

Greek Achievements

Greek Mythology

The Greek Gods originally came from all over the Middle Eastern World. They were originally derived from various religious myths and ideas which had been circulating in India, Egypt, Sumeria, Babylon, Phoenicia, Persia, Mycenae, Crete and Troy. The Olympian Gods of the Ancient Greeks were simply the combinations –the mixtures of stories and ideas- which the Greeks had acquired, while on their journeys through the many lands they traversed until they reached their final settlements around the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas.

These Gods were also formed as a result of the various tales, which they had heard from the lips of strangers passing through their new Greek ports. The Greek Gods of Olympus were ‘National’ Gods and the status quo upholding the power of the ruling class. They embodied all the moral concepts of the very Greek rulers, and were the spokespeople for the political system, and the inspiration for all the endeavors of the Greek people themselves. They symbolized *order, justice and beauty*, and were extremely nationalistic as were the Greeks themselves, who guarded their citizenship very jealously.

There were twelve main Olympian Gods, and they typified every area of city-state life. There were deities for soldiers, lovers, educationists, artists, artisans, metal workers, sailors, hunters, and married women. There was also a god for the dying, the disabled, and the spinster working in the home; not forgetting that most important being, the deity for commerce and all the business men; and the chief deity himself, Zeus, who by leadership was captain of the gods, and symbolized the complete hierarchy. His wife was Hera, who was goddess of marriage. Poseidon was god of the sea, Ares the god of war and Apollo the god of the sun. All of these gods played a role in every citizen’s life.

Greek Drama and Art

Theatre was popular in Greek culture; annual dramatic festivals were held for which the poor received free tickets. Greek drama involved two forms: tragedy and comedy. Tragedies were serious dramas centered around a main character who displayed exceptional attributes but also a tragic flaw that caused his downfall. This flaw was often hubris, or excessive pride or overconfidence. Among the most well known Greek tragedies were those of the dramatist Sophocles (*Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*) and Euripides (*Medea*). Comedies were dramas that contained not only humorous scenes but also material that satirized leading citizens, customs, or ideas. The leading comedic dramatist was Aristophanes, author of *Lysistrata*, which portrayed the persuasive power of women.

The Greeks also excelled at other art forms, Greek painting followed the traditional ideal of combining beauty with utility. Most examples of their paintings are found as murals on public buildings or scenes on ceramic vases; paintings on Greek vases depicted mythological events or scenes from everyday life. Greek sculpture, on the other hand, displayed the Greeks’ pride in the human form. The statue of Zeus at the Temple of Olympia by Phidias is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. As in other artistic endeavors, sculpture reflected the Greek ideals of order, balance, and harmony.

The Parthenon is considered the finest example of Greek architecture. Situated atop the Acropolis in Athens, the elegant proportions of the Parthenon were a tribute to the Greek ideal of the golden mean. A statue of the goddess Athena by the Athenian sculptor Phidias was the focal point in the majestic temple of the Parthenon, which was constructed in her honor. Greek architecture focused on columns. The Doric Style is rather sturdy and the top is plain. This style was used in mainland Greece and the colonies in Southern Italy and Sicily. The Ionic style is thinner and more elegant. This was found in eastern Greece and the islands. The Corinthian style is seldom used in Greek world, but seen in Rome on temples.

The Olympics

The Greeks invented athletic contests and held them in honor of their gods. The most famous of these contests were the games held at Olympia. These games took place every four years. The ancient Olympics began around 700 BCE, in honor of Zeus. No women were allowed to watch the games. Pottery dating from around 550 BCE shows men taking part in the games naked or wearing a thong.

The games were greatly expanded from a one-day festival of athletics and wrestling to, in 472 BCE, five days of many events. The first day of the event was devoted to sacrifices. The second day was foot-races, which was the main event of the games. The other days were filled with wrestling, bowing, hoarse-racing, the javelin throw, discus-throwing and other sports.

Greek Philosophy, Math and Science

Three key philosophers rose to prominence in Greek culture: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Socrates (470-399 BCE) became noted for his "Socratic method," or systematic questioning, by which he continuously challenged his students to question and justify everything before accepting it as truth. In his attempt to question traditional Greek ethics, Socrates incurred anger in some Athenians, who charged him with corrupting the morals of Athenian youth. He was condemned to death by a jury of Athenian citizens, and he took his own life in 399 BCE by drinking hemlock.

The message of Socrates continued in the life of his pupil, Plato (430-347 BCE). Plato's most lasting achievement was *The Republic*, in which he detailed his concept of the ideal state. Asserting that the best state was one in which philosophers ruled, Plato supported an aristocracy of intellectuals. The less intelligent classes would be confined to labor that which would best fit their abilities and skills.

Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was a student of Plato. Aristotle developed rules of logic to assist him in constructing arguments to explore the universe. His comprehensive work in the fields of psychology, ethics, politics, literature, biology, physics and astronomy earned him the respect of both western and Islamic worlds. Among the topics Aristotle explored were slavery and the status of women. Defending the usefulness of slavery, he also supported patriarchal families that accepted a position of inferiority for women. He was also the teacher of Alexander the Great.

The Greeks' emphasis on order and reason also led to an examination of the scientific world. Greek scientists developed theories of the motion of planets and studies the organization of the elemental principles of the earth, fire, air and water. They applied mathematics as a means of comprehending the patterns of nature. The Pythagorean Theorem ($a^2 + b^2 = c^2$) was the product of the Greek mathematician Pythagoras (582-507 BCE).

Archimedes was the greatest mathematician of his age (287-212 BCE). His contributions in geometry revolutionized the subject and his methods anticipated the integral calculus 2,000 years before Newton. He was also a thoroughly practical man who invented a wide variety of machines including pulleys and the Archimedean screw pumping device.

Hippocrates 460-370 BC, was an ancient Greek physician of the Age of Pericles, considered one of the most outstanding figures in the history of medicine. He is often referred to as "The Father of Medicine" in recognition of his lasting contributions to the field as the founder of the Hippocratic School of medicine. This intellectual school revolutionized medicine in ancient Greece, establishing it as a discipline distinct from other fields. The Hippocratic Oath is an oath traditionally taken by physicians pertaining to the ethical practice of medicine which is still used today.

The Greek civilization was responsible for many of the achievements that made the Greek culture the most important in the Mediterranean. They are responsible for many of the mathematical, scientific, literary and cultural changes that effected many surrounding areas including the Roman Empire. In the chart below discuss the many achievements of the Greek civilization and list as many facts about each as possible.

Achievement	Important Facts, Definitions and People
Greek Mythology	
Greek Drama and Art	
The Olympics	
Greek Philosophy	
Greek Math and Science	