

# Trade in Ancient Greece

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In ancient Greek city-states, an area known as the Agora was the main marketplace. Here, the east portico of this Agora is seen. It is located in present-day Turkey. Photo: Carole Raddato/Wikimedia

Trade was very important in ancient Greece. The Greeks even built cities in other parts of the world so they could trade goods. They also built ships that could travel far across the Mediterranean Sea. This is the sea that touches Europe, northern Africa and the Middle East.

Goods could be made in one part of the Mediterranean and sold in another. The Greeks spread their culture to other peoples by selling wine, olives and pottery. In return, they bought goods from other cultures.

## **From local to international trade**

In the Greek world, trade began about 4,600 years ago. Greek pottery and precious goods have been found far from where they were made.

These findings show that trade happened between Egypt, Asia Minor and Greek city-states. Asia Minor was the area that is now the country of Turkey. At some point, these civilizations became weaker and trade almost disappeared.

Homer and Hesiod were Greek writers who lived about 2,700 years ago. Their books are the first to mention trade and merchants. In their lifetimes, trade began spreading across the Mediterranean.

Trade was growing for many different reasons. More people began using gold and silver coins to buy and sell goods. This way, they did not have to exchange one item for another, but could simply use money. They also started using the same measures of weight, size and volume. This made it easier for merchants to compare their goods.



## Fewer pirates, safer seas

The Greeks were able to get rid of more pirates, which made the seas safer. Merchant ships were built to carry more goods. As merchants sailed across the sea, they would stop at various trading posts. While there, they bought and sold their goods before moving on with their journey.

One of the most powerful cities in Greece was Athens. About 2,400 years ago, Athens' port of Piraeus became the most important trading center in the Mediterranean. Goods from all over the world could be found there.

## Traded goods

Goods were traded inside Greece between different city-states. A city-state is a city that rules over the area around it. Common goods were grains, wine, olives, cheese, honey, meat and tools.

In many parts of the world, people wanted beautiful Greek pottery. This pottery has been found as far away as the western coast of Africa. Other popular Greek goods were wine, olives, olive oil and marble.

The Greeks bought many goods from other parts of the world. In major Greek cities, people could buy wheat and slaves from Egypt. Slaves were people who were captured, bought and sold.

The Greeks also bought textiles, spices and papyrus. This is a type of paper from Egypt made from the papyrus plant. Markets also sold glass and metals such as iron, copper, gold and silver.

## Trade incentives and protection

Merchants were able to borrow money to pay for their goods. They then sent ships to sell these goods at a higher price. The merchants had to pay back what they borrowed. If they did not pay back the money, their ship could be taken away.

The government did not get involved much in trading. But there was one type of good that the government was in charge of. This was grain.

Athens had a large population, and everyone needed food. The government made sure the city had enough grain. If someone tried to sell grain to another city, they would be sentenced to death. Government officials made sure that the prices were right, and buyers did not pay more than they had to.

Greek cities taxed goods that were sold or bought from outside. Taxes are money that is paid to the



government. The government uses this money to build parts of the city or to give services to citizens. When goods are taxed, it means that merchants have to give the government money when they buy or sell.

About 2,400 years ago, the Greek cities began fighting each other. They grew weaker and were conquered by other civilizations. Trade moved to other parts of the ancient world. Still, many Greek cities continued to be important trading centers, especially Athens.

## Quiz

- 1 Read the paragraph from the section "Fewer pirates, safer seas."

*The Greeks were able to get rid of more pirates, which made the seas safer. Merchant ships were built to carry more goods. As merchants sailed across the sea, they would stop at various trading posts. While there, they bought and sold their goods before moving on with their journey.*

What is the MOST accurate explanation of this paragraph?

- (A) Merchants were forced to help the ancient Greeks transport their goods.
- (B) Getting rid of pirates helped the ancient Greeks trade more goods.
- (C) Ancient Greek merchant ships were based on the design of pirate ships.
- (D) Fewer trading posts were needed after the ancient Greeks built more ships.

- 2 Read the paragraph from the section "Trade incentives and protection."

*Greek cities taxed goods that were sold or bought from outside. Taxes are money that is paid to the government. The government uses this money to build parts of the city or to give services to citizens. When goods are taxed, it means that merchants have to give the government money when they buy or sell.*

Which sentence from this paragraph BEST supports the conclusion that taxes from Greek trade helped develop its cities?

- (A) Greek cities taxed goods that were sold or bought from outside.
- (B) Taxes are money that is paid to the government.
- (C) The government uses this money to build parts of the city or to give services to citizens.
- (D) When goods are taxed, it means that merchants have to give the government money when they buy or sell.

- 3 Use the information in the article and the map in the section "From local to international trade" to select the TRUE statement.

- (A) Greece had trading ports in many areas around the Mediterranean.
- (B) Trade in the Mediterranean grew strongest outside of Greece.
- (C) The only place Greece traded was in very large ports in Asia Minor.
- (D) Greece was able to develop trade but not colonies in other countries.

- 4 Examine the two images closest to the bottom of the article.

What do these images show about ancient Greek trade?

- (A) They show that Greek coins and vases were made of the same material.
- (B) They show that most Greek images were of people gathering olives.
- (C) They show that Greeks designed vases that could be bought only with gold coins.
- (D) They show that Greeks traded both goods and money to get things they needed.