

## Unit 3 The European and Mediterranean world

# Introduction to the European and Mediterranean world

The Mediterranean world lies at the crossroads of three continents – Europe, Africa, and Asia. The name Mediterranean comes from a Latin word meaning ‘inland’ or ‘in the middle of land’.

In this chapter you will learn how things like geography, social structure and government, cultural evidence, religion, and war and conflict influenced a number of different Mediterranean societies. You will also learn how ancient civilisations in Egypt, Greece and Rome influenced our modern world.

Can we cut a line from the opening?



chapter

# 9

## 9A

Where and when did ancient societies in the Mediterranean world develop?

## 9B

What were the key features of ancient societies in the Mediterranean world?

## 9C

How did ancient societies in the Mediterranean world influence our modern world?

**Source 1** The Acropolis in Athens, Greece, is one of the most important sites from the ancient Mediterranean world. It was built around 2500 years ago as a fortress where the people could retreat when the city was attacked.

### Unit 2 The Mediterranean World

This unit offers a choice of three topics:

- Ancient Egypt
- Ancient Greece
- Ancient Rome.

**You must choose AT LEAST ONE of these topics for study.**

# 9.1 The where and when of the Mediterranean world

Some of the most significant ancient civilisations developed on the continents we now know as Europe and Africa. They included ancient Egypt, ancient Greece and ancient Rome. All of these civilisations had one thing in common – their connection to the Mediterranean Sea. The name Mediterranean comes from a Latin word meaning ‘inland’ or ‘in the middle of land’. By looking at Source 2, you can see how it earned this name.

In this unit you will be learning about one of these ancient civilisations in detail. To get a better understanding of how and why your chosen civilisation developed, it helps to look at some of the factors they had in common and how their development was linked.

Source 2 shows the location and size of these ancient civilisations and provides some key information about each of them. The timeline (Source 1) also shows the dates for each of the civilisations in the Mediterranean world. Note the dates for each civilisation as you are looking at the map – not all of them existed in the same time periods. Some flourished and then disappeared, only to later become part of another civilisation. This was the case with ancient Egypt and ancient Greece, both of which eventually became part of the Roman Empire.

## Check your learning 9.1

### Remember and understand

- 1 What is the meaning of the word ‘Mediterranean’ and what language does it originate from?
- 2 What geographical feature did ancient Egypt, ancient Greece and ancient Rome have in common?
- 3 Which ancient civilisation lasted longer, ancient Egypt or ancient Rome?

### Apply and analyse

- 4 Name one legacy of ancient Greece.

### Ancient Egypt (c. 3100–30 BCE)

Ancient Egypt was a civilisation based around the Nile River in northern Africa. It was one of the world’s first civilisations. Ancient Egypt was ruled under one government from about 3100 BCE. Between then and 30 BCE, when the last pharaoh died, there were 31 **dynasties** (ruling families) and 70 **pharaohs** (leaders).



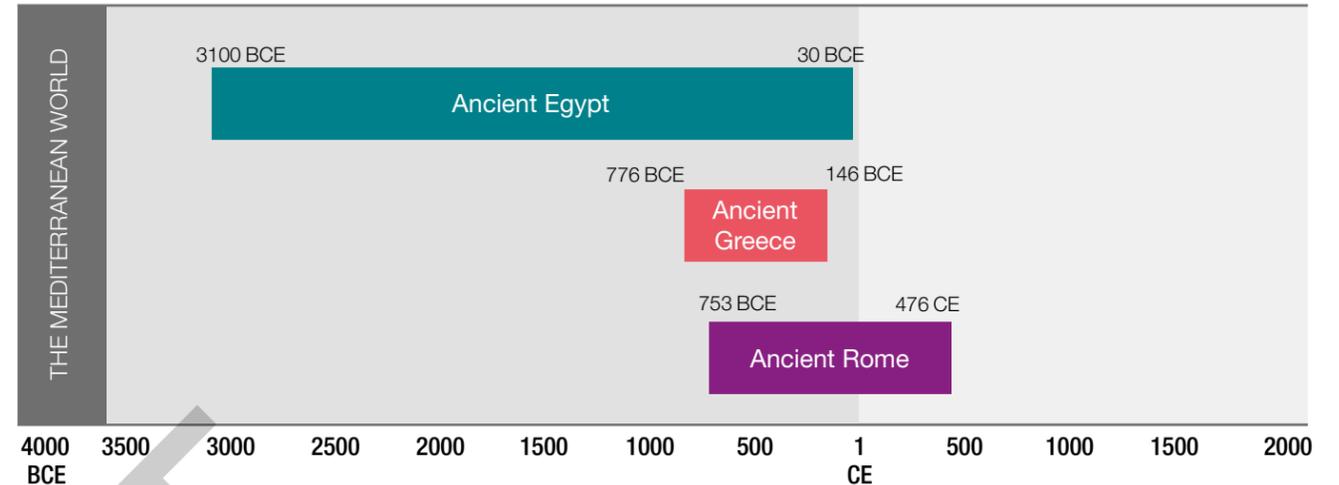
### Ancient Greece (c. 776–146 BCE)

Formed from three existing cultures in the region, ancient Greece covered all of modern-day Greece as well as parts of Turkey and other settlements around the Mediterranean and Black seas. The civilisation lasted only about 400 years, but its legacy (including democracy) influences the Western world to this day.



### Ancient Rome (753 BCE–476 CE)

The civilisation of ancient Rome lasted approximately 1300 years. It was centred around the city of Rome, in modern-day Italy. The Romans conquered the ancient Egyptians and Greeks, as well as many other peoples. During its history, Rome was ruled as a **monarchy**, a **republic** and an **empire**. It was a powerful civilisation with a strong military and an advanced culture.



Source 1 A timeline showing the rise and fall of ancient civilisations in the Mediterranean world



Source 2 This satellite image of Earth shows the location and size of key ancient civilisations in the Mediterranean world when they were at their peak.

## 9.2 Key features of ancient societies in the Mediterranean world

Even though ancient societies across the Mediterranean world were very different, they were all influenced by some common factors. Things like geography, social structures (like governments), religion and wars. We will look briefly at some of these factors now and see how they influenced different societies in the Mediterranean world.

### Geography

The geographical features of the Mediterranean region were critical in influencing how early societies there developed.

In ancient Egypt, the Nile was the lifeblood of the civilisation. Egypt would never have developed as a civilisation without the Nile. It provided the water

critical for irrigating crops that fed the early Egyptians. The deserts to the west could not support a civilisation, but they did provide the Egyptian people with protection from enemy invaders because they were impossible to cross. The Red Sea to the east and the Mediterranean Sea to the north also provided a barrier against invasion (see Source 1). Egyptian architecture and fashion was adapted to living in a hot, dry climate.

The ancient Greek civilisation sprang up in an area known as the Peloponnese, on the shores of the Aegean Sea. The land is mostly mountainous and the climate moderate throughout the year, with wet winters and warm, dry summers – a very different geography and climate to Egypt (see Source 2). The fertile coastal plain allowed agriculture.



Source 1 A satellite image of Egypt showing the fertile Nile valley and delta in green



Source 2 Steep mountains and flat farmland in the Peloponnese, Greece

The mountains isolated early settlements, as did the many islands that make up Greece, so these settlements developed independently of one another as separate city-states. Each city-state had its own ruler and customs – unlike Egypt and Rome, which each had one ruler.

Ancient Rome was settled on the Italian peninsula, which juts out into the Mediterranean Sea (see Source 3). The landscape of the peninsula is varied, comprising mountains and fertile plains. A rugged mountain range, the Appenines, runs down the peninsula's centre, which made expansion inland difficult. Being close to the sea, however, allowed the Romans easy access to many coastal settlements and other foreign territories around the Mediterranean region, which they gradually conquered with the help of their strong navy.

### Social structure and government

A common element of Mediterranean societies was that they were **hierarchical**. This means that they each had strict social classes. Despite this similarity, Egypt, Greece and Rome all had very different forms of government that developed and changed over time.



Source 3 A satellite image of the Italian peninsula

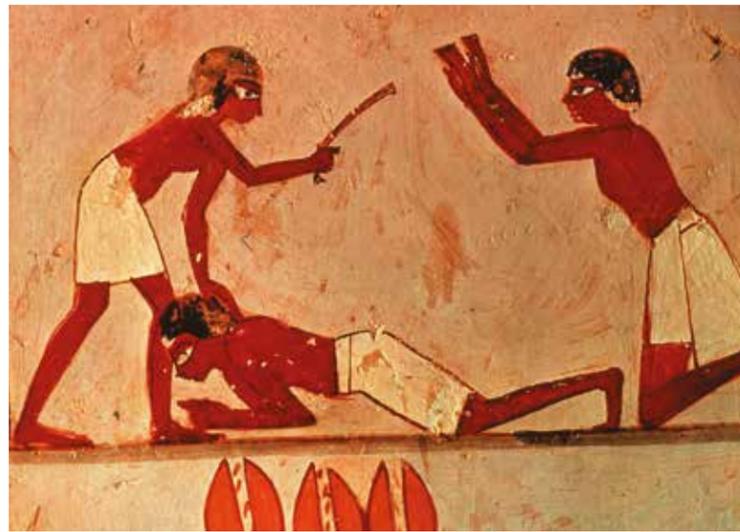
Ancient Egypt was ruled by a **pharaoh** (a person similar to a king) who owned all the land and its resources. His power was passed on to his son. Other social groups were defined by their jobs, such as priests, merchants and scribes. Slaves, who were often captured as prisoners of war, did most of the hard work in Egyptian society. The role of women was generally to raise a family, but they nevertheless had relatively strong rights for that era.

Unlike Egypt, ancient Greece was made up of a series of city-states and had no centralised government. In its early history, the **city-states** were ruled by kings who exercised total power. Later, that power passed to a small group of **aristocrats**. In the 6th century BCE, the people of Athens developed a democratic system of government, which gave **citizens** some power in running the state. Most city-states eventually adopted **democracy**. Citizenship was restricted to adult men whose parents had been born in the city-state and were married. Women, slaves and foreigners were not 'citizens' and could not vote. Women were expected to stay at home, regardless of their wealth and position. Slaves were usually prisoners of war or children sold by very poor families, and many lived short, brutal lives.

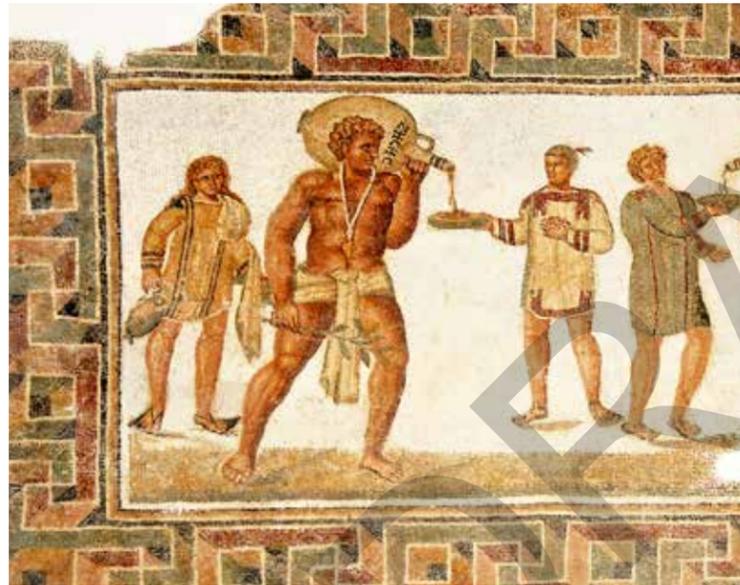
After 27 BCE, Rome was ruled by **emperors**. For a large part of its earlier history, however, the government of ancient Rome was similar to that of ancient Greece. Political decisions were made by a small group of people in the **Senate** and a **Citizens' Assembly**. All the politically important, powerful jobs were held by **patricians**, members of ancient Rome's wealthy aristocratic families. The ordinary people who made up the majority of Roman society were called **plebeians**. Similar rules of citizenship applied, so that women, foreigners and slaves could not have full citizenship. Roman women had few rights and led restricted lives that centred around the home and their family. Like other ancient civilisations, Rome depended on slaves as a source of labour. Roman slaves were also usually prisoners of war or abandoned children. Some slaves were freed (freedmen), and a few became very wealthy and influential.

## Cultural evidence

A great part of what we know about ancient civilisations comes from cultural evidence. This



Source 4 An ancient Egyptian painting of slaves



Source 5 An ancient Roman mosaic showing a slave serving wine

evidence includes artefacts such as paintings, sculpture and pottery. Cultural evidence is also present in iconography. This term refers to the content of art – how civilisations used pictures and symbols to represent their ideas and way of life.

## Art, iconography and pottery

Ancient civilisations practised art for tens of thousands of years. The oldest rock paintings are believed to be 32 000 years old, and pottery has existed for more than 20 000 years.

In ancient Egypt, art was magical and was supposed to appeal to the gods. Art was found in

temples, palaces and tombs. Artists used recognised symbols to seek protection from gods. When artists depicted people, they showed as much of the person as possible (both front and side) so that the gods would recognise them. Certain colours symbolised particular gods or parts of nature.

Most of the art remaining from ancient Greece can be found on pottery. Pots became highly detailed during Greece's Golden Age (c. 500–300 BCE), and depicted many aspects of religion and daily life. Greek pots characteristically depicted red or orange images on black backgrounds or vice versa (see Source 6). The Greeks also produced many sculptures, usually of nude figures.

The ancient Romans produced vast quantities of pottery and glassware, but it was not as decorative as ancient Greek pottery. Much of Roman art was borrowed from the Greeks. The ancient Romans produced sculptures, paintings and mosaics (pictures made of tiles). Similarly to the Greeks, they depicted gods, important people or scenes from everyday life (see Source 8).

## Writing

Some ancient societies developed systems of writing to keep records of trading. The ancient Sumerians in **Mesopotamia** produced the first known script around 3500 BCE. Only the very privileged or highly educated would have been able to read or write.

The ancient Egyptians were using **hieroglyphs** by 3000 BCE. There were about 700 signs, each one representing a word or a sound.

By the early part of the first **millennium** BCE, a number of languages in the Middle East region had alphabets. These were lists of symbols that related to particular sounds. The

first alphabets contained only consonants. The alphabet of the ancient Phoenicians (a people living in the region of modern-day Lebanon) had 22 characters. It would later influence the writing of the ancient Greeks and provide the basis for the alphabet of the ancient Romans.



Source 6 A clay tablet displaying a cuneiform script, developed by the ancient Sumerians



Source 7 A krater – a pot used to dilute wine in ancient Greece



Source 8 An ancient Egyptian plaque



Source 9 An ancient Roman mosaic depicting street musicians



Source 10 Hieroglyphs from an ancient Egyptian tomb

## Religion

Religion played a central role in **culture** and society across the Mediterranean world. The Egyptians, Romans and Greeks all had complex religious beliefs. They all worshipped multiple gods who they believed were responsible for things like the weather and natural disasters.

In Egypt, religion dominated society and the pharaoh was seen as a **deity** (god). Priests and priestesses were at the top of the social hierarchy. Many Egyptian gods were represented with animal parts, and gods were used to explain the natural world and forces of nature. Many of the most famous features of ancient Egypt, such as pyramids and mummies, were the result of religious practices related to death.

Ancient Greek religion, like Egyptian religion, involved many gods and goddesses. Myths and legends about the gods were used to explain the world and strengthen Greek history and culture. Religion was important but, unlike in Egypt, the head of the government was not a religious figure. Religious beliefs and practices influenced many aspects of Greek culture, including architecture and even the Olympic Games.

Most ancient Roman deities were the equivalent of ancient Greek gods and goddesses. Romans



Source 12 A depiction of the Egyptian god Anubis



Source 13 A marble carving showing the Greek god Apollo and the hero Heracles

also incorporated the deities of civilisations they had conquered into their belief system, such as the Egyptian goddess Isis. Roman deities were worshipped in temples and at home, and this often involved sacrificing animals. Christianity spread to Rome after it was founded. Despite Christians facing around 300 years of brutal persecution in Rome, by 394 BCE it had become the official religion of ancient Rome.



Source 11 A 17th-century painting of the Roman god Neptune

## War and conflict

In its early years, Egypt was a peaceful society, but by 1550 BCE it possessed a very powerful army, which included foot soldiers and charioteers. The pharaoh used the army to protect Egypt from attack, and various pharaohs also used the military to expand Egypt's territory and influence in the region.

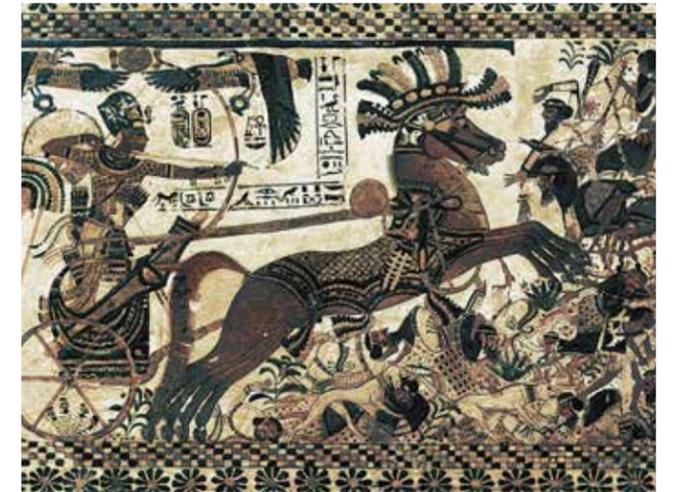
Because the Greeks were not governed by one ruler like the Egyptians, different city-states often fought wars against one another. Different city-states used different military structures and strategies. Wars were an important part of myth and legend, and the gods were believed to be involved in determining their outcomes.

A long period of wars between Greek states ruined much of Greece's farmland and weakened the city-states. Eventually, the king of Macedon, Philip II, conquered Greece's city-states. His son Alexander the Great consolidated control and also conquered Egypt in 332 BCE.

Rome had a large and powerful army. Military service was an important part of life for most citizens and was crucial to expanding the empire and then defending it. The Roman army was highly structured and organised, very disciplined, and it employed a wide range of military tactics. Through wars with neighbouring societies, Rome was able to expand its empire around the entire Mediterranean Sea. It ultimately conquered the Greeks and the Egyptians.



Source 14 An artist's impression of the Roman army at war



Source 15 A painting showing the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun on his war chariot



Source 16 A 17th-century representation of a scene from the Peloponnesian War

### Check your learning 9.2

#### Remember and understand

- 1 What was the name given to the rulers of ancient Egypt?
- 2 What was the name given to ordinary citizens in ancient Rome?

#### Apply and analyse

- 3 Choose a social group (such as women or slaves) and describe its role in each of the three ancient societies.
- 4 Discuss some of the ways religion and beliefs influenced ancient societies in the Mediterranean world.

## 9.3 Legacies of societies in the Mediterranean world

Ancient Mediterranean societies heavily influenced the development of our world in many ways. From religion and politics to science and architecture, many of the things we take for granted in the modern world can trace their beginnings to ancient societies in the Mediterranean.

### Belief systems

Christianity is the world's largest religion. It arose in the Middle East, but it first became an official religion in Rome. The Roman Empire was also central to the spread of Christianity. Today, the Pope, who is the head of the Catholic Church, is still based in Rome.

**Source 1** Crowds gathering outside the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome for a mass conducted by the Pope



### Government

A major legacy of the ancient world is **democracy**, a form of government that developed in ancient Greece. Many countries today (including Australia) have adopted democracy as their system of government. Some things have changed about the way it works, but its central ideas continue. Athens did not have political parties. Every male citizen participated directly in decisions about how their city-state was run. In countries like Australia today, our population is far too big for everyone to participate directly in running the country. Instead, we choose representatives who participate in parliament on our behalf. We also have a much broader group of citizens. In Athens, females, slaves and foreigners could not be citizens and could not vote.

**Source 2** A modern painting showing men of ancient Greece taking part in a democratic process



### Science and technology

In ancient Greece, the arts and sciences flourished. Philosophers and scholars of mathematics, astronomy, science and history created works that are still influential today. For example, we still use Archimedes' mathematical formulas. The writing of Greek philosophers – including Socrates, Plato and Aristotle – continue to influence thinking in the modern world. Greek storytellers continue to inspire us. When you were younger, you may have read Aesop's fables, which came from ancient Greece, as did famous stories such as the Trojan Horse.

There is evidence that the ancient Egyptians employed complex mathematics in their architecture. They understood decimals, fractions and geometry. They also had relatively advanced medicine. The ancient Greeks learned a lot about medicine from the Egyptians. For example, they used hot knives during surgery to seal blood vessels.

### Sport and entertainment

Many forms of modern entertainment also originated in the ancient Mediterranean world, such as sport and theatre. The massive sports stadiums of today are designed using the same planning concepts that inspired the **Colosseum** in ancient Rome. Our modern Olympic Games had their beginnings in ancient Greece nearly 3000 years ago, and the idea of marathons comes from an ancient Greek battle. Ancient Greek auditoriums are a model for many modern concert halls and movie theatres, and Western drama has its origins in ancient Greece.

### Building technology

Greek and Roman architectural forms have been influential in modern architecture. Many modern (or relatively modern) buildings in the Western world use the columns and domes developed by the Greeks and Romans.

Cement was invented in the Roman Empire, and the road-building techniques of the Romans continue to impress modern engineers. Some of the principles used by the Romans in building their huge road network are still relevant today.



**Source 3** The remains of the Colosseum in Rome



**Source 4** The design of the State Library of Victoria in Melbourne was influenced by ancient Roman architecture.

### Check your learning 9.3

#### Remember and understand

- 1 Name the most significant legacy of ancient Greece. How has this influenced the system of government in modern-day Australia?
- 2 What was the name given to ancient Rome's largest sporting and entertainment arena? Look at Source 3. How did the design of this building influence modern-day stadiums?

#### Apply and analyse

- 3 The work of ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle has had a significant impact on modern society. Conduct some research on one of these philosophers and list three ways in which they have influenced the world we live in today.