

# What is the Western Heritage?

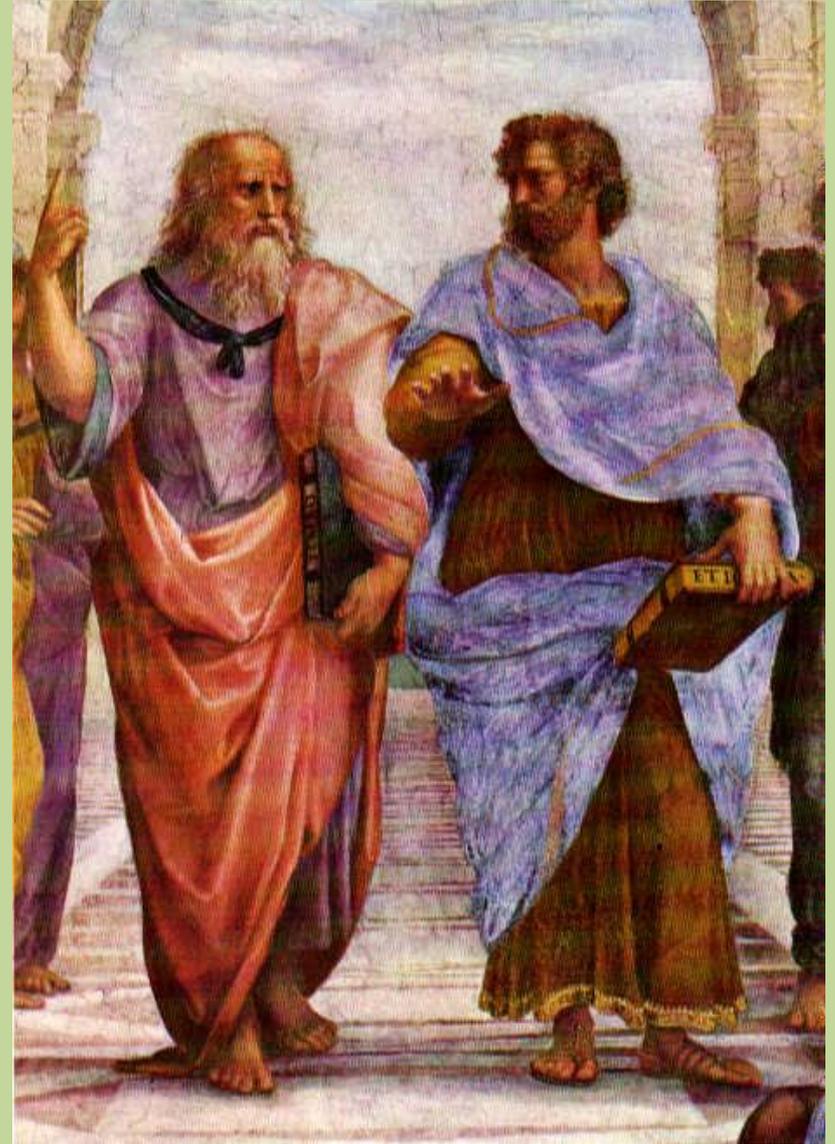
The Western Heritage as a distinct portion of world history descends from the ancient Greeks. They distinguished themselves from Mesopotamia, Persia, and Egypt due to the fact that these regions did not have democracy, or self-government.



The Parthenon, a symbol of ancient Greek architecture and democracy, in Athens, Greece.

# Greek Culture

Through their literature and philosophy, the Greeks established the idea, which became characteristic of the West, that *reason* can understand, analyze, and shape physical nature, politics, and morality.



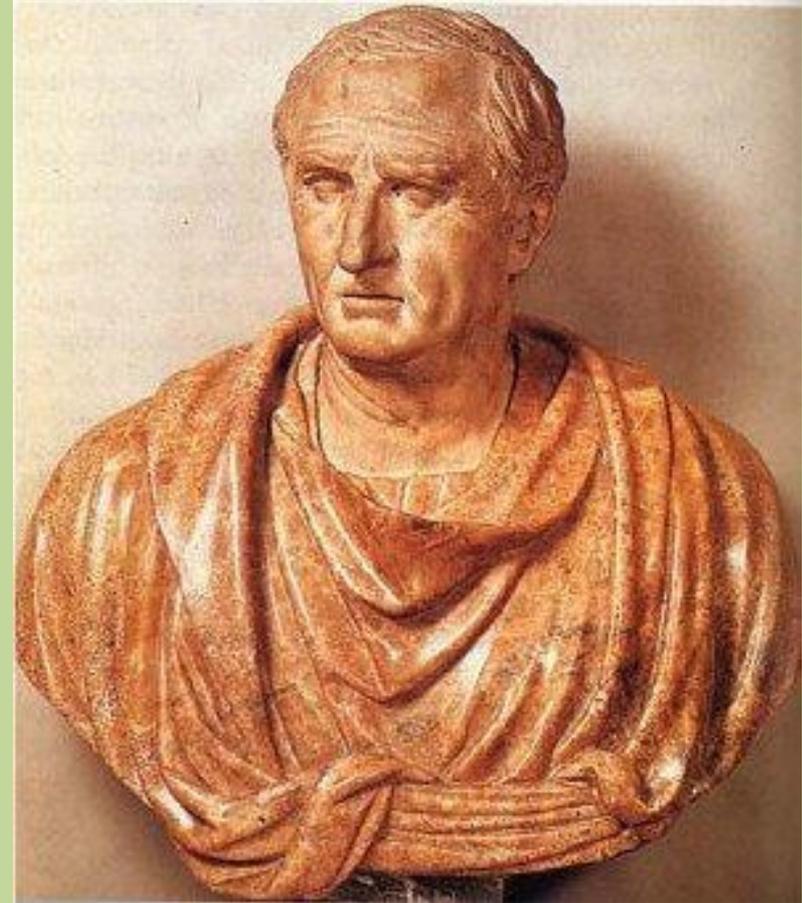
Plato and Aristotle,  
Greek philosophers  
(4<sup>th</sup> century BCE)

# Roman Empire

It has been suggested that the “Greeks thought a lot, while the Romans fought a lot.”

The Roman Republic, governed by a Senate, expanded its territory through military conquest. The Roman Republic turned into the Roman Empire, which was governed by an emperor.

The Romans conquered Greece, but spread Greek literature and philosophy throughout their empire. Thus, the West is a fusion of Greek philosophy and Roman law.



Cicero was a Roman orator and philosopher who adapted Greek philosophy to Roman law and politics (1<sup>st</sup> century BCE)



Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Christianity were spread throughout the entire Roman Empire (3<sup>rd</sup> century CE)

# Constantine and Christianity

Christianity had become an influential religion within the Roman Empire, especially among the poor. The teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in Roman-occupied Judea, were spread throughout the Roman Empire by the Apostle Paul. Jesus' message of love, charity, and humility, and his criticism of religious authorities resulted in his execution by Roman soldiers in 30 CE.

Early Christian churches had little organization, but during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE towns gradually accepted the authority and leadership of a bishop. By 200 CE, Rome and its bishop were the center of Christian authority in the Roman Empire.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, Constantine made Christianity the official state religion of the Roman Empire. The new relationship between the Roman state and the Christian church would change both of them. Scholars and theologians now ask whether “Rome was *Christianized*, or Christianity *Romanized*?”

Constantine also moved the capital from Rome to Constantinople (present-day Istanbul, Turkey), which resulted in separate realms of the empire after Rome was conquered by Germanic tribes in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE.



# Middle Ages

Christianity divided between western (Roman Catholic) and eastern (Orthodox). Western Europe, a mix of Graeco-Roman, Christian, and Germanic traditions, evolved into a distinct civilization during the “Middle Ages.”

After the Germanic invasion of Rome, most of the intellectual heritage of ancient Greece and Rome were preserved in Constantinople and the Middle East, which resulted in a political and intellectual void in Western Europe.

With an absence of centralized political authority after Roman soldiers withdrew, the Church possessed a lasting hierarchical administration throughout the old Roman Empire.

# Feudal Hierarchy

**European  
Feudalism**

**King**

**Nobles**

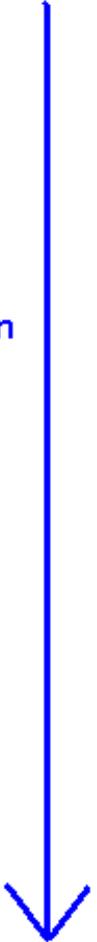
**Knights**

*Code of Conduct=Chivalry*

**Peasants/Serfs**

**\$ and power  
increase**

**population  
increases**



# Rise of Islam

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, a new religion based on the teachings of Muhammad arose in the Arabian Peninsula and spread to North Africa and the Mediterranean.

As Islam spread to the borders of Western Europe, monarchs and the Catholic Church in Rome sought to halt Islam's advance and to re-conquer the Holy Land. Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, Christian armies led by Western European kings and their knights invaded the Middle East to reclaim Jerusalem.

The Crusades were a failure and King John of England, whose predecessor Richard I had borrowed money for a crusade from England's nobles, was forced to agree to the Magna Carta (Great Charter) after losing land to the French. This document limited the authority of the king and is considered an important step towards democracy in Western Europe.

One positive aspect of the Crusades was that knowledge of ancient Greek and Roman texts began to spread to Western Europe due to contact with the Middle East.

By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Western Europe was beginning to redefine itself intellectually and culturally due to the discovery of its Graeco-Roman past.

# The Rise of Universities

The Roman Catholic Church was the unifying institution of Western Europe and the monasteries were the centers of learning. Philosophy, science, and art were all subordinate to theology.

By the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE, Greek philosophy began to have a profound influence on Western Europe through contact with the Arab world and the university developed out of the monastery.

The scholastic program of study emphasized grammar, rhetoric, and logic. Theology was the most important discipline and theologians began to think rationally to explore religious questions based on the philosophy of Aristotle.