

World History
Objective 2.02
Lesson

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Objective 2.02: Lesson: Identify the roots of Greek civilization and recognize its achievements from the Minoan through the Hellenistic period.

Question? How did the Ancient Greeks shape our culture?

Geography played an important role in the development of Greek civilization. Unlike the larger land masses of Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, and China, Greece occupies a small area. Consisting of very mountainous land and surrounded by the sea, Greece developed into separate city states; these city states with their own governments became dependent upon the sea for a living and led to the Greeks civilization being spread throughout the Mediterranean world.

The first of many civilizations was the Minoan, which developed on the island of Crete. This was followed by Mycenae, the first mainland Greek state. Mycenae developed an extensive commercial network throughout the Mediterranean and examples of their pottery has been found as far away as Syria and Egypt in the east and southern Italy in the west.

Mycenaean culture was a warrior culture and we know of some of their real or supposed adventures since they were recounted by Homer in the Iliad and the Odyssey.

After the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization, city-states (polis) developed throughout Greece. In these city-states the governments varied in size and structure but generally the people who shared a common identity and common goals formed the community. Citizens had rights but these were coupled with responsibilities.

The two most powerful city-state that developed were Athens and Sparta. Sparta was run in a military manner with the people's lives tightly controlled and highly regimented. After a period of compulsory military service in which men were required to live in military barracks, Spartans, at age 30, were allowed to vote in the assembly and live at home. The Spartan government was an oligarchy headed by two kings. Sparta wanted a secure military state so its citizens were not allowed to travel abroad and ideas from outside of Sparta were discouraged. The art of war was the ideal for Sparta.

Athens, which eventually became the chief rival of Sparta, developed in a very different manner. After an early period when they were ruled first by a king and later by aristocrats, fear of civil war led to a series of reforms in the government. This eventually led to rule by a council of 500 and created the foundations for Athenian democracy.

Under Pericles, direct democracy came into being. Every male citizen participated directly in government decision making and voted on all major issues. Athens became the center of Greek culture. Art, architecture, and philosophy flourished.

Eventually the rival city states were unable to tolerate the other's system and a series of disputes led to the Great Peloponnesian War. Sparta was the eventual winner of the war, but in fact, neither won. They had so weakened each other that Macedon, under its leader, Philip, and his son, Alexander, became the rulers of the entire Greek peninsula and most of the Eastern Mediterranean lands.

The civilization that developed under Alexander, known as the Hellenistic civilization, incorporated ideas from the many countries that Alexander conquered.

Now that you have read about the early Greek civilizations, use this material and additional material from your textbooks and other sources to make a visual representation (chart) showing four civilizations: Minoans, Mycenaeans, Spartans, and Athenians. For each civilization, list their location, values and trade. Then, make two Venn Diagrams using all four civilizations and title one: values and the other trade.