

Introduction: A (very) brief history

Democracy. Science. Theatre. Philosophy. Education: All products of Greece, born on the shores of the Mediterranean, just like Socrates, Pythagoras, and Alexander the Great. Greeks are as keen mentally, as they are strong physically and I've even heard it said that Greeks are the smartest people on Earth. They could rule the world, if they wanted to (or so the joke goes), but they'd rather sit around and drink coffee instead.

Greeks have a long history of being relaxed, and their chilled out way of life is most likely due to their environment, which is extremely favorable to human habitation. The climate is mild and besides the mountainous interior, the temperature along the coast seldom ever gets below freezing. There's a lot of sunshine, a decent amount of rain and natural springs full of mineral water, natural resources, which make basic survival pretty easy since food can be cultivated year round and all the shelter you really need is a roof overhead. It's no wonder that people started permanently settling these lands tens of thousands of years ago, because it was and simply is a great place to live.

Although the summer months can get sweltering, relief from the heat is never far away. The bountiful blue sea provides a steady wind and cool waters, which are both refreshing and rich with marine life. The sea's bounty of fish and invertebrates provides all of the protein necessary to fuel the human brain (a task that many cultures still struggle with even today).

With their basic needs met, the Greeks were able to mature quickly and made their token attempt at world domination five hundred years before Rome, when most

other people were still just trying to figure out how to stay alive. The Greeks found out the hard way, way back then, what happens to empires and they see no need now to have another go at it again. Because unlike the British, who are stuck on a cloudy, rainy island and forced to colonize other lands to make up for their own lack of natural resources, the Greeks have pretty much everything they truly need right here at home. They live in the same place they vacation, so even now, in the modern world, they can't find much of a reason to go anyplace else. Why travel? They're already where everyone else in Europe comes to party.

Greece is not new to hosting visitors. Its location at the crossroads of civilization made it a convenient center point for trade and commerce around the Mediterranean, and the influx of people "just passing through" made it ripe for social advancement, as many products and enlightening ideas traveled through its borders. However, its central seat amidst conflicting cultures has also brought Greece much turmoil, and throughout its long history, Greece's glory has been equally matched with misery, as Greece has been subject to numerous invasions and occupations by foreign entities.

The Ottoman Empire, or "the Turks," occupied the Greek peninsula for nearly four hundred years, ending only fairly recently (in historical terms), during the first half of the 19th century. Over those four long centuries, the Greeks faced enormous hardships and cultural oppression at the hands of their closest neighbors. They were forced to live as second-class citizens on their own native soil and for a third of a millennia they had no basic rights or freedoms. Even their own native tongue was forbidden to speak. Yet with patient defiance and an eventual

grassroots revolution, the Greeks somehow managed to secretly preserve their language and their culture, passing it on clandestinely and keeping it alive subversively for more than fifteen generations.

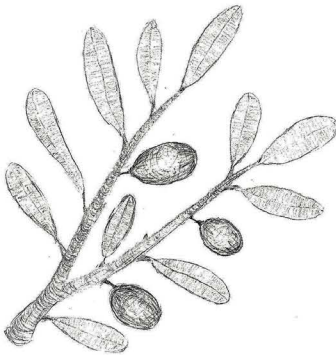
Mind over matter. Work smart, so you don't have to work hard. Steal from the government. That's the Greek way. Even if they've never had the numbers, they've always found a way to win wars. Even now, despite being such a tiny country, everybody in the world still seems to be talking about Greece. It has a certain power because it holds a strong history. Every western democracy is built off of its legacy and all western written language is derived from Greek. Many of the words they used, we still use today.

The Greeks are the ones who seemingly started it all. They really got the ball rolling for the modern world. They created mathematics and logic, and philosophical ideas about existence and our place in the universe. They came up with the whole idea of the human epic. Greece is home to the gods and mythological men, like Ulysses and Achilles, legendary both for their strength and achievements, as well as their mistakes and their flaws. But it was really innovation that secured the Greeks their place in history.

The Athenian Empire was unique from the get go. Most other empires at the time were monarchies built around some sort of fertile plain, which offered the land necessary for large-scale agriculture and in turn huge populations and massive armies. Athens, on the other hand, was a democracy built on rocky and rugged terrain. It never housed an enormous population or vast armies (when compared to other empires before and after it). Yet the Greeks still somehow managed to exert their influ-

ence all over the world, even to this day. How? How did they manage to do it? How did they make so much out of so little? How did they cast such a big shadow while being so small?

The answer is simple. The Greeks are creative. They managed to unlock the potential of the human mind and, acting in the true spirit of *homo sapiens*, they did what nobody else had done before them. They were no different, as people, than anyone else, but they allowed themselves to be free and therefore did things in ways others didn't. Athens was the first real meritocracy, which built its wealth by using ingenuity and invention.



Olives have become synonymous with Greece and there's a good reason for it. Olives grow everywhere in Greece. They are really the only leafy-tree with edible fruit that can grow wild in the soil and survive the harsh summer sun. Like the Greeks themselves, olives are

resilient and strong, and it's what's hidden inside those olives that originally made the Greeks so rich.

Oil, of all kinds, has been a precious resource throughout human history. Even to this day, wars are waged over it. But before there was petroleum to power combustion engines and whale oil to light lamps, there was grease to cook with. Traditionally, people used animal fat, but the Greeks, always using their minds, figured out a way to effectively and efficiently extract the

oil out of vegetables. And in the process of doing so, the Greeks discovered a resource more useful and precious than gold. Economically, it was cheaper to create and the health benefits were merely a bonus, seemingly rewarding their ingenuity. To me, it's really no coincidence that "Greece" is called "Greece," although it should really be spelled "Grease." (Note: this is not really the reason why Greece is called Greece. The name was derived from the term "Graeki," which was what Latin speakers called people that came from the region that is now Greece.)

Furthermore, the Greeks capitalized by simply taking advantage of what was already around them: the sea and the wind. They built the strongest and fastest sailboats to move their product and patrol their seas. As it turned out, with a little creativity, the Greeks found the perfect set up in conditions, which seemed less than ideal. Being already almost impossible to attack by land, all Athens had to do was create a technologically unmatched navy. They ruled their empire by controlling all of the ports, that way they didn't need large numbers of foot soldiers or to sustain massive occupying armies. They just needed tactical strategy.

So in a world entirely ruled by monarchies and oligarchies, the Greeks blossomed into a democracy almost 2,500 years before the rest of Europe started to dethrone their kings. And Ancient Greece was a true democracy, unlike the republics we live in today. As opposed to voting for representative officials in a government, the citizens of Athens held a debate and voted directly on the issues, with no middlemen involved.

Each citizen got one vote that they could cast on any civil proposal presented, ranging from creating and