Historical maps 1: Ancient Greek Civilization

Our knowledge about many aspects of the earliest Greek cultures (Minoan and Mycenæan) is severely limited because relatively few written documents have been found and the languages have not been effectively deciphered. In any case, there were many differences between these earlier civilizations and the subsequent Greek culture which had such an enormous impact as the foundation of Western civilization. Depending upon the choice of criteria, the beginning of the Archaic Greek Period is somewhere between 1000 B.C.E. and the traditional date for the first Olympic games in 776 B.C.E.. Available evidence suggests that original Greek contributions to mathematics began during the last century or so of the Archaic Period, whose end is marked by historical events which took place around 500 B.C.E.. The Archaic Period was followed by the Classical Period, which includes a large number of major cultural and political figures including Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

Greek settlements around 550 B.C.E.

This map shows the extent of Greek settlements during the early period of Greek mathematics. Most of the activity took place in present day Greece, the coastal areas of present day Turkey, and the southern part of Italy, including the island of Sicily. There is a more detailed map of ancient Greece and coastal Asia Minor (the Asian part of Turkey) on the next page. Unlike many other early civilizations, there were many small states rather than a handful of large kingdoms or empire, partly due to the geography of the area, in which mountains and seas were major barriers between different population centers.
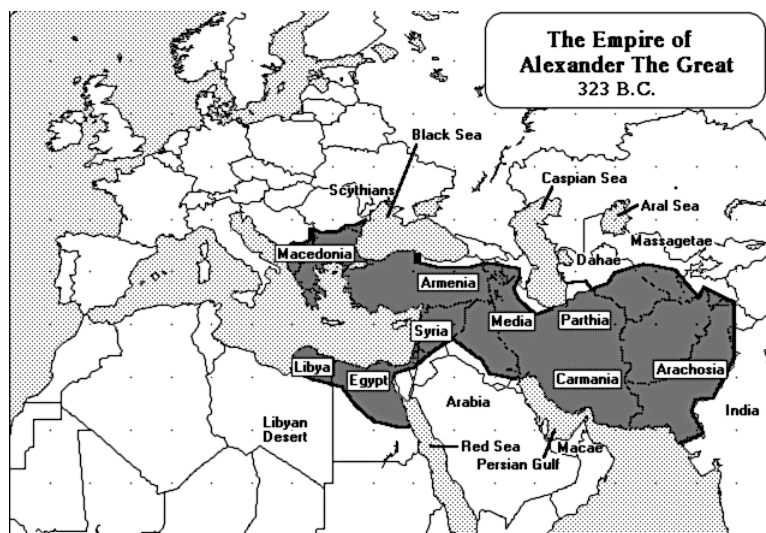
A more detailed map of the main area

(*Source:* http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/art-1813/Ancient-Greece)
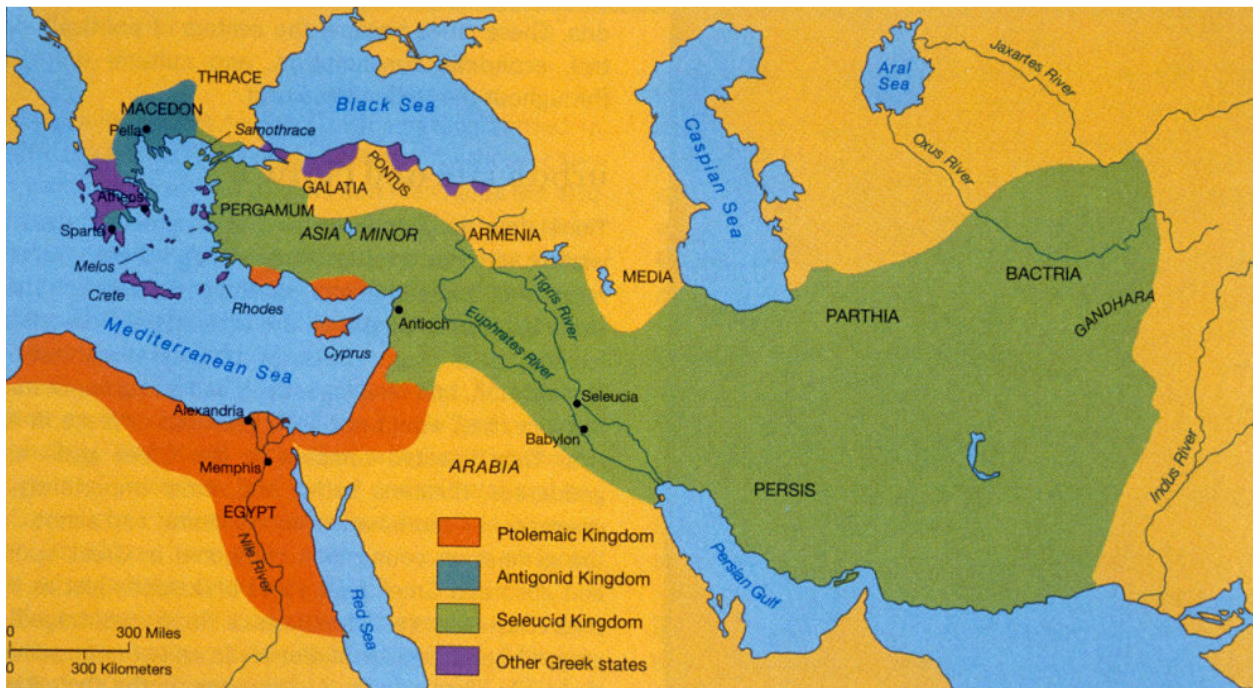
Many of the locations mentioned in Unit 2 of the notes are depicted on this map.

The conquests of Alexander the Great are the generally accepted end of the Classical Period.

(*Source:* http://www.wpclipart.com/world_history/warfare/maps/Alexander_the_Great_Empire_323_BC.png)

The Hellenistic world

Although Alexander the Great's political empire ended with his early death, the cultural impact was far more permanent. The map shows the three major Hellenistic states which arose out of the 50 years of military and political struggles which followed his death.

As indicated in the course notes, the main center of mathematical activity during the Hellenistic age was in Alexandria and other parts of the Ptolemaic Empire, but there were also other important centers (for example, Archimedes was based in Syracuse on the island of Sicily). During the same era there was also a renewed and elevated level of mathematical activity in the Babylonian tradition within the Seleucid Empire, mostly related to astronomy. Towards the end of the Hellenistic Period (which was marked by Roman conquests beginning in the middle of the 2nd century B.C.E. and continuing for the next two centuries), Greek mathematical interest in astronomically motivated issues also began to increase.