

Chapter 6 Section 1 --- Early Greek Civilization

Key Terms:

Peninsula – an area of land almost completely surrounded by water and connected to the mainland by a narrow strip of land

Acropolis – the fortified, or strengthened, hill of an ancient Greek city

Aristocrat – a member of a rich and powerful family

Tyrant – a ruler who takes power by force

Democracy – a form of government in which citizens govern themselves



First there was nothing. Then came Mother Earth. The gods of Night and Day appeared next, and then starry Sky. Earth and Sky created the Twelve Titans. These great gods rebelled against their father Sky and took away his power. The youngest of the Titans, Cronos, ruled in

his father's place. In time, Cronos has six Children. The youngest, mighty Zeus, toppled Cronos from his throne.

With such stories, the people of ancient Greece described the struggles of their gods. Like their gods, the people of Greece had to struggle for power and independence. Their struggles began with the land itself.

The Geography of Greece:

The land of Greece looks as if the sea had smashed it to pieces. Some pieces have drifted away to form small, rocky islands. Others seem to barely cling to the mainland. Greece is a peninsula made up of smaller peninsulas and islands. A **peninsula** is an area of land almost completely surrounded by water and connected to the mainland by a narrow strip of land.

The Mountains of Greece: Mountains are the major landform of Greece. Greece's islands are mostly mountain peaks. Mountains crisscross the mainland, leaving only small patches of farmland. Only about one fifth of Greece is good for growing crops. It is no wonder the Greeks became traders and sailors. At times, they left Greece to found colonies far away.

Geography and Ancient Communities: The ancient Greeks were in a way all islanders. Some lived on real islands, completely surrounded by water, or on small peninsulas. Others lived on what could be thought of as land islands. Instead of water, mountains separated the people in these small communities from one another.

Because it was difficult for Greeks from different communities to meet, each community developed its own customs and beliefs. Each was more than ready to go to war to protect itself. In fact, for most of their history, the Greeks were so busy fighting among themselves that it was easy to forget that they shared a common heritage, spoke the same language, and worshiped the same gods.

The Rise of Greek Civilization:

Early Greek civilization arose both on and off the Greek mainland. Two ancient peoples, the Minoans and the Mycenaeans, made important contributions to Greek civilization.

Minoan Civilization: From about 3000 to about 1100BC, Bronze Age people called the Minoans lived on the island, of Crete. Surrounded by the water of the Aegean and Mediterranean seas, Crete was an ideal place for the Minoans to develop a broad sea-trade network. Mainland Greece and other Greek islands, Egypt, and Sicily all traded with the Minoans, who at one time dominated the Aegean.

The Minoans developed an advanced culture. Samples of Minoan writing have been found on thousands of clay tablets. Palace ruins in the ancient city of Knossos on Crete hint at rooms once covered with fanciful wall paintings. Statues found within suggest that the Minoans worshiped mainly goddesses. In the middle of the 1400s B.B., Knossos was destroyed, and Minoan civilization declined. People from mainland Greece, the Mycenaeans, were the likely invaders.

The Mycenaeans: After the Mycenaeans came to power, mainland and island cultures blended. However, the focus of these cultures moved to the mainland, where Mycenae was located.

At the height of their power, around 1400 B.C., the Mycenaeans controlled the Aegean Sea and parts of the Mediterranean. Like the Minoans, the Mycenaeans also used writing. Studies of the Mycenaeans' script show that they spoke an early form of Greek.

The Minoans had gained much of their power through trade. Although the Mycenaeans traded widely, they relied upon conquest to spread their power. Greek myth tells the story of the Trojan War, a long struggle between Greece and the city of Troy on the west coast of Asia Minor, in present-day Turkey. There was an actual struggle over trade in the region, though the details of the legend were invented.

The Trojan War: According to the myth, Greece conquered Troy by using a trick --- the Trojan Horse. Greek warriors hid inside a huge wooden horse. The horse was rolled to the city gates. Thinking it was a gift, the Trojans brought the horse into their city. During the night, the Greek soldiers climbed out of the horse and let the rest of their army into Troy. The Greeks burned and looted Troy and then returned home.

Two epics, or long storytelling poems, about the Trojan War survive today. They are the Iliad and the Odyssey. These epics may have been composed by many people, but they are credited to one poet called Homer. The poems were important to the Greeks. They taught the Greeks what their gods were like and how the noblest, or best, of their heroes behaved. Today, people think these poems came from stories memorized by several poets and passed down by word of mouth through many generations. Homer may have been the last and greatest in this line of poets.

The Dark Ages of Greece: Not long after the Trojan War ended, civilization in Greece collapsed. No one knows exactly why. Life went on, but poverty was everywhere. People no longer traded beyond Greece for food and other goods. They had to depend on what they could raise or make themselves. Some were forced to move to islands or to the western part of Asia Minor. They were so concerned with survival that they even forgot the practice of writing.

These years, from the early 1100s B.C. to about 750 B.C., have been called Greece's Dark Ages. Without writing, people had to depend on word of mouth to keep their traditions and history alive. Old traditions were remembered only in the myths that were told and retold.

Greece's Dark Ages were not completely bleak, however. During that time, families gradually resettled in places where they could grow crops and raise animals. Some of these family farms may have developed into villages. When families chose where to build their farms, they favored places near rocky, protected hills. There they built fortifications and other structures to protect themselves from attack. The name for the fortified hill of an ancient Greek city is **acropolis**, meaning "upper city."

Side Note: Troy Discovered – Over the years, people came to believe that Troy and the Trojan War were fictional. An amateur archaeologist, disagreed. In the late 1800s, he used clues in the Iliad to pinpoint the location of Troy in Turkey. When he and later archaeologists dug there, they found nine layers of ruins from ancient cities. One was possibly the Troy of the Iliad and the Odyssey.

Governing Ancient Greece

Historians believe that sometime around 750 B.C., villages throughout Greece began joining to form cities. Each city formed near an acropolis. As these cities developed, they became **city states**. Hundreds of Greek city-states formed, each one more or less independent.

The Rule of the Aristocrats: The earliest rulers of city-states were probably chieftains or kings who were military leaders. By the end of Greece's Dark Ages, most city states were ruled by **aristocrats**, members of rich and powerful families. Aristocrats controlled most of the good land. They owned horses, chariots, and the best weapons, which made them stronger than others.

A New Type of Ruler: As the Greeks sailed to foreign ports, trading olive oil, marble, and other products, the city-states became richer. A middle class of merchants and artisans developed. They, too, wanted a say in the government of their cities. These people could not afford to equip themselves with horses and chariots for war. However, they could afford armor, swords, and spears. With these weapons, large groups of soldiers could fight effectively on foot. Gradually, military strength in the cities shifted from the aristocrats to the merchants and artisans.

As a result of these changes, aristocratic governments were often overthrown and replaced by rulers called tyrants. A tyrant was a ruler who took power by force. **Tyrants** were usually supported by the middle and working classes. Today, we think of tyrants as being cruel and violent. That was true of some Greek tyrants, but others ruled wisely and well.

Democracy: Rule by the People: Eventually, the people of many city-states overthrew tyrants who were too harsh. Some of the cities adopted a form of government that would have a lasting effect around the world for years to come. It was called **democracy**, a form of government in which citizens govern themselves. The city-state in which democracy was most fully developed was Athens.

About 594 B.C., an Athenian leader named Solon won the power to reform the laws. One of Solon's first laws canceled all debts, or money owed to other people, and freed citizens who had been enslaved for having debts. Another law allowed any male citizen of Athens aged 18 or older to debate important laws. These laws and others made Athens the leading democracy of the ancient world.

Citizens of Athens might be rich or poor. However, not everyone living in ancient Athens benefited from democracy. Only about one in five Athenians was a citizen.

In Athens, only men could be citizens. A citizen had to have an Athenian father and mother. Some of the people living in Athens were enslaved. These people, as well as women and foreigners, did not take part in democracy. But the men who were citizens of Athens were free and self-governing.

Questions:

1. Explain why someone might say the ancient Greeks were all islanders.
2. What happened during Greece's Dark Ages?
3. Who Could be granted citizenship in ancient Athens?

Guided Reading:

1. Who is Zeus?
2. Who did Zeus topple?
3. Name 3 things about the Geography of Greece?
4. Since there is not much farmland what did most Greeks become?
5. Name 3 things that all Greece's shared.
6. Which Greek civilization lived on the Main land?
7. Which Greek civilization lived on the islands?
8. Which Greek civilization defeated who?
9. Who fought in the Trojan War?
10. Where is the city of Troy located?
11. The war was over what?
12. How did it end?
13. What books helped teach the Greeks about their Gods?

14. What are 3 things that happened to Greece during the Dark Ages?
15. A fortified hill of an ancient Greek city is called?
16. A ruler who took power by force was called?
17. Members of rich and powerful families are called?
18. Form of Government in which citizens govern themselves is called?
19. By the end of the dark ages, most city-states were ruled by who?
20. As the Greek middle class became stronger, they were able to overthrow the aristocrats and put who into power?
21. Eventually the city-states overthrew tyrants and replaced them with what type of government?
22. What city-state was most fully developed in democracy?
23. What are two laws that Solon made to make Athens the leading democracy?
24. Who could be Athenian Citizens?

Notes:

The Rise of Greek Civilization

Geography	Origins	Government
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