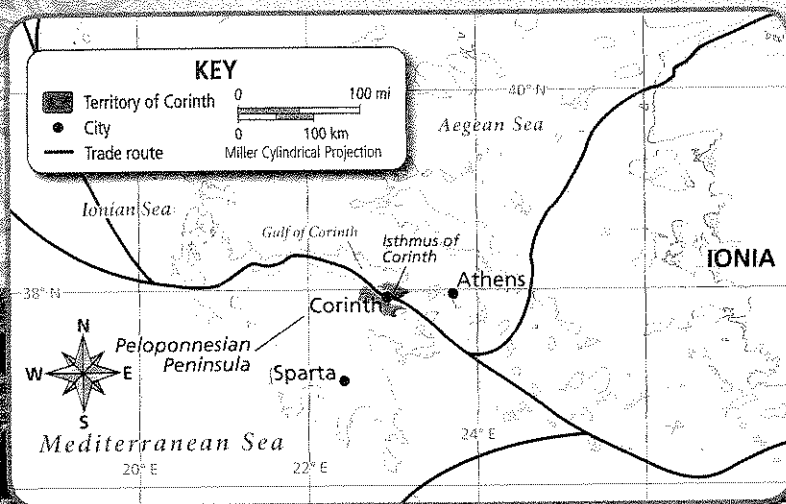


View of Corinth at the height of its power

The City-State of CORINTH

Corinth was one of the richest city-states in Greece. The city's economic power grew from its location. Corinth controlled not only the north-south land route across the Isthmus of Corinth, but also the east-west sea route. A special roadway allowed ships to be dragged across the five-mile-wide isthmus.

THINK CRITICALLY Study the map. Explain why Corinth's location was important to communication and trade.



Emergence of City-States

By the time Homer's epics were composed, each Greek community had begun to organize itself into a polis, or city-state. The city-state became one of the most important features of Greek culture. The Greeks created such city-states everywhere they settled.

The Polis A polis was more than just a city. It was a community with its own government. The government of a polis ruled a wide area that included not only the city but its surrounding villages and countryside as well.

Each Greek city-state usually had a marketplace and government center. Here members of the city-state who had legal rights—the citizens—would meet to make laws and discuss issues affecting the entire community.

The area and population of a polis were generally small. All the citizens of the polis could gather to make decisions as a single group.

The ruins of ancient Corinth ▼



myWorld Activity
Polis Timeline

The High City A typical polis was usually built on two levels. On a high hill stood the **acropolis** (uh KRAH puh lis), a word meaning “high city.” Public buildings and marble temples were located in this area. The acropolis also served as a fortress in times of danger. On lower ground, below the hill, lay people’s homes, shops, and farms. In Athens, the lower city included the agora, or marketplace. There people gathered to discuss public affairs.

Politics in the Polis The word *polis* gave rise to the term **politics**, the art and practice of government. Each city-state had a different kind of government. Some city-states were monarchies, ruled by a king. In early times the polis was governed by an **aristocracy**, a hereditary class of rulers. Aristocracy meant “rule by the best people.”

But in some city-states an extraordinary thing happened—the citizens began governing themselves. Rule by citizens made such Greek city-states unique. By

contrast, in most of the world, priests and kings held all the political power.

Even though self-government was a feature of most city-states, not everyone was allowed to participate in making decisions. Women, slaves, and foreigners were all excluded from the process. The polis had three kinds of inhabitants: citizens (who could vote), women and free foreigners (who could not vote), and slaves, who had few rights at all.

Pride in the Polis Citizens felt strong pride and loyalty toward their polis. Greeks believed that a good citizen should always be willing to sacrifice for his city. He should be prepared to die for his polis, if necessary.

As one historian wrote, “The polis was the framework of Greek life.” Greeks identified with their city. If their polis was a success, so were they. Throughout the history of ancient Greece, the polis played a key role in Greek life.

Reading Check What was the polis?

exclude, v., to shut out, keep from participating

Section 1 Assessment

Key Terms

- Use the following terms to describe the rise of the city-states: polis, citizen, acropolis, politics, aristocracy.

Key Ideas

- How did the physical geography of Greece encourage the development of the city-state?
- What kinds of governments ruled Greek city-states?
- Why was the polis called “the framework of Greek life”?

Think Critically

- ~~Synthesize~~ What changes took place in the Greek world during the dark age?
- ~~Compare and Contrast~~ Compare the advantages and disadvantages for settlers of Greece’s physical geography.

Essential Question

- What is power, and who should have it?
- Who held political power in Greek city-states? Go to your Student Journal to record your answer.

Complete only #1-4