

CHAPTER 10-MEDITERRANEAN SOCIETY: THE GREEK PHASE

Greek civilization began on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea in the late 3rd millennium B.C.E. By 2000 B.C.E. Indo-European peoples moved into the Greece mainland and established a city at Mycenae, which became the center for and gave its name to the Mycenaean civilization. The Myceneans expanded outward to overpower the Minoans and also establish colonies in Italy and Anatolia. This seafaring civilization became a center of Mediterranean trade and established colonies on some of neighboring islands; however by 1100 B.C.E. it had fallen under foreign control.

The most important organizational unit in Greek civilization was the *polis*, or city-state. Even though all Greeks shared a common language and culture, each city-state developed distinct characteristics. Sparta, for example, was a military-based culture, while Athens was the birthplace of democracy. As significant as the culture of Sparta was at the time, it is Athens's system of democracy that made the most lasting contribution to world history. Athenian democracy was not comprehensive, being limited to free males who were Athenian citizens, but it was more democratic than any other system to that point in history.

In addition to democracy, the Greek economy and society gave us many ideas that are still part of society today, including the Olympic Games, the poetry of Homer and Sappho, drama, and the beginnings of western philosophy. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others not only helped form Greek society but also provided the basis for European philosophy into the 1700's and influenced both Christianity and Islam.

The best-known Athenian was Pericles (443-429 B.C.E.), the popularly elected leader of Athens whose reign brought some peace to Athens. It was during this period that the Greeks began to expand outward. They established colonies, spread trade, as well as the Greek language and culture. They also became involved in a series of wars with the Persians. The Persian king, Xerxes, attempted to invade Greece but was defeated. However, as a result of this Persian invasion, the Greeks formed the Delian League to unite themselves against the Persians. When the Persian threat no longer existed, Athens still wanted to be the leader of the League. The result was a Greek society split into two factions, with Sparta on one side and Athens on the other. The two sides confronted each other in what was known as the Peloponnesian War.

It was into these weakened Greek states that Alexander (the Great) of Macedon came. Between 336 B.C.E. and 323 B.C.E. he conquered Greece, Egypt, Syria and even moved into northern India (refer to chapter 9). After Alexander's death in 323 B.C.E. his kingdom was divided into three parts, but his influence was felt for years to come.

Key Concept 2.1. The Development and Codification of Religious and Cultural Traditions

- II. New belief systems and cultural traditions emerged and spread, often asserting universal truths.

- V. Artistic expressions, including literature and drama, architecture, and sculpture, show distinctive cultural developments. (Arts in Classical civilizations)

Key Concept 2.2. The Development of States and Empires

- I. The number and size of imperial societies grew dramatically by imposing political unity on areas where previously there had been competing states.