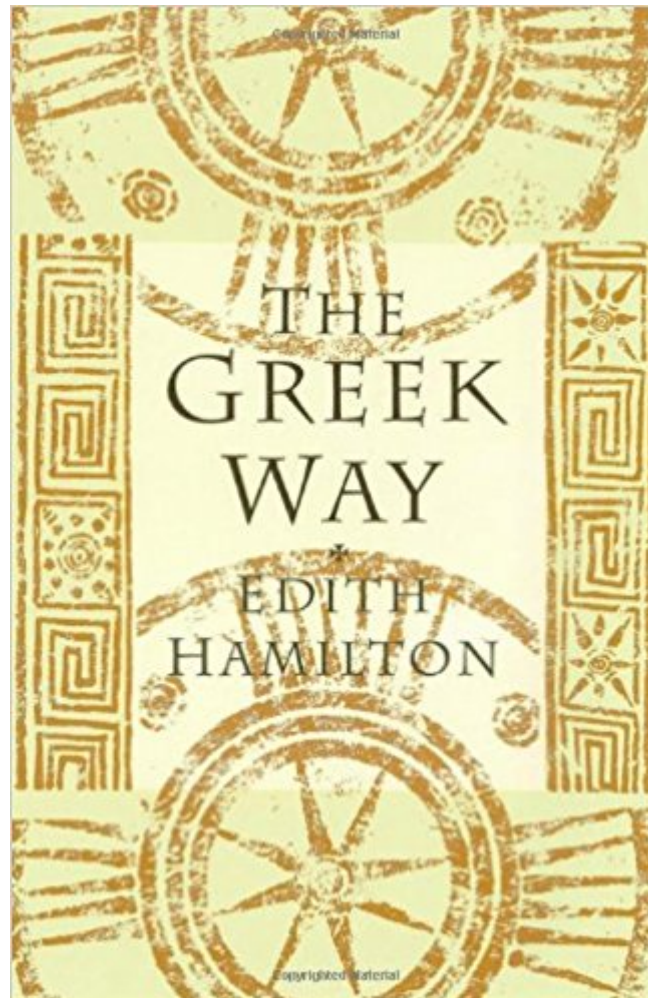




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The Greek Way



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Synopsis

The aim of this work is not a history of events but an account of the achievement and spirit of Greece. "Five hundred years before Christ in a little town on the far western border of the settled and civilized world, a strange new power was at work. . . . Athens had entered upon her brief and magnificent flowering of genius which so molded the world of mind and of spirit that our mind and spirit today are different. . . . What was then produced of art and of thought has never been surpassed and very rarely equalled, and the stamp of it is upon all the art and all the thought of the Western world." A perennial favorite in many different editions, Edith Hamilton's best-selling *The Greek Way* captures the spirit and achievements of Greece in the fifth century B.C. A retired headmistress when she began her writing career in the 1930s, Hamilton immediately demonstrated a remarkable ability to bring the world of ancient Greece to life, introducing that world to the twentieth century. The New York Times called *The Greek Way* a "book of both cultural and critical importance."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Who were the ancient Greeks and why do they still move us? Their society is as alien to us as their language. Yet Greece still beckons us more than two millennia since the fall of Athens. The pinnacle of Greek culture lasted a mere century, yet it has left its mark on all of western society. The great intellectual institutions, such as philosophy, science and literature, originated in Greece. Beyond these marvels, however, lies a value so fundamentally important - and enduring - that a basic understanding of the Greeks is as important today as ever. In *The Greek Way*, author Edith Hamilton covers the height of Greek culture in the 5th century BC. She begins by contrasting the east and

west - an approach that becomes clear as one reads along. The east, according to Hamilton, stood for faith and force, while Greece embodied the opposite values of reason and freedom. Early in the book, Hamilton writes: "In a world where the irrational had played the chief role, they (the Greeks) came forward as the protagonists of the mind." Thus, the Greeks introduced to the world the idea that the universe was orderly, that man's senses were valid and, as a consequence, that man's proper purpose was to live his own life to the fullest. These are discoveries that many westerners take for granted today, but not Edith Hamilton. Throughout the book, she constantly reminds the reader of the awe and beauty of the Greek spirit. An important corollary of the Greek view that the world is knowable was their belief in the supremacy of independence. Hamilton paints a vivid portrait of the major Greek writers, statesmen and philosophers, all of whom possessed just such an intransigent commitment to independence.

Edith Hamilton's book, *The Greek Way*, tells the amazing story of how the Greeks in the small city of Athens developed a new way of life in the western world around 500BC. Some of the highlights of her fascinating story are as follows: In a world where tyrants and the irrational played the chief role, the Greeks in the city of Athens believed in the supremacy of the mind in the affairs of men. The Athenians lived in a "reasonable" world because they used their reason on the world. For a brief period, extraordinary creative activity blossomed in Athens because the Athenians combined the clarity of reason with spiritual power.ï The ancient Egyptians left tombs (Pyramids) as their monuments to death.ï The ancient Athenians left theaters, statues, and plays as their monuments to life. The Athenians were different from most other ancient peoples because:ï The mountains of Greece helped to create a physically vigorous people who resisted submitting to despots.ï The Athenians looked at the world closely and had an intense desire to understand what they saw. They were the first "scientists" and delighted in making the obscure clear and finding system, order, and connection in the world.ï The Athenians loved reason, knowledge, and play.ï The Athenians were not oppressed by governments, religions or superstitions and were free to use their minds to examine whatever they wished.ï The Athenians, unlike many ancient or modern cultures, found the world a beautiful and delightful place in which to live and they found happiness in using their vital powers in the pursuit of excellence.

" Little is left of all this wealth of great art: the sculptures, defaced and broken into bits, have crumbled away; the buildings are fallen; the paintings gone forever; of the writings, all lost but a very few. We have only the ruin of what was; the world has had no more than that for well on for two

thousand years; yet these few remains of the mighty structure have been a challenge and an incitement to men ever since and they are among our possessions today which we value as most precious." A passage taken at random (page 18 of my Norton edition) which illustrates the strength of this remarkable book. Edith Hamilton writes beautiful prose which has been a joy to many since her book was first published in 1930. She writes for an audience unfamiliar with ancient Greek culture. Her attempt to indicate the effect that Pindar achieved is perhaps bound to fail, but it is a noble attempt. She fares a little better with the dramatists, though hindered in that we are little equipped to appreciate verse drama in translation. The best sections are those dealing with prose writers: Plato, Herodotus, Thucydides. An important proviso though is that Hamilton is not primarily an analyst. She strives to pass on her own love and appreciation, not a critique. As such her work has always been welcomed by lay readers new to the subject. This beautifully written book, both lofty and inspiring, yet inculcates a number of falsities about ancient Greece, once commonly held. It downplays Greek religion and magical and mystical beliefs, apparently under the impression that the philosophical outlook (which survives in written form more so than religious texts) was the norm.

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