Greek Geography

How did its geography impact Ancient Greece?

Objective: Describe how geographic factors encouraged or hindered expansion and interactions within Ancient Greece.

Greek civilization began in 1750 BC north of the Mediterranean Sea in Europe.

Ancient Greece

Greece is in southeastern Europe and consists of a mainland and an archipelago (chain of islands). Mainland Greece is a large peninsula surrounded on three sides by the Mediterranean Sea (branching into the Ionian Sea in the west and the Aegean Sea in the east).

The geography of Greece greatly influenced the culture in that, with few natural resources and surrounded by water, the people eventually took to the sea for their livelihood. Mountains cover eighty percent of Greece which provides little opportunity for agriculture. As a result, the early Greeks colonized neighboring islands and founded settlements along the coast of Anatolia (also known as Asia Minor, modern day Turkey). The Greeks became skilled ship builders, sailors, and traders to acquire resources they did not have. One benefit of Greece's trade with other nations was that they encountered the Phoenician alphabet, which they adapted and became the basis for Latin and many other languages including English.

The mountains that covered Greece and the seas between islands also isolated the people of Greece. As a result, Greeks developed individual polis, also known as city-states. City-states were cities with surrounding land and villages. Each city-state was independent and located in an isolated valley. While the Greeks spoke the same language, they had different cultures and government and social structures because they were divided. The mountains separating the city-states were barriers to cultural diffusion and unity. In addition, a lack of resources and differences between the city-states led to rivalry and antagonism that led to wars. The two most well-known city-states were Sparta and Athens.

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Step One: As you read, circle as many cause and effect transition words as possible.

Step Two: Answer the following questions.

Paragraph #2

1. What challenge did Greeks face due to the mountainous geography?

2. How did they overcome this challenge?

3. What skills did Greeks develop to overcome a lack of natural resources?

4. Greeks coming into contact with the Phoenicians and adapting their alphabet would be an example of what historical concept?

Paragraph #3

5. What effect did the mountains and seas have on the Greek population?

6. How did Greeks respond to this challenge?

7. What was different among city-states?

8. What effect did these differences have on the relationships among Greek city-states?