

CHAPTER
5

CHAPTERS IN BRIEF

Classical Greece, 2000 B.C.–300 B.C.

Summary

CHAPTER OVERVIEW A rugged Greek landscape causes creation of independent city-states. They fight one another but unite to defeat invaders from Persia. Athens becomes the home of culture, but its empire collapses after years of war with Sparta. Alexander conquers Greece, the Persian Empire, and Egypt. After his death, a new culture blends influences from territory he conquered.

❶ Cultures of the Mountains and the Sea

KEY IDEA The shape of the land caused separate groups of Greek-speaking peoples to develop societies in isolation from one another.

The lives of the ancient Greeks were shaped by the geography of their land. Greece is a rocky land with high mountains and deep valleys. It was difficult to move over this land. So, Greeks living in different areas could not easily be united. Good farmland covered only a small part of Greece and could not support many people. The Greeks had easy access to the sea, however. They became excellent sailors, and trade became important. The climate is mild, which allowed Greek men to spend much time outdoors. They attended public events and were active in civic life.

The first culture to arise in Greece was that of the Mycenaeans. They were among the Indo-Europeans who invaded many areas around 2000 B.C. The Mycenaeans were ruled by powerful warrior-kings in their main city, Mycenae. Other rulers lived in palace-forts in other cities.

The Mycenaeans came in contact with the Minoan culture of Crete. They adopted many parts of this culture, including the form of writing and some religious beliefs. Because of this contact, the Mycenaeans also became interested in trade. According to ancient legend, Mycenaeans also had a long war with the people of Troy, a city in Anatolia. The famous Trojan Horse—a gigantic, hollow wooden horse hiding Greek soldiers—is part of that legend.

The culture of the Mycenaeans fell about 1200 B.C. Sea raiders destroyed their palaces. For the next 400 years, Greece went into decline—a decline so deep that no written records exist from this period. However, through spoken word, Greeks of this time continued to relate epic stories of the earlier age of heroes. One long poem, the *Iliad*,

tells of the war with Troy. The Greeks also created a rich set of myths. Many of them tried to explain the world in terms of the actions of the Greek gods.

❷ Warring City-States

KEY IDEA Greek culture produced many city-states. They had different forms of government, one of which is democracy.

By 750 B.C., the center of Greek life was the polis, or city-state. This name was given to Greek cities and the countryside villages surrounding them. Each city-state was independent. The people who lived in them were fiercely proud of their homes. These city-states had different kinds of government. A monarch or king might rule some. A family of nobles might rule a few. A few wealthy merchants might rule others. Also, the idea of a government made of representatives chosen by the people took hold in some city-states. The most prominent of these city-states was Athens.

In Athens, as in other city-states, the wealthy and poor clashed in a contest for power. Athens, however, avoided major political upheaval by introducing reforms. Solon, an Athenian leader who came to power in 594 B.C., removed some of the laws that the poor did not like, such as debt slavery. He also opened the assembly, where laws were discussed and approved, to all Athenian citizens. Some 90 years later, the Athenian leader Cleisthenes introduced further reforms. The most important of these was the setting up of the Council of Five Hundred. This body proposed laws and advised the assembly. Council members were chosen by lot.

The reforms of Solon and Cleisthenes allowed Athenian citizens to take part in a limited democracy. But citizenship was limited to a small group of Athenians. Only free adult male property owners were considered citizens. Women, foreigners, and slaves were denied citizenship and played no role in Athenian political life.

Sparta, a very strong city-state in the south of Greece, developed in a very different way. The leaders of Sparta made their city a military state. Boys joined the army at age seven and went through a long period of training as soldiers. Spartan women ran the farms and other businesses, freeing their husbands to serve in the army. A small Council of Elders suggested laws that had to be approved by a vote of all Spartan citizens.

Over the years, the Greeks developed the ability to make iron weapons. Because these cost less than weapons made of bronze, more people could afford them. Soon each city-state had its own army. The soldiers were from all walks of life—armed with iron weapons and ready to defend their homes. This new citizen army proved itself in fending off an attack from the east. The powerful Persian Empire set its sights on conquering the Greeks. In 490 B.C., Persian ships landed 25,000 soldiers on the coast of Greece. At the Battle of Marathon, the Greeks won a tremendous victory that saved Athens.

The Persians returned ten years later. The Greeks lost a battle on land, despite the heroic efforts of a small band of Spartans. The Persians also burned Athens. However, the ships of Athens won a great sea battle. The Spartans followed it with another victory on land. The threat from Persia was over.

③ Democracy and Greece's Golden Age

KEY IDEA *During Greece's Golden Age, democratic ideas and Greek culture flourished.*

Athens chose Pericles as its leader, and he served in that role for more than three decades. In that time, he took many steps to make Athens better. He had three main goals:

1. He wanted to make Athens more democratic. So he created more positions in government that paid a salary. Poor people could hold these jobs.
2. He wanted to make Athens stronger. The city was the head of a group of more than 200 Greek city-states called the Delian League. Pericles used the league's money to make sure that Athens had the strongest navy in the Mediterranean.
3. He wanted to make Athens beautiful. So he again used Delian League money to fund a great building program in his city.

Athens also became home to a group of very skilled playwrights. Some wrote tragedies, plays

about the pain and suffering of human life. Others wrote comedies, which often included important ideas. Some plays were critical of Athenians, proof that Athens was a free and open society.

After being rivals for many years, Sparta and Athens finally went to war beginning in 431 B.C. The conflict ended badly for Athens. In 430 B.C. a horrible plague killed a large portion of Athens' people. After several battles, the war dragged on until Athens finally gave up in 404 B.C. Athens had lost its empire.

In the time of uncertainty after Athens' defeat, several great philosophers appeared. They tried to understand human life. One, Socrates, believed deeply in truth and justice, but many people did not trust him. He was convicted of treason and forced to drink poison. His pupil, Plato, recorded many of his ideas and became an important thinker in his own right. A third was Aristotle. He wrote books that summarized all things known to the Greeks at the time. He also invented a way of thinking logically. His work was very influential for many centuries.

④ Alexander's Empire

KEY IDEA *Alexander the Great conquered Persia and Egypt. Then he moved as far east as the Indus River in northwest India.*

North of Greece was the kingdom of Macedonia. The Greeks looked down on the people there because they lacked the great culture of Greece. The Macedonians were tough fighters, though, and had a strong leader in King Philip II. He decided to use his army to invade Greece. The Greek city-states united too late to save themselves. The Macedonians won, and Greek independence was now over. Philip did not enjoy his victory for long, though. He died just two years later, and his son Alexander became king at age 20.

Alexander was a brilliant general, just like his father. He had been taught well, and he prepared to carry out his father's dream of conquering the Persian Empire. In 334 B.C., Alexander invaded Persia. He won two stunning victories and then moved south to enter Egypt. He was crowned pharaoh and founded a city that he named for himself—Alexandria. He then turned back to Persia and won another great battle, which ended all Persian resistance. The empire was now his.

The young king pushed east, taking his army as far as India. He won another battle and moved

deeper into India. However, after many years of marching and fighting, the soldiers wanted to return home. Alexander agreed, and turned back. On the way back, he began to make plans for how to govern his new empire. Then he suddenly fell ill and died. He was just 32 years old.

Three of Alexander's generals divided his empire. One ruled Macedonia and Greece. Another took control of Egypt. The third became ruler of the lands that used to be in the Persian Empire. Alexander's empire was not long-lasting, but it had important effects. After Alexander, the people of Greece and Persia and all the lands between mixed together and shared ideas and culture.

9 The Spread of Hellenistic Culture

KEY IDEA *Hellenistic culture was formed of ideas from Greece and other lands. It flourished throughout Greece, Egypt, and Asia.*

A new culture arose—the Hellenistic culture. It blended Greek with Egyptian, Persian, and Indian influences. The center of this culture was Alexandria, Egypt. Located in the delta of the Nile River on the Mediterranean Sea, it had a ship harbor. Trade was lively and Alexandria had a large population from many different countries.

Alexandria was also a beautiful city. Its huge lighthouse towered over the harbor to show a light to incoming ships. Its famous museum had rooms with works of art, a zoo, and a garden. Its magnificent library held half a million scrolls of papyrus that contained everything known in the Hellenistic world. It was the first true research library, and scholars read through the scrolls.

These scholars kept alive what was known about science. Some used an observatory to look at the stars and the planets. One of these astronomers developed two important ideas. He argued that the sun was actually larger than the earth, which no one had thought to be the case before. He also suggested that the earth and other planets revolved around the sun. Other astronomers rejected these ideas, though, and their views remained common for many centuries. Another scientist tried to estimate the size of the earth. He came extremely close, figuring the earth to be about 16 percent larger than its actual size.

The thinkers in Alexandria also made advances in mathematics. Euclid wrote a book with the basic ideas of geometry; his approach is still used today. Archimedes was another important scientist and mathematician. He invented many clever machines, including the Archimedes screw, which could be used to bring water from a low level to a higher one. It was used to bring water to fields being farmed.

Two new schools of philosophy arose in these times. The Stoics argued that people should live a moral life to keep them in harmony with natural laws. Desire, power, and wealth, they thought, could hurt a person's moral well-being. The Epicureans said that people could rely only on what they learned from their five senses. They urged everyone to live moral lives. People should try to do things in moderate ways, rather than taking anything to an extreme.

The arts flourished in the Hellenistic age as well. Sculpture, in particular, had several notable achievements. The sculpture of this time differed from that of the earlier Greek style. In the past, figures had been idealized, as sculptors tried to show a perfect form. In the Hellenistic age, figures were more realistic and emotional.

Review

1. **Recognizing Effects** What effect did geography have on the way Greece developed?
2. **Summarizing** What were the different forms of government of the Greek city-states?
3. **Comparing and Contrasting** Compare and contrast Athens and Sparta.
4. **Drawing Conclusions** What happened to Alexander's empire, and why?
5. **Synthesizing** What was the long-lasting effect of Alexander's empire?