

# Ancient greeks and romans.

[History](#), [Ancient History](#)



Running head: ANCIENT GREEKS AND ROMANS Comparison and Contrast of Greeks and Romans World Civilization 1 HIS 103 There were many different cultures and civilizations in the ancient world. Each of the cultures had their own customs and ethnology that either set them apart from the rest of the world or rendered them similar. Two civilizations that have a multitude of similarities as well as differences are the Greeks and the Romans. In the eyes of some, the Greeks and Romans are synonymous. While they do have their share of similarities, they also have defining characteristics that make them extraordinarily different.

The Greeks and the Romans are similar and different in many aspects including religion, social/political aspects, influence of geographical factors and the lasting effect they have had on later civilizations. Abraham Lincoln once said, “ When I do good, I feel good; when I do bad, I feel bad. That’s my religion. ” If only the Greeks and Romans thought of Religion with such simplicity. Both ancient Roman and Greek civilizations took their religion very seriously and built temples and shrines showing their appreciation to the gods. Religion was a very important aspect of Greek society and culture.

They participated in sacrifices and regular worships of gods for the purpose of unifying the people in a common goal to please the Gods. The Greeks were a polytheistic civilization and believed that their gods would protect their city-states if they were kept appeased. The Greeks pleased their gods by frequently performing rituals, sacrifices and ceremonies. Greek religion was more than legendary tales and fictitious myths; it was a complex organization with each city-state containing its own divinities, which acted to cement the body of citizens into a true community [ (O'Connell, 1999) ].

In this concept, the Romans were similar. They also were polytheistic and very concerned about appeasing their gods. The Romans were great copiers. They borrowed many of their gods from the Greeks, but unlike Greek gods, they were more cold and formal and did not have as much of a personality. The Romans lived under the gods and constantly tried to please them with rituals and sacred rites. The Romans also performed human and animal sacrifices in addition to the ceremonies. Over the years, these rituals became very complex and needed special people to perform them.

Unlike the Greeks, the Romans had priests who were usually distinguished statesmen or generals. Roman religion and politics were intermeshed, and it was not uncommon for the emperor (during the empire period) to be worshipped as a god himself [ (O'Connell, 1999) ]. Because the Greeks were divided into many different city-states, they had many different forms of government. Aristotle divided the Greek governments into monarchies, oligarchies, tyrannies and democracies. In 510 B. C. the city-state of Athens created the first democratic government and shortly thereafter, the rest of the city-states followed suit [ (Carr, Ancient Greek Government, 2009) ]. They no longer had one single leader as the Romans did. Rome was originally ruled by kings, in a monarchical system. After this time period known as the Ancient Roman period, the Roman Republic was formed in 509 BC. The Roman Republic provided for a more representative government. Roman imperialism created a sizable gap in wealth and social classes within Rome.

With such power and wealth, there was great economic as well as social conflict. The noblemen of Rome were constantly fighting for more wealth as

small farm owners suffered when large plantations were being formed with slaves. The Roman nobles were fighting for greed and personal wealth creating extensive conflicts in Rome. Despite the conflict, the development of political institutions was one of Rome's greatest accomplishments [ (Carr, 2009) ]. As the documentary source *Histories: The Roman Constitution* clearly exemplifies, the Romans had a very effective political system.

As Polybius states in this excerpt, “ For the people is the sole fountain of honor and of punishment; and it is by these two things and these alone that dynasties and constitutions and in a word, human society are held together: for where the distinction between them is not sharply drawn both in theory and practice, there no undertaking can be properly administered – as indeed we might expect when good and bad are held in exactly the same honor. ” It is clear that the Roman constitution is equally balanced in power, and has contributed to the strength of the Roman civilization [ (Sherman, Grunfeld, Markowitz, Rosner, & Heywood, 2006) ]. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “ Men hate each other because they fear each other, and they fear each other because they don't know each other, and they don't know each other because they are often separated from each other. ” The many ancient Greek city states were isolated from one another by the mountainous terrain of the Greek peninsula. Much of their land was barren so most Greek city-states arose along the coastline. Map 4-2 clearly shows the extent of Greek settlements around the Mediterranean and Black Seas between 750 and 550 B.

C. E. It exemplifies the Greek civilization by illustrating the location of the Greek colonies in comparison to the competing Phoenician colonies that the

Greeks often came into contact with. It also shows the importance of colonies for diffusing culture throughout the Mediterranean and explains how Greek and Greco-Roman civilization came to dominate most of the Mediterranean basin even when the Greeks were no longer a great military-political force and their colonies ceased to be independent. Because the Greeks were surrounded by mountains, they were not as open to attack as the Romans were.

Map 5-1 clearly shows some of the civilizations that occupied Italy and its immediately surrounding territory during the fifth century B. C. E. It further exemplifies the Roman civilization by illustrating the many influences other civilizations had upon the Roman Republic. Before Rome became a dominant power, the Etruscans, Carthaginians and Greeks all ready had strong literate sophisticated civilizations. As Rome expanded, many of the institutions and practices of these civilizations were incorporated into their civilization.

Therefore, Rome's geographic and cultural environment played an important role in the development of the Roman Republic [ (Sherman, Grunfeld, Markowitz, Rosner, & Heywood, 2006) ]. The Roman and Greek cultures have long been admired for their literature, government and scientific accomplishments. They have not only left their foot prints on later civilizations, but they continue to be studied and admired all around the world today. Greece was home to Herodotus (the first historian) who is regarded as the father of history. Greece is also ecognized for accomplishments such as the initial development of dramatic and comedic plays, and for being the home of the first mathematicians. In addition, Greece contributed many developments in politicalscienceincluding the

creation of democracy and republics and the fundamentals of classical western philosophy, as found in the works of Plato and Aristotle [ (Conservapedia, 2008) ]. In The Republic as written by Plato, democracy is scrutinized. This literary work exemplifies the Greek civilization by illustrating how democracy was implemented, yet also met with resistance and criticism.

Plato says “ Because of the liberty which reigns there – they have a complete assortment of constitutions; and he who has a mind to establish a State, as we have been doing, must go to a democracy as he would to a bazaar at which they sell them, and pick out the one that suits him; then, when he has made his choice, he may found his State. ” It is clear that Plato did not hold the Athenian form of democracy in highest regards [ (Sherman, Grunfeld, Markowitz, Rosner, & Heywood, 2006) ]. The Romans contributed just as much as the Greeks did.

Their styles of architecture are still used around the world today. Most importantly, Christianity arose and was adopted as the official faith of the Roman Empire. Although it contradicted Roman civilization by insisting that there is only one God, it still continued to spread throughout Rome and much of Europe. The Roman Republic conquered Greece in 146 BC. They took much of the Greek religion and incorporated it into their own until the 4th century CE when Christianity prevailed. The Greco-Roman population in the seventeenth century did much to shape the contemporary western world.

The philosophy focused strictly on the role of reason and inquiry. Many philosophers today concede that Greco-Roman philosophy has shaped the entire Western thought since its foundation. Their architecture styles are still

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used as well as the democratic form of government which is used not only in Europe but all around the world. Seventeenth century Greco-Roman literature is still renowned, studied by historians and taught in schools all over the world. Greek and Roman contributions to the contemporary world are great in both number and significance.

Their advancements in mathematics, architecture, science, philosophy, government and literature not only advanced their own civilizations but the world as a whole. Humanity has benefited greatly from the contributions of the Greeks and Romans. The world would be an entirely different place if the Romans and Greeks had not existed. The Greeks and Romans have existed in the world as separate entities and also as one community. Because they have been so intermingled, in some ways they are parallel.

The Greeks and the Romans are similar and different in many aspects including religion, social/political aspects, influence of geographical factors and the lasting effect they have had on later civilizations. The Greek and Roman civilizations were some of the greatest civilizations to evolve. They mutually succeeded in showing other civilizations both how to succeed and how to fail at the things which men might try. Both civilizations had their peaks and their declines. While these two great civilizations continue to present their similarities, they also are extensively different.

Just like many countries today have their similarities and also their differences. Despite the many technological and societal advances achieved by societies today, wars still continue to ravage the world. That fact has not changed. Differences continue to divide the globe; and until we can embrace them, will always do so. “ Our greatest strength as a human race is our

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ability to acknowledge our differences; our greatest weakness is our failure to embrace them (Henderson, 2009). " References (2008, September 7). Retrieved March 11, 2009, from Conservapedia: [http://www.conservapedia.com/Greek\\_influence\\_on\\_Western\\_Culture](http://www.conservapedia.com/Greek_influence_on_Western_Culture)

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