens.

Only citizens could participate	
<i>To be a citizen you must be:</i>	<i>You could not be:</i>
A man	A woman
You must own property	A slave
	A man who didn't own property



Yes it wasn't perfect, but it was a start, a start which we have built upon for our country today.

III. *The Strength or was it the Sickness of Sparta.*

Sparta was another of the many Greek city-states. Unlike Athens, however, the Spartans weren't all that concerned with their government. They had an **aristocracy** which simply means rule by a wealthy few which was assisted by the Council of Elders. This was all the men over 60 years of age. Needless to say it wasn't a large group.

Sparta wasn't concerned with their government because they saved their energies for other concerns. Early on, the Spartans decided they didn't want to farm or trade. However, if you don't farm or trade you don't survive. The Spartans decided to use slaves to take care of these needs. Now in the ancient world, slavery was common, but it wasn't based on race. Slaves were usually captives from war, or people who went so far into debt that they had to sell themselves. The Spartans called their slaves

Helots: Spartan slaves who farmed and traded.

There was only one problem with the helots. The Spartans needed so many of them that eventually the helots outnumbered the Spartans **20 to 1**. Do the math and that is 200 helots for every 10 Spartans and 2,000 helots for every 100 Spartans. If the helots rebelled the Spartans would be in for some deep trouble, right? Wrong! The Spartans solution to this problem was strict controls on helots, keeping weapons out of their

hands, and the Spartans developed the greatest military and the finest soldiers in the ancient world. If the helots rebelled they would be CRUSHED!

IV. The Spartan Way of Life: Could you have survived as a Spartan?

1. At birth newborns were examined for any signs of weakness. If it was determined the child was weak or deformed in any way it was taken from the family and left on a hillside to die from the elements or starvation.
2. At age 7, boys left their families to live permanently in military camps. Here they were trained as soldiers.
 - Long marches through the woods in silence. If you collapse and can't go on, you are left to die.
 - Forced to steal food from helots for survival
 - Every 10 days you're checked for excess body weight. If they find some, you are starved until it's gone.
 - Disobedience, defiance, talking back to any Spartan resulted in severe beatings. Usually a good whipping. If you cry out while being whipped, you are whipped longer for showing weakness.
3. At age 12 you left the camps and instead you left in the woods to survive on your own until the age of 20. If you survived you returned to great honor at your city-state. If you died, you died.
4. Ages 20 to 60 you served in the Spartan military. You can marry but you live apart from your wife in military barracks. Don't worry Spartans almost always won. If they didn't, well they would die trying. Spartans never showed weakness, and never retreated!
5. If you made it to 60 you served in the Council of Elders, but you were always on call to active duty if the army needed you. This was the Spartan way of life for Spartan boys. What about the girls?

Spartan way of life for women: Unlike Athens where women didn't have any rights at all, Spartan women were relative equals to the men. Since the men were busy in the military the women of Sparta ran the shops and businesses, commanded the helots, and kept the city-state running. Their duty was to stay in excellent physical shape because strong women produce strong babies. Therefore they boxed, wrestled and raced and supported their husbands by telling them when they went into battle.

"Come home with your shield or on it"

V. ***This is nuts! Why didn't the kids refuse to go to the camps? Why did parents allow their kids to die?***

The Spartans behavior is seemingly incomprehensible to us today. Our sense of our own independence and freedom is so strong that we cannot comprehend Spartan behavior. For the Spartans their lives were insignificant compared to the importance of the survival of their city-state and their culture. The only way their culture could survive was to make these extreme sacrifices. People have made those sacrifices in this country also when they put this country above themselves in importance. Thus our troops stormed the beaches at Normandy during the D-day invasion knowing that many of them would die, but knowing that Adolph Hitler and the Nazis had to be stopped, even if it meant giving up their lives.

Maybe this will help give you the mindset of the Spartans. It's a story they tell their children when they're growing up at home. It's a story that teaches them what a good Spartan is!

Wow! Where could I find a boy like that? How dreamy!



Fox cub? What fox cub?

One day a good Spartan boy stole a fox cub that didn't belong to him.

He was spotted running away from the scene and arrested. Before they caught him he hid the cub inside his tunic.

The boy's master told him to turn over the fox cub. The boy's reply was of course, "Fox cub? What fox cub? I don't know anything about a fox cub!"

The master's questioning went on and on for he knew the boy had taken the fox cub. Suddenly the boy fell down. Dead.

When the boy's body was examined it was discovered that the cub had eaten into the boy's guts apparently while he was being questioned. The boy, however, had never let on to his suffering, or given in to the questioning, even though it cost him his life.

** Story taken from the book **The Groovy Greeks** by Terry Deary. He writes a wonderful series of books for kids known as **Horrible Histories**, including **The Awesome Egyptians**, **The Rotten Romans**, and **The Measly Middle Ages**.*

The story probably isn't true but it demonstrates the qualities the Spartans admired.

VI. Honoring the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus!

Athens and Sparta are just two examples of the many, many Greek city-states. Athens and Sparta are the most famous and powerful but there are a hundred other city-states all doing their own thing.

While constantly bickering, competing and fighting, all Greek citizens felt it was essential to honor the gods. They felt that to do so was to make the most of the gifts the gods had given them. What gifts are these? Well the **Mind and Body** of course.

Perfection of the Body: To be slothful and a couch potato was to waste what the gods had given you. Thus the Greeks were really the first fitness fanatics. The greatest celebration of the body was a festival held at Olympia.

Olympic Games: Festival held every four years at Olympia in honor of Zeus. The Greeks took these games extremely seriously.



- All wars must cease during the festival
- Victory here considered greater than victory in battle
- No prizes for second place. Winners receive a crown of olive leaves.
- Many of the events are the same as our track and field events of today with some differences

Wrestling –only rules were no biting or gouging the eyes

Boxing – slap boxing. Goes on until contestant raises a finger.

Chariot racing

Pentathlon – determined the greatest athlete in all of Greece.

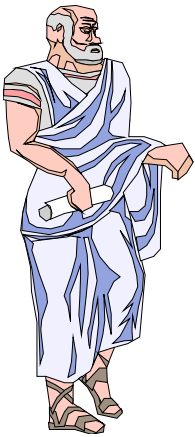
Five events – dash, long jump, discus, javelin, and wrestling.

Sounds cool huh? The Greeks continued the Games until they were conquered by the later Romans and they banned them. We started them up again for the spirit of bringing all nations together in peace, just as the games brought the Greeks together in peace for friendly competition. Oh and one other thing. Most Greeks outside of Sparta were very sexist or biased against women. So in the Greek Olympics no women were allowed competing or even watching. Also to show the gods their bodies' perfection, Olympic athletes competed in the buff. **They were NAKED.** This would probably help the modern games television ratings and I think should be considered.

Perfection of the Mind: The Greeks also believed that the mind was like any other muscle. Use it or lose it! They believed the harder you worked it the stronger it got. The Greeks many great scientists and mathematicians but the greatest minds come from that hotbed of democracy in Athens. Democracies it seems encourage people to think.

In Athens appears a series of great thinkers called,

Philosophers: People who think about the meaning of life. They search for truth.



Socrates: taught young people to examine and question their beliefs.

“The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Socrates was a lot of fun. Whatever you believed he wanted to know why you believed that. For instance if you said that the world was real for certain because you can touch, feel it and see it. Socrates would reply that can you not seem to do those things in a dream? The answer of course is yes it seems you can. So therefore how do you know the world is real and not just a dream. Actually how do you know yesterday even happened or whether you just dreamed that. My head hurts!

By asking WHY? all the time Socrates even had young people question their beliefs in the gods and the government. He never told them not to believe in the gods he just wanted them to understand why they did.

Some Athenians began to believe that making these young people think was perhaps dangerous. Socrates was put on trial and because he refused to stop teaching he was condemned to death for giving young people dangerous ideas. Socrates was made to drink poisonous hemlock juice.

Afterward, the Athenians came to their senses and realized they had killed a great man for no reason and erected a bronze statue of him. Socrates is one of the first examples of the dangers of CENSORSHIP as ideas aren't dangerous, but people are.

Plato: Socrates greatest student. Plato felt that only the wise and good should rule. He thought democracy was dangerous.

Plato feared that democracy like that in Athens could lead to bad decisions because people oftentimes vote selfishly and not for the overall good. Plato also feared that people are sometimes overwhelmed by their emotion and elect demagogues.

Demagogues: these are people who come to power using emotion and appeals to the heart, and not through reason. Demagogues use hatred, fear, and pride to gain power. A good example of a demagogue was probably Adolph Hitler in Germany who was elected into power by a frustrated German people in 1933.

Plato wrote a book on his ideas called the ***“Republic”*** which is the first book on the study of government. Plato also opened a school called the ***Academy*** where he would train future rulers to be wise and just.

Aristotle: greatest student of Plato. Great scientist and biologist.

- Wrote over 200 books of which almost all have been lost.
- Classified plants and animals which resembled each other.
 - Amphibians
 - Reptiles
 - Mammals
- Completed the scientific method

Aristotle is the authority on science in Europe for nearly 2,000 years. After the Groovy Greeks and Rotten Romans science goes literally no where in Europe and thus Aristotle is the height of scientific achievement for some time.

Oh there are so many more great Greek minds but we don't have time for them all. Great names such as Archimedes, Pythagorus, Ptolemy, Thucydides, Euclid, Hippocrates, Herodotus and more but drive on we must.

VII. Birth of drama and the theater.

Not only wanting to honor the gods through mind and body, the Greeks also wanted to entertain them through festivals and through dramatic performances and the theater.

At first on hillsides but later in large constructed outdoor amphitheaters the Greeks performed for the entertainment of all. There were two types of plays.



Comedies

Tragedies

Comedies were funny. Often they poked fun at politicians and even the gods. Tragedies were plays about suffering. They didn't always have an unhappy ending but they often did.

- Wore masks, as seen above, to show their character's emotion and to help funnel their voices.
- No women were allowed acting. Boys whose voices hadn't changed played female parts. The first Juliet of Shakespeare's day was probably a guy.
- If you didn't like the play feel free to throw stuff.

VII. The coming of Alexander the Great

Greek achievements were tremendous, but they Greeks were always divided and thus weak. During times of crisis such as the Persian Wars the Greeks were able to unite but most oftentimes the Greeks were busy fighting on another. To the north of Greece lay the kingdom of Macedonia whose ruler, King Phillip II loved Greek culture but hated Greek division. Phillip conquered the Greeks and united them under his command. Phillip had dreams of greater conquest but he died and his twenty year old son took over.

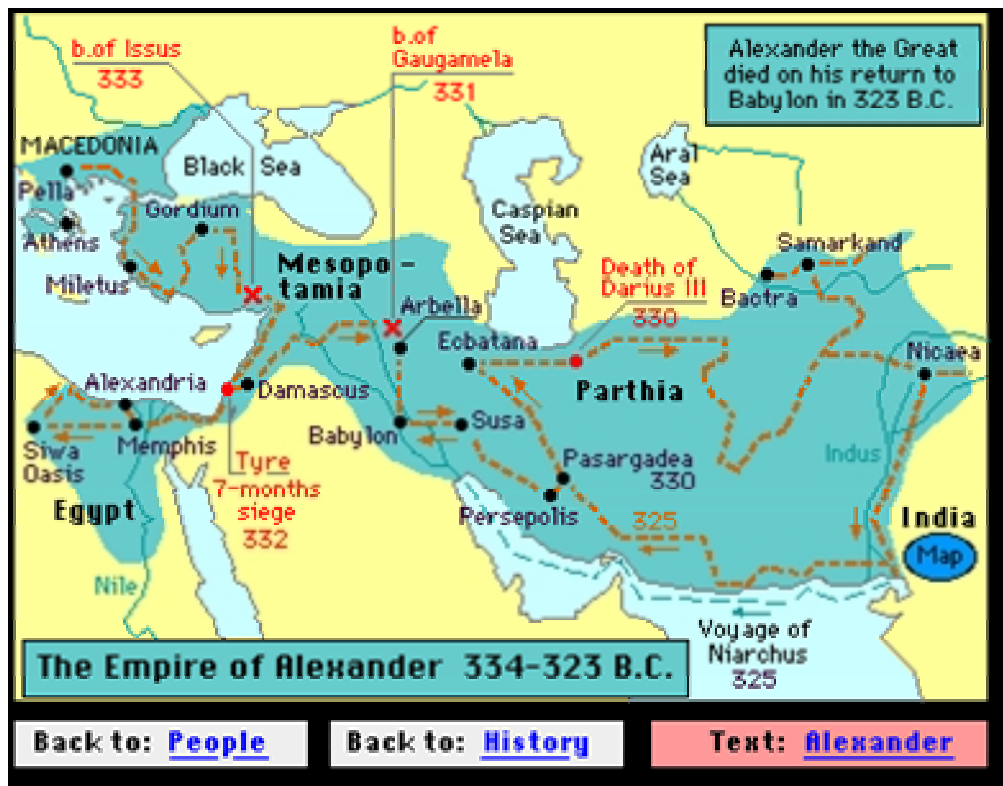
Alexander the Great: Macedonian ruler who leads the Greeks in conquest over the Persian Empire.

- General at 16, ruler at 20.
- Tutored by Aristotle
- Believed he was a reincarnated Achilles. Kept a dagger and the *Illiad* under his pillow every night.



- Wanted to conquer the world.
- Never loses a battle.

Alexander the Great invaded the Persian Empire and over the next 10 years fought and won battle after battle. Not satisfied with just the Persian Empire, Alexander kept marching even into India where his men fought war elephants.



Finally however his men said no more refusing to continue fighting. They wanted to return home to Greece to see their homes and families. Alexander now 32 stopped but intended to continue after administering the empire for a few years.

Alexander founded many, many cities which he named after himself. The most famous and greatest of his cities was

Alexandria: city on the Nile delta. Center for learning and trade and home to two wonders of the world.

Great Lighthouse: 400 foot lighthouse whose beam could be seen forty miles out to sea. Knocked over by an earthquake.

Great Library: massive library complex with thousands of scrolls containing the knowledge of the ancient world. Tragically burned by a Christian mob.

Alexander was returning home but in Babylon he developed a mysterious fever and died in 323 B.C. His empire was divided up among his generals and faded away. What he would have conquered had he lived will never be known. **The importance of Alexander is that because of the Empire Greek culture, learning and knowledge is spread throughout the known world. Greek ideas never die and they live on with us today.**