**UNIVERSITY OF 8 MAI 1945, GUELMA**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**Lecture in culture and civilization**

**First year, LMD**

**The Geography of Greece**

**Geography Shapes Ancient Greek Life**

The **mainland** of Greece sticks out into the Mediterranean Sea. It is a **peninsula**, a body of land that is nearly surrounded by water. Greece also includes thousands of islands. A gulf of water nearly divides the Greek peninsula in two. The southern tip forms a second peninsula called the **Peloponnesus**. A narrow strip of land called an **isthmus** links the Peloponnesus to the rest of Greece.

**Landscape and Climate:** Mountains cover most of Greece and divide the land into many regions. The country also has no large rivers. The uneven landscape and lack of large rivers made transportation difficult in ancient times. The **rugged** landscape also made it difficult for Greeks to unite under a single government.

Greece has mild, rainy winters and hot, dry summers. The warm climate encouraged outdoor life in ancient Greece. For example, outdoor athletic competitions such as races were an important part of Greek culture.

**Land Use in Greece**

Mountains cover 70 to 80 percent of Greece. As a result, only about 20 to 30 percent of Greek land was good for farming. Even so, the ancient Greeks found ways to make the best use of the land that they had.

**•** They grew grain on the few open plains. Olive trees grew on the edges of those plains.

**•** The Greeks planted grapevines on the lower slopes of hills.

**•** Sheep and goats grazed on land that was too rocky or too infertile to grow crops.

**Agriculture** Greek land was rocky, so only a small part of the region was good for farming. Even so, more than half of all Greeks were farmers or herders. Most farming took place in the valleys located between mountains. In Greek society, landowners were part of the upper class. In general, only men owned property. A person who owned land could support himself. He had enough wealth to pay for equipment such as helmets, shields, and swords. This allowed him to serve in the army and defend his homeland. As a result, landowners had a higher place in society than merchants or poor people.

**Resources** The lack of farmland was not the only problem. Greece also lacked natural resources such as precious metals. As a result, the Greeks had to find those resources in other places.

**Trade Helps Greece Prosper**

Just as rivers influenced other ancient cultures, the sea influenced life in ancient Greece. Greece has a long coastline, and most places in Greece are less than 100 miles from the coast. In fact, many cities were built directly on harbours.

**A Seafaring People:** Several seas played a major role in the life of ancient Greece. The largest was the Mediterranean Sea to the south. The Ionian and Aegean seas were branches of the Mediterranean. The Ionian Sea is west of Greece, and the Aegean Sea lies to the east.

These “highways of water” linked most parts of Greece to each other. The Greeks used the seas as transportation routes, and they became skilled sailors and shipbuilders. They built rowing ships for fighting and sailing ships for trading. Some warships had two or three levels of oars on each side. Most sailing ships had a single mast and square sail.

The Ionian and Aegean seas are not very large. Small ships could sail around them by staying near the coast or by sailing from island to island. Once the Greeks learned these routes, they were able to sail to other regions.

The sea was a source of fish, an important part of the Greek diet. The Greeks traded fresh fish from the sea to local ports along the coast. They also dried some kinds of fish so that they could be transported over great distances.

**Trade and Commerce:** Greece did not produce much grain, but some regions produced surplus olive oil, wine, wool, and fine pottery. Greek city-states bought and sold surplus goods from each other. In addition, Greeks traded these items to other regions around the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, including Egypt and Italy.

The main items that the Greeks bought were grain, timber for building, animal hides, and slaves. The Greeks also traded for nuts, figs, cheese, and flax, which they used to make linen.

**The Earliest Greeks**

The Greek culture of sailing and trading developed over thousands of years. The earliest Greeks had moved onto the Greek peninsula about 2000 B.C.

**Mycenaean Civilization:** The first Greek civilization was built on the Peloponnesus. It was named after its most important city, Mycenae (my•SEE•nee). The city, located among hills, was surrounded by a protective wall. This fortress could withstand almost any attack. A king ruled each city of Mycenaean Greece as well as the surrounding villages and farms.

The nobles who lived within the fortress in Mycenae lived in luxury. They enjoyed great feasts in huge dining halls. They drank from gold cups and wielded bronze weapons. Most common people in Mycenaean Greece made tools from less expensive materials such as stone and wood.

