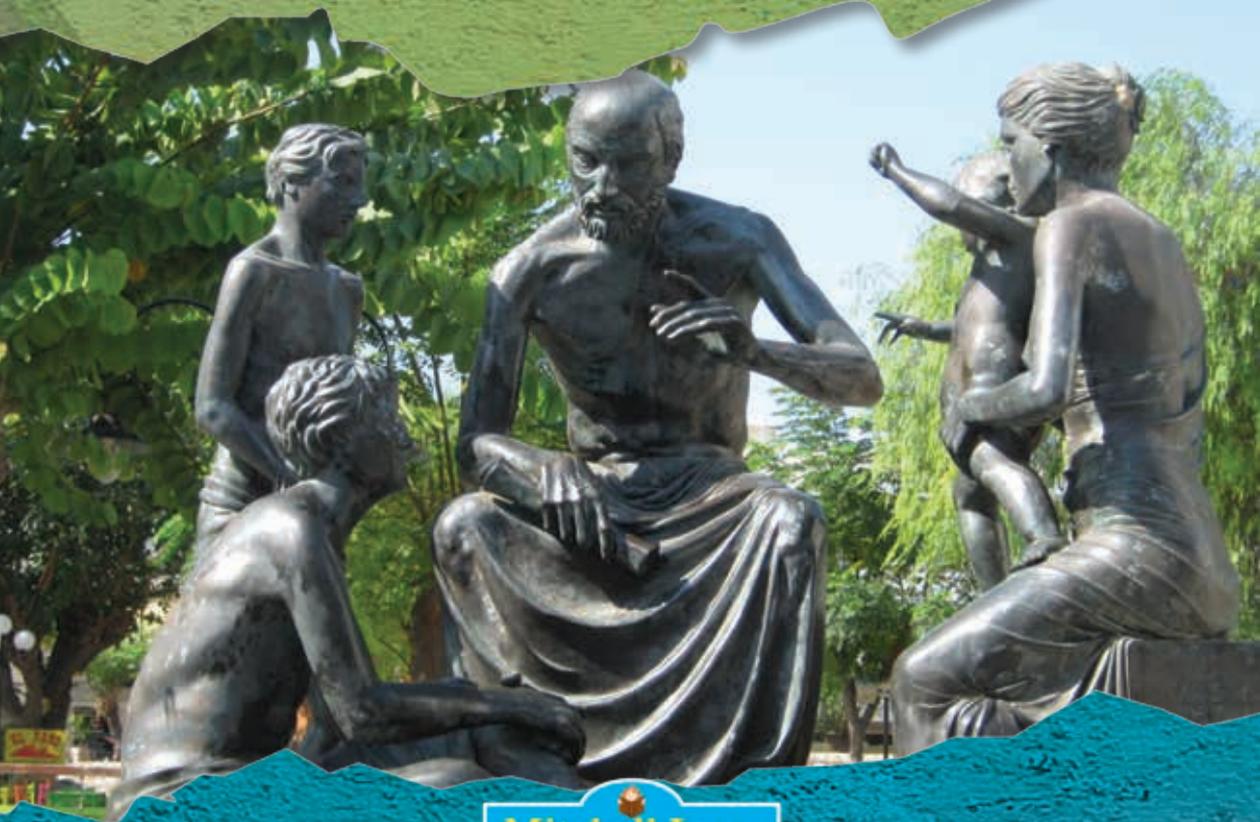


JUNIOR
BIOGRAPHY
FROM
**ANCIENT
CIVILIZATIONS**

HIPPOCRATES

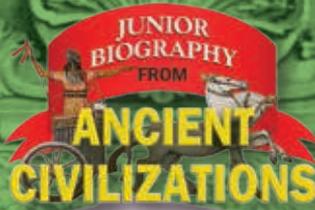
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**Mitchell Lane**

PUBLISHERS

2001 SW 31st Avenue
Hallandale, FL 33009
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Printing 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Marcia Amidon Lusted has written over 100 books and 500 magazine articles for young readers. She lives in New Hampshire. Visit her at www.adventuresinnonfiction.com for more information about her books.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: The facts on which the story in this book is based have been thoroughly researched. Documentation of such research can be found on pages 44–45. While every possible effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the publisher will not assume liability for damages caused by inaccuracies in the data, and makes no warranty on the accuracy of the information contained herein.

To reflect current usage, we have chosen to use the secular era designations BCE (“before the common era”) and CE (“of the common era”) instead of the traditional designations BC (“before Christ”) and AD (*anno Domini*, “in the year of the Lord”).

**Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Lusted, Marsha Amidon, author.
Title: Hippocrates / by Marsha Amidon Lusted.
Description: Hallandale, FL : Mitchell Lane Publishers, [2018] |
Series: Junior biography from ancient civilizations | Audience: Age 8-11. |
Audience: Grade 4 to 6. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2017009113 | ISBN 9781680200300 (library bound)
Subjects: LCSH: Hippocrates—Juvenile literature. | Medicine, Greek and Roman—Juvenile literature. | Physicians—Biography—Juvenile literature.
Classification: LCC R126.H8 L87 2018 | DDC 610.938 —dc23
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017009113>

eBook ISBN: 978-1-618020-031-7

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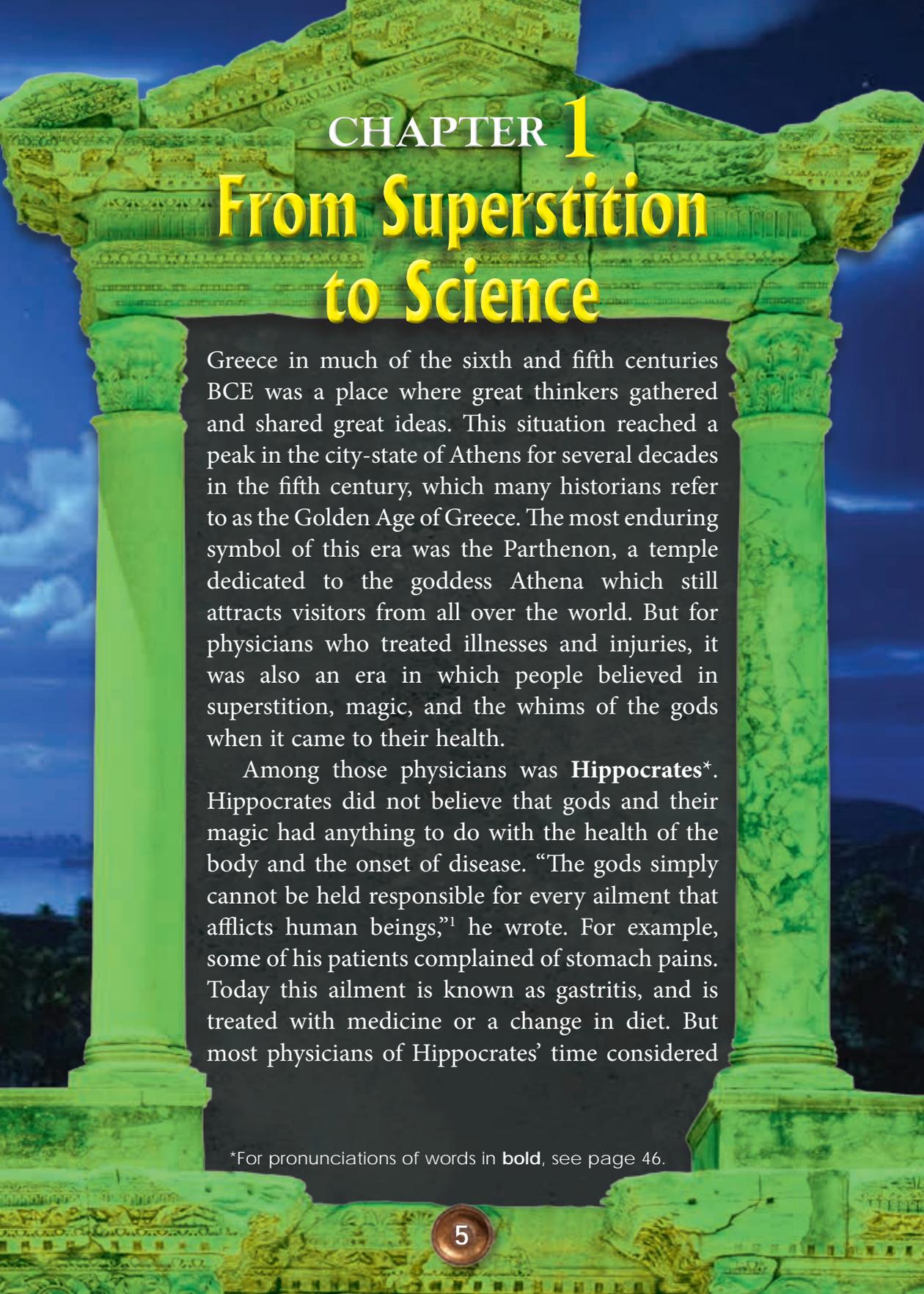
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Phonetic pronunciations of words in **bold**
can be found on page 46.



No one is exactly sure what Hippocrates looked like. This portrait is by Swiss painter Albert Andker (1831–1910).



CHAPTER 1

From Superstition to Science

Greece in much of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE was a place where great thinkers gathered and shared great ideas. This situation reached a peak in the city-state of Athens for several decades in the fifth century, which many historians refer to as the Golden Age of Greece. The most enduring symbol of this era was the Parthenon, a temple dedicated to the goddess Athena which still attracts visitors from all over the world. But for physicians who treated illnesses and injuries, it was also an era in which people believed in superstition, magic, and the whims of the gods when it came to their health.

Among those physicians was **Hippocrates***. Hippocrates did not believe that gods and their magic had anything to do with the health of the body and the onset of disease. “The gods simply cannot be held responsible for every ailment that afflicts human beings,”¹ he wrote. For example, some of his patients complained of stomach pains. Today this ailment is known as gastritis, and is treated with medicine or a change in diet. But most physicians of Hippocrates’ time considered

*For pronunciations of words in **bold**, see page 46.

that stomach pain was the curse of the god **Apollo**. Why? Because one symptom of the disease was black bowel movements that looked like droppings of swallows. These birds were associated with Apollo, the god of medicine. Praying to Apollo provided the only method of obtaining relief.²

The Greeks also honored **Asclepius**, considered to be a master physician who could cure any ailment. Some stories even said that he had brought a dead man back to life. He supposedly inherited his medical knowledge from his father Apollo, but he himself was not a god because his mother was a mortal woman. When Asclepius died, Apollo grieved so much that he begged **Zeus**—the king of the gods—to honor Asclepius’s memory. Zeus made Asclepius into the

This statue of the god Zeus is part of the Fountain of the Four Rivers in Rome, Italy.





Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, is pictured here with Apollo and Hippocrates.



constellation **Ophiuchus** as well as making him the patron of all physicians.

Hippocrates knew that he could not change Greek society. But he wanted to show people that medicine was based on science, not superstition. He lived to the age of 80 or 90. During his long life, he would change the way that physicians thought about treating patients. He was the first Greek physician to look beyond magic and the gods and develop a system of medicine based on observation and common sense.³

Hippocrates and his beliefs guided physicians for thousands of years. Even today, new doctors take an oath based on Hippocrates' teachings and philosophy.

So what is known about this man and his life? How did he come to create such an important legacy?

Stone statue of Hippocrates by Alexander Munro at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History in Oxford, United Kingdom.

The Greek Gods

The Greeks believed in twelve gods who ruled over all aspects of human life. **Zeus** was the king of the gods. He was especially noted for hurling thunderbolts. **Hera** was the supreme goddess and the wife of Zeus. She was also the goddess of marriage and childbirth. **Poseidon** was the god of the sea. His weapon was a trident, which looked like a pitchfork with three prongs.

Hades was the lord of the underworld, and he ruled over the dead. He was also the god of wealth. **Hestia** was the goddess of the hearth and home. **Ares**, the son of Zeus and Hera, was the god of war.

Athena was the goddess of reason, intelligence, arts, and literature. **Apollo** was the god of music and healing. He taught medicine to mankind. His twin sister was **Artemis**, the goddess of hunting, the moon, and nature.

Aphrodite was the goddess of love, desire, and beauty. **Hermes** was the cleverest of the gods, and served as their messenger. Finally, **Hephaestus**, another son of Zeus and Hera, was the god of blacksmiths and craftspeople. Even though he was lame and deformed, he was Aphrodite's husband.



This marble image of the twelve gods and goddesses was probably created in the first century BCE. They all carry something that symbolizes their power.

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