

All Greek To Me: A Glossary of Ancient Greek Terms You Need to Know

Greece is a beautiful country in southeastern Europe between Italy and Turkey. Ancient Greek civilization served as a basic foundation of Western culture. It is the place to study to learn about democracy, science, art and culture, and a lot of history. Ancient Greece was chock-filled with excitement, often involving Zeus and the rest of the gods.

There are many basic terms used when we study ancient Ancient Greece. Let's delve right in.

Ancient Greek Terms in Alphabetical Order

Acropolis

is the name of a fortified area inside a city. It is also the name of the Acropolis of Athens, which symbolizes the greatness of that ancient city. The Acropolis had many great public buildings, including the **Parthenon**, a great temple.

Alexander the Great

was a Greek ruler (356 BCE - 323 BCE) who built an empire through conquest from Greece to India. His empire broke apart after his death, but the Greek culture spread in his army's wake lived on in the Hellenistic Age.

Ancient Rome

was an important growing regional power in the heyday of Ancient Greece. Romans eventually conquered Greece and were greatly influenced by their culture.

Archaic Period

was the historical period of Ancient Greece from 800 BC to 480 BC. It was the period when the Ancient Greeks grew in power and significance.

Archipelago

is a group or chain of islands, often found in the ocean or sea. The islands in an archipelago may be small or large, and they may be close together or spread out over a wide area.

Aristotle

was a great Greek philosopher, a student of Plato, and a teacher of Alexander the Great. He was particularly concerned with science and nature. Aristotle's scientific beliefs influenced Western science into the Middle Ages.

City-states

are centers of power that develop around cities, often major locations of trade and commerce. Ancient Greece was a collection of city-states such as Athens and Sparta, cities that controlled the surrounding areas and overseas colonies.

Classical Period

is the golden age of the Ancient Greeks that took place between 480 and 323 BCE.

Delian League

is a group of Greek city-states that joined together to fight against the Persian Empire.

Greek Chorus

was a group of performers who during a Greek play commented on the ongoing action. It is also the term used for people who do this in general.

Helots

were serfs and slaves that served the Spartans. Most residents of Sparta were helots.

Hellenistic Period

is the Greek historical era after the death of Alexander the Great that lasted until the death of Cleopatra. When people speak of "Hellenistic" influences, they are concerned with Greek history, art, and culture, and its influences, during and arising from this period.

Hippocrates

was a Greek scientist of medicine (aka the "Father of Medicine") who originated the famous Hippocrates Oath that includes the motto "do no harm."

Homer

was a Greek poet who is traditionally understood to be the author of *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey*, two classical Greek epic poems telling the tales of the great Trojan War. His poems are a window into Ancient Greek culture and influenced Western culture in modern times.

Hoplites

were citizen-soldiers in the *Greek city-states*.

Mediterranean

is the term used to describe the area around the *Mediterranean Sea*, the body of water found between *Western Europe* and *North Africa*.

Mount Olympus

is the highest mountain in *Greece* and the mythical home of the *Greek gods*.

Mythology

is the study of myths, stories that are symbolic accounts of the creation of the world, the origins of human societies, and the nature of things as a whole.

The Olympics

is a modern-day athletic event where people from different nations come together to peacefully battle for prizes. It arises from an ancient athletic event held by the *Ancient Greeks* every four years, which served the same purpose.

The Peloponnesian War

was an extended series of battles between the city-states of *Athens* and *Sparta* in the *5th Century BCE*. *Sparta* led the *Peloponnesian League*, named after the *Peloponnese* (*Southern Greece*). *Athens* and *Sparta* were the two "superpowers" of the day.

Pericles

was a famous *Athenian* statesman and general who played a major role in transforming *Athens* into a major cultural and political powerhouse in the *5th Century BCE*.

Persian Empire

was an ancient empire that formed in the area now found in modern-day *Iran*. It was a rival to the *Greeks*. The two sides fought a series of wars in the first half of the *Fifth Century BCE*.

Philosophy

is the study of wisdom, the examination of the nature of reality. A **philosopher** is a person who studies philosophy. Ancient Greece is considered the birthplace of Western philosophy and was filled with many great philosophers.

Socrates

was an Athens-based philosopher known for his questioning nature. We know his teaching from the writings of others, including his student Plato. Socrates committed suicide after being found guilty of crimes against Athens.

The Republic

is a major philosophical work by Plato that discusses his ideal vision of ethics and political rule. A well-known portion tells the life in a fictional cave to teach a lesson in how we often see a false vision of reality, even if the vision is quite popularly accepted.

The Trireme

was a type of boat used by the Ancient Greeks. It had three rows of oars (the source of its name) on each side. A light and fast vehicle, it was used for trade and war.

Troy

was an ancient city found in modern-day Turkey. The Greeks and Troy, according to the stories of Homer, fought a long war that was started by a dispute among the gods. The stories might be based on actual events, perhaps a real-life military conflict arising between two trade rivals.

Zeus

was the leader of the Greek gods, a role the Romans later applied to Jupiter.