

THE COUNTRY
Greece is a region of great variety

Mediterranean and sub-alpine conditions exist within a few miles of each other
fertile plains alternate with wild mountain country

Most Greek states had their strip of Barren mountain-summits
of forested mountain slopes
of upland pastures
of fertile plains
and in many cases had access to the sea as well

Barren mountain summits

these are formed mainly of rock and comprise about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the entire country
vegetation does not grow on the mountains because there is not enough
permanent moisture to counteract the constant weathering
forests which retain moisture in their roots have been cut down by the Greeks
over their history allowing storms to sweep the mountains dry
in early times mountain slopes were well-forested and a rich source of
timber and game

Forested mountain slopes

these have diminished over the years and now form a very small area
trees were cut down for fuel (the ancients had no coal)
goats constantly nibble at trees and prevent replacements growing
most Greek wild trees are really bushes -
the bay, the oleander, the myrtle
the maple, the juniper, the strawberry tree
timber for ships had to be obtained from outside the Greek peninsula

Upland pastures

this is soil which is not good enough to be sown or planted
it tends to be a separate region away from the settlements on the plain
thus Oedipus can easily be passed on by shepherd to another country
the Greeks mainly pastured goats and sheep - and had only few cows
they kept pigs where there are oak trees (as in Arcadia)
sustenance is provided by scrub, stiff, hard and prickly (and not by grass)
thus animals were mainly thin
the flowering of the scrub provides rich nourishment for bees
honey was necessary to the ancients - they had no sugar or sweetening
in winter when there is snow on the high pastures
shepherds descend to the lower lands

Fertile plains

the smallest of the four areas - but the most important
the structure of the plains of Greece is important for its political history
the mountains do not fall into valleys which broaden out, but into ridges
the mountains do not run in straight lines as ridges
but roughly rectangularly, enclosing the land into little
square boxes
hence cultivable land is divided into separate compartments
which are well-protected against easy entrance
some are formed partly on alluvial soil with one side open to the sea
such are the plains of ARGOS, ATHENS and ELEUSIS
others are shut in by mountains on all sides
such are the plains of SPARTA, THESSALY and ARCADIA
both types were equally isolated in early times
coastal cities were built away from the shore for fear of pirates
in early times there were no regular maritime communications

Products of the fertile plains
the three most important were CORN, WINE and OLIVE OIL

Corn

either wheat or barley, it was the staple Greek food
meat was rarely eaten except at festival times when sacrificial animals
were distributed

cheese and goat's milk were also regularly eaten

the Greeks ate flour in great quantities and many varieties
usually wheat was made into bread

barley was kneaded but not baked & was eaten as a sort of porridge
with water

there were usually 2 meals - lunch towards midday, after $\frac{1}{2}$ day's work
supper in the evening

corn was sown in October and reaped in May and June

every Greek state tried to grow its own corn

every available space was used - including inaccessible rock terraces

Wine later, growing population forced Athens to import corn from Black
the vine has been in Greece from earliest times
wine has always been the national drink

Herodotus was surprised to see the Egyptians drinking beer

'They drink a wine made from barley, as they have no vines
in the country.'

HERODOTUS II 77

wine played a large part in the social and religious life of the Greeks
but they were not a drunken nation - they always drunk it fixed
usually three parts of water to two of wine
they thought it uncivilised to take it neat

Olive Oil

the only one of the 3 products which is characteristically Mediterranean

it can only be grown in an area with a practically rainless summer

it supplied 3 separate roles for the Greek - cooking, washing, lighting

cooking - olive oil was used in almost every dish

washing - the Greeks used no soap but rubbed themselves in oil

lighting - the Greeks had no light other than oil and resinous torches

numerous oil lamps have been discovered.

a different quality of oil was used for these three purposes

olives were squeezed in presses -

1st squeeze produced oil for cooking and eating

2nd squeeze for oil for anointing the body

3rd squeeze for oil for lamps

all the rest, skins and all, was used for fuel

olive trees grow in all parts of Greece wherever there is enough soil
up to a height of 1800'

it flourished best in Attica

an olive grove is not a forest but an open orchard

trees are planted tidily in rows - usually 40' between each tree
60' between each row

thus there is plenty of room to grow corn between the trees

so a peasant can grow both forms of cultivation

olives require very little looking after

olives are picked in the late autumn

it is convenient that olives ripen later than figs and grapes

olives only come to maturity a long time after they are planted

they do not bear a full crop for 16-18 years.

they are not at their best for 40-60 years