

Ancient Greece

The Homeric Age

The Poems of Homer

Much of our knowledge of the early Greeks derives from two long epic poems, the Iliad and the Odyssey, both attributed to Homer.

The Iliad relates

The Odyssey describes the wanderings of the Greek hero Odysseus returning home from the Trojan War.

People doubted the existence of Troy until its ruins were uncovered in the 1870s by the archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann.

Life During the Homeric Age

The Greeks lived primitively. They

- a) were ruled by tribal chieftains or kings usually advised by a council of elders,
- b) were farmers growing wheat, olives and grapes and shepherds herding sheep and cattle,
- c) warred constantly, using iron weapons and horse-drawn chariots, and
- d) believed that their gods actively intervened in human affairs.

Geographic Factors Influencing Greek Development

1. Location: Greece is a peninsula in the northeastern Mediterranean within easy sailing distance of the Fertile Crescent and Egypt.

The Greeks learned about writing, navigation and other achievements of these earlier civilizations mainly from Cretan and Phoenician merchants.

Ancient Greece



Geography cont.

2. Deep Harbors: Because Greece has numerous good harbors on its irregular coastline, many Greeks turned to the sea.

They became merchants and traders who sailed the Black, Aegean, and Mediterranean seas.

The Greeks exported **wine**, **olive oil**, pottery, cloth and metal implements; they imported foodstuffs, timber, hides and metal ores.

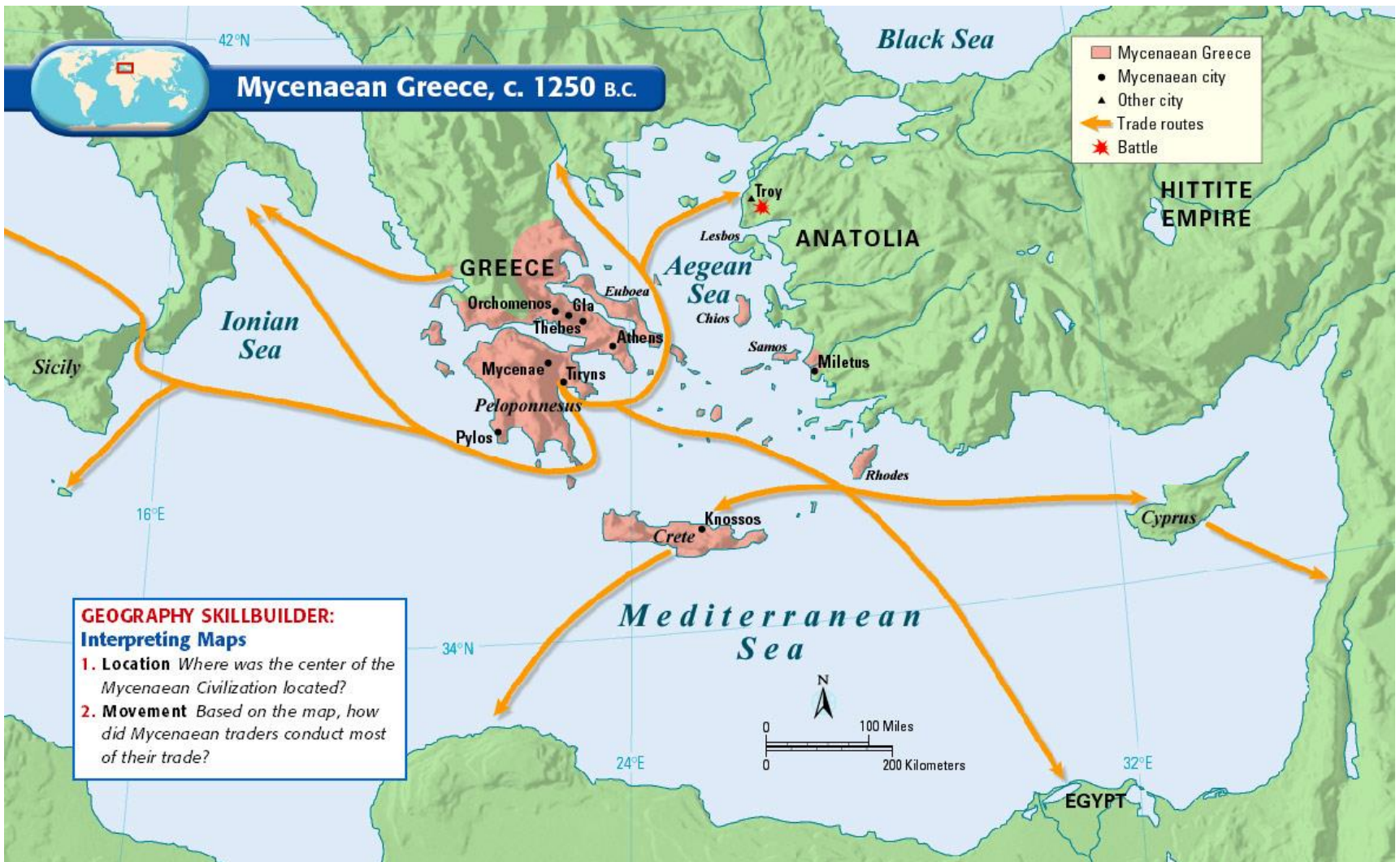
Geography cont.

3. Insufficient Farmland:

Since Greece lacked sufficient farmland, many Greeks between 750 and 500 B.C. established colonies on the shores of the Mediterranean and Black seas.

They founded important colonies at Byzantium at the mouth of the Black Sea, **Naples** in Italy, **Syracuse** in Sicily and **Marseilles** in France.

These colonies became important as centers of Greek population, trade and culture.



**GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER:
Interpreting Maps**

- 1. Location** Where was the center of the Mycenaean Civilization located?
- 2. Movement** Based on the map, how did Mycenaean traders conduct most of their trade?



Greece



Geography cont.

- Mountains:

Greece is a land of high mountain ranges enclosing fertile valleys. These valleys were isolated because transportation over the mountains was hazardous.

Such geographic barriers led the Greeks to organize, not a central government, but many independent city-states. Because the mountains helped cause political disunity, the first loyalty of the people was not to a larger Greece as a nation but to their own city-state.

Athens: Early Development

Athens would become the leading Greek city-state;

After 750 B.C. Athens slowly progressed from

- 1) Monarchy – rule by one man , the king, who inherited power by family succession; to
- 2) Aristocracy – rule by a small group of nobles who wrested power from the king; to
- 3) Tyranny – rule by one man, the tyrant, who seized power and generally favored the people ; and finally to
- 4) Democracy – rule by the people.

Athenian democracy encouraged similar reforms in a number of Greek city-states.

Discontent in Athens

a) **Economic.** The small farmers, unable to compete with low priced grain imports, were poverty stricken. They borrowed money from the wealthy nobles and mortgaged their land as security. When unable to pay their debts, these farmers

1. lost their land and

2. were sometimes sold into slavery

b) **Political.** The common people had no voice in the government. As the king lost power, control passed entirely into the hands of the aristocracy.

Leaders and Reformers in Athens

7th-5th centuries B.C.

As the nobles gradually responded to the people's demand for reforms, Athens advanced toward democracy. Leadership was provided by the following men, all drawn from the aristocratic class:

- a) **Draco** in 621 B.C. codified the existing Athenian laws. Limited by this code, the judges, who were nobles, could no longer interpret unwritten laws to favor their own class at the expense of the common people. The code provided severe punishment for crimes; death was the penalty for even a minor offense. (From Draco comes our word – Draconian, meaning harsh or severe.)

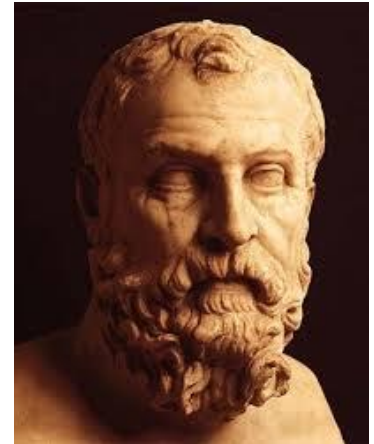
Draco



Solon

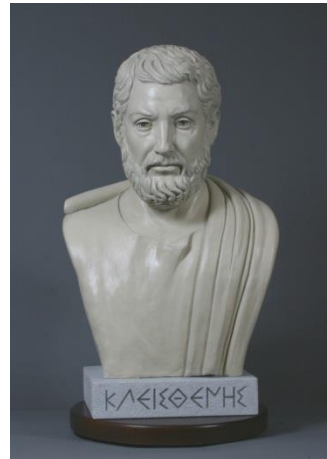
b) **Solon** in 594 B.C. rewrote the laws to

1. Cancel mortgages on land,
2. Free persons enslaved for debt,
3. Limit the amount of land owned by one person,
4. Allow all male citizens to serve on juries,
5. Grant male commoners the right to vote in the legislature, the Assembly. Thus, for the first time, the common man gained a voice in his government.



Despite Solon's reforms, the wealthy retained control of the government. Only they could gain membership in the policymaking and administrative body, the Council. Only they could serve as chief executives.

c) **Cleisthenes** in 508 B.C. expanded democracy by extending citizenship to more males and permitting men of all economic classes to serve in the Council. Under Cleisthenes' leadership the Assembly adopted the practice of ostracism, banishing for ten years any citizen deemed dangerous to the state. Ostracism was intended to prevent the rise of an Athenian dictator.



Two Democracies: Major Differences

Ancient Athens

- Direct democracy
- Citizenship based on Athenian ancestry; generally denied to aliens;
- Women denied voting and other rights;
- Slavery permitted

Modern America

- Representative democracy
- Citizenship based on American birth; granted to immigrants following naturalization;
- Women and men granted equal rights;
- Slavery prohibited

Greece Stands Up to Persia

