

Unit 3

The Heritage of Ancient Greece and Rome

Reader



GRADE 6 Core Knowledge Language Arts®



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Core Knowledge Language Arts®

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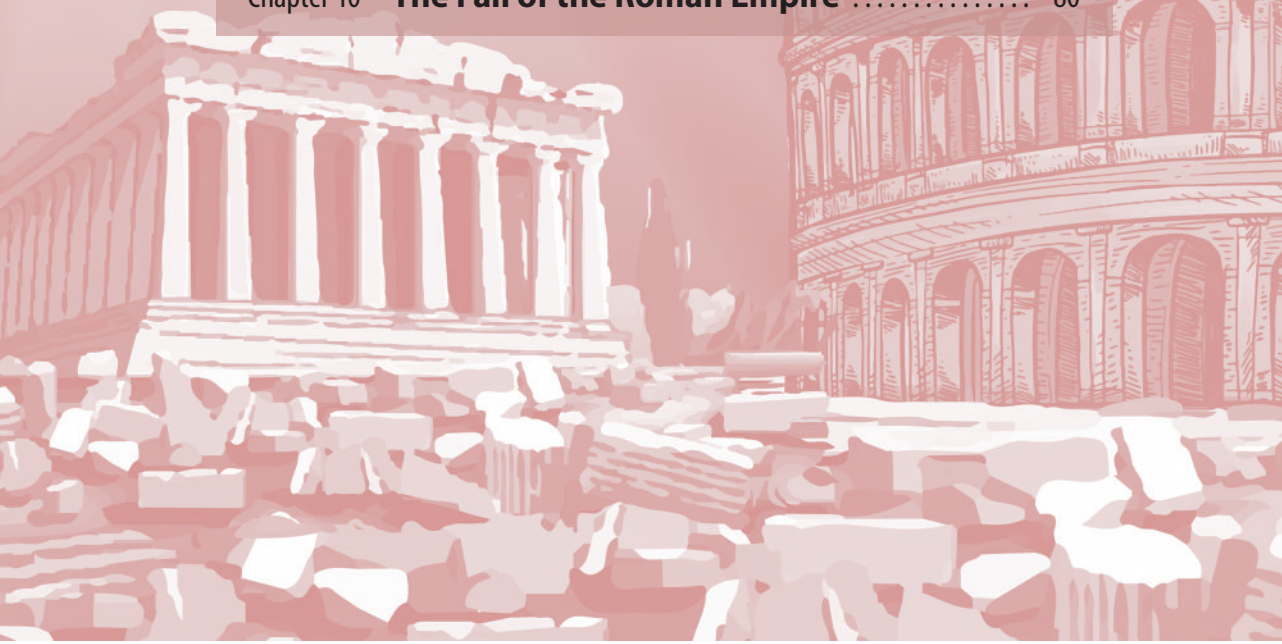
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The Heritage of Ancient Greece and Rome

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The Heritage of Ancient Greece and Rome

Reader

Core Knowledge Language Arts™

Chapter 1

The Heritage of Ancient Greece and Rome

A Rich Legacy It is almost impossible to overestimate the influence the civilizations of Greece and Rome have had on the United States. If you visit our nation's capital in Washington, DC, you will see that the great majority of our important national buildings and monuments are based on Greek and Roman architecture.



The Parthenon is an ancient temple to the Greek goddess Athena.

The United States Supreme Court Building was inspired by the Parthenon (/par*thuh*non/). The White House, the Jefferson Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Capitol are all based on Greek and Roman designs. In fact, it is rare to find a statehouse anywhere in America that is not based, at least in

Vocabulary

classical, adj.
belonging to, or in
the style of, ancient
Greece or Rome

culture, n. a
society's way of
living, including
beliefs, customs, art,
and achievements

part, on **classical** architecture. Many older banks and churches also show traces of the classical style. You will read more about the Parthenon and other classical architecture in Chapter 5 of this reader.

But these buildings are only the tip of the iceberg. Our political institutions have also been greatly influenced by these ancient **cultures**. The leaders of the American Revolution and the framers of the U.S. Constitution paid close attention to the political histories of Greece and Rome.



The architectural style of the Supreme Court building in Washington, DC, was based on classical architecture.

Ancient Greece was made up of city-states, but they were not united. City-states like Athens and Sparta each had its own government and used a different form of democracy. Our nation's early leaders wanted a government that was more united than the Greeks. However, they also did not want the national government to be as strong and centralized as it was under the Roman Empire, which used its powerful emperors and strong armies to maintain absolute rule over its lands. In laying out the Constitution, our early leaders tried to create a mixed government. They tried to make sure that different parts of the American government serve as "checks and balances" against one other. They paid particularly close attention to the Roman Republic.

As a result, we have a government that borrows heavily from the Romans. We pledge allegiance to a republic inspired by the Roman Republic, which was ruled by elected officials called consuls. We elect senators to a Senate modeled partly on the Roman Senate. But we have borrowed from the Greeks as well. From them, we have taken the idea of democracy, the principle of majority rule, and the concept of a jury to help make decisions in a court of law. Even our major political parties—Democratic and Republican—can trace their names back to ancient Greece and Rome.

The cultural influence of ancient Greece and Rome is with us not only on election day but every day of the year. Although many people may not realize it, our calendar is basically a Roman calendar, designed by Roman leader Julius Caesar. Several of our months are named for Roman gods, and two summer months are named for Roman leaders. The month of July is named after Julius Caesar, and the month of August is named after the emperor Augustus Caesar.

The way we divide our day into a.m. and p.m. also comes from the Romans. The Romans divided the day into two parts: the time before the sun reaches its meridian, or middle point, and the time after the sun passes the meridian. In Latin (the language of ancient Rome), these periods are referred to as *ante meridiem*, or a.m., and *post meridiem*, or p.m.

Nor are these the only abbreviations that come from the Latin language. Do you know anyone who has a B.A. degree? Or maybe an M.A., M.D., J.D., or Ph.D.? All of these abbreviations come from Latin, the language spoken by the Romans. And so do some others you might see in books. The abbreviation *e.g.* (*exempli gratia*) means “for example”; *i.e.* (*id est*) means “that is”; and *n.b.* (*nota bene*) means “note well.”

Greek and Latin Words

Thousands of English words are derived from Latin words. English also includes many Greek words. You probably speak several Latin and Greek words every day without even realizing it. Take a look at the chart. How many of these words do you know and use?

Vocabulary
jurisprudence, n. a country's system of laws and justice

English Words from Latin	English Words from Greek
aquarium	aristocracy
army	astronomy
cancer	athlete
candle	comedy
cereal	democracy
extra	economics
gladiator	epic
hospital	geometry
jurisprudence	harmony
justice	hero
language	laconic
major	marathon
minor	mathematics
nebula	melody
picture	metaphor
pirate	olympics

pollen	panic
port	philosophy
prejudice	physics
property	poetry
radius	police officer
salary	politics
school	rhetoric
senate	rhythm
street	spartan
verb	stadium
vision	tragedy

Of course, all of this might have turned out differently. Another ancient society, the Persians, temporarily took over rule of some Greek city-states. Two of the strongest city-states, Athens and Sparta, cooperated and were able to force the Persians out of Greece during the Persian Wars. If they had not done this, the Persians might have conquered much of Europe and our language might be full of Persian words. We might not think about politics, drama, or architecture in the same way that we do today.

Likewise, the Romans wouldn't be as influential to us today if a different culture had ruled their empire. Rome battled the powerful North African city-state of Carthage for control of their lands and society. These wars lasted over one hundred years, with Rome finally emerging victorious. Had Rome lost, both our language and our culture would certainly be different. But those things did not happen. Instead, it was the civilizations of Greece and Rome that prevailed and prospered. These two civilizations had a great influence on the European cultures that came after them, and European immigrants eventually brought their cultures to America.

The knowledge and accomplishments of the ancient Greeks and Romans laid the groundwork for many of the achievements of later centuries. Engineering achievements, such as the column and the arch, made it possible to build

cathedrals, palaces, law courts, and government buildings, as well as bridges and towers. History made it possible to understand and learn from the past, while philosophy and religion made it easier to understand the universe. Drama and art made life more enjoyable; government made it more orderly; medicine and science helped extend it.

Vocabulary

heritage, n.
something that is received by one person or group from an older person or group

All these things, taken together, make up the cultural **heritage** of ancient Greece and Rome. They represent a tradition, or a collection of ideas and concepts that we have inherited from these earlier cultures. The Greco-Roman heritage is so rich, and so important, that it is impossible to fully understand modern America without knowing a little about ancient Greece and Rome. That is why these ancient civilizations are still important today.



Many of our ideas of government can be traced to ancient Greece. The democratic principle of people choosing their own leaders is demonstrated during local, state, and national elections when candidates are chosen.

Chapter 2

The Ancient Greek City-States

A Great Civilization Many people believe that the greatest of all the civilizations of the ancient world was the civilization of Greece. However, it is a little misleading to speak about ancient Greece as though it were a single civilization.

Ancient Greece was not a unified country. It was a collection of independent **city-states**. The ancient Greek word for city-state was *polis* (/poh* lihs/). A typical polis would have included a town or a small city and the farmlands surrounding

Vocabulary

city-state, n. a city that is an independent political state with its own ruling government

Asia Minor, n. a peninsula in southwestern Asia; today most of this area is the country of Turkey

it. Most Greek city-states had a population of no more than twenty thousand and covered an area of only a hundred or so square miles.

By 500 BCE, dozens of these city-states existed, mainly along the shores of the Aegean Sea. Most were located in the area of present-day Greece, but others were scattered along the coast of **Asia Minor**, on the shores of the Black Sea, in southern Italy, and in northern Africa.



This ancient Greek fresco, known as *The Toreador*, was found on the Greek island of Crete. The ancient Greeks produced beautiful art and architecture.

The Greek city-states had a number of things in common. First, the people of the city-states all spoke Greek, though dialects varied from city-state to city-state. (A dialect is a regional variety of a language.) The Greeks referred to non-Greek speakers as “barbarians.” The word comes from another Greek word —*bárbaros*—meaning to babble. When these people spoke, the Greeks could hear only meaningless syllables that sounded to them like *bar, bar, bar*.

The Greek city-states were also unified by religion. The citizens of the various city-states worshiped the same set of Greek gods. Zeus (/zooss/) was the chief god, but he shared power with other gods, including his wife Hera (/hihr*uh/), the sun god Apollo (/uh*pahl*oh/), the sea god Poseidon (/poh*sye*dun/), and the love goddess Aphrodite (/af*ruh*dye*tee/). The Greeks believed that these gods lived on Mount Olympus but came down from time to time to influence



This ancient sculpted wall decoration, called a frieze, can be found on the Parthenon in Athens, Greece. The frieze depicts some of the Assembly of the Gods. From left to right you can see Poseidon, Apollo, and Artemis, the goddess of the hunt.

human affairs. They told marvelous stories, or myths, about the adventures and misadventures of their gods. They built temples to honor their gods.

Greek city-states also came together for athletic competitions like the Olympic Games. But each Greek city-state was also unique. Each had its own traditions, legends, and local heroes. Almost all city-states worshiped a handful of local gods along with the central gods.

Different Governments

Each city-state also had its own distinctive form of government. In fact, the Greeks were so innovative, or groundbreaking, when it came to government and politics that many of the words we use to talk about these subjects today can be traced back to ancient Greek words. Our words *politics* and *police officer* are both derived from the word *polis*. Politics is the art of governing a polis, or state, and a police officer is a person who helps preserve order in the state.

In the beginning, most Greek city-states were ruled by kings. However, by 500 BCE, most city-states had adopted other forms of government, including **tyranny**, **aristocracy**, **oligarchy** (/ahl*ih*gahr*kee/), and **democracy**.

Tyranny was a system in which one man was the dictator—someone who held all the power. For Greeks, tyranny was different from **monarchy**: tyrants seized power illegally, whereas kings inherited the throne legally. Some tyrants were

Vocabulary

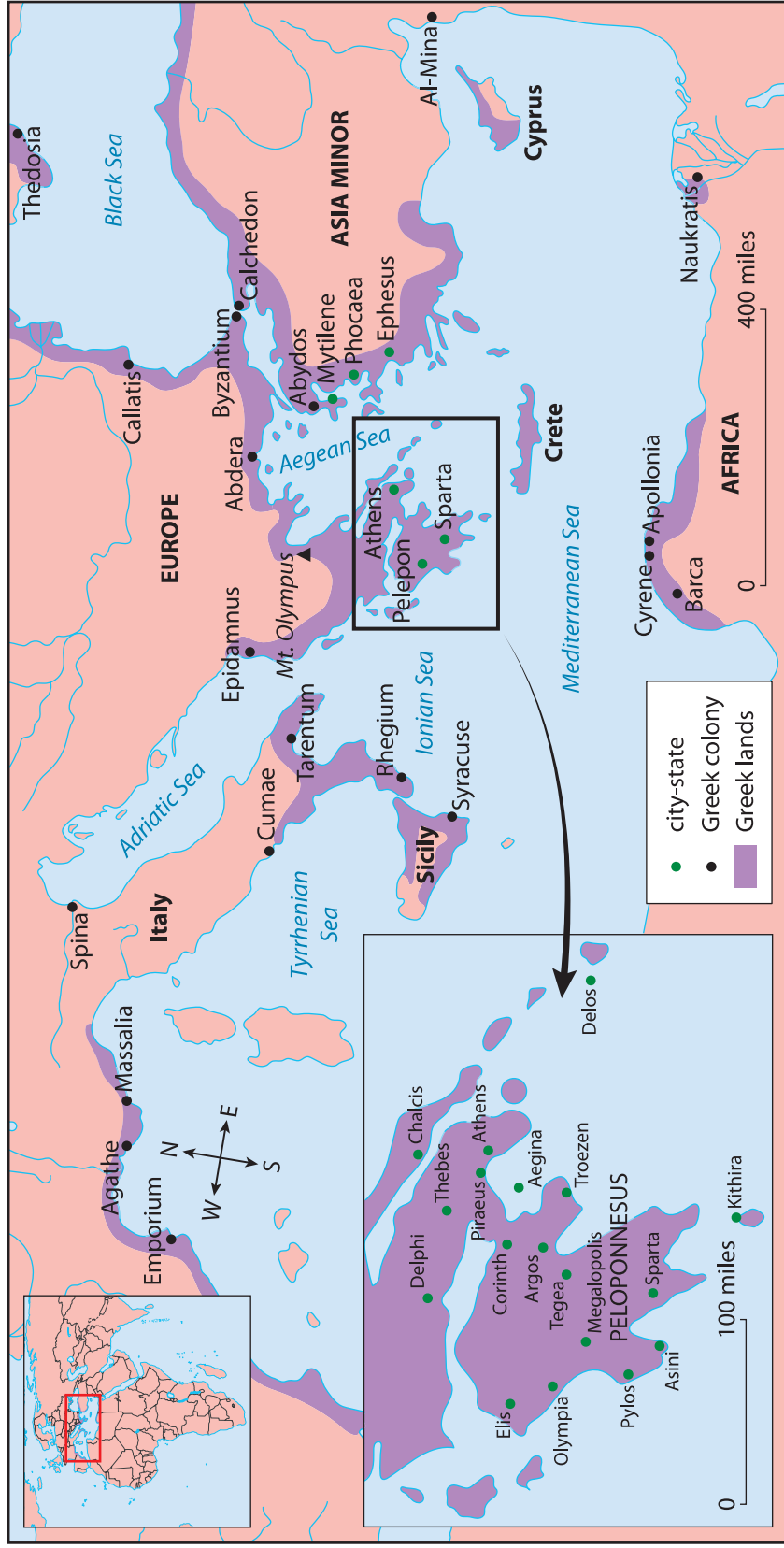
tyranny, n. a type of government in which one person illegally seizes all power, usually ruling in a harsh and brutal way; a dictatorship

aristocracy, n. the upper or noble class whose members' status is usually inherited

oligarchy, n. a government controlled by a small group of people made up of aristocratic and wealthy non-aristocratic families

democracy, n. in ancient Greece, a form of government in which the male citizens held ruling power and made decisions; in modern times, a form of government in which citizens choose the leaders by vote

monarchy, n. a government led by a king or a queen



The Greeks established colonies throughout the Mediterranean. This map shows the extent of ancient Greece around 500 BCE.

popular because they opposed the rich and helped the poor. However, few Greeks wanted to live under tyrants all the time.

Aristocracy was a system in which a few noble, or upper-class, families held power. The word *aristocracy* actually means rule of the best. Sometimes these “best” families shared power with an **assembly** made up of citizens, but not always.

Vocabulary

assembly, n. a group of people; in ancient Greece, the Assembly made laws

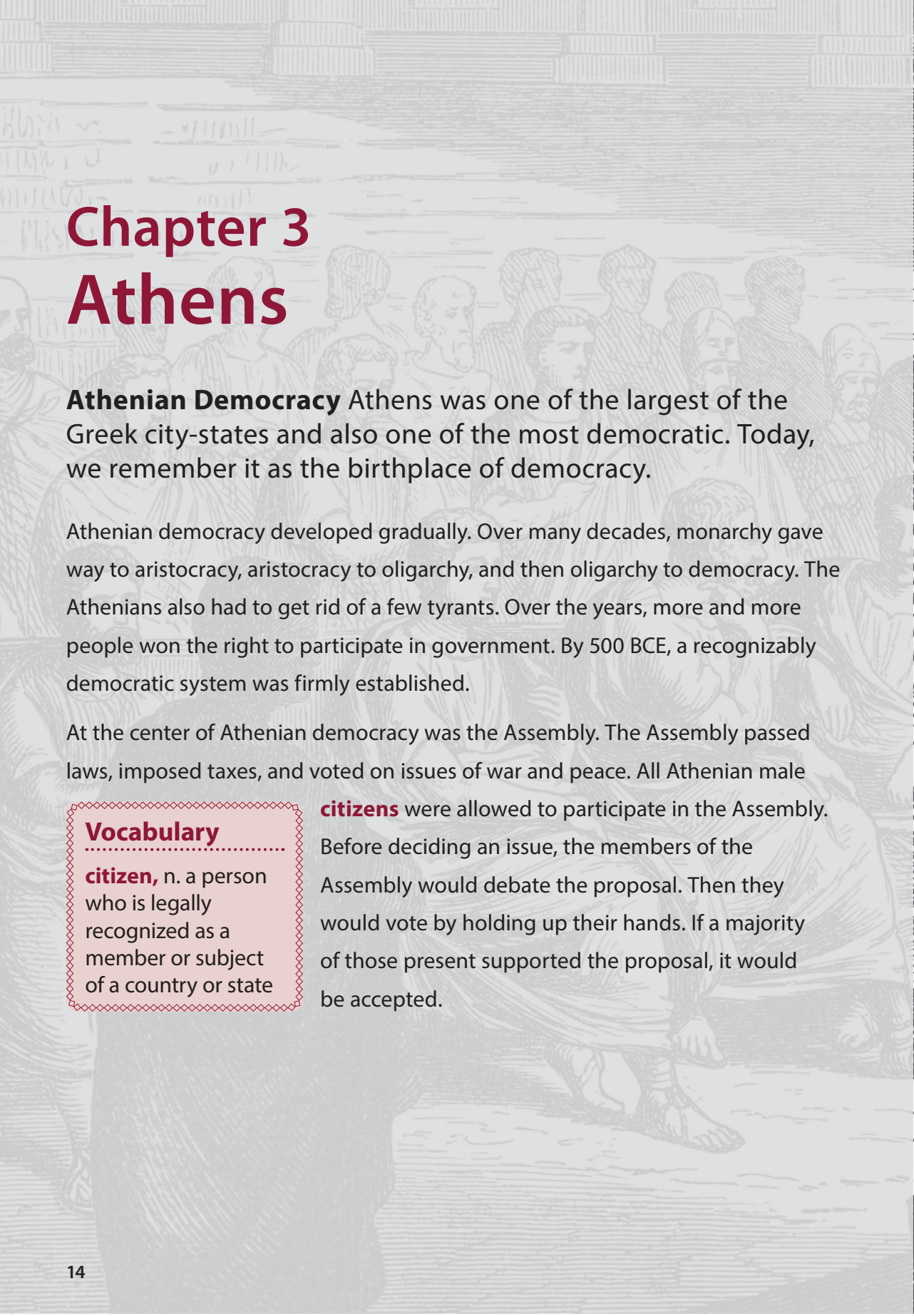
An oligarchy was similar to aristocracy. Again, the power was held by only a few people. In fact, *oligarchy* means rule of the few. But in this case, the few were not only noble families but also wealthy men. (Often oligarchies were comprised of aristocratic and wealthy nonaristocratic families.)

Finally, there was democracy. In a democracy, power was shared by a large number of male citizens. Citizens took part in debates, decided government policy, and elected officials. The Greeks seem to have been the first people to experiment with this kind of government. The experiment eventually caught on, and democracy became the pattern of government in a number of Greek city-states.

Lack of Unity

The Greeks were proud of the independence and individuality of their city-states. They thought it was better to live under local government than under the power of a king who lived far away. However, there were also disadvantages to the city-state model. The Greek city-states were frequently getting into disagreements and wars. This lack of unity made it easier for foreign countries to invade Greece. In times of crisis, the city-states might join together to fight a common enemy, but this was the exception, not the rule. In general, the alliances among city-states tended to be short-lived, while the rivalries among them tended to be long-lasting.

One of the greatest rivalries was between Athens and Sparta, two of the largest and most powerful city-states. In the next two chapters, you will read about these two city-states and the differences between them.

A detailed black and white line drawing of a group of ancient Athenians, including men and women in traditional robes, gathered in what appears to be a public assembly or marketplace. The drawing is in the background, slightly faded, and serves as a thematic backdrop for the text.

Chapter 3

Athens

Athenian Democracy Athens was one of the largest of the Greek city-states and also one of the most democratic. Today, we remember it as the birthplace of democracy.

Athenian democracy developed gradually. Over many decades, monarchy gave way to aristocracy, aristocracy to oligarchy, and then oligarchy to democracy. The Athenians also had to get rid of a few tyrants. Over the years, more and more people won the right to participate in government. By 500 BCE, a recognizably democratic system was firmly established.

At the center of Athenian democracy was the Assembly. The Assembly passed laws, imposed taxes, and voted on issues of war and peace. All Athenian male

Vocabulary

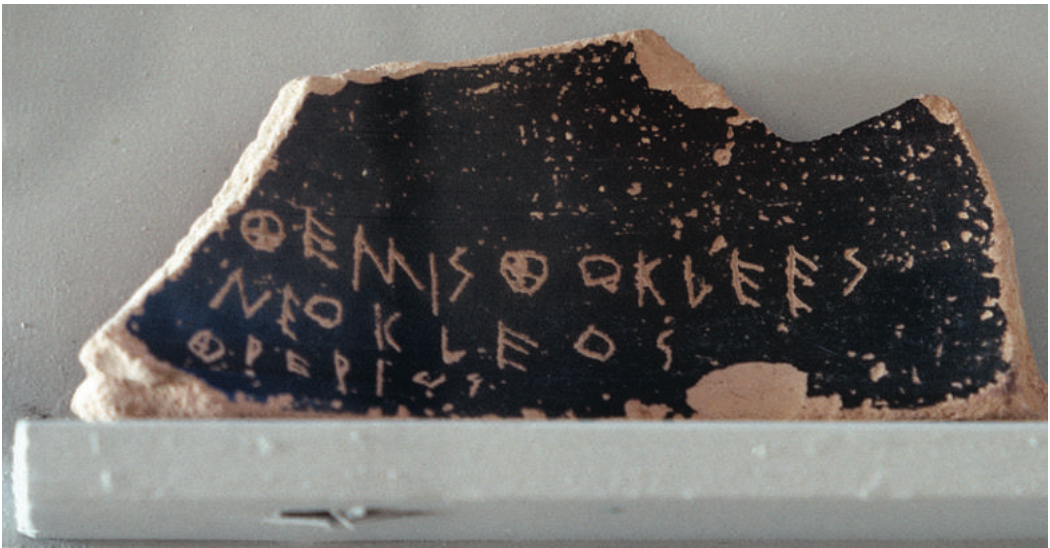
citizen, n. a person who is legally recognized as a member or subject of a country or state

citizens were allowed to participate in the Assembly.

Before deciding an issue, the members of the Assembly would debate the proposal. Then they would vote by holding up their hands. If a majority of those present supported the proposal, it would be accepted.



In Athens, the Assembly debated and voted on issues.



This *ostrakon* had the name “Themistocles” scratched on it.

The Assembly also had the power to **ostracize**, or banish, citizens who might pose a danger to the polis. Again, this was done by voting. During ostracism votes, each citizen was allowed to scratch another citizen’s name on a piece of pottery called an *ostrakon*. If enough people scratched the same name, the ostracized citizen had to leave the city-state and stay away for ten years. However, he was allowed to keep his property, and at the end of ten years, he was allowed to return.

Vocabulary

ostracize, v. in ancient Athens, to send a person away from the city; today, *ostracize* means to shun or ignore a person

The Assembly was assisted by a smaller council, called the Boule (/boo*lee/), which was made up of five hundred members chosen by lot. Each member served a year-long term, and no citizen could serve more than two terms. The Boule decided which issues needed to be brought before the Assembly and which ones could be handled by other officials.

The Legal System

The legal system was also quite democratic. Athenian law was divided into two sections. There were public laws, which had to do with the city-state, and private

laws through which people could work out their disagreements. If someone broke a public law, he would have to pay a fine or face the penalty that had been decided upon by the Assembly or by the Boule. If someone had a disagreement with a neighbor, he could take his neighbor to a law court near the marketplace and have a **jury** decide his case.

Athenian juries were larger than ours are today. In some cases, as many as 501 citizens sat on a single jury! The idea behind these giant juries was to reduce the risk of bribery and **corruption**: it is easier to bribe a dozen jurors than it is to pay off several hundred. Because the juries were so big, nearly all citizens served on juries at some point in their lives. Jury members voted by placing tokens, called hubs, in a jar. Solid hubs stood for “not guilty,” and hollow hubs meant “guilty.”

The fourth element of Athenian democracy was a board of ten generals known as the *strategoi* (/strat*uh*goi/). These generals directed the army. They were elected each year by a tribe, or group, to the Assembly. There were ten groups in all.

Limits of Athenian Democracy

It is important to understand that Athens was not completely democratic by modern standards. You read earlier that all Athenian citizens were allowed to participate in the Assembly. However, not everyone in the polis was a citizen. To qualify as a citizen, a person had to be:

- male
- at least eighteen years of age
- not enslaved
- the son of two Athenian parents

Vocabulary

jury, n. a group of people who listen to information presented during a trial in a court and make decisions about whether someone is guilty or innocent

corruption, n. illegal or dishonest behavior, often by people in a position of power

Women, children, enslaved people, and foreigners living in Athens were not citizens. Therefore, they could not vote in the Assembly or serve on juries.

Although Athenian women played an important role in religious affairs, they had almost no political rights. They could not own property. They were always under the control of a male relative, such as a husband, father, brother, or even an adult son. This male relative decided whom the

woman would marry. If her husband died, she could be remarried without her consent. Sometimes, if a husband knew he was dying, he would decide before his death whom his wife should marry next! Women could not participate in debates in the Assembly. They could not attend certain public events. Girls might receive some education at home, but they were not sent to school. Instead of participating in polis politics, women were expected to bear children and tend to their families. The family was very important in ancient Athens, and Athenian women were expected to uphold it.

As a busy trading city, Athens opened its doors to many foreigners. These foreign residents, known as *metics* (/met*ihks/), played an important role in the Athenian economy. Many metics were artisans, craftsmen, or merchants. Although some metics were presented with honorary citizenship, most never became citizens.

Enslaved people had it even worse. They made up as much as a quarter or a third of the population. A rich citizen might have hundreds of enslaved workers to run his household, farm, or business. A smaller household might have between ten and fifty. Only the poor did not depend on slave labor. Enslaved



This ancient Greek stone carving shows a woman working in her home.

workers cleaned, shopped, cooked, carried water, washed clothing, and helped raise children. Some enslaved workers were educated, so they could help teach the children in a family. Others were accomplished musicians who provided entertainment. But even the most talented enslaved person lacked any political rights. Although Athenian enslaved workers could sometimes buy their freedom, they could not purchase Athenian citizenship.

Because of these requirements, only about forty thousand of the nearly three hundred thousand people living in Athens and the surrounding countryside qualified as citizens. So Athenian democracy definitely had its limits. Still, we should not dismiss what the Athenians achieved. In 500 BCE, you could not find another place where so many of the people were involved in political affairs. Later societies would carry democratic ideals even further, but it was the Athenians who took the all-important first steps.

Athenian Education

Because the Athenians believed that every citizen should play a role in the government of the city-state, they took pains to prepare young men to become good citizens. They believed a good education would benefit the polis as well as the individual.

A citizen needed to be able to take part in debates in the Assembly and law courts. He also needed to know how to argue, how to defend his own opinions, and how to criticize the ideas of others. This is why the Athenians taught their sons **rhetoric**.

Along with rhetoric, Athenian schools taught **logic**, reading, writing, arithmetic, and music. Boys learned to play a stringed instrument called the lyre and memorized sections from two **epic poems** attributed to the ancient Greek poet Homer, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

Vocabulary

rhetoric, n. the skill of using words effectively in speaking or writing

logic, n. the study of ways of thinking and making well-reasoned arguments

"epic poem,"
(phrase) a long poem that tells the story of a hero's adventures



This painted vase depicts a classroom in ancient Greece.

In addition to academic instruction, every young man was given two years of military instruction and many years of physical education. Athenian men were expected to exercise in a gymnasium. This was not an enclosed building, like a modern gym, but a parklike area outside the city where men gathered in the cool shade of the trees to exercise their bodies and relax their minds. The men did not wear clothes when they exercised. In fact, the word *gymnasium* comes from a Greek word meaning "to exercise naked." In addition to exercising, they competed in athletic competitions.

When an Athenian male got a little older, he might go to a symposium. A symposium was like a banquet. Citizens gathered to eat, drink, listen to musicians, converse, and enjoy one another's company. Much wine was consumed, but many symposiums also had an educational purpose. When the members of a symposium settled down for conversation, the men took turns speaking on a chosen theme, such as love or happiness. The participants were not just gossiping or wasting time. They were sharing wisdom and reaching conclusions.

Athenian education sought to produce loyal Athenian citizens, but it also sought to produce cultured, well-rounded men who appreciated art, music, and sports. The ideal citizen would be equally comfortable on the battlefield or in the Assembly. He would be willing to follow army discipline during wartime but also willing to drink wine and eat a hearty dinner at a symposium when the war was over. He would fulfill his political responsibilities but also pursue other interests. In short, the Athenian educational system was designed to produce solid citizens and well-rounded individuals.

Chapter 4

Sparta

Military Culture In the city-state of Sparta, less than one hundred miles southwest of Athens, there was a very different idea about the purpose of education. Spartans raised their children to be warriors. They had no interest in developing “well-rounded individuals,” or individuals of any sort.

The Spartan educational system emphasized military training, almost from the cradle to the grave. For example, the Athenians required two years of military training, but the Spartans required twenty-three!

When a Spartan woman gave birth to a baby boy, the child was inspected by a government committee. If the baby was healthy and looked as if he might grow into a strong warrior, he was allowed to live. However, if the baby seemed weak or unhealthy, he was often left outdoors to die.

The Spartans made sure children grew up to be tough. Spartan children who cried were not picked up or comforted. The Spartans believed that soothing children in this way made them soft. A similar objection was raised against sandals—wearing shoes meant that boys would have soft feet. Soldiers needed tough feet. Therefore, Spartan boys had to go barefoot, even in the dead of winter.



Sculpture of a Spartan soldier



Spartan warriors, like the one shown here, were the best-trained soldiers of their time. The inset image is a bronze statue of a Spartan soldier from the 500s BCE.

At the age of seven, Spartan boys were sent away from their families to begin military training. They lived in **barracks** with other boys their age and were taught to obey without question. Even the slightest questioning of authority brought a severe whipping.

Vocabulary

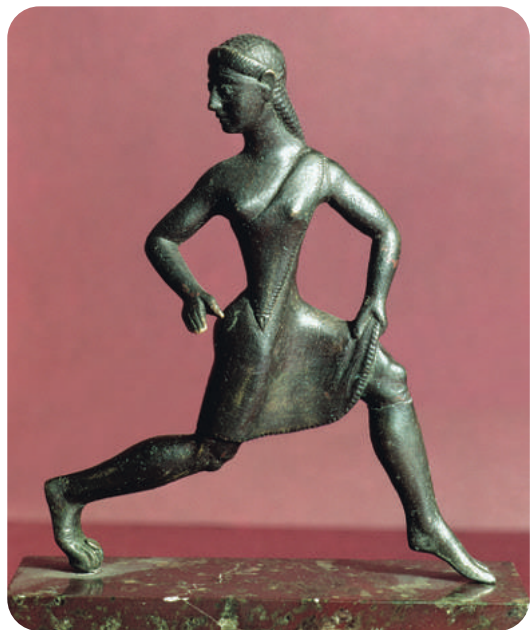
barracks, n.
buildings where
soldiers live

In Sparta, little time was spent teaching reading, writing, and poetry. Instead, physical fitness was king. Spartan boys were taught to endure great pain and never accept defeat. When the boys became teenagers, their food rations were cut so that they would have to learn to find food for themselves—this included stealing.

Young men could marry at age twenty, but they had to continue sleeping in the barracks until they turned thirty. They had to sneak away to be with their wives, and they were punished if they got caught. Even after they moved in with their wives, they had to eat with their army unit rather than with their wives and children. Military service continued until the men turned sixty.

The entire Spartan state was organized as a military unit, and everyone had a role to play. Spartan women did not fight, but they had more political rights than Athenian women. They could own land, and they were encouraged to take part in footraces and other sports so that they would be healthy mothers. Once they became mothers, they were expected to help raise their sons to be warriors.

Spartan mothers had to be prepared to lose their sons in war.



This bronze statue of a Spartan woman running is from the 500s BCE. Spartan women were encouraged to run to keep fit.

On hearing that her son had died in battle, one Spartan woman refused to weep. Instead, she announced her loss proudly: "I bore him so that he might die for Sparta, and that is what has happened, as I wished."

Why did the Spartans place so much emphasis on military skill and bravery? It was partly to protect themselves against foreign enemies. When someone suggested that Sparta build a wall around the city, the legendary Spartan leader Lycurgus (/lie*ker*gis/) supposedly replied that a "wall of men" would protect the city more effectively than any wall of bricks.

But there was another reason too. The Spartans ruled over large numbers of enslaved people called *helots*. The first helots were captured in war. Like serfs in feudal Europe centuries later, helots were tied to the land, forced to work on state-owned farms. They were assigned to individual Spartans, but could not be bought and sold by these masters. Whatever they grew or produced on the land, they owed their masters a portion of it.

The life of a helot in Sparta, in most cases, was much worse than the life of an enslaved person in Athens. In fact, Spartans made fun of the Athenians for coddling their enslaved workers. The Spartans said that in Athens, you could hardly tell the enslaved workers from the citizens. That was not a problem in Sparta. Although the helots outnumbered Spartan citizens by perhaps twenty to one, the Spartans had a reputation for treating them harshly. There are many historical accounts that say the helots were beaten regularly and could be put to death for complaining. However, there are some accounts that describe the Spartans as being a little more reasonable at times. They may even have allowed some helots the right to own property and fight alongside Spartans in battle.

Despite the harsh rules (or perhaps because of them), the helots sometimes rose in revolt. That was another reason the Spartans forced all male citizens to be warriors.

Spartan education was cruel and inhuman by today's standards. But Spartans valued the results that came from these methods. Spartan citizens were

patriotic, disciplined, and tough. They valued equality between Spartan citizens. They were taught to care more about the well-being of the state than about their own personal well-being. And they were matchless fighters, willing to defend their polis to the death.

Spartan Government

The government of Sparta is generally called an oligarchy, but it also contained elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and very limited democracy. The Spartans had not one, but two kings. These two men were supposed to prevent each other from becoming corrupt tyrants. They were also in charge of the all-important army. In addition to the kings, Sparta also had



The disciplined and well-trained Spartan soldiers were more than a match for other armies.

an **aristocratic council** of elders and an Assembly. Sparta's Assembly, though, was far less democratic than the one in Athens. Citizens were not allowed to debate an issue, only to approve or disapprove a proposal, and they showed their approval or disapproval not with a show of hands but by shouting for or against a measure.

Vocabulary

"aristocratic council," (phrase) a group of people from the upper class or nobility who helped govern Sparta

Spartan elections were handled in the same way. Citizens were called together in an open field and asked to shout for the candidate they preferred. Judges determined which candidate got the loudest shouts. (The Athenians found all this shouting very humorous.)

Although the Spartans accepted a few democratic ideas, they were generally doubtful about Athenian-style democracy. They believed that their way of life was better than the Athenian way of life.

Contrasting Lifestyles

Athenians enjoyed going to symposiums, or banquets, with good food and wine. The Spartans were less extravagant and believed in keeping life simple. Athenian writers wrote that Spartan cooks were told not to make the food too tasty. Apparently, they succeeded. After eating dinner in Sparta, one visitor said, "Now I know why they aren't afraid to die in battle!" The only "fun" activity the Spartans allowed was dancing, and this was only tolerated because the elders thought dancing improved a soldier's footwork. However, it is important to note that a lot of what we know about Sparta comes from the Athenians, and they were more than a little biased!

The Athenians trained their citizens to be skilled in rhetoric and public speaking. Spartans, on the other hand, were famous for avoiding long speeches. You may know the English word *laconic*. This word means concise, or of few words. What you may not know is that in ancient Greece, *laconic* was a synonym for *Spartan*—and the word itself comes from *Laconia*, the

name of the territory where Sparta was located. The Spartans were famous for their brief replies. Once a Greek from a hostile city-state told a Spartan, "If we defeat you, we will destroy your city." The Spartan spoke only one word in reply: "If." Now that's laconic!

Athens was a culturally rich city that eventually produced some of the greatest art and literature of all time. A great Athenian statesman once explained that Athenians saw no conflict between strength and beauty: "Our love of what is beautiful does not lead to extravagance; our love of the things of the mind does not make us soft." By contrast, the Spartans worried that too much attention to the "things of the mind" might make them soft. They chose to produce soldiers, not artists.

Athens was located only four miles from the sea, but Sparta was an inland city. This inland location may have encouraged the Spartans to isolate themselves from the rest of the world. Whatever the reason, that is what they tried to do. While Athens welcomed foreigners, Sparta tried to keep them away so that they could preserve their traditional ways and highly ordered society. The Spartans even avoided using silver and gold coins, because these had a tendency to attract foreign merchants. Instead, they used iron bars, which nobody but a Spartan could possibly want.

Location also helped determine the military differences between these two city-states. The **landlocked** Spartans generally had a small navy, or none at all, but their army was the best in Greece. The Spartan army often fought using a military formation known as the **phalanx**. The phalanx formation was made up of many soldiers in a tight, dense group, armed with spears and shields. They moved together as one. The success of this formation in battle depended greatly on constant

Vocabulary

landlocked, adj.
cut off from the seacoast; surrounded by land

phalanx, n. a group of soldiers who attack in close formation with their shields overlapping and spears pointed forward

drilling, discipline, courage, patriotism, and the idea of equality. The phalanx in many ways defined Spartan society.

Athens tried to excel in both land and sea warfare, but the Athenian navy was especially strong.

Sparta and Athens were so different that each city-state was suspicious of the other, and it was hard for the two to get along. The rivalry between these two city-states would play an important role in Greek history. In the next few chapters, you will read about a couple of occasions when Athens and Sparta managed to cooperate and also about a fateful war in which they confronted one another on the battlefield.



Athens had a large, powerful fleet of ships.



Chapter 5

The Golden Age of Athens

Rise of the Athenian Empire The Greeks' victory in the Persian Wars allowed the Greek city-states to remain free and independent. After the Persian Wars, Athens and Sparta were the two leading Greek city-states.

The Spartans had fought bravely at Thermopylae. They led the army during the final victory at Plataea. The Athenians had triumphed against all odds at Marathon. They defeated the Persian fleet during the naval battle of Salamis.



Although they were greatly outnumbered by the Persians, the Athenians were victorious at the Battle of Marathon.

Athens and Sparta worked together during the war. But as soon as the war was over, they took separate paths. The Spartans went home to keep an eye on the helots. Meanwhile, Athens began building a mighty empire.

At the end of the war, many of the Greek city-states feared that the Persians might try to invade again. They wanted to form a **league** to defend themselves against such an invasion. In 478 BCE, they set up an alliance known as the Delian (/dee*lee*un/) League. Sparta did not participate in the Delian League, so Athens became the leader of the alliance.

Each of the city-states in the Delian League—named after the island of Delos in the middle of the Aegean Sea, where the league met—agreed to send money or ships to support the league. Athens decided how much money and how many ships each city-state had to send. Over time, Athens began treating the other members of the league less like **allies** and more like colonial subjects. Other city-states were made to swear a loyalty oath to Athens. They were not allowed to resign from the league.

Income from the Delian League helped fund what is now known as the Golden Age of Athens. The Golden Age lasted seventy-five years, from the end of the Persian Wars in 479 BCE until the end of the Peloponnesian (/pell*uh*pen*ee*shun/) War in 404 BCE. During this time, Athens produced some of the greatest artistic and cultural achievements the world has ever known.

Pericles

One important citizen of Athens during its Golden Age was Pericles (495–429 BCE). For nearly thirty years, Pericles (/pehr*ih*kleez/) was reelected again and again as one of the ten *stratego*i, or generals. Eventually, he became the most powerful and influential man in Athens.

Vocabulary

league, n. a group that works together to achieve common goals

ally, n. a nation that promises to help another nation in wartime

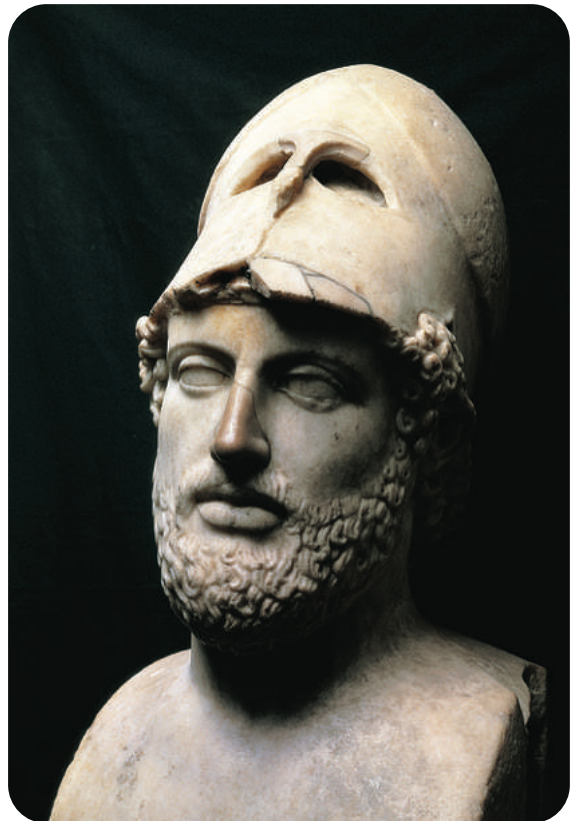
One key to Pericles's success was his skill as an **orator**, or public speaker. One biographer said that his words were "like thunder and lightning." When Pericles proposed a measure, the Assembly usually went along with him. Even though Pericles was technically only one citizen among many, he soon emerged as the leader of the Athenian city-state.

Vocabulary

orator, n. a skilled public speaker

Pericles was well known for his hard work and dedication. It was said that he was never seen walking on any road besides the ones that led to government buildings. He did not believe in wasting time at parties and social events. He was rumored to have attended only one party during his lifetime and then he left early.

Under Pericles, the Athenian empire grew stronger. Pericles led armies in victorious campaigns. He helped keep the other members of the Delian League in line. He supervised the establishment of a number of Athenian colonies. He also convinced the Assembly to build bigger and stronger walls to protect Athens from attack. Walls stretched from Athens to the nearby seaport of Piraeus (/pye*ree*us/). Without these walls, an attacking army could surround the city and cut off its food supplies. With the walls, it would be possible for the Athenian navy to bring in food supplies from overseas, even while the enemy attacked. (This was why Athens had to have a powerful navy.)



Athens reached its greatest height of accomplishments under the leadership of Pericles.

Pericles also strengthened Athenian democracy. Before Pericles, poor Athenians were often unable to participate in government. As citizens, they had the right to do so. However, because government work (including being part of a jury) did not pay, a poor citizen often could not afford to leave his paying job to accept an unpaid government position. Pericles convinced the Athenians to pay citizens for government work. This opened the Athenian democracy to a wider range of citizens.

Pericles is also remembered as a supporter of the arts. He supported **dramatists**, painters, sculptors, and **architects**. In 449 BCE, Pericles suggested that Athens rebuild the temples and public buildings in the Acropolis, a complex of buildings on a bluff overlooking the city. The temples and buildings on the Athenians' Acropolis had been destroyed during the Persian Wars. Rebuilding it would be expensive, but Pericles had a plan. He said the Athenians could take some of the money they were getting from their allies in the Delian League and spend it on this important architectural project.

Vocabulary

dramatist, n. a person who writes plays

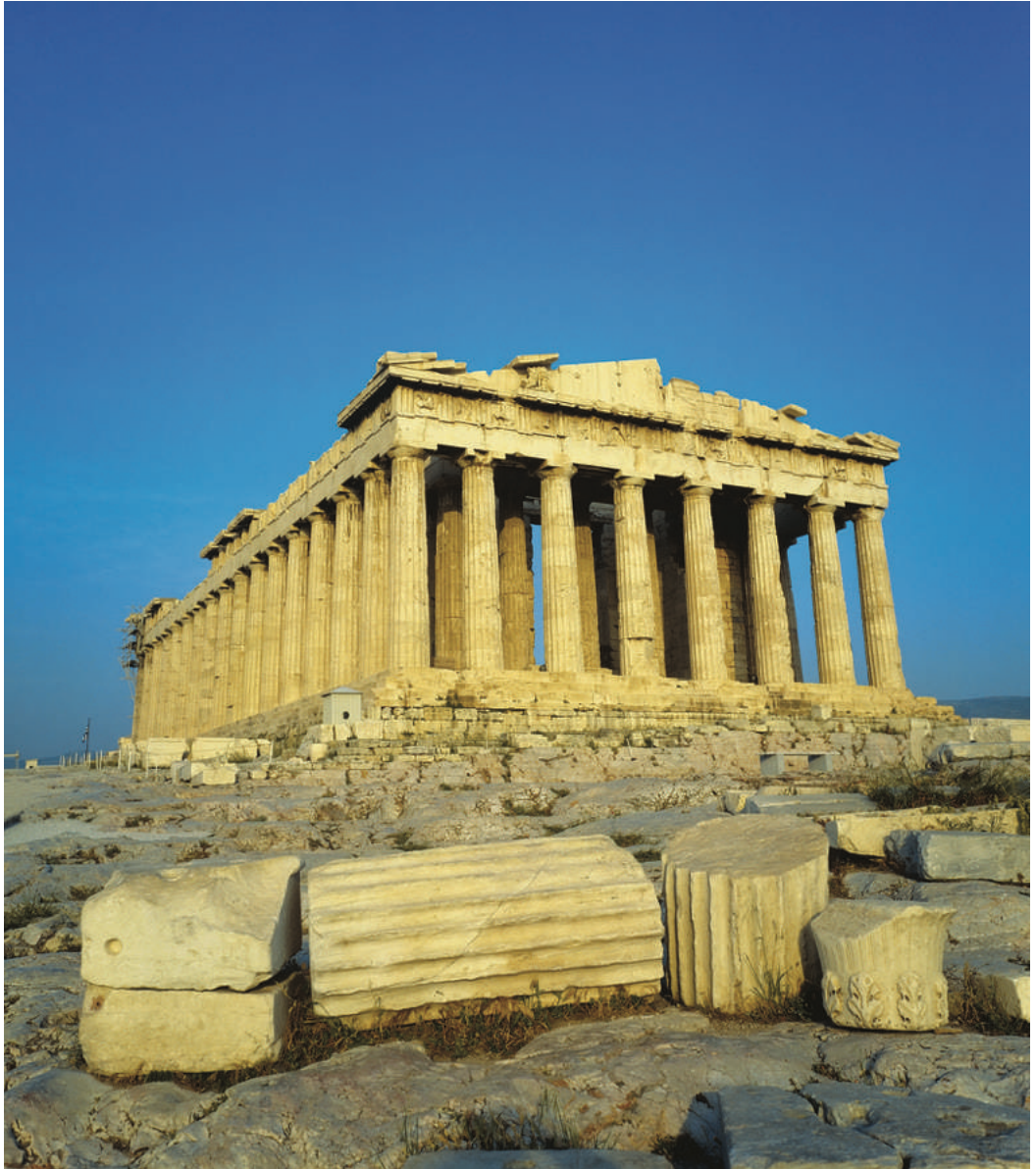
architect, n. a person who designs buildings

This idea was controversial. Many of the members of the Delian League complained that it was unfair to use their money to beautify Athens. Even some Athenians questioned the strategy. Pericles used Athenian military power to make the other Greek city-states accept his plan. He used his oratorical skills to convince the Athenians that his plan was acceptable. Pericles said that as long as Athens was protecting its allies, it could use the excess money in any way it saw fit.

The Parthenon

The most famous of all the buildings built under Pericles's leadership was the Parthenon (/par*thuh*non/). The Parthenon is a temple to Athena (/uh*theen*uh/), the Greek goddess of wisdom, for whom the city of Athens

was named. Built between 447 and 432 BCE, the Parthenon is considered the greatest of all Greek buildings and one of the treasures of human culture. It was badly damaged by an explosion in the late 1600s, when it was being used to store gunpowder during a war. However, the Parthenon still stands. It is 2,500 years old. Thousands of tourists travel to Athens each year to see it.



The image above shows the Parthenon as it is today. The structure was built on a hill so that it could be seen from miles away. The Parthenon was the spiritual center of ancient Greece and was built to honor the goddess Athena.



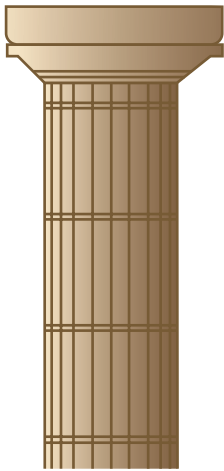
Believe it or not, there is a reconstruction of the Parthenon in Nashville, Tennessee. You can see it in this image, set against the modern buildings of downtown Nashville.

Pericles recruited two leading architects to design and build the Parthenon. He wanted them to build a temple that would honor Athena but would also serve as a symbol of the wealth, power, and prosperity of Athens. They did not let him down. The two designed a rectangular building larger than any other temple on the mainland of Greece. It was roughly 230 feet long, 100 feet wide, and 60 feet high. More than twenty thousand tons of marble were used in the construction process.

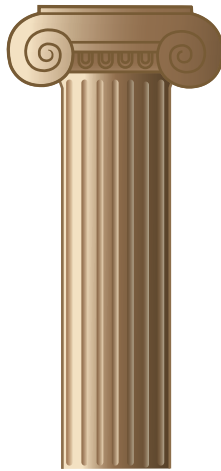
The architects placed a colonnade, or row of columns, on each of the four sides of the building. Many Greek architects before them had used this same technique. Indeed, the Greeks were so fond of columns that they eventually developed three styles of architecture, each of which was based on a distinctive kind of column. These three styles, or orders, were called Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian.

The Doric (/dawr*ihk/) column was the oldest and simplest of the three. It featured a large ridged column with a capital, or top, shaped like a saucer. The Ionic (/eye*ahn*ihk/) style of column was tall and slender with spiral scroll-like curlicues on either side of the capital.

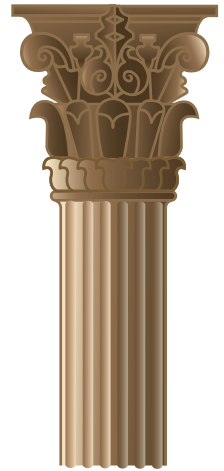
Greek Columns



Doric



Ionic



Corinthian

The ancient Greeks used three different styles of columns for their buildings.

The Corinthian (/kuh*rihn*thee*un/) column was the most ornate. The capital on top of a Corinthian column looks like a basket with layers of leaves in it.

The architects used Doric columns for the Parthenon, which is now widely considered to be one of the finest examples of Doric architecture ever built.

The carvings on the sides of the temple were done by an artist named Pheidias (/fihd*ee*us/), the most famous sculptor of ancient Greece. He worked with his students and builders from all over Greece to create them.

The carvings depicted religious ceremonies and mythological battles between gods and mortals.

Inside the temple the ceiling was high enough to hold a forty-foot-tall statue of Athena. This statue, also made by Pheidias, was covered with ivory and gold. The ivory was used for the skin of the goddess and the gold for her clothing. The statue cost even more than the building that housed it. Unfortunately, it was destroyed in ancient times, though a small copy has survived.

Greek Drama

Athenian architects also built large outdoor theaters for dramatic performances. The most important Athenian theater was the Theater of Dionysus (/dye*uh*nye*sus/),

located below the Acropolis, not far from the Parthenon. In this semicircular, open-air theater, fifteen thousand Athenians gathered.

Like the Olympics, Greek drama began as part of a religious festival. In this case it was a festival in honor of the Greek god of wine, Dionysus. At first a chorus of men danced around the altar of Dionysus, singing in honor of the god. Gradually, performances became more complex. A single actor was introduced in addition to the chorus; then additional actors were included, to allow for conversation and discussion among actors. Eventually, Greek drama began to look a lot like what we think of as a play.

Just as Greek athletes were given prizes for athletic excellence at the Olympics, so Athenian playwrights were given prizes for excellence in the



Greek theaters were designed so that even a whisper on stage could be heard from every seat. Today, modern audiences still respond to the plays of ancient Greece. Here you can see the ruins of the Theater of Dionysus.

Theater of Dionysus. Each year several dramatists would present plays, and a panel of judges would give prizes for the best plays.

The performances were paid for by wealthy men like Pericles. The actors were Athenian citizens. It seems that many Athenian citizens served their city not only in government but also on the stage. According to one estimate, as many as three thousand citizens performed in the festival each year.

The Athenian dramatists invented two kinds of drama that are still important today: comedy and tragedy. Comedies were funny plays with happy endings. They often addressed contemporary issues. The most famous comic playwright was Aristophanes (/ar*ih*stahf*uh*neez/). Tragedies, on the other hand, were serious plays with sad endings. They were usually based on well-known Greek myths. The most famous tragic playwrights were Aeschylus (/es*kih*lus/), Sophocles (/sohf*uh*kleez/), and Euripides (/yoo*rihp*uh*deez/).

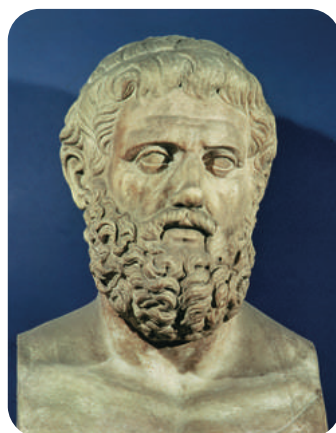
The Big Four

Aeschylus, who was born around 525 BCE, was the oldest of the four major Athenian dramatists. He was old enough to have fought against the Persians. When the Persian Wars were over, he became the leading dramatist of his day. In 472 BCE, Aeschylus wrote a play about the Persian Wars. This play was sponsored by Pericles himself. Later, Aeschylus wrote a famous three-part play called the *Oresteia* (/awr*es*tye*uh/), about murders and revenge. According to legend, one scene completely terrified the audience in the Theater of Dionysus. Aeschylus wrote more than eighty plays in total. Unfortunately, only seven of these plays have survived.

Sophocles was thirty years younger than Aeschylus. When Aeschylus and the Athenian navy defeated the Persians at Salamis, Sophocles was only a teenager. However, because of his boyish good looks and dramatic skills, he was chosen to play a leading role in a dramatic performance celebrating the victory. Later, Sophocles began writing plays. He and Aeschylus became

dramatic rivals. They competed for top honors during the festivals of Dionysus. Sophocles also played a role in public affairs. Sophocles's most famous play is called *Oedipus the King*.

The last of the great tragic playwrights was Euripides. He was born around 485 BCE. Euripides produced eighty or ninety plays. Although he won fewer prizes than Aeschylus and Sophocles, he was popular with Athenian audiences. He is widely admired today for his analysis of human nature.



Marble bust of Sophocles

The great master of Athenian comedy was Aristophanes, who lived from 445 to around 380 BCE. In his plays, Aristophanes made fun of **statesmen** like Pericles, dramatists like Euripides, and philosophers like Socrates (/sahk*ruh*teez/), whom you will meet in Chapter 8.

Vocabulary

statesman, n. a political leader

Athenian drama was an astonishing achievement. The plays are so powerful and so well written that they are still admired and performed today.

Other Cultural Achievements

In addition to architecture and drama, many other arts also flourished during the Golden Age of Athens.

Athenian craftsmen produced distinctive pottery, including bowls, urns, and vases. Much of this pottery was decorated with pictures. The pictures showed episodes from mythology, religious rites, Olympic competitions, and everyday scenes. These decorated urns and vases were used to hold oils, foods, and beverages. They were sold all around the Greek world and beyond. Today, they are even more valuable than they were in the Golden Age. Museums display them for the beautiful scenes they show, and scholars use them to learn about everyday life in ancient Athens.

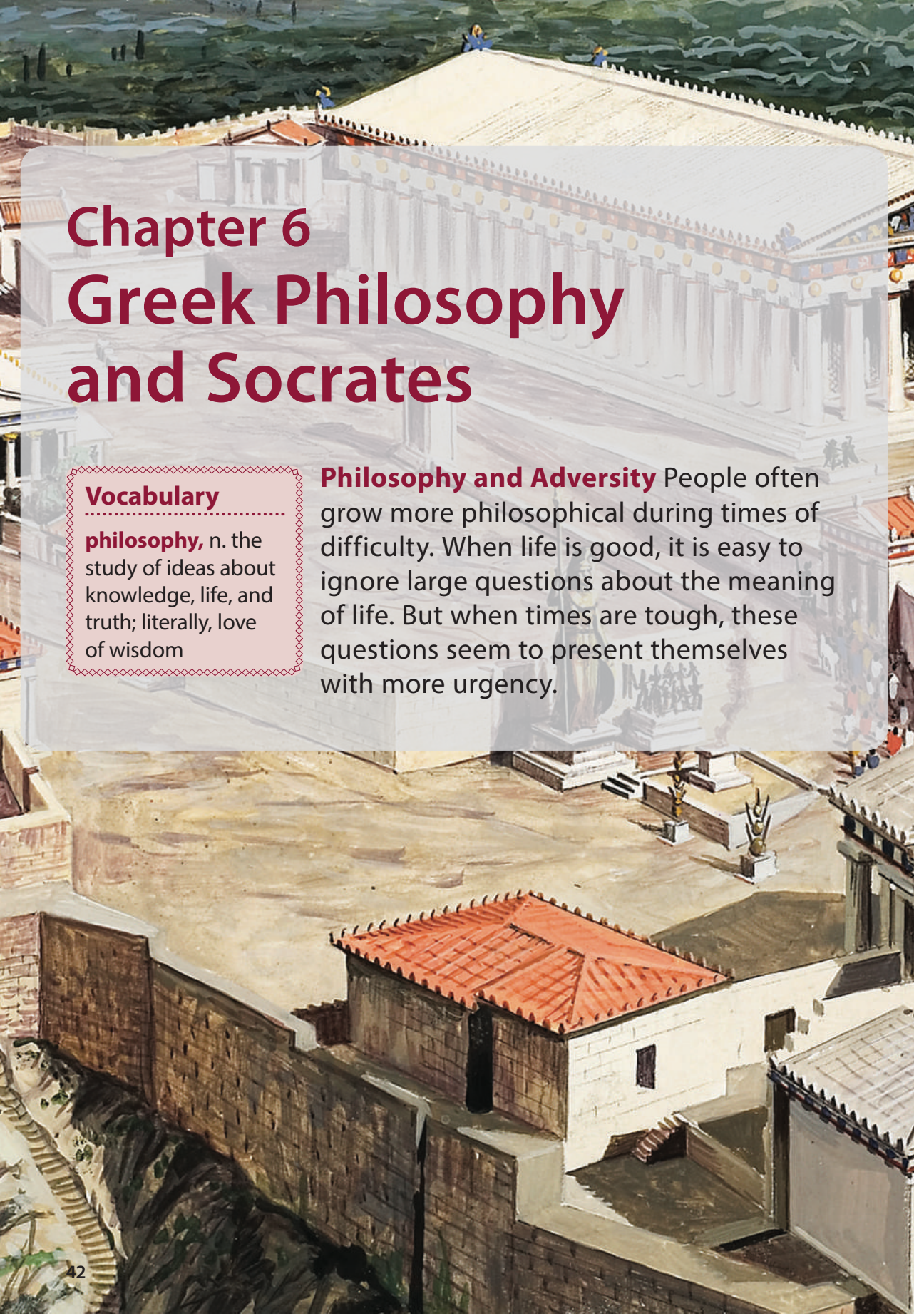
This age also gave the world two of its first historians. Herodotus (/huh*rod*uh*tus/) is often called the father of history. He wrote down the history of the Persian Wars, including the last stand at Thermopylae. Thucydides (/thoo*sihd*ih*deez/) told the story of the Peloponnesian War, which you will read about in the next chapter.

There were also advances in science and medicine. The famous doctor, Hippocrates (/hih*pahk*ruh*teez/), is considered the father of medicine. Hippocrates, who was born around 460 BCE, was one of the first to recognize that weather, drinking water, and location can influence people's health. He is chiefly remembered for the Hippocratic (/hihp*uh*krat*ihk/) oath, a pledge that doctors have been taking for almost 2,500 years. When new doctors recite the Hippocratic oath, they agree to use their medical skills only for the good of the patient: "I do solemnly swear . . . that into whatsoever house I shall enter, it shall be for the good of the sick."

Pericles was very proud of Athenian culture. He described the city as "an education for Greece," and not only for Greece, but for all time. When one considers all the achievements of this era—beautiful temples and theaters, raucous comedies and heartbreaking tragedies, stylish vases and urns, groundbreaking historical writings, and important medical advances—it is hard not to agree. The Golden Age of Athens was truly one of the greatest periods in the history of human culture.



Amphoras often had lids, such as the one here. This urn is from the 300s BCE and shows a wedding scene.



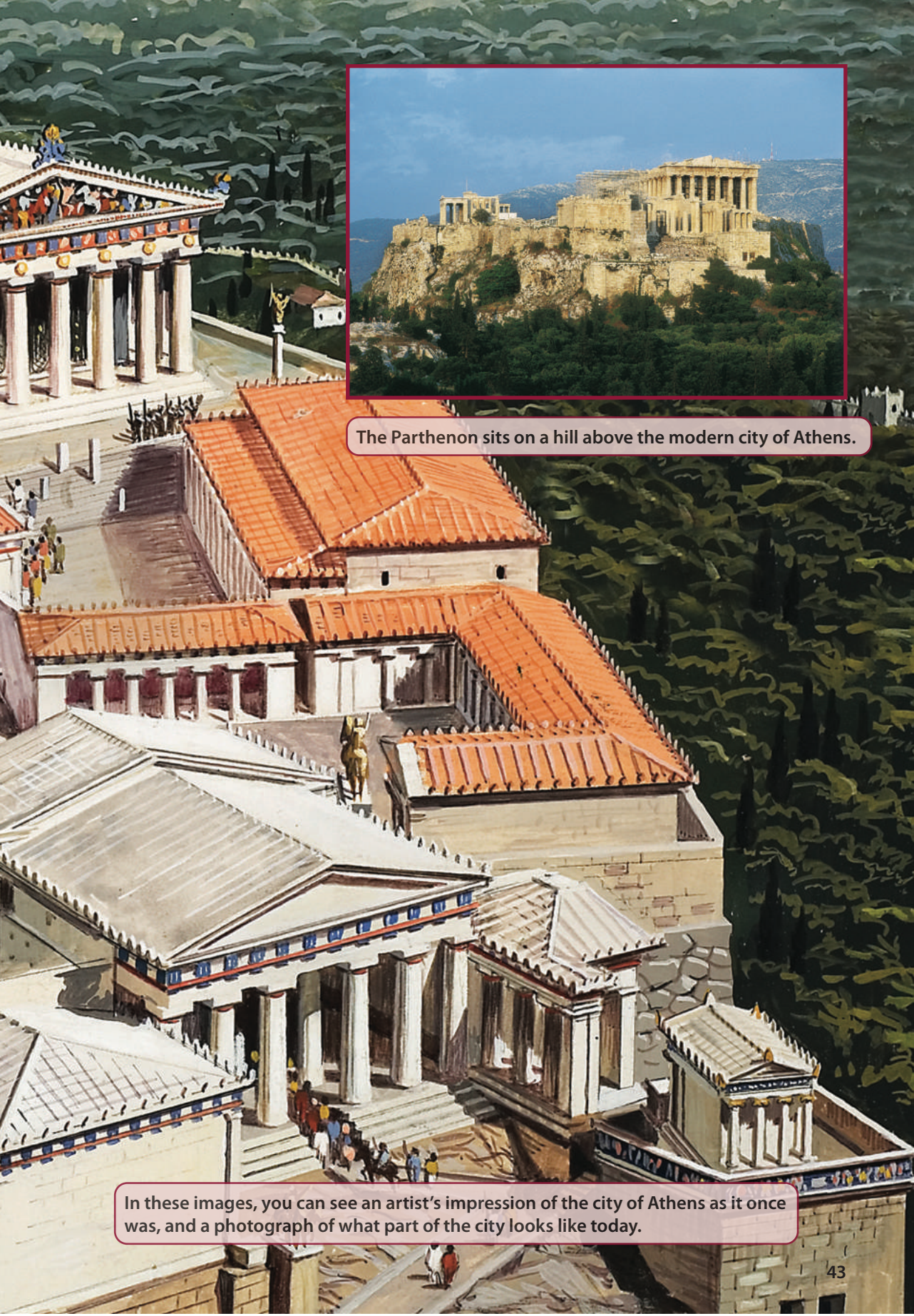
Chapter 6

Greek Philosophy and Socrates

Vocabulary

philosophy, n. the study of ideas about knowledge, life, and truth; literally, love of wisdom

Philosophy and Adversity People often grow more philosophical during times of difficulty. When life is good, it is easy to ignore large questions about the meaning of life. But when times are tough, these questions seem to present themselves with more urgency.



The Parthenon sits on a hill above the modern city of Athens.

In these images, you can see an artist's impression of the city of Athens as it once was, and a photograph of what part of the city looks like today.

The history of Athens seems to demonstrate this point. As the Athenian empire collapsed, Athenian philosophy burst into magnificent bloom. During the last years of the Peloponnesian War and the decades that followed, Athens fell on hard times militarily and politically. Yet the city-state was home to a string of brilliant and influential philosophers, including Socrates, Plato (/play*toh/), and Aristotle (/ar*ess*taht*ul/).

Early Greek Philosophy

Of course, some Greeks had asked philosophical questions before these three philosophers came along. In earlier times they had asked questions such as: How can we understand the world around us? Where did the earth come from? How did the universe get started? Why is life so full of troubles? Like people in other ancient cultures, the Greeks told stories that helped them understand the world. They said that natural events were caused by the gods. A storm at sea meant that the sea god Poseidon was angry. A thunderstorm meant that Zeus was throwing his thunderbolt spear. The world was full of troubles because Zeus had given the first woman, Pandora, a jar or box, with strict instructions that she not open it. But Pandora's curiosity got the better of her. She opened the lid, releasing all the evils and miseries that hurt humanity.

By the 500s BCE, however, some people were no longer satisfied with the answers given by the myths. Some of them no longer believed that gods and goddesses were behind natural **phenomena**. They wondered whether there weren't other ways to understand the world. Eventually, some Greeks began to use **reason** to try to understand the world. This was the beginning of philosophy.

Vocabulary

phenomena, n. observable events; in nature, occurrences such as sun, rain, storms, and earthquakes

reason, n. the ability of the mind to think and understand

A philosopher is a person who uses reason to try to acquire wisdom about life or the universe. Many of the early Greek philosophers tried to figure out where the world came from, how it began, and what it was made of. Some of their ideas have stood the test of time and are still considered important. Other ideas seem strange to us today. But at least the early philosophers were trying to figure things out by using their brains.

The early philosopher Heraclitus (/her*ah*klite*us/) held that everything in life is always changing.

It is impossible, Heraclitus said, to step in the same river twice, because the river itself is always flowing and never at rest. This is an idea that still makes sense to us today. But Heraclitus also seems to have thought that to live long, it was important

to keep one's **soul** from becoming too wet. At death, a dry soul would rise all the way to the sun and help bring about light, day, and summer. But a wet soul would only rise as far as the moon, where it would help bring about winter, night, and rain. These ideas make less sense to us.

Another early philosopher, Thales (/thay*leez/) taught that everything in the universe comes from water. The philosopher Anaximenes (/an*ak*sihm*uh*neeZ/) believed that everything comes from air. Air is alive with movement, he reasoned, and so air must be the origin of all life. Empedocles (/em*ped*uh*kleez/) had a slightly more complicated theory. He proposed that everything comes from the combination or separation of four elements: earth, air, fire, and water.

Some of these theories or ideas came from simple observation of the world in which they lived. It took a long time before

Vocabulary

soul, n. the nonphysical part of a person; in many religions, the soul is believed to live even after the body dies



Heraclitus

philosophers began to test their ideas. Still, these early philosophers were important because they were attempting to answer difficult questions. They were teaching themselves and their listeners how to reason, instead of just accepting the old myths.

Socrates

One of the most famous of all the Greek philosophers and teachers was an Athenian named Socrates, who lived from 469 BCE to 399 BCE. Socrates grew up during the Golden Age of Athens but lived to see that Golden Age crumble during the Peloponnesian War, in which he fought. Most of what we know about the philosophical ideas of Socrates comes from the writings of one of his students, named Plato. Socrates himself wrote nothing. Yet, because he was immortalized in the writings of Plato, when we think of Greek philosophy, we always think of Socrates.

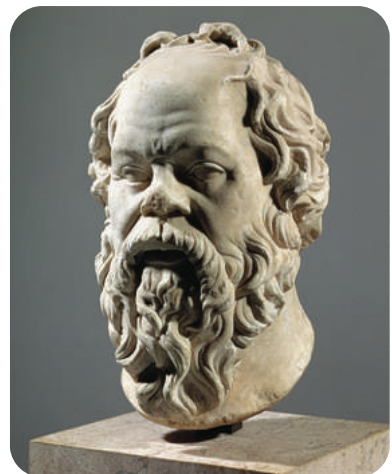
Socrates was different from earlier Greek philosophers in several ways. First of all, he was more interested in questions about how human beings should behave than about where the world came from or what it might be made of. Socrates was one of the first philosophers to study **ethics**.

Vocabulary

ethics, n. rules based on ideas about right and wrong

Socrates also had some unusual methods of philosophizing. Instead of just sitting in his room and writing about philosophical questions, he went to the Athenian marketplace, called the *agora*, and talked with other Athenians. In this way, Socrates made philosophy personal.

During his discussions, Socrates tried to get the Athenians to examine their lives. He wanted them to realize that they were not



Socrates



The agora was the heart of Athenian economy and social life. Socrates enjoyed talking to the people of Athens there.

always living according to the ideals and values they said were important. He tried to convince Athenians that “the unexamined life is not worth living.”

He tried to get them to understand this by asking them questions, instead of giving direct answers. Socrates would ask his listeners to explain what they meant by an important concept or idea, such as justice. Then he would point out the contradictions between what they said and how they lived. By doing this, he was not trying to condemn people as **hypocrites**. He was trying to get people to think more deeply about their lives and about moral and ethical ideals.

Vocabulary

hypocrite, n. a person whose behavior does not match his or her beliefs

The Socratic Method

We can get an idea of what Socrates might have sounded like by looking at an excerpt from Plato’s works. In the following passage, Socrates is talking

with a friend named Crito, making a comparison between physical fitness and moral or ethical fitness:

SOCRATES: Well, is life worth living with a body which is worn out and ruined in health?

CRITO: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: What about the part of us which is mutilated by wrong actions and benefited by right ones? Is life worth living with this part ruined? Or do we believe that this part of us, whatever it may be, in which right and wrong operate, is of less importance than the body?

CRITO: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: Is it really more precious?

CRITO: Much more.

SOCRATES: In that case, my dear fellow, what we ought to consider is not so much what people in general will say about us but how we stand with the expert in right and wrong, the one authority, who represents the actual truth.

We cannot be certain that these are Socrates's exact words. The words were written down later by Plato. But we do know that this was the way Socrates worked, by asking a series of questions that were designed to lead the listeners to realizations about how they ought to behave.

Today, this question-asking method is known as the *Socratic method*. It is still widely used. Whenever your teacher asks you a series of questions, trying to get you to realize or understand something, he or she is using the Socratic method.

Unlike other Greek teachers, called **sophists**, who were paid for their words of wisdom, Socrates did not receive money for teaching. He did not want money for his ideas. He did not care about

Vocabulary

sophist, n. a philosopher; in ancient Greece, a teacher of philosophy and rhetoric

personal comforts. Once when he was passing through the marketplace, he remarked, "How many things I can do without!"

Socrates also differed from the teachers of his day by claiming that he did not have wisdom. He questioned people who claimed to be wise, in order to find out what made them wise (or gave them the reputation for wisdom), and constantly found that they claimed to know things—but really did not. He said he himself was wise only in *one* thing: he at least knew that he knew nothing.

Socrates insisted that he had never taught anyone anything. He simply liked to have conversations. His conversations, however, were always based on two principles. Socrates believed strongly that it was important never to do any wrong, even indirectly. The second principle was that people who really understood what was right and good could not possibly choose the wrong thing.

Although some people liked Socrates, many others found him very annoying. Socrates was constantly talking and expressing his ideas, even when these ideas were unpopular. Socrates also got on people's nerves by pointing out their faults. Nobody likes to be reminded of their shortcomings, especially when they are in front of others. Eventually, Socrates was arrested on the charge of corrupting, or harming, the young men of Athens.

Some of the citizens of Athens felt that Socrates had misled the young men of the city. They accused the philosopher of failing to teach the young proper respect for older people and for the gods. They said he encouraged young men to be selfish and power hungry. Alcibiades had been one of Socrates's favorite students, they said. Other students had been involved in the corrupt government that ruled Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian War. Some Athenians held Socrates responsible for the way these young men had treated the rest of the citizens of Athens.

The Death of Socrates

Plato wrote a series of works about the last days of Socrates. One of these works describes the trial in which Socrates defended himself but was eventually convicted (by a vote of 280 to 221) and sentenced to death.

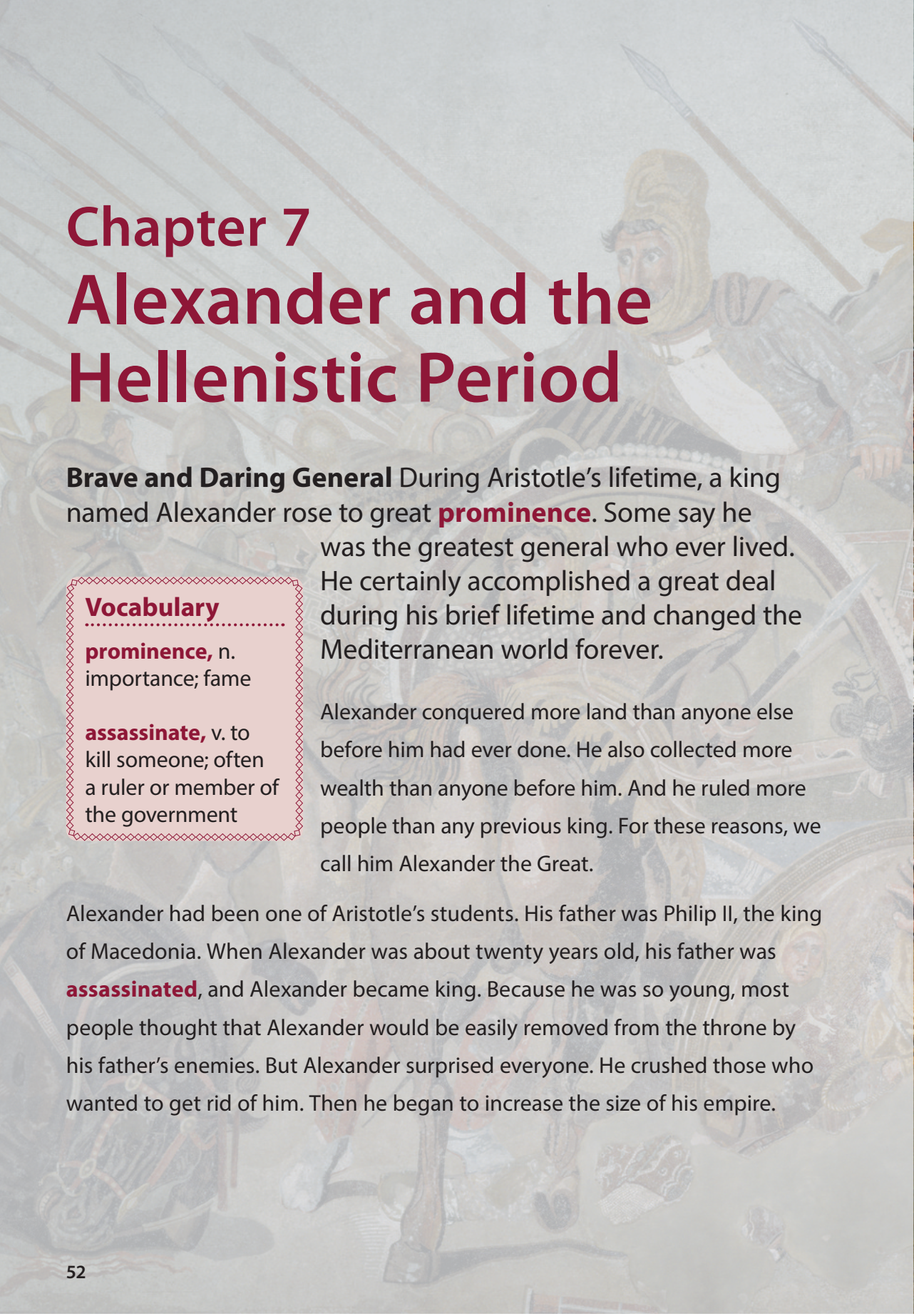
Plato also wrote down conversations that Socrates had with his friends while he was in prison awaiting death. When someone suggested that there were important people who would help Socrates escape from prison, the philosopher refused to save himself and rejected their help. He argued, "One must obey the commands of one's city and country, or persuade it as to the nature of justice." Socrates refused to break the law, even when it condemned him. The citizens of Athens had condemned him to death, and he would face death because it was the right thing to do. He would not put himself above the law.



This painting is called *The Death of Socrates*. It was painted by Jacques-Louis David, a French artist, in the 1700s.

Socrates was executed by being made to drink hemlock, a kind of poison. Plato described Socrates continuing to talk with his friends after he drank the hemlock before gradually drifting into death. In reality, the death of Socrates must have been much more gruesome. Plato chose not to focus on his death but rather on the fact that Socrates was an example of reason and self-control right up to the bitter end. He wanted Socrates to be remembered as Plato himself remembered him, as "a man of whom we may say that of all whom we met at that time he was the wisest and most just and best."

Today, Socrates is remembered for the Socratic method and for his commitment to seeking truth. He expanded the role of the philosopher to include the important task of examining how people live their lives. It wasn't enough for Socrates to think about what goodness meant ideally. He wanted people to choose goodness and live rightly every day. That is why his contributions to philosophy are still important to us all these centuries later.



Chapter 7

Alexander and the Hellenistic Period

Brave and Daring General During Aristotle's lifetime, a king named Alexander rose to great **prominence**. Some say he was the greatest general who ever lived. He certainly accomplished a great deal during his brief lifetime and changed the Mediterranean world forever.

Vocabulary

prominence, n.
importance; fame

assassinate, v. to
kill someone; often
a ruler or member of
the government

Alexander conquered more land than anyone else before him had ever done. He also collected more wealth than anyone before him. And he ruled more people than any previous king. For these reasons, we call him Alexander the Great.

Alexander had been one of Aristotle's students. His father was Philip II, the king of Macedonia. When Alexander was about twenty years old, his father was **assassinated**, and Alexander became king. Because he was so young, most people thought that Alexander would be easily removed from the throne by his father's enemies. But Alexander surprised everyone. He crushed those who wanted to get rid of him. Then he began to increase the size of his empire.



This image is of a Roman mosaic depicting the Battle of Issus, in which Alexander the Great fought the Persians.

Alexander was strong, handsome, and extremely intelligent. He was also a fearless fighter who never hesitated to put himself in the worst part of the battle. This made his troops very loyal to him. It also made his enemies afraid of him because they were never sure where his daring and courage would lead him.

As a young man, Alexander helped his father conquer Greece. (This was not hard to do because the Greek city-states were disorganized.) After his father's death, Alexander decided to attack Greece's old enemies, the Persians. In 334 BCE, the Persian Empire was still very large. It extended all the way to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and included present-day Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, the Middle East, and Egypt.

At the time, Alexander just had a small army of about thirty thousand **infantrymen** and another five thousand men on horseback. He had no navy. But Alexander didn't care. His plan was to gain a couple of quick and easy victories so that he would have supplies on hand. Then, people would want to follow him because he was brave and strong.

Vocabulary

infantryman, n. a soldier who travels and fights on foot

Alexander and the Persian Empire

Alexander and his army attacked Asia Minor and conquered it. He faced the Persian king Darius III in a battle and was so fierce that the king and the Persian army broke ranks and fled. This enabled Alexander to march south, seizing towns along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. He conquered the Middle East, including the city of Jerusalem. He took over everything between Asia Minor and Egypt.

The Persian king asked Alexander for peace. He promised Alexander that he would not attack his army if Alexander let him keep the other half of his empire. Because Alexander had never lost a battle, he saw no reason to accept Darius III's offer. Alexander wanted all of the Persian Empire.



The Battle of Alexander at Issus, painted by the German artist Albrecht Altdorfer, shows Alexander the Great's successful victory in battle over the Persians.

Meanwhile, the nobles of the Persian Empire were not happy with Darius III. They thought he was a weak king and a coward. They decided to arrest Darius and take on Alexander themselves. Once they had arrested the king, however, they found out that Alexander was coming after them. The nobles murdered Darius III and prepared to fight Alexander.

Alexander was brave and strong, but so were the Persian nobles. They forced

Alexander to fight them for three years. He had to fight from mountain stronghold to mountain stronghold in the eastern part of the Persian Empire. Every time he captured one fortress, there would be another one waiting for him. And as he moved east, the nobles gathered their troops to attack him from behind. In the end, however, Alexander won. He had conquered the Persian Empire, the largest and most powerful empire of its time.



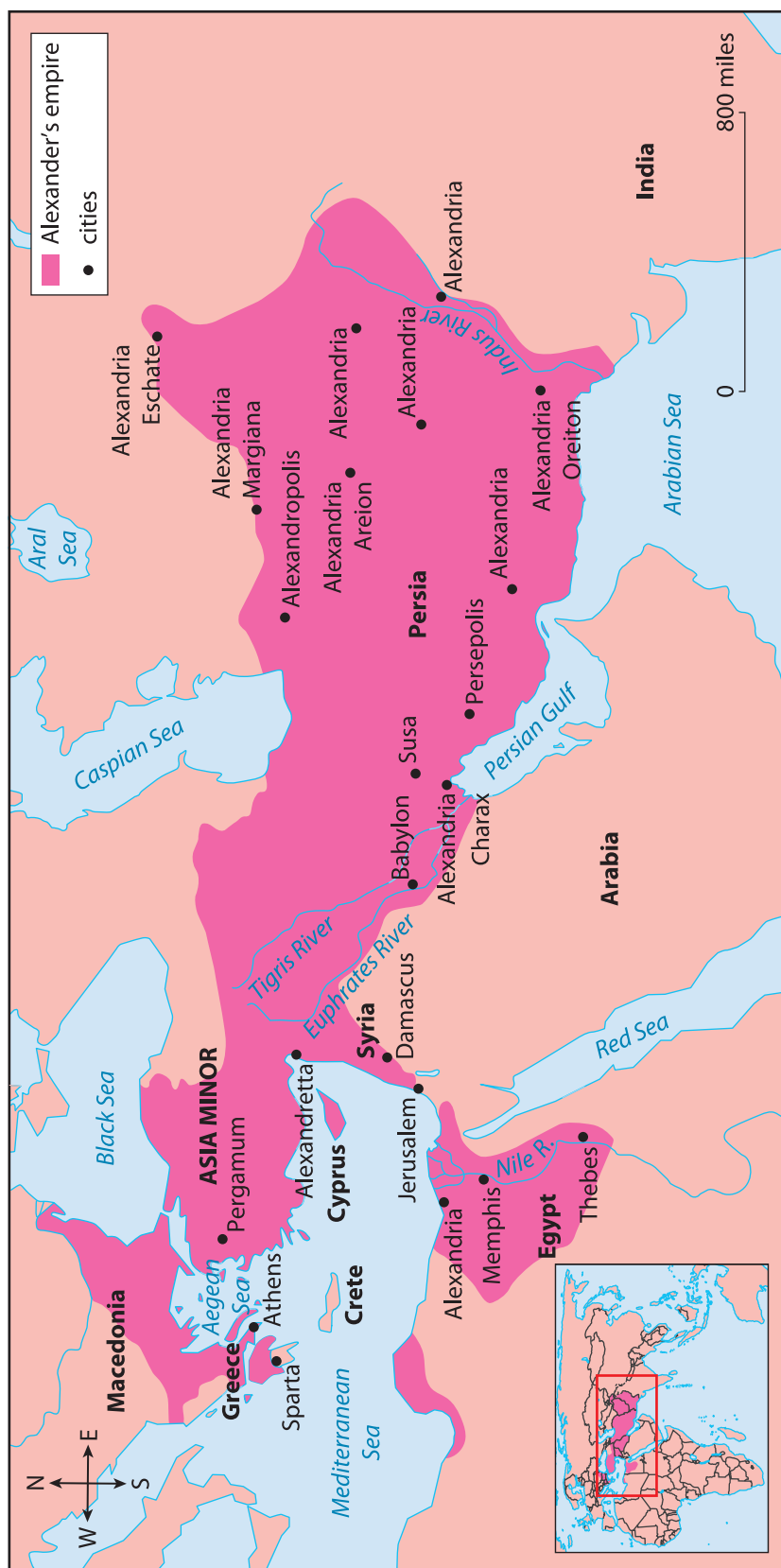
It took Alexander only eleven years to establish his empire. He gave the name "Alexandria" to several of the cities that he founded.

Conqueror of the World

Although Alexander had already created an immense empire, he did not stop. He led his army farther east toward India. By 326 BCE, he and his army were trying to conquer the western part of India. After winning one especially difficult battle, Alexander's army decided they had had enough. They did not want to fight anymore. They were tired of years and years of war, and they knew that this enemy army was far stronger than they were. They had won one battle, but they had not yet faced the largest part of the enemy army.

In ancient times, one of the weapons used in war was the attack elephant. Elephants were used in battle to charge against the enemy and trample soldiers. The Indian army that Alexander and his men had successfully faced had used two hundred of these trained elephants in the battle. But they

Empire of Alexander the Great, 300 BCE



This map shows the extent of Alexander the Great's empire in approximately 300 BCE. As you can see from the map, he named many cities after himself.

knew that the Indian army had five thousand more elephants that they would have to defeat. Eventually, soldiers would learn how to sidestep or take down a charging elephant. But at this point in time, Alexander's men simply wanted to go home.

Having conquered what was then virtually all of the known world, Alexander returned to Babylon, a major city in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) and the center of his new empire. He was strong and capable, so the people of his empire probably expected that he would rule them for many years to come.

In 324 BCE, Alexander began to make plans for new projects, including establishing new cities. Unfortunately, it was not to be. In 323 BCE, Alexander caught a fever. Not long after, he died. He was only thirty-three years old.

Alexander was among the most brilliant and bravest military leaders the world has ever known. He never lost a battle and never gave up. Because of Alexander, the people who lived around the Mediterranean Sea came into contact with Greek culture. As a result, their ideas and knowledge changed forever.

Tales About Alexander

Whenever history produces a larger-than-life character, tales about that person spring up. Alexander the Great was no exception. Tall tales were repeated about him throughout the centuries. It was said that once when he wanted to cross the sea, the waves parted before him, showing the respect that even nature had for this extraordinary man.

Another tale concerned the Gordian knot. According to legend, Gordius, a king in Asia Minor, had tied a large complicated knot in a rope connected to a wagon he had dedicated to the god Zeus. It was said that the knot could only be undone by the man who was destined to rule Asia. Anyone who attempted to untie the knot and failed would be put to death. When

Alexander the Great saw the knot, he took out his sword, and with a single blow, cut it apart. Thus, Alexander the Great proved he was worthy to rule all of Asia. Today, the phrase “cutting the Gordian knot” is used when someone finds an unusual solution to a difficult problem.

The Hellenistic Period

Alexander the Great had a short life, but his accomplishments had a long-lasting impact. In the years after his death, Greek, or Hellenic, culture spread to many of the lands he had conquered. Because Greek culture was so important to so many people during these years, the period from the death of Alexander in 323 BCE to 30 BCE is often known as the **Hellenistic** Period.

When Alexander died so unexpectedly, he left neither an **heir** nor directions as to how his empire was to be governed. On his deathbed, he was asked to name his successor. But the weakened Alexander only muttered that the kingdom should be given “to the strongest.” He didn’t, or couldn’t, specify who this might be.

The empire was eventually divided among five of his Greek generals. These generals fought among themselves to determine who was “the strongest.” This led to much confusion and disorder, but the generals also spread Greek culture wherever they went.

Alexander had believed in the Greek system of education and wanted it established throughout his empire. He had planned to build new cities and improve old ones. He wanted the people throughout his empire to have new public buildings, theaters, and gymnasiums, like those in Athens and other Greek cities. His generals agreed with and carried out as many of his plans as

Vocabulary

Hellenistic, adj.
relating to Greek culture or language

heir, n. a person who will legally receive the property of someone who dies; the person who will become king or queen after the current king or queen dies or steps down

they were able to. Soon, Greek soldiers, philosophers, artists, and poets were in demand throughout the Mediterranean world.

During the Hellenistic Period, kings made coins that looked like Greek coins. Educators imitated the Greek style of education. Philosophers pored over the works of Plato and Aristotle. Artists copied Greek statues, and architects built buildings in the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian styles. In cities throughout the Middle East and Asia Minor, learning and science flourished.

Alexandria

One of the major cities of the Hellenistic Period was Alexandria, Egypt. Although it was in Egypt, Alexandria was a model Greek town. Its government was run by Greeks in the Greek style. The city was planned and built like a Greek city, including gymnasiums where male citizens could exercise and carry on conversations. Alexandria also contained important schools where philosophers could work and deepen their knowledge. It was an important center of learning and Greek culture for nearly a thousand years.

When King Ptolemy (/tahl*uh*mee/) ruled Alexandria, he began a library there that would be envied by people throughout the Mediterranean world.



The magnificent Alexandria library was in Egypt. The library contained thousands of scrolls.

It is said that he collected two hundred thousand scrolls. (Because there were no machines to print books, people wrote on sheets of papyrus, a kind of paper, and rolled the sheets up into scrolls.) When Ptolemy's son became the ruler of Alexandria, he continued to collect works of knowledge. By the 90s BCE, the main library at Alexandria had more than seven hundred thousand scrolls and was still growing. There was no other library like it in the ancient world.

For centuries, the library at Alexandria was a center of learning. Some very important thinkers of the ancient world used the library for their research. The astronomer Ptolemy worked there. His theory of how the planets, the sun, and the stars all revolve around Earth was accepted throughout Western civilization until the 1500s. Unfortunately, the library of Alexandria no longer exists. It was destroyed by a series of robberies, fires, and foreign invasions.

The Hellenistic Period was a great flowering of Greek culture. But even as Hellenistic culture flourished throughout the Mediterranean, another great civilization was growing on the Italian peninsula.

Chapter 8

The Roman Republic

The Beginnings of Rome Legend says that the city of Rome was founded by twin brothers, Romulus and Remus. According to the story, when the twins were babies, they were thrown into the Tiber River by their wicked uncle. A female wolf saved them from drowning and raised them. Once they grew up, they founded a city and named it Rome.





Rome began as a modest settlement but became a center of power.

The story of Romulus and Remus is a myth. The actual history behind the founding of Rome is a bit harder to pin down. We know that during the 400s BCE, when Athens was experiencing its Golden Age, Rome consisted of a few thousand farmers living on some hills by the Tiber River in Italy. Eventually, several of these villages united to form one town. In time, this town, known as Rome, would become a city and the center of a great empire.

Early Rome was ruled by kings. Very little is known about this period.

According to legend, six of the kings were good, kind, and just rulers, but the seventh was harsh and cruel. His name was Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (/loo*shuhs/ tahr*kwin*ee*us/ suh*purb*us/), and in about 509 BCE, the citizens of Rome rose in revolt and removed him from power.

The Romans replaced their monarchy with an **aristocratic republic**. The king was replaced by two elected officials called *consuls*. These consuls

Vocabulary

“aristocratic republic,” (phrase) a government in which people from the upper class or nobility serve as representatives



In ancient Rome, many public buildings bore the initials *SPQR*. These stood for *S*(enatus) *P*(opulusque) *R*(omanus)—The Senate and the People of Rome. This image shows the Arch of Titus, built in Rome in the 80s CE. You can see the inscription at the top of the arch.

were elected by an assembly of three hundred Roman aristocrats. The Senate, or lawmaking body, may have existed under the kings, but in the new republic, it grew more powerful. It not only elected the two new consuls every year but also advised them once they were elected.

The idea behind the republican system was that Rome should be ruled neither by a king, as it had been in its earlier days, nor by a full-fledged democracy in which every citizen could vote on every issue, as was the case in Athens. Instead, republican Rome was ruled by men chosen from among the Roman elite, including consuls and senators.

During this early period, Romans were divided into two unequal groups: **patricians** and **plebeians**.

Patricians were members of the aristocracy. These noblemen held almost all the power. The best education was reserved for them, and only patricians could be members of the Senate. Plebeians were the common people. Initially, they had few rights and almost no say in how they were governed. For many years, there was even a law that prevented plebeians from marrying patricians.

For the first two centuries of Rome's existence, the patricians and plebeians were locked in a struggle with each other. The plebeians wanted rights, and the patricians wanted to keep their power. The struggle between them eventually resulted in many changes that helped to make Rome great.

To obtain rights and to secure themselves from injustice, the plebeians got organized. When they disagreed with the patricians' attempts to control them, they left the city and refused to listen to the patricians. The plebeians even elected their own leaders, called **tribunes**. Gradually, the plebeians forced the patricians to treat them better and to give them a voice in government.

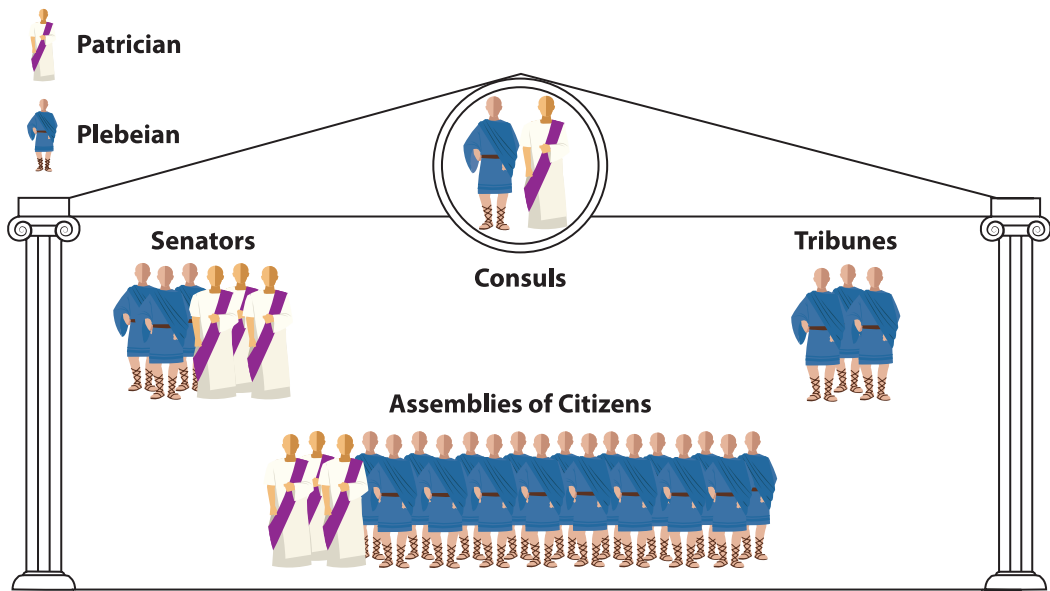
Vocabulary

patrician, n. a member of ancient Rome's highest social class; a wealthy landowner in ancient Rome

plebeian, n. a common person without power in ancient Rome

tribune, n. in ancient Rome, an elected plebeian representative

Government under the Roman Republic



A democratic form of government developed in Rome, with both patricians and plebeians making laws for all citizens.

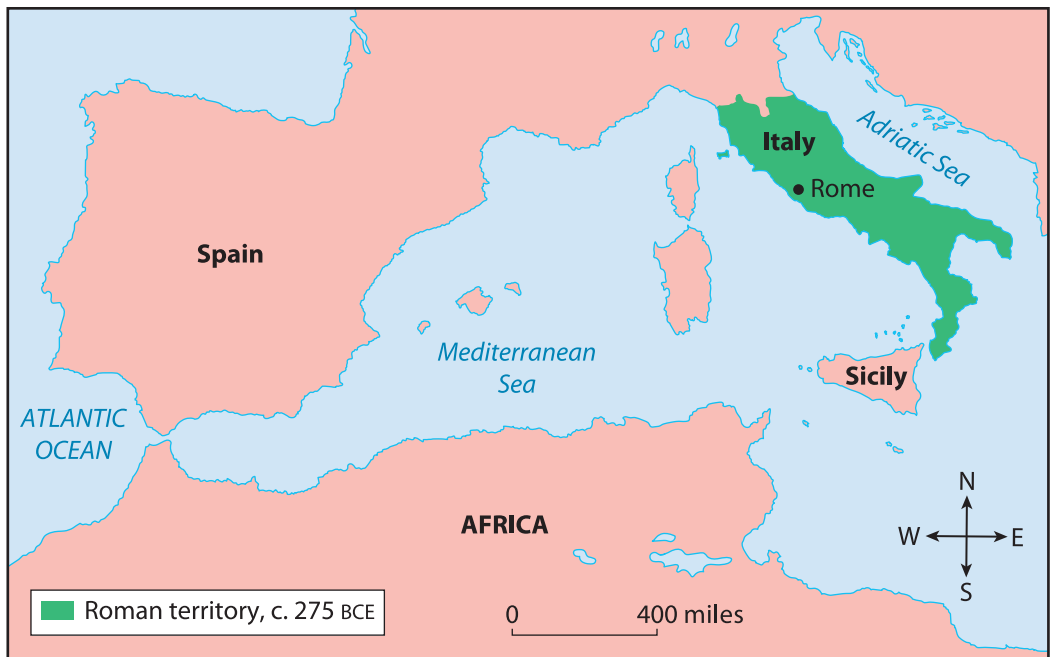
Eventually, the class distinctions between patricians and plebeians faded away. But there were other distinctions that never faded away. Slavery was widespread in Rome, as it had been in ancient Greece, and women had almost as few rights in Rome as they had in ancient Athens.

The Roman Republic Grows

During its early years, the city of Rome was surrounded by enemies. At first, the Romans had to defend themselves against outsiders who wanted to conquer their city. Over time, however, they began to push their enemies back. Then, the Romans began to conquer other lands and other peoples. Eventually, they would build a great empire this way.

The Roman army conquered central Italy, then northern Italy. By 275 BCE, the city of Rome governed all of Italy. Within another hundred years, they had conquered nearly all the land surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. From early on, then, Roman society was based on the army. This determined the most important ideals Romans had. Most of all, Romans admired valor, or bravery, because this was the characteristic that a good soldier needed to have.

Rome, c. 275 BCE



Romans admired other qualities as well, such as loyalty, duty, honor, and fidelity (faithfulness). These qualities would help them build their republic into a mighty empire.

How Romans Governed

In the beginning, the Roman army was made up of poor farmers who were forced to fight. But once the army began to conquer other peoples, soldiers could bring home things of value that they took from those they conquered. Soldiers were also given land as a reward for their service. So some began to see the benefits they could get from fighting in the army. Others saw it as an honor to belong to the Roman army.

Conquered territories were organized into **provinces**, each of which was overseen by a **governor** answerable to Rome. The Romans also stationed troops in each province to keep

Vocabulary

province, n. an area or region; when an area was conquered by Rome, it became a province under Roman control

governor, n. the leader of the government in a province

order and to carry out decisions made by the government in Rome.

When most ancient empires conquered another people, they either wiped out the defeated people or demanded that they pay **tribute**. The Romans governed a little differently. From the beginning, they made the people they conquered part of their republic. They demanded that the people they conquered serve in their army. Like all the other soldiers in the army, if these people fought well, they were rewarded. This was different from what had happened before. Conquered people were not crushed under the heel of an occupying army; they could actually benefit from the new government.

Vocabulary

tribute, n. payment of money or goods by a people or their ruler to another country or ruler, in exchange for protection

The Romans did something else that was new. Frequently, they made these conquered people citizens of Rome. Thus, the conquered people gained political rights. They found themselves part of a growing republic that often gave them a better style of life than they had enjoyed before they were conquered.

The Romans did not do these things out of kindness. They had a purpose. It would have been impossible for a tiny group of Romans to try to control the many different peoples that were part of their growing republic. By making it in people's best interest to be loyal to the Roman Republic, and by making the city of Rome the center of everything—government, trade, and culture—the Romans were building a strong, united society.

The Republic Faces the Future

As the republic grew, so did the power of the Senate. It evolved to include wealthy plebeians as well as patricians, and it became the chief governing body of the republic. The Senate had to make decisions about all sorts of things. It passed laws, decided what the army should do, and dealt with issues at home and in the provinces. It was also a court of law and sat in judgment in certain cases.

Because the army was so successful, Rome eventually became very rich. Great amounts of stolen riches were being brought back from successful military campaigns, so Roman citizens didn't have to pay taxes. Generals and other army leaders became wealthy and spent their riches building temples and arches to celebrate their victories.

Roman men were eager to make their way in the world by being successful soldiers. They would gain wealth if they were victorious in battle, but they would also gain power. They would have important positions in society.

All of this meant that the Roman economy, system of government, and society in general relied on the continued success of the army. If Rome was to stay strong and grow, there always had to be more lands to conquer, more riches to bring home, and more citizens to include in the republic. The leading members of Roman society knew that this was important.

This way of doing things created problems, as the Romans soon learned. If the army was the place an ambitious Roman could make himself a good career, then the army was the way to power. And this way to power posed a threat to those already in power. The army could potentially be used against the Senate and the rest of the government. This was a major problem that the Romans found themselves struggling with after 100 BCE.



The Roman army was organized and powerful.

Chapter 9

Julius Caesar: A Great Roman

Hail to the Conqueror! Rome continued to look for new areas to conquer and new peoples to govern. The young men of Rome's most powerful families were eager to gain fame by leading a Roman army in battle.



They looked forward to the wealth, honor, and power they would gain if they succeeded. Julius Caesar, who lived from 101–44 BCE, was one of these ambitious young men.

Caesar belonged to a patrician family, but he was not wealthy. He knew that if he was going to get ahead in life, he would have to do it through military advancement. Caesar lived at a time when the Roman Republic was beginning to have problems. The consuls and the Senate still ruled, but governors in the provinces were not always just and often forced people to pay high taxes. People in some of the conquered territories were unhappy about how they were governed. Rome had to rely on the strength of the army to keep the republic together.

The Roman army had changed, too. It was no longer manned by ordinary citizens. It had become a professional army. This meant that the men who joined



Julius Caesar

the army did so to further their careers. They were willing to fight, but mostly they wanted to get rich and gain higher status. They felt more loyalty to the generals who could lead them to victory, and who would give them the rewards of war, than they did to Rome itself.

The army had always been important to the Roman Republic, but now it was more important than ever. The generals who led the army were extremely powerful and could do great good or great harm. It was just a matter of time before someone tried to take over the republic completely. Julius Caesar was that someone.

The Rise to Power

Caesar was tall and well-built. He had dark-brown eyes and cared about how he looked. He kept his hair trimmed and his face clean-shaven. Caesar was intelligent and had a good sense of humor. He could be charming and courteous when he wanted to be. But because Caesar was a very ambitious and determined man, he could also be ruthless.

Caesar commanded part of the Roman army, but that was not enough for him. He wanted as much power as he could get. Caesar knew that to get what he wanted, he would have to be victorious in battle. Then, his soldiers would be more loyal to him than to Rome. He would also need political allies in Rome. If he helped others get some of the power they wanted, he could use them to get the power that he wanted.

To become powerful at this time, it was important to be popular with the right people in Rome. So Caesar spent money entertaining others and making friends. Once he was popular, Caesar entered into an alliance with two other powerful Roman men named Pompey (/pahm*pee/) and Crassus (/kras*us/). They helped one another to pass laws they wanted and schemed to hold onto the power that their enemies wanted to take from them. Caesar became powerful enough to be elected consul in 59 BCE.



Caesar led the campaign against Gaul, which today we know as France.

Julius Caesar became one of the most successful generals the Roman army had ever seen. He helped expand the Roman Republic in Europe. It took him about nine years to fight the **Gallic Wars**, which gave Rome power in Gaul (present-day France). He even invaded Britain in 55 BCE, although Rome would not conquer the island until the next century. Much of northern Europe was coming under the control of the Mediterranean world and would be influenced by the culture and laws of the Romans.

Vocabulary

Gallic Wars, n. wars between Rome and the people of Gaul, which today is the country of France

After he had conquered Gaul, Caesar decided that he wanted to be elected consul again—his previous consulship had ended. The first time he had been consul, however, he had been proud and arrogant. He did some things he should not have done. Worse, his alliance with Pompey and Crassus had broken down. Pompey, in particular, did not trust Caesar anymore and wanted to remove him from power.

No one becomes powerful without making enemies, and Caesar had made some powerful ones. Now these enemies were determined to keep him from becoming consul again. They told Caesar that if he wanted to be elected consul, he had to come to Rome for the election. They also reminded him that he was not allowed to bring his army into Rome. But Caesar knew that if he went to Rome without his army, Pompey would have him arrested. Caesar faced a difficult choice. He wanted to be consul again, but it seemed impossible without breaking the law and taking at least part of his army into the city.

Dictator for Life

Caesar was not afraid to do things the hard way. In 49 BCE, he gathered his army and marched toward Rome. By crossing the Rubicon River, the northern boundary of Italy, he showed the Senate that he would fight them for power. Caesar understood that there was no turning back. Legend has it that when he crossed the Rubicon he said, "The die is cast." Today, we use the phrase "the die is cast" to mean taking decisive action. Similarly, the phrase "crossing the Rubicon" has come to mean going past the point of no return.

Caesar's actions started a **civil war**. Caesar and his army now had to fight with other parts of the Roman army. The existence of the Roman Republic itself was at stake.

Vocabulary

civil war, n. a war between people who live in the same country

Caesar quickly took control of Italy, but Pompey and his army managed to escape. Caesar chased them down until the two armies clashed in Greece. Pompey was defeated in Pharsalus, Greece, and fled to Egypt, where he was killed. Caesar made his way to Egypt and continued fighting Pompeian forces loyal to the old republic in North Africa and Spain. At last, in 44 BCE, Caesar achieved what he had wanted all along. He became the dictator, or absolute ruler, of Rome.



Caesar led his army across the Rubicon toward Rome, showing that he was willing to fight to stay in power.

The Romans had known dictators before. In fact, they felt that in times of emergency, a dictator was necessary. But dictatorship was seen as a temporary thing, to be used only in wartime. Legally, dictatorships could only last six months.

Caesar had something else in mind. He thought the idea of a temporary dictator was foolish. Who would willingly give up ultimate power simply because the Senate told him to?

Caesar was not going to give up the power he had gained. He made sure that everyone knew he meant to be the ruler for a long time. He had his face put on coins, (something only kings did at this time), and the month of Quintilis was renamed Julius (July) in his honor.

Caesar had always loved the attention that he got from being a public figure. Nothing pleased him more than the privilege of wearing a laurel wreath, the symbol of conquerors and victors. But opponents said it looked like he was wearing a royal crown.

During the five years after Caesar had crossed the Rubicon, he gained absolute power. True, he spent a lot of his time making sure that his enemies could not overthrow him, but he also genuinely tried to improve things for people. Caesar had plans to make more people Roman citizens, stop corruption, improve the court system, and help people avoid falling into debt. He seemed to work constantly. He dictated letters while he was riding to battle. He worked quickly and tirelessly, but there was simply more work than one man could do.



This Roman coin shows Julius Caesar wearing a wreath.

Out of Touch

Caesar found it difficult to give other people things to do. In part, this was because he distrusted everyone and wanted to be in complete control.

But it was also true that many government officials wouldn't cooperate with him because they were horrified by the bloody civil wars that pitted Roman against Roman. Many blamed Caesar for the collapse of the republic.

The pressures of being dictator began to make Caesar sick. He became exhausted, tense, and irritable. His health was affected. He felt dizzy and suffered from convulsions and blackouts. In addition, accounts from the time said he suffered from epilepsy. Epilepsy is a medical condition that affects the nervous system and causes sudden convulsions and blackouts.

Although Caesar had been an excellent general, he was not an especially good dictator. He was arrogant and offended many powerful Romans. He even dismissed his bodyguards, saying that no one could possibly want to murder him because his death would only bring about chaos.



Although Julius Caesar had the Senate make him dictator for life, he had made a great many enemies.

This showed that Caesar was seriously out of touch. He did not recognize how much some people hated him. Then, in February of 44 BCE, Caesar went even further. He had the Senate vote him dictator for life.

There had long been powerful people in Rome who did not like the fact that Caesar had become dictator. Once he became dictator for life, even more people grew angry. To many, having a dictator for life was no different than having a king. They blamed Caesar for destroying the republic, and now they were prepared to do something about it.

The Betrayal

Caesar never seemed to realize how much pain he had caused the Roman people when he forced Roman to fight against Roman in the civil wars he started. He never seemed to realize that Romans were proud of the republic and did not want to see the days of the kings brought back. This shortsightedness contributed to his downfall.

About a month after he was made dictator for life, Caesar was murdered in the Senate house by several members of the Roman Senate. There were about sixty **conspirators**, although only a handful actually drove their weapons into Caesar. The leaders of the **assassination** plot were Brutus (/broot*us/) and Cassius. Tradition has it that as he was being stabbed, Caesar noticed Brutus among the men surrounding him and said, "Et tu, Brute?" (/et/tu/broo*tay/) This is Latin for "You too, Brutus?" He had considered Brutus a friend and was shocked that Brutus had conspired against him.

Vocabulary

conspirator, n. a person who plans or participates with others in a crime

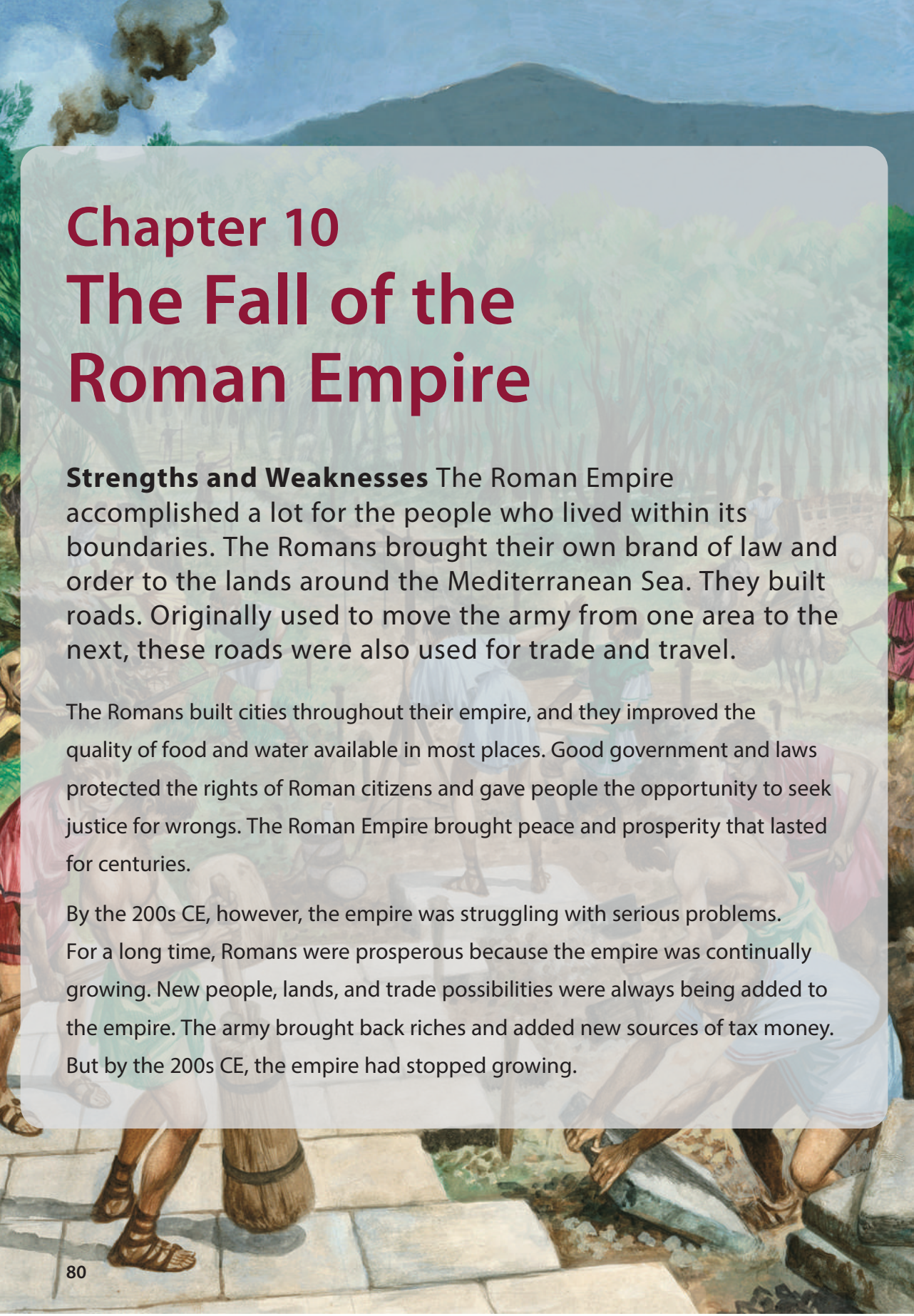
assassination, n. the murder of a public figure, such as a government official



Julius Caesar was assassinated in the Senate house.

Caesar had destroyed the republic in his quest for power, but he had not had the time—or perhaps the ability—to put a new form of government in its place. His assassination ended his rule and left the leaders of Rome to try to figure out who should rule in his place.

Julius Caesar is remembered today as a great general who did much to increase the power of Rome. Although he destroyed the Roman Republic, he also paved the way for the Roman Empire. He is the link between the republic that Rome had been and the empire it would become.



Chapter 10

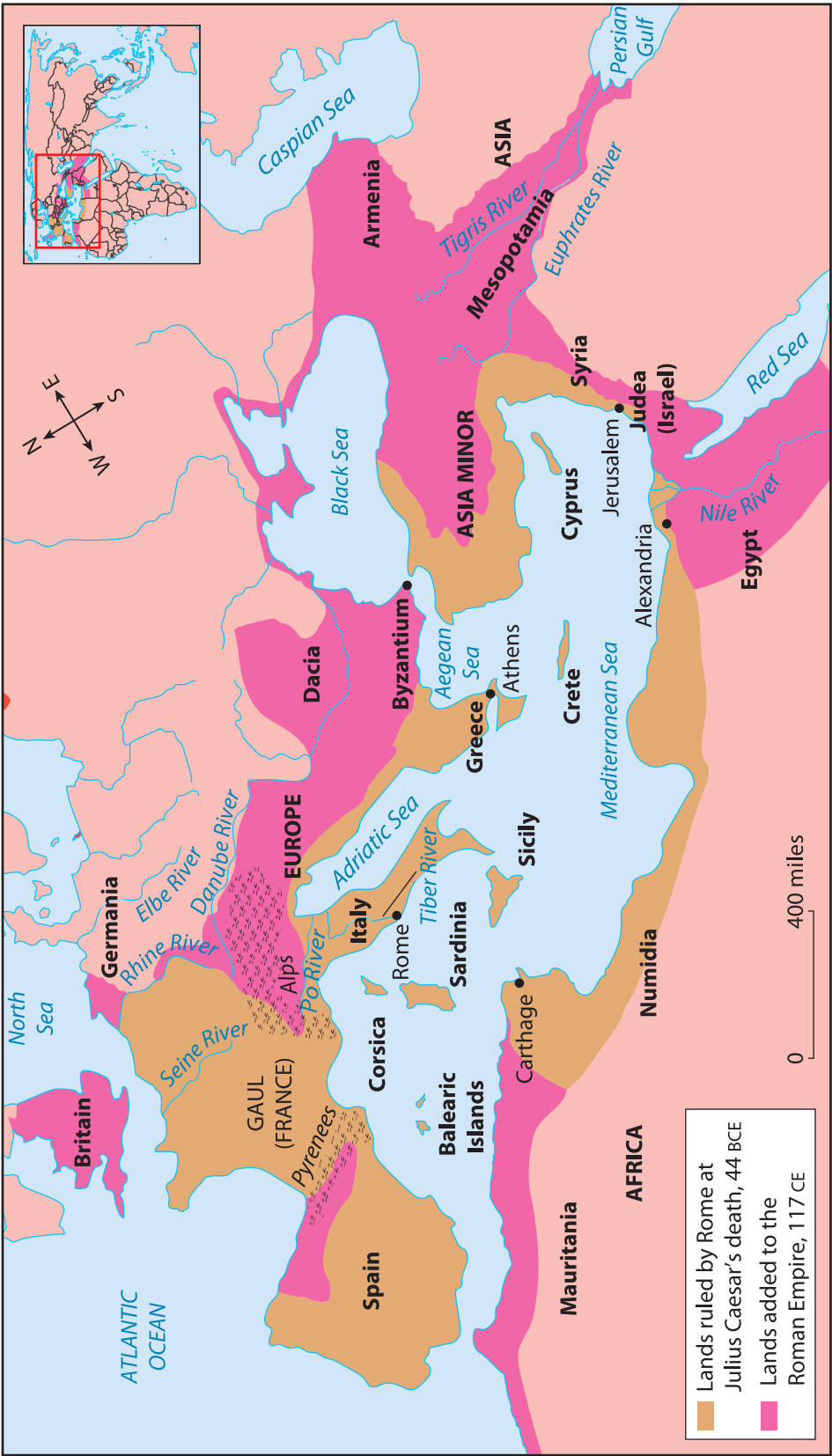
The Fall of the Roman Empire

Strengths and Weaknesses The Roman Empire accomplished a lot for the people who lived within its boundaries. The Romans brought their own brand of law and order to the lands around the Mediterranean Sea. They built roads. Originally used to move the army from one area to the next, these roads were also used for trade and travel.

The Romans built cities throughout their empire, and they improved the quality of food and water available in most places. Good government and laws protected the rights of Roman citizens and gave people the opportunity to seek justice for wrongs. The Roman Empire brought peace and prosperity that lasted for centuries.

By the 200s CE, however, the empire was struggling with serious problems. For a long time, Romans were prosperous because the empire was continually growing. New people, lands, and trade possibilities were always being added to the empire. The army brought back riches and added new sources of tax money. But by the 200s CE, the empire had stopped growing.

The Roman Empire



At its height, the Roman Empire stretched over two million square miles.

Money Troubles

The empire began to show signs of weakness. Some of these were **economic**. By the year 200 CE, there was a significant **recession**. This meant that there were fewer jobs and fewer goods available. Recessions are often accompanied by periods of **inflation**, and that is what happened in the Roman Empire. During a time of inflation, money is available but not worth much, so prices rise. People have to pay more and more for the things they want to buy.

The emperors tried to address the problems that came with recession and inflation. The emperor Diocletian (/dye*uh*klee*shun/) (284–305 CE) thought that he could stop prices from rising by declaring what the prices should be. This did not improve matters. The only thing that happened was that some goods became completely unavailable.

Emperor Constantine (274–337 CE) thought that the problem with high prices was that more money was needed. He took gold from the pagan temples and turned it into money, but this did not help either. Inflation did not stop, and other problems developed. Recession and inflation combined to cause joblessness. With joblessness came poverty, and with poverty came crime and disease. Some Roman leaders tried giving away money and bread, but these were short-term fixes to problems that were large and complicated.

Vocabulary

economic, adj. relating to the management of money and resources to produce, buy, and sell goods and services

recession, n. a time of reduced economic activity, when there is little buying or selling

inflation, n. a rise in prices and a fall in the purchasing value of money



On this ancient Roman coin, you can see the emperor Constantine.

Gap Between Rich and Poor

Additionally, the gap between the rich and the poor widened. Aristocrats, such as senators, were five times richer than they had been in the Age of Augustus. And there were fewer and fewer opportunities for people to improve their future. The Roman army had been one place where many men had gained wealth, land, and social position. However, the army was no longer conquering new territories. In fact, it was struggling to hold on to lands that had been conquered many years before.

Government also suffered serious problems. Powerful generals and the army legions loyal to them battled for power. General murdered general. It seemed as if civil war had become a way of life. Officials became increasingly corrupt and did not do their jobs properly.

Some emperors were good and wise, but others were totally unsuited to ruling. For example, Nero, who reigned from 54 to 68 CE, was probably insane. He had his mother stabbed to death and his first and second wives were killed. One was executed; the other was murdered. He was accused of setting fire to the city of Rome—a crime that he blamed on Christians, whom he cruelly put to death. (Today, most historians have concluded that it is unlikely that Nero caused the fire.) At last, the army forced him to commit suicide. Before he died, Nero supposedly said, “Death! And so great an artist.” Other emperors poisoned their enemies and neglected the affairs of the empire. Between 180 and 270 CE there were eighty emperors—almost one a year—and many of them were worthless.

People wondered whether there was any justice in the world. It seemed that greed and corruption were everywhere in the empire. They began to wonder whether there was anything worth believing in.

During this time, the number of Christians continued to grow. Christianity seemed to offer what many in the empire were looking for. Some were drawn to Christianity because it preached peace in a time of violence. Others were



Nero blamed the Christians for the fire that broke out in Rome in 64 CE.

drawn to Christianity because it gave opportunities for talented men to become leaders without having to kill to gain power. Talented, educated men were needed to lead the Church, and Church leaders did not lead by force and violence. During the 200s CE, Christians were still not considered loyal citizens of the empire, and they still faced persecution. After the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, however, they could be found throughout society.

The troubles of the 200s and 300s CE were so serious that it seemed like the empire would collapse. But the problems inside the empire were only part of the story.

The Germanic Tribes

For the Romans, the center of the world was Rome, and Rome was part of the Mediterranean world. Their attention was drawn to the lands and peoples that surrounded the Mediterranean Sea. Once Rome had conquered all of these, their generals looked for other ways to expand the empire. Men such

as Julius Caesar fought wars in Europe to bring the peoples of the North under Roman control. Caesar and a few other Romans went as far as Britain and established bases there.

The peoples of northern Europe, however, were not like the familiar peoples of the Mediterranean. The Romans referred to northern Europeans as barbarians. Unlike the peoples of the Mediterranean, some of the peoples of Europe did not settle in one place. They moved from place to place in search of adequate sources of food, and at times because of conflicts with others. They did not build large cities like the ones in other parts of the Roman Empire, and they offered fewer opportunities for trade with Rome.

Goths and Vandals

One significant group of northern people included Germanic tribes, such as the Goths and the Vandals. For several centuries, these tribes bothered the Romans by attacking Roman soldiers and trying to invade the empire. Most of these attacks were small and not well organized. Such attacks were not really a threat to the empire when it was strong, but now the empire had its own problems and was not as strong as it had been. The Germanic tribes began to be successful when they attacked Roman troops.

Many of the so-called barbarians were fierce fighters. The Romans admired this. In places when they were able to, they included these warriors in the army legions that patrolled the borders of the empire. After a time, the Roman army that patrolled the northern borders of the empire was mostly made up of warriors from Germanic tribes. They fought off the attacks of other Germanic tribes. At least they were supposed to.

In 410 CE, the Visigothic king Alaric (/al*uh*rihk/) and his army invaded the empire and attacked the city of Rome. They overcame Rome's defenses and **plundered** it. The Roman leaders in the

Vocabulary

plunder, v. to take something by force

eastern part of the empire were shocked that the western Roman leaders had let it come to this. The western part of the empire was in chaos. The last Roman emperor in the west was Romulus Augustulus. He was overthrown by Odoacer (/oh*doh*ay*sur/), a Germanic warrior. Odoacer became the first barbarian king of Italy. He ruled until 493 CE when he was overthrown by Theodoric (/thee*ah*duh*rihk/), king of the Ostrogoths. At this point, Roman rule no longer existed in western Europe and the western part of the Mediterranean.



In 410 CE, the Visigoths, led by King Alaric, attacked and plundered Rome.

The Rise of Islam

Roman rule still existed in the east, which had long been the wealthier and more important part of the empire. Increasingly, it was also called the Byzantine (/bihz*un*teen/) Empire. There was an emperor in the great city of Constantinople, which Emperor Constantine had founded as the “New Rome.” (Constantine founded Constantinople in a place formerly known as Byzantium which is where the Byzantine Empire got its name. Today, this city is called Istanbul and is in Turkey.) The Eastern Roman (or Byzantine) Empire ruled over the lands that today are Greece and Turkey. At different times, the Eastern Roman Empire also ruled over parts of the Middle East.

In 610 CE, a man named Muhammad, who lived in Arabia, began to see visions. He was regarded as a holy **prophet** by many and soon became the leader of a new religion: Islam. Muhammad united

Vocabulary

prophet, n. someone chosen by God to bring a message to people

the Arabs, who had long been fighting, and gave them a sense of purpose. They became followers of Allah and students of a holy book called the Koran. Islam grew as a religion. Within several years, the Arabs had joined together as Muslims. Anyone who was not a Muslim was classified as an unbeliever. Many Muslims felt that it was lawful to make war on unbelievers.

The Arab armies began to attack the Byzantine Empire from the south. The city of Antioch in Syria fell in 637 CE. Alexandria in Egypt fell in 642 CE. In the early 700s, Muslim armies conquered Spain. However an attempt to invade Gaul (France) was stopped by a Christian army in 732 CE.

The Eastern Roman Empire, or Byzantine Empire, with its capital in Constantinople, remained standing. It would last for almost a thousand years, although it was attacked a number of times. Finally, in 1453 CE,



This medieval painting from the 1400s shows the city of Constantinople.

Constantinople was conquered, and the emperor was killed. The Byzantine Empire, which had always considered itself an extension of the Roman Empire, had fallen at last.

The Grandeur That Was Rome

The decline and fall of Rome was a long, slow process. It had many causes, and there was no single moment, event, or decision that could have stopped it. Problems within the empire and challenges from outside combined to bring the empire in the west to an end. Yet even when there was no longer a Roman emperor in Rome, people still thought in terms of the empire.

Christian leaders took on many of the duties of Roman officials. They divided the Church along the same lines as the empire in the west had been divided. Over centuries, the Roman official called a *vicarius* became a church vicar, a minister or priest in charge of a church. A *diocese*, originally an area for Roman administration, became an area of church administration. Church leaders continued to wear the same clothing, or *vestitus*, that Roman officials had worn. Today, these items are referred to as vestments, the garments worn for religious rituals.

The prestige of the old Roman Empire was so strong that in 800 CE, a king of the Franks named Charlemagne was named “Holy Roman Emperor.” Although his “empire” was really much of western Europe and did not even include all of Italy, he was the strongest ruler at the time, and therefore, in the minds of many people, the man who should be the new emperor.

European kings after Charlemagne based their laws on Roman laws. European universities made sure their students read Roman histories and Roman poets, such as Virgil. In later centuries, Rome was rediscovered as a center for art, culture, and learning. Although the empire ended, its power and influence continued to live on.



Charlemagne was crowned emperor in 800 CE by Pope Leo III.



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