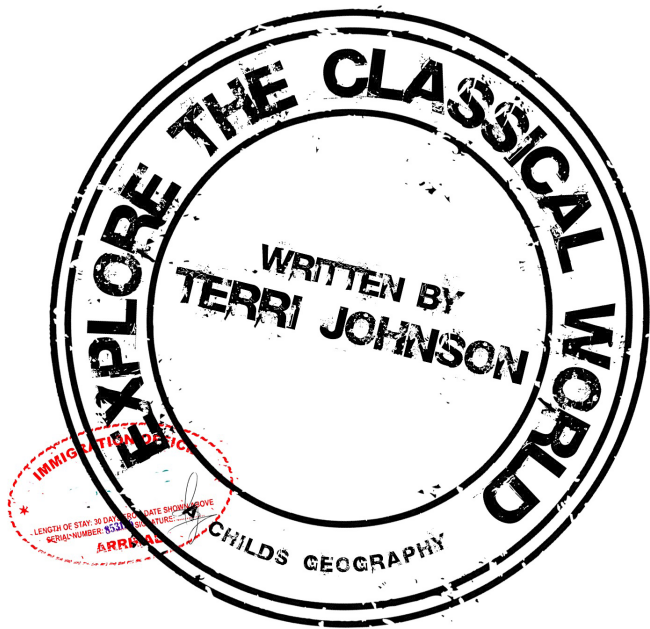


A CHILD'S GEOGRAPHY

Volume III



A CHILD'S GEOGRAPHY

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Timelines, Map Work, Activities, Recipes, Prayer Guide and more can be found on the CD-ROM in the back of your book.



“THE CLASSICAL WORLD”

ITALY, GREECE, MALTA, AND THE BALKANS

KNOWLEDGE QUEST MAPS



CROATIA

BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

SERBIA

MONTENEGRO

MACEDONIA

ALBANIA

GREECE

TURKEY

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

AEGEAN SEA

SEA OF CRETE

CRETE



DANUBE RIVER

BELGRADE

SARAJEVO

MOKRA GORA

BOBOTOV KUK

MOUNT LOVCEN

(Kosovo)

PODGORICA

PRIZREN

SHKODER

SKOPJE

DURRËS

TIRANA

LAKE OHRID

BITOLA

THESSALONICA

MOUNT OLYMPUS

CORFU

PINDUS MOUNTAINS

SKYROS

EUBOEA

(ATTICA PENINSULA)

CORINTH CANAL

ATHENS

(PELOPONNESE PENINSULA)

SARONIC GULF

MYKONOS

PAROS

NAXOS

IOS

SANTORINI

RHODES

CHANIA

HERAKLION

KNOSSOS

ZAGREB

SPLIT

MOSTAR

DUBROVNIK

KOTOR

BAY OF KOTOR

CETINJE

BARI

BLACK SEA

IONIAN SEA

PROVENCE

*For my family, who believed in me, rejoiced
with me and parted with me for two weeks
while I explored the "Classical World." I can
never thank you enough for that gift!*

*Todd, my beloved
Nicole, my traveler
Brady, my support
Rachel, my helper
Lydia, my enthusiast
Autumn, my tender one
Levi, my energy*

Explore the Classical World: INTRODUCTION

Grab your passport and your map. Strap on your backpack and tie your shoes! In this book, the third in the Child's Geography series, we'll take a grand adventure through the countries that surround the sparkling Mediterranean Sea. This area was once known as The Classical World and is considered to be the birthplace of Western Civilization, that is, the "way of life" for all people living in the western hemisphere of our planet. These countries are both very old and very new at the same time. How can this be? They are old because the very first European colonies began and flourished in this little corner of the world. Did you know that the oldest wooden wheel has been found in Slovenia, a country in Europe, not the Middle East. They are new because country lines have been redrawn recently, new names have been given to them and new governments have been formed. Of course, the redrawing of imaginary lines on a map cannot change the people, culture or landforms of a geographical area. So, we will rediscover these old places together. Are you ready?

As we travel around the Classical World, we'll learn about Greece, Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, San Marino, Vatican City and Malta. Some of these countries are tiny islands and others are peninsulas that jut into the sea; some are hot and dry while others are cool and snowy; but each of these countries have at least one thing in common—these lands were the center of world power during the Classical Age, from over 2000 BC to AD 500. They also relied upon the Mediterranean Sea for travel, trade and conquest. It was known as The Great Sea in ancient times for it stretches from the Holy Land of Israel to the "very edge of the world" as it was considered then, which we know now as the Iberian Peninsula, or Spain. The ancient people didn't know there was any land further west than this. (In fact, Jonah tried to flee to Tarshish in Spain, because this was as far as anyone could travel back in his day. Do you remember what happened to him?) This great body of water is also where three continents meet—Africa, Asia and Europe.

While the Mediterranean is one great big salty sea, it is called by different names at various places. Here are the names of portions of the Mediterranean waters—Aegean Sea, Sea of Crete, Ionian Sea, Adriatic Sea, Tyrrhenian Sea, Ligurian Sea, Balearic Sea and the Alborian Sea. These eight seas all mix and run together in one great body of water, but like land, have different names at its different locations. We will concentrate on just the first five, as they are the ones that surround Greece, the northern Balkan countries, Italy, and Malta.

See the map on the next page!



A FEW THOUGHTS BEFORE EMBARKING...

This book is a stand-alone book and can be read straight through without any additional resources. We have provided pronunciation and glossary assistance, along with photos and maps to help you get everything you need out of this volume. However, there are a few things that you should know...

1. This is Volume 3 of A Child's Geography. Two volumes precede it—[A Child's Geography: Explore His Earth](#) and [A Child's Geography: Explore the Holy Land](#). These books do not need to be read in order, but they do complement each other nicely. The first two volumes were written by best-selling author Ann Voskamp. She set the stage for a great series of books that teach history and geography using a "living book" approach, engaging the reader while bringing greater understanding and appreciation for distant corners of our globe. [Explore His Earth](#) lays a foundation for geography by covering earth science topics such as components of our planet, layers of the atmosphere, continents and seas, tectonic plates, earthquakes, volcanoes, latitude, longitude and so much more. [Explore the Holy Land](#) dives straight down into the Middle East, exploring the beautiful countryside and exposing the cultures and people who live there.

2. Volumes 2 and 3 would be the perfect companions to an ancient history study. We hope to publish [The Far East](#) soon, then hopefully [Western Europe](#), the [Viking Lands](#) and [England and Her Neighbors](#) in the near future. Ambitious, we know! But A Child's Geography is a GREAT way to study history and geography together in a seamless way.

3. A single volume of *A Child's Geography* can be studied over the course of a semester or an entire year. If you plan to use only one book this year, then aim to cover one chapter every two weeks. The first week, you can read the chapter and discuss the narration questions. The second week, you and your students can work on additional projects, such as writing in your journals, keeping a timeline, labeling maps, doing extra reading and tackling some fun projects, especially (I hope!) cooking up some of the recipes provided. If you would prefer to finish the book in half the time—one semester—then plan on spending one week on each chapter, reading the content and choosing one or two additional activities per country.

4. The extra activities are located on the CD-ROM in the back of your book. There, you will find timelines for each chapter, map labeling suggestions, hands-on activities (including authentic recipes), extra reading suggestions and an optional prayer guide.

5. A *Child's Geography* series is intended for students in 1st through 6th grades, but it can work equally well with middle school students. Feel free to adjust the activities and assignments according to the necessary grade level and/or maturity level.

6. This book is your book and you are the teacher. Please use this book, along with its many optional activities, as you see fit. We hoped to provide you with MORE than you need or want to do. That way, you can pick and choose what works best for your family or group of students. Our goal is to equip you with resources, not shackle you to a pile of extra work.

If you have any questions or comments, please send them to me at terri@knowledgequestmaps.com. I would love to discuss them with you. Oh, that reminds me... yes, I, Terri Johnson, am the author of this book. While Ann Voskamp began the series several years ago, she is unable to continue it at this point in her life. I hope that I have been able to do this volume justice, following on her heels and trying to fit into her awfully large shoes (no, her feet aren't big, but her reputation as an extremely gifted author is great indeed). Any mistakes that you find are mine alone. Anything that you love about the first two books and the series concept as a whole can be credited to Ann.

I hope that you enjoy this fascinating journey around the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. I cannot wait to show these places to you. It will be like traveling there without leaving the comfort of your own home. Together, we will embrace new cultures and appreciate people different from ourselves. It will be an adventure you will not soon forget. Do you have your map? Let's go!



ANCIENT GREECE





GREECE, PT 1: ISLAND HOPPING

Long, long ago, on a small crescent-shaped island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, there lived a people called the Minoans [mi-NO-ens]. This ancient civilization grew and became a great power around 2500 BC. The Minoans lived on Crete for over one thousand years. They are believed to have built the earliest civilization in Europe shortly after the worldwide flood as recorded in Genesis 7. They lived in grand palaces and explored the Great Sea (as the Mediterranean was known at that time) in large sailboats. The Minoans are especially remembered for the way they celebrated special holidays. Young people displayed their bravery and acrobatic skills by vaulting over charging bulls!

Yes, the Minoans were a daring people, and Crete, which now belongs to the nation of Greece, is a great place to start our journey through the countries that surround the sparkling Mediterranean Sea.



Greek islands as seen from space. Photo courtesy of NASA.

Have you ever lain on your back on the soft grass and gazed up at the drifting clouds overhead? Sometimes the clouds look like cotton balls floating across the blue sky. This is what the central part of the Mediterranean Sea looks like. You would spy thousands of islands dotting the blue sea if you were to look down at it from above. Crete is just one of those many islands in the Mediterranean, but it is one of the largest.

So, to begin this journey, just as we begin all journeys, we will need a map. It is important to know where we are now and where we are going—or we might get lost!

A CHILD'S GEOGRAPHY

Grab your globe or use the map at the beginning of this book to locate the island of Crete. Its crescent shape makes it easy to find. Crete is the fifth largest island in the Mediterranean and is located below and between mainland Greece and Turkey. It sits like a jewel in the center of the enormous crystal sea!

Over 4,000 years ago, a seafaring people—the Minoans—founded and settled the island of Crete, which is 100 miles south of mainland Greece. The Minoans were master storytellers. Around their fires at night, they told of a king named Minos, the son of the



Photo courtesy of NASA, taken from the International Space Station. Notice the sun glint in the sea to the northwest of the island, which occurs from light reflecting towards the astronaut photographer.

mythological god Zeus and his wife Europa. Minos was very clever, but also very cruel. This tyrant of a king built an elaborate maze, called a **labyrinth**, which became the home of the Minotaur, a creature with the body of a man but with the head and tail of a bull. This monstrous Minotaur was a ferocious man-eating beast. Every nine years, the cruel King Minos would send seven young men and seven young women to their doom down the corridors of the labyrinth. He wanted them to become hopelessly lost and disoriented before being eaten by the Minotaur monster. As you can imagine, the people of Crete were afraid of their king. They needed a hero!

Word of the Minotaur and the cruelty of King Minos spread far and wide until it reached the city of Athens on the mainland of Greece. The Prince of Athens, Theseus, also a son of the gods, despaired for his distant neighbors and resolved to slay the beast. Before another nine years had passed and before seven more men and seven more women would be sentenced to their doom, Prince Theseus set off across the seas with his black sail raised, promising his father that he would return with a white sail in its place to signal his safe and victorious return.

Once in Crete, Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos, fell instantly in love with Theseus. When she learned of his plot to secretly take the place of one of the sentenced youths so that he might slay the dreaded Minotaur, she pleaded with him to reconsider his heroic plan. Theseus would not be dissuaded. But he promised her that if he survived and returned from the death maze, he would bring her back with him across the seas to Athens.

On the day he was to enter the labyrinth, Theseus, like all the others, was stripped of his weapons. With one final touch, Ariadne pressed into Theseus' hand a ball of string to help him find his way out of the labyrinth and back to her. Once inside, Theseus tied the string to the doorpost and pulled out



Image of Theseus and the Minotaur on 6th-century black-figure pottery. Photo is public domain, courtesy of Wikimedia.org.

the small sword that he had concealed from the guards beneath his tunic. Following Ariadne's directions, he moved ever forward and ever downward, never to the left or to the right. At the center of the labyrinth, he met the hungry Minotaur and slashed him in the throat with his dagger, killing the monster instantly. Theseus managed to get himself and the other thirteen youths safely out of the labyrinth by following the string back to the entrance.

Once outside, he collapsed from exhaustion on the beach. In a dream, his mother, the goddess Athena, told him to sail quickly for Athens but not to bring Ariadne with him. Reluctantly, he followed her instructions, but in his misery at the loss of Ariadne, he forgot to raise the white sail. Theseus' father, King Aegean [ah-GEE-un], was anxiously awaiting his son's return. When he saw the black sail far off in the distance, he believed that Theseus had perished. In grief and despair, he jumped off a cliff into the sea and drowned. That region of the Mediterranean waters was named the Aegean Sea in his honor.

Back on Crete, Ariadne wept bitterly for the loss of Theseus.

This does not make for a very happy ending, but that is how the story goes... Or so we are told by famous ancient Greek storytellers such as Homer, Ovid, and Plutarch, who penned this exciting story and many others after hundreds of years of people telling them to their children and grandchildren—something we call “oral tradition.” Even today, the Cretans tell stories because they are a people proud of their heritage, their traditions, and their history.

After more than a thousand years, the Mycenaeans [my-se-NEE-ens] conquered the Minoans, who had been weakened by the terrible destruction of a tsunami—a massive wave that rolls across the sea in the aftermath of a large earthquake or volcanic explosion. Later, the island of Crete was taken over by the Romans, then the Byzantines, the Venetians and finally the Ottomans. Crete ruled itself for a short time about a hundred years ago and then joined forces with Greece before the beginning of World War I in 1914.

And that brings us to the Crete of today...



The kri-kri on the island of Crete.

Although Crete is now part of Greece, the islanders are unique and have their own way of speaking (dialect) and dressing, as well as distinct musical tastes. Families on Crete are large and have long histories. Not unlike the Montagues and Capulets, the feuding families of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, or the Hatfields and McCoys of Appalachia, the family clans of Crete are known for their long-standing quarrels with one another. Most families who live outside the cities have guns, whether or not they have permission. So, while we're traipsing through the countryside of Crete, we should stick to the roads and not trespass through a farmer's field!

The countryside of Crete, however, is lovely. The island is mountainous, and its mountain caps are blanketed with snow in the wintertime. From the tops of these jagged mountains, home to the kri-kri (a wild goat) and the Cretan wildcat, we have a breathtaking view of the wide Mediterranean Sea and the white beaches encircling the island. Natural harbors surround Crete, providing **moorage** for boats of every size and kind, from small dinghies to towering cruise ships. Crete is a popular holiday destination for local and international tourists alike, as one in five travelers to Greece make a stop in Crete.

While we are in Crete, let's visit some landmark sites. On the northwest coast is Chania [HAN-ya] Town on Chania Harbor, a popular tourist destination and favorite stop for the locals. Let's take a walk through the narrow and colorful streets with their mixture of Venetian and Turkish architecture to see what the local **artisans** are selling. We can have a light breakfast at a quaint cafe, sip some Greek coffee or hop on a **catamaran** to visit some of the smaller islands nearby.

Now let's leave Chania and head east toward the middle of the island along the northern coast to the city of Heraklion [ear-RACK-lee-yon], Crete's largest city and its capital. We can see that the Greeks, Italians, and Turks have been here. During the Crusades, the Republic of Venice conquered the island of Crete and its footprint has been left behind. We see Venetian structures such as mighty fortresses, giant walls, and canal systems in the old city. Around the corner, we notice Turkish mosques



Photo in the public domain, taken by Tango7174, available at Wikipedia.org.

and government buildings dating from the time when the Ottoman Turks conquered the island—after 21 long years of siege during the 17th century (known as the Cretan War).

If we go just three miles south-east of the center of Heraklion, we reach the ancient ruins of the Palace at Knossos, the oldest and best-preserved ruins on the island and the fabled home of the cruel King Minos. If these walls could speak, they would tell stories indeed. Actually, the artwork that has been left behind does!

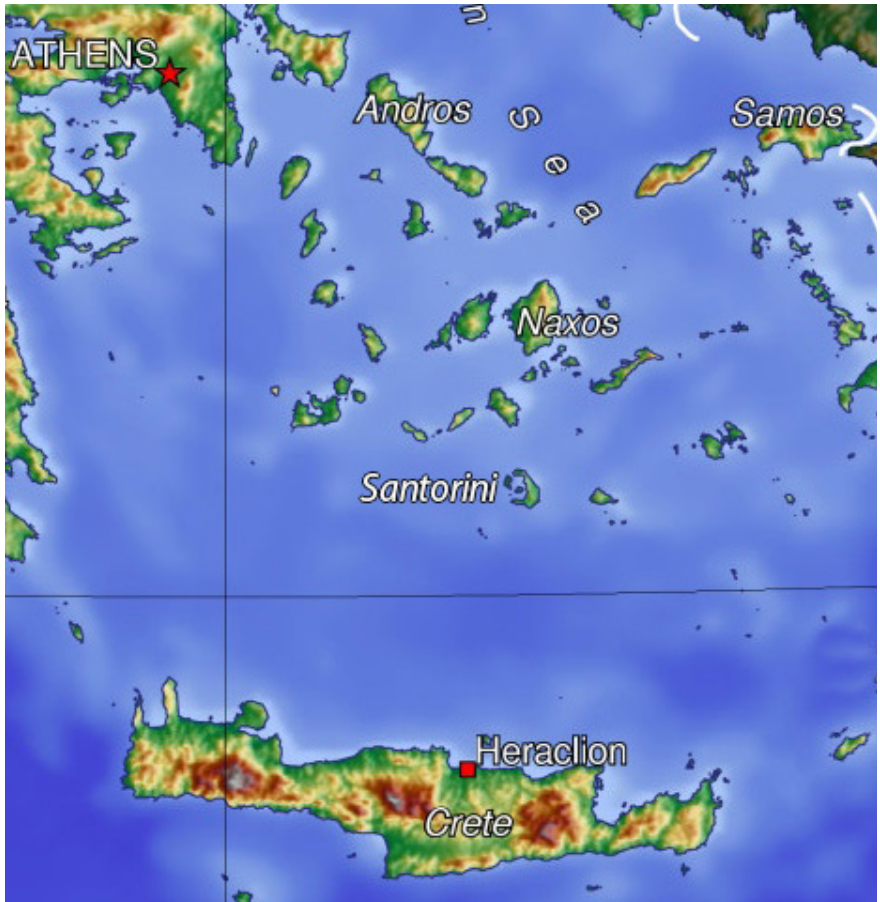


The north portico at Knossos, taken by Bernard Gagnon.

Frescoes of dolphins leaping through the sea and of youths bull-jumping adorn the walls and columns of this 3500-year-old palace.

As you may have already guessed, the bull was celebrated and worshipped by the ancient Minoans, as well as by other nearby Mediterranean civilizations. The scenes in these old frescoes show young athletes vaulting over bulls as part of a ceremonial ritual, not unlike how modern gymnasts flip, twist and turn over the vault during the Olympic games—only this vault moves! How would you like to leap over a charging bull? Watch an incredible Olympic vaulter at this link—<http://knowledgequestmaps>.





The island of Santorini (Thera). Image courtesy of Wikimedia.org.

com/blog/2013/05/would-you-leap-over-a-charging-bull/

The Minoan civilization was ultimately destroyed by a terrific and terrifying volcanic eruption on the nearby island of Thera (known as Santorini today) that resulted in a great tsunami in 1420 BC, around the same time that the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt down in Africa. The Minoan eruption of Thera was one of the largest volcanic explosions that ever occurred on Earth. It blew off half the island of Thera and devastated many of the surrounding islands as well, including the island of Crete. Its explosion and tsunami were likely felt in far-off Egypt.

~::~::~~



Field Notes (jot your thoughts down in a little notebook)

Well, here we are in Greece, the birthplace of the Ancient Classical World. What do you think of it so far? I'm so interested to hear your thoughts about...

The early Minoan civilization on Crete:

Tell me about King Minos, Theseus and the Minotaur. Have you read or watched any modern stories that remind you of this ancient myth? What do you think about bull jumping?

The geography of Crete:

What do you remember about the lay of the land - the shape, the interior, the coastline?

Must-see sites of Crete:

Tell me about Chania Town, Heraklion, and the ruins at Knossos.

~::~::~~

Since Santorini (or Thera as it was known in ancient times) is one of the few **Cyclades** [ki-KLAH-dees] Islands with an airport, let's hop on a small jet and visit this volcanic island that caused such a stir in the Mediterranean waters in 1420 BC. This island also belongs to Greece. Did you know that there are 140 inhabited Greek islands? However, if you count every outcropping in the **Aegean Sea** (which is the northern part of the Mediterranean between Greece and Turkey), the count soars to over 3000!



Close-up view of Santorini (Thera). Image courtesy of NASA.

Santorini, located about 120 miles (200 km) southeast of mainland Greece, is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. Its picturesque towns perched high atop steep cliffs surrounding a sparkling lagoon, draw vacationers, photographers, and hikers from around the world. But don't let its beauty fool you! Santorini is home to the most active and dangerous volcano in the Aegean Sea. Volcanic eruptions have devastated this island and its neighbors on numerous occasions.

From the air, Santorini looks a bit like a "J" with two smaller islands lining its gap. Before the enormous Minoan eruption, Thera was probably one large circular island. Parts of its circle were blown to bits by the massive force of the explosion, forming a **caldera** in the middle. A caldera is a cauldron-like geological feature usually formed by the collapse of land following a volcanic eruption. In this case, the land collapsed right into the sea!

In fact, this "sinking into the sea" event of the greater portion of Ancient Thera may have inspired Plato's account of Atlantis. The islanders of Atlantis, according to Plato, were a great naval super-power from the sea beyond "the pillars of Hercules"—a people who had conquered a large portion of Europe and Africa and were now ready to attack Athens, Greece, on the mainland. They failed in their attempt to invade the Greek capital and, it is told, "after a day and a night of misfortune," the island of Atlantis sank into the sea. Indeed, a great volcanic explosion would certainly cause great misfortune! Ancient scholars never believed the tale, but many modern historians do, and the hunt for Atlantis continues to this day.



Photo of excavation site of Akrotiri courtesy of Klearchoskapoutsis at en.wikipedia.org.

Perhaps scholars need to look within the caldera of Santorini or maybe below the very rock of the island itself to find some clues. Rather recently, less than 50 years ago, the ancient town of Akrotiri [ack-row-TEE-ree] was discovered below the lava-rock on the southern end of the island (in the curve of the J), revealing a well-preserved Minoan settlement. Only a small portion of the town has been uncovered so far, yet a complex civilization has been revealed. Buildings up to three stories high, as well as streets, squares and staircases were found still intact. Houses in Akrotiri had a dual-pipe plumbing system, indicating that families enjoyed both hot and cold running water. Their hot water probably came from underground volcanic hot springs. Archaeologists have also discovered many colorful wall frescoes here along with other fine artwork such as painted pottery, carved sculptures and delicate jewelry. They have concluded that this was a wealthy and civilized society. Could it be that Plato was inspired by this advanced Minoan civilization that sank into the sea one terrible day in 1420 BC, triggering his account of Atlantis? What do you think?

Let's travel up the rocky coastline of Santorini from Akrotiri to the city of Fira [FEE-ruh]. This beautiful **whitewashed** city sits atop the cliff walls blanketing the bare rocks that overlook the blue lagoon. See the steep, zigzag footpath allowing visitors access to the town from the seaport 400 feet below? If you would rather not walk, you may ride a donkey to the top or take a ride on the cable car that transports guests from the terminal at the port to the city on the cliff.



On this rocky bluff, buildings appear to be stacked on top of one another and connected to each other with shared walls. Let's walk along the narrow streets through small passageways and staircases to browse the vendor stalls. Afterwards, we'll have lunch in an outdoor café with a blue umbrella over our table. It does not get more quaint or "Mediterranean" in appearance than this. Fira is the epitome of a Mediterranean Sea town with the warmth of a white-hot sun, the cool of man-made shade, the brightness of whitewashed buildings and the blue of the crystal sea. The sun is almost always shining here in Santorini, as the island only gets about twelve inches of rain each year.



Photo in the public domain, taken by Tango7174, available at Wikipedia.org.

Let's head back down that zigzag footpath to the port below. We'll hop on a ferry that will take us to another beautiful Greek island in the Aegean Sea. We'll travel north by ferry and pass the islands of Ios [ee-YOSS], Naxos, and Paros to arrive at Mykonos [MEE-ko-noss], a popular tourist destination for beach lovers, windsurfers, and photographers. Can you find all of these islands on your map?

As we step off our ferry, we can see why tourists flock to enjoy the beaches at Mykonos. The golden sand where the granite island meets the glistening waters of the Aegean Sea feels soft and luxurious



Image of Fira, courtesy of Wikimedia. Buildings in the Greek isles are usually whitewashed—painted with inexpensive mixture of slaked lime and chalk—to keep their interiors cool under the hot Mediterranean sun. The whitewash reflects the sunlight and keeps them cool to the touch. Domes are usually painted blue, or cyan, to represent the color of the sea and sky. The word "cyan" comes from the Greek word *kyanos*, which means "blue".



Image of Elias Beach on Mykonos, courtesy of Wikimedia.org.

under our feet. Sunbathers line the beaches, escaping from the heat when necessary under umbrellas woven from palm fronds.

After a refreshing dip in the salty sea, it's time to see a little more of the island. Mykonos is the main city on this island with the same name and is located on the western coast. Although the buildings look decidedly Greek, we can still see influences of past civilizations as we walk the narrow streets of this old town. Mykonos was originally inhabited by the Carians [KAHR-ree-

ans], a group of people from Anatolia (Turkey). Later, the seafaring Phoenicians used this island as a trading post in their vast Mediterranean trade network. Still later, Egyptians inhabited the island, followed by the Ionians [eye-O-nee-ins], a major civilization of Ancient Greece.

Let's take a peek at Little Venice, a quaint old neighborhood on the west side of Mykonos Town. Here the buildings and houses are built so close to the water's edge that the balconies actually hang over the sea. Many of these dwellings were built several hundred years ago during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when pirating was still common and merchants needed to be able to load and unload their goods quickly before moving on to the next seaport.



Photo in the public domain, taken by Zitumassen, available at Wikipedia.org.

Despite the pungent smell of seaweed and fish, travelers will often pay three times the going rate for a five-star ho-

tel just to stay in a small fisherman’s hut in Little Venice. This is a painter and novelist’s paradise as it stirs the imagination and takes us back in time to an older world of romance and adventure.

We have two more stops here in Mykonos before we continue on our journey through the Greek Islands. The oldest standing structure on the island is the Paraportiani [pa-ra-por-tee-AH-nee], the old church built in 1425 AD. This humble whitewashed church acted as a gateway through the thick medieval walls that encircled the old town of Chora (modern Mykonos). Its name, Paraportiani, means “Our Lady of the Side Gate.” Photographers flock to this landmark site to capture the essence of this impressive church, which has stood proud for nearly six hundred years.



The Paraportiani Church at Mykonos, taken by Bernard Gagnon.

As the sun begins to set, the lights of the city turn on, the music is turned up, and the party begins. It turns out that Mykonos is a center for party life and draws a crowd of nightclub hoppers. This doesn’t appear to be a good place for children (or for me either!), so let’s sneak out now before it gets too rowdy.

From the ferry, I can point out the last landmark I want you to see. The old windmills of Mykonos are giant sentinels guarding the island and can be seen from nearly any point in Mykonos as they stand proudly on a hill overlooking the town and busy harbor. Built by the Venetians during the sixteenth century, they were used primarily as grain mills. The mills have not been in operation since the middle of the last century (1950s), but they represent the economy and hardworking nature of a people who lived and worked here in days gone by. Are you interested to know how windmills operate to grind grain? Learn more from these videos—<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/blog/2013/05/windmills-used-to-grind-grain/>.

I don’t know about you, but I am ready to leave the crowds and the tourists behind us and cruise north through the Aegean waters toward the Greek island of Skyros [SKEE-ross]. We pass the last of the



Two of the windmills at sunset, taken by Christina Milioni.

Cyclades and enter into more open waters. Standing at the rail of the ferryboat and looking out at the deep midnight blue waters, it is not hard to imagine the Achaeans [ah-KAY-ens] of Sparta (a city-state of Greece) setting sail across the sea to besiege the city of Troy in what is now the country of Turkey. We visited Turkey in our last adventure in *Explore the Holy Land*, the second volume of *A Child's Geography* on that wonderfully magic flying carpet. Do you remember that fantastic adventure?

Let me tell you this story...

The Spartan Greeks sailed furiously across the Aegean Sea to seek revenge on Paris, the man who insulted the Achaeans when he stole away their king's wife, Helen, to the distant city of Troy. In righteous anger, they lifted their battle cry and prepared to restore Helen to her rightful place, no matter the cost. The waters churned beneath their boats as it churns beneath ours. It was ten long years of siege before the Greeks finally defeated the Trojans through the clever use of the Trojan horse. Ten years of encampment outside the gates of Troy gave the Greeks plenty of time to think and this is the plan they conceived... What if they could build a great horse on wheels that could be presented to the Trojans as a peace offering? It would be so big that a great number of soldiers could be hidden inside its hollow belly. It was an outrageous but tempting plan. So, they built the horse, set it before

the gates of Troy then sailed their sparsely manned ships out to sea. The curious Trojans wheeled the horse inside their walled city to inspect the supposed gift more closely. How surprised the people of Troy must have been when they saw those clever Greeks spilling out from the inside of the towering wooden horse! This surprise attack won the battle and ultimately the war for the Greeks.

The gentle sway of the water, the hum of the ferry engine, and the satisfaction of a good story lulls us to sleep until we reach our last island stop.

Pulling into the Skyros harbor, the sun blazing golden on the eastern horizon, we notice that this is a very different island indeed. There are no crowds. And instead of bare rock, we are greeted with pine forests and empty beaches. Skyros is the southernmost island in the **archipelago** of **Sporades** [sp-RAH-dees]. The northern portion of the island is covered in pine forests, and its peak is called Mount Olympus. The southern half is bare and rocky. Its capital is also named Skyros (or Chora, as the locals refer to it) and is built along the slopes of a rocky butte overlooking the sea. Skyros is famous for its ancient Byzantine castle and monastery.



The earliest known depiction of the Trojan Horse, from the Mykonos vase ca. 670 BC. Image courtesy of Wikimedia.



Image of the city of Chora built along the slopes of a rocky butte, courtesy of Wikimedia.org.

According to Greek Mythology, Theseus, our hero from the labyrinth on Crete, died here on this island of Skyros, as did the famous English poet Rupert Brooks. It truly is a peaceful place—a good place to spend one's final years.

How did you enjoy our hop around the Greek Isles? These are some fascinating islands, steeped in history and picturesque in landscape. If we had more time here in the islands, I would show you two more places—the islands of Rhodes and Corfu. Rhodes, the island of roses, is located in the southeast part of the Aegean Sea just off the coast of Turkey. It has a rich medieval past with strong fortresses, majestic castles, and serene monasteries to explore. Can you find it on your map?

Another island that I think you would find intriguing is Corfu, which is located on the other side of mainland Greece in the Ionian Sea. Corfu and its surrounding islands mark the northwest border of the nation of Greece. Corfu Town is the charming capital of Corfu and if you didn't know better, you might begin to wonder if you are in Italy instead of Greece. Of course, you wouldn't be far from Italy when on the island of Corfu. Check its location on your map. This island, along with so many other islands that surround Greece, was once under the control of the Republic of Venice and like the others,

has a Venetian flair.

It is time to head over to the mainland of Greece to continue our journey. There is so much more to see and learn about Greece.



Field Notes (jot your thoughts down in a little notebook)

The Greek Isles are spectacular, aren't they? What do you think of our visit to Greece so far? I'm so interested to hear your thoughts about...

Santorini (Thera):

Tell me about the great volcanic explosion on the island of Thera during the age of the Minoans. Can you imagine an explosion large enough to blow off half the island? Tell me about Plato's legend of Atlantis. Do you think he could have been inspired by the volcanic eruption on Thera? Tell me about Akrotiri. What was found there? What do you think of the beautiful city of Fira?

Mykonos:

What do you remember about the island of Mykonos? What would you most like to see - Little Venice, the windmills or the old church?

Skyros:

Tell me about the island of Skyros. How is it different from the other islands that we have visited so far? What do you think of the city of Chora, built on the side of a mountain? Would you like to live there?



Photo of Chania Harbor, Crete is courtesy of Niki J. Photography.

Chapter 1 Timeline Events	
2500 BC	Growth of Minoan Civilization
1420 BC	Minoan Civilization of the Grecian island of Crete destroyed by tsunami, as a result of a devastating volcanic eruption on the Grecian island of Thera.
1425 AD	Paraportiani church built on the Grecian island of Mykonos in the town of Chora
16th C	Venetians built granary windmills on the island of Mykonos

2

GREECE, PT 2: IN THE BEGINNING

As we disembark from our ferry onto the mainland of Greece, we spy a boy with his father selling sesame rings from a small wooden vendor cart sandwiched between the busy marina and the chic waterfront cafés. Since visiting some of the Greek islands and spending hours getting tossed about on the waters of the Aegean, we feel a bit disoriented. We ask the man and his son, “Which way is Athens and how far of a drive is it?”

“What is your hurry?” the man asks. “While our capital city is a feast for the eyes, the ears and the belly, there is much to see and do between here and there.” He winks good-naturedly and his son straight-



ens their hand-painted wooden sign that reads *KOULOURI* [koo-LOO-ree]. The yeasty and nutty smell of these beautiful sesame bread rings piled high atop their cart reminds us that we are hungry and we decide to buy a few.

“Yum, these are so good! So, do tell us, what is there for us to do before we reach Athens?” The father nods to his son who pulls out some folding chairs hanging from a peg on the side of his cart. He motions for us to sit and enjoy our snack.

“Are you just now arriving on the mainland of Greece?” We nod, our mouths full of the delicious bread. “Then you must start at the beginning.”

“Not far from here is the great mountain where the world began.” He pauses to let that sentence sink in. “Well, that is what our ancient forefathers used to think. The Ancient Greeks

believed that there were twelve gods and goddesses who ruled our world and even threw it into being from the mighty **Mt. Olympus**, just west of here. Of course, we—my son, Nikolos and I—we know that it was the spoken word of the one true God that brought the earth into existence as it is recorded in the first chapter of Genesis.” (Most Greeks are Christian by faith, belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church.)

The vendor continued, “But you must stop in the village of Litochoro [lee-to-HO-ro] at the base of Mt. Olympus, so that you can get a good look at it. It will take your breath away, really. It is almost 10,000 feet in elevation and capped with snow. Mt. Olympus is our tallest mountain. When you see the majesty of the mountain, you can appreciate why our ancestors believed it was the home of the gods, misled as they were.” He winks again and his leathery face breaks open into a wide smile. “Perhaps you will want to hike to the top? Thousands of people do it every year, but it’s a rigorous adventure.”

“What else?” I ask. “You have definitely convinced us to stop at Mt. Olympus, but are there other sights you think we should see on our way to Athens?”

“Yes,” he grins. “You should definitely see the monasteries at Metéora [met-TE-or-a] and the Oracle of Delphi. Our family has visited both of those sites. They are **UNESCO World Heritage sites** and are absolutely worth the stop. You may want to check out the island of Euboea too, on your way. It is very pretty with white beaches, steep cliffs and lush green forests. Don’t you think so, Nikolos? It is easy to get to. Just cross the Chalkida [kael-KEE-dah] Bridge and you’re there.”



I guess we ought to get going, but our view here of the waterfront is spectacular!

As he sees us licking our fingers for the remains of that toasted sesame flavor, Nikolos hands us extra napkins and asks us if we would like any more to eat.

Nikolos’ father continues, “You see, Euboea [you-BEE-ya]—Greece’s second largest island after Crete—is very close to the

mainland. In fact, many geographers believe it was attached to mainland Greece at one time, but was separated by a large and destructive earthquake. That is a reasonable assumption since it is located on a fault line. But it has been an island as long as we Greeks can remember. In fact, the first bridge to cross the Euripus [Yur-RIP-us] Strait was constructed during the Peloponnesian War around 400 BC.”

He pauses and rubs his chin.

“Well, those are our favorite stops between here and Athens, although there are plenty more. When you get to Athens, make sure you visit the **Acropolis** and **Mars Hill**. It is such an amazing privilege to walk in the very footsteps of the **Apostle Paul**, don’t you think?”

We smile and nod in agreement. Having long since finished our delicious snack, we thank our gracious hosts and decide that we must be on our way.

Nikolos shouts a kind farewell, “Drive safely. Look out for goats crossing the road!”

With that word of caution, we are on our way. In our tiny rental car, we follow the winding road to Litochoro, the small village with the big view. This is the base camp for the 10,000 hikers who make the trek to the top of Mt. Olympus each year.

Mt. Olympus is grand indeed! Isn’t our God amazing to create such marvels as we have seen so far—deep blue oceans, green valleys and majestic mountains?

According to Greek mythology, the twelve Olympian gods ruled from Mt. Olympus. Zeus was the king of the gods and the god of the sky and of thunder. With his wife Hera, the goddess of family, they had two sons: Ares [AIR-ees], god of war, and Hephaestus [hay-FEST-us], god of fire. Zeus had six other children as well—Dionysus [dy-oh-NEE-sus], Apollo, Artemis, Hermes, Athena and Aphrodite. Finally, to bring the full number to twelve, there was Poseidon, god of the sea, and Demeter, goddess of nature. These two were the brother and sister of Zeus. Hades, the god of the underworld, is rarely



Satellite image showing Euboea on the right, and the Greek mainland on the left, courtesy of NASA.



Mt. Olympus rises 9,573 ft above sea level. Over 10,000 hikers make the trek to the top starting from the town of Litichoro, which took the name City of the Gods because of its location at the base of the mountain (image in public domain).

counted among the twelve Olympian gods, although he was another brother to Zeus.

The ancient Greeks believed that this **dysfunctional** family explained both the common and extraordinary events of life, such as love, birth, growth, **famine, war**, earthquakes and **thunderstorms**. Good things happened when the family got along, but destruction occurred when there was anger and fighting among them and when evil family members got the upper hand.

Greek mythology, the stories of the gods and goddesses who held council here on this magnificent mountain, dates back to the sixth century BC, around the time when Esther was Queen of **Persia** in modern-day **Iraq** to the east. Greek mythology makes its first written appearance in Homer's epic poems, The Iliad and The Odyssey. Remember Homer from our last chapter about the Greek islands? He wrote down the story of Theseus and the Minotaur. These myths may have been told even earlier during the **Greek dark ages**, but no writing remains from that time, only **geometric** shapes etched into pottery that have been dug up from the ground.

Here is one Greek myth that explains a common aspect of life—the seasons. One day Demeter and her daughter, Persephone [Per-SEF-oh-nee], were picking wildflowers in the field. Hades came along and stole Persephone away to his underworld home. While his action was wrong, he was good to her, and she grew to love him. But her mother Demeter was heartbroken without her. She searched the world over and could not find her beloved Persephone. She asked Zeus to help her, and he sent a messenger, Hermes, to the underworld to search for her there. He found her in pleasant spirits, but informed Persephone that her mother was grieving for her. Hades told her that she must go



“Olympus was not shaken by winds nor ever wet with rain, nor did snow fall upon it, but the air is outspread clear and cloudless, and over it hovered a radiant whiteness.” From *The Odyssey* by Homer.

and care for her mother, so she returned to the world of the living. Her mother leapt for joy, and the flowers of the field sprung up to celebrate the return of Persephone. However, Persephone had made a bargain with Hades, saying that she would return to him in due time. Several months passed, and she decided it was time to return to the underworld. Above, the trees and flowers withered and died at the loss of the beautiful Persephone as Demeter, her mother, wandered again in despair. To keep both Hades and Demeter happy, Persephone lived half of each year in the underworld and half of each year in the world above. Parents who lived in Ancient Greece told this myth to their children to explain why the seasons change—why there is new growth in the spring and the withering of nature in the fall.

Another tale they told explained the abundance of olive trees that grow all around this countryside. When a great and powerful city of Greece was seeking a **patron** god to protect it, Poseidon and Athena both volunteered. To help them decide between the two, the people of the city asked both Poseidon and Athena to present a gift. Poseidon, the god of the sea, gave the gift of seawater, which would allow the people to expand and trade with other countries. Athena, the goddess of war, offered the first domesticated olive tree to grow for food, oil and wood. According to Sophocles [SOF-oh-klees], an ancient Greek playwright, the olive tree is “the tree that feeds the children.” The citizens accepted Athena’s gift and named their city Athena (or Athens) after their new patron goddess. That is how the **capital** and largest city of Greece received its name.

This reminds me... we need to get going. We still have quite a bit of ground to cover before we reach the capital city.



Many olive trees in groves around the Mediterranean are said to be hundreds of years old, and some even as ancient as 2,000 years old (image of Greek olive grove is in the public domain).

~::~::~~



Field Notes (jot your thoughts down in a little notebook)

What do you think of mainland Greece so far? Isn't Mt. Olympus breathtaking? The Ancient Greeks had some intriguing myths to explain the aspects of everyday life. I'm so interested to hear your thoughts about...

Mt. Olympus:

Tell me about the great mountain that is located on the mainland of northeast Greece. How tall is it? How many hikers climb it each year? Tell me about the 12 mythological gods and goddesses that lived on this mountain? Can you retell a story from Greek mythology?

~::~::~~

Back on the road and heading south, we decide to save the monasteries of Metéora for later when we double back up through central Greece on our way to Albania. Our next stop is the Oracle at Delphi.

Running down through the center of Greece from north to south, like a backbone, is the Pindus mountain range. We'll stay on this side—the eastern side—for now. The interior of Greece, the re-

gion known as Thessaly and Central Greece, is rather mountainous, but dotted with rolling hills and wide green valleys. As we travel down through the Thessalian Plain, we can see that this is good land for growing grain and raising cattle and sheep. There are large farms and ranches scattered about the countryside. Flocks of goats and sheep nibble on the lush grasses fed by melting snows and rains from the Pindus Mountains. There are also orchards, both large and small, growing olive trees and nut trees, such as almond, pistachio, and walnut. It reminds me a little of the area just north of where I grew up in northern California. The temperature is pleasant, not too hot and not too cold, just right.

Heading toward Delphi on the main highway running north-south in Central Greece, we approach the coastal pass of Thermopylae [ther-MOP-uh-lee], which is translated as “The Hot Gates” [thermo=hot; pylae=gates]. This area is best known for the Battle of Thermopylae fought between the independent **city-states** of Greece and the mighty **Persian Empire** in 480 BC. This war had started twelve years earlier when Darius the Great of Persia wanted to conquer the whole known world and had reached the gates of



Image of Thessian Plain is in the public domain, courtesy of Wikipedia.

Greece. He was defeated at the first invasion attempt at the Battle of Marathon (more on that later). After he passed away, his son Xerxes (the husband of Queen Esther) took up his father’s design to conquer Greece and brought the full force of Persia down on Greece at this pass of Thermopylae for a second invasion attempt. The Greeks probably would have won this battle too, as they had the high ground and the gritty determination to defend their beautiful little country. But there was a traitor among their ranks who revealed a little-known path that led right behind the Greek lines. While Greece didn’t win this battle, they did go on to win the war on another day.

We’ll take an exit off the main highway and follow a winding mountain road until we reach Delphi. What we see takes our breath away. Opening before us is the slope of Mount Parnassus, the site of the Oracle of Delphi and the theater and temple dedicated to the god, Apollo. The temple was built here because, according to legend, this is the site where Apollo slew the Python, a fierce mythological dragon. To commemorate, athletes from all over Greece would gather and compete in the Pythian [PITH-ee-un] Games, one of four such competitions held on the Greek **peninsula** every four years. Winners of various athletic feats were crowned with wreaths woven from laurel branches. These ancient **games** began in 776 BC and continued for over a thousand years. They were the precursors to our **modern Olympic Games** held every four years.

A CHILD'S GEOGRAPHY

Standing on the steps of the theater and gazing down at the temple of Apollo, it is almost hard to believe that these ruins have been here for nearly 3,000 years. In ancient times, people came from every corner of Greece to meet with the **Oracle**—an elderly woman chosen from among the poor peasants of the area. This “oracle” was supposed to have magical powers and insight. It was believed that she could hear Apollo’s voice when she sat over the very spot where the Python dragon was slain. People wanted to talk to Apollo about everything under the sun—from whom their next ruler should be to how to choose a good wife. And so the Oracle was consulted before any big decisions were made in Greece, especially such things as declaring war or establishing a new **colony**, a Greek outpost on a distant shore of the Mediterranean.

When a major earthquake rumbled through the area in 83 BC, the temple crumbled and fell into disrepair. About 150 years later, when **Nero** became the **emperor** of the **Roman Empire**, he took 500 of the finest **statues** from Delphi to Rome. Some of these were later returned to Delphi.

I lift my gaze from Apollo’s temple at the base of this theater and look towards the heavens. I am so thankful that I do not consult a god who speaks from one single spot on earth but that I can pray to God who speaks to me any time, any place, as long as I have ears to hear. Psalm 121 says, “I lift up my





Images of the Oracle of Delphi (left) and the Plain of Marathon (above) are in the public domain, courtesy of Wikimedia.

eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.”

Let’s go to Athens and see what adventures await us there!

We are now traveling southeast down the Attica Peninsula, the most populous region of Greece. Attica is a triangular-shaped peninsula, bordered by the Kithairon [KITH-hair-ron] Mountains to the north, the island of Euboea off its eastern coast, and the Saronic Gulf at its southwestern coast. It was once connected to the Peloponnese by the Isthmus of Corinth but is now separated by a man-made canal. The sprawling city of Athens, one of the world’s oldest cities, dominates the Attica Peninsula. Before reaching Athens, we’ll pass by the town of Marathon. That sounds like a running race, doesn’t it? Let me tell you how the race got its name...

In the year 490 BC, Darius the Great of Persia was attempting to conquer the whole known world. After many successful battles across Lydia (modern-day Turkey) and the Aegean Sea, Persia was ready to take on Greece. Persia’s first invasion attempt occurred on the shore of the Attica Peninsula at a little town called Marathon. The Greek soldiers successfully blocked the two exits from the Marathon Plain for five days, tiring the Persians who finally admitted a temporary defeat and withdrew their fleet from the bay. A messenger was sent to announce the victory to the citizens of Athens, twenty-six

A CHILD'S GEOGRAPHY

miles to the west. It is said that he ran the entire distance from Marathon to Athens without stopping. But moments after declaring his message “Nenikēkamen” [nay-nee-KEE-kah-men] (“We have won!”) to the city, he collapsed and died from exhaustion.

When the first modern Olympics were held in Athens in 1896, the Olympic Committee decided that an endurance race would be included which would follow the footsteps of the ancient messenger who declared the good news to Athens in 490 BC. So, a twenty-six-mile marathon race was run from Marathon to Athens during the first modern Olympic Games and has continued ever since. But you don't have to wait for an Olympic Games to watch a marathon. Over five hundred marathon races are held throughout the world each year.

As we enter Athens, we are struck by its contrasts—it is both old and new, small and large, crowded yet spread out. The most impressive site by far is the Acropolis, an ancient **citadel** situated on a rocky outcropping high above the city. It includes the ruins of several ancient civic and religious buildings, the most famous being the Parthenon, the temple dedicated to the goddess Athena. Located at its base is Plaka, the old town of Athens—old but not as old as the Acropolis. Not too far from the Plaka, we can see ultra-modern graffiti-marked buildings side-by-side with the ancient ones.

Let's find a coffee shop in Old Town and enjoy the sights, sounds, and tastes of this ancient city. Winding our way through a maze of narrow cobblestone streets lined with little shops and crowded



Image of the Acropolis in the public domain, courtesy of Wikimedia.org.

cafés, we are surprised when we come to a large open square. We find a place to sit and enjoy some Greek coffee and **baklava** at a little outdoor café with an amazing view of the Acropolis. (Greek coffee has gritty grounds at the bottom. It is strong and slightly bitter, so you may want to add some cream and sugar to yours to make it taste better.) Our wooden chairs are hard and a little uncomfortable, but the people who pass by, who smile or nod a greeting, warm our hearts and make us want to stay awhile. The people of Greece are very friendly and persuasive. They laugh. They smile. They argue. They pat each other hard upon the back. Such exuberance! We keep our emotions much more controlled and checked where I come from. Yet, I like this difference in cultures and would like to linger awhile longer.

It's a beautiful but windy day in Athens. It seems that most days here are beautiful, temperature-wise. Athens has a subtropical Mediterranean climate, which means that it is hot and dry in the summer and the winters are cool and somewhat rainy. Athens gets about sixteen inches of rain each year, much less than other cities in the **Balkans** because Mt. Parnitha creates a **rainshadow** for the city. A rainshadow is the dry area on the **leeward** (or back) side of a mountain, blocking the passage of rainclouds and casting a "shadow" of dryness. In comparison, Tirana in Albania to the north receives over three times more rainfall than Athens; and Shkodra, also in Albania, gets about five times as much rain.

The coffee and pastries are delicious and the people-watching fascinating, but let's take in a few more sights in this city of wonders. Not far from here is the Ancient Agora, the meeting place for the Ancient Greeks. Public meetings were held here in this open square in true democratic fashion. City councils and courts of law met here beginning around 509 BC when the city-state of Athens became a democracy. The jurors were chosen among the adult male citizens of Athens and anyone who hap-



Image of Acropolis courtesy of Niki J. Photography.



Image of the Agora in the public domain, courtesy of Wikimedia.org.

pened by the Agora could witness a court trial or city council meeting. The word **agoraphobia** gets its name and meaning from the Agora. It means a fear of open spaces or public gatherings. So, if you are agoraphobic, then the Agora isn't the place for you.

Just to the southwest of the Agora is the hill of the Areopagus, also known as the "Rock of Ares," which functioned as the high court of appeals in early ancient times. Later, during Roman times, it was given a new name—Mars Hill—to honor the Roman god of war, Mars. The Apostle Paul stood upon this hill and looking out over the Agora and towards the Acropolis, proclaimed, "Athenians, I see that you are very religious. As I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—but I am here to tell you about Him. The one true God made the whole world and everything in it. He is the Lord of heaven and earth and doesn't dwell in temples made from human hands. Nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything. He Himself gives life and breath to all things." (Acts 17:22-24)

This was a radically new concept for the Ancient Greeks, but struck a deep and profound chord with them. Paul went on to explain about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and how a God bigger and more powerful than the ones that they had invented through their stories and myths could save them from their sins once and for all. After Paul finished his sermon, many Athenians became followers of Jesus and friends to Paul.

I get chills just thinking about it. This city is so historically rich, one of the oldest cities on the planet, so well-preserved and full of life. These old neighborhoods, wide plazas, rocky outcroppings and ancient ruins are so breathtaking. Our western culture and democratic societies sprang up from this center of the Classical World. This is our heritage, our history, our ancestry. We were once shackled

by the trappings of ancient **polytheism** (belief in many gods), but were rescued by a Savior who was not created by human hands or dependent upon mortal men. He reached down into our chaos and brought us order and life.

The bright Athens sunshine and the warmth of the dry air invite us to bask in this amazing hope. We are God's children, whether we live in the Balkans, the Holy Land, or the Americas. We are united in this. I smile and nod my head to the passers-by engaged in animated conversation and give you a hearty pat on the back as I revel in this truth!

Let's see what we can find on the other side of the Isthmus of Corinth, the land bridge that connects Athens on the Attica Peninsula with the Peloponnese.

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Field Notes (jot your thoughts down in a little notebook)

Isn't Greece an old and fascinating place? I'm so interested to hear your thoughts about...



Image of Mars Hill courtesy of Niki J. Photography.

Topography:

What is the Thessalian Plain like? What mountain range runs from the North to the South of Greece like a backbone? Where is the Attica Peninsula? What big city is located there?

Thermopylae:

What can you tell me about the Battle of Thermopylae? How did the race called “marathon” get its name? Tell me about first marathon runner and his ambitious run to Athens. What are the similarities and differences between his run and a modern marathon run?

Athens:

What do you remember about Athen’s climate? Can you explain what a rainshadow is? What is the name of the big rocky bluff that rises high above Athens skyline? Which god or goddess was the Parthenon built for? Can you tell me what polytheism means? What was the Agora? What does it mean to be agoraphobic? What famous man of the Bible spoke on the Rock of Ares or Mars Hill?



Image of steps to Mars Hill courtesy of Niki J. Photography.

Chapter 2 Timeline Events	
8th C, BC	Iliad and Odyssey of Homer composed
776 BC	First Olympic Games held
509 BC	Public democratic meetings held at open square of Agora
490 BC	Battle of Marathon of the Greco-Persian Wars
480 BC	Battle of Thermopylae of the Greco-Persian Wars
400 BC	First bridge crossing the Euripus Strait constructed (during Peloponnesian War)
83 BC	Earthquake destroys Temple of Apollo
1896	First modern Olympic Games held in Athens

3

GREECE, PT 3: THE FOUR-FINGERED HAND

When I was little, I liked to draw pictures of people, usually my family. But the hands were so hard to draw. Usually they ended up too big and the fingers looked too round and chubby, more like balloons than fingers. If I had known that the Peloponnese Peninsula of Greece looked like a hand, I could have traced it and the hands in my pictures would have looked pretty good. Not perfect though, because the Peloponnese only has four fingers. It is missing a thumb!

Take a look at your map of Greece and notice the portion of land called the Peloponnese. It has three peninsulas jutting south and one more stretching to the southeast. It looks like a hand without a thumb. Or maybe it has a thumb, but it is missing an index finger. What do you see when you look at the shape of the Peloponnese?



The Peloponnese peninsula. Image courtesy of Wikimedia.org.

The Peloponnese, known as Achaia [ah-KAY-uh] in ancient times, is considered a peninsula because the four-mile-wide Isthmus of Corinth connects it to the Attica Peninsula where Athens is located. An **isthmus** is a land bridge that connects two larger landmasses, in this case two peninsulas. Do you remember what a **peninsula** is? It is a portion of land that is bordered by water on three of its sides, but still connected to the mainland. However, the Peloponnese is technically surrounded on all sides by water. How could this be, you ask? Well, it touches water on all sides only because a man-made **canal** was dug right through the isthmus so that boats could take a shortcut from the Ionian Sea to the Aegean Sea without having to sail around the peninsula. Now, what do we call a landmass that is com-



pletely surrounded by water? An **island**, right? Still, no one calls the Peloponnese an island because the waterway that separates the peninsula from Attica is narrow, shallow, and man-made. You can see it from the air. It is the waterway that is as straight as an arrow. Can you spot it?

Throughout history, sailing around the Peloponnese Peninsula was a treacherous ordeal, as strong gales frequently blew up around the jutting **headlands**, smashing ships onto the rocky coast. It was



Excavated western end of Diolkos road close to the Gulf of Corinth, courtesy of Wikipedia.org.

the Ancient Greeks who dreamed up a shortcut to connect the calm waters of the Gulf of Corinth to the Saronic Gulf. Find these two gulfs on your map. A shortcut would make sense, wouldn't it? A tyrant of Corinth named Periander made the first attempt at a shortcut—a canal—in the seventh century BC. He soon abandoned the project, blaming the failure on technical difficulties. Instead, he constructed a stone ramp and **portage road** across the isthmus. This allowed ancient vessels to be rolled across the neck of land on logs; much like the Egyptians rolled their blocks of granite when building the **pyramids**. This portage road was called Diolkos [dee-OL-kos] and you can still see remnants of it alongside the modern canal. About seven hundred years after the Diolkos was constructed, the Roman Emperor Nero ordered six thousand slaves to hand-dig a canal with spades. They advanced about half a kilometer (547 yards) during that first year, and then Nero died. His successor abandoned the project because it was too expensive.

And so the canal was never finished and the old Diolkos road continued to be used for the hard work of dragging ships overland for hundreds, even thousands, of years. Then in 1893, after Greece won its independence from the Ottoman Empire, the canal was finally completed following eleven years of construction.



Image of submersible bridge over the Corinth Canal in Greece taken by Aspasia Coumiotis.

Let's cross the canal and see what's on the other side on this four-fingered peninsula. We can cross

by train or by car on one of the five bridges spanning the canal. We'll cross on one of the submersible bridges located at either end of the canal. A **submersible bridge** is a type of movable bridge that lowers into the water when a ship is coming. It is a rather unique type of bridge as most bridges spanning a canal or waterway lift or rise up to allow ships to pass underneath. Here comes a ship! We'll have to wait to cross over the canal. Of course, we don't mind a bit, because we can watch the bridge lower, lower, lower, and then disappear below the surface of the water. After several minutes, the large ship passes, and our bridge seems to magically rise from the water until it reaches the top of the canal and becomes level with our roadway. The line of waiting traffic is now free to pass over the bridge. You can watch the bridge in action here—<http://knowledgequestmaps.com/blog/2013/05/submersible-bridge-on-the-corinth-canal/>.

After we drive past Corinth, the modern city and the ancient village of the same name, we head into a mountainous region. The Pindus mountain range that runs down through central Greece like a backbone continues right down through the Peloponnese Peninsula. In fact, the Pindus mountain range continues across the sea and ends on the island of Crete. Nearly 80% of Greece is covered in mountains or rolling hills, making it one of the most mountainous countries in Europe. The jagged coastline is steep and rocky, the deep blue waters littered with the remains of **shipwrecks** and ancient treasure hidden below.

The Peloponnese Peninsula was home to the legendary Spartans from the ancient city-state of Sparta. They were the sworn enemy of the Athenians. These two city-states really didn't like each other at all; each thought the other too powerful, too close, and too different. While the Athenians were demo-



Image of Peloponnese coastline in the public domain, courtesy of Wikipedia.org.

cratic, artistic and scholarly, the Spartans were strong, militant and swift. In the English language, the word **spartan** means, “sternly disciplined and rigorously simple, frugal, or austere.” Our English word comes from the Ancient Spartans, who sacrificed food and comfort for the glory of discipline and honor.

Perhaps you are wondering what it would be like to grow up in Ancient Sparta? All boys were required to leave home at the age of seven and enter a **military academy** where they trained to become **warriors**. The boys lived together under strict conditions. Their food was rationed so that they were always hungry. They were expected to steal and learn other survival skills. The boys who showed the most leadership and survival skills were moved into the secret police. At the age of twenty, young men became full-time soldiers until the age of sixty. Spartan warriors were known for their long hair and red cloaks, which intimidated their foes.

Spartan girls were raised at home and were allowed more freedoms than in other Greek civilizations. They were formally educated and allowed to participate in athletic competitions, including **javelin throwing** and wrestling. Young women also sang and danced competitively. As adults, Spartan women were allowed to own property and personal **slaves**, who relieved them of much of their domestic responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning and making clothing.

While the Spartans were growing in strength and military might on the Peloponnese Peninsula, the Athenians were growing in culture and democratic refinement on the Attica Peninsula just across the Isthmus of Corinth. Their societies clashed in every way and eventually the two city-states went

to war in 431 BC. The war was long and ended with a Spartan victory in 404 BC. Their disciplined military society as a whole, coupled with each warrior's personal sacrifices, won the day for Sparta.



Image of Spartan ruins in Achaia in the public domain, courtesy of Wikipedia.org.

Let's make one more stop before we leave the southern portion of Greece known as Achaia. It is the town of Olympia, the home of the ancient Olympic Games.

This town built an athletic complex to host the most famous athletic competitions in history. The Olympic Games were first held in 776 BC and continued every four years for more than a **millennium** (that is, 1000 years). Athletes came from all over Greece and the surrounding regions to compete in these historic games.

While only ruins remain today, we can walk around and see the buildings that were built to house the athletes and hold their competitions. A massive **hippodrome** hosted horse and chariot racing, and another large stadium featured field sports, such as foot races, hurdles and jumping competitions. We also see the remains of ancient temples dedicated to Zeus and Hera; the **Gymnasium**, a gathering place for intellectual conversation and for exercise; **hostels** for living accommodations; **public baths** for social and cleansing purposes; various government buildings; and palaces for royalty and diplomats to live in luxury while enjoying the festivities.

This Olympic compound was large and accommodated thousands of visitors who came to watch the games. Because the games did not move around to different host cities like our modern Olympics do, the Greeks could re-use their Olympic complexes every four years.

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Field Notes (jot your thoughts down in a little notebook)

This region of Greece is steeped in history. I can't wait to hear what you will tell me about...



1: North-East Propylon – 2: Prytaneion – 3: Philippeion – 4: Temple of Hera – 5: Pelopion – 6: Nymphaeum of Herodes Atticus – 7: Metroon, – 8: Treasuries – 9: Crypt (arched way to the stadium) – 10: Stadium – 11: Echo stoa – 12: Building of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II – 13: Hestia stoa – 14: Hellenistic building – 15: Temple of Zeus – 16: Altar of Zeus – 17: Ex-voto of Achaeans – 18: Ex-voto of Mikythos – 19: Nike of Paeonius – 20: Gymnasion – 21: Palaestra – 22: Theokoleon – 23: Heroon – 24: Phidias' workshop and paleochristian basilica – 25: Baths of Kladeos – 26: Greek baths – 27 and 28: Hostels – 29: Leonidaion – 30: South baths – 31: Bouleuterion – 32: South stoa – 33: Villa of Nero



The Peloponnese Peninsula:

What is a peninsula? An isthmus? A canal? What does the Peloponnese Peninsula look like? Is it located in the northern or southern part of Greece? What connects the Peloponnese to the Attica region where Athens is located?

Submersible Bridge:

Tell me about the canal that crosses the Isthmus of Corinth. How many bridges span the canal? What is a submersible bridge? Explain how it works. What is the Diolkos?

The Spartans:

Tell me about the ancient city-state of Sparta. Would you enjoy growing up in Sparta? What would you like? What wouldn't you like?

Ancient Olympia:

Tell me about the ancient city of Olympia. Describe how the ancient Olympic Games were like our modern games. How were they different? Describe a couple of the buildings in the ancient Olympic village.

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It's time to drive north and leave this region of Greece by way of the one bridge located on the northern coast of the peninsula—the Charilaos Trikoupis [ha-REE-la-oss tree-KOO-pis] Bridge near the city of Patras. Nearly two miles in length, this bridge is the longest multi-span cable bridge in the world, connecting the towns of Rio and Antirrio. Looking out the window, it is mesmerizing to watch the thick cables as we pass by each one. It's very windy today in this gorge, and when we slow for some traffic congestion, it feels as if the bridge is swaying. Perhaps it is, just a little! This bridge was built to withstand and absorb **seismic** activity, up to 7.0 on the **Richter** scale. The feeling is a bit sickening, as we are fairly high up, but we are confident that this bridge is sturdy and constructed to accommodate large amounts of traffic, gusty winds and strong earthquakes. In fact, this bridge would be one of the safer places during an earthquake!

Do you remember the street vendor selling *koulouri* (sesame bread rings) who told us that we must stop at the monasteries at Metéora? Let's go there now. We'll be driving along some winding mountain roads to get there so, why not roll down the window, get some fresh air and enjoy the view.



Image of the Charilaos Trikoupis bridge in the public domain, courtesy of Wikipedia.

It's usually not wise to read a book on roads such as these or you might get carsick.

In a way, we are traveling forward in time as we wind our way up the Pindus Mountains to the **UNESCO World Heritage Site** of Metéora. We've learned about the Ancient Greeks while visiting Attica and the Peloponnese; now we'll find out more about a faction of Greek **monks** who lived during the more recent Middle Ages—the era of knights and castles. Over a

thousand years ago, in the ninth century AD, an **ascetic** group of **hermit** monks moved up to the **limestone pinnacles** known today as Metéora. They were trying to get away from all of the worldly influences and distractions of their day.



These holy, **solitary** men were not the first people to live in this pillared landscape, but they are the most extraordinary. They lived in the **hollows** and **fissures** of the rock towers, some as high as 1800 feet (550 meters) above the valley floor below. Because of this great height, along with the sheer cliff walls, all but the most determined visitors were discouraged from calling. Each of the cave-dwelling hermits led a life of solitude, but they did meet together on Sundays and other special holidays to worship and pray in the chapel built at the base of a rock known as Dhoupiani [doo-pi-AH-nee].

A few hundred years later, when Turkish raiders were threatening Central Greece, the monks of Metéora determined to build a refuge that would provide them with greater protection. In total, they built twenty **monasteries** on the very tops of these pillars. To gain access, they dangled long **rope ladders**, which were drawn up whenever they felt threatened. The monks believed that entering the monasteries should be an

exercise in faith, so they only replaced the ropes “when the Lord let them break.” Woe to the monk on the ladder when the ropes began to creak and tear!

Today, only six of the monasteries remain. Some fell into disrepair over the years and others were destroyed by bombings during WWII. Four of these housed men while **nuns** lived in the other two. Until recently, these lofty **eyries** remained very medieval and inaccessible from below. Supplies were transported to the monks and nuns using



baskets on ropes. Then, in the 1920s, steps were cut into the rocks and bridges were built to span **chasms** allowing easier access to the medieval hermitages. These fortresses are no longer used for religious purposes or as shelters from danger. The monasteries are open to the public so that travelers like us can understand an earlier time in history and have a peek into a different way of living.

Let's continue our journey to the east, down through the mountains, past Mt. Olympus and Katerini where we first disembarked from our ferryboat. If we continue north and east, we should arrive at Thessalonica [AKA Thessaloniki], the second largest city in Greece and the capital of the northern region of Macedonia. The road signs are not translated into English in these parts, so it is easy to miss a turn and get lost. Now we understand the phrase, "It's all Greek to me," as the Greek alphabet is very different from the Latin one we are used to.

Thessalonica received its name in 312 BC when it was named after Alexander the Great's sister, Thessalonike, and means "Victory!" This city is a major transportation hub and port city for southeast Europe. It is also famous for its festivals and cultural events. People come from all over the world to attend its fairs, festivals and trade shows.



Thessalonica is mentioned in the Bible in the book of Acts. In fact, the Apostle Paul wrote the first letter of the New Testament to the Thessalonians from another city in Greece, probably either Corinth or Athens. Paul wrote this **epistle**, or letter, to encourage the Christians in Thessalonica to continue being strong in their faith and to set good example for others. He writes in the first chapter of I Thessalonians, “You have become an example to all the believers in Greece, throughout both Macedonia (northern Greece) and Achaia (southern Greece). And even now, the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for everywhere we go we find people telling us about *your* faith in God.” (1 Thessalonians 1:7-8, emphasis mine)

During the days of the early Christian Church, Thessalonica was an important city for its work in spreading the gospel message around the Mediterranean Sea and eventually the whole world.

Oh, there is so much to do and see here in the country of Greece. But we must press on and visit some other countries in the **Balkans**. Our next stop is Macedonia and we will travel by train from Thessalonica to Skopje [SKO-pch], the capital city. We can look out our windows as we travel through the

ancient land of Macedonia. This is beautiful countryside!



Map of Macedonia in the public domain, courtesy of Wikipedia.org.

The name “Macedonia” is a little confusing because it refers to at least three regions, sometimes four. The region of Northern Greece is known as Macedonia. Also, there is a country north of Greece that is named Macedonia (Officially FYROM—Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). Then there is the ancient Empire of Macedonia, which was expanded greatly by a ruler named Philip II of Macedon to include all of the land belonging to Greece. Later, his son, Alexander the Great, expanded this Macedon empire further to include the whole known world at the time, from Greece in the west to India in the east, even spreading south to include the mighty Kingdom of Egypt.

Clearly, Macedonia is more than just a place on a map. It is a people of determination and purpose. It is a spirit of pride and innovation. But those eyelids of yours are looking heavy. Perhaps you should close your eyes for this leg of the journey. Before you know it, we'll be in Macedonia. I'll wake you when we get there.



Field Notes (jot your thoughts down in a little notebook)

This region of Greece is intriguing. I can't wait to hear what you will tell me about...

The Charilaos Trikoupis Bridge:

Did the description of the Charilaos Trikoupis Bridge scare you just a little? How would you feel driving over it? Tell me about the bridge and why it sways.

Metéora:

Tell me about the monasteries in Metéora. What can you tell me about the life of a monk living there during the Middle Ages? Would you like living in a place like that?

Macedonia:

How many 'Macedonias' are there? What areas have been called Macedonia? How are they different? Who was the city of Thessalonica named after?



Chapter 3 Timeline Events	
9th C, BC	An ascetic group of hermit monks moved to Metéora, to get away from all worldly influences and distractions.
776 BC	First Olympic Games held
7th C, BC	First attempt to build canal between Gulf of Corinth and the Saronic Gulf; when the attempt failed, the Corinthian tyrant Periander instead built the portage road, Diolkos.
431 BC	Wars between Athens and Sparta
404 BC	Sparta conquers Athens
312 BC	Thessalonica named by Alexander the Great after his sister, Thessalonike
67 AD	Roman emperor Nero attempts to build canal between the gulfs, personally removing the first basketful of debris after striking the ground with his pickaxe; Nero died shortly thereafter, and construction came to a halt.
1893	Corinth Canal was built by newly independent Greek state
1920's	Steps cut into limestone rocks to provide monks and nuns better access to their hermitages at Metéora

To learn more about the Classical World—especially the countries of Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, San Marino, the Vatican and Malta—come along with me in [A Child's Geography: Explore the Classical World](#).

Together, we will travel through these beautiful lands; walk in the footsteps of Socrates, Alexander the Great, the Apostle Paul (to name just a few); eat some incredible culinary dishes from the Mediterranean region of the world; get our hands dirty with some hands-on activities and pray for our neighbor (optional). Sound wonderful? Come... Let's go into all the world together...

[A Child's Geography: Explore the Classical World](#)