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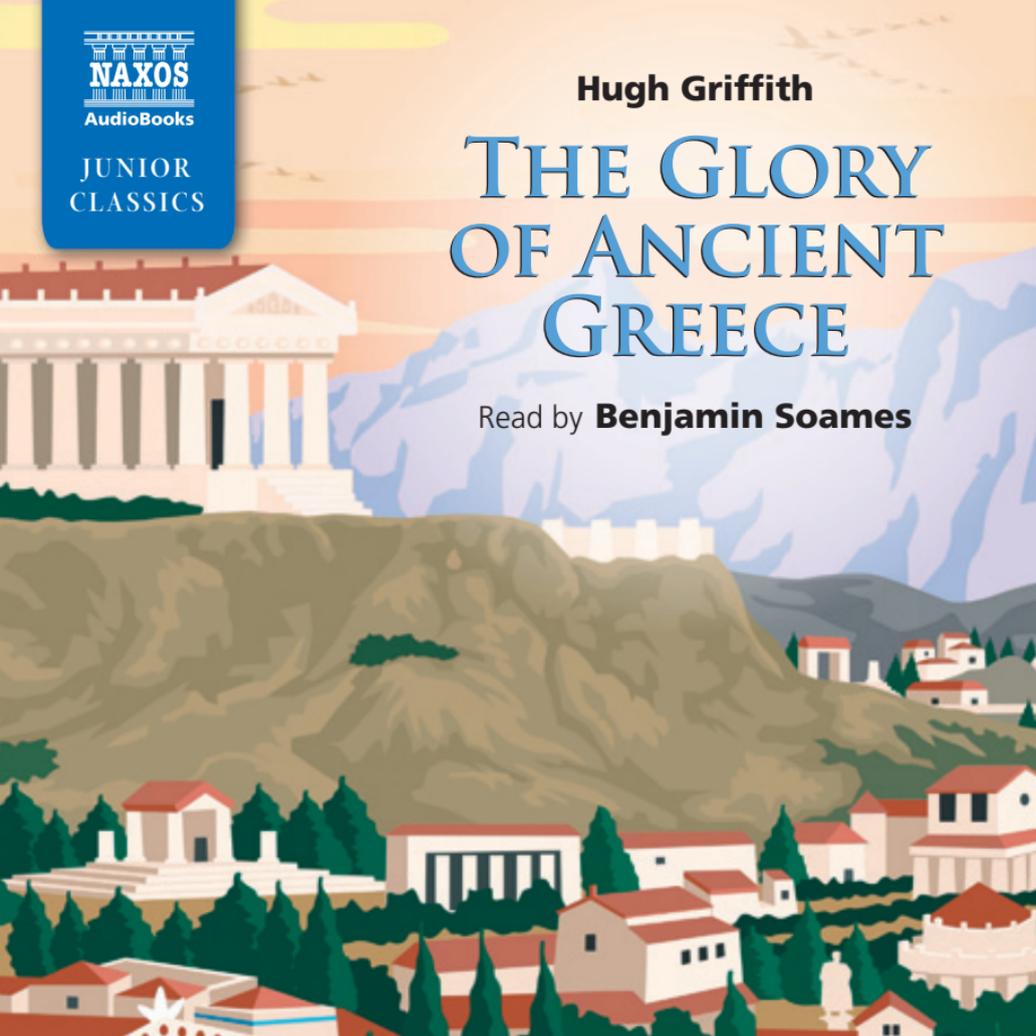
AudioBooks

JUNIOR
CLASSICS

Hugh Griffith

THE GLORY OF ANCIENT GREECE

Read by **Benjamin Soames**



1	The Glory of Ancient Greece by Hugh Griffith – Introduction	7:23
2	Of all their myths, the one that everyone knew best...	6:01
3	Aristocrats, games and the wider Greek World...	6:09
4	The cities that sent competitors...	6:12
5	Sparta and Athens	6:41
6	And then there was another class...	5:09
7	The Oracle at Delphi	4:41
8	But it was also a very special place.	4:24
9	The First Persian Invasion – Marathon	6:54
10	Darius hoped the Greeks might be so afraid of him...	7:04
11	Second Persian Invasion	4:59
12	The Spartans at Thermopylae had shown the Greeks how to fight.	5:13

13	Greek Warfare	4:53
14	The regular warship was the one they had used at Salamis...	4:09
15	Athens and Democracy	6:42
16	One thing about the list...	5:01
17	The Athenian Empire	5:56
18	It's a great help we have someone we can name...	4:39
19	Theatre of Dionysus (Tragedy)	5:37
20	The plays were put on under the open sky...	7:49
21	The Peloponnesian War	5:31
22	Meanwhile, back in Sicily...	5:09
23	Socrates	5:45
24	Well, it's easy for us to look back...	7:04
25	Last Scenes (Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great)	7:00

Total time: 2:26:21

Hugh Griffith

THE GLORY OF ANCIENT GREECE

In our world today, information is so quickly and easily available that we forget how painfully this knowledge was gained in the first place. And when we look back into the distant past, that's especially true.

Books and websites are packed with information about the ancient Greeks, but they don't often mention the most important fact, which is that we can recover only the tiniest fraction of their history. Most of it was lost for ever long ago, and what we do know has had to be pieced together from the few scattered remains that survived.

What we know about the Greeks has come to us in two ways. There are actual physical relics of their world, the temples, pots, iron tools and stone sculptures that have come to the surface over centuries. And there are the books they wrote, that whole body of literature that comes down to us from the various Greeks who wanted

to give expression to what they knew or believed.

It's the physical relics that can have the most immediate impact – even just a few columns of a ruined temple among olive trees in the brightness of the Greek sunlight. And some of the old weather-beaten stones carry valuable information too. When they wanted to record things that mattered, like the passing of a new law, the Greeks would carve the words in stone and set them up in a place where all could see them. These stone inscriptions have preserved for us some of the most important things we know about Greek history.

Most of the ancient relics were buried under the earth and forgotten as newer civilisations came and went. So we owe a lot to the archaeologists who have uncovered them with painstaking labour and carefully interpreted what they found.

Some things are almost indestructible and can lie for ever in the ground or on the seabed just waiting to be brought to light. Stone, fired clay and gold are good examples. The layout of a town, with its walls and streets, will remain preserved through time even when the actual buildings have long vanished.

But most things that are used in everyday life decay much more quickly, and this certainly includes anything to do with books and writing. No writing has survived from the time of the ancient Greeks, some 2,500 years ago, apart from what was inscribed in stone. Yet we can still read the books that they wrote. How is this possible?

The answer to that question makes a very interesting story of its own. The Greeks wrote their books on papyrus, a plant that used to grow in great quantities in Egypt by the river Nile. Less commonly, they used parchment, which is the polished skin of a sheep or goat. Some pieces of papyrus have survived in Egypt, where the sand is so dry that no moisture assists the process of decay. But these are mostly from the 2nd or 3rd centuries AD, already a long time after the golden age of Greece.

In Greece itself, not a single trace remains of all the papyrus and parchment that they wrote on. Obviously, then, when we read their books, we are reading copies of copies of copies. That seems simple enough, until we realise that most of ancient Greek literature has been lost for ever. What we possess is only a very small proportion of all that was once readily available.

Under the Roman empire, Greek literature was still the common property of educated people all around the Mediterranean. But when the Roman empire began to collapse in the 5th century AD, most of that knowledge was lost.

The process of education was halted as the great centres of civilisation were invaded and overrun by marauding tribes of Franks, Vandals, Visigoths, Huns and others. The classical past was forgotten and such learning as remained was now centred on the new religion of Christianity.

During these so-called 'Dark Ages', roughly the period 500–800 AD, the papyrus rolls and the parchment books of the pre-Christian Greeks were thrown on rubbish heaps or burnt or left to rot in

damp cellars. The surprise is not that we possess so little of Greek literature but that any of it survived at all.

The people we have to thank for its survival are the monks of the Byzantine empire. This was the eastern remnant of the old Roman empire, where the official language was not Latin but Greek. Respect for learning was strongest in the monasteries, and the copying of religious texts was an important duty of those monks who had the skill to do it. Luckily for us, they saw it as their duty to copy not just the Bible and other texts bearing the word of the Christian God, but also the great works of earlier times – Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, the *Histories* of Herodotus and many others besides.

There was nothing in these works about the Christian message, but they were judged too important to be forgotten. Sitting at their desks, labouring away by the light of a candle over many years, those scribes of the Byzantine monasteries saved the greatest gems of Greek literature for posterity.

No one outside the monasteries was at all interested in old books written

by the ancient Greeks. Even the monks didn’t always understand what they were copying, as we can tell by some of the changes they made to the text when the meaning was unclear. They knew Greek, but the language had changed much over the 1,000 years or more since the books were first written.

For several more centuries these great works lay forgotten, though thankfully preserved, until at last a new appetite was born in the west, a thirst for knowledge of the pagan civilisations of Greece and Rome. Starting in the 14th century, it grew ever stronger through the 15th century, until all Europe was bathed in the light of the classical past. The ancient texts were copied and recopied, pored over and discussed with reverence.

So began the Renaissance, the rebirth of ancient ideas in a new age of learning. But all depended on those dutiful monks, earnestly preserving those books from destruction by the slow movement of their pens when the rest of the world neither knew nor cared that such books still existed.

Notes by Hugh Griffith

Map of Ancient Greece





Benjamin Soames trained at LAMDA. He appeared in the popular TV series *Sharpe* and toured worldwide in the acclaimed Cheek by Jowl production of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* directed by Declan Donnellan. He has read *The Tale of Troy*, *The Adventures of Odysseus*, *More Tales from the Greek Legends*, *Great Rulers of Ancient Rome*, *Stories from Shakespeare: The Plantagenets* and featured in *From Shakespeare – with love* for Naxos AudioBooks.

Credits

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Recorded at Motivation Sound Studios, London
Edited by Sarah Butcher

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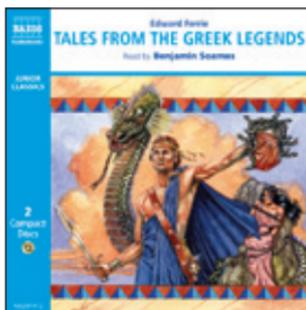
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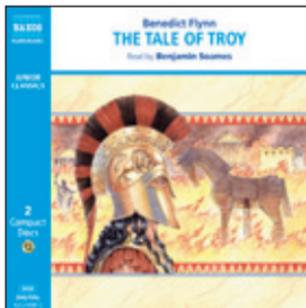
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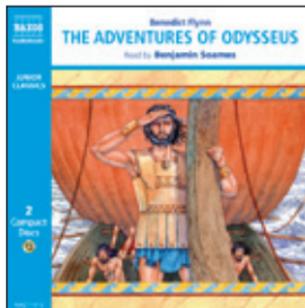
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Hugh Griffith

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The glory of Ancient Greece is all around us, even in the 21st century, because Greece was the cradle of Western civilisation. We know about the gods and their characters – Zeus, Athene, Apollo, Ares, Aphrodite – and their heroes, both legendary (Heracles) and historical (Alexander the Great). Architecture, mathematics, politics, philosophy, observation of nature and the cosmos and much more emerged in Ancient Greece. Hugh Griffith's entertaining but informative account of the people and the history places it all in perspective. An outstanding introduction for younger listeners.



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Total time
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NA0012D

CD ISBN:
978-184-379-421-9