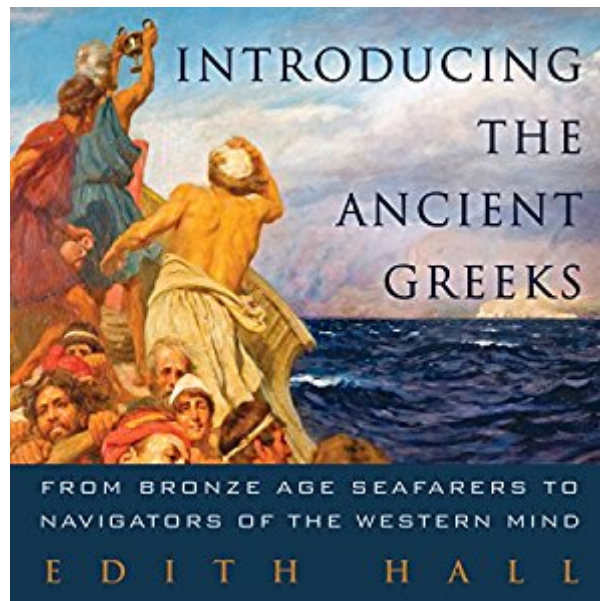


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# Introducing The Ancient Greeks: From Bronze Age Seafarers To Navigators Of The Western Mind



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Edith Hall is a major presence in the Classical studies field. Her depth and breadth of knowledge, intuitive and abstract as well as concrete analysis of the ancient Greeks and their achievements make for thrilling viewing and now reading. Her new book is an elegantly compressed and satisfying

run-through of the trajectory of the Greek world, from their first stirrings to their (tragic) collapse in the Christian world. Nevertheless, their presence continues to imbue the world through all things intellectual, aesthetic, philosophic, and scientific. For newcomers as well as seasoned scholars, Hall's work is infinitely pleasurable and informative, lyrical in composition and useful for various forms of contemporary application. We would indeed do well to remember what we owe the magnificent Greeks.

In this extraordinarily easy to read and fascinating introduction to the history of the Ancient Greeks, Hall takes the reader on an epic journey that would make Homer proud. Beginning with Mycenae and ending with the period of the Emperor Julian in the late fourth century CE, Hall explores the Ancient Greek identity, looking at ten specific characteristics. The period covered is quite long, about 1600 years or so, but Hall successfully keeps the reader engaged through her prose and through the subject matter itself. The Ancient Greeks were probably the most influential civilization that continues to shape the modern (Western) world. From Mycenae and the Minoans to Homer and the "Dark Ages" to the period of colonization of the Mediterranean and Black seas to the beginnings of Athenian Democracy. From the wars with Persia for the future of the freedom of the Ancient Greek cities to Athenian imperial overreach that led to the Peloponnesian War and continuing on through the epic achievements in varied fields such as astronomy, mathematics, political theory, and philosophy, Hall narrates a story that is at once familiar but that is also new as she interweaves new findings and discoveries about the Ancient Greeks. The book continues on into the conquests of Alexander when the Greek language and Greek ideas were spread throughout the Near East and the Hellenistic World arose as a result. This is probably one of my favorite periods in ancient Greek history and Hall does a superb job of providing clarity for a politically complex period that was at the same time filled with magnificent advances in art and the sciences. She next explores what the conquest of the Romans meant for the Greeks and for the Romans themselves. And finally she looks at the coming of Christianity and its effects on the Ancient Greek mind and the world that those minds had created. This is a superb introduction that is easy to read. Definitely recommended for anyone interested in the Ancient Greeks.

Very good survey introduction, just as advertised. I found it fun to read. After I had read many more, increasingly detailed books on the subject, I went back and was surprised at how useful this book had been and continues to be. It is arranged in chapters based on her "ten main characteristics of the Ancient Greeks." (For example, because Greece is small and early Hellenic settlements were

almost all on the sea, the Greeks were excellent seafarers and (mostly) had excellent navies. This was an important factor in how Mediterranean culture developed. If you want a good introduction that will encourage you to learn more, I recommend this.

Introducing the Ancient Greeks: From Bronze Age Seafarers to Navigators of the Western Mind by Edith Hall is an exceptional review of the impact of the ancient Greeks and clearly describes how these innovators gained their knowledge and scattered their culture abroad to what ultimately becomes known as the Roman Empire. Hall uses ten characteristics unique to the ancient Greeks and how each of these characteristics manifest themselves, especially in literature and archaeology. Hall begins the tale with the Mycenaeans who inhabited the island of Crete during the late Bronze Age and continues the narrative through the colonization of Asia Minor, the Persian Wars, the Peloponnesian War, and the conquests of Macedonian and Rome. With each time period, she brilliantly connects the characteristics and shows how they evolve and developed over the centuries. The evidence does become rather slim after the conquests of Macedonia under Alexander the Great - almost as if the characteristics become diluted, as if the characteristics became a shadowy reflection of what the ancient Greeks ultimately become. The most interesting aspects of Introducing the Ancient Greeks were the archaeology commentary. The ancient Greeks left a wealth of information in their pottery, palaces, and temples, giving scholars the foundation in which to understand how the ancient Greeks lived, which only highlighted the evidence of Hall's thesis that many of the skills and ideas commonly associated with the ancient Greeks have roots in cultures that predate them. My only complaint about the book is that there is no new information or new theory being presented. It is an ideal book for anyone who is new to the study of the ancient Greeks but those who have studied the culture would find that the book has nothing new to add to the history. If you are really into the ancient Greeks, you will enjoy the book just to reread the philosophy and mythology (who can really get tired of reading those?).

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