

# History of geography shaped greek civilization history essay



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Greece was known as the “ Birthplace of Western Civilization” (Aquino & Badilles, 2006, p. 80) because its culture became the epitome for the succeeding western civilizations. The tale of the ancient Greek civilization is a painful history of foreign supremacy. But their civilization was built on solid foundation and led by efficient leaders that created values and customs that are still being practiced and observed by modern societies. It is for this reason that the Greek civilization flourished, remembered, celebrated and accepted by the whole world.

One factor that can be considered as an integral part of the development of Greek civilization is its geography. The geography of Greece had an overwhelming impact on its political, cultural, economic and social growth. The geographical features of ancient Greece contributed to its advantage and disadvantage.

Ancient Greece can be found at the tip of Balcan peninsula in Southwestern Europe. It is surrounded by three seas: in the south is the Mediterranean Sea; Ionian Sea in the west; and the Aegean Sea in the east. The Corint Gulf connects the separate region of the Peloponnesus, which is the southern tip of Greece, and Africa (Willis, 1985). The Greek mainland is a peninsula which extends into the Mediterranean Sea. The core of ancient Greece is consisted of mountainous and rugged lands. The Pindus Mountain, which is 8700 feet high, runs down the Middle of the Balkan Peninsula and is considered as the dominant range (Burns, 1958). Greece is a strategic location for empire building because it served as the crossroads between Africa, Asia and Europe.

Three geographical features that affected Greece the most included the climate, the mountains and the seas. Ancient Greece's climate is temperate, making it comfortable to the people to be outside of their homes almost every year. This allowed them to engage in outdoor life within their city-states. They were able to interact with each other which enabled them to organize outdoor activities such as athletic competitions, public gatherings, entertainment and art shows, and meetings, which facilitate to the development of a rich and distinct Greek culture.

The second geographical feature is the mountains. Greece is a mountainous society. Almost 70 to 80 percent of Greece is covered and dominated with mountains (Aquino & Badilles, 2006). The advantage of the mountains is that they contributed to the preservation of the purity of Greek culture. Because of the mountains, inhabitants of ancient Greek civilization were secluded to their area resulting to rare interactions with other cultures. One bad effect of this geographical feature is that it served as a natural barrier which acted like walls separating different communities. It hindered communication among communities and slowed down the introduction of new ideas and technology. It also obstructed the development of a unified system of government. The Greeks ingenious solution to this problem is to developed the polis or the city-state. The creation of the city-states indicates the start of Greek's classical age because the emergence of the polis started the numerous great achievements of the civilization (Willis, 1985). It also proved that democratic government works better in smaller states (Willis, 1985). Every polis has its own government and laws and it helped promote people's participation in political affairs. It also provided protection and security to the

inhabitants. Because states are smaller, the demands and needs of the people were easily reflected in the laws and policies that the government established. Another disadvantage of this geographical feature is that only few lands were dedicated to farming. Few small valleys and plains of ancient Greece provided farm land for the people. Adding to the disadvantage is the the rocky lands and poor soil which are not suitable for the domestication of plants. Although they experienced such disadvantages in farming, they still tried to cultivate olives and grapes. They also domesticated sheeps and cattles as an alternative to farming. The development of the polis also helped in their dilemma because it allowed them to supply enough food for the smaller population.

The last and probably the most important geographical feature is the sea. Having been surrounded by three major bodies of water served as an advantage because it allowed early Greeks to travel and trade. The nearness of Greece to major trade routes allowed the prosperity in maritime commerce (Aquino & Badilles, 2006). The sea also made the people became fishers, sailors and merchants. They excelled in ship buildings and voyaging because of their knowledge about seas around them. In the Greco-Persian wars, the Greeks used the seas to their advantage. They build smaller more efficient ships to pass through narrow routes and they exhibited their skills as naval armies. Also, the seas allowed the Greeks to depend heavily on trade. The Greeks get what they could not grow through trading. The exchanged olive oil, wine, wool and pottery with grains and other natural resources, which had a limited supply during that time . Because of their proximity to the seas, fish became the Greeks' staple food. Moreover, trade

encouraged cultural diffusion. It enabled the exchange of ideas with other culture and the spread of Hellenistic culture. It also encouraged them to have further knowledge about different existing civilizations at that time.

To sum it all up, the mountains of Greece limited the civilization's agricultural progress and political unity. But, instead of being a disadvantage, the limitations provided ancient Greece with a stronger and well-developed communities. Adding to that are the seas that connect Greece with each other and the whole world. The seas provided Greeks with wider perspectives about other cultures and encouraged them to find ways on how to properly utilize their limited resources. It just affirms that geography, in one way or another, shaped and affected the ancient Greek civilization.