

Simply Charlotte Mason presents

ON THE EDGE OF THE GREAT SEA

A History of Ancient Greece and Rome

The First Peoples of Greece to the Fall of Rome

SAMPLE



COMPILED AND EDITED BY **KATIE THACKER**



The story of Greece and Rome comes alive!

This living history book provides a birds-eye view of the history of Ancient Greece and Rome. The interesting narratives will capture your student's imagination, bringing to life the history of the ancient societies whose ideas shaped our modern world.

Learn the tales of how Greece and Rome were founded. Find out about fascinating ancient cultures and their customs. Get to know scientists, artists, statesmen, and other prominent figures whose names are still legendary. And learn the stories of how and why each of these ancient civilizations eventually fell.

Written for all ages to enjoy together, *On the Edge of the Great Sea* is accessible for younger children while including plenty of details to provide older students with an overview of ancient history that gives context for more in-depth studies. Photographs and reproductions of historical artifacts throughout the book also help students visualize the events and people they will get to know.

History doesn't have to be boring or tedious! With *On the Edge of the Great Sea*, you and your students can truly enjoy learning the story of the ancient world which still impacts how we live today.

Simply
Charlotte Mason

simplycharlottemason.com

On the Edge of the Great Sea

A History of Ancient Greece and Rome

The First Peoples of Greece to the Fall of Rome

Compiled and edited by Katie Thacker

On the Edge of the Great Sea: A History of Ancient Greece and Rome
© 2026 by Simply Charlotte Mason

All rights reserved. However, we grant permission to make printed copies or use this work on multiple electronic devices for members of your immediate household. Quantity discounts are available for classroom and co-op use. Please contact us for details.

ISBN 978-1-61634-799-4 printed

ISBN 978-1-61634-800-7 electronic download

Published by
Simply Charlotte Mason, LLC
930 New Hope Road #11-892
Lawrenceville, Georgia 30045
simplycharlottesmason.com

Printed in the U.S.A.

Contents

	A Note for Teachers	5
1	How the Greeks Became the Greeks.	9
2	The Early Rulers of Greece.	17
3	The Legends of Troy.	23
4	How the Romans Arrived in Rome.	31
5	Homer and His Tales	37
6	The Life of the Spartans	43
7	The First Olympics	49
8	Romulus and Remus, the Founding Twins of Rome . .	57
9	The Early Laws of Athens.	63
10	The Theater of the Greeks	69
11	The Kings of Rome.	75
12	The Roman Republic	83
13	Plebeians, Patricians, and New Laws	87
14	The Burning of Athens.	95
15	The Lives of the Athenians.	103
16	Cincinnatus and the Roman Triumph	109
17	The Age of Pericles	117
18	The Peloponnesian War	125
19	The Great Teacher Socrates	129
20	The Gauls Burn Rome	137
21	Philip II of Macedon	145
22	Alexander the Great	153
23	Building Greece and Rome	163

24	Archimedes	171
25	The First Gladiators and New Hope for the Roman Poor	177
26	The First Punic War	185
27	Hannibal	191
28	Growing Up Roman.	197
29	The Fall of Ancient Greece.	203
30	Pompey the Great.	209
31	Cicero and Cataline	217
32	Caesar.	223
33	Rome Becomes an Empire.	231
34	Christians in Rome.	237
35	Nero.	245
36	The Colosseum	251
37	Trajan's Column and Hadrian's Wall.	257
38	Marcus Aurelius	265
39	Constantine.	271
40	The Fall of Rome.	277
	Bibliography	283
	Image Sources	285

A Note for Teachers

Taking on the study of ancient history is no simple task. Before long, even the most discerning student can find himself bombarded with contradictions, exaggerations, new archaeological finds that seem to change the entire narrative, and a myriad of other frustrations. It can feel like just when a story shows signs of clarity, another questioning historian comes along and proposes yet one more angle to flip the original record on its head.

So what is a student to do? We can acknowledge that the history of the ancients is littered with myth, moralized tales, and propaganda-level patriotism. We can accept that we cannot go back and apply our modern academic standards to the writing techniques of the ancient writers such as Herodotus, Plutarch, Livy, and Tacitus. We can also understand that we cannot gather evidence that doesn't exist, or at least, we have yet to find. History across the ages is full of fissures, and the further back in time we peer, the wider the chasms.

We can also remind ourselves regularly that even though all of history is by definition *over*, it will never be *settled*. There will always be new evidence, new interpretations, and new approaches. If we study history with the pursuit of accuracy for accuracy's sake, how will we know when we have hit the "right answer?" And from whose perspective will that answer be considered "right"?

It can be tempting to gloss over, or skip entirely, ancient history because of these monumental challenges, but rather than give up, we can change our approach. Although the specific details certainly have their place, maybe those small, blurry, fleeting particulars can be set aside at times in favor of the ideas that the study of history offers us.

Charlotte Mason wrote:

“It is a great thing to possess a pageant of history in the background of one’s thoughts. We may not be able to recall this or that circumstance, but, ‘the imagination is warmed’: we know that there is a great deal to be said on both sides of every question and are saved from crudities in opinion and rashness in action. The present becomes enriched for us with the wealth of all that has gone before.”

A Philosophy of Education, page 178

In putting together this book, I chose to prioritize ideas, inviting students to think about pursuit (and lack) of character, the ways in which humanity has progressed and regressed, and how in so many ways, we are still faced with the same obstacles that confronted our earliest relatives. I looked for material from writers who loved learning about ancient societies and shared these stories with passion. In the time since many of those texts were written, however, continued work by contemporary researchers has raised questions about details. Where possible, I have adjusted the language to emphasize uncertainty where it has arisen, and encourage readers to keep in mind that future research may confirm or shift each story even more.

We also want to value ancient history for what it can offer us in our Christian walk. In understanding the world as it was while it waited for the arrival of our Savior, and then that same world as it reacted to His time on Earth and the birth of His church, we can build a context in which we read Scripture and

apply it to our lives. Appreciating how the people of the past were different than we are in some ways but so very like us in all the others can give us a deeper relationship with God's Word.

As you make your way through these pages, if you find your students (or yourself!) wanting to take a deeper dive into the lives of the ancient Greeks and Romans, I encourage you to take a look at the sources listed in the bibliography at the end of this book as well as simplycm.com/ancient-times for additional images, links, and other resources to enrich your study.

Katie Thacker

Chapter 1

How the Greeks Became the Greeks

Have you ever been on a hike through the woods and come upon a stream? If you needed to cross the water to continue on your journey, you probably first looked for stepping stones that could help you safely reach the other side. Without those stones, you were most likely either getting wet or turning around, the rest of your hike left incomplete.

If you spend some time with a map of the Mediterranean Sea, you'll find a country named Greece just to the east of the heel of Italy's "boot." Look closer, and you'll see a collection of over 2,000 islands scattered throughout the sea, all part of this country with the richest of histories. Just like those stepping stones on your hike, those islands, along with the over 8,000 miles of coastline on Greece's mainland, served as connectors for the earliest Greeks, allowing them to travel, communicate, and learn in an age before fast boats, vehicles, and airplanes connected our world.

Although Greece (or Hellas) is only half as large as the state of New York, it holds a very important place in the history of the world. It sits in the southern part of Europe, cut off from the rest of the continent by a chain of high mountains, which form a great wall on the north. The land is surrounded on nearly all sides by the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea, which stretch

so far inland that the people say no part of the country is more than 40 miles from the sea or 10 miles from the hills. Thus, shut in by sea and mountains, it forms a little territory by itself, and it was the home of an ancient people.

The history of Greece goes back to the time when people did not know how to write and kept no official record of what was happening around them. For a long while, the stories told by parents to their children were the only information that could be had about the country and its former inhabitants, and these stories, slightly changed with each new teller, grew more and more extraordinary as time passed. At last, they were so changed that no one could tell where the truth ended and fancy began.

When the Ancient Greeks told the stories of their origins, they talked of a very early, primitive people called the Pelasgians (puh-LAZ-jee-uhns). The way the storytellers put it, they were a rough people who spent their days hunting game and gathering wild berries. For clothing, they used the skins of the beasts they had killed, and they loosely organized themselves into tribes to defend against outsiders.

The Pelasgians were lacking in civilization compared to many of their neighbors—their ability to make tools, build homes, and grow crops was far behind that of many others living around the seas, including the Egyptians, Phoenicians, and the Israelites. While the great pyramids were being erected in the deserts of Africa, it is thought that the Pelasgians were living in caves or sleeping on the forest floor. While the great inland sea was filling with ships traveling from island to island, the Pelasgians were fighting each other with clubs and eating raw meat.

Today, *archaeologists* search for and study what may be left of these first people in Greece, but there is very little to be found. An archaeologist might carefully *excavate* a site for months in hopes of finding a single stone arrowhead, so our knowledge of

these people, their culture, and their language is shadowy at best, leaving us with only a few fragments of what is left of the stories.

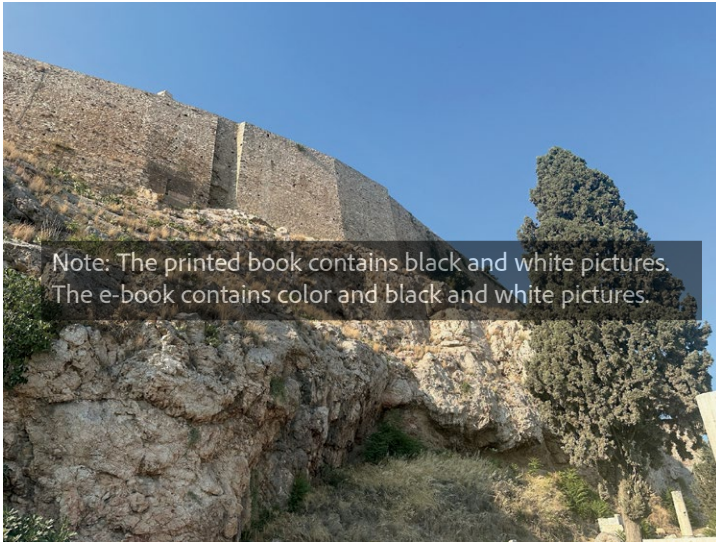
The tales, recorded centuries later by some of the greatest writers in history, tell the story of an Egyptian prince named Inachus (ih-NAK-us), who, around 2,000 years before the birth of Christ, discovered the lovely climate in Greece and decided to settle there. He taught the Pelasgians how to make fire and how to cook their meat. He also showed them how to build comfortable homes by piling up stones one on top of another, much in the same way as the farmer makes the stone walls around his fields.

The Pelasgians were intelligent, and they soon learned to build these walls higher in order to keep the wild beasts away from their homes. Then, when they had learned the use of bronze and iron tools, they cut the stones into huge blocks of regular shape. These stone blocks were piled one upon another so cleverly that some of the walls are still standing, although no mortar was used to hold the stones together. Such was the strength of the Pelasgians that they raised huge blocks to great heights, and made walls which their descendants declared must have been built by giants.

As the Greeks called their imaginary giants Cyclops (SAI-klahps), which means “round-eyed,” they soon called these walls Cyclopean, and, in pointing them out to their children, they told strange tales of the great giants who had built them and always added that these huge builders had but one eye, which was in the middle of the forehead.

The stories go on to say that some time after Inachus the Egyptian had thus taught the Pelasgians the art of building and had founded a city called Argos, there came a terrible earthquake. The ground under the people’s feet heaved and cracked, the mountains shook, the waters flooded the dry land, and the people fled in terror to the hills.

In spite of the speed with which they ran, the waters soon overtook them. Many of the Pelasgians were thus drowned, while their terrified companions ran faster and faster up the mountain, and none stopped to rest until they were quite safe.



Walls standing around the famous Acropolis in Athens, Greece, are believed to have been built by some of the country's earliest residents

Looking down upon the plains where they had once lived, they saw them all covered with water. They were now forced to build new homes, but, when the waters little by little sank into the ground or flowed back into the sea, they were very glad to find that some of their thickest walls had resisted the earthquake and flood and were still standing firm.

The memory of the earthquake and flood was very vivid, however. The poor Pelasgians could not forget their terror and the sudden death of so many friends, and they often talked about that horrible time. As this flood occurred in the days when Ogyges (o-JI-jez) was king, it has generally been linked to his name, and called the Deluge (or flood) of Ogyges.

Several hundred years after Inachus had built Argos, it was said that another Egyptian prince came to settle in Greece. His name was Cecrops (SEE-krops), and, as he came to Greece after the Deluge of Ogyges, he found very few inhabitants left. He landed, and decided to build a city on a promontory—or a point of high land that juts out into the water—northeast of Argos. Then he invited all the remaining Pelasgians to join him.

The Pelasgians, glad to find such a wise leader, gathered around him, and they soon learned to plow the fields and to sow wheat. Under Cecrops' orders they also planted olive trees and vines and learned how to press the oil from the olives and the juice from the grapes. Cecrops taught them how to harness their oxen, and before long the women began to spin the wool of their sheep and weave it into rough woolen garments, which were used for clothing instead of the skins of wild beasts.

After building several small towns in Attica, Cecrops founded a larger one, which eventually became the famous city of Athens, named so to pay tribute to the goddess Athena. The Greeks believed that Athena would watch over the welfare of her favorite city.

When Cecrops died, he was followed by other princes, who continued teaching the people many useful things, such as the training and harnessing of horses, the building of carts, and the proper way of harvesting grain. One prince even showed them how to make beehives and how to use the honey for food.

As many mountain sides in Greece are covered with a carpet of wild, sweet-smelling herbs and flowers, the Greek honey is very good, and people say that the best honey in the world is made by the bees on Mount Hymettus (hy-MET-tus) near Athens, where they gather their golden store all summer long.

In the centuries that followed, Greece became the new home for many more *immigrants* from other lands, attracted to the beautiful country. More cities were built, festivals and games were founded, language and writing advanced, and

Greece started to develop an *economy*, a system for buying and selling items, food, and services with each other and with their neighbors.

Many of the newcomers became powerful, and their stories are included in the legends of Greece's earliest days. One of these men was another Egyptian called Danaus (duh-NOWS), who came to Greece and settled a colony on the same spot where Inachus had once been. The new Argos rose on the same place as the old, and the country around it, called Argolis, was separated from the regions of Boeotia and Attica only by a long, narrow strip of land, which was known as the Isthmus of Corinth.

Danaus not only showed the Pelasgians all the useful arts that Cadmus and Cecrops had taught, but also helped them to build ships like the one in which he had come to Greece. He also conducted religious festivals in honor of the harvest goddess, Demeter (duh-MEE-ter). The women were invited to these games, and only they were allowed to bear torches in the public processions, where they sang hymns in honor of the goddess.

The descendants of Danaus long ruled over the land, and one member of his family, Perseus (PER-see-uhs), built the town of Mycenæ (my-SEE-nee) on a spot where many of the Pelasgian stone walls can still be seen. The Pelasgians who joined this young hero helped him to build great walls all around his town. These were provided with massive gateways and tall towers, from which the soldiers could overlook the whole country, and see the approach of an enemy from afar.

These same people, along with others who came after them, built tombs for some of the ancient kings and many treasure and storehouses. These buildings, buried under earth and rubbish, have been uncovered at different times in history, each discovery an exciting opportunity to learn more about these ancient communities. In the tombs archaeologists have found swords, spears, remains of armor, gold ornaments, pieces of pottery, human bones, and, perhaps the most surprising of all,

thin masks of pure gold, which covered the faces of some of the dead.

Thus you see, the Pelasgians, little by little, joined the new colonies which came to take possession of the land and founded little states or countries of their own, each governed by its own king, and obeying its own laws. Eventually, the Greeks would begin to carefully observe and write down their history, but the details about the earliest people remain mysterious. We can still appreciate the great work of these early peoples, as several of the enduring cities of Greece today were founded during these years, including Thebes, Athens, and Thessaloniki. We will learn more about the incredible civilizations who lived in these places and others in the chapters to come.

Chapter 4

How the Romans Arrived in Rome

While the Greeks were starting to organize themselves as societies in their homeland, there was another civilization taking root just across the sea. For in these days the land of Italy came to be settled, which would one day become the power-center of the mighty Roman Empire.

If you look at a map of Europe, you will soon find a peninsula, shaped somewhat like a boot, and surrounded on three sides by the Mediterranean and Adriatic seas. This peninsula is Italy. To the north are the snow-topped Alps, a chain of high mountains which separate this country from the rest of Europe; and through the peninsula run the Apennines (A-puh-nines), a less lofty mountain range.

As Italy is in the southern part of Europe, it has a very mild and delightful climate. The tall mountains in the north prevent the cold winds from sweeping down upon it, and many plants, which you see here in hothouses, grow there in the open ground.

Orange and almond trees, camellias, and pomegranates are all covered with fruit or flowers, and the vine and olive both yield rich harvests in this beautiful land. The soil is so rich that people do not need to work very hard in order to have fine crops, and, as the weather is generally clear, they can live out-of-doors almost all the year round.

As the climate is so pleasant, the land so fertile, the skies so blue, and the views so beautiful, travelers have always liked to visit Italy and have spoken about its charms to all they met. It is no wonder, therefore, that many people have gone to settle there, and you will easily understand that the whole country was occupied long, long ago.

So many years ago that no one can really tell when it was, Italy was already inhabited by a people who, as the clues tell us, once lived in Central Asia. These people were probably crowded at home and left their native land in search of good pasture for their cattle and a fertile country where they might dwell.

They traveled on and on, day after day, and, coming finally to the great mountains, some of them climbed up to see what was on the other side. When they beheld the valleys of Italy and saw how beautiful the country was, they told their companions, and all made haste to cross the mountains.

These people traveled on foot with their families, cattle, and all their household goods. They had very little knowledge of civilization, but bit by bit, however, they learned to build houses, cook their food, make simple pottery from the clay they found in the valleys, spin and weave the wool from their sheep, and fashion this homemade cloth into garments.

Although each family at first lived by itself, it was soon discovered that if several families joined together, they could cultivate the ground better, hunt more successfully, and, in times of danger, more easily defend themselves.

Thus several families would form a tribe under the strongest and cleverest man among them, whom they chose as their leader. These leaders selected the best place for them to settle in, told them what to do in time of war, and thus became chiefs or kings over their own tribes.

There were a number of such little kingdoms scattered throughout Italy, and, as the people grew richer, wiser, and more numerous, they occupied more and more land.

Now it was from some of these tribes that the Romans were mostly descended. Their city became, in time, the greatest in the world, and many histories have been written about it, but none of them were begun until several centuries after Rome was founded. Hardly any records had been kept of the distant past, and the best that could be done was to write down some stories that had been told by parents to their children, and thus had been preserved from generation to generation. These had become much changed by being told so many times, and they were connected and rounded out by pure guesswork, but the whole was soon accepted as true and was believed by everyone for ages.

You will now read the story from the beginning, as the Romans themselves told it. Many of the events in the first part of it never really happened, but no one can tell exactly where the mere stories leave off and the true history begins.

In the days when the Greeks were fighting against Troy, that great city in Asia Minor which they besieged for 10 years, the people in Italy were divided into several small kingdoms, among which were those of the Etruscans (uh-TRUH-sknz) and the Latins.

The Etruscans occupied the northern part of Italy, or the top of the boot, and called their country Etruria, while the Latins dwelt farther south in a province named Latium. Each of these kingdoms had its own leader, or king.

Now, the king of Latium in those days was Latinus. He had a beautiful daughter called Lavinia, and as soon as she was old enough to marry, he thought of getting her a good husband. One night King Latinus dreamed that the gods of his country came and spoke to him, telling him to be sure and give his daughter in marriage to a stranger whom they would send to Latium.

When Latinus awoke, he was very much troubled, because his wife was anxious that Lavinia should marry Turnus, a neighboring king. The queen soon persuaded Latinus to allow

this engagement to take place, but he insisted that the marriage should be postponed for some time longer.

Meanwhile, the city of Troy had at last fallen into the hands of the Greeks, and only a few among them managed to escape death. Among these few, there was a prince named Æneas (uh-NEE-uhs). His father was Anchises (uhn-KAI-suhz), the cousin of the king of Troy, and his mother was Venus, the goddess of beauty. As Venus did not want her son to die with the rest of the Trojans, she appeared to him during the fatal night while the Greeks were plundering and burning the houses. She showed him that resistance would be useless, and bade him flee from the city with all his family.

Sadly, Æneas' wife was lost in the escape, and Æneas aimlessly sailed the seas with his followers with no idea where he would find his new kingdom.

Twice he tried to settle down, but each time something happened to drive him away, until finally Æneas dreamed that the gods spoke to him and told him that he should go to Italy, a land whence one of his ancestors had come to Troy.

The little band therefore sailed for the west, although it was foretold that they would have to suffer many hardships before they could reach Italy, and that they would not be able to settle until they had eaten the very boards upon which their food was served.

After many days of sailing thus on the blue waters of the Mediterranean, Aeneas and his companions came at last to the island of Sicily. This, as you will see on your maps, is a three-cornered piece of land, near the toe of the boot formed by the Italian peninsula. While the Trojans were resting here, Æneas' poor father died, but as soon as the funeral rites were ended, Æneas prepared to sail away, for he knew that this was not the place where he was to make his new home.

The next year, after many travels, Æneas found himself at the mouth of the Tiber River. When Æneas saw the fair country

that stretched out before him, he bade his men sail up the stream, and towards evening they all went ashore to cook their food. Some flat cakes were baked, and as they had no dishes with them, his son Iulus (EYE-you-luhs) proposed that these should serve as plates.

The men all sat down around the fire, and Iulus, who was very hungry indeed, quickly ate his share of meat and then devoured the cake on which it had been placed. As he swallowed the last mouthful he cried, "Just see how hungry I was! I have eaten even the board on which my meal was served!"

At these words Æneas sprang to his feet and cried that the prophecy was fulfilled at last and that now they could settle in the beautiful country they had reached. The next day they were welcomed by Latinus, King of Latium, who, after hearing their story, remembered his dream, and promised that Æneas should have his daughter Lavinia in marriage.

He then settled in Latium, where he built a city which was called Lavinium, in honor of his wife. Some time after, Æneas fell in battle and was succeeded by his sons. The Trojans and Latins were now united, and during the next 400 years the descendants of Æneas continued to rule over them; for this was the kingdom which the gods had promised him when he fled from Troy.

