CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter surveys the political and cultural history of the Greek poleis in the period of their greatest power, 479-338 B.C.E., and continues the story to the eve of the Roman conquest, about 150 B.C.E. After the Persian retreat from Greece, Athens emerged as the leader of a coalition of Greek states of the Aegean islands and the coast of Asia Minor (Delian League). Athens collected tribute from these states to finance a war to free those Greeks still under Persian rule, to protect all against a Persian return, and to collect booty. Cimon led the allies to victory and became the most influential statesman in Athens for nearly two decades.

In the late 460s, however, in the wake of foreign reverses, Cimon was ostracized. Ephialtes and Pericles attacked and overturned his policies of conservatism at home and friendly relations with Sparta abroad. For about fifteen years (461-445 B.C.E.), Athens, in alliance with Argos, pursued an intermittent war with Sparta for control of the Greek mainland (First Peloponnesian War). Initially Athens was victorious, but she was soon forced to make peace with Persia (449 B.C.E.) and then with Sparta (445). A lasting result of the war was that Athens exercised stricter control over her allies: the Delian League became the Athenian Empire. Led by Pericles, Athens after 445 pursued a conservative foreign policy of maintaining her empire and remaining at peace with Sparta.

Even as the Athenians were tightening control over their allies, at home they developed the freest government the world had ever seen. Under the leadership of Pericles, the powers of the aristocratic council, the areopagus, were curtailed and every decision of the state had to be approved by the popular assembly. As well, jury pay was introduced and the actions of government officials were scrutinized carefully at the end of their terms. Pericles voiced the pride that the Athenians felt for their democracy in his famous Funeral Oration. Despite all of this theoretical freedom, political privilege was restricted to citizens, thus making Athenian citizenship a prized commodity. The text analyzes the position of women in the state noting their complete lack of political rights and legal restrictions. Slavery also was a part of Greek life. Though the extent of slavery in society is disputed, the Greeks certainly supported a chattel system.

The Thirty Years Peace of 445 B.C.E. lasted for only a decade. In 435, a dispute involving the island of Corcyra forced the Athenians to side against an important ally of Sparta, Corinth. The deep-seated distrust between Sparta and Athens coupled with the aggressive arguments of Corinth resulted in a Spartan declaration of war in 432. The chapter continues with a more detailed narration of the Great Peloponnesian War which was fought, with a short period of unstable peace, for the next 27 years (431-404 B.C.E.). This long and disastrous war eventually led to the defeat of Athens and shook the foundations of Greek civilization.

The collapse of the Athenian empire created a vacuum of power in the Aegean and opened the way for Spartan leadership or hegemony (404-371 B.C.E.). Unable to maintain control of the various Greek coalitions, Spartan leadership soon passed to Thebes which was headed by the great general, Epaminondas. The Theban hegemony (371-362) ended with the death of Epaminondas. Although Athens had rebuilt her Aegean empire, her subjects succeeded in revolting in 355 B.C.E. The Greeks were more disorganized than ever.

In the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E., the Greek civilization flourished and produced cultural achievements which justify the designation of Classical Period. The chapter recounts the contributions of the Attic tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, who dealt with powerful, cosmic themes and great confrontations of conflicting principles, as well as the psychology and behavior of human beings under stress. This century also produced the first prose literature in the form of history. Herodotus, the "father of history" wrote an account of the Persian wars, while Thucydides contributed his masterpiece on the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides has been called a "scientific historian" for his devotion to accuracy and truth.

Athenian architecture and sculpture also flourished, reaching their acme in the temples of the Acropolis, above all the Parthenon. The brilliance of these buildings gave confirmation to Pericles' statement that Athens was "the school of Hellas." Art & the West focuses on the "Charioteer of Delphi."

Fifth century philosophers continued their predecessor's interest in the nature of the universe, but more important was the emphasis placed on man and his institutions by the itinerant teachers called Sophists. The disillusionment felt by many Greeks after the destruction of the Peloponnesian War and the political chaos of the fourth century, was also reflected in the philosophy of the period. Although Socrates believed that the laws of a polis had a legitimate claim on its citizens, his student, Plato, advocated a reorganization of the state, which should not be ruled by the masses, but by philosopher kings. Plato's pupil, Aristotle, shared his concern for the crisis of the polis but proposed a more realistic solution: a state governed not by the wisest, but by the most moderate--the middle class.

At the beginning of the fourth century, Macedon, the land to the north of Thessaly, was a backward, semi-barbaric kingdom, beset by civil strife, loose organization and a lack of money. In spite of these problems, Philip II rose to unify the Macedonians and led them to victory over the Greek city-states to the south.

Beginning in the 350s B.C.E., Philip removed his internal enemies and used the knowledge gained while a hostage in Thebes under Epaminondas to reorganize the Macedonian army and elevate the cavalry to the decisive role in battle. The Greek city-states to the south were weakened militarily and were mired in political chaos and indecision about whether to accept or reject Philip as hegemon. The famous debates between Isocrates and Demosthenes testify to
the impotence of the Greek states to commit themselves to unified action for or against Philip. At Chaeronea in 338, Philip defeated the Greek army and became ruler of Greece.

The chapter then proceeds to give a more detailed account of Macedonian government in Greece, the assassination of Philip and the succession of Alexander the Great. His exploits against the Persian empire are next recounted as are his death and the struggle for succession to his position and empire.

Alexander's conquest marked the end of the central role of the polis in Greek life and thought. Cities prospered, but without political freedom, they had only a shadow of the vitality of the true polis. In this new environment, most Greeks turned away from political solutions to their problems, and sought instead personal salvation in religion, philosophy and magic. The confident humanism of the fifth century B.C.E. gave way to a kind of resignation of man's fate to chance.

The new attitude was reflected in philosophy. Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum continued to be important, but changed somewhat in their emphases. Two new schools which offered ways of dealing with the insecurities of the times, however, flourished. Epicureanism sought not knowledge, but happiness, which followers expected to find in a life based on reason. The Epicureans, in order to free men from the fear of death and all non-material powers, emphasized sense perception. They believed that true happiness depended on the avoidance of pain and advocated withdrawal from public life.

Stoicism was founded in Athens about 300 B.C.E. by Zeno of Cyprus. Their school advised men to live in harmony with God and nature by living in accordance with divine reason - a philosophy almost indistinguishable from religion. The wise Stoic knew what was good, what was evil and what was "indifferent." Above all, he avoided passion. Withdrawal was counseled, but duty was important and political activity allowed.

In the Hellenistic world, the city flourished and the diversity and intellectual richness of Hellenistic civilization thrived in the life of one of the most important cities of the time, Alexandria in Egypt. It was here that scholars copied and preserved in the famous library the literature of the Classical Age. Wealthy royal patrons also supported art and sculpture which now emphasized sentimental and realistic modes.

Perhaps the Hellenistic period's most lasting achievements were in mathematics and science, for they stood until the scientific revolution of the Renaissance. Euclid and Archimedes made great progress in geometry and physics and advocated both the heliocentric and geocentric theories of planetary movement. Eratosthenes offered a more detailed and accurate map of the world.

KEY POINTS AND VITAL CONCEPTS

1. **The Athenian Empire:** There is a basic contradiction of principle in Athenian democracy. How can a state which espouses the freedom of democracy for all of its citizens maintain an empire of "allied states" by force? Since the great architecture and sculpture on the Acropolis were built under the direction of Pericles through funds demanded and collected by Athenian officials, the question then becomes: what price civilization? The Athenian empire can be seen as a fountain for Western Civilization or as an ethical contradiction. Without the funds contributed to Athens, could there have been such a flowering of art and culture in Athens?

2. **The Great Peloponnesian War:** This conflict has often been viewed as one war with three phases: 1) 431-421 B.C.E. 2) 421-415 B.C.E. 3) 415-404 B.C.E. Phases 1 and 3 were periods of "hot war." Phase 2 was one of "festering peace," as Thucydides termed it, where each side was suspicious and was moving for position before war would inevitably break out again. This is a pattern which repeats often in Western Civilization. Good examples might be the religious wars of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as World Wars I and II, which have been viewed as one war with a "festering peace" from 1919-1939.

3. **Athenian Democracy:** Although all policies of the state had to be approved by the assembly of the people before being implemented, the democracy was still ultimately dependent upon its leaders, especially those holding renewable military posts and those whose oratorical ability warranted attention. Under a moderate leader of foresight such as Pericles, Athens flourished. But under the extremism of Cleon or Alcibiades, Athenian policy was often cruel and disjointed. That democracy was "fickle" and the people prone to quick and complete reversal of opinion was a continuing criticism of Athenian government at this time.

4. **Hellenistic World:** The term "Hellenistic" was coined in the nineteenth century and means "Greek-like." It thus refers to a world which is similar to, but still distinct from, the Hellenic world of the Greeks in the fifth and fourth centuries. The new civilization was a mixture of Greek and Oriental elements, thanks in great part to the conquests of Alexander the Great. The Hellenistic world was much larger in area than the Hellenic world and its major units were much larger than city-states, though these persisted in different forms. It was a period of great political insecurity which in turn, inspired much important intellectual activity in mathematics, science and philosophy.
5. **Alexander the Great**: Due to the paucity and exaggeration of our primary sources, the figure of Alexander remains an enigma to historians. For some, he represented an effort to unite East and West and to intermix races in hopes of establishing a "brotherhood of man." For others, Alexander was nothing more than a brutal, drunken egomaniac whose lust for conquest and glory overshadowed any other secondary achievements. The truth undoubtedly lies somewhere in between since we can never know his full intentions concerning his conquest. Perhaps Alexander himself did not fully plan or even comprehend the importance of his actions.

6. **Hellenistic Science**: In spite of the scientific advances of the Hellenistic world, there was no scientific and industrial revolution comparable to that of modernity. Scholars have variously attributed this to the lack of an adequate technological base, the deterrent effect of slavery or the contemptuous attitude of gentlemen towards work. In truth, it is impossible to explain just why antiquity did not undergo an industrial revolution because historians still have not explained why the modern world did.
**SUGGESTED FILMS**

*Athens: The Golden Age.* Encyclopaedia Britannica. 30 min.

*The Acropolis of Athens.* McGraw-Hill. 30 min.

*Ancient Greece.* Coronet. 11 min.


*The Death of Socrates.* McGraw-Hill. 27 min.

*Death of Socrates.* Time-Life. 45 min.

*The Ancient World - Greece.* New York University Film Library. 66 min.

*Man and State: The Trial of Socrates.* Bernard Wilets. 29 min.

*Plato's Apology - The Life and Teachings of Socrates.* Encyclopaedia Britannica. 30 min.

*Plato's Drinking Party.* Time-Life. 40 min.

*Aristotle's Ethics - The Theory of Happiness.* Encyclopaedia Britannica. 30 min.

*Age of Sophocles.* Encyclopaedia Britannica. 30 min.

*Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic Age.* Coronet. 14 min.

*You Are There: The Triumph of Alexander the Great.* McGraw-Hill. 26 min.

*Ancient Persia.* Coronet. 11 min.