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Greek Civilization

1. The early Greeks (or Hellens), like the Aryans in India, lived in tribes, each composed of a number of families under a leader. A group of tribes had a king.
2. The main occupations are agriculture and herding.
3. The early Greeks had many gods whom they imagined to be like human beings, though more powerful and immortal. Zeus was the god of the sky and hence caused thunder. Poseidon, god of the sea, raised storms that sank ships.
4. Appollo, the sun god, could reveal the future. Athena, was the goddess of victory and patroness of the arts. Dionysus was the god of wine and there were many others. The Greeks thought their gods lived on Mount Olympus.
5. Around 800 BC, groups of Greek villages began joining into larger units to form city-states. At the highest point in a city-state, an acropolis or citadel was built for defence and city spread out around the acropolis. Such cities were Sparta, Athens, Macedonia, Corinth, Thebes and others. Sparta and Athens were two most important city-states.
6. The Spartans' main concern was with militarism and war so much so that the word 'spartan' is often used to mean militaristic.
7. Spartans were fine soldiers, but they contributed little else to Greek culture.
8. The city-state of Athens developed along lines quite different from Sparta. The territories it ruled had been occupied gradually and peacefully and militarism had not developed. Athens had excellent harbours and mineral deposits. Athenians built a prosperous trade and culture. Pericles (469 BC — 429 BC) was the most important ruler of Athens.
9. The Battle of Marathon (490 BC) : The Greek defeated the Iranian (Persian) king Darius I at Marathon near Athens.
10. The Peloponnesian war, between Sparta and Athens from 431 BC to 404 BC, ended in tragedy for Athens.
11. Philip of Macedonia conquered most of states in the years following Athens' defeat.
12. Then his son, Alexander, set out at the age of 20 - to conquer the world.

13. During the 13 years (336 BC - 323 BC), he compelled all Greece to accept his leadership and conquered the Achaemenid empire. This brought him to borders of India where he defeated king Porus on the Jhelum in 326 BC. He sailed down the Indus and then returned to Mesopotamia where he died of fever in 323 BC at the age of 32.

14. Alexander's conquests brought many important changes to the world. Trade between Europe and Asia was developed. Many new cities were founded.

15. In the 2nd century BC, the Roman empire started expanding eastward. As a result of Roman attacks, almost the entire territory of the Greeks and their empire became a part of the Roman empire.

Contributions of Greek Civilization

1. The glory of Greece that the world has never forgotten was largely the glory of Athens at the time of Pericles.

2. The Olympic games were first held in 776 BC by the Greeks in honour of God Zeus at Mount Olympus (Olympia) in Greece, hence the name, and they continued till 394 AD. From 394 AD these games started degenerating and by 580 AD they altogether vanished. They were banned by the Roman Emperor Theodosius as Pagan manifestations. It was the French Baron, Pierre de Coubertin, who (nearly over 1500 years after the last ancient Olympics) revived these games in 1894 and the modern series of the Olympic games started in 1896 at Athens and since then they are being held every fourth year.

3. Homer's 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey' are among the best epics of the world. The Iliad is the story of seizure and destruction of the city of Troy, as the western coast of Asia Minor. The Odyssey describes the adventures and home coming, from Troy, of a Greek hero, Odysseus.

4. The founder of Greek tragedy was Aeschylus, author of 'Prometheus Bound'. Sophocles is considered the greatest of Greek tragedians. His famous plays are 'Oedipus Rex', 'Antigone' and 'Electra'. Aristophanes, is considered the master of Greek comedy.

5. Greece produced some of the world's earliest great historians e.g. Herodotus (known as 'the father of History'), Thucydides, Plutarch etc.

6. The most famous philosophers of Greece were Socrates, Plato (disciple of Socrates and author of 'Republic'), and Aristotle (disciple of Plato). Aristotle was both philosopher and scientist. He made important contribution to philosophy,

medicine, biology and astronomy. He believed in the principle of the Golden Mean, that is, neither extreme luxury nor self-denial.

7. The Greek made many contributions to mathematics, especially to geometry as is seen in the work of Euclid and Pythagoras.

8. In medicine, Hippocrates laid the foundation of modern medicine. He is the known as the 'father of medicine'.

9. The most important astronomers were : Aristarchus, Ptolemy, Hipparchus, Eratosthenes etc. Ptolemy's belief that the earth was the centre of the universe was accepted as truth until the 16th century. Eratosthenes prepared a fairly accurate map of the globe and was the first to suggest that one could reach India from Europe by sailing west.

10. The temple of Athena, the Parthenon, is the best example of Greek architecture. Myron and Phidias are two best-known sculptors of ancient Greece. It was Phidias whom Pericles appointed to supervise the construction of the Acropolis in Athens.

