**The Religious Systems of Ancient Greeks and Romans**

**Introduction:** The religion of ancient Greeks represented a predominant form of early Paganism. They believe in worshipping many Gods. The Romans Gods can be cited as a belief of “numen”, according to which God inhabit the living things and objects and can be found in everything in nature [[2](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/the-religious-systems-of-ancient-greeks-and-romans-religion-essay.php%22%20%5Cl%20%22ftn2)] . The religious beliefs of these two cultures deeply influence the cultural, political and other such activities in the state. A study is done here to find out the practices that are followed in these cultures as a result of different religious beliefs and political and social differences between the two in the pre-historic times by comparing their beliefs.Find out

**Roman Religion:** The history of Rome can be divided into three phases or periods. It originated in the year 753-509 B.C. when it established itself by conquering Etruscans. Then the second phase is the era when the Republic falls and the Battle of Actium happened between 509-31 B.C. Finally the new law and government and the Roman Empire emerged in the era 31 B.C. to 476 A.D. Also Christianity emerged as new phenomena to be reckoned in this period [[3](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/the-religious-systems-of-ancient-greeks-and-romans-religion-essay.php%22%20%5Cl%20%22ftn3)] .

The Roman pantheons were originated in small villages of Rome by farming community. The mythology thus believed in faceless and nameless deities which support the communities. The people believed in Numen as a pantheistic inhabitant which however later transformed to a more defined system of Gods. The Romans were particular about the responsibility of their deity and thus each family was assigned with a guardian spirit called Lar Familiaris (Lars) which were then involved in all family functions. Examples of these are Genii represent men and junii for women.

The Roman Gods as we know today got their form in the dynasty of Etruscan king in 6th century B.C. The God like Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva were then worshiped in temples. The Romans used to easily adopt others culture and they worship foreign Gods and adopt their customs as well, for example goddess Cybele was adopted in the Second Punic War, which is a Phoenician God and it still prevails in Roman System [[4](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/the-religious-systems-of-ancient-greeks-and-romans-religion-essay.php%22%20%5Cl%20%22ftn4)] .

An imperial system rose in Rome with time and the Emperors like Julian Caesar claimed to be descendent of Aeneas and accepted the divine honors like God. This however became a source of conflict with Christians, and the emperor worship continued till 4th century A.D. and ended in the reign of Constantine. Christianity became the official religion in 392 AD.

According to editor Fjordman of The Brussels Journal, Christianity gradually became the Greco-Roman culture since its foundation. As Christianity had suppressed the Greco-Roman religion, Henry Bamford stated in his book Gods and Men -The Origins of Western Culture that [[5](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/the-religious-systems-of-ancient-greeks-and-romans-religion-essay.php%22%20%5Cl%20%22ftn5)]

“â€¦although Christianity may have borrowed from the pagan heritage, it borrowed only what it could integrate with its own basic doctrines and could profitably absorb and make use ofâ€¦.Much more important in the early evolution of Christianity was the influence of the classical intellectual heritage. As men trained in Hellenic and Roman modes of thought became converted, they began to reinterpret the new doctrines in the terms to which they were accustomed. Thus, Christian theology was presented in the language of Greek philosophy and of Roman law”.

**Greek Religion:** The origin of ancient Greeks is thought to be 2nd millennium B.C. i.e. somewhere around the Aryan invasions period. Greek culture is formed with the fusion of the Aegeans (Pelasgians) and the Minoans of Crete culture. The civilization thus created was also known as Minoan-Mycenean civilization which existed from 1600 B.C. till 1400 B.C [[6](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/the-religious-systems-of-ancient-greeks-and-romans-religion-essay.php%22%20%5Cl%20%22ftn6)] .

The Greeks used to worship many Gods. They have various myths with respect to distinct gods and domains. Many mythological series were illustrated in the art of Archaic and Classical Greece. The Greek pantheon determined twelve principle deities. Zeus the sky god is considered to be the prime power amongst others. Mount Olympos is considered to be the home of gods in Greece. Greek religious practices had some of its roots in the Bronze Age (3000-1050 B.C.). Lliad and Odyssey are considered to influence the Greek thoughts and the relation between the god and the humans were believed to be on concept of exchange of gifts [[7](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/the-religious-systems-of-ancient-greeks-and-romans-religion-essay.php%22%20%5Cl%20%22ftn7)] .

Greeks used to give offering to their god in separate sanctuaries. The sanctuaries were built by marking off an area around an altar. As said by Aeschylus, “The altar is an unbreakable shield, stronger than a fortification tower” [[8](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/the-religious-systems-of-ancient-greeks-and-romans-religion-essay.php%22%20%5Cl%20%22ftn8)] . The boundary stones also called horoi might be used to create fence also called peribols thereby establishing a separate area which was termed as temenos. Each and everything in the sanctuary is treated as sacred and many refuges took shelter in these temenos. In the words of Euripides, “The abode of the gods is a protection shared by all men [[9](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/the-religious-systems-of-ancient-greeks-and-romans-religion-essay.php%22%20%5Cl%20%22ftn9)] “. It was a civil and religious crime to steal any property of god from these temenos.

The hundreds or thousands of deities in Greece have one day dedicated to them each year, when the families celebrate the day with their neighbors. The family also might sacrifices a goat or sheep to keep the deity happy. Apart from these annual festivals the people can worship in case of personal needs like Apollodorus promised one-tenth of his profits to Poseidon on his safe return, before making a business trip. This gift which is served as a votive offering could be in the form of small statuette or painted plaque to the sanctuary with his name and the purpose of gift written on it like this:

“Apollodorus, son of Diopeithes after having made a vow, Erects this for you. Poseidon, as a tithe.” Many such dedications can be found in the Greek dedicated museums today [[10](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/the-religious-systems-of-ancient-greeks-and-romans-religion-essay.php%22%20%5Cl%20%22ftn10)] .

Art and philosophy arose as a result of Greek religion. The Greek religion was highly influenced by women as it arose at a time when the women deities were dominant. Some women involved in the early formation of Greek religion were Hecate, Ariadne, Athene, Demeter etc. Art of god and goddesses became the milestones of Greek and earned Greek society huge benefits by means of trade. Religion was more integrated in the ancient Greek people, compared to nowadays. All people belonging to same culture followed a common religion. The Greek religion is also referred as ‘pagan’ which means ignorance of Christianity, however the Christianity was well came into existence in the Roman period. Also it is believed that Christianity was the adoption of Greek culture with changed names [[11](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/the-religious-systems-of-ancient-greeks-and-romans-religion-essay.php%22%20%5Cl%20%22ftn11)] .

**Comparing Greeks and Romans:** In ancient times, the Greeks and the Romans influenced European and American civilization the most. The Roman culture acquired many of its habits from the Greeks and also the laws and architecture designs of Roman culture were inspired by the Greeks [[12](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/the-religious-systems-of-ancient-greeks-and-romans-religion-essay.php%22%20%5Cl%20%22ftn12)] . However comparison can be made between the two in many ways. The Greeks followed a democratic form of government with the leader being a group of men called an oligarchy as chosen by people. The Romans however followed a semi-democratic form of government with a governing Senate and a political leader having all the powers as of a single emperor.

The ancient Greeks were artistic in nature and had constructed well defined buildings which were beautiful and pleasant, and were especially temples, facades and columns. The Romans, on the other hand, worked more as engineers and constructed best roads, buildings, and other civic amenities and were less interested in building gods and goddesses’ architecture. However in both the cultures the people have to pay stiff taxes to government for their buildings. The literary interests existed in both the cultures with the Greeks epic followed the old tradition of writing like “the Iliad” by Homer , however the Roman epics were composed by living and on the spot writers like “The Aeneid” by Vergil [[13](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/the-religious-systems-of-ancient-greeks-and-romans-religion-essay.php%22%20%5Cl%20%22ftn13)] .

The Greek and the Roman Gods performed the same duties but with different names. The Roman religion accepted many of the deities of the Greek Pantheon like the Mithra, the sun-god, Isis etc. but was more comprehensive in nature. Romans religion was practical in nature as against poetic nature of the Greek religion. The household Gods are dominant in Rome as they worship their ancestors, and the festivals celebrated in worship of God are numerous in Rome as compared to Greeks [[14](https://www.ukessays.com/essays/religion/the-religious-systems-of-ancient-greeks-and-romans-religion-essay.php%22%20%5Cl%20%22ftn14)] .

**Conclusion:** The study of the two ancient cultures here presented the fact that our ancient civilization is rich in culture and the various religions had an influence on each other in their formation. The culture and the religion followed by the people in ancient times were different still they paved the way for a common religion called Christianity. The religions greatly influenced the beliefs of the people and the society as a whole. The political and social thoughts of these two cultures are discussed here and the differences were found. The difference in the deities and the way of worship can also be seen. Thus the significance and relevance of the topic of discussion is great in all respect.