

The “Nutshell” History of Ancient Greece

by Ellen McHenry

The Greeks were part of the world B.C.,
The year 2000 starts their history.
The Minoans lived well on the island of Crete,
The Palace of Knossos was their government seat.
The palace was huge, with a labyrinth of halls,
There were frescoes of dolphins on the plaster walls.

Long about the year 1-5-0-0
The palace was destroyed by a northern foe.
The people of Mycenae came and conquered Crete,
But they loved what they saw and decided to cheat--
They copied many things the Minoans had done,
Then they fought against Troy, and by a trick they won.

The Dark Ages came in 11-0-0,
We call them “dark” ‘cause there’s much we don’t know.
They wrote no stories and forgot how to paint,
So the record they left is very faint.
They painted their pots in geometric styles,
Their buildings were of wood, on the mainland and the isles.

In about 800 came the Archaic times,
Aesop wrote his fables, and Homer wrote his rhymes.
Homer’s story of Troy is famous, you’ll agree,
It’s in the Iliad and the Odyssey.
They built temples out of stone and held Olympic games,
Pythagoras and Thespis were notable names.

In the late 400s, the Persians came,
But at Marathon they were put to shame.
Then came peace and the Golden Age,
The Parthenon was built, and the Epidaurus stage.
Socrates was wise and told them all he knew,
Plato waxed eloquent, and Aristotle, too.

In the early 400s, the Greeks fought each other.
Sparta won the war, then the Golden Age was over.
Then along came Philip and his son, Alexander,
They took over Greece and decided to expand her.
The Greeks conquered most of the world they knew,
Archimedes and Euclid helped out, too.

From 300 on was the Hellenistic Age,
With Venus de Milo and Nike Samothrace.
Then the Romans conquered Greece in about 150,
They loved Greek culture and thought it was nifty.
They renamed the gods and borrowed architecture,
Then Rome ruled the world... but that’s another lecture!

The 1500-room palace at Knossos is very likely the origin of the myth about the labyrinth that contained the mythical minotaur (finally killed by Theseus who used a piece of string to find his way back out of the labyrinth).

Say the numbers: one-five-oh-oh

The Myceneans assimilated Greek culture and made it part of their own culture.

The trick in the last line is obviously the famous wooden horse.

Say: “eleven-oh-oh”

Archaic is pronounced “Ar-KAY-ick:

The Greco-Persian Wars lasted from 499-479. The Battle of Marathon was in 490. The Battle of Salamis in 480 marked the turning point after which Persia was on the defensive and soon left Greece.

Socrates said, “All I know is that I know nothing.”

The Peloponnesian Wars were essentially between Athens and Sparta. They lasted from 431-404. Alexander wanted revenge for what Persia had done to Greece in the Greco-Persian Wars. Archimedes’ most famous discovery was the principle of buoyancy. Euclid (Yoo-clid) was a geometry genius.

Venus de Milo and Nike of Samothrace are famous statues, now in the Louvre Museum in Paris. Milos and Samothrace are the islands on which the statues were found.