

# Ancient Greece



*Ancient Greece and nearby regions*

# A Struggle for Power

Greece is made up of a small, mountainous **peninsula** on the Mediterranean Sea and many small islands. The mountains and sea kept early Greek communities separate from each other. For this reason, it was difficult to bring all the Greek people together under one government.

By 750 B.C., Greek communities had grown into **city-states**. The Greek word for city-state is **polis**. The polis was a town, city, or village and its surrounding countryside. Athens and Sparta were the two most famous Greek city-states, and they were very different.



Sparta was a strictly controlled **military state**. Every Spartan worked hard to make sure Sparta's military was the best. All Spartan boys had to join the army at age 7. They moved into military barracks and lived there until they turned 30. At 30, men could live at home, but they had to serve in the army until age 60. Women were expected to exercise and stay fit so that they could have healthy male children. To keep citizens from learning new ideas, Spartans were not allowed to travel outside the city-state. New ideas were thought to be dangerous to the military state. Sparta had the most powerful army in Greece, but had little art or freedom.

The government of Athens was different from Sparta's government. Early Athens had a **democratic government**. In a democracy, the citizens make government decisions by voting. Every male citizen in Athens voted on major issues. Male citizens had meetings every 10 days. At these meetings, they passed laws, elected public officials, and made decisions about war for Athens. Athens became the center of Greek culture. Art, architecture, literature, drama, and philosophy grew in a place where new ideas were encouraged.

Athens and Sparta were both powerful, and they both wanted to control Greece. The Greek world became divided as other Greek city-states took sides with these two leading city-states. The Athenian alliance included most of the island and coastal city-states. Sparta led most of the major land powers of central Greece. Therefore, Athens had a stronger navy and the Spartans had a stronger army.

The **Peloponnesian War** started in 431 B.C. After a 27-year struggle, Athens was defeated. Sparta became the most powerful city-state in Greece.