

# The Rise of Greek Civilization



**BEFORE  
YOU  
READ**

## Reach Into Your Background

What makes the community where you live special? What makes it a community? Does it

have traditions and customs of its own? What are they? What does your community share with its neighbors?

### Questions to Explore

1. How did geography influence the development of civilization in Greece?
2. How did democracy develop in Athens?

### Key Terms

peninsula	aristocrat
epic	tyrant
acropolis	democracy
city-state	

### Key People and Places

Homer  
Solon  
Troy

**F**irst 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 (TYT unz). 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 had six children. The youngest, mighty Zeus (zoos), toppled Cronos from his throne.

With such words, 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.

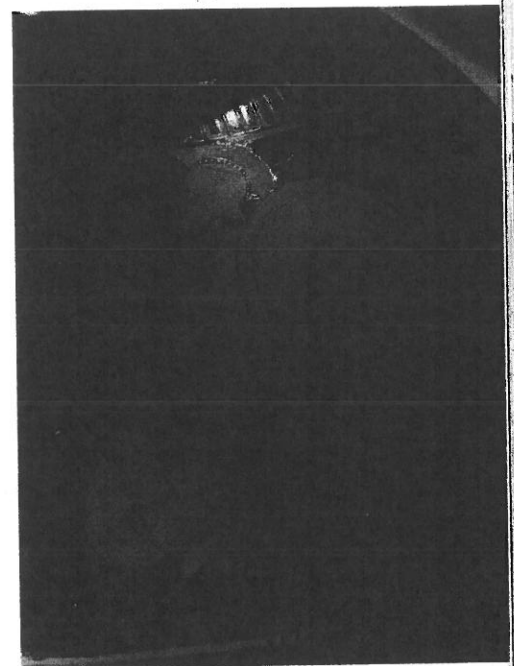
## Greece's Geographic Setting

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 barely cling to the mainland. Greece is a peninsula made up of peninsulas. A peninsula is an area of land surrounded by water on three sides. Look at the map. As you can see, no part of Greece is very far from the sea.

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

What was life like for people living in Greece 3,000 years ago? In a way, the ancient Greeks were all islanders. Some lived on real islands completely surrounded by water or on small peninsulas. Others lived on

▼ The sea was an important part of life in ancient Greece. It inspired an artist to decorate this clay pot with soldiers riding dolphins.



► Several typical geographic features appear in this picture of the northwestern coast of Greece. These features include a rocky coastline and rugged mountains. **Critical Thinking** How did the geographic features shown affect the way ancient people lived in this area?



## READ ACTIVELY

**Predict** What effect do you think the geography of Greece had on the kind of communities that developed?

“land islands.” Mountains cut off these small communities from each other. The geography of Greece made it hard for people from different communities to get together.

For this reason, it is no surprise that ancient Greek communities thought of themselves as separate countries. Each one developed its own customs and beliefs. Each believed its own land, traditions, and way of life were the best. And 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 is easy to forget that they shared a common heritage, spoke the same language, and worshipped the same gods.

## Greek Beginnings

All Greeks shared a wealth of stories and myths about their origins. The myths explained the creation of the universe and the features of nature. They described the adventures of Greek heroes and gods. Various stories told how cities and traditions came to be.

Some of the most important stories told were about the Trojan War, a long struggle between Greece and the city of Troy on the west coast of Asia Minor. All the great heroes from both regions joined in the war.

**The Trojan War** The story of the Trojan War has everything a story should have—great battles, plots and schemes, loyalty and betrayal. According to the myths, a prince named Paris, from the wealthy city of Troy, was the guest of a Greek chieftain named Menelaus (men uh LAY us). Breaking the law of the gods, Paris kidnapped Menelaus' wife, Helen, and took her to Troy. To get Helen back, the Greek chieftains sent a huge army to attack Troy.

For ten long years, the war dragged on. Many heroes on both sides perished. At last, the Greeks conquered Troy by a trick—the Trojan Horse. The Greeks burned and looted Troy and then returned home.

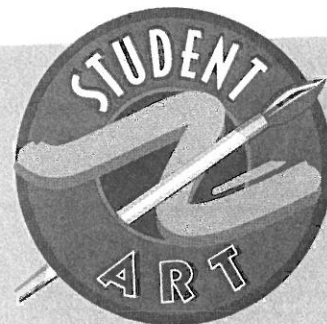
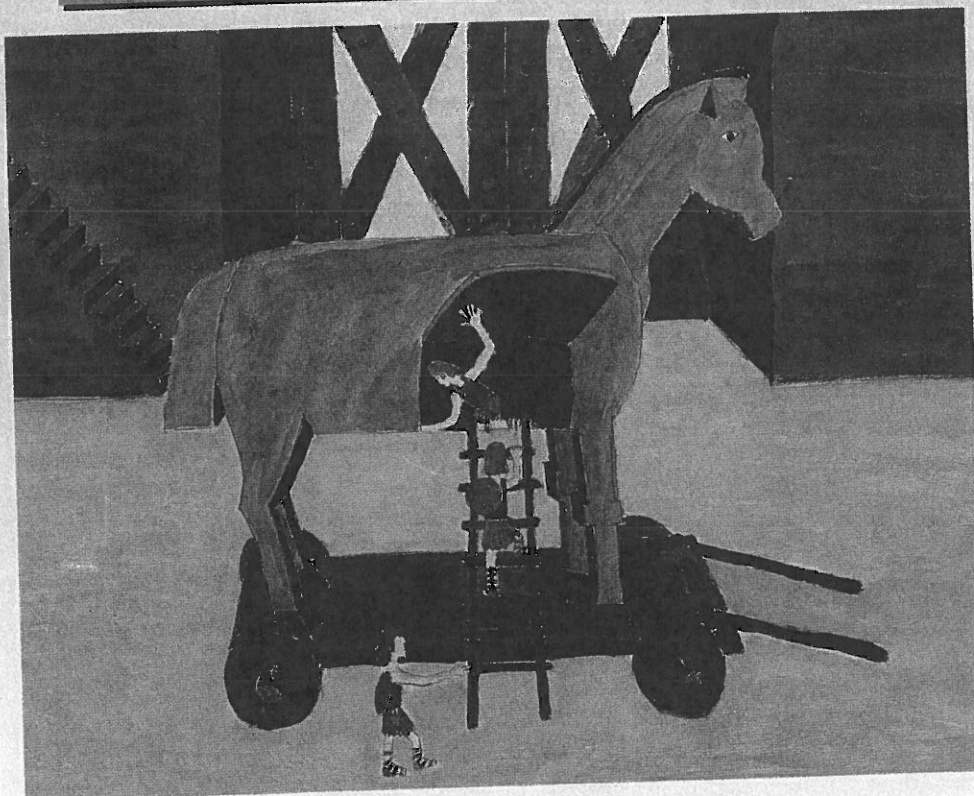
Two epics, or long poems, about the Trojan War survive today. They are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The *Iliad* tells about a quarrel between Greek leaders in the last year of the war. The *Odyssey* describes the adventures of the hero Odysseus (oh DIS ee us) as he struggles to return to his homeland from Troy.

These epics may have been composed by many people, but they are credited to a poet called Homer. The poems were important to the Greeks. They taught them what their gods were like and how the noblest 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 who told about the Trojan War.



**Ask Questions** What would you like to know about the Trojan War?

### Trojan Horse



**Sissy Pachiadaki**  
age 12  
Greece

This picture shows how the Trojan Horse helped the Greeks conquer Troy. Greek warriors hid inside a huge wooden horse. The horse was rolled to the city gates. The Trojans thought it was a gift to the gods, so they brought it into their city. During the night, the Greek soldiers climbed out of the horse and let the rest of their army into Troy.



◀ These warriors decorate a vase from the 500s B.C. The background is the natural color of the baked clay. The black figures were painted on.

### The Dark Ages of Greece

Not long after the end of Troy, civilization in Greece collapsed. No one knows exactly why. Life went on, but poverty was everywhere. People no longer traded for food and other goods beyond Greece. They had to depend on what they could raise themselves. Some were forced to move to islands and

to the western part of Asia Minor. The art of writing disappeared.

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 this time, families gradually began to resettle in places where they could grow crops and raise animals. Some of these family farms may have developed into villages. When they chose places to build their farms, people favored places near rocky, protected hills where they would be safe from attack. The name for such a place was **acropolis**, meaning "high city."

### Governing the City-States

Sometime around 750 B.C., villages in a small area probably joined together to form a city in the shadow of an acropolis. At that time, each city began to develop its own traditions and its own form of government and laws. Each one was not only a city, but also a separate independent state. Today, we call these tiny nations **city-states**. Each included a city and the villages and fields surrounding it. Hundreds of Greek city-states grew up, each more or less independent.



**Troy Discovered** Over the years, people came to believe that Troy and the Trojan War were fiction. An amateur archaeologist, Heinrich Schliemann, disagreed. In the late 1800s he used clues in the *Iliad* to pinpoint the location of Troy. 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*.

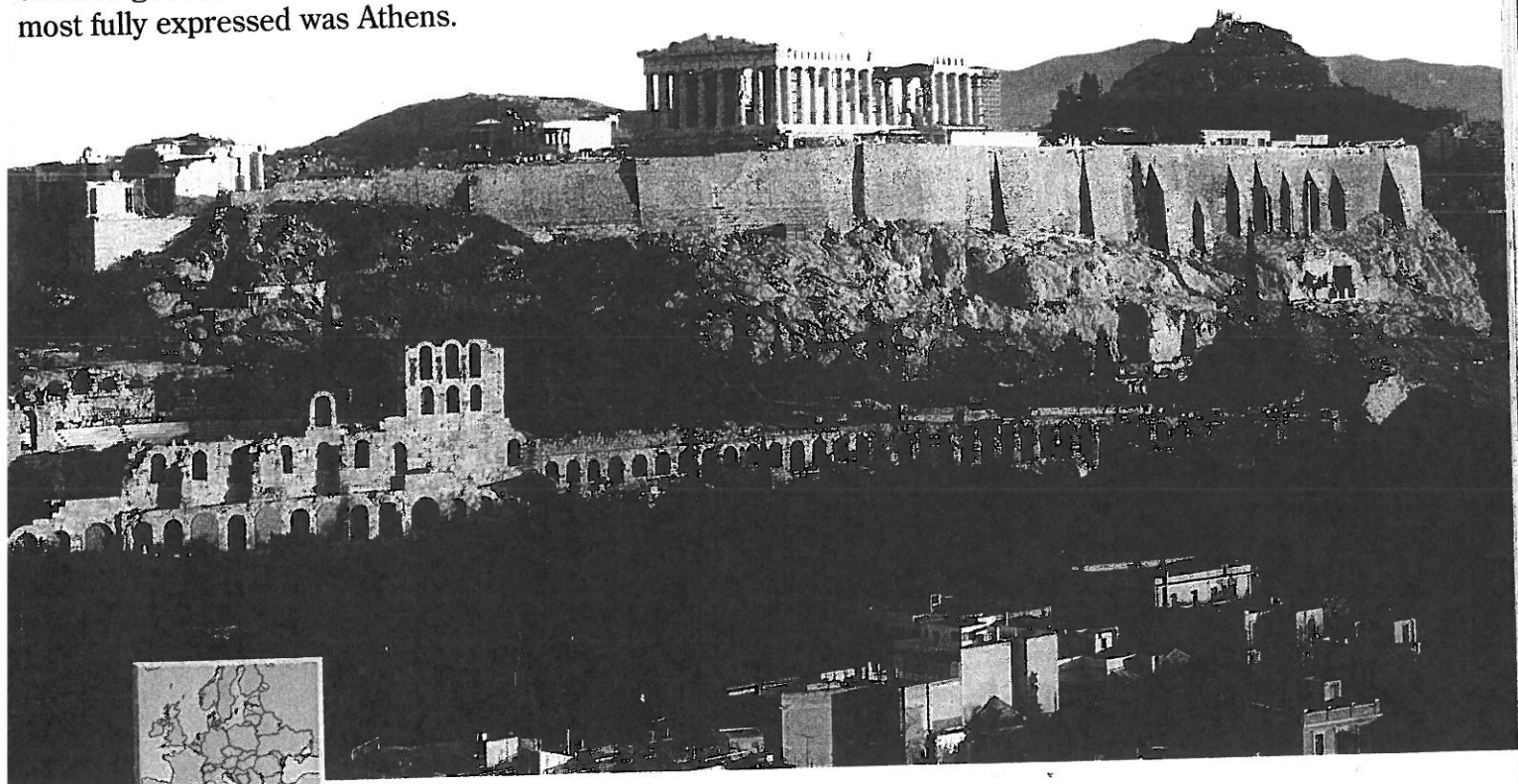
**Aristocracy: Nobles Rule** The earliest rulers of city-states were probably chieftains or kings who were military leaders. By the end of Greece's Dark Ages, most city-states were ruled by **aristocrats**, members of the rich and powerful families. Aristocrats controlled most of the good land. They could afford horses, chariots, and the best weapons to make themselves 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 wanted some 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 aristocrats to 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 seized 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.

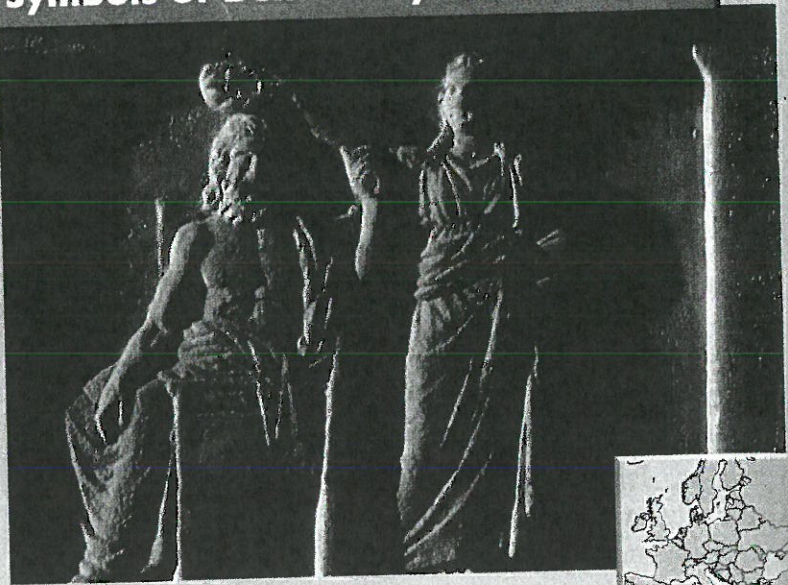
**Democracy: Rule by the People** Eventually, the people of many city-states overthrew tyrants who were too harsh. A few cities moved to a form of government called **democracy**. In a democracy, citizens govern themselves. The city-state in which democracy was most fully expressed was Athens.

▼ The Acropolis in Athens was known for its beautiful temples. It was also a fortress. During wartime, people moved to the Acropolis where the enemy could not easily reach them.



## Symbols of Democracy

In this carving (right), the woman stands for democracy. She is crowning a man seated on a throne. He stands for the Athenian people. The carving reminded the people of Athens of their duty to take part in government. Greek citizens served on juries at trials. Bronze plates like this one (below) were used to identify and choose members of juries.



**Connect** Would you like to have lived under the democracy in Athens? Why or why not?

About 594 B.C., a wise Athenian leader called Solon won the power to reform the laws. Solon was well known for his fairness. His laws reformed both the economy and the government of Athens. One of his first laws canceled all debts and freed citizens who had been enslaved for having debts. Another law allowed any male citizen of Athens aged 18 or older to have a say in debating important laws. These laws and others allowed Athens to become the leading democracy of the ancient world.

However, not everyone living in ancient Athens benefited from democracy. Only about one in five Athenians was a citizen. Some of the people living in Athens were enslaved. These people did not take part in democracy. Nor did women and foreigners. But the men who were citizens of Athens were free and self-governing.

## SECTION 1 REVIEW

1. **Define** (a) peninsula, (b) epic, (c) acropolis, (d) city-state, (e) aristocrat, (f) tyrant, (g) democracy.
2. **Identify** (a) Homer, (b) Solon, (c) Troy.

3. Describe the three kinds of governments that developed in the Greek city-states after the Dark Ages.
4. What group of Athenians benefited most from democracy? Why?

### Critical Thinking

5. **Recognizing Cause and Effect** How did the mountains in Greece contribute to the rise of city-states?

### Activity

#### 6. Writing to Learn

Describe conditions in Greece during the period between the 1100s B.C. and the 700s B.C. Why are these years referred to as Greece's Dark Ages?