



HISTORY

UNIT 5

THE CLASSICAL WORLD

Dear students,

In this notes we are going to study about Greece – The Hellenic World and Rome – The Hellenistic World.

Greece: The Hellenic World

- Until 8th century BC (BCE) Greece was not different from the rest of the world. People were illiterate, craft specialization was primitive, and life was difficult. With the exception of Sparta, agriculture was limited by the mountainous terrain. However, the Greeks succeeded in founding colonies along the coast that helped them earn revenue through trade.
- As a result by the 6th century BC (BCE), Greece turned into a network of City-States. **Acropolis**, a fortified city of ancient Greeks on a hill in Athens, is an illustrative example of their advancement. Though the City-States fought each other they were bound together by trade, by a common alphabet, similar religious practices, and festivals. The illustrious example for the last one was the Olympic festival of sports and games.



Acropolis

Greeks' Victory over Persians

- King Darius (BC (BCE) 550–486), who was heading a great empire in Persia, decided to conquer the Greek City-States. The first Persian attack on Greece failed. This was due to the fact that Persian army suffered from disease and lack of food during its march. Therefore, in planning the second attack, the



Persians avoided the land route and came by sea. The Greeks or Hellenes, fought patriotically and defeated the Persian army at Marathon in 490 BC (BCE).

- Xerxes, King Darius' successor conducted another expedition. Joined by Spartans this time, the Athenians persisted in their resistance and in the final battle fought in Salamis, Persian ships were destroyed. Disheartened Xerxes returned to Persia without achieving his end.

"Democracy" in Hellenic Greece

- When the Greek City-States first emerged, they still carried the legacy of the past. The rulers came from lines of traditional chieftains. Those who grew rich from the expansion of trade resented the privileges enjoyed by the old ruling families.
- Yet the Age of Tyrants 6th century to 4th century BC (BCE) proved to be a period of urban development, with new buildings and enormous temples such as **Olympian Zeus** at Athens.

Athenian Democracy

- In Athens, the pressure from below resulted in the replacement of both oligarchy and tyranny by "democracy." The law-making power in Athens was vested in an assembly open to all freemen.
- Judges and lower officials were chosen by lots. This arrangement was resented by the upper classes who considered democracy to be the rule of the mob.
- The Persian danger had united the Greeks. When this danger was removed, they started quarrelling again. The history of many Greek city-states was one of continual struggles by the rich landowners against "democracy". The only exception was Athens, where "democracy" survived for about 200 years.

Pericles (461–429 BC (BCE))

- Athens had a great leader, Pericles, who held power for thirty years. During his rule, **Athens** and **Sparta** were continuously at war with each other. This war is known as the Peloponnesian War.
- Athens, despite hostility and disturbance from Sparta, became a noble city with magnificent buildings. There were great artists and great thinkers. Historians therefore call this the **Age of Pericles**.

Beginnings of Hellenistic Civilisation

- The Greek city-states did not have an elaborate bureaucracy. They were therefore able to show a greater dynamism. Under Alexander the Great, the Greeks were able to establish a kingdom in



Macedonia. This kingdom succeeded in annexing two historic empires of Egypt and the Middle East. But the entire period of Alexander's reign was spent on wars.

- The Greek school of Science, Mathematics and Philosophy reached its peak in the Greek- Egyptian city of Alexandria. **Euclid** who formulated the basic theorems of geometry, **Eratosthenes** who accurately calculated the diameter of the earth, and **Hipparchus**, the founder of trigonometry were all products of

Rome: The Hellenistic World

Roman Republic

- In the beginning Rome was a society of agriculturists, organized through lineages. Out of this developed a hereditary ruling class. Roman people were divided into two classes: Patricians, rich landlords, and Plebeians, a common citizens.
- Rome was strategically located in the crisscrossing trade routes cutting north–south and east–west. Taxes on passing traders added to the revenue derived from agriculture. By the late 6th century BC (BCE), Rome developed into a prosperous town.

Class War between Patricians and Plebeians

- Prisoners of war were enslaved in Rome. Thus Rome produced a new labour force for the rich to exploit. Big landholders bought slaves cheaply and used them to cultivate their estates.
- The slave population grew and by the 1st century BC (BCE) there were two million slaves, when the total strength of free population was 3.25 million. Slave labour led to the impoverishment of free labour.
- Many poor peasants had to abandon their children who also ended up in the slave markets.
- The conflict between Plebeians and Patricians became bloodier.
- Tiberius Gracchus and Gaius Gracchus, though Patricians, voiced their opinion in favour of the poor peasants. As the peasants supported their programme, the Senators, shocked by this development, murdered both of them.
- The martyrdom of the Gracchus brothers played a decisive role in the transformation of the Roman Republic into the Roman Empire.

Transfer of Power from Consuls to Emperor

- When Marius became Consul with the support of the *equites* (new rich or propertied class below the rank of Senatorial Class), he made an attempt to push through a land distribution bill in the Senate. This led to violence.



- The allies of Marius were killed. This resulted in a civil war between the followers of Marius and Sulla. After expelling Marius Sulla reigned for three years as a virtual dictator. He was killed and succeeded by Cinna and Catalina.

Establishment of Principate

- The civil wars over social issues ended only to be replaced by civil wars between Generals.
- Marius and Cinna against Sulla, Pompey against Julius Caesar, after Caesar's death Brutus and Cassius against Mark Antony and Octavian (Caesar's nephew) and finally Octavian against Mark Antony. The rich, old and new alike, felt that allowing Octavian, now called Augustus, to establish a de facto monarchy was the only way to re-establish political stability.
- The period starting from Augustus (27 BC (BCE)) is known as Principate. Augustus called himself Imperator, equivalent to the English word Emperor.

Society under Principate

- During the period of Principate, the imperial ruling class became far more prosperous than under the republic. The period witnessed a great influx of luxury goods such as silk, spices, and gems from the east. Cities were built on a grand scale, with temples, theatres, stadia and colosseum, gymnasia, aqueducts, baths and markets.
- The rich people distracted the attention of the poor by organizing games and contests in circuses, where the gladiators were forced to fight and kill each other.
- The most distinguished writers of the **Augustan Age** brought glory to the empire. Pliny the Elder completed a voluminous encyclopaedia of "science." He called it *Natural History*.
- Seneca was another well known author of an encyclopaedia of science. Horace in his *Odes* developed a philosophy that combined Epicurean justification of pleasure with Stoic bravery in the face of trouble. Livy was more a prose stylist than a historian. The best known historian was Tacitus. Virgil's *Aeneid* glorified Roman imperialism. The Roman law attained its highest stage of development during the Principate.
- After the death of Augustus in 14 AD (CE) Rome had few enlightened and capable rulers. With the exceptions of **Trajan** (98–117), **Antoninus Pius** (138–161) and **Marcus Aurelius** (161– 180), all others were tyrants. Marcus Aurelius stands apart from all others.
- As a philosopher, he authored many books. He was the first Roman Emperor to send an embassy to China and establish contact with an Asian power.

External Invasions and the Decline of Roman Empire



- The empire, facing threats from “barbarian incursions,” depended on expensive mercenary armies. In AD (CE) 330 the centre of the empire moved from Italy to the Greek speaking city of Byzantium. But it was difficult to rule the western parts from such a distance.
- In 410 A.D. (C.E.) the Goth Alaric led his forces to sack Rome. The Frank Clovis took control of Gaul. The Ostrogoth Theodoric proclaimed himself the emperor of Rome.
- The final onslaught came from Vandals. In 476 A.D. (C.E.), disgusted by the rule of Emperor Romulus Augustus, the Roman army led by Odovacer revolted and deposed him. This marked the end of Western Roman Empire.