

## ANCIENT GREECE

### Geography and the Settlement of Greece

#### Section 1: Introduction

**Vocabulary: Peninsula** is a piece of land surrounded by water on three sides

In this unit, you will learn about the civilization of ancient Greece. This remarkable culture flourished between 750 and 338 B.C.E. Ancient Greek art, ideas, and writings continue to influence us today. Greece is a small country in southern Europe. It is shaped a little like a hand, with fingers that reach into the Mediterranean Sea. The mainland of Greece is a peninsula. A **peninsula** is land that is surrounded on three sides by water. Greece also includes many islands throughout the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. Mainland Greece is a land of steep, rocky mountains, almost entirely surrounded by turquoise-blue seas. The ancient Greeks lived on farms or in small villages scattered throughout the country. These farms and villages were isolated, or separated, from one another by the high mountains. In this chapter, you will explore how Greece's geography influenced the way the ancient Greeks lived. You will learn why they lived and farmed in isolated communities. You will also discover how they used the sea to establish colonies and trade with people from other lands.

#### Section 2: Isolated Communities and the Difficulties of Travel

**Vocabulary: settlement** a small community or village

**shelter** a place that provides protection from weather, such as a house

In ancient Greece, communities were isolated from one another because of the high mountains. It was hard to travel over the mountains, so there was little communication between people in different **settlements**. Travel by land was especially difficult. People walked, or rode in carts pulled by oxen or mules. Roads were unpaved. Sharp rocks frequently shattered wooden wheels, and wagons could become stuck in mud. Only the

wealthy could afford to ride horses. Travelers could stop at inns on the main roads, but many inns provided only **shelter**. People had to bring their own food and other supplies with them. Slaves or pack animals carried bedding, food, and other necessities. With all these things to carry, the Greeks had to travel in groups that moved more slowly than someone traveling alone. And there was always the danger of being attacked by bandits. Traveling by boat was easier, but it was still uncomfortable and dangerous. Travelers might be attacked by pirates or robbed by dishonest sailors. The greatest danger was from the sea itself. Sudden storms sometimes drove ships off course or sent them smashing into the rocky shoreline. Even in open waters, ships could sink. The Greeks treated the sea with great respect. Whenever possible, sailors kept their ships close to shore. They sailed only during daylight and stopped each night to anchor. And a wise captain always made a sacrifice to the sea god Poseidon before sailing.

### Section 3: Farming in Ancient Greece

Most people in ancient Greece survived by farming. But farming wasn't easy in that mountainous land. Even in the plains and valleys, the land was rocky and water was scarce. No major rivers flow through Greece, and it rains mostly during the winter months. With so little flat land available, Greek farmers had to think of the best ways to use the land they had. Some farmers built wide earth steps into the hills to create more flat land for planting. A few farmers were able to grow wheat and barley, but most grew crops that needed less land, especially grapes and olives. Greek farmers produced a lot of olive oil, which was used for cooking, soap, and fuel for lamps. Ancient Greek farmers grew food for their own families. In addition to small vegetable gardens, many farmers planted hillside orchards of fruit and nut trees. Some Greek families kept bees to make honey. Honey was the best known sweetener in the ancient world. Greek farmers also raised animals. Instead of cattle, which need lots of flat land for grazing, they raised sheep and goats, which can graze on the sides of mountains. Sheep supplied wool for clothing, while goats provided milk and cheese. Farmers kept a few oxen, mules, and

donkeys for plowing and transportation. Many Greek families also kept pigs and chickens. The shortage of good farmland sometimes led to wars between Greek settlements, with each one claiming land for itself. As you will see, some settlements were also forced to look beyond the mainland for new sources of food and other goods.

#### Section 4: Starting Colonies

**Vocabulary: colony** an area controlled by people from another country

**colonist** a person who lives in a colony

As the populations of Greek communities grew, some communities did not have enough farmland to feed their people. One solution to this problem was to start colonies. Colonies are settlements in distant places. Many Greek communities sent people over the sea, hoping they could grow food in new lands and send it home. These people were called colonists. Colonists had many preparations to make before starting their journey. Often they began by asking the Greek gods if their efforts would be successful. To do this, they consulted an oracle. An oracle was a holy person whom they believed could communicate with the gods. Next, the colonists gathered food and supplies. They made sure to take a flame from their town's sacred fire so they could start a sacred fire in their new home. Starting a colony wasn't easy. First, there was a long sea voyage to survive. Then settlers had to find a place for their colony. They looked for areas that had natural harbors and good farmland. They also tried to avoid places where the local people might be strong enough to prevent them from settling. Finally, they had to establish their new community and work hard to make it survive. The Greeks established colonies over a period of more than 300 years, from 1000 to 650 B.CE. The first group of settlers created a colony called Ionia in Asia Minor, in what is today Turkey. Later, Greeks started colonies in Spain, France, Italy, and Africa, and along the coast of the Black Sea. The colonies helped to spread Greek culture. Some of the colonies became quite wealthy through farming and trade. Colonists continued to enjoy the rights of citizens back home, including the right to participate in Greek athletic games.

## Section 5: Trading for Needed Goods

**Vocabulary: merchant** a person who makes money by selling goods

Besides starting new colonies, many Greek settlements on the mainland used trade to get goods they needed. Some settlements had enough farmland to take care of their own needs, so they traded very little. But others relied on trade because they had too little land to grow everything they required. The Greeks traded among the city-states, with Greek colonies, and in the wider Mediterranean region. Olive oil, pottery, and wine from the mainland were traded for such goods as grain, timber, and metal. Most goods traveled on ships owned by merchants. Merchant ships were built of wood, with large rectangular cloth sails. Merchants built their ships for space to hold goods rather than for speed. Because ships traveled about three to five miles per hour, journeys were long. A one-way trip from the mainland could take two months. Navigating the ships was difficult. The Greeks had no compasses or charts. They had only the stars to guide them. The stars could tell sailors where they were, but they could not tell them what hazards lay nearby. No lighthouses warned sailors of dangerous coastlines. In spite of these dangers, adventurous sailors carried more and more goods, and trade flourished along the Mediterranean coast.

### Summary

In this chapter, you learned how the Greeks settled in isolated communities because of their country's mountainous geography. Most Greeks survived by farming, but good farmland was scarce. So the Greeks took to the seas, creating new colonies and trading with other peoples. In the next chapter, you will see how the isolated communities of ancient Greece developed their own customs, including different forms of government.