**UNIVERSITY OF 8 MAI 1945, GUELMA**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**Lecture in culture and civilization**

**First year, LMD**

**Life in Ancient Greece**

**New Advances in Greek Culture:** In time, Greek culture began to flourish again. One reason for this is that the Greeks learned from other people, such as the **Phoenicians** (fih•NIHSH•uhnz). The Phoenicians were an important trading people living on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. As traders, the Phoenicians needed a way of recording trade transactions clearly and quickly. They developed a system that used 22 symbols to stand for sounds. Such a system of symbols is called an **alphabet**. By trading with other people, the Phoenicians spread their system of writing. The Greeks picked up the Phoenician alphabet between 900 and 800 B.C. They changed some letters to suit their language.

The Greek alphabet later evolved into today’s alphabet of 26 letters.

The Greeks also learned about coins from trading with other peoples. Coins were invented about 650 B.C. in Anatolia. Most parts of Greece were making their own coins by 500 B.C.

The life of ancient Greeks was influenced by Greece’s geography and trade. The ancient Greeks honoured many gods and developed their own literature. Like other ancient peoples, the Greeks believed in many gods. This belief is called **polytheism**. But you won’t find gods with animal heads in Greece as in Egypt. Greek gods looked like humans, yet were more powerful and beautiful than any human could be.

**Greek Gods and Myths**

To the Greeks, the gods were not distant beings. They became involved in people’s lives, and the Greeks loved to tell stories about them. These **vivid** tales portrayed gods who could be noble or wise but could also be cruel or selfish.

**The Gods of Greece:** The Greek gods had both divine and human qualities. For example, they were very powerful and could shape human events. Yet they had a wide range of human emotions, including love, anger, and jealousy. The gods and goddesses of Greece constantly competed with one another.

**Zeus** (ZOOS) was the ruler of the gods. The Greeks believed that he and 11 other major gods and goddesses lived on **Mount Olympus** (uh•LIHM•puhs), the highest mountain in Greece. The Greeks also worshiped many less-important gods.

Each city had a special god or goddess to protect it. For example, Athena (one of the 12 who lived on Olympus) was the protector of Athens. She was the goddess of wisdom, a warrior, and the patron of crafts such as weaving.

**Greek Mythology:** Mythsare stories that people tell to explain beliefs about their world. Myths often begin as oral stories. Later they might be written down.

The Greeks developed myths to explain the creation of the world and of human beings. One such myth tells about Pandora, the first woman on earth. Zeus gave Pandora a sealed jar, but told her not to open it. Despite the warning, she opened the jar, releasing sickness, greed, and all the other evils upon the earth. One spirit remained in the jar: hope.

Many myths described the gods and goddesses and how they related to one another and to humans. For example, the myth of Prometheus (pruh•MEE•thee•uhs) tells how he stole fire from the gods and gave it to humans. Zeus punished him for this by chaining him to a rock. Every day, an eagle ate his liver—which grew back every night.

**Honouring the Gods**

Like other ancient peoples, the Greeks believed it was important to honor the gods. An angry god could cause trouble. The Greeks created statues of the gods and built temples as places for the gods to live. They also held special events to honour the gods.

**Zeus** was the father of many other gods. Some of his children were Aphrodite, Apollo, Athena, and Hermes.

**Athena** was the goddess of wisdom and also a warrior. Athena had no mother. She sprang from the forehead of Zeus.

**Demeter** was a fertility goddess who was linked with growing grain.

**Holy Festivals:** Certain days of each month were holy to different gods and goddesses or to aspects of nature. People celebrated holy days \*with sacrifices and public ceremonies.

**The Olympics** In Greece, games were often part of religious festivals. The largest and most elaborate of these were the Olympics. The **Olympics** were games held every four years as part of a major festival that honoured Zeus. They took place in a stadium built in the city of Olympia. Only men competed in these contests. Events included wrestling, the long jump, the **javelin** throw, and the discus throw. These games tested skills that were valuable to soldiers.

**Early Greek Literature**

In addition to stories about gods, the Greeks told stories about their ancient heroes. Much of what we know about the early Greeks comes from stories passed down through generations and from long poems that told stories. These long poems are called **epics**. According to tradition, a blind man named Homer composed the most famous epic poems. They are still considered masterpieces of literature.

**Epics of Homer** Homer’s two great epic poems are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey.* The backdrop of both poems is the Trojan War. The war started because a Trojan (a resident of Troy) stole the wife of a Greek king. The Greeks gathered a great army and sailed to the city of Troy. They surrounded the city and spent more than nine years fighting the Trojans and trying to capture their city.

The ***Iliad***is famous for its portrayal of heroes, especially the Greek warrior Achilles (uh•KIHL•eez). When he was a baby, his mother held him by his heel and dipped him in a special river. Every place the water touched was protected from injury. Achilles seemed unbeatable in battle. But when an arrow struck his one weak spot—his heel—he died.

For centuries, people thought the Trojan War was fiction. Around 1870, archaeologists discovered the ruins of ancient Troy. A real war did take place there, but it did not happen exactly as the *Iliad* portrays it.

Homer’s other major epic is the *Odyssey*. It describes the adventures of the Greek hero Odysseus (oh•DIHS•YOOS). On his trip home after the Trojan War, Odysseus offended Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea. In revenge, the god made Odysseus’ journey take ten years. During that time, Odysseus and his men travelled through strange and mysterious lands and encountered many dangers.

Odysseus used his wits and trickery to survive his long journey.

These ancient stories still influence speech and art today. For instance, the phrase “Achilles’ heel” is used to refer to a person’s weakest area. The word ***odyssey***describes a challenging trip or adventure.

**Aesop’s Fables** A **fable** is a short story, usually involving animals, that teaches a moral lesson. Many fables told today are credited to a Greek named Aesop (EE•suhp). One of Aesop’s best-known fables is “The Hare and the Tortoise.”

**Society in Ancient Greece**

Like all early civilizations Ancient Greece was an agricultural society. Most of the people lived by farming and the main form of wealth was owning land. In each city there was an upper class and a middle class of men like substantial farmers, doctors and teachers. However the vast majority of people were peasants and craftsmen or slaves. Slavery was common.. If they worked in rich people’s homes slaves could be reasonably treated. However by law owners were allowed to whip slaves. Those slaves who worked in mines probably suffered the most.

Women participated in religious festivals. However in a wealthy family women usually stayed apart from men. They usually stayed in the back or upper part of the house.

In a rich family the wife was expected to run the home .However rich women would normally stay indoors and send slaves to do the shopping. Poor women, of course had no choice. They might also have to help their husbands with farm work. Women were expected to spin and weave cloth and make clothes. However in Sparta women owned much of the land. Others sold food or perfume. Some were wool workers.

Men if they were not training in military, or discussing politics went to the Theatre for entertainment to watch dramas including tragedies and comedies. It is thought that women were not allowed to watch theatre or perform at the theatre, although male actors did play women roles.

