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Abbreviations: BC before Christ; AD anno Domini ("in
the year of the Lord", indicating years numbered from
the birth of Christ); c. circa ("about")



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ANCIENT GREECE

THE HISTORY of ancient Greece begins with the Mycenaeans, a warlike people who created a powerful and wealthy civilization in about 1550 BC.

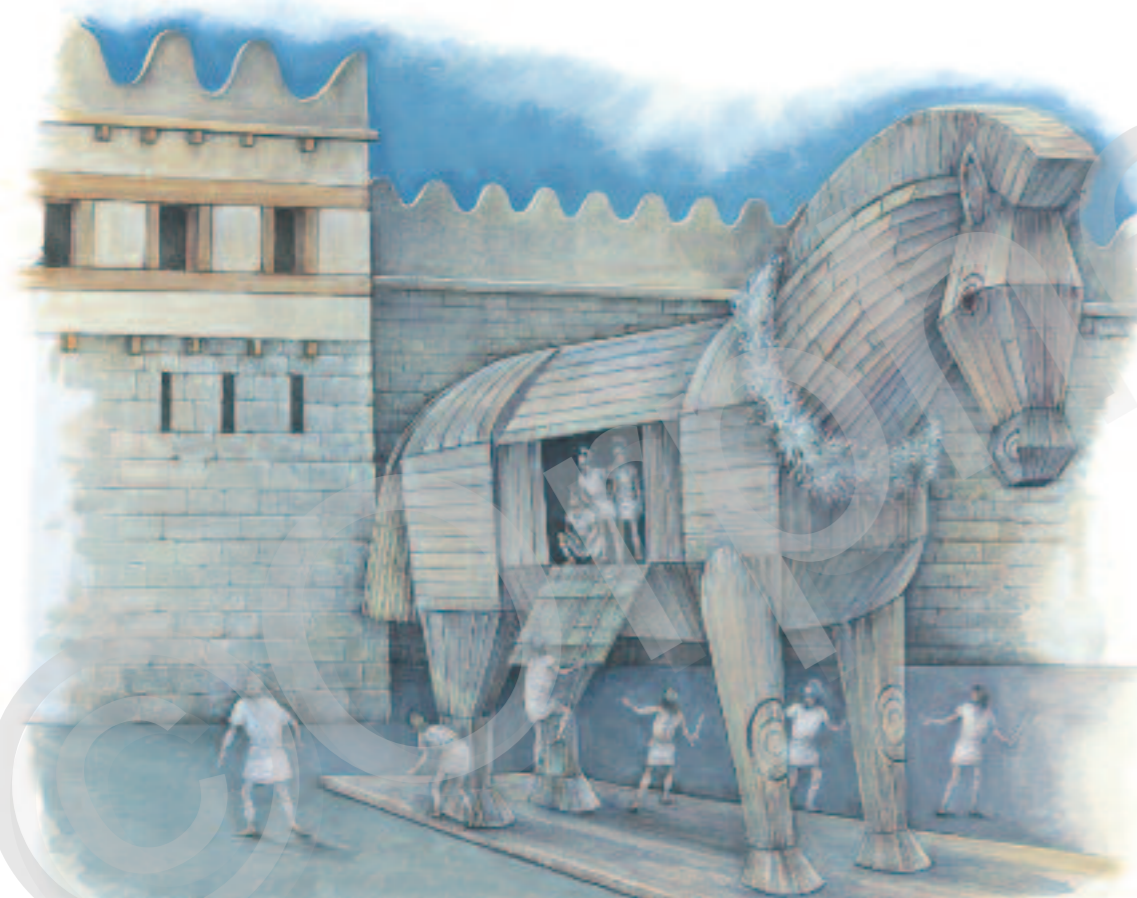
The first settlers in Greece lived in simple stone houses and farmed the land. These people, who later came to be called the Mycenaeans, began to trade around the Mediterranean and came into contact with the Minoan civilization on Crete. They borrowed many ideas and skills from the Minoans and began to make superb craftwork of their own.

The Mycenaeans were very different from the Minoans, however. The Minoans were a peaceful race, but the Mycenaeans were warriors. Their palaces were surrounded by massive walls. Inside, former rulers were buried in large, beehive-shaped tombs, called *tholoi*. From their palace strongholds, the Mycenaeans set off on raids around the Mediterranean.



Four gold death-masks of kings were found in the royal tombs at Mycenae. This one was once thought to be the mask of Agamemnon, a king of Mycenae at the time of the Trojan War. Experts now think it is 300 years older, so could not be his.

Legends about the Mycenaeans date back thousands of years. One, told in the *Iliad*, by the Greek poet, Homer, gives an account of the war between Greece and Troy. The Mycenaean king, Agamemnon, set out to rescue his brother's beautiful wife Helen, who had been captured by the Trojan prince, Paris. After 10 years of fighting, Agamemnon's army finally defeated Troy by trickery. Greek soldiers hid inside a wooden horse (*below*), which was towed into the city by the triumphant Trojans, thinking the Greeks had gone home. At nightfall, the Greeks emerged to capture the city.



GREEK WARFARE

City-states consisted of a main city or town and the villages around it. Each one was ruled by powerful nobles. Sometimes the nobles were overthrown by a tyrant, someone who took power although he had no right to do so.

By about 500 BC, each city-state had its own army. One of the most formidable came from the city-state of Sparta in the south. By this time, the Classical Age (*see page 6*) had begun in Greece and the city-state of Athens was a haven for thinkers and artists. To the Spartans, however, the important thing was to make war.

Most of the Greek armies were made up of young men who trained as soldiers for two years after they left school. They were called up to join the army if there was a war (when they were known as conscripts). The Spartans, however, had a full-time army who were always ready to fight.

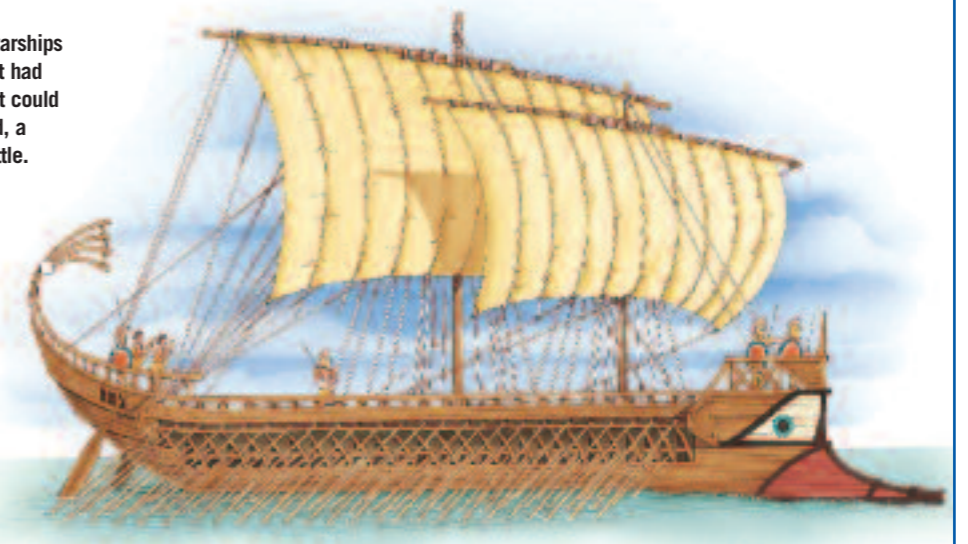
All Greek armies fought in a phalanx formation. The soldiers formed closely packed rows so that their shields partly protected their neighbour. Then they advanced on the enemy like a battering ram. The first few rows held their spears out in front of them so they could strike the enemy from a distance. The close formation made them difficult targets, so the phalanx was a very effective way of fighting.



A foot soldier from the Greek city-state of Sparta was called a hoplite. He wore armour over a short pleated tunic. Hoplites carried a shield and fought with a spear or a sword.

The Mycenaean civilization disappeared around 1200 BC. Afterwards, there was a period known as the Dark Ages until about 800 BC, when the Greek civilization began to develop. Greece was not one country but a series of separate city-states. City-states fought each other to gain more power.

The Greeks had fleets of warships called triremes. Although it had square linen sails so that it could take advantage of the wind, a trireme was rowed into battle. The ship was rowed by three rows of oarsmen, one above the other. The rowers at the bottom level were inside the ship and their oars came out through portholes. On the front of the ship was a battering ram for ramming holes in enemy ships.



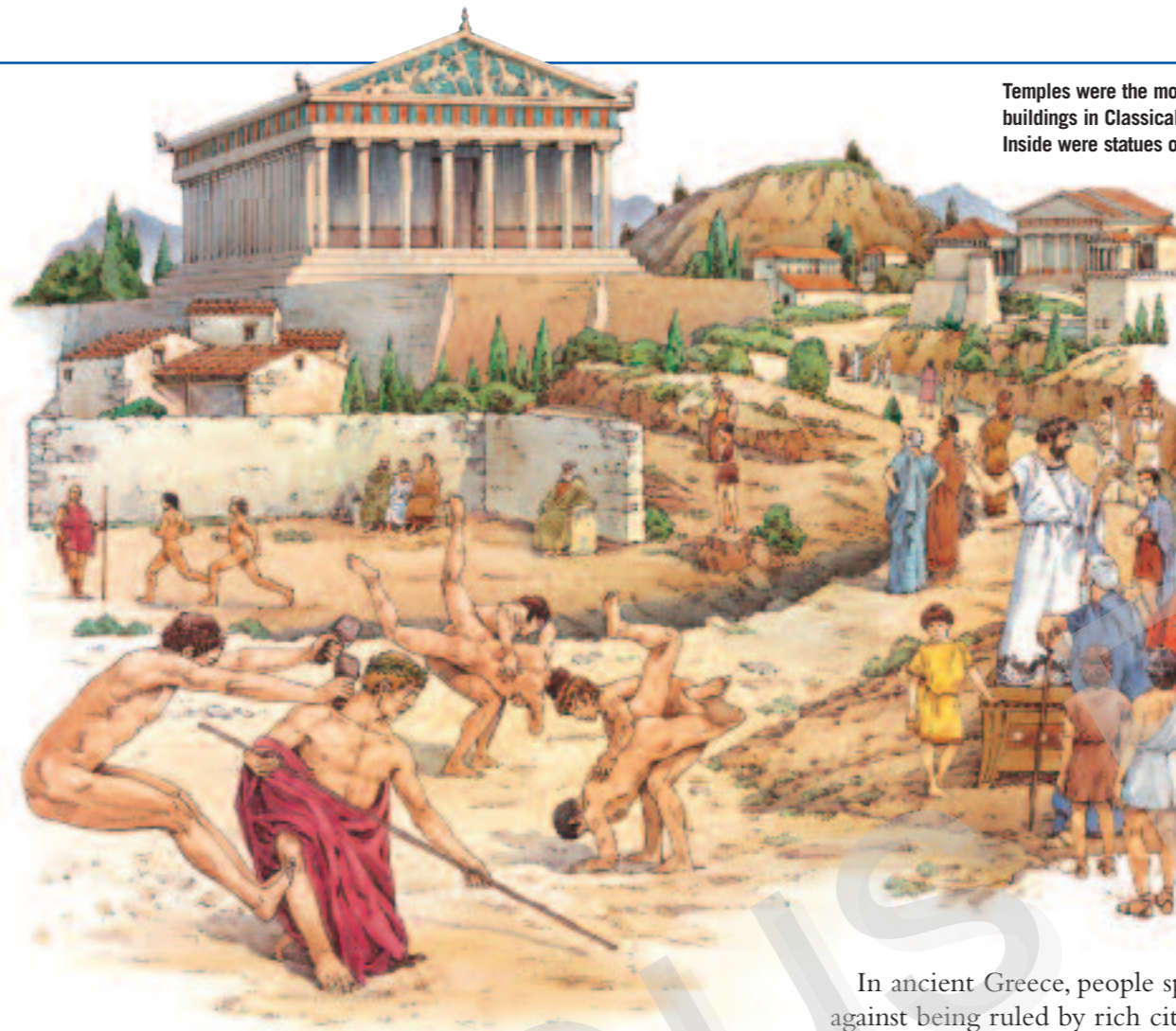
LIFE IN ATHENS

THE CLASSICAL AGE was a time when Greece flowered in the arts, philosophy and science. The city-state of Athens was at its most powerful during this period. The city had been destroyed by the Persians in 480 BC, but it was rebuilt in great splendour. One of the most magnificent projects of all was the group of buildings on the Acropolis, a rock that still dominates Athens today. At the heart of the Acropolis buildings was the Parthenon, a marble temple dedicated to the city's goddess, Athena.

Much of what we know about the ancient Greeks comes from the arts and literature of the time. Pottery was often decorated with scenes from everyday life. Sculptors created beautiful statues, philosophers wrote down their thoughts and ideas, and dramatists created plays based on real-life events.

The ancient Greeks worshipped many gods and goddesses. The 12 most important gods were said to live on Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece. Zeus was the chief of the Olympian gods.

Modern theatre had its roots in ancient Greece. The audience sat on stone seats in the semi-circular, open-air auditorium. The actors wore large Comedy or Tragedy masks so that the audience could see them. These masks are still the symbol of the theatre today.



Temples were the most important buildings in Classical Greece (left). Inside were statues of the temple's god.

Citizens could vote for their leaders, although women and slaves did not count as citizens, so they could not vote. Athenian citizens were members of the city's assembly, which met once a week. Any citizen could speak at these meetings. The assembly was run by a council of 500 people, who were chosen by drawing lots.

The Greeks prized freedom of speech. In the centre of most Greek cities was an open space, called an *agora*, where meetings were held and political speeches made. Besides its chief use as a marketplace, the *agora* was surrounded by temples and law courts.

Here a man is making a political speech in an open space in a Greek city. If people were dissatisfied with a member of their government, they could vote for a public figure to be removed from office. Athenian citizens made their feelings known by writing his name on pieces of broken pottery, called *ostraka*.

Greek athletes practised for the sports festival held every four years at Olympia in southern Greece. This festival was the forerunner of the Olympic Games which are still held today.

Every large city had a theatre and drama was popular entertainment. The earliest form of theatre was a festival of songs and dances. Later, playwrights such as Sophocles and Aristophanes began to write plays which actors could perform. There were two main types, comedies and tragedies. Many of these plays, written centuries ago, are still famous today.

Plays were performed on 10 days of each year. Audiences went to the theatre for the whole day. They would usually see three tragedies or three comedies and a short play called a satire, which poked fun at a serious legend or event.

In ancient Greece, people spoke out against being ruled by rich citizens and of having no say in how they were ruled. A new system of government, called *demokratia*, which means "government by the people", was introduced in Athens. Our English word "democracy" comes from this word. In Greek democracies, all citizens had a say in how the city-state was run, much as people have a say in democracies today.

MEDICINE

The basis of modern medicine also comes from ancient Greece. During the Classical Age, a man called Hippocrates founded a school of medicine on the Greek island of Kos, where diagnosis of illness was based on examination of patients. Doctors had to take the Hippocratic Oath, which outlined their duties and responsibilities. Doctors still have to take this oath today.

The ruins of the Acropolis temples can still be seen in Athens today. The Greeks used columns like the ones supporting the Parthenon for many of their temples and public buildings. Columns were made by standing one block of stone on top of another. The top of the column was usually decorated with carvings.

