



Introducing the Ancient Greeks: From Bronze Age Seafarers to Navigators of the Western Mind

Edith Hall

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“Wonderful . . . a thoughtful discussion of what made [the Greeks] so important, in their own time and in ours.”—Natalie Haynes, *Independent*

The ancient Greeks invented democracy, theater, rational science, and philosophy. They built the Parthenon and the Library of Alexandria. They wrote down the timeless myths of Odysseus and Oedipus, and the histories of Leonidas’s three hundred Spartans and Alexander the Great. But understanding these uniquely influential people has been hampered by their diffusion across the entire Mediterranean. Most ancient Greeks did not live in what is now Greece but in settlements scattered across Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Libya, France, Italy, Bulgaria, Russia, and Ukraine. They never formed a single unified social or political entity. Acclaimed classics scholar Edith Hall’s *Introducing the Ancient Greeks* is the first book to offer a synthesis of the entire ancient Greek experience, from the rise of the Mycenaean kingdoms of the sixteenth century BC to the final victory of Christianity over paganism in AD 391.

Each of the ten chapters visits a different Greek community at a different moment during the twenty centuries of ancient Greek history. In the process, the book makes a powerful original argument: A cluster of unique qualities made the Greeks special and made them the right people, at the right time, to take up the baton of human progress. According to Herodotus, the father of history, what made all Greeks identifiably Greek was their common descent from the same heroes, the way they sacrificed to their gods, their rules of decent behavior, and their beautiful language. Edith Hall argues, however, that their mind-set was just as important as their awe-inspiring achievements. They were rebellious, individualistic, inquisitive, open-minded, witty, rivalrous, admiring of excellence, articulate, and addicted to pleasure. But most important was their continuing identity as mariners, the restless seagoing lifestyle that brought them into contact with ethnically diverse peoples in countless new settlements, and the constant stimulus to technological innovation provided by their intense relationship with the sea.

Expertly researched and elegantly told, *Introducing the Ancient Greeks* is an indispensable contribution to our understanding of the Greeks.

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