

# Mediterranean Society: The Greek Phase

## Chapter 10

### The First Greek Civilizations

#### The Impact of Geography

- Greece is a mountainous peninsula about the size of Louisiana.
  - The mountains and the sea were the most important geographical influences on Greece.
    - The many mountain ranges caused small, independent communities to develop different ways of life.
    - Their size and independence probably encouraged political participation within, and war among, the different communities.
- Greece has many ports, inlets, and islands.
  - The Greeks became seafarers.
  - They sailed into the Aegean, the Black, and the Mediterranean Seas, making contact with the outside world and spreading colonies and trade throughout the Mediterranean area.

#### The Greeks in a Dark Age

- The period from 1100 to 750 B.C. in Greece is called the Dark Age because few records of that period exist.
  - Both population and food production fell.
- The works of Homer, one of the world's great poets, appeared near the end of the Dark Age.
  - Homer's two great epic poems were the Iliad and the Odyssey.
    - The Iliad takes place during the Trojan War.
    - The Odyssey tells of the Greek hero Odysseus' ten-year return to his home and family.
- Both of Homer's poems gave the Greeks an ideal past and a set of values.
  - The values in them were used to educate Greek males for generations.
  - The basic Homeric values were courage and honor.

### The Greek City-States

#### The Polis: Center of Greek Life

- By 750 B.C., the polis (city-state) became the central focus of Greek life.
  - Our word politics comes from the word polis.
  - It was a town, city, or village serving as a center where people met for political, economic, social, and religious activities.
- City-states varied in size.
  - Most were between a few hundred and several thousand people.
  - By contrast, Athens' population exceeded three hundred thousand by the fifth century B.C.
- Most of all the polis was a community of people who shared an identity and goals.
  - There were three classes:
    - citizens with political rights (adult males)
    - citizens without political rights (women and children)
    - noncitizens (slaves and resident aliens)
- Responsibilities accompanied rights.
  - As the Greek philosopher Aristotle stated, "We must regard every citizen as belonging to the state."
    - This loyalty, however, made the city-states fiercely patriotic and distrustful of each other.
  - The city-states' independence helped bring Greece to ruin by city-states warring with each other.

## Sparta

- To maintain power over the helots (conquered peoples), Sparta created a military state.
  - Between 800 and 600 B.C., the lives of the Spartans were rigidly controlled and disciplined.
  - Boys learned military discipline, entered the military at 20, and lived in the barracks until 30.
  - They ate all meals in public dining halls.
    - They ate a foul broth of pork boiled in animal blood, vinegar, and salt.
- Two kings who led the Spartan army headed the Spartan oligarchy.
  - Five men known as ephors were responsible for the youths' education and the citizens' conduct.
  - A council of two kings and 28 men over 60 years of age decided on the issues the assembly would vote on.
  - The assembly did not debate, but only voted.
- Sparta closed itself off from the outside world.
  - Travelers and travel were discouraged, except for military reasons.
  - Spartans frowned upon new ideas and the arts.
  - Only the art of war mattered.

## Athens

- A king ruled early Athens.
- The Athenians appointed the reformer Cleisthenes leader in 508 B.C.
  - He created a new council of five hundred to propose laws and supervise the treasury and foreign affairs.
  - Under Cleisthenes, the assembly of all male citizens had final authority to pass laws after free and open debate.
  - Cleisthenes' reforms laid the foundation for democracy.

## Classical Greece

### Daily Life in Classical Athens

- Athens had the largest population of any fifth-century B.C. Greek city-state, about 150,000 citizens and 35,000 foreigners before the plague of 430 B.C.
- The Athenian economy was based largely on farming and trade.
  - Grapes and olives were cultivated for wine and olive oil.
  - Athens had to import from 50 to 80 percent of its grain, a basic item in the Athenian diet.
- Women were citizens who could participate in religious festivals but had no other public life.
  - They could not own property beyond personal items, and always had a male guardian.
  - If they left the house, they had to have a companion.
  - An Athenian woman was expected to be a good wife, bear children, and keep up the household.
  - Girls did not get a formal education and married around 14 or 15.

## The Culture of Classical Greece

### Greek Religion

- Religion affected all aspects of Greek life because Greeks considered religion necessary for the well-being of the state.
  - Temples to the gods and goddesses were the major buildings in Greek cities.
- Homer described the deities of Greek religion.
  - Most important were the twelve gods and goddesses that lived on Mount Olympus.
- Greek religion did not have a body of doctrine, nor was it focused on morality.
- Religious festivals were used to honor the gods and goddesses.
  - These festivals included athletic events.
  - The games at Olympia honoring Zeus, first held in 776 B.C., are the basis of the modern Olympic Games.

## Greek Philosophy

- Philosophy ("love of wisdom") refers to an organized system of rational thought.
- In the fifth century B.C., Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle raised questions that have been debated ever since.
  - Aristotle did not believe in a world of ideal Forms.
    - He thought of forms, or essences, as part of the things of the material world.
  - Aristotle was interested, therefore, in analyzing and classifying things by observation and investigation.
    - In this way we could know reality.
    - He wrote on ethics, logic, politics, poetry, astronomy, geology, biology, and physics.
  - Like Plato, Aristotle was interested in the best form of government, one that would rationally direct human affairs.
    - He tried to find this form of government by analyzing existing governments.
    - He looked at the constitutions of 158 states and found three good forms:
      - monarchy, aristocracy, and constitutional government
      - Of these, the third was the best.
    - Aristotle's ideas about government are in his *Politics*.

## Alexander and the Hellenistic Kingdoms

### The Threat of Macedonia and Alexander the Great

- The Greeks viewed their northern neighbors, the Macedonians, as barbarians because they were rural people who did not live in city-states.
  - By the end of the fifth century B.C., however, Macedonia was a powerful kingdom.
- Alexander the Great became king of Macedonia when only 20.
  - Alexander considered non-Greeks the equal of Greeks and envisioned a world in which mixed cultures would live together.
- Alexander entered Asia Minor in 334 B.C. with an army of thirty-seven thousand soldiers, including five thousand cavalry.
  - By 331 B.C., Alexander had conquered the Persian Empire and established the city of Alexandria in Egypt.
  - By 327 B.C. he had moved through present-day Pakistan into northern India.
  - Wearied from many hard battles, his soldiers refused to continue on and Alexander agreed to return home.
  - In 323 B.C., he died in Babylon, exhausted from wounds, fever, and alcohol.
- Alexander created a new age, called the Hellenistic Era.
  - This era saw the expansion of the Greek language and ideas to the non-Greek world of Southwest Asia and beyond.

### The Hellenistic Kingdoms

- After Alexander's death, his empire fell apart as Macedonian generals vied for power.
  - There were four Hellenistic kingdoms:
    - Macedonia
    - Syria
    - Pergamum in western Asia Minor
    - Egypt
  - All were conquered later by the Romans.
- Unlike Alexander, these Hellenistic monarchs included only Greeks and Macedonians in their ruling class.

## Hellenistic Culture

- Important advances in mathematics and astronomy were made during the Hellenistic Age.
  - Aristarchus developed the theory that the sun is the center of the universe and that the earth rotates around the sun.
  - Eratosthenes determined that Earth is round and nearly calculated the correct circumference of the Earth.
- Archimedes was one of the most important Hellenistic scientists.
  - He established the value of pi and did important work in the geometry of spheres and cylinders.
- Athens remained a center for philosophy.
  - It became the center of two new schools of thought, Epicureanism and Stoicism.
  - Epicurus believed that human beings were free to follow their self-interest.
    - Happiness was the goal of life, and happiness was achieved by pursuing pleasure, the only true good.
      - Pleasure, however, was not satisfying physical appetites but rather the freedom from anxiety that comes from a mind at rest.
    - Achieving this peace meant removing oneself from public life, but not social life.
  - A teacher named Zeno founded Stoicism.
    - This school of thought also emphasized achieving happiness.
      - For the Stoics, however, happiness was gained by living in harmony with the will of God.
    - Stoics also regarded public service as noble and did not remove themselves from public life.