

## **Part 4: Classical and Hellenistic Greece**

We already know that Greece is the birthplace of democracy, and that Athens and Sparta were Greece's two greatest city-states. But, other than the birth of democracy, we have yet to see the great flowering of classical Greece. That is still to come. But what if it had never happened? What if Greece has been conquered by the Persian Empire? Archaism would have triumphed and all of Western history would have been aborted. Fortunately, it wasn't. The Greeks won the Greco-Persian War and Athens did have its *Golden Age* and was able to transmit its values to posterity. Sadly, after that, Greece did decline. Due to a never-ending series of wars, it became a shadow of its former self during a long descent called the "Hellenistic Period." Ultimately, it was conquered by Rome, which became the conduit of "Greco-Roman" values into Western civilization.

### **I. The Greco-Persian War (c.500-c.449BC)**

#### A. The Most Important War in Human History!

1. There have been many great wars in history. Of course, *World War I* and *World War II* come to mind as the most destructive conflicts in human history. Various civil wars in China have also resulted in tens of millions of deaths. But body counts are not the best measure to use to decide the importance of a war. What matters is how much history was affected—which means: how much *the present* was shaped.
2. From that perspective one war is by far the most important: the ancient Greco-Persian War.
3. We have yet to see exactly what Greece contributed to human history. We only know of the invention of democracy. In addition, however, we will see that the Greeks (mostly the Athenians) invented physical science, philosophy, history, and beautiful realistic art—among other things.
4. Without the *birth* of these humanistic pursuits in Greece, there would never have been a *rebirth* of them (i.e. the "Renaissance").
5. This includes the rebirth of the science of geography, of which Christopher Columbus was such a crucial participant.
6. So if classical Greece was never born, there would not have been a Renaissance, Europe would probably still be living in the Dark Ages, *America would never have been discovered—and there would never even have been a United States.* (What modern war can match *that* in terms of importance!?)