

## Ancient Civilizations of the World

### Introduction

You learnt about ancient civilizations of the world when you were in Grade 06. Most of the information you gained about those civilizations were yielded from the archaeological excavations that were carried out recently. Unlike those civilizations, the Greek and Roman civilizations that we are discussing in this chapter are not ones that had been ignored by the literary world for some time. What is very special about these civilizations is that they had a great influence on building the European Civilization. In this lesson, your attention is drawn on to the main characteristics of the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations.



### Greek Civilization

#### Location

Greek civilization evolved based in the peninsula that lies between the Ionian Sea on the West and the Aegean Sea on the East jutting out into the Mediterranean sea and the chain of islands including Crete that lie to the south of this peninsula. Crete is the largest of the chain of these islands.

Greece is a mountainous country. Out of those mountains, the beautiful Mount Olympus is the most famous. In these areas there was a highly favourable environment for agricultural activities because of the numerous waterways that flow down through these mountains. The mild climate that prevailed in these areas was very favourable for human life as well as for animal husbandry.



Map 5.1 Greek Civilization

Having many natural harbours along the rugged coast was very helpful in enhancing external relations and trade activities of ancient Greece.

## **The Origin of the Greek Civilization**

Before the origin of the Greek civilization, there was an ancient civilization based in Crete island. It is called the Minoan civilization.

As various tribes and groups of people came to Crete from the surrounding areas, the Minoan civilization began to decline. The Greek civilization originated in about 2000 BC with the establishment of small villages by those tribes and groups of people.

## **Administration**

The villages established by the above mentioned tribes and groups of people flourished and cities evolved from those villages. By about 700 BC, a number of states originated based on the cities thus developed. Those states were called city states. Out of those city states Athens and Sparta are considered to be the dominant ones. The key features of those city states included:

- being small in area,
- having a limited population, and
- giving political rights only to the citizens of those states.

The citizens of the city states gathered at one place, held discussions and made political decisions. Getting involved in administrative affairs by the citizens themselves in this manner is called direct democracy. This is how the foundation for the parliament democracy that has been established in the modern world was created.

The reign of the ruler called Pericles is considered to be the golden era of Greece. He established the acropolis or the capital city on the top of a small hill that was located in the middle of the city of Athens.

Later, the city states of Greece made efforts to dominate one another. Taking advantage of this dissension, King Philip of Macedonia invaded Greece. After the sudden death of King Philip, his son Alexander the Great captured Greece and became the king of Greece.

### **Activity**

Make a copy of the map of Greece and mark the following on it.

The cities of Sparta, Troy and Corinth, Crete island, Ionian Sea, Aegean Sea and Mount Olympus.



Fig 5.1 Beautiful clay pots produced by Greeks

## The Economy

The ancient Greek lifestyle was based on agriculture, animal husbandry and trade.

## Agriculture

- Grains like wheat and barley, grapes and olive were the main crops.



Fig 5.2 Olive tree



Fig 5.3 A replica of an ancient Greek house

## Animal Husbandry

- Animals like cattle, goats and sheep were reared.

## Trade

- The Greeks maintained trade relationships with countries like India, China, and Sri Lanka.
- The Greeks used to call Sri Lanka as “Taprobane”.
- The goods that the Greeks traded included perfume, beautiful earthenware, linen, wine, etc.

## Lifestyle

The ancient Greek society was comprised of three social groups namely, the elite, the masses and slaves. Family was the smallest social unit. The Greeks used to live simple lives.

## Food and Drink

The food and drink of the ancient Greeks included vegetable, meat, fish, barley and wine.

## Housing

- The elite lived in storeyed houses.
- Bedrooms, kitchen, storerooms etc. had been constructed around the middle courtyard of those houses.
- The masses lived in small houses.

## Costumes



Fig 5.4 Costumes of ancient Greeks

## Artistic Work

### Architecture

- The Greeks were skilled in constructing huge buildings and very beautiful churches.
- Materials like polished lime stones, marble and beautiful floor tiles had been used in constructing those churches.
- Temple of Athena Parthenos is a good example for such constructions.

### Sculpture and Statues

- Images and statues were created so that the natural appearance of the human body has been imparted to them.
- The statue of the discus thrower is a good example for such sculpture.
- Materials like ivory and gold had been used in creating statues. The statue of Goddess Athena is a fine example for that.





Fig 5.5 A picture of the Temple of Athena Parthenos

### Plays

There were two types of plays namely comedies and tragedies. Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides are some of the greatest playwrights of that period.

### Literature

- Greek language was used in writing literary works.
- Histories and epics are great literary works.



Fig 5.6 Goddess Athena

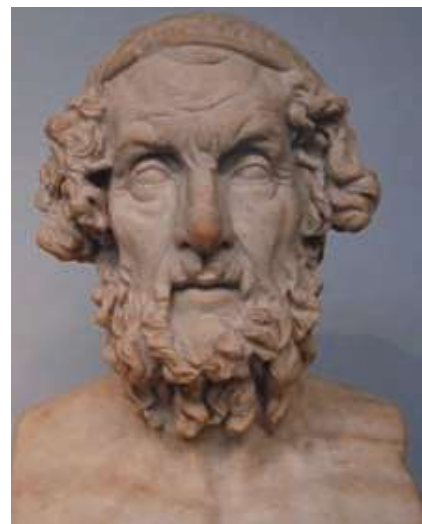


Fig 5.7 Homer

- The Iliad and The Odyssey by Homer are examples for Greek epics.
- Herodotus, Thucydides and Aristotle were great historians.



Fig 5.8 An outdoor theatre

## Education and Philosophy

### Education

There existed a well-developed education system which produced various professionals, philosophers and artists. Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum were prominent educational institutions.

### Philosophy

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were eminent Greek philosophers.

Hippocrates who was a Greek national is considered the 'father of western medicine'. Archimedes is recognized as a great mathematician and scientist.

### Religion

- Worshipping gods could often be seen in Greece.
- There were separate gods for each of the city states.

- God Zeus is considered to be the ruler of Greek gods.
- Goddess Athena who is considered to be the daughter of God Zeus was the most worshipped and prominent goddess. Parthenon temple was dedicated to Goddess Athena.

## Sports

### Types of games

- Running, boxing, weight lifting, throwing the discus are examples for sports that were done in Greece.

The modern Olympic Games owe their origin to ancient Greeks. The citizens of all the city states took part in the ancient Olympic Games that were held every four years to commemorate God Zeus. Olympic Games are an occasion which displays the unity that the ancient Greeks had.



Fig 5.9 The discus thrower

### The heritage that the world inherited from the Greek civilization

- It was the Greek civilization that provided the foundation for building modern Europe.
- The impact of Greek civilization was an important causative factor that contributed to the evolution of politics, literature, science and arts in Europe.
- The teachings of Greek philosophers and their thinking led to the evolution of the modern European thinking.
- It was from the Greeks that the world inherited the modern democratic ruling system.
- Olympic Games, too, were inherited to the world from the Greeks.



### Activity

Prepare a booklet containing information about the Greek civilization according to the following topics.

Commencement

Nature

World heritages

## 5.2 Roman Civilization

### Location

The Roman civilization evolved based in the city of Rome in Italy. Italy is a peninsula that juts out into the Mediterranean sea. This peninsula is surrounded by the Adriatic sea on the east and the Mediterranean sea on the west and the south. Italy is separated from the other countries of Europe because of the Alps mountain range located in the north of Italy. There is a mountain range called the Apennines that stretches from the north to the south along the peninsular country. The fact that ships could sail up to the city of Rome along the Tiber, a long river that starts from the Apennines, contributed a lot towards the progress of that city.





Map 5.2 Roman civilization

### Origin of the Roman Civilization

There are several views about the origin of the Roman civilization. One such view is that the Latins who migrated to Italy from Europe built Rome. There also is a legend which says that a hero named Romulus built Rome. As Rome has been an important trade centre since ancient times, it can generally be accepted that those who migrated to Rome from other parts of the world built the Roman civilization.

### The Legend of Romulus building the City of Rome

Consequent to a conspiracy that was planned in a royal family, two newly born twins named Romulus and Remus, who were heirs to the throne, were ordered by the king to be killed by drowning. The servant who was assigned

with that task felt sad about the two infants and therefore he kept the infants on a cradle made of wood and floated it. A she-wolf of which the pups had died saw the two infants at the bank of the river, took them to its den and brought them up. Later a shepherd discovered the two children and he looked them after as his own children. As they became young men, they decided to establish a kingdom of their own. Accordingly they started building a city. The city thus built by Romulus was called Rome.

### System of Administration

It is believed that there had been a tribe or family based administrative system in Rome at the beginning. Later a monarchy was established, but with the passage of time it failed, too, and by about 509 BC a federal system of government was formed. Under



that system, the administrative powers were granted to two officers who were called consuls. A senate was formed to assist the two consuls in handling the administrative affairs.

As Rome advanced politically in this manner, the entire peninsula of Italy came under the rule of Rome. Thus the Roman Empire was established in about 27 BC, and later countries like Spain, England, France and lands around the Mediterranean Sea were attached to the Roman Empire.



### Activity

Identify on a map of the world the Italian Peninsula, City of Rome, the Tiber, the Alps, the Apennines, Adriatic Sea, Mediterranean Sea and the city of Pompey.

- During the reign of Augustus Caesar, Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem that is situated close to Jerusalem that belongs to the Roman Empire.



Fig 5.10 Augustus Caesar

## Eminent Roman Emperors

### Julius Caesar

- Julius Caesar was a great warrior who was highly skilled in warfare.
- He ruled the Roman Empire righteously.

### Augustus Caesar

- Octavious alias Augustus Caesar was the first roman emperor.
- The reign of Augustus Caesar is considered to be the golden era of the Roman history.
- The great Roman monuments like the Colosseum and the Baths of Caracalla were constructed during the reign of Augustus Caesar.

## Folk Life

Roman society consisted of patriarchal families. The father of the family handled all the affairs of the family. In the Roman society, even women had great powers and they also held high ranks in society. Not only that, they had also been engaged in important professions like the medical profession. Mothers were treated with great respect.

## Society

The Roman society had been divided into three groups namely, the elite, the masses and slaves.



Fig 5.11 The Baths of Caracalla

### **Town Planning and Housing**

There were well-planned towns. The elites lived in luxurious houses in the towns. There also were multi-storey houses.

Particular attention had been paid to the provision of water supply and sanitation facilities.

All the towns had been connected with a network of roads. The Romans had special knowledge on the technology of constructing bridges.

### **Arts and Architecture**

As well as the Greeks, the Romans, too, were great writers. There are many works of excellent literary prose and verse composed by Roman writers. Virgil's *Enid* is one such epic.

The theatres and open air theatres that had been constructed in Rome provide evidence to the artistic skills that the Romans possessed.



Fig 5.12

A large number of people from the countries that were invaded by the Romans were captured and were taken away to Rome in order to be sold at the market as slaves.



Fig 5.13

The Roman elites were the highest social class. They lived luxurious lives in beautiful mansions. Hundreds of slaves lived in each of those mansions.

## Images and Statues

The Romans also possessed an excellent technology of carving images and statues. The bronze image of the head that is considered to be the head of Emperor Nero is a fine example for the living look of the images created by the Romans.

## Architecture

The Roman Colosseum is an open air stadium that had been constructed in the City of Rome. What is special about this stadium is that 50,000 people can gather there at a time. This is considered to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Pantheon Temple is a massive construction which displays the fineness of the Roman architecture. This temple had been dedicated for all the deities that the Romans believed in.





Fig 5.14 An ancient Roman bridge

The massive construction on which the pipeline that carried pure drinking water to the city of Rome over a distance of about hundred kilometres had been laid.

### Sports Activities of the Romans

- There is less evidence which shows that the Romans had engaged in sports activities.
- Evidence shows that the Romans had held chariot races, too.
- The Romans were also interested in holding dangerous and brutal fighting events using animals like lions. You must be surprised to hear that a large number of people and animals had died in such fighting events. Slaves had been sent to participate in such events.

### Trade Relationships

Rome was a very wealthy city and was a centre of trade between the eastern and the western parts of the world. Rome had trade relationships with countries around the Mediterranean Sea and also with Asian countries like India, China and Sri Lanka. Roman traders have recorded certain facts about Sri Lanka, too.

Ancient sources of our country report that King Bhathikabhaya had imported beads from Rome to make an offering to Ruwanwelisaya.



Fig 5.15 The Colosseum of Rome

What the world has inherited from the Roman Civilization

- The European civilization inherited from the Romans the technologies of constructing bridges, laying water pipes and constructing roads.
- Christianity originated in the Roman Empire and it later spread through out the world.
- The spread of Roman law
- Latin language
- Roman architecture

### *Summary*

1. The Greek civilization originated based in the Crete island.
2. There were city states like Athens and Sparta.
3. Greeks had excelled in art, science and philosophy.
4. A number of heritages have been inherited to the present world from the ancient Greek civilization.
5. The Roman civilization originated based in the city of Rome in Italy.

6. The Roman power was established in a large area around the Mediterranean Sea and thus the Roman Empire expanded further.
7. After the Greeks, the most advanced European civilization was built by the Romans.
8. A lot of heritage that the world has inherited from the Roman civilization contributes immensely towards the advancement of the modern world.



### Activity

1. Identify on a map of the world the Italian Peninsula, the City of Rome, the Tiber, the Alps, the Apennines, England, France and Spain.
2. Prepare a picture book including pictures which depict the artistic skills, architectural skills and the engineering technology of the Romans.
3. Ancient Roman coins that were found from Sri Lanka have been kept for display at the Museum in Colombo. Visit the museum and collect more information related to them.