In summing up the meaning of Greece to the modern world, the 19th-century English poet Shelley proclaimed, "We are all Greeks, our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their roots in Greece." Our Founding Fathers would have agreed with Shelley. The writers of our Constitution, in an effort to establish a government that would strike a balance between liberty and authority, debated issues first argued in Athens in the 5th century B.C.

Most of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 had been schooled in the classics—Greek and Roman studies. They had studied Homer and could read the Iliad and the Odyssey in the original Greek. From their study of history, these early American leaders were familiar with the deeds of Pericles, the plays of the Greek dramatists, and the art of imperial Athens.

Our budding young nation looked to ancient Greece for inspiration. As a result, the curriculum in the first American colleges stressed classical studies. Thomas Jefferson, himself an architect, turned to Greek models when he designed his home at Monticello and buildings for the University of Virginia.

Other Presidents, including Madison and Monroe, followed Jefferson's example. A walk today through our nation's capital, Washington, D.C., should be sufficient to convince anyone that the buildings that crowned the Acropolis in the days of Pericles set a standard of beauty and proportion that is still admired and copied after 25 centuries.

Important and obvious though the Greek influences are in the art and architecture of the modern world, the most significant impact of Greece on later centuries has been in the realm of ideas—in philosophy, politics, science, literature, and in religion. Little wonder then that the famous modern historian of world civilizations, Arnold Toynbee, should say of Greece, here was "the finest flower of the species that has ever yet come to pass."
Pottery often provides glimpses into ancient Greek religion. Here Persephone, a daughter of Zeus, sits with her husband, Hades, ruler of the underworld.

Reading Preview

In this chapter you will read about important Greek achievements.

1. The Greeks laid the foundation for philosophy.
2. The Greeks produced impressive literature.
3. The Greeks made important advances in science and art.

The Greeks laid the foundation for philosophy.

After the defeat of Persia, the Greeks entered upon the richest period of their history. Although most of the Greek world was involved, Athens became the cultural center, serving as a magnet that attracted artists, poets, and philosophers from all over the Greek world.
The Greeks sought answers about people’s lives through reason.

The contributions made by the Greeks to philosophy—that is, to an understanding of the universe and the individual’s place within it—surpassed that of most other peoples. They advanced theory after theory to explain the nature of the world and everything in it.

By the middle of the 5th century B.C., Greek thinkers turned away from speculations about the nature of the physical world and began to center their attention on matters that directly affected people. The lead was taken by a group of teachers who were referred to collectively as the Sophists [sof’ists].

One of the leading Sophists was Protagoras [pro tag’ər əs], who summed up the Sophist philosophy in the phrase “man is the measure of all things.” He seemed to be saying that such things as truth, beauty, and justice are not absolutes. They differ from time to time, from place to place, and from person to person. The Sophists argued that society should judge right from wrong and determine what was just in any given situation.

The Sophists were very popular with the younger generation of Athens. Their views, however, brought a strong reaction from their critics. Many Athenians feared that the views of the Sophists, if widely accepted, would undermine society. The result would be anarchy and an attack on religion.

A new school of philosophy arose in Athens.

To counter the Sophists’ views, a new school of philosophy developed that was destined to be the most influential of all. The new school held to the view that truth is not something relative to time and place, as the Sophists maintained. They believed that truth is real and unchanging. Absolute standards of right and wrong and of good and evil exist and can be discovered by using the right method. Their method was that of inquiry, of asking the right questions and systematically seeking answers. Their leaders were three of the most famous men in the history of philosophy—Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

Socrates [sok’rə tēz’] lived in the 5th century B.C. He was known to other Athenians as “the gadfly” because his persistent questioning of all ideas and acts stung his listeners into thinking. In fact, the so-called “Socratic method” consisted of asking questions and then carefully analyzing the answers to try to arrive at the truth. Socrates might begin by asking the question, What is the beautiful and what is the ugly? Each answer would be questioned, and further questions would be posed until agreement was reached by the participants about the exact meaning of the terms. Socrates’ advice to everyone was “know thyself.”

Some Athenians believed that Socrates was a bad influence on his students because he encouraged young men to question the acts of Athenian leaders. As a result, Socrates was put on trial in
399 B.C., charged with corrupting the youth of the city and showing disrespect for religious traditions. In his defense at the trial, Socrates justified his actions with pride but was convicted by a wide margin. As you learned in Chapter 4, Greek defendants proposed their own punishments to go along with the proposal of the state. Socrates, who believed that he had only acted virtuously, suggested that he deserved to be fed by the state for life. After persuasion from some friends, however, Socrates proposed a fine of a miniscule amount. Socrates' claims incensed the court, and the jury voted to sentence him to death. After a month in jail, Socrates took a drink of poisonous hemlock.

The most famous pupil of Socrates was Plato [plá'tō], who lived from 430 B.C. to 347 B.C. He started the Academy, a famous school in Athens that existed for more than 900 years. His best known work is The Republic, which describes an imaginary land in which each man or woman does the work that suits that individual best. In this imaginary land, all young people would be given 20 years of education, and no job would be closed to women.

Plato believed that there should be three classes of people—workers to produce the necessities of life, soldiers to guard the state, and philosophers to rule in the interests of all. Private property would be abolished, and education would be set up for the benefit of the rulers.

Plato's most famous pupil was the 4th century philosopher, Aristotle [ar'sot'li]. He was a brilliant thinker with wide interests, writing about biology, mathematics, astronomy, physics, ethics, logic, and politics.

Like most Athenians, Aristotle believed that a person could be happy by being moderate in all things. He taught that people should strike a balance or mean point, between rash action and inactivity. According to the Doctrine of the Mean, the best way to meet danger is through brave action—brave action being the mean, or halfway point between two extremes, between foolhardiness and cowardice.

In his book, Politics, Aristotle wrote about the good and bad features of different kinds of governments: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. You will find an excerpt from Politics in the “From the Archives” feature at left. Unlike Plato, Aristotle did not describe an imaginary state, nor did he find a single ideal system. As a work, Politics serves to point out an important difference between Plato and Aristotle. Plato often appeared to deal only with abstract ideas, but Aristotle, in contrast, seemed more down-to-earth.

**Hellenistic philosophers sought the good life.**

Two major schools of Greek philosophy came out of the Hellenistic Age. These were Epicureanism...
[ēp′ə kyū rē′ə niz′əm] and Stoicism [stō′ə siz′əm]. The first was developed by Epicurus, a man who believed that living a life free of extremes was the best way to lessen pain and increase pleasure.

Some of his followers misinterpreted his ideas about pleasure. They thought Epicurus meant that one should only eat, drink, and be merry. For this reason, Epicureanism is often misrepresented as meaning that pleasure, instead of the mental activity that Epicurus emphasized, is a way of gaining inner peace.

Another Hellenistic philosopher, Zeno [zē′nō], developed a philosophy known as Stoicism. He taught that true happiness, or inner peace, can be reached by people when they find their proper places in nature. His followers were called Stoics, because they often met on a stoa, or porch.

Believing all nature to be good, the Stoics thought that people must accept poverty, disease, and even death as the will of God. This philosophy led them to be indifferent toward all kinds of experience, good or bad. Today, the word “stoic” means a person who does not show feelings or emotions.

This ivory statuette shows the elaborate exaggeration of Greek theater costumes.

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**Section 1 Review**

**Identify** Sophists, Protagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Stoics

**Main Ideas**

1. What had become the major concern of Greek philosophy by the middle of the 5th century B.C.?
2. How did the views of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle differ from those of the Sophists?
3. What were the aims of the Hellenistic philosophers?

**Critical Thinking**

**Recognizing Values:** Socrates led his students to question their ideas and the acts of their leaders. Do you think this was a good idea? Support your judgment with evidence.

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2

The Greeks produced impressive literature.

As we saw in Chapter 4, Greek literature began in the 800s B.C. with the epic poetry attributed to Homer. The literature of the Golden Age drew heavily on this tradition and on the Greek religious heritage, also from the distant past.

By the time of Pericles, the Greeks had invented innumerable stories and legends about the gods. The people honored the gods but were free to accept any account of them they wished. Greek religion became an important part of community life, and honoring the gods was seen as an important civic duty. The stories and legends about the gods were a continuing source of inspiration for poets, dramatists, and historians.

The Greeks invented drama.

Greek drama began as part of the religious rites that were held at festivals honoring the god of wine, Dionysus [di′nə səs]. A chorus of men chanted hymns and performed dances in praise of the god. In the 6th century B.C., changes in the rites eventually led to the development of drama. Individual actors were separated from the chorus and given roles to play, and dialogue was used. Most important was the use of new themes based on heroic legends not related to Dionysus. You will
A professional Greek poet recites his work in a performance, continuing the literary tradition of Homer.

learn more about Greek drama in the “Highlights of Civilization” feature on page 87.

By the 5th century B.C., two distinct forms of drama—tragedy and comedy—had evolved in Athens. For the most part, the writers of tragedy borrowed from the old familiar legends of the gods and heroes for their plots. They reinterpreted these themes in the light of the values and problems of their own times. The chorus remained a basic part of the play, commenting on the action as it took place. Both men’s and women’s roles were played by men. Greek tragedy dealt with serious matters, and the plays always had unhappy or disastrous endings.

Athenian playwrights excelled in tragic and comedic drama.

The most famous authors of tragedies among the Greeks were three Athenian poets who lived in the 5th century B.C.. They were Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

Aeschylus [es’kə laz], considered by many to be the father of tragedy, wrote some 90 plays, of which only seven have survived. He found inspiration in contemporary themes as well as the old myths and legends.

In The Oresteia, a series of three plays, Aeschylus drew his material from the Trojan War and its aftermath. The hero Agamemnon [ag’ə mem’nən] returns home safely from the war only to be murdered by his wife Clytemnestra [kli’təm nes’tra]. His son Orestes [o rəs’təz] and daughter Electra avenge their father’s death with Orestes’ murder of his mother. In turn, however, Orestes is made to pay for his crime when he goes insane. In this way the tragic cycle of murder, revenge, and retribution is carried out.

Sophocles [sof’ə klēz’], the most important of the Greek tragedians, was concerned more with human nature and individual motivation than with the working out of divine justice. He illustrated the strength of the human spirit by depicting people who experienced painful tragedy.

The most famous of his surviving plays, Oedipus Rex (“Oedipus the King”) centers around the tragic consequences when Oedipus [ed’ə pas], not knowing the true identity of his parents, kills his father and subsequently marries his mother.

Euripides [yû rip’ə dēz’], the last of these prominent Athenian writers of tragedy, reflected the more critical spirit that prevailed in the wake of the Peloponnesian War. To him, human life was often pathetic, and the ways of the gods at times ridiculous. Euripides’ popularity lasted long after the Golden Age, probably because of his use of everyday speech in his writings and his modern critical outlook toward life.

Comedy, which is an amusing play or a play with a happy ending, also began in the festivals of Dionysus. The most famous author of comedy was Aristophanes [ar’s stōf’ə nēz], another 5th-century Greek. Since no laws protected Athenians from false or damaging statements, Aristophanes often ridiculed important citizens and politicians in his plays.

The Greeks wrote the first true histories.

So far as we know, the word history was first used for a description of past events by Herodotus [hə rod’ə təs], a 5th century B.C. Greek. His masterpiece, History of the Persian Wars, is filled with anecdotes, legends, and many entertaining bits of odd information that are not always reliable as historical evidence. Herodotus does, however, let the reader know when he is describing events he can verify.
The use of masks, popular in ancient Greek drama, is carried to modern times in this production of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in Britain.

The other important Greek historian of the 5th century was **Thucydides** [θüˈsidəz']. Like Herodotus, Thucydides wrote only one book, the *History of the Peloponnesian War*. In it, he only used material that he felt was important to the history. A faithful historian, Thucydides judged evidence and only used facts he had carefully checked.

Thucydides looked for the human causes of the Greek wars. He did not believe that human events could be explained as fate or as acts of the gods. Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* became a model for other historians.

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**Section 2 Review**

**Identify** Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Herodotus, Thucydides

**Main Ideas**
1. How did the festivals honoring Dionysus lead to the development of drama?
2. Who were the most famous writers of tragedy and comedy? For what are they remembered?
3. Who were the leading Greek historians and what kind of history did they write?

**Critical Thinking**

**Evaluating Sources of Information:** Imagine that you are a Greek historian during the Golden Age. Would you try to be objective about your country's and ruler's activities even when appealing to the patriotism of your readers? Why?

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3. **The Greeks made important advances in science and art.**

Just as they did in philosophy and literature, the Greeks broke new ground and set high standards in science and art. The Greeks absorbed the heritage of earlier peoples and advanced it far beyond any of their predecessors.

**Greek scientists introduced new methods of inquiry.**

Building on the work of earlier philosophers, Greek scientists of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. made remarkable progress. They began looking at the world around them with an open mind, in an effort to explain its mysteries by reason rather than by myth and legend. Aristotle was far and away the ideal of this new breed of philosopher-scientist. He not only dominated his age but also provided the foundation for the remarkable scientific advances of the Hellenistic period and for many centuries to come. True knowledge, he argued, could be obtained only as a result of the painstaking collection and organization of particular facts.

In his famous work *Organon*, Aristotle set forth two ways in which new truths could be acquired. The first, induction, moves from particular facts to general truths. In other words, the scientist collects a body of facts, studies them, and then reaches at least a tentative conclusion as to where these facts lead. Deduction, on the other hand, moves from the general to the particular. In using this method, the scientist begins with an idea that appears to have validity, then goes in search of the specific examples that support it.

Using these methods, Aristotle and his assistants investigated such diverse fields as biology, mathematics, astronomy, physics, literary criticism, rhetoric, logic, politics, ethics, and metaphysics. In science he uncovered facts that would not be discovered again until the intellectual revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries.

**The Hellenistic Greeks added to scientific knowledge.**

Building on the work of Aristotle and others, Greek science continued to advance in the 3rd cen-
tury B.C. Greek concern for direct study and observation, instead of abstract speculation, reached its peak during the Hellenistic period. The new center of learning was now Alexandria, Egypt. Scientists flocked to Alexandria to carry on research and study with other scientists. Based on direct observation of natural phenomena, their discoveries broke new ground in several key areas. In mathematics Euclid [yu′klid] laid down the elements of plane and solid geometry. In the area of physics, Archimedes [är′kə mē′dēz] made an important discovery about measuring volume. According to legend, Archimedes was asked by Hiero, the king of Syracuse, to figure out whether a goldsmith had cheated him by making a crown that was not pure gold. In solving the problem, Archimedes determined how to find the volume of an object by measuring the amount of water it displaced in a container. He also discovered that the goldsmith had in fact tried to cheat the king. 

Two other Greeks made important achievements that have endured to this day. Pythagoras [paθag′ərəs] stated the geometric rule that is essential to any high-school geometry course, the Pythagorean [pə thag′ə rē′ən] theorem, above right.

The other scientist, Hippocrates [hi pok′rətĕz′], founded a medical school. “Every disease has a natural cause,” he said. His work helped end some of the superstitions and belief in magic that had stood in the way of the study of disease. Physicians today swear an oath of ethical conduct, called the Hippocratic oath, based on one that Hippocrates drew up.

Art and architecture flourished throughout the Greek world.

The most striking evidence of the splendor of Greek civilization is provided by the art and architecture of the 5th century B.C. Even in a state of ruin, as so much of it is, the artistic achievement of the Golden Age is an inspiration.

Greek painting, pottery, and sculpture all reflected high artistic standards. The value of Greek pottery for the student of the past is as much or more in the drawings and paintings on the vases as in the pottery itself. In many instances these illustrations tell us about aspects of everyday life in ancient Greece that we can learn in no other way.

Greek sculpture also reflected the high artistic standards of Greek civilization. The most famous sculptor of the age was Phidias [fɪdɪəs]. His masterpiece—Athena, which once stood inside the Parthenon, is now gone, and only remnants of his other works remain.

Hellenistic sculptors continued and intensified the realistic approach of the Golden Age, adding dramatic and emotional elements. Outstanding surviving examples from the Hellenistic period include the "Laocoön," the "Apollo Belvedere," the "Venus de Milo," and the "Winged Victory."

As you learned in the "Highlights of Civilization" feature in Chapter 4, classical Greek architecture reflected harmony and proportion. All relationships, such as column spacing and height and the curvature of floor and roof lines, were calculated and executed with remarkable precision to achieve a perfect balance.

The host of new cities that sprang up in Hellenistic times served as a tremendous impetus to architecture. The new cities benefited from town planning, with streets laid out on a rectangular grid. The impressive public buildings were elaborate and highly ornamented. The much more elaborate Corinthian columns were preferred over the simple Doric and Ionic.

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**Section 3 Review**

**Identify** Euclid, Archimedes, Pythagoras, Hippocrates

**Main Ideas**

1. What new methods of inquiry did Greek scientists introduce?
2. What contributions did the Hellenistic Greeks make to scientific knowledge?
3. In which of the arts did the Greeks excel?

**Critical Thinking**

**Assessing Cause and Effect:** Imagine that you are a Greek scientist during the Hellenistic period. Do you think that you would join the many scientists who traveled to Alexandria to study? What advantages might you see in a community of scholars? Might there be disadvantages?