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The Geography of Greece

Introduction

All history takes place within a geographical setting. It is not merely a matter of needing to know where places are in order to follow an historical narrative, but also one of understanding why over time certain recognizable patterns emerge and why the people who settle in a given region tend to develop in one way instead of in another. After general sections on the topography, climate, and use of the land overall, this chapter will present a tour of the Greek world to show how the specific geography of the major regions helped shape their historical development. The aim is to explain some of the “givens” in Greek history: why the Thessalians had the best horses and consequently the first cavalry in Greece; why the Greek cities on the coast of Asia Minor had more to do with mainland Greece than with the regions to the east; why most sea traffic from west to east passed over the Isthmus instead of around the Peloponnese, such that Sparta lay off the beaten track while Corinth on the Isthmus grew prosperous; and so on. The chapter serves both as an introduction to the narrative that follows, with references ahead to the relevant chapters, and also as a resource for consultation when appropriate.

General Topography

Greece lies at the base of the Balkan Peninsula in southern Europe. It juts out into the Mediterranean Sea between the Adriatic on its west and the Aegean on its east. Greece is a mountainous land, and the mountain ranges as a general

rule run from northwest to southeast. They become progressively lower farther to the south and eventually dip below sea level. Their highest peaks, however, often still rise above sea level to form islands. Thus, the same geological formation which makes up Magnesia drops below sea level south of Cape Sepias before it again rises above the sea in the form of the island of Euboea. South of Carystus it drops again, but its highest peaks farther south appear as the islands of Andros and Tenos.

During unsettled times, the mountain ranges can direct the flow of migrations (see chap. 3) through the land: such migrations have tended to follow the ranges' northwest–southeast orientation southwards until reaching either a west–east pass (at which point the migrating peoples could turn left and proceed farther in an easterly direction) or an inlet of the sea (which the migrating peoples could then cross on makeshift boats). In settled times, the mountains can help divide the country into sections for human habitation, sections which can be identical with communities' territories: this is especially true for cities in mountain valleys (e.g., Tegea and Mantinea in Arcadia) or on small coastal plains (e.g., Troezen or Epidaurus in the Argolis). The mountainous nature of the country also means that fertile plains are few; but where such plains do exist, they tend to be intensely cultivated. The mountains also mark the coastline which, owing to the ruggedness and unevenness of the land, has thousands of inlets and gulfs. The largest of these is the Gulf of Corinth which, together with the Saronic Gulf, almost divides Greece in two; the land to the south of these two gulfs, the Peloponnese, is connected only by a narrow isthmus to the rest of Greece (see Figure 1.1). That isthmus – always known simply as “the Isthmus” – had importance both for land and sea traffic. All land travel between the Peloponnese and the rest of Greece had to pass across it. At the same time, it proved easier and quicker in antiquity for those transporting goods from west to east by sea to unload the goods at the Isthmus, to haul them across, and then to reload them on the other side (see also Box 1.1). The Isthmus, then, functioned as an important connecting point for sea travel as well.

Given the mountainous nature of the land, which tended to impede travel overland, much travel was in fact by sea; and the sea usually helped unite rather than divide Greece. This was especially true for the Aegean Sea. Islands dot the sea such that when sailing from mainland Greece to Asia Minor one never loses sight of land – from any one island the next is always visible. In effect, the islands function as stations on a road across the water.

As one moves farther east across the Aegean, one eventually reaches the mainland of Asia Minor. In this region Greeks settled in the eleventh to tenth centuries BC. (see chap. 3). They came from the West, moving across the water island by island. For this reason their settlements in Asia Minor tended to look westwards to the sea rather than farther inland. When the Persians in the early fifth century again took possession of those Greek cities which had risen up in the **Ionian Revolt** (see chap. 9), the Persians sent their fleet along the coast from city to city because the cities were far more easily accessible by sea than by land. Miletus, in the **classical** period the most important Greek settlement



Figure 1.1 Satellite image of the Isthmus. Source: Image Science and Analysis Laboratory, NASA-Johnson Space Center. “The Gateway to Astronaut Photography of Earth.” <<http://eol.jsc.nasa.gov/scripts/sseop/QuickView.pl?directory=ESC&ID=ISS023-E-5385>> 01/10/2013 10:52:32

on the mainland in Asia Minor, provides a spectacular example of this orientation towards the sea. Although the city is technically on the mainland, mountains to the south make it almost inaccessible by land (see Figure 1.2). The simplest way to travel from Miletus into the interior of Asia Minor was actually to embark on a ship, to sail across an inlet of the sea, and then to disembark in the plain of the Meander River. From here one could easily journey overland into the interior.

Greeks reached the northern coast of the Aegean by sea as well – though a little later this time, as late as the eighth century; and while expansion into the interior here did take place (especially on account of the silver and gold mines of Pangaeum), the same more or less held true here as for the settlements in Asia Minor – they looked towards mainland Greece with which they were connected by the Aegean Sea. In every respect the Aegean united Greeks; and the region around the Aegean always formed the core territory of Greek civilization.

Another basic fact about Greece requires a brief comment at the end of this section. Greece lies close to where the Eurasian and African tectonic plates meet, and there is much seismic activity. Earthquakes and tsunamis are common and occasionally devastating. Portions of the land, moreover, are of volcanic origin – the island of Thera, with its active volcano which during the **Bronze**

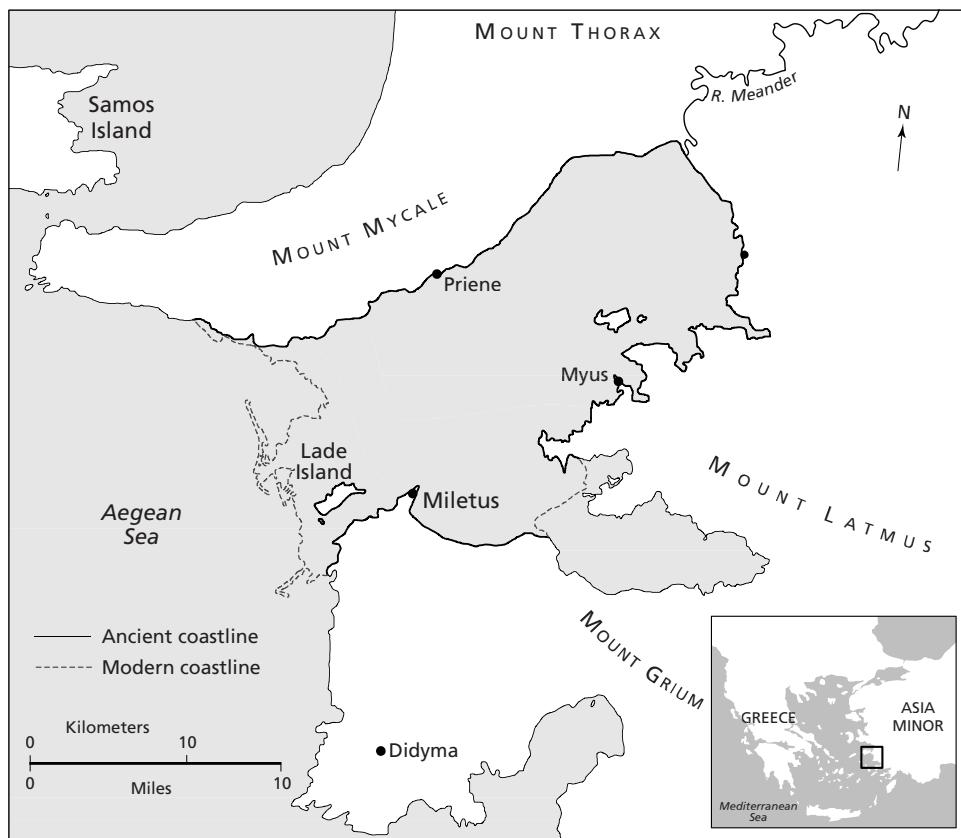


Figure 1.2 Position of Miletus on Gulf of Meander River in ancient times

Age (around the middle of the second millennium BC) erupted cataclysmically, is only the best known.

Climate

Greece is a hot, thirsty land. Most rivers are dry through the summer as evaporation proceeds more quickly than springs or rainfall can replenish the water. The rainy season begins in the late autumn, around November. With the rains, torrents rush down ravines and the dry beds of rivers are filled again.

The mountain ranges divide Greece up into countless “compartments,” each with its own microclimate determined by whether the mountains shield it from rain or trap rain in it; by whether it is exposed or closed to breezes off the Aegean; and by whether it is protected from or open to storms. Despite the overall aridity of much of the land, pockets (such as the plain near the head of the Argolic Gulf) are moisture-laden or even swampy (for example, the land at the head of the Messenian Gulf). In such regions even water-intensive crops,

Box 1.1 *Mt. Athos and Other Coastlines Exposed to the Aegean*

The prevailing weather patterns in the Aegean – in particular harsh storms from the east especially during the winter – combine with the geology of mainland Greece to create an unusual feature of its eastern coastline. The storms erode the land until they reach the hard bedrock of the mountains. The resulting coastline consists of steep, rugged cliffs with few harbors or safe anchorages. Wherever a mountain is directly exposed to the storms – Mt. Athos (see Figure 1.3), Magnesia, the island of Euboea, Cape Malea – such a coastline arises. But any body of water behind the exposed mountain – for example, the strait between Euboea and the mainland – remains calm with a gentle coastline replete with harbors on both sides. Thus, ships sailing northward from Attica kept to the west of Euboea. In the south, Cape Malea (see Figure 1.4) proved so prone to storms and so dangerous for mariners that circumnavigation of the Peloponnese rarely took place (major naval expeditions were the one exception). Hence, traffic west from the Aegean passed over the Isthmus and through the Gulf of Corinth.



Figure 1.3 The exposed eastern side of Mt. Athos. Source: Gabriel, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mount_Athos_by_cod_gabriel_20.jpg (accessed 10th January 2013). CC BY 2.0

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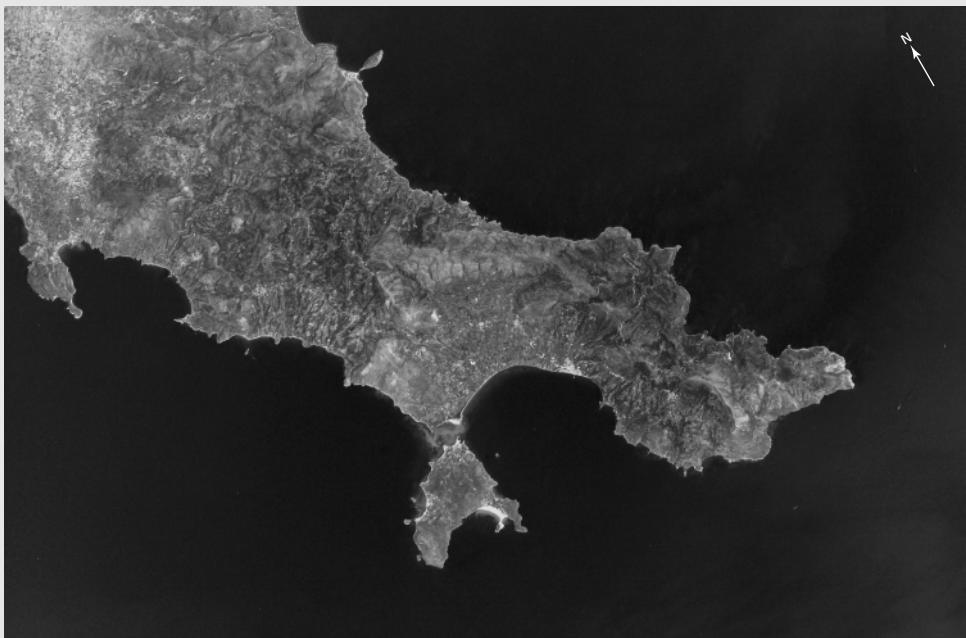


Figure 1.4 Satellite image of Cape Malea. Source: Image Science and Analysis Laboratory, NASA-Johnson Space Center. “The Gateway to Astronaut Photography of Earth.” <<http://eol.jsc.nasa.gov/scripts/sseop/QuickView.pl?directory=ESC&ID=ISS015-E-9024>> 01/10/2013 12:17:06

such as flax in Messenia, can be planted; orange and lemon groves today cover the plain of Argos near the sea. The general paucity of water, however, means that the staple grain in Greece tends to be the less nutritious barley that grows in lower-quality soil and requires less water; only in a few regions, like the plain of Eleusis, can the more nutritious wheat be planted.

Towards the south the temperature, even during the winter, remains fairly warm. In the north, however, the winters can be bitterly cold. The severity of the winter can also vary a great deal according to altitude, with the lower regions having considerably warmer weather. Although one can make some generalizations, where climate is concerned, every region in Greece is unique.

The Use of the Land

The climate and the topography work together to affect how humans use the land. First, crops are planted during the winter – only then is there sufficient

water –, and the harvest takes place in the early spring. This agricultural cycle, incidentally, dictated the military season in antiquity: over the winter men stayed home and farmed; only after they had gathered in the harvest could they go out to war. Summer, then, was the time for warfare. The storms which brought the rain also made the winter unsafe for sailing so naval campaigns were confined to the summer as well.

Second, because mountains make a large percentage of the land unusable for humans, the remaining land was intensely worked to best effect. First-rate land tended to be reserved for staple grains, while the second-rate land was planted with trees and used for grazing animals. Herdsmen drove flocks of sheep into mountain valleys and onto meadows too remote for other uses, and goats could find something to eat even on the rockiest patches of ground. Place names such as Aegospotami, “Goat’s Creek” – i.e., only a goat could find something to eat there – provide evidence for the way in which the Greeks exploited goats to make even the least fruitful soil yield something useful.

The harsh struggle to win as much as possible from the land characterizes human settlement in Greece, especially in those periods when the population was growing rapidly. When the land could not yield enough staple crops, what it could produce was converted into food through trade. Megara, for example, had precious little good land after it lost the plain of Eleusis to Athens in the early sixth century (see chap. 5), but sheep could still be kept on the poorer land remaining. The Megarians could work the wool and sell it in Athens and throughout the Athenian Empire, at least until the Athenians banned this in the 430s (see chap. 12). The comic playwright **Aristophanes** (*Acharnians*, 519–535) actually states that the Megarians started to starve on account of this ban, and even if he was exaggerating for effect, it still shows how the people in a given area could use even second-rate land intensely to produce a commodity for export and thus secure their survival.

States likewise could come under pressure either to conquer additional arable land from neighbors (for example, the “land wars” of the **Archaic** period – see chap. 5) or to take new land in their territories under cultivation. This could be done by deforestation, but that is backbreaking labor and hence not lightly undertaken. One could also, however, cultivate marginal land which had hitherto served only for grazing. In the fourth century both the Phocians and the Western Locrians appear to have done precisely this. In both cases it led to so-called **Sacred Wars** since the land in question was dedicated to the god Apollo (see chap. 18). This example illustrates just how the pressure to gain land by whatever means could immediately drive historical developments.

Main Regions of Greece

Geologically, the Peloponnese is dominated by a large central massif, which several mountain ranges combine to produce. This central area – Arcadia – is rugged and isolated. When the Mycenaean kingdoms (see chap. 2) which

dominated Greece in the thirteenth century fell circa 1200 (see chap. 3), some of the refugees from these kingdoms retreated into this intensely mountainous region. Agriculture was possible only in the valleys, and here settlements sprang up and eventually grew into cities of reasonable size. Nonetheless, Arcadia remained poor and backward: it was a region people tried to leave; no one ever much wanted to go to it. Like many impoverished mountainous regions throughout history it commonly provided surrounding regions with a steady stream of mercenaries – young men with little to do at home, young men whose only hope of escaping lay in taking pay in someone else's army (see, for example, chap. 18 for mass hiring of mercenaries).

To the south of Arcadia two mountain ranges, Taÿgetos and Parnon, run roughly northwest to southeast. A narrow valley separates them towards the north, but farther southwards the valley gradually widens until it becomes a sizable plain. This is the region known as Laconia; and the plain here is exceptionally fertile and well-watered: the Eurotas is one of the few rivers in Greece which carries water all the year round (see Figure 1.5). Here lay the city of Sparta, the predominant military power in Greece during the **classical** period. In the very earliest period Mt. Taÿgetos and Mt. Parnon delimited the territory of Sparta; but already in the seventh and sixth centuries BC the Spartans – or,



Figure 1.5 Eurotas River. Source: Aeleftherios, <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eurotas.JPG> (accessed 10 January 2013)

to give them their proper name: Lacedaemonians – broke through these geographically dictated boundaries and conquered the regions lying west of Mt. Taÿgetos and east of Mt. Parnon. The two mountains extend out into the Mediterranean far beyond the point at which the Laconian Plain, built up by the sediment brought down by the Eurotas, ceases and form narrow, rocky fingers that frame the Laconian Gulf.

The fertility of the Laconian Plain notwithstanding, the Lacedaemonians eventually crossed Mt. Taÿgetos to conquer Messenia in the seventh century (see chap. 6). The fertile Messenian Plain, lying about the upper Pamisus River, was one of the first targets of the Lacedaemonian lust for land. Overlooking the plain stands Mt. Ithome, a vast natural fortress in which rebels against the Lacedaemonians would, in the fifth century, withstand a ten years' siege (see chap. 12). To the south of the Messenian Plain a squat peninsula, not nearly so long or so rugged as Taÿgetos, lies opposite, enclosing the Messenian Gulf. To the west and northwest of the Messenian Plain lies a smooth, gently curving coastline formed by rains which bring sediment down from the mountains at almost exactly the same rate at which erosion caused by the sea operates. The area towards the south about the Bay of Navarino has resisted this process of smoothing owing to tough rock formations.

In classical and later times the appellation “Messenia” applied to these three regions – upland plain, western coast, and southern peninsula. Over the centuries, however, the regions did not always form a political unity: they were united in the Kingdom of **Pylos** in the thirteenth century BC (see chap. 2); in the late eighth century BC the coastal regions in the West and the southern peninsula were politically independent of the Messenian Plain; from about 600 BC onwards all three regions were united politically with the Laconian Plain under Lacedaemonian control (see chap. 6); and after 370 BC they were united in an independent Messenian state (see chap. 16) until this state became part of the Achaian League in the course of the third century BC (see chap. 23).

Moving northward from Messenia, one crosses the River Neda to come to the border region of Triphylia – literally “three tribes’ land” – which had received its name from three tribes that had long since disappeared by classical times. Eventually, the Arcadians to the west and the Eleans to the north laid claim to this region.

Continuing north, one comes to Elis, literally just “valley,” the prominent and highly fertile valley of the Peneus River, and the original focal point of the Eleans’ settlement. Although the Eleans never played a prominent role in Greek history, they did eventually have on their territory one of the most important Panhellenic sanctuaries, Olympia. The festival held here in honor of the god Zeus of Olympus over the course of many decades acquired significance far beyond Elis: already in the eighth century people from Messenia to the south were attending the festival; shortly thereafter people from other regions in the Peloponnese began to come; and by the late sixth people from all over Greece.

Eastwards from Elis one comes to a narrow strip of coastline between the waters of the Gulf of Corinth to the north and the mountains of Arcadia to

the south. For most of the classical period this region, Achaia, consisted of poor fishing villages. In the third century BC, however, it would form the nucleus of the most powerful state in Greece, the Achaian League (see chap. 23 and 24). That **league** or **ethnos** (see Box 4.1) was an old structure, dating to the time of settlement by the Achaians; and initially it consisted of twelve cities which annually sent representatives to a centrally located communal sanctuary.

The regions discussed so far have been either impoverished (Arcadia, Achaia) or for various reasons off the beaten track (Elis, except for the Olympic festival; Arcadia; Laconia; Messenia). This last has mostly to do with the prevailing route for sea travel (see Box 1.1) which kept ships from going around the Peloponnese. Although Sparta had a harbor at Gythium, it had little practical use. Good harbors lay on the peninsula to the south of the Messenian Plain, but, again, little traffic came that way. The way in which the coast along the west of the Peloponnese had been formed meant that it had few harbors (Pylos on the Bay of Navarino is the chief exception); and marshes dominate much of the coast of the northwestern Peloponnese in Elis with little land suitable for a port (Cyllene is the chief exception).

However, as one proceeds eastwards from Achaia one finally comes to the well-connected region of the northeastern Peloponnese. Here lay the powerful cities of Corinth (which dominated the Isthmus at its southern and narrower end) and Argos which lay on the Argolic Gulf which led directly to the Aegean. Corinth controlled the land-route between the Peloponnese and the rest of Greece as well as the sea-route from the Saronic to the Corinthian Gulf.

Argos, meanwhile, lay at the head of an alluvial plain, remarkable for its fertility. This plain originally hosted any number of independent cities such as Nauplia and Asine, but eventually fell under Argive control. Eastwards of Argos lay the so-called Argolic Peninsula, the “thumb” of the three-fingered Peloponnesian hand. Some cities lay along the coast: Hermione, **Tiryne**, and Epidaurus (the site of the best-preserved Greek theater – see Figure 1.6). The Argolic Peninsula enclosed the Argolic Gulf on the northeast and protected it against Aegean storms from the east. The Gulf provided easy access to the Aegean.

Southwards of Argos lay the regions of the Thyreatis and the Cynuria which tapered off to the south in a narrow strip of habitable land between Mt. Parnon to the west and the Aegean to the east. Mt. Parnon separated these two regions from the Laconian Plain, though there were several passes which connected them with it. Those passes across Mt. Parnon formed Sparta’s primary connection with the rest of Greece. In the mid-sixth century BC Sparta wrested control of the Thyreatis and Cynuria from Argos (see chap. 6) and for the first time gained access to the Aegean port of Prasiae, afterwards the main harbor for Sparta’s navy. Argos, thereafter, was restricted to the plain at the head of the Argolic Gulf.

Argos had, however, not always dominated that region. In the plain, towards the east, lies the citadel of Tiryne on a low hill. In the thirteenth century BC. Tiryne dominated much of the plain although it may have shared dominance with the even more impressive fortress of **Mycene** high up in the mountains

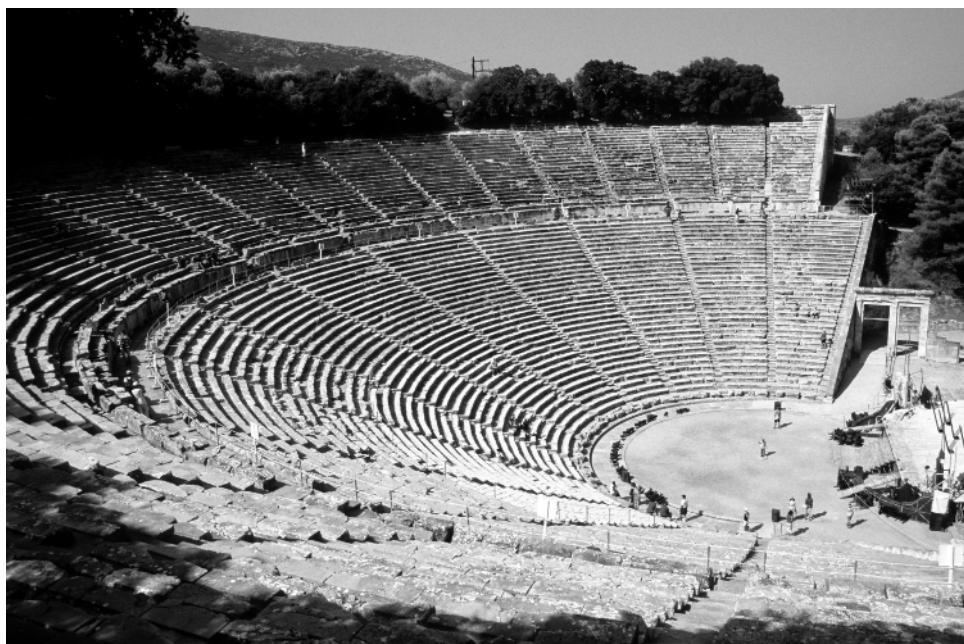


Figure 1.6 The theater of Epidaurus (fourth century BC). The theater was a typical architectural feature of a Greek city. Source: Olecorre, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Theatre_of_Epidaurus_OLC.jpg (accessed 10 January 2013) CC BY-SA 3.0, 2.5, 2.0, 1.0

overlooking the plain to the North. These two citadels may in fact have belonged to one single kingdom during the so-called **Mycenaean** period (roughly the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC). However, both Mycene and Tiryns were destroyed around 1200 BC and in course of time political dominance passed to Argos.

Leaving the Peloponnese by way of the Isthmus one comes first to Megara (the “halls”), perched precariously on the northern half of the Isthmus and sandwiched between two powerful neighbors, Corinth and Athens. North of Megara one enters central Greece, dominated on the mainland by Athens to the east and Boeotia to the west. The large island of Euboea which runs parallel with the Attic and Boeotian coastline to the north also belongs to central Greece. Athens, by Greek standards, was of enormous size. It gained control of the plain of Eleusis in the west in the course of the early sixth century BC (see chap. 5). In addition to this rich, grain-producing region, Athens possessed substantial tracts of land which, although they were marginal in terms of grain production, could support olive plantations. Athens’ chief export throughout the archaic and classical periods was always olive oil. Finally, in the southeastern quarter of the Attic peninsula lay rich silver mines at Laureum, mines which in the fifth century BC would provide the initial outlay for the construction of Athens’ navy (see chap. 10).

Box 1.2 *The Size of Greek States*

The way in which the mountains divide Greece up into small valleys and small coastal plains has tended to make Greek states comparatively small in size. Even in those periods when larger states developed they are dwarfed by contemporary states in the Near East. Thus the **Hittite** kingdom during the Bronze Age in Asia Minor was far larger than any Mycenaean kingdom such as Pylos, **Thebes**, or **Knosos** in Greece; likewise the Achaian and Aetolian Leagues were minuscule next to the **Seleucid** and **Ptolemaic** kingdoms in the **Hellenistic** Age. For most of the archaic and classical periods, however, states in Greece were considerably smaller than, say, the Kingdom of Knosos or the Achaian League of the second century BC.

A hypothetical walking tour of the Argolic Peninsula may help to give a concrete idea of the size of a Greek state in the classical period (fifth to fourth centuries BC). If one began an overland journey on foot – granted one would need a certain amount of vigor as the terrain is rugged and mountainous – at the tip of the Argolic Peninsula in Hermione; and if one carefully planned one's route, one might in the course of a vigorous two days' hike cross the territories of no fewer than five fully independent states: from Hermione to Troezen (on the Saronic Gulf on a narrow coastal plain just south of Methana, a rough peninsula of volcanic origin) to Argos to Epidaurus (on another coastal plain farther to the northwest) and on to Phleius to the west just south of Corinth. In fact, if one planned the trek in the year 480, one could manage to visit the territories of two additional states, Mycene and Tiryns, which for a few years in the early fifth century were independent of Argos (which shortly thereafter reconquered them). Two days' vigorous walking could lead one, then, through seven states.

For most of the classical period the vast majority of states were so small that one could walk the length and breadth of them in less than a day. This holds true not just for the islands of the Aegean, but also for the mountain valleys in Arcadia and the small plains along the coast. There were, of course, exceptions: Sparta and Athens were comparatively large as were some of the league or **tribe** states such as Thessaly.

To the north of Athens lies the island of Euboea, the largest island in the Aegean. The island's eastern coast – raw, steep, and devoid of harbors – meets the Aegean storms head on, but the channel between the island and the mainland is sheltered and accordingly calm. All north-south navigation follows the course of the channel which has a wasp's-waist at the mid-point, the Euripus, where a stone's throw separates mainland from island (see Figure 1.7).

The Euripus was not just a major sea-route, but also a major land-route since all traffic between the mainland and Euboea went through this spot. Because of its propinquity to the mainland, Euboea's history is closely bound up with the history of its neighbors, Athens and Boeotia. In the thirteenth century BC



Figure 1.7 The Euripus today (spanned by a retractable bridge). Source: Georgios Pazios, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Evripis_moving_bridge_1.JPG (accessed 10 January 2012)

the Kingdom of Thebes in Boeotia controlled at least central and southern Euboea (see chap. 2); through much of the fifth and fourth centuries BC Athens controlled Euboea (see chaps. 11, 16. and 18). In the intervening period Euboea had been home to several independent states, the most important of which were Chalcis and Eretria, on the island's western side, close to the Euripus, at opposite ends of the Lelantine Plain – the most fertile area on Euboea. Chalcis and Eretria exhausted themselves in the so-called **Lelantine War** over this plain in the late eighth and early seventh centuries (see chap. 5).

Northwest of Attica and across the Euripus from Euboea lies Boeotia. Since Boeotia borders both the Aegean and the Corinthian Gulf, some trade moved overland across it between the two bodies of water – though never so much as across the narrower Isthmus. Dominating Boeotia politically, in all periods, was the city of Thebes. Already in the thirteenth century BC a Mycenaean kingdom was based there. For most of the archaic and classical periods Boeotia was, like Achaia, a league- or tribe-state, albeit one with a large, powerful city, Thebes, at its center. Theban predominance, however, drove other cities to attempt to leave this league; Plataea, for example, in southeastern Boeotia, until its destruction in 427 BC (see chap. 13), constantly sought support from Athens against Thebes.



Figure 1.8 The temple of Apollo at Delphi, with the theater in the foreground and the Pleistos Valley in the background. Source: Adam Carr, <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ac.delphi1.jpg> (accessed 10 January 2013) CC BY-SA 3.0

West of Boeotia one comes to Phocis and Locris. Phocis, another tribe-state, would have been very much on the periphery of the Greek world had it not been for the Temple of Apollo at **Delphi** (see Figure 1.8), the most important sanctuary in the Greek world and site of a much-frequented oracle.

Apart from Delphi, however, Phocis was an impoverished backwater of little relevance until 356 BC when the **Phocian War** broke out (see chap. 18). Locris was also of little importance, though its fragmentation requires some explanation. On either side of the Phocians lay the two chief groups of Locrians, the Ozolian or Western Locrians and the Opuntian or Eastern Locrians. These last are also called the Hypocnemidian Locrians, that is, the “Locrians at the foot of Cape Cnemis.” The Opuntian Locrians were physically divided into two territories by Cape Cnemis which itself remained under Phocian control. Both Opuntian and Ozolian Locris were tribe-states with close ancestral ties while existing independently of one another. In Ozolian Locris lay the strategically important port of Naupactus, just east of the wasp’s-waist of the Gulf of Corinth, between Rhium and Antirrhium. In 456 BC the Athenians appropriated Naupactus and held it for half a century (see chap. 12).



Figure 1.9 Satellite image of the Aegean Sea and surrounding land. Source: NASA, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Aegeansea.jpg> (accessed 10 January 2013)

West of Phocis and Locris one comes to Aetolia, another league. Aetolia very much lay on the periphery of the Greek world during the classical period; its inhabitants were considered semi-barbarous at best. In the third century BC, however, the Aetolian League would become the largest and most powerful state in Greece north of the Peloponnese (see chap. 21). West and northwest of Aetolia one comes to regions and peoples (e.g., the Acarnanians) not quite Greek, even if they did slowly become **Hellenized** during the classical period. Farther to the west, along the Adriatic Sea, however, there were a number of colonies founded in the eighth and seventh centuries by Corinth: Leucas, Anactorium, Ambracia, and, on an island off the coast, Corcyra.

North of Phocis and Locris, the pass of Thermopylae led to Thessaly, the chief state of northern Greece. Thessaly possessed the one large plain in Greece, the only place where the rearing of horses was practicable on a large scale. In the rest of Greece horses functioned chiefly as a status symbol since only the wealthy could afford to keep them, and the standard beast of burden remained the donkey. In Thessaly, however, the first true cavalry in Greece arose, and Thessalian breeds were much sought after when other states in Greece developed cavalries of their own. Thessaly was another tribe-state, traditionally under

the leadership of an elective king called a *tagos*. Thessaly proper was limited to the plain, but by classical times the Thessalians had conquered a number of peoples living in the mountains about Thessaly, the so-called Thessalian **Perioeci** (“dwellers-about”): clockwise from the southeast, the Phthiotic Achaians, the Perrhaebians, and the Magnesians. In the mountains to the north of the Thessalian plain, incidentally, lay Mt. Olympus, the home of the gods in Greek mythology.

A few words now, before leaving Thessaly, on the pass at Thermopylae. This long, narrow pass was the only good route from central Greece into Thessaly. As such it had both economic and military significance. With regard to the latter characteristic, those who held the pass attempted to keep it closed (e.g., during the Persian Wars when Greek troops vainly endeavored to prevent the Persians from entering central Greece – see chap. 10, and Figure 10.4), but with regard to the former and far more important characteristic, people strove to keep it open. To this end there grew up about the pass an association, the **Pylaean Amphictiony**, based at the sanctuary of Demeter of Anthela, which lay within the pass itself near the hot springs from which the pass got its name. (“Thermopylae” means “Hot Gates,” “gate” here being used, as often in Greek, in the sense of “pass.”) The association consisted of those who dwelt on either side of the pass – “amphi-ctiones” in Greek just means “those who live on either side (i.e., of a natural landmark)” – and was dedicated in the first instance to the maintenance of the pass. In course of time this association took on other responsibilities (for example, the maintenance of the sanctuary at Delphi – see chap. 18) and various political functions.

To the north of Thessaly lies Macedonia, which, owing to its importance for the history of Greece from the mid-fourth century onwards (see chap. 18), may usefully be discussed here – quite apart from the much-vexed question of whether or not the Macedonians were Greeks. The heartland of Macedonia, the Emathia or “Lower Macedonia,” lay in the plain between the River Axius to the northeast and the mountains of northern Thessaly to the south. Only in the fourth century did the Macedonians begin to expand eastwards of the Axius into Thrace. The coastal strip to the east of the Emathia was either marshy or held by Greek colonies such as Pydna and Methone, so in the early period the Macedonians lacked access to the Aegean. To the west of the plain lay mountain ranges which boxed highland regions such as Lyncestis and Orestis off from one another. These regions, collectively called “Upper Macedonia,” stood under the control of the stronger Macedonian kings, but tended to become independent under the weaker ones. Even in the time of Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great, these highland areas were still imperfectly integrated into Macedonia as a whole.

During the eleventh and tenth centuries BC, Greeks migrated across the Aegean Sea to settle the islands in it as well as the western coast of Asia Minor. This migration will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 3, so here only the major regions affected need to be mentioned: Doris (southwestern Asia Minor), Ionia (the central portion of the western coast of Asia Minor), and Aeolis (the coastal region north of Ionia).

Box 1.3 *The Names of Peoples and Regions in Greece*

The relationship between the name of a region and the name of the people living there may reveal much. In Greece a region often receives its name from the people who live in it. Specifically, the name of the people is primary, and the name of the region is derived from the name of the people by the addition of a suffix. Here a few examples with the suffix “-ia”:

<i>Name of individual</i>	<i>Name of region</i>
Magnes	Magnes-ia
Arcas (stem: Arcad-)	Arcad-ia
Boeotos (stem: Boeot-)	Boeot-ia

Next, two examples with the suffix “-id-” (which here appears as “-is”):

<i>Name of individual</i>	<i>Name of region</i>
Phoebeus (stem: Phoc-)	Phoc-is
Locros (stem: Locr-)	Locr-is

On many occasions it is known that in this case – i.e., when the land received its name from the people – the people did not originally dwell in that land. That is to say, the people existed as an entity before their entrance into that land; and when they took possession of that land, they named it after themselves. This is most clearly the case along the coast of Asia Minor (to which no Greeks were native). The three main Greek-settled regions were called Aeolis, Ionia, and Doris. In each case the name conforms to the pattern just discussed:

<i>Name of individual</i>	<i>Name of region</i>
Aeoleus (stem: Aeol-)	Aeol-is
Ion	Ion-ia
Dorieus (stem: Dori-)	Dori-(i)s

The major island group within the Aegean are the so-called Cyclades, or “Circling Isles,” in the center. Their name comes from their being imagined to circle about the small island of Delos, an important religious center. Off the southern coast of Asia Minor lie the Dodecanese (“Twelve Isles”) or southern Sporades. This group is usually considered to belong to the Doris. A number of large islands lie off the coast of Asia Minor (from south to north): Rhodes, Cos (these two belong to the Dodecanese), Samos, Chios (these two are usually considered part of Ionia), and Lesbos (usually considered part of the Aeolis).

Most of these islands in the classical period were independent states; the largest ones (Lesbos and Rhodes) actually supported several independent states.

The Greeks penetrated at a surprisingly late date into the regions around the northern Aegean (see chap. 5). Here, both on the islands as well as on the mainland, dwelled non-Greek peoples. Greeks from Euboea settled the large, three-fingered peninsula of the Chalcidice, probably in the eighth century BC. As for the islands, Parians from the Cyclades settled the large island of Thasos in the mid-seventh century BC; the Athenians conquered Lemnos and Imbros from non-Greek inhabitants in the late sixth century; and not until the 470s did the Athenians drive the non-Greek Dolopians from the northern Sporades, in particular Scyros.

Two more islands remain to be mentioned. At the southern end of the Aegean lies the large, elongated island of Crete. Although out of the mainstream of Greek development for most of the period discussed in the book, it hosted an extremely important Greek kingdom during the thirteenth century BC (see chap. 2). Finally, far beyond the confines of the Aegean, in the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean, lies the island of Cyprus, opposite Cilicia and Phoenicia. Greek traders had been visiting Cyprus from time immemorial and had begun at some point to settle there. Large-scale settlement need not, however, have begun until the eleventh century BC. The Greeks who settled on Cyprus were closely related to those who settled in Arcadia in the central Peloponnese: the two groups spoke closely related dialects despite their geographical isolation from one another. The Greeks were not the only inhabitants of Cyprus, incidentally: Phoenicians settled large parts of it in the tenth century BC; and besides Greeks and Phoenicians there dwelled on the island another people which antedated both of them, the so-called **Eteocyprians**. The Greek cities on Cyprus, because of their distance from the rest of Greece, tended to have a distinct political and cultural development; but no one ever denied their Greekness or wished to exclude them from the wider Greek world.

FURTHER READING

The best atlas for the ancient Greco-Roman world is:

Talbert, R.J.A. (2000) *The Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*. Princeton. (The supplementary volumes contain valuable discussions and specific bibliography.)

Also useful is:

Talbert, R.J.A. (1985) *Atlas of Classical History*. London.

The standard survey of the geography of mainland Greece is in German:

Philippson, A., and E. Kirsten. (1950–1959) *Die griechischen Landschaften*. Frankfurt.

For the western coast of Asia Minor, see:

Philippson, A. (1910–1915) *Reisen und Forschungen im westlichen Kleinasiens*. Gotha.

Much of the detailed geographical information about the ancient Greek world comes from two ancient sources, the *Description of Greece* by Pausanias and the *Geography* by Strabo. Both works are available in translation in the Loeb series, the former in a Penguin translation as well. On Strabo's *Geography*, see now D. Dueck (2010) "The Geographical Narrative of Strabo of Amasia," in: K. Raaflaub and R.J.A. Talbert (eds.), *Geography and Ethnography: Perceptions of the World in Pre-modern Societies*, 236–251. Maldon, MA.

