

Herodotus is known as the “father of history.” He wrote a history of the wars between the Greeks and the Persians.

31.2 Literature and History

Did you know that the word *alphabet* comes from the first two letters of the Greek alphabet, *alpha* and *beta*? Our alphabet grew out of the one that ancient Greeks used. In addition, many English words have Greek roots. For example, the word *telephone* is made up of the Greek words *tel*, meaning “far off,” and *phone*, meaning “voice.”

Even the way we write sentences comes from the language of ancient Greece. The rules of English grammar, punctuation, and paragraphing are all based on Greek writing. And don’t forget literature. The Greeks created drama, including both tragedy and comedy. They also developed historical writing. Modern historians follow in the footsteps of great Greek writers such as Herodotus (huh-ROD-uh-tuhs), known as the “father of history,” and Thucydides (thoo-SID-ih-deez).

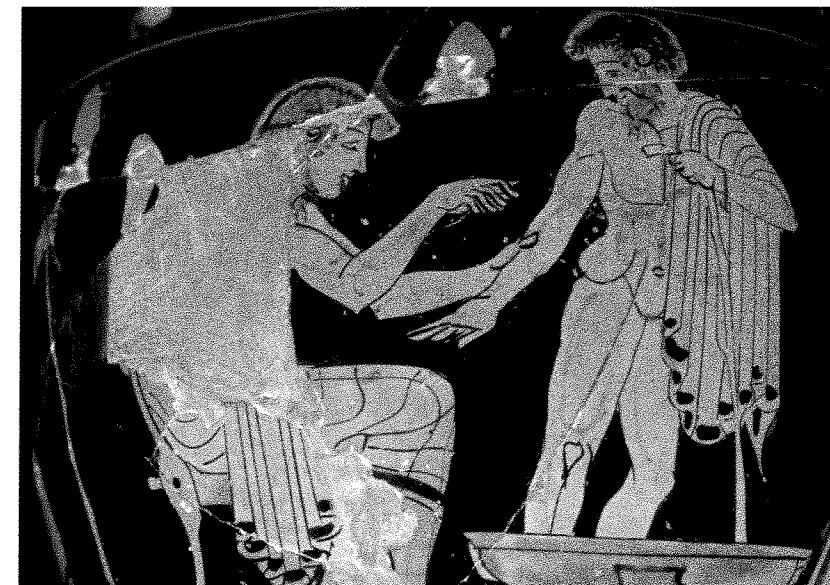
Thucydides was one of the greatest historians of ancient Greece. He wrote *History of the Peloponnesian War*, an account of the conflict between Athens and Sparta in the 400s B.C.E. Thucydides himself took part in the war, serving in the Athenian army. Although he was an eyewitness to history, he was careful to present facts rather than his own viewpoint or opinion. He is remembered today as one of the founders of historical writing.

31.3 Government

Democratic government was a Greek idea. Democracy, or rule by the people, began in Athens. The practice of having citizens serve on juries also began in Greece.

Democratic government in the United States has roots in ancient Greece. There are a number of important differences, however, between American democracy and ancient Greek democracy. For example, in Athens, all citizens debated and voted on every issue. But in the United States, citizens elect representatives to speak for them and make laws. Another difference is that only native-born men could be citizens in Athens. But in the United States, all men and women born in this country are U.S. citizens, and people from other countries can become citizens, too.

Still, the basic **principles** of democracy were developed by the ancient Greeks. Athenians were proud that their government allowed citizens to control their own destiny. This idea remains the basis of democracy today.



Hippocrates emphasized principles of medicine, including ethical conduct. At left, a vase painting shows a Greek doctor treating a patient.

31.4 Medicine

For centuries, the Greeks believed that gods and goddesses controlled natural events, including health and sickness. In fact, the earliest Greeks thought that illnesses and accidents were punishments sent by the gods. Ancient Greeks didn’t know about the natural causes of disease and healing.

A Greek man named Hippocrates (hih-POK-ruh-teez) changed the way people thought about health and medicine. Hippocrates is often called the “father of medicine.” He brought a scientific way of thinking to his work as a doctor. Hippocrates believed that diseases had natural causes. He taught his students to carefully observe their patients and write down what they saw.

Even more important, Hippocrates established principles of medicine that are still followed. Today, people who become doctors take the Hippocratic Oath, based on these ideas of ethical behavior. Doctors promise to be honest, to preserve life, and to keep information about their patients private.

The Greeks loved to participate in and watch competitions in sports. Their interest in athletics gave them some knowledge about how the human body moves. But their understanding of the body was limited, partly because it was forbidden to look inside the body to see how it worked. The early Greeks believed that cutting open a human body offended the gods. As these beliefs changed over time, the Greeks made new discoveries.

Several centuries after Hippocrates, Greek **medical** students were able to name and describe organs inside the body. They discovered that the heart was a pump that sent blood flowing throughout the body. They also learned that the brain was the center of the nervous system.