

# Who were the Greeks? An investigation into the cultural identities of the ancient Greek world

Ancient Greece is everywhere in our world. Since the Renaissance in Western Europe, an understanding of the Greek and Roman worlds has been seen as central to a full and balanced education. During the Second World War, meanwhile, Hitler saw his quest to build an elite race as a continuation of the military excellence exhibited by the warriors of ancient Greece. In 2000, many Western democracies celebrated the 2,500th-year anniversary of democracy itself, while in 2002-3, the White House was said to have been avidly reading Herodotus and Thucydides as modern-day America and its allies prepared to invade Iraq.

Thus, throughout our history, and especially today, the Greek world has stood as a model against which we have measured ourselves and from which we have exported countless (and often conflicting) traditions, ideologies, practices and policies. But just who really were the Greeks?

This course attempts to separate modern folklore about the Greek world from the realities of the ancient world, and in turn, to investigate how one has led to the other. We will look at the emergence of Greece and its competing cultural identities from the supposed first-ever Olympic games in 776BC and the advent of democracy and its challengers in the 6th century, through to Greece's 2nd century absorption into the Roman Empire and 4th century adoption of Christianity, right up to the position of the Greek world in our own culture today. We will examine some of the methodological problems involved in attempts to understand identity and show how our own needs in the modern world have often influenced how we have understood the ancient. The course expects no previous knowledge of the subject and seeks to impart a better understanding of who the Greeks really were, what the ancient world was like and what can be learnt from it--as well, most importantly, of the care with which that knowledge and understanding must be deployed in today's world.

Topics covered in the twelve lectures include:

- Problems and approaches: Could you call a Greek a Greek?
- Early types of identity: the individual, the state and the ethnos
- Separate identities: how did an individual express himself within a city?
- A notion of Greekness: the war to end all wars and the birth of the 'other'
- Panhellenic conscience: the international religious sanctuaries of Delphi and Olympia
- Ethno-centricity: Athens above all--the problem of Athenian democracy and empire
- Living at the margins: the identities of Greeks overseas
- Self-destruction: Greece tearing itself apart at the end of the 5th century
- Careful recalibration: rewriting history and identity in the 4th century
- Broadening horizons: the wider world of Hellenistic Greece
- Tourist trade: Greece's identity under Rome
- Where do we go from here? Just who were (and are) the Greeks?

## Instructor

[Dr Michael Scott](#)

## Texts

Students should regard this as a preliminary reading list and are advised to consult the texts before arrival in Cambridge.

- M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Greeks* (1991) J. M. Hall, *A History of the Archaic Greek World 1200-479BC* (2007)
- I. Morris and K. Raaflaub (Eds.), *Democracy 2500? Questions and Challenges* (1998)
- S. B. Pomeroy et al. (Eds.), *Ancient Greece: A political, social and cultural history* (1999)
- J. Boardman, *The Greeks Overseas* (1999)
- P. Cartledge, *Spartan Reflections* (2001)
- M. Shanks, *Classical Archaeology and Greece: experiences of a discipline* (1996)
- B. Strauss, *Salamis: the greatest battle of the ancient world 480BC* (2004)
- T. Holland, *Persian Fire: the first world empire and the battle for the west* (2005)
- P. Cartledge, *A portrait of Self and Others* (2002)
- I. Malkin, *Ancient perceptions of Greek ethnicity* (2001)
- N. Spivey and M. Squire, *Panorama of the Classical World* (2004)
- S.E. Alcock et al. (Eds.), *Pausanias: travel and memory in Roman Greece* (2001)
- S. Goldhill, *Being Greek under Rome: cultural identity, the Second Sophistic and the development of Empire* (2001)