1

Cultures of the Mountains and the Sea

MAIN IDEA	WHY IT MATTERS NOW	TERMS & NAMES
CULTURAL INTERACTION The roots of Greek culture are based on interaction of the Mycenaean, Minoan, and Dorian cultures.	The seeds of much of Western cultural heritage were planted during this time period.	• Mycenaean • Homer • Trojan War • epic • Dorian • myth

SETTING THE STAGE In ancient times, Greece was not a united country. It was a collection of separate lands where Greek-speaking people lived. By 3000 B.C., the Minoans lived on the large Greek island of Crete. The Minoans created an elegant civilization that had great power in the Mediterranean world. At the same time, people from the plains along the Black Sea and Anatolia migrated and settled in mainland Greece.

Geography Shapes Greek Life

Ancient Greece consisted mainly of a mountainous peninsula jutting out into the Mediterranean Sea. It also included about 2,000 islands in the Aegean (ih•JEE•uhn) and Ionian (eye•OH•nee•uhn) seas. Lands on the eastern edge of the Aegean were also part of ancient Greece. (See the map on page 121.) The region's physical geography directly shaped Greek traditions and customs.

The Sea The sea shaped Greek civilization just as rivers shaped the ancient civilizations of Egypt, the Fertile Crescent, India, and China. In one sense, the Greeks did not live *on* a land but *around* a sea. Greeks rarely had to travel more than 85 miles to reach the coastline. The Aegean Sea, the Ionian Sea, and the neighboring Black Sea were important transportation routes for the Greek people. These seaways linked most parts of Greece. As the Greeks became skilled sailors, sea travel connected Greece with other societies. Sea travel and trade were also important because Greece lacked natural resources, such as timber, precious metals, and usable farmland.

The Land Rugged mountains covered about three-fourths of ancient Greece. The mountain chains ran mainly from northwest to southeast along the Balkan Peninsula. Mountains divided the land into a number of different regions. This significantly influenced Greek political life. Instead of a single government, the Greeks developed small, independent communities within each little valley and its surrounding mountains. Most Greeks gave their loyalty to these local communities.

In ancient times, the uneven terrain also made land transportation difficult. Of the few roads that existed, most were little more than dirt paths. It often took travelers several days to complete a journey that might take a few hours today.

Much of the land itself was stony, and only a small part of it was arable, or suitable for farming. Tiny but fertile valleys covered about one-fourth of Greece.

The small streams that watered these valleys were not suitable for large-scale irrigation projects. With so little fertile farmland or fresh water for irrigation, Greece was never able to support a large population. Historians estimate that no more than a few million people lived in ancient Greece at any given time. Even this small population could not expect the land to support a life of luxury. A desire for more living space, grassland for raising livestock, and adequate farmland may have been factors that motivated the Greeks to seek new sites for colonies. **A**

The Climate Climate was the third important environmental influence on Greek civilization. Greece has a varied climate, with temperatures averaging 48 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter and 80 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. In ancient times, these moderate temperatures supported an outdoor life for many Greek citizens. Men spent much of their leisure time at outdoor public events. They met often to discuss public issues, exchange news, and take an active part in civic life.

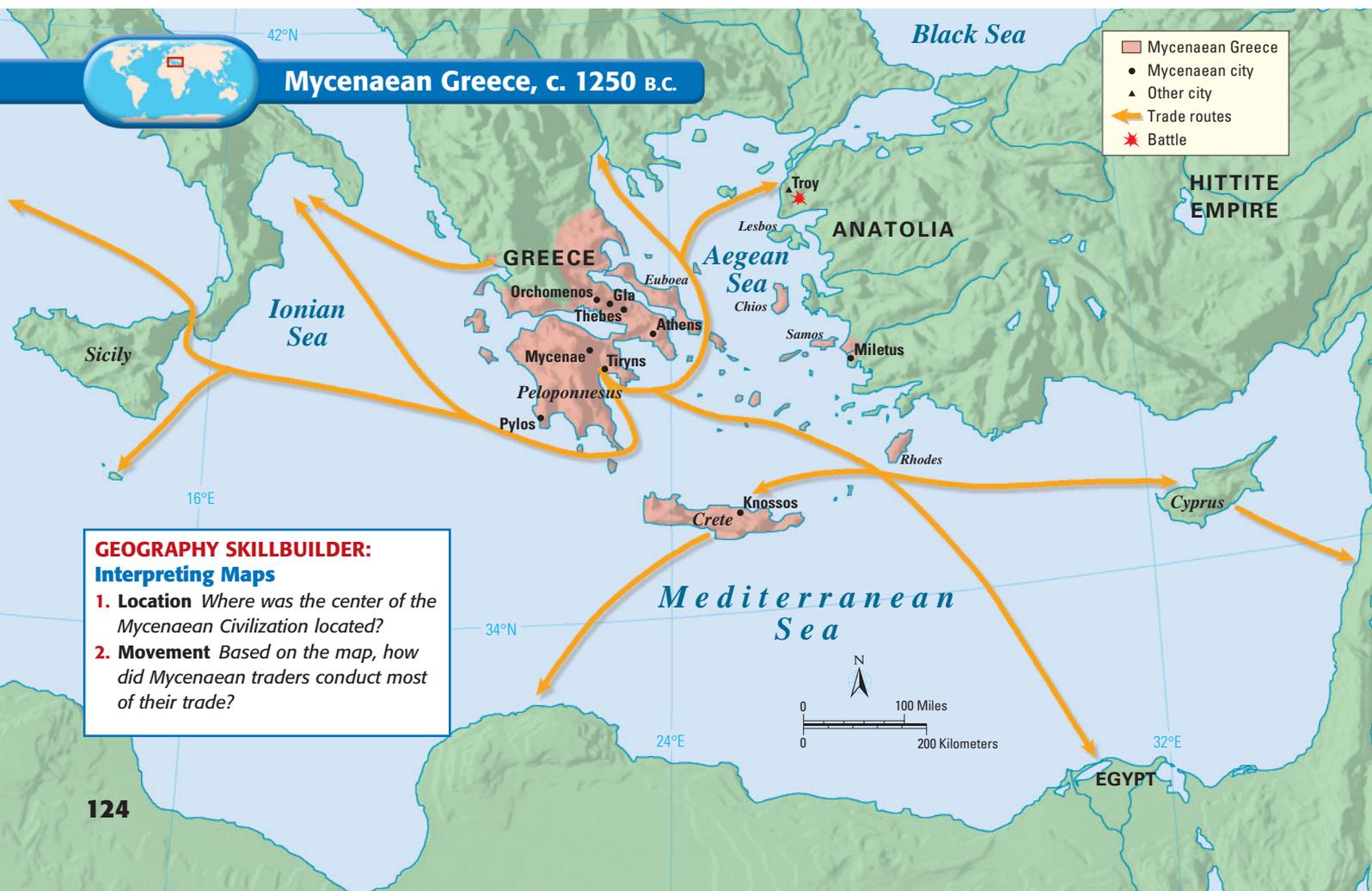## Mycenaean Civilization Develops

As Chapter 3 explained, a large wave of Indo-Europeans migrated from the Eurasian steppes to Europe, India, and Southwest Asia. Some of the people who settled on the Greek mainland around 2000 B.C. were later known as **Mycenaeans**. The name came from their leading city, Mycenae (my•SEE•nee).

Mycenae was located in southern Greece on a steep, rocky ridge and surrounded by a protective wall more than 20 feet thick. The fortified city of Mycenae could withstand almost any attack. From Mycenae, a warrior-king ruled the surrounding villages and farms. Strong rulers controlled the areas around other Mycenaean cities, such as Tiryns and Athens. These kings dominated Greece from about 1600 to 1100 B.C.

Mycenaean Greece, c. 1250 B.C.

Legend: Mycenaean Greece • Mycenaean city ▲ Other city ← Trade routes ✳ Battle

Black Sea · HITTITE EMPIRE · Troy · Lesbos · ANATOLIA · GREECE · Aegean Sea · Euboea · Chios · Orchomenos · Gla · Thebes · Athens · Samos · Ionian Sea · Mycenae · Tiryns · Miletus · Sicily · Peloponnesus · Pylos · Rhodes · Knossos · Crete · Cyprus · Mediterranean Sea · EGYPT

GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER:
Interpreting Maps
1. **Location** Where was the center of the Mycenaean Civilization located?
2. **Movement** Based on the map, how did Mycenaean traders conduct most of their trade?

Contact with Minoans Sometime after 1500 B.C., through either trade or war, the Mycenaeans came into contact with the Minoan civilization. From their contact with the Minoans, the Mycenaeans saw the value of seaborne trade. Mycenaean traders soon sailed throughout the eastern Mediterranean, making stops at Aegean islands, coastal towns in Anatolia, and ports in Syria, Egypt, Italy, and Crete.

The Minoans also influenced the Mycenaeans in other ways. The Mycenaeans adapted the Minoan writing system to the Greek language and decorated vases with Minoan designs. The Minoan-influenced culture of Mycenae formed the core of Greek religious practice, art, politics, and literature. Indeed, Western civilization has its roots in these two early Mediterranean civilizations. **B**

The Trojan War During the 1200s B.C., the Mycenaeans fought a ten-year war against Troy, an independent trading city located in Anatolia. According to legend, a Greek army besieged and destroyed Troy because a Trojan prince had kidnapped Helen, the beautiful wife of a Greek king.
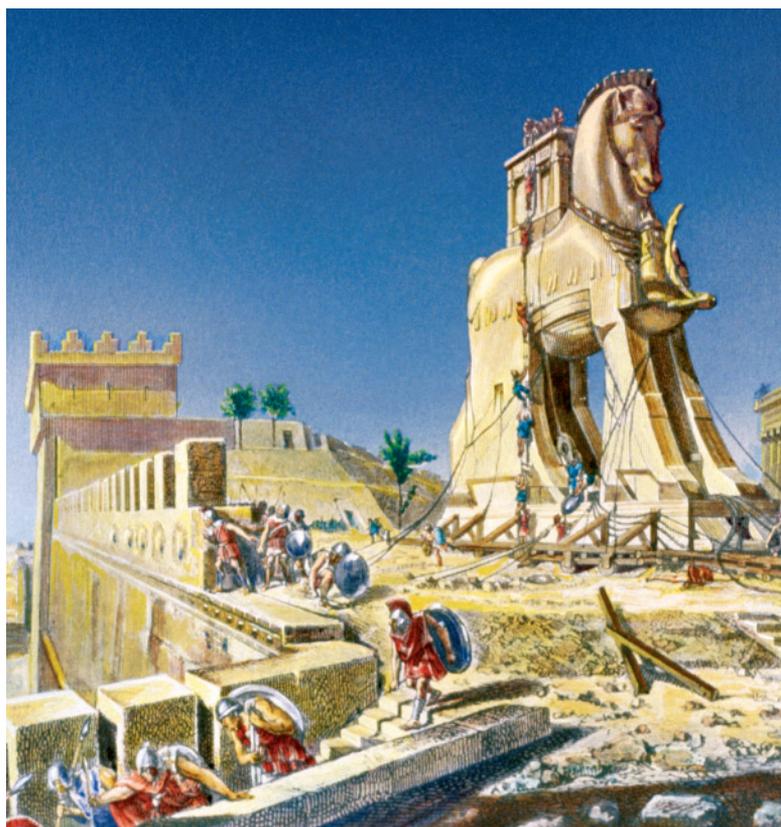
For many years, historians thought that the legendary stories told of the **Trojan War** were totally fictional. However, excavations conducted in northwestern Turkey during the 1870s by German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann suggested that the stories of the Trojan War might have been based on real cities, people, and events. Further archaeological studies conducted in the 20th century support Schliemann's findings. Although the exact nature of the Trojan War remains unclear, this attack on Troy was almost certainly one of the last Mycenaean battle campaigns.

▲ Greek stories tell of their army's capture of the legendary city of Troy by hiding soldiers in a hollow wooden horse.

Greek Culture Declines Under the Dorians

Not long after the Trojan War, Mycenaean civilization collapsed. Around 1200 B.C., sea raiders attacked and burned many Mycenaean cities. According to tradition, a new group of people, the **Dorians** (DAWR•ee•uhnz), moved into the war-torn countryside. The Dorians spoke a dialect of Greek and may have been distant relatives of the Bronze Age Greeks.

The Dorians were far less advanced than the Mycenaeans. The economy collapsed and trade eventually came to a standstill soon after their arrival. Most important to historians, Greeks appear to have temporarily lost the art of writing during the Dorian Age. No written record exists from the 400-year period between 1150 and 750 B.C. As a result, little is known about this period of Greek history.

Epics of Homer Lacking writing, the Greeks of this time learned about their history through the spoken word. According to tradition, the greatest storyteller was a blind man named **Homer**. Little is known of his personal life. Some historians believe that Homer composed his **epics**, narrative poems celebrating heroic deeds, sometime between 750 and 700 B.C. The Trojan War forms the backdrop for one of Homer's great epic poems, the *Iliad.*

The heroes of the *Iliad* are warriors: the fierce Greek, Achilles (uh•KIHL•eez), and the courageous and noble Hector of Troy. In the following dramatic excerpt, Hector's wife begs him not to fight Achilles:

PRIMARY SOURCE
"My dear husband, your warlike spirit will be your death. You've no compassion for your infant child, for me, your sad wife, who before long will be your widow. . . . As for me, it would be better, if I'm to lose you, to be buried in the ground. . . ."
Great Hector . . . replied, "Wife, all this concerns me, too. But I'd be disgraced, dreadfully shamed . . . , if I should slink away from war, like a coward. [F]or I have learned always to be brave, to fight alongside Trojans at the front, striving to win great fame for my father, for myself."

HOMER, *Iliad* (translated by Ian Johnston)

Hector's response to his wife gives insight into the Greek heroic ideal of *aretē* (ar•uh•TAY), meaning virtue and excellence. A Greek could display this ideal on the battlefield in combat or in athletic contests on the playing field.

Greeks Create Myths The Greeks developed a rich set of **myths**, or traditional stories, about their gods. The works of Homer and another epic, *Theogony* by Hesiod, are the source of much of Greek mythology. Through the myths, the Greeks sought to understand the mysteries of nature and the power of human passions. Myths explained the changing of the seasons, for example.

Greeks attributed human qualities, such as love, hate, and jealousy, to their gods. The gods quarreled and competed with each other constantly. However, unlike humans, the gods lived forever. Zeus, the ruler of the gods, lived on Mount Olympus with his wife, Hera. Hera was often jealous of Zeus' relationships with other women. Athena, goddess of wisdom, was Zeus' daughter and his favorite child. The Greeks thought of Athena as the guardian of cities, especially of Athens, which was named in her honor. You will learn about Athens and other cities in Section 2.

▲ This is a marble sculpture of Polyphemus, a cyclops, or one-eyed monster, who appears in another of Homer's epics, the *Odyssey*.

SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

TERMS & NAMES 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.
• Mycenaean   • Trojan War   • Dorian   • Homer   • epic   • myth

USING YOUR NOTES
2. Which of the cultures on your chart do you think contributed the most to Greek culture? Explain.

Culture	Contribution
Minoan	Writing System: pottery designs
Mycenaean	
Dorian	

MAIN IDEAS
3. What impact did nearness to the sea have on the development of Greece?

4. What aspects of culture did the Mycenaeans adopt from the Minoans?

5. Why were the epics of importance to the Greeks of the Dorian period?

CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING
6. **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** How did the physical geography of Greece cause Greek-speaking peoples to develop separate, isolated communities?

7. **ANALYZING CAUSES** Other than the explanation offered in the legend, why do you think the Greeks went to war with Troy?

8. **MAKING INFERENCES** The Dorian period is often called Greece's Dark Age. Why do you think this is so?

9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** CULTURAL INTERACTION Write an expository **essay** explaining why the Greek epics and myths are so well known and studied in today's society.

CONNECT TO TODAY WRITING EXPLANATIONS
Many names and phrases from this period of Greek history have been absorbed into the English language. Use library resources to find examples, such as *Achilles heel, Homeric,* and *Trojan horse.* Write a brief **explanation** of each example.