Conclusion

For a long time, our knowledge of the earliest Greek civilizations was based on myths and legends. From archaeological discoveries of the past century and a half, we now think that parts of these myths and legends may have been true. The earliest Greeks relied on sea travel. They traded the resources of their environment with other Mediterranean people. The early Greeks kept mostly sheep and goats; olives and grapes were their most important crops.

Historians can only guess about why the civilization grew up in Greece. This civilization featured a common Greek language, a common religion, but separate city-states. The separate city-states, relatively isolated from each other in the mountainous Greek environment, founded many colonies in other lands around the Aegean Sea.

The two most important city-states, Athens and Sparta, were at first allies against Persia during the fifth century BC. Athens and Sparta later fought each other in a series of wars known as the Peloponnesian Wars. Sparta eventually prevailed in these wars. During the fifth century BC, Athens developed into what many historians feel was the world's first democracy. Historians have suggested that the open cultural climate of Athens played a role in this development. Unlike Athens, Sparta's whole way of life was based upon the military. Despite its victory in the Peloponnesian Wars, Sparta had lost military leadership of Greece by the middle of the fourth century BC.

About this same time, Macedonia arose as an important political and military power. Situated between the barbarian lands to the north and the Greek city-states to the south, Macedonia was influenced by both sets of its neighbors. For centuries, Macedonian shepherd people took advantage of their mountain environment in order to raise livestock. Macedonian resources of timber and gold were important to the city-states of the south. Under Philip II, an admirer of Greek civilization, Macedonia conquered much of Greece. His son Alexander went on to conquer an empire that included Egypt, Persia, and most of what was termed as the *Known World*. When Alexander tried to extend his empire into India, conditions of the local environment and exhaustion in his ranks forced him to turn back.

While Alexander’s empire fell apart after his death, the marks of the Greek civilization did stay in the lands he conquered, and the effects of Greece and Alexander extend down through the ages to influence us even today.