

1 Cultures of the Mountains and the Sea

TERMS & NAMES

- Mycenaeans
- Trojan War
- Dorians
- Homer
- epics
- myths

MAIN IDEA

Physical geography caused separate groups of Greek-speaking peoples to develop isolated societies.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The seeds of much of Western cultural heritage were planted during this time period.

SETTING THE STAGE In ancient times, Greece was not a united country. It was a collection of separate lands where Greek-speaking people lived. By 2000 B.C., the Minoans lived on the large Greek island of Crete. The Minoans created an elegant civilization that had great power in the Mediterranean world. At the same time, Indo-European peoples migrated from the plains along the Black Sea and Anatolia. The Indo-Europeans settled in mainland Greece. Seaborne commercial networks spread ideas as well as resources throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

Geography Shapes Greek Life

Ancient Greece consisted mainly of a mountainous peninsula jutting out into the Mediterranean Sea. It also included approximately 1,400 islands in the Aegean (ih-JEE-uhn) and Ionian (eye-OH-nee-uhn) seas. Lands on the western coast of Anatolia were also part of ancient Greece. (See the map on page 112.) The region's physical geography directly shaped Greek traditions and customs.

The Sea The sea shaped Greek civilization just as rivers shaped the ancient civilizations of Egypt, the Fertile Crescent, India, and China. In one sense, the Greeks did not live *on* a land but *around* a sea. Greeks rarely traveled more than 85 miles to reach the coastline. The Aegean Sea, the Ionian Sea, and the neighboring Black Sea were important transportation routes for the Greek people. These liquid highways linked most parts of Greece. As the Greeks became skilled sailors, sea travel also connected Greece with other societies. Sea travel and trade were also important because Greece itself was poor in natural resources. Greece lacked timber, precious metals, and usable farmland.

The Land Rugged mountains covered about three-fourths of ancient Greece. Mountains divided the land into a number of different regions. The mountain chains ran mainly from northwest to southeast along the Balkan peninsula. They significantly influenced Greek political life. Unlike the Egyptians or the Chinese, it was difficult to unite the ancient Greeks under a single government. Greece developed small, independent communities within each little valley and its surrounding mountains. Most Greeks gave their loyalty to these local communities.

In ancient times, the uneven terrain also made land transportation difficult. Early Greek roads were little more than dirt paths. For example, the city-state of Sparta was only about 60 miles from Olympia, the site of the Olympic Games. Yet it took Spartans almost seven days to travel that distance.

Much of the land itself was stony and only a small part of it—approximately 20 percent—was arable, or suitable for farming.

Vocabulary

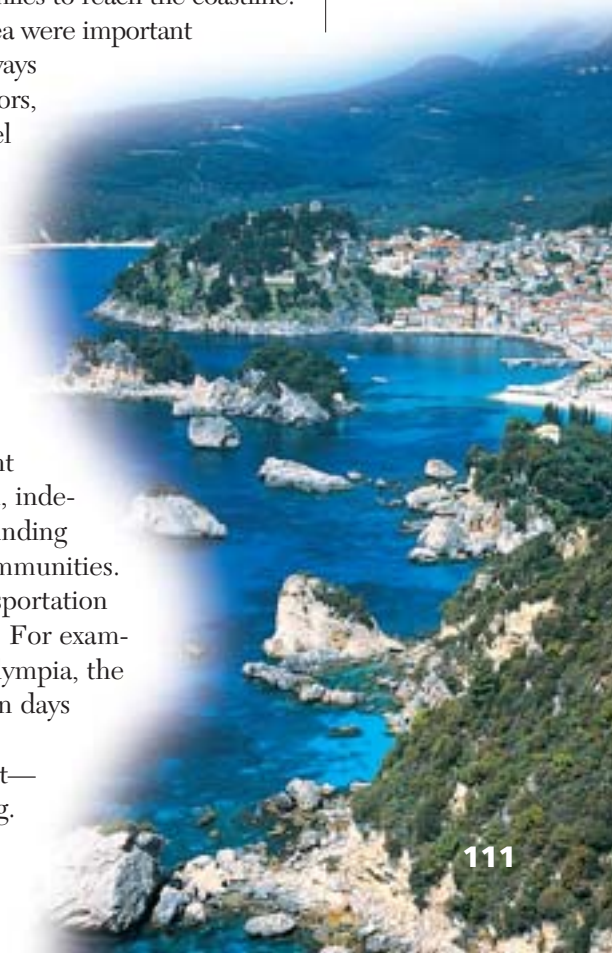
peninsula: a piece of land that extends into a body of water and is connected to the mainland

Nestled at the base of a mountain range, this coastal Greek city has a rugged shoreline.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Analyzing

Causes In what ways did Greece's location by the sea and its mountainous land affect the development of its society?





Modern Athens



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

- 1. Movement** Based on the map, how did Greek traders conduct most of their trade?
- 2. Human-Environment Interaction** How might the topography or surface features of Greece have affected communications among early Greek settlements?

Tiny but fertile valleys covered about one-fourth of Greece. The small streams that watered these valleys were not suitable for large-scale irrigation projects.

With so little fertile farmland or fresh water for irrigation, Greece was never able to support a large population. It is estimated that no more than a few million people lived in ancient

Greece at any given time. Even this small population couldn't expect the land to support a life of luxury. As a result, the Greeks based their diet on basic staple crops such as grains, grapes, and olives. A desire for more living space, grassland for raising livestock, and adequate farmland may have been factors that motivated the Greeks to seek new sites for colonies.

The Climate Climate was the third important environmental influence on Greek civilization. Greece has a varied climate with temperatures averaging 48 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter and 80 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. In ancient times, these moderate temperatures supported an outdoor life for many Greek citizens. Men spent much of their leisure time at outdoor public events. They met often to discuss public issues, exchange news, and take an active part in civic life.

Mycenaean Civilization Develops

As Chapter 3 explained, a large wave of Indo-Europeans migrated from the Eurasian steppes to Europe, India, and Southwest Asia. Some of these people who settled on the Greek mainland around 2000 B.C. were later known as **Mycenaean**. The name came from their leading city, Mycenae (my-SEE-nee).

Mycenae was located on a steep, rocky ridge and surrounded by a protective wall up to 20 feet thick. The fortified city of Mycenae could withstand almost any attack. From



Mycenae, a warrior-king ruled the surrounding villages and farms. Similar Mycenaean palace-forts dotted the southern part of Greece. Influential and militaristic rulers controlled the Mycenaean communities in towns such as Tiryns and Athens. These kings dominated Greece from about 1600 to 1200 B.C.

Culture and Trade The nobles who lived within the fortresses enjoyed a life of surprising splendor. They feasted in great halls 35 feet wide and 50 feet long. During banquets, the firelight from a huge circular hearth glittered on a dazzling variety of gold pitchers and silver cups. When the royal Mycenaeans died, they were buried with their richest treasures. Warrior-kings won their enormous wealth by controlling local production and commercial trade. They also led their armies in search of plunder. However, few other Mycenaeans had the wealth of the warrior-kings. Wealthy kings of the Bronze Age (2000–1100 B.C.) wielded bronze weapons and drank from cups of gold. The common people used tools made from less expensive materials such as stone and wood. Most were farmers, but others worked as weavers, goat herders, or stonemasons.

The warrior-kings of Mycenae also invaded Crete. The Minoan civilization had flourished on Crete for 600 years. The civilization ended abruptly and mysteriously in 1400 B.C. The Mycenaean invasions prevented the Minoans from rebuilding. However, the Mycenaeans preserved elements of Minoan culture by making it part of their own lives.

From their contact with the Minoans, the Mycenaeans saw the value of seaborne trade. Mycenaean traders sailed to islands in the Aegean, coastal towns of Anatolia, and to cities in Syria, Egypt, Italy, and Crete. The Minoans influenced Mycenaean culture in other ways as well. The Mycenaeans adapted the Minoan writing system to the Greek language and decorated vases with Minoan designs. Their legacy survived in the form of legends. These legends later formed the core of Greek religious practice, art, politics, and literature. Western civilization has roots in these early Greek civilizations.

The Trojan War About 1200 B.C. the Mycenaean kings fought a ten-year war against Troy, an independent trading city located in Anatolia. According to legend, a Greek army besieged and destroyed Troy because a Trojan youth had kidnapped Helen, the beautiful wife of a Greek king.

For many years, historians thought that the legendary stories told of the **Trojan War** were totally fictional. Then around 1870, a German archaeologist, Heinrich Schliemann, began excavating a hill in northwestern Turkey. He found the remains of nine layers of city life, one of which may date from this time period. His discoveries suggest that the stories of the Trojan War may have been based on real cities, people, and events.

In 1988, another German historian, Manfred Korfmann, excavated an ancient maritime cemetery near the hill believed to be the site of ancient Troy. Although some scholars disagree, Korfmann believes the Trojan War was a struggle for control of a crucial waterway in the Aegean Sea. In any event, the attack on Troy was probably one of the last campaigns of the Mycenaeans.

Greek Culture Declines Under the Dorians

Not long after the Trojan War, Mycenaean civilization collapsed. Around 1200 B.C., sea raiders attacked and burned palace after palace. At Mycenae, a layer of ashes from a terrible fire covered the entire palace site. According to tradition, a new group of people, the **Dorians** (DAWR-ee-uhnz), moved into this war-torn countryside. The Dorians spoke a dialect of Greek and were distant relatives of the Bronze Age Greeks.

The Dorians were far less advanced than the Mycenaean Greeks. The centralized economy collapsed and trade eventually came to a standstill with their arrival. Most

Background

On the Aegean island of Thera, near Crete, a volcano erupted around 1470 B.C. This event may have helped to bring about the end of Minoan civilization.

Vocabulary

Western civilization: the culture that evolved in Europe and spread to the Americas

Greek stories tell of their army's capture of the legendary city of Troy. Some scholars think that the hollow wooden horse of Western literature may actually have been a gigantic siege engine or battering ram.





important to historians, Greeks appear to have temporarily forgotten the art of writing during the Dorian Age. No written record exists from the 400-year period between 1150 and 750 B.C. Without written records, little is known about this period of decline.

Epics of Homer Lacking writing, the Greeks of this time learned about the Trojan War through the spoken word. Their greatest storyteller, according to Greek tradition, was a blind man named **Homer**. Little is known of his personal life. Some historians believe Homer composed his **epics**, narrative poems celebrating heroic deeds, between 750 and 700 B.C. The Trojan War forms the backdrop for Homer’s two great epic poems, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

The heroes of *The Iliad* are warriors: the fierce Greek, Achilles (uh-KIHL-eez), and the courageous and noble Hector of Troy. In the following dramatic excerpt, Hector’s wife begs him not to fight Achilles:

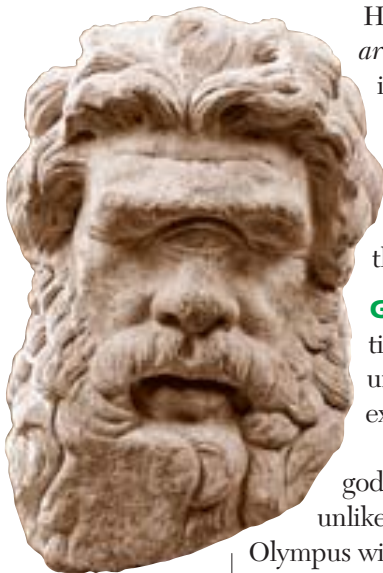
A VOICE FROM THE PAST

“O Hector, your courage will be your destruction; and you have no pity on your little son or on me, who will soon be your widow. . . if I lose you, it would be better for me to die. . . .”

Then tall Hector. . . answered, “Wife, I too have thought upon all this. But I would feel deep shame if like a coward I stayed away from battle. All my life I have learned to be brave and to fight always in the front ranks of the Trojans, winning glory for myself. . . .”

HOMER, *The Iliad*

This is a marble sculpture of Polyphemus, a cyclops, or one-eyed monster, in Homer’s *The Odyssey*.



Hector’s response to his wife gives insight into the Greek heroic ideal of *aretē* (ar-uh-TAY), meaning virtue and excellence. A Greek could display this ideal on the battlefield, in combat, or in athletic contests.

Homer’s other epic, *The Odyssey*, concerns the adventures of Odysseus (oh-DIH-see-uhs). Odysseus uses his wits and trickery to defeat the Trojans. Much of this epic is set after the war. It concerns his ten-year journey home and the strange and mysterious lands Odysseus visits along the way.

Greeks Create Myths The Greeks developed a rich set of **myths**, or traditional stories, about their gods. Through these myths, the Greeks sought to understand the mysteries of nature and the power of human passions. Myths explained the changing of the seasons, for example.

Greeks attributed human qualities, such as love, hate, and jealousy, to their gods. The gods quarreled and competed with each other constantly. However, unlike humans, the gods lived forever. Zeus, the ruler of the gods, lived on Mount Olympus with his wife, Hera. Hera was often jealous of Zeus’ relationships with other women. Athena, goddess of wisdom, was Zeus’ daughter and his favorite child. The Greeks thought of Athena as the guardian of cities, especially of Athens, which was named in her honor. You will learn about Athens and other cities in Section 2.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY
B. Making Inferences Why was the oral tradition during the Dorian Age important to later historians?

Section 1 Assessment

1. TERMS & NAMES

- Identify
- Mycenaeans
 - Trojan War
 - Dorians
 - Homer
 - epics
 - myths

2. TAKING NOTES

Re-create the graph below on your paper and fill in examples of how geography affected early Greek civilization.

Geographic Feature	Effects
sea	
land	
climate	

3. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Why did the lack of writing represent a setback to the development of Greek civilization?

THINK ABOUT

- Minoan and Mycenaean accomplishments
- uses of writing
- other forms of communication

4. ANALYZING THEMES

Cultural Interaction Why do you think that early Greek epics and myths are so well known and studied in today’s society?

THINK ABOUT

- *aretē*
- Greek ideals compared to ideals in today’s world
- early Greeks’ purpose of storytelling