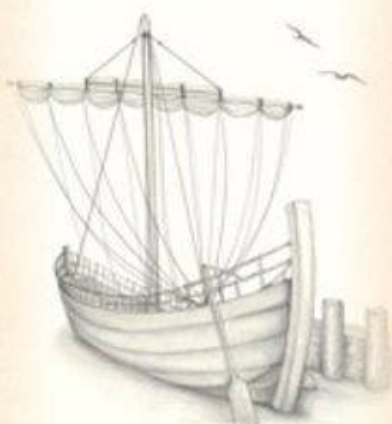




# Historically Speaking

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## Places Everyone



### Greece: Cradle of Western Civilization

The ancient Greeks are credited with creating many of the staples of western society: democracy, laws, philosophy, drama, art and architecture. Most of the development and advancement of those things are really attributed specifically to Athens. That is not to discredit the contributions and advancements from the other city-states. Certainly some places deviated greatly from the Athenian model, most notably Sparta which was a singularly military society, and very successfully so. But it is the Athenian model along with those places aligned with Athens that most influenced our modern society. In a future newsletter I will discuss architecture specifically.

The gods of ancient Greece were numerous. Most people are at least aware of the central gods, especially the Olympians. When the Romans conquered Greece, they adopted most of the pantheon as their own, changing the names to suit their own mythology. The chief Olympian was Zeus who the Romans called Jupiter or Jove. I will list the Olympians as well as a few other gods, and the names given on the second page of this newsletter for those not familiar with them.

As I continue these newsletters, I will try to keep in mind that some of the subscribers have an advanced knowledge of mythology and others have a limited awareness. I am attempting to address subjects in a way that will be informative to all.

Greek mythology evolved through an oral tradition for centuries. The first story-tellers were sailors and soldiers. Later, professional bards took up the task. These bards would travel around to different communities and offer their services. A local patron would pay the bard, inviting them to a feast or similar function where the bard would sing the stories of mythology. To earn extra income, they would work the local heroes, politicians, and even the host into the stories. They sometimes performed for hours non-stop, accompanying themselves with a lyre, making up the phrases as they went, usually using dactylic hexameter (more on that in some future newsletter). With so many bards creating and modifying the stories, the mythology grew in volume, and many of the stories wound up having several different versions. Sometimes the variations of a story had a more practical explanation. For example: the story of the abduction of Persephone includes the fact that she would have to return to the underworld one month for each pomegranate seed she ate in the house of Hades. When the story was told in the north, that might be six months and in the south maybe only three. Since Persephone was the embodiment of the seed grain (corn or wheat), that meant that the season the seeds would produce was limited to the time Persephone was not in Hades. The myth thus deals with the seasons as well as birth, death and resurrection.

One of the reasons that classical mythology (the mythology of the Greeks and Romans) has continued to be of interest through the ages is the volume of these myths. And yet, some or much of that mythology never made it from the oral tradition into the written and, therefore, was not preserved for future generations.

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