

### **Ancient Greece: Impact of Geography**

Greece is a mountainous peninsula (island) located in the Mediterranean region. The high mountain ranges enclosed fertile valleys. These valleys were isolated because transportation over the mountains was hazardous. The mountains isolated Greeks from one another, which caused Greek communities to develop their own way of life. Greece is made up of many mountains, isolated valleys, and small islands. This geography prevented the Greeks from building a large empire like that of Egypt or Mesopotamia.

Mountains and the sea cut off Greek centers of population from one another; such geographic barriers led the Greeks to organize many independent “city-states”. Each city-state was called a “polis”. The first loyalty of the people was not to Greece as a nation but to their own city-state. Each city-state had its own form of government and system of laws. However, Greeks also shared a common culture based on their language, religious beliefs, traditions, and economic ties. A “polis” typically was made up of two parts. There was a hilltop acropolis, which included marble temples. On the flatter ground below was the main city, within a wall. This area included the marketplace, theater, other public areas, and homes.



The sea also influenced ancient Greek society. Many Greeks turned to the sea because Greece has numerous good harbors on its irregular coastline. The climate was generally mild. Most Greeks lived along the coast, with its many excellent harbors. Because of its hilly terrain, parts of Greece — especially Athens — came to depend on trade. Many Greeks became merchants and traders who sailed the seas. The Greeks traded wine, olive oil, and pottery with other people of the Mediterranean. They sailed out to other islands, making contact with the outside world.

Later, they established colonies that spread Greek civilization throughout the Mediterranean world. These colonies became important as centers of Greek population, trade, and culture. Through such contacts, the Greeks learned astronomy, mathematics, navigation, and building techniques. For example, they borrowed the alphabet from the Phoenicians and the use of coined money from Lydia.

### **Questions to Answer**

1. How did mountains affect the development of Greece?
2. Why were Greeks more loyal to the city-state than to the nation?
3. How did location to the sea affect Greece?
4. Why were colonies important to Greece?