

CHAPTER •5•  
**THE WORLD OF ANCIENT GREECE**  
 3000 B. C. — 133 B. C.

### LIFE OF THE ANCIENT GREEKS

Ancient Greek civilization blossomed between 800 B.C. and 300 B.C. During these years new developments emerged in art, religion, science, literature, philosophy, and government. After the conquests of Alexander the Great, Greek influence spread throughout Western Europe, the Near East, and over time to the rest of the world. As you read the following selections on ancient Greece, see if you can recognize the ideas and beliefs that have affected your society's way of life.

#### READING 9

##### THE ATHENIAN WAY OF LIFE

In ancient Greece it was the custom to have an important person make a speech at public funerals. Such was the case at the public funeral given for the first men who died in the Peloponnesian War. Pericles (PER-uh-kleez), the leader of the government of Athens during that time, was chosen to speak. In the following excerpt from his speech, Pericles expresses pride in the Athenian way of life and compares it to that of the Spartans.

I shall begin with our ancestors. It is both just and proper that they should be mentioned first on this occasion. They lived in this country without break from generation to generation, and handed it down free to the present time by their bravery. And if our more distant ancestors deserve praise, much more do our own fathers, who added to their inheritance the empire that we now possess. Our country has furnished us with everything that can enable it to depend on its own resources, whether for war or for peace. But what was the road by which we reached our position of empire? What was the form of government under which our greatness grew? These are the questions which I shall try to answer before I proceed to my thoughts about these dead men.

Our government favors the many instead of the few. This is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their differences. Poverty does not bar the way. If a man is able to serve the state, he is not prevented from doing so by how poor he is. The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbor for doing what he likes. But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as

citizens. Against this, fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the judges and the laws, particularly such as regard the protection of the injured.

Further, we provide plenty of means for the mind to refresh itself from business. We celebrate athletic games and sacrifices to the gods all year round.

If we turn to our military policy there also we differ from our enemies. We throw open our city to the world. And never exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing. In education, where the Spartans from their very cradles seek manliness by painful discipline, at Athens we live exactly as we please. And yet are just as ready to meet every danger. In proof of this it may be noticed that the Spartans do not invade our country alone, but bring with them all their friends. We Athenians advance unsupported into the territory of an enemy, and fighting upon a foreign soil, usually defeat with ease men who are defending their homes.

We place the real disgrace of poverty in the failure to struggle against it. Our public men have their private affairs to attend to. Our ordinary citizens, though occupied with business and farming, are still fair judges of public matters. We Athenians are able to judge all events and think of discussion as a necessary introduction to any wise action at all.

— Adapted from: Zeph Steward, ed. *The Ancient World: Justice, Heroism and Responsibility*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966.

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1. Which two of the following would best describe how Pericles felt about the Athenian way of life? Defend your selections.

- a. It was dictatorial.
- b. It was democratic.
- c. It allowed people to better themselves.
- d. It was military-dominated.

2. According to Pericles, what is the definition of democracy? Cite an example from the selection.

3. If people in the future were to study the government of your society, what impressions might they have of your way of life? *Aw. V.*

*We throw open our city to the world*

**READING 10**  
**THE SPARTAN WAY OF LIFE**

The following description is of Sparta in the period 600 B.C.–100 B.C. It was written by a Greek author who lived during the years 246 B.C.–220 B.C. The writer tells how Lycurgus (lie-KUR-gus), a ninth-century ruler of Sparta, molded the Spartan way of life by regulating the education of young boys and girls.

Because he considered education to be the noblest work of a ruler, Lycurgus began by regulating marriages and the birth of children. He encouraged girls to strengthen their bodies by exercise in running, wrestling, and hurling javelins, in order that their children might spring from a healthy source, be healthy, and grow up strong. Lycurgus did not view children as belonging to their parents, but above all to the state. Therefore he wished his citizens to be born of the best possible parents.

A father did not have the right to bring up his child, but had to carry it to a certain place where the elders of the tribe judged the child. If they thought it well built and strong, they ordered the father to bring it up. But if it was misshapen, they sent it away to be exposed on the side of a nearby mountain. They considered that if a child did not start with health and strength, it was better both for itself and for the state that it should not live at all.

Nor was each man allowed to bring up and educate his son as he chose. As soon as a boy was seven years of age, he was taken away from his parents and put into an army company. Here a superintendent of the boys was appointed. He was one of the bravest and best-born men of the state. The boys looked to him for orders, obeyed his commands, and endured his punishments, so that even in childhood they learned to obey.

They learned to read and write, but all the rest of their education was meant to teach them to obey with cheerfulness, to endure labors, and to win battles. As they grew older, their training became more severe. They received one garment for all year round. They were dirty, as they had no warm baths except as a

luxury on certain days. They slept together on beds made of straw that they themselves gathered.

Lycurgus did not allow citizens to leave the country at will and wander in foreign lands, where they would be put into contact with foreign habits and learn to imitate the untrained lives found in other countries. Neither did he allow strangers in Sparta who were not there for a useful purpose. He feared that they might teach the people some mischief. Lycurgus thought that strangers introduced strange ideas. He believed it was important to keep evil habits from coming into the city.

— From *Readings in Ancient History from Gilgamesh to Diocletian*, ed. Nels M. Bailkey. Copyright © 1969 by D.C. Heath and Company. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

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1. According to this account, which three of the following best describe the Spartan method of education? Defend your selections.

- a. It was very democratic.
- b. It was athletic-oriented.
- c. The government had an important role in raising children.
- d. It was military-oriented.

2. Would Aristotle have agreed with the Spartan method of educating youth? Explain your answer.

3. If you were to form a school of your own, what subjects would you require students to study? Why?

*Aw. V.*

**READING 11**  
**THE EPHEBIC OATH**

By 330 B.C. all young men in Athens were required to go through military training. Once the training was completed, they were asked to take an oath whereby they swore to uphold the following principles.

I swear never to disgrace these sacred weapons,  
Nor desert my comrades in the ranks;  
I will protect the temples and all public property  
With others to help me, or alone if need be;  
I will pass on my fatherland  
Not less, but greater and better  
Than it was handed down to me;  
I will obey the magistrates  
Who rule with reason;  
I will observe the laws which have been  
And those which are made by the people in the future  
And I will oppose any man who will try to undo them;

I will honor the religion of my ancestors.  
 All this I swear  
 By the gods Agraalos, Enyalios, Hestia, Enyo, Ares,  
 Athena Areia, Zeus, Thallo, Auxo, Hegemone,  
 and Heracles,  
 By the borders of my native land,  
 And by the wheat, barley, vines, and the trees of  
 olive and fig that sustain us.

— From "The Ephebic Oath," translated by James Hanscom, from *Voices of the Past: Readings in Ancient History*, edited by James Hanscom, Leon Hellerman, Ronald Posner. Copyright © 1967 by Macmillan, rights reverted to James Hanscom.

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1. What did a young Athenian promise to do when he took the Ephebic Oath? *Protect the ideals of Athens*
2. What did Athenians consider to be most sacred as shown by this oath? *Religion "Sacred Temples, Gods"*

3. Read the words to the "Pledge of Allegiance" to the U.S. flag. How is this pledge similar to or different from the Ephebic Oath?

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**REVIEWING READINGS 9–11**

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1. Based on your examination of these selections and the information in your textbook, choose four words that describe ancient Greek society. Defend your choice.
2. What Greek ideas have been adopted by your society?
3. Why do you think such ideas have lasted for such a long time without much change?