

5

The Greek World from the Bronze Age to the Roman Conquest

Nadejda Williams

5.1 CHRONOLOGY

c. 3300 – 1150 BCE	Bronze Age
c. 1100 – 700 BCE	Dark Ages
c. 700 – 480 BCE	Archaic Period
480 – 323 BCE	Classical Period
431 – 404 BCE	The Peloponnesian War
323 – 146 BCE	Hellenistic Period

5.2 INTRODUCTION

Sometime in the eighth century BCE, an aristocratic resident of the Greek trading colony of Pithekoussai—located on the tiny island of Ischia just off the coast of Naples in Italy—held a symposium at his home. Most of what happened at the party stayed at the party, but what we do know is that it must have been a good one. One of the guests, presumably operating under the influence of his host’s excellent wine, took the liberty of scratching the following ditty onto one of his host’s fine exported ceramic wine cups: “I am the Cup of Nestor, good to drink from. Whoever drinks from this cup, straightaway the desire of beautifully-crowned Aphrodite will seize him.”

While party pranks do not commonly make history, this one has: this so-called **Cup of Nestor** is one of the earliest examples of writing in the **Greek alphabet**, as well as the earliest known written reference to the Homeric epics. Overall, this cup and the inscription on it exemplify the mobility of the Ancient Greeks and their borrowing of skills and culture from others around the Mediterranean while, at the same time, cultivating a set of values specific to themselves. After all, just like the very residents of Pithekoussai, the cup had originally made the journey all the way from the island of Euboea, off the coast of Athens, to Pithekoussai, on the island of Ischia.

Furthermore, the new script, in which the daring guest wrote on the cup, had just recently been borrowed and adapted by the Greeks from the **Phoenicians**, a seafaring nation based in modern-



Figure 5.1a | "The Cup of Nestor" | Pythekoussai this so-called Cup of Nestor is one of the earliest examples of writing in the Greek alphabet, as well as the earliest known written reference to the Homeric epics.
 Author: User "Antonius Proximo"
 Source: Wikimedia Commons
 License: CC BY-SA 3.0

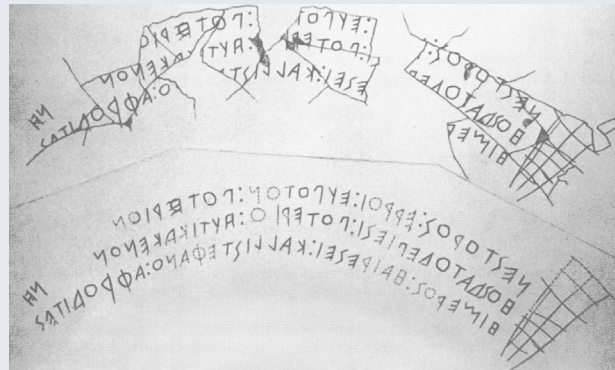


Figure 5.1b | "The Cup of Nestor" | Detailed reconstruction of the inscription.
 Author: User "Dbachmann"
 Source: Wikimedia Commons
 License: Public Domain

day Lebanon. Indeed, our clever poet wrote from right to left, just like the Phoenicians. Finally, the poem mentions Nestor, one of the heroes of **Homer's *Iliad***, an epic about the **Trojan War**, and a source of common values that all Greeks held dear: military valor, competitive excellence on both the battlefield and in all areas of everyday life, and a sense of brotherhood that manifested itself most obviously in the shared language of all the Greeks. That feeling of kinship facilitated collaboration of all the Greeks in times of crisis from the mythical Trojan War to the **Persian Wars**, and finally, during the Greeks' resistance against the Roman conquest.



Map 5.1 | Map of the Island of Ischia and the Environs | The "Cup of Nestor" journeyed from the island of Euboea, off the coast of Athens, to Pithekoussai, on the island of Ischia.
 Author: User "Norman Eistein"
 Source: Wikimedia Commons
 License: CC BY-SA 3.0

5.3 QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOUR READING

1. In what ways did Greek geography and topography impact the history of the ancient Greek world?
2. What are the different periods of Greek history, and what are the chief defining characteristics of each period?
3. What primary sources are available for the study of Greek history, and what are the limitations of these sources?
4. What were the most important developments in the Greek world in the Archaic Period?
5. What was the significance of the Persian Wars for the subsequent history of the Greek World?
6. What were the stages of the Peloponnesian War? How did the outcome of the war impact Greece in the fourth century?
7. What were some of the most important contributions of Classical Athens in the areas of art, government and law, philosophy, and literature?
8. How and why did the Macedonians conquer the Greek world? Why did the empire conquered by Philip and Alexander disintegrate after Alexander's death?
9. What were some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Hellenistic kingdoms as political entities? Why did they prove to be inherently unstable?
10. What were some of the achievements and legacies of the Hellenistic period?

5.4 KEY TERMS

- Achaemenid Empire
- Alexander the Great
- Alexandria
- Antigonid dynasty
- Archaeological evidence
- Archaic Period
- Archidamian War
- Archimedes of Syracuse
- Aristophanes
- Aristotle
- Asia Minor
- Athenian democracy
- Athens
- Battle of Chaeronea
- Battle of Leuctra
- Battle of Marathon
- Battle of Thermopylae
- Bronze Age
- Chigi vase
- Classical Period

- Cleisthenes
- Cleopatra VII
- Crete
- “Cup of Nestor”
- Cynic philosophers
- Cyrus the Great
- Darius
- Dark Ages
- Decelean War
- Delian League / Athenian Empire
- Delphi
- *Ekklesia*
- Epicureanism
- Epidaurus
- Euripides
- First Peloponnesian War
- *Gerousia*
- Great Library of Alexandria
- Greek alphabet
- Greek colonization
- Hannukah
- Hellenistic Period
- Helots
- Herodotus
- Herophilus of Chalcedon
- Homer
- Homer’s *Iliad*
- Hoplite phalanx
- Kingdom of Pergamon
- *Kleos*
- Isthmus of Corinth
- Linear A
- Linear B
- Macedonian Wars with Rome / Third Macedonian War
- Magna Graecia
- “Mask of Agamemnon”
- Mauryan Empire
- Megara Hyblaea
- Messenia
- Minoans
- Mycenaean
- Oligarchy
- Olympic Games
- Orientalizing style
- *Othismos*
- Pan-Hellenic
- Peace of Nicias
- Peisistratus
- Peloponnesian War
- Pericles
- Persian Wars
- Pharos of Alexandria
- Philip II of Macedon
- Phoenicians
- Plato
- *Polis / poleis*
- Ptolemaic Egypt
- Ptolemy I Soter
- Pythia
- *Sarissa*
- Seleucid Empire
- Septuagint
- Sicilian Expedition
- Skepticism

- Socrates
- Solon
- Sophocles
- Sparta
- Spartan constitution
- Stoic philosophy
- Theban Hegemony
- Theban Sacred Band
- *Thetes*
- Thucydides
- Tyranny
- Tyranny of the Thirty
- Trojan War
- Tyrtaeus
- Wars of the *Diadochi*
- Xerxes

5.5 GEOGRAPHY AND TOPOGRAPHY

This chapter's title refers to the Greek World, rather than Greece. While Greece is a unified country today, the territory of the present-day country was not unified under one rule until the rise of the Macedonians in the fourth century BCE. Instead, the basic unit of organization in the period covered in this chapter was the *polis*, an independent city-state, which consisted of a walled city that controlled and protected the farmland around it. Historians estimate that close to 1,500 of these city-states dotted the ancient Greek landscape.

Each of these *poleis* (plural form of *polis*) possessed its own form of government, law-code, army, cults of patron gods, and overall culture that set it apart from the other city-states. While the two most famous *poleis*, **Athens** and **Sparta**, controlled vast territories of farmland, most city-states were quite small, with a population of just a few thousand citizens. Furthermore, the Greek world in antiquity encompassed much more than present-day Greece, extending as far as Italy in the West and the territories of modern-day Turkey and Ukraine in the East.

The geography and topography of the Greek mainland and the Mediterranean region surrounding it influenced the history of the Greek people in a number of crucial ways. First, the mountainous nature of mainland Greece, especially in the north, allowed different regions to remain somewhat isolated. The most isolated of all, Thessaly and Macedon, were viewed as uncivilized barbarians by the rest of the Greeks in the Archaic and Classical periods (one oft-mentioned example of their "barbarism" in Greek literature is that they drank their wine undiluted!) and largely kept to themselves until their rise to military prominence in the mid-fourth century BCE.

The mountains throughout the northern portion of mainland Greece, in addition to isolating regions from each other and promoting regional culture, also provided tactical defenses in the face of external attacks. Most famously, the Persians learned the hard way about the challenges of navigating the Greek landscape during the second Persian invasion of Greece in 480 BCE. Indeed, the story of the 300 Spartans who fought to the death at the **Battle of Thermopylae** addresses the challenge of the Persian army trying to cross the mountains to the north of Attica in order to invade Athens by land.

The **Isthmus**, a narrow strip of land controlled by Corinth, played a similar role in separating mainland Greece from the large peninsula of the **Peloponnese**. An inland city in southern



Map 5.2 | Map of the Ancient Greek city-states at the beginning of the Persian Wars | Historians estimate that close to 1,500 of these city-states dotted the ancient Greek landscape.

Author: User "Bibi Saint-Poi"
 Source: Wikimedia Commons
 License: CC BY-SA 3.0

Peloponnese, Sparta conquered **Messenia**, its surrounding region, early in its history and extended political control over much of the peninsula by early fifth century BCE. Unless the interests of Sparta herself were directly involved, Sparta practiced a policy of isolation and limited military intervention in other city-states affairs and wars, a practice enabled due to Sparta's far southern location in Peloponnese.

No less influential for the history of the Greek city-states than the topographical features were the resources that the land in different regions provided for agriculture and manufacturing. Mainland Greece was notoriously unsuitable for agriculture. Growing the grain staples wheat and barley in the rocky and clay-filled soil of Athens was especially difficult, while the mountainous regions across the entire mainland were optimal for herding, rather than agriculture. One notable exception, however,

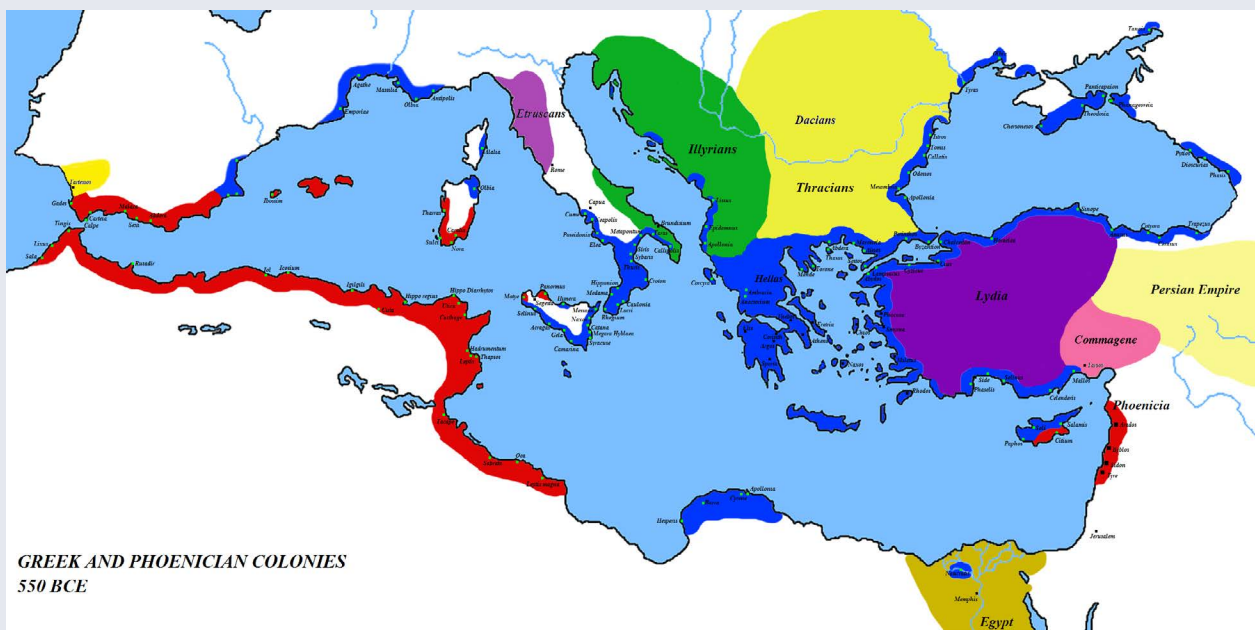
were olive trees, which grew abundantly. Olive oil, as a result, was ubiquitously used for eating, bathing, and lamps, and even as currency or prize for victors in athletic games. In addition, early on in their history, the inhabitants of Attica and Corinth found a way to profit from the clay in their soil by developing advanced ceramic pot-making and decorating techniques. Remains of Athenian and Corinthian wares have been found at archaeological sites all over the Mediterranean, attesting to their popularity abroad.

Finally, precious metals were in short supply in the mainland, but the few that were available had an impact on the history of their regions. Most famously, the discovery of the silver mines at Laurion in Attica contributed to the increased prosperity of Athens in the mid-fifth century BCE.

But the topography and geography of mainland Greece and the Peloponnese only



Figure 5.2 | Corinthian black-figure amphora, depicting the myth of Perseus and Andromeda c. 575-550 BCE, found in Cerveteri, Italy | The inhabitants of Attica and Corinth found a way to profit from the clay in their soil by developing advanced ceramic pot-making and decorating techniques. Remains of Athenian and Corinthian wares have been found at archaeological sites all over the Mediterranean, attesting to their popularity abroad.
 Author: User "Butko"
 Source: Wikimedia Commons
 License: CC BY-SA 2.0



Map 5.3 | Map of the Greek (blue areas) and Phoenician city-states and colonies (red areas) c. 550 BCE.
 Author: User "Javierfv1212"
 Source: Wikimedia Commons
 License: User "Javierfv1212"

tells us a part of the story. The Aegean is filled with islands, some of which remained autonomous, but most came under the control of the Athenian maritime empire in the fifth century BCE. In addition, the **Greek colonization** movement of the seventh and sixth centuries BCE resulted in the foundation of numerous Greek city-states in **Asia Minor** (modern-day Turkey), **Magna Graecia** (southern Italy), Sicily, and the Black Sea littoral.

The history of the Greek world from its earliest settlements to the Roman conquest, therefore, is inextricably tied together with the history of the Mediterranean as a whole. And since the Greek areas of influence overlapped with those controlled by the Phoenicians, Persians, and eventually the Romans, interactions, often warlike, were unavoidable as well. As the modern historians Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell noted, the Mediterranean was “the Corrupting Sea”¹ whose inhabitants were like frogs around the pond, watching each other, and borrowing each other’s cultural and technological achievements. As this chapter and the next will show, the Greeks and the Romans were the farthest-leaping frogs of all.

5.6 PERIODS OF GREEK HISTORY

Historians today separate Greek history into particular periods, which shared specific features throughout the Greek world:

The **Bronze Age** (c. 3,300 – 1,150 BCE) – a period characterized by the use of bronze tools and weapons. In addition, two particular periods during the Bronze Age are crucial in the development of early Greece: the Minoan Age on the island of **Crete** (c. 2,000 – 1,450 BCE) and the Mycenaean period on mainland Greece (c. 1,600 – 1,100 BCE), both of them characterized by massive palaces, remnants of which still proudly stand today. The Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations had writing (dubbed **Linear A** and **Linear B**, respectively), which they used for keeping lists and palace inventories.

The **Dark Ages** (c. 1,100 – 700 BCE) – a period that is “dark” from the archaeological perspective, which means that the monumental palaces of the Mycenaean period disappear, and the archaeological record reveals a general poverty and loss of culture throughout the Greek world. For instance, the Linear A and Linear B writing systems disappear. The Greeks do not rediscover writing until the invention of the Greek alphabet at the end of the Dark Ages or the early Archaic Period.

Archaic Period (c. 700 – 480 BCE) – the earliest period for which written evidence survives; this is the age of the rise of the Greek city-states, colonization, and the Persian Wars.

Classical Period (c. 480 – 323 BCE) – the period from the end of the Persian Wars to the death of **Alexander the Great**. One of the most important events during this period is the Peloponnesian War (431 – 404 BCE), which pitted Athens against Sparta, and forced all other Greek city-states to choose to join one side or the other. This period ends with the death of Alexander the Great, who had unified the Greek world into a large kingdom with himself at its helm.

Hellenistic Period (323 – 146 BCE) – the period from the death of Alexander to the Roman conquest of Greece; this is the age of the Hellenistic monarchies ruling over territories previously conquered by Alexander and his generals. Some historians end this period in 30

¹ Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000).

BCE, with the death of **Cleopatra VII**, the last surviving ruler of Egypt who was a descendant of one of Alexander's generals.

The rest of this chapter will be devoted to examining each of these periods in greater detail, covering chief political, military, and cultural developments.

5.7 METHODOLOGY: SOURCES AND PROBLEM

Before launching into the story of the early Greek world, it is important to consider the methodology that Greek historians utilize. In other words, how do we know what we know about the Greek world? Modern scholars of ancient history are notoriously obsessed with evaluating their primary sources critically, and with good reason. Studying Greek history, especially in its earliest periods, is like putting together a puzzle, most of whose pieces are missing, and some pieces from another puzzle have also been added in for good measure. Greek history requires careful consideration of a wide range of sources, which fall into two broad categories: literary sources (including both fiction and non-fiction), and material culture. The job of the historian, then, is to reconstruct the story of the Greek people using these very different sources.

While historians of the modern world rely on such archival sources as newspapers, magazines, and personal diaries and correspondence of individuals and groups, historians of the ancient world must use every available source to reconstruct the world in which their subject dwelled. Literary sources, such as epics, lyric poetry, and drama, may seem strange for historians to use, as they do not necessarily describe specific historical events. Yet, as in the case of other early civilizations, such sources are a crucial window into the culture and values of the people who produced them. For instance, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, discussed in Chapter 2, is a key text for the study of early Mesopotamia.

The earliest literary sources for Greek history are the Homeric epics, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. They are, however, one of the most challenging sources to interpret, with one modern historian dubbing them a "historian's headache."² Composed orally before the existence of the Greek alphabet, the epics were not written down until sometime in the sixth century BCE. The epics most likely do not reflect the society of any particular Greek city-state in any one period, but rather consist of an amalgam of features from the Bronze Age to the early Archaic Period. Their value for historians, as a result, rests more on their impact on subsequent Greek culture, rather than on their providing information about Bronze Age Greeks. More than any other literary source, the Homeric Epics influenced the mentality of the Greeks in thinking about war and what it means to be a hero.

Most other literary sources from the Archaic and Classical periods are easier to interpret than the Homeric Epics, as we often can date these later sources more precisely and thus know the period whose values or problems they reflect. There is, however, one important limitation to keep in mind: the overwhelming majority of surviving literature is from Athens, with very few sources from other city-states. Some of this distribution of evidence has to do with the differing values of the city-states themselves. For example, while Greeks of the Classical period considered Sparta to

² Kurt Raaflaub, "A Historian's Deadache: How to Read 'Homeric Society'?" in N. Fisher and H. Van wees eds., *Archaic Greece: New Approaches and New Evidence* (London: Duckworth: 1998).

be as great a city as Athens, Spartans valued military valor over all else, so they did not cultivate arts and letters the way Athenians did. As a result, the only literary sources from Sparta are the works of two poets, Alcman and Tyrtaeus. Tyrtaeus' military elegies, like the Homeric epics, glorify heroic death in battle over life without honor and were likely sung by Spartan warriors as they marched into battle.

Several genres of non-fiction survive as well, allowing historians to study specific events and problems in the history of the Greek world, and especially Athens. The works of three major historians survive from Classical Athens. **Herodotus**, dubbed the Father of History, wrote the *Histories* about the Persian Wars in mid-fifth century BCE. **Thucydides**, an Athenian general in the Peloponnesian War, wrote a history of the Peloponnesian War over the course of the war (431 – 404 BCE). Finally, Xenophon wrote a history of the end of the Peloponnesian War, starting with 411 BCE, where Thucydides' work ended, and into the fourth century. In addition to the works of the historians, philosophical treatises – most notably, those of **Plato** and **Aristotle** – provide crucial insight into the political thought, moral values, and perceptions of the world in late fifth and fourth centuries BCE. The approximately 100 surviving courtroom speeches from the same period likewise provide us with a window into the Athenian legal system. Finally, the Hippocratic corpus, a series of medical treatises and physicians' journals from the Classical period, help us to understand the Greeks' views of the human body and diseases. But in addition to the geographical restrictions of these sources, which largely document Athens, it is also important to note two other key limitations of the available evidence. First, virtually all of the literary sources were written by men and provide very little evidence of the lives and perspectives of women in the Greek world, except as seen through the eyes of men. Second, most of the authors were wealthy and socially prominent individuals; thus, their perspective does not reflect that of less affluent citizens and slaves.

Archaeological evidence thankfully allows historians to fill some of the gaps in the literary evidence, but also comes with problems of its own. One joke that refers to the optimism of archaeologists reflects some of these problems of interpretation: whenever an archaeologist finds three stones that are together, he labels the find as a Minoan palace. Whenever he finds two stones that are together, he thinks he has found a city wall. Whenever he finds one building stone, he thinks he has found a house.

Still, archaeological sources provide us with key information



Figure 5.3 | Megara Hyblaea, main road, looking north | The careful planning of the road and the buildings is still evident, as the ruins on both sides of the road are perfectly aligned.

Author: User "Alun Salt"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 2.0



Figure 5.4 | Attic Black-Figure Hydria, c. 520 BCE | Shows women getting water from a public fountain.

Author: User "Jastrow"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 2.5

about different aspects of everyday life in different city-states. For example, the excavations of the sixth-century BCE colony **Megara Hyblaea** in Sicily shows that Greek colonists were interested in city planning and in equality of citizens, as demonstrated by the equal size of the lots.

Material finds, such as pottery remains, in different sites across the Mediterranean also allow historians to map trading routes – for instance, Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show vases that were made in Euboea and Corinth respectively, but were found in Greek colonies in Italy. In addition, images on

pottery provide information about stories and myths that have entered popular culture and that sometimes reflect further aspects of everyday life. For instance, the prevalence of images of women gathering at public fountains on Athenian *hydriae* (water pots) from the late sixth century BCE shows the importance of the public fountains for the social life of women in Athens in the period.

Finally, written archaeological sources, such as inscriptions on stone or pottery shards from all over the Greek world, and papyri from Hellenistic Egypt, are the equivalent of documentary archives from the ancient world. The evidence from epigraphy (inscriptions) includes laws that were written on large stones and set up in public, such as the monumental law-code from Gortyn, Crete, and lists of war-dead, as well as private tomb inscriptions.

Papyri, on the other hand, include such private documents as prenuptial agreements (among the strangest are prenuptial documents for brother-sister marriages – legal

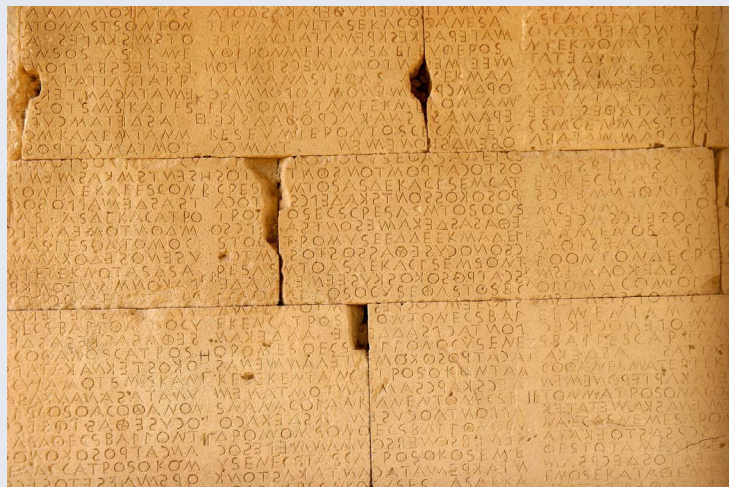


Figure 5.5 | The Gortyn Code (c. fifth century BCE) | Close-up of part of the inscription.

Author: User "Afrank99"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 2.5

in Egypt but nowhere else in the Greek world), divorce documents, loans, and village police reports (cattle theft appears to have been a serious problem in the Faiyum in the Hellenistic Period!).

Taken together, the literary and archaeological sources allow the historian to complete much more of the puzzle than would have been possible with just one of these types of sources. Still, significant gaps in knowledge remain nevertheless, and are, perhaps, one of the joys of studying ancient history: the historian gets to play the part of a sleuth, attempting to reconstruct the history of events based on just a few available clues.

5.8 FROM MYTHOLOGY TO HISTORY

The terms “mythology” and “history” may seem, by modern definitions, to be antithetical. After all, mythology refers to stories that are clearly false, of long-forgotten gods and heroes and their miraculous feats. History, on the other hand, refers to actual events that involved real people. And yet, the idea that the two are opposites would have seemed baffling to a typical resident of the ancient Mediterranean world. Rather, gods and myths were part of the everyday life, and historical events could become subsumed by myths just as easily as myths could become a part of history. For instance, Gilgamesh, the hero of the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, was a real king of Uruk, yet he also became the hero of the epic. Each Greek city-state, in particular, had a foundation myth describing its origins as well as its own patron gods and goddesses. Etiological myths, furthermore, served to explain why certain institutions or practices existed; for instance, the tragic trilogy *Oresteia* of the Athenian poet Aeschylus tells the etiological myth for the establishment of the Athenian murder courts in the Classical period.

Yet, while the Greeks saw mythology and history as related concepts and sometimes as two sides of the same coin, one specific mythical event marked, in the eyes of the earliest known Greek historians, the beginning of the story of Greek-speaking peoples. That event was the Trojan War.

5.8.1 Homer and the Trojan War

It is telling that the two earliest Greek historians, Herodotus, writing in the mid-fifth century BCE, and Thucydides, writing in the last third of the fifth century BCE, began their respective histories with the Trojan War, each treating it as a historical event. The Homeric epics *Iliad* and *Odyssey* portray the war as an organized attack of a unified Greek army against Troy, a city in Asia Minor (see map 5.2). The instigating offense? The Trojan prince Paris kidnapped Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, from her husband Menelaus, king of Sparta. This offense, interpreted as a slight to Menelaus’ honor, prompted Agamemnon, king of Mycenae and Menelaus’ brother, to raise an army from the entire Greek world and sail to Troy. The mythical tradition had it that after a brutal ten-year siege, the Greeks resorted to a trick: they presented the Trojans with a hollow wooden horse, filled with armed soldiers. The Trojans tragically accepted the gift, ostensibly intended as a dedication to the goddess Athena. That same night, the armed contingent emerged from the horse, and the city finally fell to the Greeks. Picking up the story ten years after the end of the Trojan War, the *Odyssey* then told the story of Odysseus’s struggles to

return home after the war and the changes that reverberated throughout the Greek world after the fall of Troy.

The Homeric epics were the foundation of Greek education in the Archaic and Classical periods and, as such, are a historian's best source of pan-Hellenic values. A major theme throughout both epics is personal honor, which Homeric heroes value more than the collective cause. For example, when Agamemnon slights Achilles' honor in the beginning of the *Iliad*, Achilles, the best hero of the Greeks, withdraws from battle for much of the epic, even though his action causes the Greeks to start losing battles until he rejoins the fight. A related theme is competitive excellence, with *kleos* (eternal glory) as its goal: all Greek heroes want to be the best; thus, even while fighting in the same army, they see each other as competition. Ultimately, Achilles has to make a choice: he can live a long life and die unknown, or he can die in battle young and have everlasting glory. Achilles' selection of the second option made him the inspiration for such historical Greek warriors and generals as Alexander the Great, who brought his scroll copy of the *Iliad* with him on all campaigns. Finally, the presence of the gods in the background of the Trojan War shows the Greeks' belief that the gods were everywhere, and acted in the lives of mortals. These gods could be powerful benefactors and patrons of individuals who respected them and sought their favor, or vicious enemies, bent on destruction. Indeed, early in the *Iliad*, the god Apollo sends a plague on the Greek army at Troy, as punishment for disrespecting his priest.

It is important to note that while the Homeric epics influenced Greek values from the Archaic period on, they do not reflect the reality of the Greek world in any one period. Furthermore, they were not composed by a single poet, **Homer**; indeed, it is possible that Homer never existed. Because the epics were composed orally by multiple bards over the period of several hundred years, they combine details about technological and other aspects of the Bronze Age with those of the Dark Ages and even the early Archaic Age. For instance, the heroes use bronze weapons side-by-side with iron. Archaeological evidence, however, allows historians to reconstruct to some extent a picture of the Greek world in the Bronze Age and the Dark Ages.

5.8.2 Greece in the Bronze Age, and the Dark Ages

While there were people living in mainland Greece already in the Neolithic Period, historians typically begin the study of the Greeks as a unique civilization in the Bronze Age, with the **Minoans**. The first literate civilization in Europe, the Minoans were a palace civilization that flourished on the island of **Crete** c. 2,000 – 1,450 BCE.

As befits island-dwellers, they were traders and seafarers; indeed, the Greek historian Thucydides credits them with being the first Greeks to sail on ships. Sir Arthur Evans, the archaeologist who first excavated Crete in the early 1900s, dubbed them Minoans, after the mythical Cretan king Minos who was best known for building a labyrinth to house the Minotaur, a monster that was half-man, half-bull. Bulls appear everywhere in surviving Minoan art, suggesting that they indeed held a prominent place in Minoan mythology and religion.

Four major palace sites survive on Crete. The most significant of them, Knossos, has been restored and reconstructed for the benefit of modern tourists.

who arrived from mainland Greece. Recent discoveries also suggest that at least some of the destruction may have been the result of tsunamis which accompanied the Santorini/Thera volcanic eruption in the 1600s BCE.

The Mycenaean, similarly to the Minoans, were a palace civilization. Flourishing on mainland Greece c. 1,600 – 1,100 BCE, they received their name from Mycenae, the most elaborate surviving palace and the mythical home of Agamemnon, the commander-in-chief of the Greek army in the Trojan War. The archaeological excavations of graves in Mycenae reveal a prosperous civilization that produced elaborate pottery, bronze weapons and tools, and extravagant jewelry and other objects made of precious metals and gems. One of the most famous finds is the so-called “**Mask of Agamemnon**,” a burial mask with which one aristocrat was buried, made of hammered gold.

The Mycenaean also kept palace records in a syllabic script, known as Linear B. Related to the Cretan Linear A script, Linear B, however, has been deciphered, and identified as Greek.

Archaeological evidence also shows that sometime in the 1,200s BCE, the Mycenaean palaces



Figure 5.7 | Reconstructed North Portico at Knossos

Author: User "Bernard Gagnon"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0



Figure 5.8 | Mask of Agamemnon, Mycenae

Author: User "Xuan Che"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY 2.0

suffered a series of attacks and were gradually abandoned over the next century. The period that begins around 1,000 BCE is known as the “Dark Ages” because of the notable decline, in contrast with the preceding period. The Mycenaean Linear B script disappears, and archaeological evidence shows a poorer Greece with a decline in material wealth and life expectancy. Some contact, however, must have remained with the rest of the Mediterranean, as shown by the emergence of the Greek alphabet, adapted from the Phoenician writing system towards the end of the Dark Ages or early in the Archaic Period.

5.9 ARCHAIC GREECE

The story of the Greek world in the Dark Ages could mostly be described as a story of fragmentation. With a few exceptions,

A COMPARATIVE TABLE OF ANCIENT ALPHABETS.

HEBREW.	NAME AND POWER OF THE HEBREW LETTERS.	RAB. BINNIC HEBREW	ARABIC.	SAMA-RITAN.	SYRIAC.	PHOENICIAN.	ANCIENT HEBREW.	ANCIENT GREEK.
א	Aleph a 1	א	ا ا	א	ܐ ܐ	𐤀 𐤀	א	Α
ב	Beth b 2	ב	ب ب	ב	ܒ ܒ ܒ ܒ	𐤁 𐤁	ב	Β Β
ג	Gimel g 3	ג	ج ج	ג	ܓ ܓ ܓ ܓ	𐤂 𐤂	ג	Γ Γ Γ
ד	Daleth d 4	ד	ד ד	ד	ܕ ܕ	𐤃 𐤃	ד	Δ Δ Δ
ה	He h 5	ה	ه ه	ה	ܗ ܗ	𐤄	ה	Ε Ε
ו	Vav v 6	ו	و و	ו	ܘ ܘ	𐤅 𐤅	ו	Φ Φ
ז	Zain z 7	ז	ز ز	ז	ܙ ܙ	𐤆	...	Ι
ח	Cheth ch 8	ח	ح ح	ח	ܚ ܚ ܚ ܚ	𐤇 𐤇	ח	Θ Θ
ט	Teth t 9	ט	ط ط	ט	ܛ ܛ ܛ ܛ	𐤈	...	⊙
י	Yod y 10	י	ي ي	י	ܝ ܝ ܝ ܝ	𐤉 𐤉	י	Ζ Ζ
כ	Caph k 20	כ	ك ك	כ	ܟ ܟ ܟ ܟ	𐤊 𐤊 𐤊 𐤊	כ	Χ Χ
ל	Lamed l 30	ל	ل ل	ל	ܠ ܠ ܠ ܠ	𐤋 𐤋 𐤋 𐤋	ל	Ψ Ψ
מ	Mem m 40	מ	م م	מ	ܡ ܡ ܡ ܡ	𐤌 𐤌 𐤌 𐤌	מ	Μ Μ
נ	Nun n 50	נ	ن ن	נ	ܢ ܢ ܢ ܢ	𐤍 𐤍	נ	Ν
ס	Samech s 60	ס	س س	ס	ܣ ܣ ܣ ܣ	𐤎 𐤎	...	†
ע	Ain e 70	ע	ع ع	ע	ܥ ܥ ܥ ܥ	𐤏 𐤏	ע	Ο
פ	Pe p 80	פ	ف ف	פ	ܦ ܦ ܦ ܦ	𐤐	פ	Ϝ
צ	Tzade tz 90	צ	ص ص	צ	ܘ ܘ ܘ ܘ	𐤑 𐤑	צ	Ζ
ק	Koph k 100	ק	ق ق	ק	ܩ ܩ ܩ ܩ	𐤒 𐤒	ק	Ϟ Ϟ
ר	Resh r 200	ר	ر ر	ר	ܪ ܪ	𐤓 𐤓	ר	Ϙ Ϙ
ש	Shin sh 300	ש	ش ش	ש	ܫ ܫ ܫ ܫ	𐤔 𐤔 𐤔 𐤔	ש	Μ Μ
ת	Tau t 400	ת	ت ت	ת	ܬ ܬ	𐤕 𐤕	ת	Τ

Figure 5.9 | Comparative chart of writing systems in the Ancient Mediterranean | As this chart shows, in addition to the influence of the Phoenician alphabet on the Greek, there were close connections between the Phoenician, Egyptian, and Hebrew writing systems as well.

Author: Samuel Prideaux Tregelles

Source: Google Books

License: Public Domain

individual sites had limited contact with each other. The Archaic period, however, appears to have been a time of growing contacts and connections between different parts of mainland Greece. Furthermore, it was a time of expansion, as the establishment of overseas colonies and cities brought the Greeks to Italy and Sicily in the West, and Asia Minor and the Black Sea littoral in the East. Furthermore, while Greeks in the Archaic period saw themselves as citizens of individual city-states, this period also witnessed the rise of a **Pan-Hellenic** identity, as all Greeks saw themselves connected by virtue of their common language, religion, and Homeric values. This Pan-Hellenic identity was ultimately cemented during the Persian Wars: two invasions of Greece by the Persian Empire at the end of the Archaic period.

5.9.1 Rise of the Hoplite Phalanx and the Polis

A Corinthian vase, known today as the **Chigi Vase**, made in the mid-seventh century BCE, presents a tantalizing glimpse of the changing times from the Dark Ages to the Archaic Period. Taking up much of the decorated space on the vase is a battle scene. Two armies of warriors with round shields, helmets, and spears are facing each other and appear to be marching in formation towards each other in preparation for attack.

Modern scholars largely consider the vase to be the earliest artistic portrayal of the **hoplite phalanx**, a new way of fighting that spread around the Greek world in the early Archaic Age and that coincided with the rise of another key institution for subsequent Greek history: the *polis*, or city-state. From the early Archaic period to the conquest of the Greek world by Philip and Alexander in the late fourth century BCE, the *polis* was the central unit of organization in the Greek world.

While warfare in the *Iliad* consisted largely of duels between individual heroes, the hoplite phalanx was a new mode of fighting that did not rely on the skill of individuals. Rather, it required all soldiers in the line to work together as a whole. Armed in the same way – with a helmet, spear, and the round shield, the *hoplon*, which gave the hoplites their name – the soldiers were arranged in rows, possibly as much as seven deep. Each soldier carried his shield on his left arm, protecting the left side of his own body and the right side of his comrade to the left. Working together as one, then, the phalanx

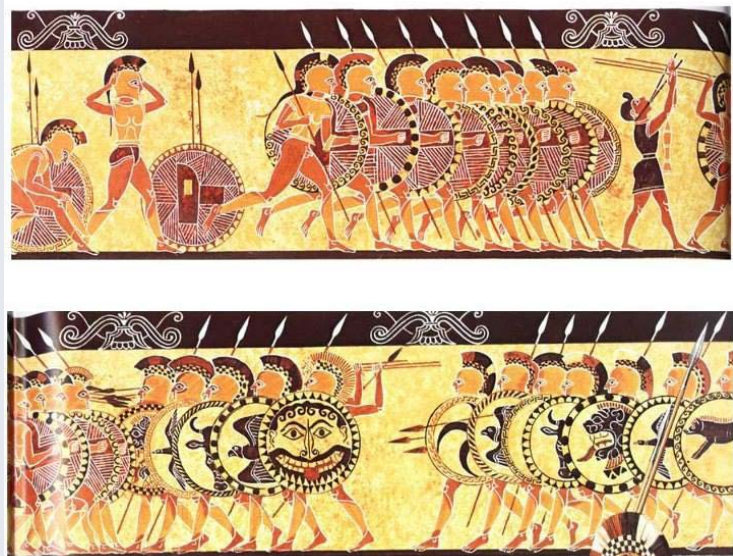


Figure 5.10 | “Unrolled” reconstructed image from the Chigi Vase

Author: User “Phokion”

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 4.0

would execute the ***othismos*** (a mass shove) during battle, with the goal of shoving the enemy phalanx off the battlefield.

Historians do not know which came into existence first, the phalanx or the *polis*, but the two clearly reflect a similar ideology. In fact, the phalanx could be seen as a microcosm of the *polis*, exemplifying the chief values of the *polis* on a small scale. Each *polis* was a fully self-sufficient unit of organization, with its own laws, definition of citizenship, government, army, economy, and local cults. Regardless of the differences between the many *poleis* in matters of citizenship, government, and law, one key similarity is clear: the survival of the *polis* depended on the dedication of all its citizens to the collective well-being of the city-state. This dedication included service in the phalanx. As a result, citizenship in most Greek city-states was closely connected to military service, and women were excluded from citizenship. Furthermore, since hoplites had to provide their own armor, these citizen-militias effectively consisted of landowners. This is not to say, though, that the poorer citizens were entirely excluded from serving their city. One example of a way in which they may have participated even in the phalanx appears on the Chigi Vase. Marching between two lines of warriors is an unarmed man, playing a double-reed flute (seen on the right end of the top band in Figure 5.10). Since the success of the phalanx depended on marching together in step, the flute-player's music would have been essential to ensure that everyone kept the same tempo during the march.

5.9.2 Greek Religion

One theory modern scholars have proposed for the rise of the *polis* connects the locations of the city-states to known cult-sites. The theory argues that the Greeks of the Archaic period built city-states around these precincts of various gods in order to live closer to them and protect them. While impossible to know for sure if this theory or any other regarding the rise of the *polis* is true, the building of temples in cities during the Archaic period shows the increasing emphasis that the *poleis* were placing on religion.

It is important to note that Greek religion seems to have been, at least to some extent, an element of continuity from the Bronze Age to the Archaic period and beyond. The important role that the gods play in the Homeric epics attests to their prominence in the oral tradition, going back to the Dark Ages. Furthermore, names of the following major gods worshipped in the Archaic period and beyond were found on the deciphered Linear B tablets: Zeus, king of the gods and god of weather, associated with the thunderbolt; Hera, Zeus' wife and patroness of childbirth; Poseidon, god of the sea; Hermes, messenger god and patron of thieves and merchants; Athena, goddess of war and wisdom and patroness of women's crafts; Ares, god of war; Dionysus, god of wine; and the twins Apollo, god of the sun and both god of the plague and a healer, and Artemis, goddess of the hunt and the moon. All of these gods continued to be the major divinities in Greek religion for its duration, and many of them were worshipped as patron gods of individual cities, such as Artemis at Sparta, and Athena at Athens.

While many local cults of even major gods were truly local in appeal, a few local cults achieved truly Pan-Hellenic appeal. Drawing visitors from all over the Greek world, these Pan-Hellenic



Figure 5.11 | Themis and Aegeus | The Pythia seated on the tripod and holding a laurel branch – symbols of Apollo, who was the source of her prophecies. This is the only surviving image of the Pythia from ancient Greece

Author: User "Bibi Saint-Poi"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

cults were seen as belonging equally to all the Greeks. One of the most famous examples is the cult of Asclepius at **Epidauros**. Asclepius, son of Apollo, was a healer god, and his shrine at Epidauros attracted the pilgrims from all over the Greek world. Visitors suffering from illness practiced incubation, that is, spending the night in the temple, in the hopes of receiving a vision in their dreams suggesting a cure. In gratitude for the god's healing, some pilgrims dedicated casts of their healed body parts. Archaeological findings include a plentitude of ears, noses, arms, and feet.

Starting out as local cults, several religious festivals that included athletic competitions as part of the celebration also achieved Pan-Hellenic prominence during the Archaic period. The most influential of these were the **Olympic Games**. Beginning in 776 BCE, the Olympic Games were held in Olympia every four years in honor of Zeus; they drew competitors from all over the Greek world, and even Persia. The Pan-Hellenic appeal of the Olympics is signified by the impact that

these games had on Greek politics: for instance, a truce was in effect throughout the Greek world for the duration of each Olympics. In addition, the Olympics provided a Pan-Hellenic system of dating events by Olympiads or four-year cycles.

Finally, perhaps the most politically influential of the Pan-Hellenic cults was the oracle of Apollo at **Delphi**, established sometime in the eighth century BCE. Available for consultation only nine days a year, the oracle spoke responses to the questions asked by inquirers through a priestess, named the **Pythia**. The Pythia's responses came in the form of poetry and were notoriously difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, city-states and major rulers throughout the Greek world considered it essential to consult the oracle before embarking on any major endeavor, such as war or founding a colony.

5.9.3 Maritime Trade and Colonization

The historian Herodotus records that sometime c. 630 BCE, the king of the small island of Thera traveled to Delphi to offer a sacrifice and consult the oracle on a few minor points. To his surprise, the oracle's response had nothing to do with his queries. Instead, the Pythia directed him to found a colony in Libya, in North Africa. Having never heard of Libya, the king ignored the advice. A seven-year drought ensued, and the Therans felt compelled to consult the oracle again. Receiving the same response as before, they finally sent out a group of colonists who eventually founded the city of Cyrene.

While this story may sound absurd, it is similar to other foundation stories of Greek colonies and emphasizes the importance of the Delphic oracle. At the same time, though, this story still leaves open the question of motive: why did so many Greek city-states of the Archaic period send out colonies to other parts of the Greek world? Archaeology and foundation legends, such as those recorded by Herodotus, suggest two chief reasons: population pressures along with shortage of productive farmland in the cities on mainland Greece, and increased ease of trade that colonies abroad facilitated. In addition to resolving these two problems, however, the colonies also had the unforeseen impact of increasing interactions of the Greeks with the larger Mediterranean world and the ancient Near East. These interactions are visible, for instance, in the so-called **Orientalizing style** of art in the Archaic period, a style the Greeks borrowed from the Middle East and Egypt.

As section 5.3.5 will show, however, the presence of Greek colonies in Asia Minor also played a major role in bringing about the Greco-Persian Wars.

5.9.4. Aristocracy, Democracy, and Tyranny in Archaic Greece

Later Greek historians, including Herodotus and Thucydides, noted a certain trend in the trajectory of the history of most Greek *poleis*: most city-states started out with a monarchical or quasi-monarchical government. Over time the people gained greater representation, and an assembly of all citizens had at least some degree of political power—although some degree of strife typically materialized between the aristocrats and the poorer elements. Taking advantage of such civic conflicts, **tyrants** came to power in most city-states for a brief period before the people banded together and drove them out, thenceforth replacing them with a more popular form of government.

Many modern historians are skeptical about some of the stories that the Greek historians tell about origins of some *poleis*; for instance, it is questionable whether the earliest Thebans truly were born from dragon teeth. Similarly, the stories about some of the Archaic tyrants seem to belong more to the realm of legend than history. Nevertheless, the preservation of stories about tyrants in early oral tradition suggests that city-states likely went through periods of turmoil and change in their form of government before developing a more stable constitution. Furthermore, this line of development accurately describes the early history of Athens, the best-documented *polis*.

In the early Archaic period, Athens largely had an aristocratic constitution. Widespread debt-slavery, however, caused significant civic strife in the city and led to the appointment of **Solon** as lawgiver for the year 594/3 BCE, specifically for the purpose of reforming the laws. Solon created a

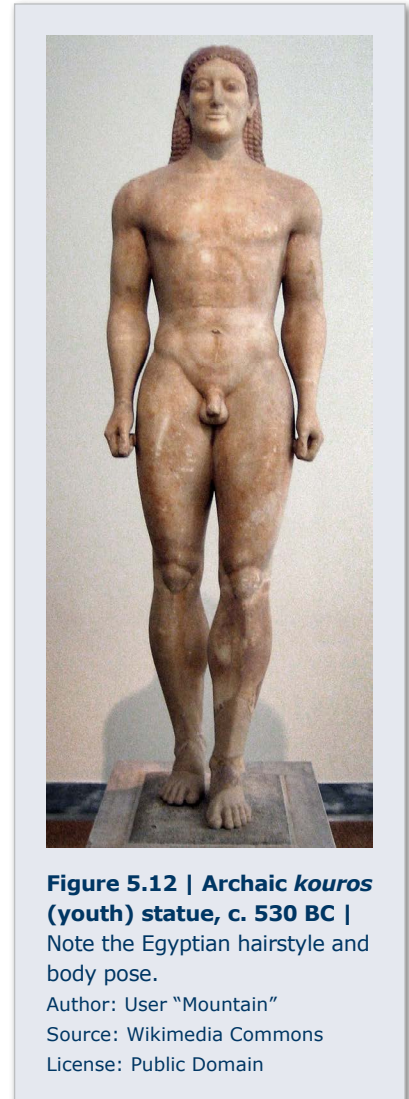


Figure 5.12 | Archaic *kouros* (youth) statue, c. 530 BC |

Note the Egyptian hairstyle and body pose.

Author: User "Mountain"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

more democratic constitution and also left poetry documenting justifications for his reforms—and different citizens’ reactions to them. Most controversial of all, Solon instituted a one-time debt-forgiveness, *seisachtheia*, which literally means “shaking off.” He proceeded to divide all citizens into five classes based on income, assigning a level of political participation and responsibility commensurate with each class. Shortly after Solon’s reforms, a tyrant, **Peisistratus**, illegally seized control of Athens and remained in power off and on from 561 to 527 BCE. Peisistratus seems to have been a reasonably popular ruler who had the support of a significant portion of the Athenian population. His two sons, Hippias and Hipparchus, however, appear to have been less well-liked. Two men, Harmodius and Aristogeiton, assassinated Hipparchus in 514 BCE; then in 508 BCE, the Athenians, with the help of a Spartan army, permanently drove out Hippias. In subsequent Athenian history, Harmodius and Aristogeiton were considered heroes of the democracy and celebrated as tyrannicides.

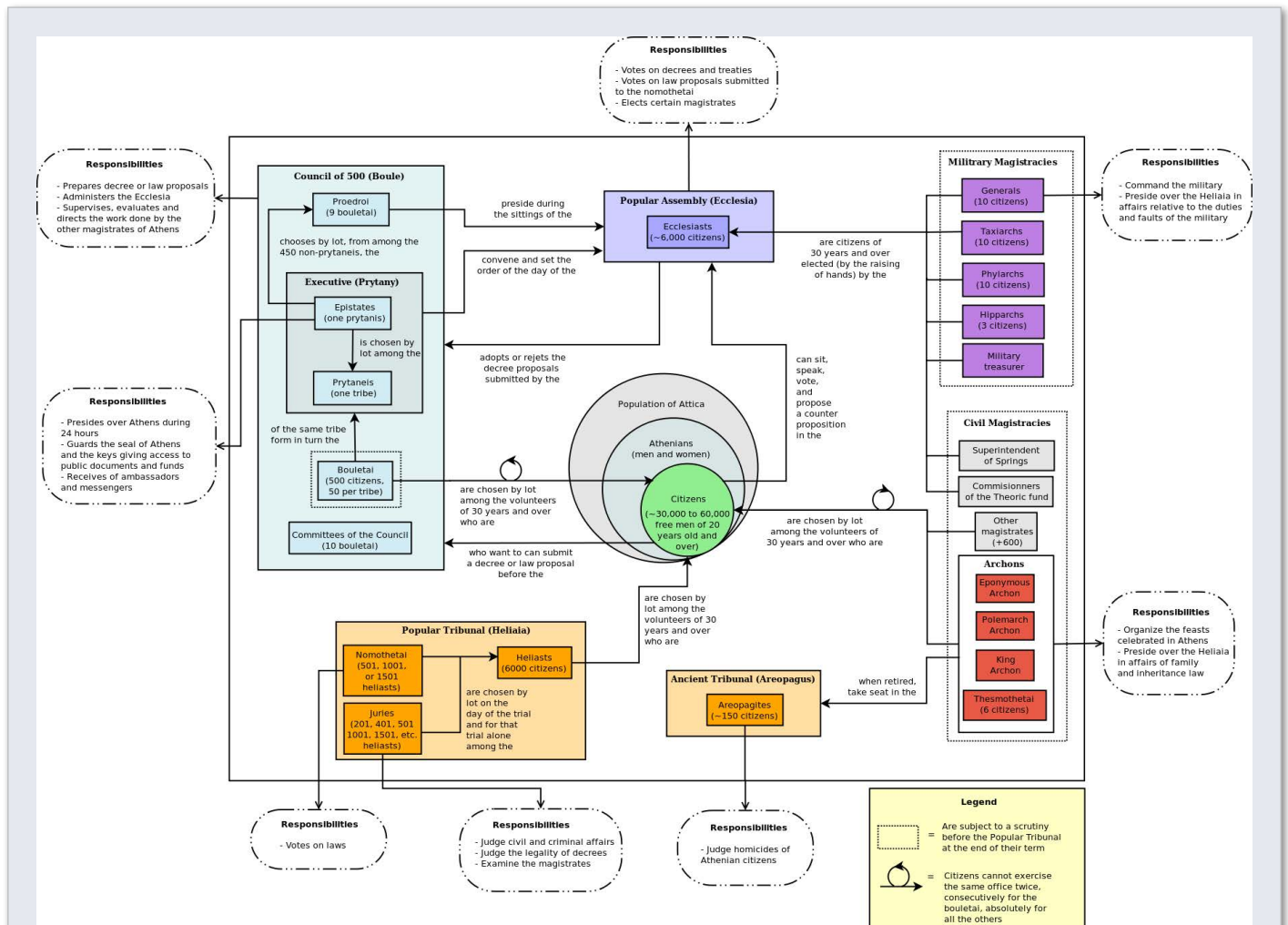


Figure 5.13 | The structure of the Classical Athenian democracy, fourth century BCE

Author: User "Mathieugp"
 Source: Wikimedia Commons
 License: CC BY-SA 3.0

Immediately following the expulsion of Hippias, Athens underwent a second round of democratic reforms, led by **Cleisthenes**. The Cleisthenic constitution remained in effect, with few changes, until the Macedonian conquest of Athens in the fourth century BCE and is considered to be the Classical **Athenian democracy**. Central to the democracy was the participation of all citizens in two types of institutions: the **ekklesia**, an assembly of all citizens, which functioned as the chief deliberative body of the city; and the law-courts, to which citizens were assigned by lot as jurors. Two chief offices, the generals and the archos, ruled over the city and were appointed for one-year terms. Ten generals were elected annually by the *ekklesia* for the purpose of leading the Athenian military forces. Finally, the leading political office each year, the nine archons, were appointed by lot from all eligible citizens. While this notion of appointing the top political leaders by lot may seem surprising, it exemplifies the Athenians' pride in their democracy and their desire to believe that, in theory at least, all Athenian citizens were equally valuable and capable of leading their city-state.

Developing in a very different manner from Athens, Sparta was seen by other Greek *poleis* as a very different sort of city from the rest. Ruled from an early period by two kings – one from each of the two royal houses that ruled jointly – Sparta was a true oligarchy, in which the power

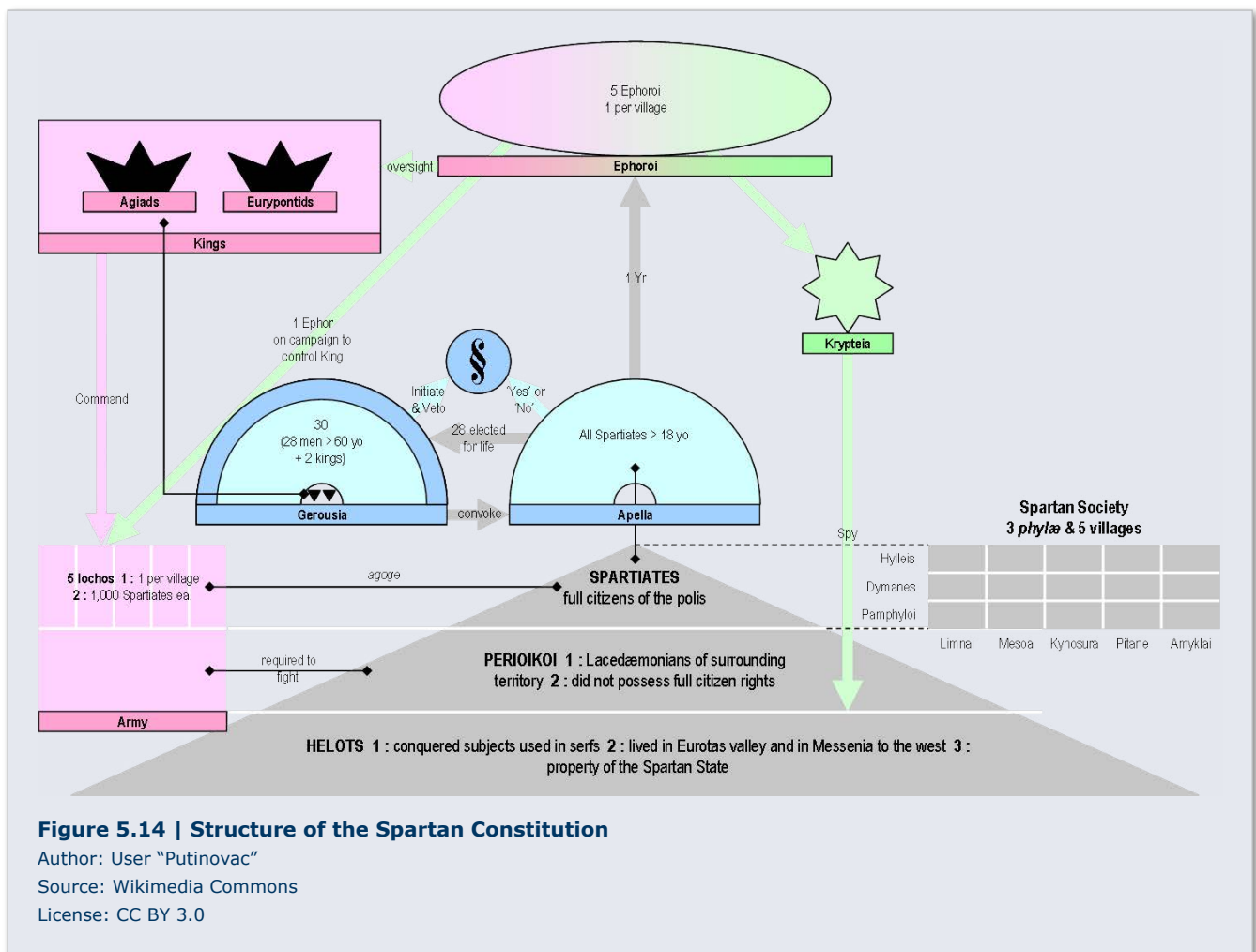


Figure 5.14 | Structure of the Spartan Constitution

Author: User "Putinovac"
 Source: Wikimedia Commons
 License: CC BY 3.0

rested in its *gerousia*, a council of thirty elders, whose number included the two kings. While an assembly of all citizens existed as well, its powers were much more limited than were those of the Athenian assembly. Yet because of much more restrictive citizenship rules, Spartan assembly of citizens would have felt as a more selective body, as Figure 5.14 illustrates.

A crucial moment in Spartan history was the city's conquest of the nearby region of Messenia in the eighth century BCE.

The Spartans annexed the Messenian territory to their own and made the Messenians **helots**. While the helots could not be bought or sold, they were permanently tied to the land in a status akin to medieval

European serfs. The availability of helot labor allowed the Spartans from that point on to focus their attention on military training. This focus transformed Sparta into the ultimate military state in the Greek world, widely respected by the other Greek *poleis* for its military prowess. Other Greeks were fascinated by such Spartan practices as the communal bringing up of all children apart from their parents and the requirement that all Spartan girls and women, as well as boys and men, maintain a strict regimen of exercise and training.

But while Athens and Sparta sound like each other's diametrical opposites, the practices of both *poleis* ultimately derived from the same belief that all city-states held: that, in order to ensure their city's survival, the citizens must place their city-state's interests above their own. A democracy simply approached this goal with a different view of the qualifications of its citizens than did an oligarchy.

A final note on gender is necessary, in connection with Greek city-states' definitions of citizenship. Only children of legally married and freeborn citizen parents could be citizens in most city-states. Women had an ambiguous status in the Greek *poleis*. While not full-fledged citizens themselves, they produced citizens. This view of the primary importance of wives in the city as the mothers of citizens resulted in diametrically opposite laws in Athens and Sparta, showing the different values that the respective cities emphasized. In Athens, if a husband caught his wife with an adulterer in his home, the law allowed the husband to kill said adulterer on the spot. The



Map 5.5 | Map of Sparta and the Environs

Author: User "Marsyas"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0

adultery law was so harsh precisely because adultery put into question the citizenship status of potential children, thereby depriving the city of future citizens. By contrast, Spartan law allowed an unmarried man who wanted offspring to sleep with the wife of another man, with the latter's consent, specifically for the purpose of producing children. This law reflects the importance that Sparta placed on producing strong future soldiers as well as the communal attitude of the city towards family and citizenship.

5.9.5 The Persian Wars

Despite casting their net far and wide in founding colonies, the Greeks seem to have remained in a state of relatively peaceful coexistence with the rest of their Mediterranean neighbors until the sixth century BCE. In the mid-sixth century BCE, Cyrus, an ambitious king of Persia, embarked on a swift program of expansion, ultimately consolidating under his rule the largest empire of the ancient world and earning for himself the title “**Cyrus the Great.**”

Cyrus' **Achaemenid Empire** bordered the area of Asia Minor that had been previously colonized by the Greeks. This expansion of the Persian Empire brought the Persians into direct conflict with the Greeks and became the origin of the Greco-Persian Wars, the greatest military conflict the Greek world had known up until that point.

Over the second half of the sixth century, the Persians had taken over the region of Asia Minor, also known as Ionia, installing as rulers of these Greek city-states tyrants loyal to Persia. In 499 BCE, however, the Greek city-states in Asia Minor joined forces to rebel against the Persian rule. Athens and Eretria sent military support for this Ionian Revolt, and the rebelling forces marched on the Persian capital of Sardis and burned it in 498 BCE, before the revolt was finally subdued by the Persians in 493 BCE.

Seeking revenge on Athens and Eretria, the Persian king **Darius** launched an expedition in 490 BCE.



Darius' forces captured Eretria in mid-summer, destroyed the city, and enslaved its inhabitants. Sailing a short distance across the bay, the Persian army then landed at Marathon. The worried Athenians sent a plea for help to Sparta. The Spartans, in the middle of a religious festival, refused to help. So, on September 12, 490 BCE, the Athenians, with only a small force of Plataeans helping, faced the much larger Persian army in the **Battle of Marathon**. The decisive Athenian victory showed the superiority of the Greek hoplite phalanx and marked the



Map 5.7 | Map of the Greek World during the Persian Wars (500-479 BCE)

Author: User "Bibib Saint-poi"
 Source: Wikimedia Commons
 License: CC BY-SA 3.0

end of the first Persian invasion of Greece. Furthermore, the victory at Marathon, which remained a point of pride for the Athenians for centuries after, demonstrated to the rest of the Greeks that Sparta was not the only great military power in Greece.

Darius died in 486 BCE, having never realized his dream of revenge against the Greeks. His son, **Xerxes**, however, continued his father's plans and launched in 480 BCE a second invasion of Greece, with an army so large that, as the historian Herodotus claims, it drank entire rivers dry on its march. The Greek world reacted in a much more organized fashion to this second invasion than it did to the first. Led by Athens and Sparta, some seventy Greek *poleis* formed a sworn alliance to fight together against the Persians. This alliance, the first of its kind, proved to be the key to defeating the Persians as it allowed the allies to split forces strategically in order to guard against Persian attack by both land and sea. The few Greek city-states who declared loyalty to the

Persian Empire instead—most notably, Thebes—were seen as traitors for centuries to come by the rest of the Greeks.

Marching through mainland Greece from the north, the Persians first confronted the Spartans at the Battle of Thermopylae, a narrow mountain pass that stood in the way of the Persians' accessing any point south. In this now-legendary battle, 300 Spartans, led by their king Leonidas, successfully defended the pass for two days before being betrayed by a local who showed a roundabout route to the Persians. The Persians then were able to outflank the Spartans and kill them to the last man. This battle, although a loss for the Greeks, bought crucial time for the rest of the Greek forces in preparing to face the Persians. It is also important to note that although the Spartans were considered even in the ancient world to be the heroes of Thermopylae, they were also accompanied by small contingents from several other Greek city-states in this endeavor.

The victory at Thermopylae fulfilled the old dream of Darius, as it allowed access to Athens for the Persians. The Athenian statesman Themistocles, however, had ordered a full evacuation of the city in advance of the Persian attack through an unusual interpretation of a Delphic oracle stating that wooden walls will save Athens. Taking the oracle to mean that the wooden walls in question were ships, Themistocles built a massive fleet which he used to send all of the city's inhabitants to safety. His gamble proved to be successful, and the Persians captured and burned a mostly empty city.

The Athenians proceeded to defeat the Persian fleet at the Battle of Salamis, off the coast of Athens, thus shortly before winter turning the tide of the war in favor of the Greeks. Finally, in June of 479 BCE, the Greek forces were able to strike the two final blows, defeating the Persian land and sea forces on the same day in the Battle of Plataea on land and the Battle of Mycale on sea. The victory at Mycale also resulted in a second Ionian revolt, which this time ended in a victory for the Greek city-states in Asia Minor. Xerxes was left to sail home to his diminished empire.

It is difficult to overestimate the impact of the Persian Wars on subsequent Greek history. Seen by historians as the end-point of the Archaic Period, the Persian Wars cemented Pan-Hellenic identity, as they saw cooperation on an unprecedented scale among the Greek city-states. In addition, the Persian Wars showed the Greek military superiority over the Persians on both land and sea. Finally, the wars showed Athens in a new light to the rest of the Greeks. As the winners of Marathon in the first invasion and the leaders of the navy during the second invasion, the Athenians emerged from the wars as the rivals of Sparta for military prestige among the Greeks. This last point, in particular, proved to be the most influential for Greek history in the subsequent period.

5.10 THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

So far, the story of the Greek world in this chapter has proceeded from a narrative of the fragmented Greek world in the Dark Ages to the emergence and solidification of a Pan-Hellenic identity in the Archaic Period. The story of the Greeks in the Classical Period, by contrast, is best described as the strife for leadership of the Greek world. First, Athens and Sparta spent much of the fifth century BCE battling each other for control of the Greek world. Then, once both were weakened, other states began attempting to fill the power vacuum. Ultimately, the Classical

Period will end with the Greek world under the control of a power that was virtually unknown to the Greeks at the beginning of the fifth century BCE: Macedon.

5.10.1 From the Delian League to the Athenian Empire

In 478 BCE, barely a year after the end of the Persian Wars, a group of Greek city-states, mainly those located in Ionia and on the island between mainland Greece and Ionia, founded the **Delian League**, with the aim of continuing to protect the Greeks in Ionia from Persian attacks. Led by Athens, the league first met on the tiny island of Delos. According to Greek mythology, the twin gods Apollo and Artemis were born on Delos. As a result, the island was considered sacred ground and, as such, was a fitting neutral headquarters for the new alliance. The league allowed member states the option of either contributing a tax (an option that most members selected)



Map 5.8 | Map of The Athenian Empire in 431 BCE

Author: User "Marsyas"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0

or contributing ships for the league's navy. The treasury of the league, where the taxes paid by members were deposited, was housed on Delos.

Over the next twenty years, the Delian League gradually transformed from a loose alliance of states led by Athens to a more formal entity. The League's Athenian leadership, in the meanwhile, grew to be that of an imperial leader. The few members who tried to secede from the League, such as the island of Naxos, quickly learned that doing so was not an option as the revolt was violently subdued. Finally, in 454 BCE, the treasury of the Delian League moved to Athens. That moment marked the transformation of the Delian League into the **Athenian Empire**.

Since the Athenians publicly inscribed each year the one-sixtieth portion of the tribute that they dedicated to Athena, records survive listing the contributing members for a number of years, thereby allowing historians to see the magnitude of the Athenian operation.

While only the Athenian side of the story survives, it appears that the Athenians' allies in the Delian League were not happy with the transformation of the alliance into a full-fledged Athenian Empire. Non-allies were affected as well. The fifth-century BCE Athenian historian Thucydides dramatizes in his history one particularly harsh treatment of a small island, Melos, which effectively refused to join the Athenian cause. To add insult to injury, once the treasury of the Empire had been moved to Athens, the Athenians had used some funds from it for their own building projects, the most famous of these projects being the Parthenon, the great temple to Athena on the Acropolis.

The bold decision to move the treasury of the Delian League to Athens was the brainchild of the leading Athenian statesman of the fifth century BCE, Pericles. A member of a prominent aristocratic family, Pericles was a predominant politician for forty years, from the early 460s BCE to his death in 429 BCE, and was instrumental in the development of a more popular democracy in Athens. Under his leadership, an especially vibrant feeling of Athenian patriotic pride seems to have developed, and the decision to move the Delian League treasury to Athens fits into this pattern as well. Shortly after moving the treasury to Athens, Pericles sponsored a Citizenship Decree in 451 BCE that restricted Athenian citizenship from thence onwards only to individuals who had two free-born and legitimately-wed Athenian parents, both of whom were also born of Athenian parents. Then c. 449 BCE, Pericles successfully proposed a decree allowing the Athenians to use Delian League funds for Athenian building projects, and, c. 447 BCE, he sponsored the Athenian Coinage Decree, a decree that imposed Athenian standards of weights and measures on all states that were members of the Delian League.



Figure 5.15 | Model of the Acropolis, with the Parthenon in the middle

Author: User "Benson Kua"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 2.0

Later in his life, Pericles famously described Athens as “the school of Hellas;” this description would certainly have fit Athens just as much in the mid-fifth century BCE as, in addition to the flourishing of art and architecture, the city was a center of philosophy and drama.

The growing wealth and power of Athens in the twenty or so years since the Persian Wars did not escape Sparta and led to increasingly tense relations between the two leading powers in Greece. Sparta had steadily consolidated the Peloponnesian League in this same time-period, but Sparta’s authority over this league was not quite as strict as was the Athenian control over the Delian League. Finally, in the period of 460-445 BCE, the Spartans and the Athenians engaged in a series of battles, to which modern scholars refer as the **First Peloponnesian War**. In 445 BCE, the two sides swore to a Thirty Years Peace, a treaty that allowed both sides to return to their pre-war holdings, with few exceptions. Still, Spartan unease in this period of Athenian expansion and prosperity, which resulted in the First Peloponnesian War, was merely a sign of much more serious conflict to come. As the Athenian general and historian Thucydides later wrote about the reasons for the Great Peloponnesian War, which erupted in 431 BCE: “But the real cause of the war was one that was formally kept out of sight. The growing power of Athens, and the fear that it inspired in Sparta, made the war inevitable” (Thucydides, I.23).

5.10.2 The Peloponnesian War (431 – 404 BCE)

Historians today frown on the use of the term “inevitable” to describe historical events. Still, Thucydides’ point about the inevitability of the Peloponnesian War is perhaps appropriate, as following a conflict that had been bubbling under the surface for fifty years, the war finally broke out over a seemingly minor affair. In 433 BCE, Corcyra, a colony of Corinth that no longer wanted to be under the control of its mother-city, asked Athens for protection against Corinth. The Corinthians claimed that the Athenian support of Corcyra was a violation of the Thirty Years Peace. At a subsequent meeting of the Peloponnesian League in Sparta in 432 BCE, the allies, along with Sparta, voted that the peace had been broken and so declared war against Athens.

At the time of the war’s declaration, no one thought that it would last twenty-seven years and would ultimately embroil the entire Greek-speaking world. Rather, the Spartans expected that they would march with an army to Athens, fight a decisive battle, then return home forthwith. The long duration of the war, however, was partly the result of the different strengths of the two leading powers. Athens was a naval empire, with allies scattered all over the Ionian Sea. Sparta, on the other hand, was a land-locked power with supporters chiefly in the Peloponnese and with no navy to speak of at the outset of the war.

The Peloponnesian War brought about significant changes in the government of both Athens and Sparta, so that, by the end of the war, neither power looked as it did at its outset. Athens, in particular, became more democratic because of increased need for manpower to row its fleet. The lowest census bracket, the *thetes*, whose poverty and inability to buy their own armor had previously excluded them from military service, became by the end of the war a full-fledged part of the Athenian forces and required a correspondingly greater degree of political influence. In the case of Sparta, the war had ended the Spartan policy of relative isolationism from the



rest of the affairs of the Greek city-states. The length of the war also brought about significant changes to the nature of Greek warfare. While war was previously largely a seasonal affair, with many conflicts being decided with a single battle, the Peloponnesian War forced the Greek city-states to support standing armies. Finally, while sieges of cities and attacks on civilians were previously frowned upon, they became the norm by the end of the Peloponnesian War. In short, Thucydides's narrative of the war shows that the war had a detrimental effect on human nature, encouraging a previously unprecedented degree of cruelty on both sides. It is important to note, though, that as brutal as sieges could be during the Peloponnesian War, Greek siege warfare during the fifth century BCE was still quite primitive, as no tools existed for ramming or otherwise damaging the city gates or walls. Furthermore, catapults, so useful for targeting a city from the outside, first came into being in 399 BCE, five years after the war had ended.

Modern historians divide the Peloponnesian War into three distinct stages, based on the tactics used in each: the **Archidamian War**, the **Peace of Nicias**, and the **Decelean War**. The first stage, the Archidamian War (431 – 421 BCE), is named after the Spartan king

Archidamus, who proposed the strategy of annual invasions of Attica at the beginning of the war. Beginning in late spring and early summer of 431 BCE, Archidamus led the Spartan army to invade Attica in order to devastate the agricultural land around the city. The Spartans thereby hoped to provoke the Athenians to a battle. Pericles however, refused to enter into battle against the Spartans, and instead ordered all inhabitants of Attica to retreat within the city. Pericles' decision was wise, as the Athenians would likely have lost a land battle against the Spartans. His decision, though, had unforeseen repercussions. In 430 BCE, the crowded conditions within Athens resulted in the outbreak of a virulent plague which by some estimates killed as much as twenty-five percent of the city's population over the following three years. Among the dead was none other than Pericles himself.

The plague had significant repercussions for Athens during the first phase of the war because of not only the loss of fighting men to disease and the consequent lowered morale in the city, but also the death of Pericles, the moderate leader. The subsequent leaders who emerged, such as

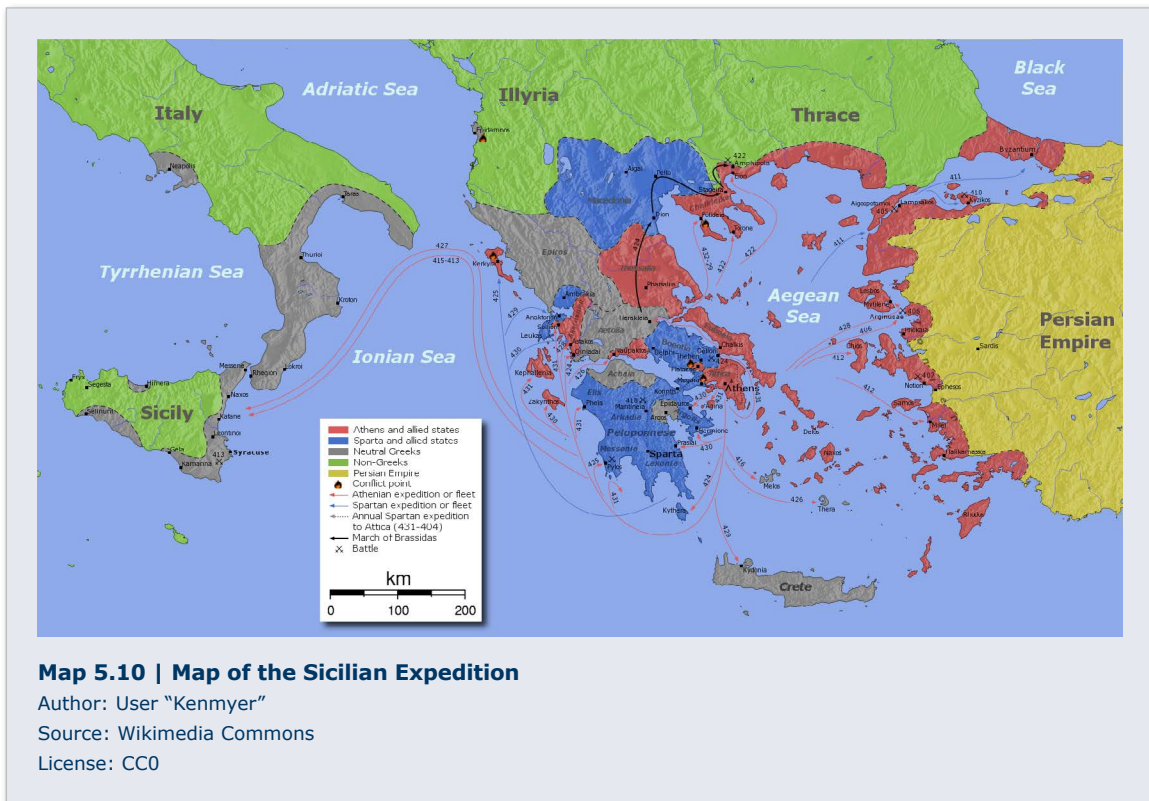
Cleon, were known as war-hawks. Meanwhile, the Spartans continued their annual invasions of Attica until 425 BCE, when luck was finally on the Athenians' side.

In 425 BCE, the Athenian fleet faced a new Spartan fleet in the Battle of Pylos in the Peloponnese. The Athenians won the battle and also managed to trap 420 Spartans on the tiny island of Sphacteria, just off the coast of Pylos. Sending shockwaves through the entire Greek world, the Spartans surrendered. By bringing the hostages to Athens, the Athenians put an end to the annual invasions of Attica. Finally, in 421 BCE, with the death of the most pro-war generals on both sides, the Athenians with their allies signed a peace treaty with Spartans and their allies. Named the "Peace of Nicias" after the Athenian general who brokered this treaty, it was supposed to be a fifty years' peace; it allowed both sides to return to their pre-war holdings, with a few exceptions. As part of the peace terms, the Spartan hostages from Pylos were finally released.

Despite its ambitious casting as a fifty years' peace, the Peace of Nicias proved to be a short and uneasy time filled with minor battles and skirmishes. One problem with the treaty was that while Athens and all of its allies signed the peace, several key allies of Sparta, including Corinth and Thebes, refused to do so. Furthermore, Athens made the disastrous decision during this stalemate to launch the **Sicilian Expedition**, a venture that took much of the Athenian fleet to Sicily in 415 BCE.

Syracuse, however, proved to be a difficult target, and the expedition ended in 413 BCE with a complete destruction of the Athenian navy. That same year, the Spartans renewed the fighting, launching the third and final phase of the Peloponnesian War.

In the third stage of the Peloponnesian war, also known as the Decelean War, the Spartans took the war to Attic soil by occupying Decelea, a village in Attica proper, and transforming it into a



military fort. This occupation allowed the Spartans to prevent the Athenians from farming their land and cutting off Athens from most supply routes, effectively crippling the Athenian economy for the remainder of the war. Losing the Sicilian Expedition and the challenge of the Decelean War produced a high level of resentment towards the democratic leaders in Athens. Therefore in 411 BCE, an oligarchic coup briefly replaced the democracy with the rule of the Four Hundred. While this oligarchy was quickly overthrown and the democracy restored, this internal instability highlighted the presence of the aristocratic element in the city as well as the dissatisfaction of at least the aristocratic citizens with the long war.

Remarkably, in a testament to the resilience and power of the Athenian state, the Athenians managed to rebuild a navy after the Sicilian Expedition, and even managed to continue to win battles on sea during this final phase of the war. In 405 BCE, however, the Spartan general Lysander defeated Athens in the naval battle of Aegospotami. He proceeded to besiege Athens, and the city finally surrendered in 404 BCE. For the second time in a decade, the Athenian democracy was overthrown, to be replaced this time by the Spartan-sanctioned oligarchy known as the **Tyranny of the Thirty**. The rule of the Thirty proved to be a much more brutal oligarchy than that of the Four Hundred. A year later, an army formed largely of Athenian democrats in exile marched on the city and overthrew the Thirty. The democracy thus was restored in 403 BCE, and the painful process of recovery from the war and the oligarchic rule could begin.

5.10.3 Athenian Culture during the Peloponnesian War

Because it drained Athens of manpower and financial resources, the Peloponnesian War proved to be an utter practical disaster for Athens. Nevertheless, the war period was also the pinnacle of Athenian culture, most notably its tragedy, comedy, and philosophy. Tragedy and comedy in Athens were very much popular entertainment, intended to appeal to all citizens. Thus issues considered in these plays were often ones of paramount concern for the city at the time when the plays were written. As one character in a comedy bitterly joked in an address to the audience, more Athenians attended tragic and comic performances than came to vote at assembly meetings. Not surprisingly, war was a common topic of discussion in the plays. Furthermore, war was not portrayed positively, as the playwrights repeatedly emphasized the costs of war for both winners and losers.

Sophocles, one of the two most prominent Athenian tragedians during the Peloponnesian War era, had served his city as a general, albeit at an earlier period; thus, he had direct experience with war. Many of his tragedies that were performed during the war dealt with the darker side of fighting, for both soldiers and generals, and the cities that are affected. By tradition, however, tragedies tackled contemporary issues through integrating them into mythical stories, and the two mythical wars that Sophocles portrayed in his tragedies were the Trojan War, as in *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, and the aftermath of the war of the Seven against Thebes, in which Polynices, the son of Oedipus, led six other heroes to attack Thebes, a city led by his brother Eteocles, as in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Sophocles' plays repeatedly showed the emotional and psychological challenges of war for soldiers and civilians alike; they also emphasized the futility of war, as the heroes of his plays,

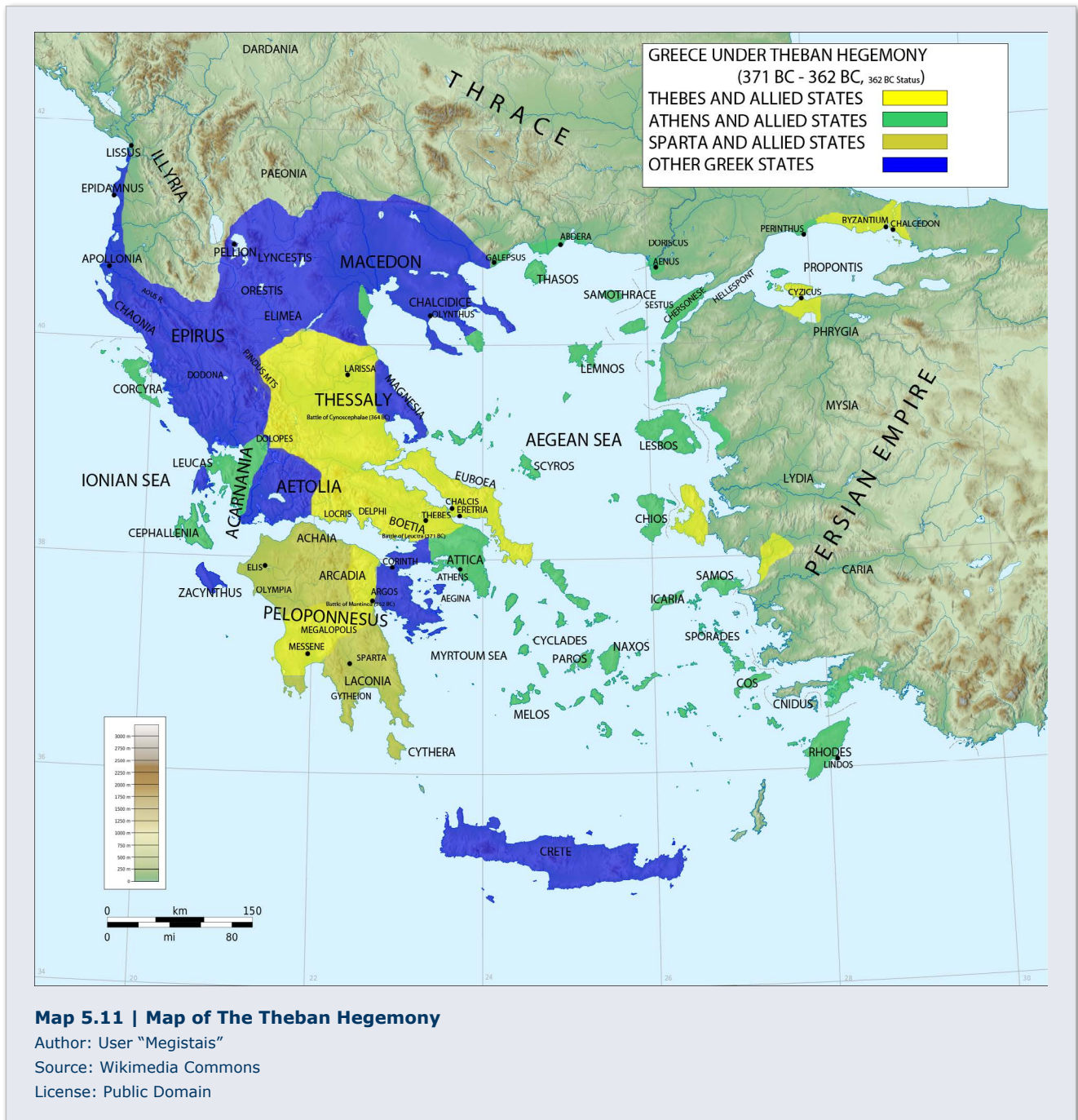
just as in the original myths on which they were based, died tragic, untimely deaths. Sophocles' younger contemporary, **Euripides**, had a similar interest in depicting the horrors of war and wrote a number of tragedies on the impact of war on the defeated, such as in *Phoenician Women* and *Hecuba*; both of these plays explored the aftermath of the Trojan War from the perspective of the defeated Trojans.

While the tragic playwrights explored the impact of the war on both the fighters and the civilians through narrating mythical events, the comic playwright **Aristophanes** was far less subtle. The anti-war civilian who saves the day and ends the war was a common hero in the Aristophanic comedies. For instance, in the *Acharnians* (425 BCE), the main character is a war-weary farmer who, frustrated with the inefficiency of the Athenian leadership in ending the war, brokers his own personal peace with Sparta. Similarly, in *Peace* (421 BCE), another anti-war farmer fattens up a dung beetle in order to fly to Olympus and beg Zeus to free Peace. Finally, in *Lysistrata* (411 BCE), the wives of all Greek city-states, missing their husbands who are at war, band together in a plot to end the war by going on a sex-strike until their husbands make peace. By the end of the play, their wish comes true. Undeniably funny, the jokes in these comedies, nevertheless, have a bitter edge, akin to the portrayal of war in the tragedies. The overall impression from the war-era drama is that the playwrights, as well as perhaps the Athenians themselves, spent much of the Peloponnesian War dreaming of peace.

While the playwrights were dreaming of the things of this world—most notably war—their contemporary, **Socrates**, was dreaming of difficult questions. One of the most prominent philosophers of the ancient world, Socrates has not left any writings of his own, but thoughts attributed to him survive in dialogues penned by his student, the fourth-century philosopher **Plato**. In Plato's writings, Socrates comes across as someone who loved difficult questions and who was not above confronting any passers-by with such questions as “What is courage?”; “What is moral?”; “What would the ideal city look like?” Using what became known ever since as the “Socratic method,” Socrates continued to probe further every definition and answer that his conversation partners provided, guiding them to delve deeper in their reflections on the topics at hand than they had before. As a result of his love of such debates, Socrates was seen as connected to the Sophists, philosophical debate teachers, who (as Aristophanes joked) could teach anyone to convince others of anything at all, regardless of reality or truth. But Socrates radically differed from the Sophists by not charging fees for his teaching. Instead, as he himself is purported to have said, he was a pest-like gadfly that kept disturbing Athens from growing too content and encouraged all with whom he spoke to keep thinking and questioning.

5.10.4 The Fourth Century BCE

In 399 BCE, a seventy-year old Athenian was put on trial for impiety and for corrupting the youth, convicted, and speedily sentenced to death. The trial is especially shocking, since the man in question was none other than Socrates, the philosopher who had spent his life wandering the streets of Athens engaging in endless dialogues regarding the meaning of life. Why did the Athenians suddenly turn against this public teacher and judge him worthy of execution? The answer, most



likely, is not the openly-stated causes of the trial, but rather the connections that Socrates previously had to oligarchic leaders. In particular, Socrates had taught Critias, who became one of the Thirty in 404 BCE. Fueled by their hatred of all enemies of the democracy and anyone who had associated with the Thirty, the Athenians condemned Socrates to death. This trial shows how deeply the scars went in the collective psyche and how difficult it was for the Athenians to forget the terrible end of the Peloponnesian War. And while, as usual, more information survives about how the Athenians—more than any other *polis*—dealt with the aftermath of the war, it is clear that for the rest of the

Greek world, their life in the fourth century BCE was very much the result of the Peloponnesian War.

The early fourth century saw a power vacuum emerge in the Greek world for the first time since the early Archaic Period. Defeated in the war, Athens was no longer an Empire, while the winner, Sparta, had suffered a catastrophic decline in its population over the course of the Peloponnesian War. At the same time, Thebes had revamped its military, introducing the first two

significant changes to the hoplite phalanx way of fighting since its inception: slightly longer spears, and wedge formation. The final key to the Theban military supremacy was the **Theban Sacred Band**, formed in 378 BCE. An elite core of 300 warriors, the band consisted of 150 couples, based on the assumption that the lovers would fight most bravely in order not to appear to be cowardly to their beloved. In 371 BCE, the Thebans demonstrated the success of their military reforms by defeating

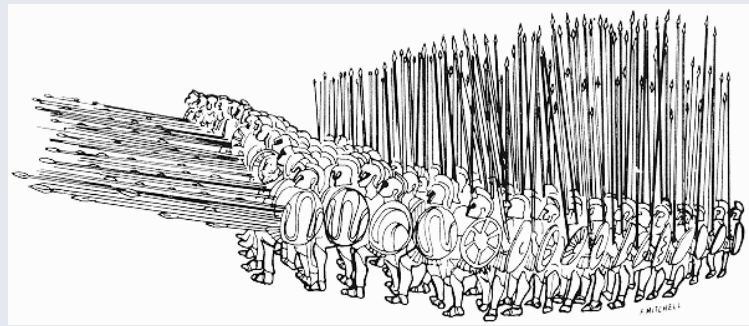


Figure 5.16 | The Macedonian Phalanx | The wedge formation using the Macedonian sarissa, a spear about eighteen feet in length
 Author: User "Alagos"
 Source: Wikimedia Commons
 License: Public Domain

the Spartans at the **Battle of Leuctra**. They continued an aggressive program of military expansion over the next decade, a period known as the **Theban Hegemony**.

Sometime in the 360's BCE, a young Macedonian prince stayed for several years in Thebes as a hostage. While there, he caught the eye of the military reformer, Epaminondas, who took the prince under his wing. Circa 364 BCE, the prince returned to Macedon, and, in 359 BCE, he ascended to the throne as king **Philip II**. Up until that point in Greek history, the Macedonians had largely been known for two things: drinking their



Map 5.12 | Map of the Conquests of Philip | The Kingdom of Macedon at the death of Philip II (336 BC)
 Author: User "Marsyas"
 Source: Wikimedia Commons
 License: CC BY-SA 3.0

wine undiluted, which had marked them as complete and utter barbarians in the eyes of the rest of the Greeks, and being excellent horsemen. With Philip at the helm, this estimation was about to change. As soon as he came to the throne, Philip began transforming the Macedonian military into a more successful image of what he had seen at Thebes. Philip further lengthened the already longer spears used by the Thebans, creating the Macedonian **sarissa**, a spear of about eighteen feet in length, double that of the traditional Greek hoplite spear.

He retained the Theban wedge formation but also added heavy cavalry to the line, thus incorporating the Macedonians' strongest element into the phalanx. The results spoke for themselves, as over the next twenty years, Philip systematically conquered all of mainland Greece, with the exception of Sparta, which he chose to leave alone. Philip's final great victory, which he shared with his teenage son Alexander, was at the **Battle of Chaeronea** (338 BCE), in which the Macedonian armies defeated the combined forces of Athens and Thebes. Philip's conquest of the entire mainland was the end of an era, as for the first time, the entire territory was united under the rule of a king.

By all accounts, it appears that Philip was not going to stop at just conquering the Greek world. He did not, however, have this choice. In 336 BCE while on his way to a theatrical performance, Philip was assassinated by one of his own bodyguards. His son Alexander, then twenty years old,



Figure 5.17 | Alexander the Great | Alexander fighting Darius in the Battle of Issus (333 BCE). Mosaic from the House of the Faun, Pompeii. Note Alexander on the left side of the mosaic, fighting on horseback, while Darius, almost at the middle, charges in a chariot.

Author: User "Berthold Werner"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0

succeeded and continued his father's ambitious program of conquests. Alexander's first target was the Persian Empire, motivated in part by his love of Homer's *Iliad*, and the perception among the Greeks that this new campaign was the continuation of the original, mythical war against Asia. Moving farther and farther East in his campaigns, Alexander conquered the Balkans, Egypt, and the territories of modern-day Lebanon, Syria, and Israel before he achieved a decisive victory over Darius III at the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BCE.

Continuing to move eastwards, Alexander invaded India in 327 BCE, planning to conquer the known world and assuming that he was close to this achievement, since the Greeks of his day were not aware of China's existence. His war-weary troops, however, rebelled in 326 BCE and demanded to return home (see Chapter 3). It appears that this mutiny was not the first that occurred in Alexander's army; indeed, over the course of his rule, Alexander had also been the target of a number of failed assassinations. However, this mutiny forced Alexander to give in. Leaving several of his officers behind as satraps, Alexander turned back. In 323 BCE, he and his army reached Babylon, the city that he had hoped to make the new capital of his world empire. There, Alexander fell ill and died at the ripe old age of thirty-three.



Map 5.13 | Map of the campaigns and conquests of Alexander

Author: User "IrakliGuna"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0

While Alexander's rule only lasted thirteen years, his legacy reshaped Greece and the rest of ancient Eurasia for the next several centuries. A charismatic leader, albeit one prone to emotional outbursts, Alexander redefined what it meant to be king and general. His coinage reflects this reinvention. On one coin minted during his lifetime, for instance, appears Alexander dressed as

the hero Heracles, while Zeus, whom Alexander alleged to be his real father, appears on the other side.

In addition, by conquering territories that were previously not part of the Greek world, Alexander spread Greek culture farther than had anyone else before him. At the same time, by marrying several non-Greek princesses and encouraging such marriages by his troops, Alexander also encouraged the creation of a “melting-pot” empire; he further cemented this creation by founding new cities named

after himself all over his new empire. In particular, Alexandria, the city that he founded in Egypt, became a center of Greek civilization—albeit with an Egyptian twist—was seen as a new Athens well into the Roman Empire. Alexander’s brief time in India produced a significant impact as well, as in 321 BCE, Chandragupta Maurya was able to unify India into a single kingdom for the first time, establishing the **Mauryan Empire** (see Chapter Three). Finally, in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Greek world, Alexander’s generals divided his conquests into several kingdoms that they and their descendants continued to rule until the Romans conquered these respective areas. It appears that Alexander’s melting-pot empire, burning up as a phoenix upon his death, actually allowed several new empires and kingdoms to arise from its ashes.



Figure 5.18 | Silver coin of Alexander as Heracles

Author: User “World Imaging”

Source: Wikimedia Commons

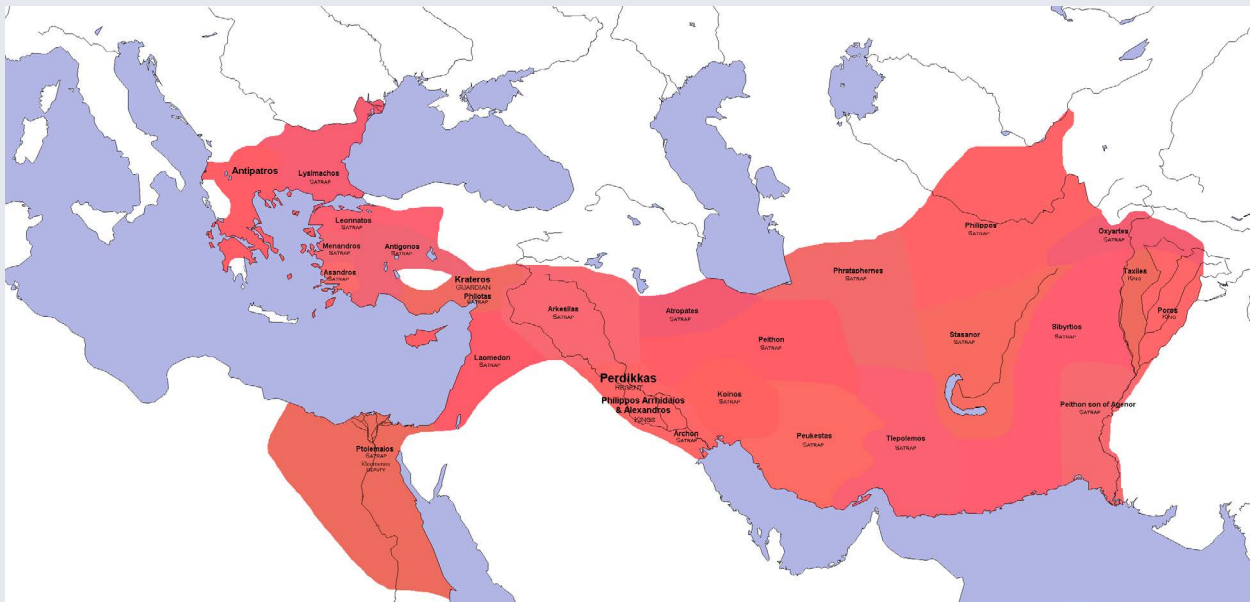
License: CC BY-SA 3.0

5.11 HELLENISTIC PERIOD

Historians today consider the death of Alexander to be the end point of the Classical Period and the beginning of the Hellenistic Period. That moment, for historians, also marks the end of the *polis* as the main unit of organization in the Greek world. While city-states continued to exist, the main unit of organization from that point on was the great Hellenistic kingdoms. These kingdoms, encompassing much greater territory than the Greek world had before Alexander, contributed to the thorough Hellenization of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. The age of the Hellenistic kingdoms also coincided with the rise of Rome as a military power in the West. Ultimately, the Hellenistic kingdoms were conquered and absorbed by Rome.

5.11.1 Hellenistic Kingdoms

Although Alexander had several children from his different wives, he did not leave an heir old enough to take power upon his death. Indeed, his only son, Alexander IV, was only born several months after his father’s death. Instead, Alexander’s most talented generals turned against each other in a contest for the control of the empire that they had helped create.



Map 5.14 | Map of the Initial partition of Alexander's empire, before the Wars of the Diadochi

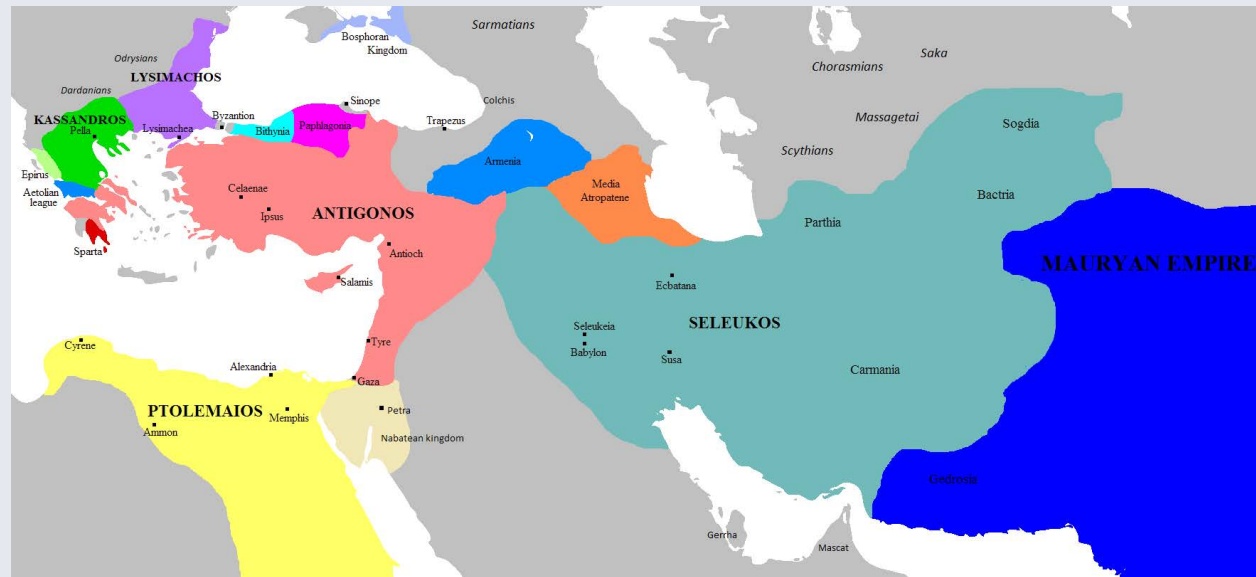
Author: User "Fornadan"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0

These **Wars of the Diadochi**, as they are known in modern scholarship, ended with a partition of Alexander's empire into a number of kingdoms, each ruled by dynasties. Of these, the four most influential dynasties which retained power for the remainder of the Hellenistic Age, were the following: Seleucus, who took control of Syria and the surrounding areas, thus creating the **Seleucid Empire**; Antigonos Monophthalmos, the One-Eyed, who took over the territory of Asia Minor and northern Syria, establishing the **Antigonid Dynasty**; the Attalid Dynasty, which took power over the **Kingdom of Pergamon**, after the death of its initial ruler, Lysimachus, a general of Alexander; and Ptolemy, Alexander's most influential general, who took control over Egypt, establishing the **Ptolemaic Dynasty**.

The most imperialistic of Alexander's successors, Seleucus I Nicator took Syria, swiftly expanding his empire to the east to encompass the entire stretch of territory from Syria to India. At its greatest expanse, this territory's ethnic diversity was similar to that of Alexander's original empire, and Seleucus adopted the same policy of ethnic unity as originally practiced by Alexander; some of Seleucus' later successors, however, attempted to impose Hellenization on some of the peoples under their rule. These successors had difficulties holding on to Seleucus' conquests. A notable exception, Antiochus III, attempted to expand the Empire into Anatolia and Greece in the early second century BCE but was ultimately defeated by the Romans. The empire's story for the remainder of its existence is one of almost constant civil wars and increasingly declining territories. The Seleucids seem to have had a particularly antagonistic relationship with their Jewish subjects, going so far as to outlaw Judaism in 168 BCE. The Jewish holiday **Hannukah** celebrates a miracle that occurred following the historical victory of the Jews, led by Judah



Map 5.15 | Map of the Hellenistic Kingdoms c. 303 BCE

Author: User "Javierfv1212"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

Maccabee, over the Seleucids in 165 BCE. Shortly afterwards, the Seleucids had to allow autonomy to the Jewish state; it achieved full independence from Seleucid rule in 129 BCE. In 63 BCE, the Roman general Pompey finally conquered the small remnant of the Seleucid Empire, making it into the Roman province of Syria.

Antigonos Monophthalmos, Seleucus' neighbor, whose holdings included Macedonia, Asia Minor, and the northwestern portion of Syria, harbored ambitious plans that rivaled those of Seleucus. Antigonos' hopes of reuniting all of Alexander's original empire under his own rule, however, were never realized as Antigonos died in battle in 301 BCE. The greatest threat to the Antigonids, however, came not from the Seleucid Empire, but from Rome with whom they waged three Macedonian Wars between 214 and 168 BCE. The Roman defeat of king Perseus in 168 BCE at the Battle of Pydna marked the end of the **Third Macedonian War**, and the end of an era, as control over Greece was now in Roman hands.

The smallest and least imperialistic of the successor states, the kingdom of Pergamon, was originally part of a very short-lived empire established by Lysimachus, one of Alexander's generals. Lysimachus originally held Macedonia and parts of Asia Minor and Thrace but had lost all of these territories by the time of his death in 281 BCE. One of his officers, Philetaerus, however, took over the city of Pergamon, establishing there the Attalid dynasty that transformed Pergamon into a small and successful kingdom. The final Attalid king, Attalus III, left his kingdom to Rome in his will in 133 BCE.

Lasting from the death of Alexander in 323 BCE to the death of Cleopatra VII in 30 BCE, the Ptolemaic kingdom proved to be the longest lasting and most successful of the kingdoms carved from Alexander's initial empire. Its founder, **Ptolemy I Soter**, was a talented general, as well as

an astronomer, philosopher, and historian, who wrote his own histories of Alexander's campaigns. Aiming to make Alexandria the new Athens of the Mediterranean, Ptolemy spared no expense in building the Museum, an institution of learning and research that included, most famously, the **Great Library**, and worked tirelessly to attract scholars and cultured elite to his city. Subsequent Ptolemies continued these works so that Alexandria held its reputation as a cultural capital into Late Antiquity. One example of a particularly impressive scientific discovery is the work of Eratosthenes, the head librarian at the Great Library in the second half of the third century BCE, who accurately calculated the earth's circumference. But while the Ptolemies brought with them Greek language and culture to Egypt, they were also profoundly influenced by Egyptian customs. Portraying themselves as the new Pharaohs, the Ptolemies even adopted the Egyptian royal custom of brother-sister marriages, a practice that eventually percolated down to the general populace as well. Unfortunately, brother-sister marriages did not prevent strife for power within the royal family. The last of the Ptolemaic rulers, Cleopatra VII, first married and ruled jointly with her brother Ptolemy XIII. After defeating him in a civil war, she then married another brother, Ptolemy XIV, remaining his wife until his death, possibly from sisterly poisoning. Best known for her affairs with Julius Caesar and, after Caesar's death, with Marcus Antonius, Cleopatra teamed with Marcus Antonius in a bid for the Roman Empire. The last surviving ruler who was descended from one of Alexander's generals, she was finally defeated by Octavian, the future Roman emperor Augustus, in 30 BCE.

The history of the successor states that resulted from the carving of Alexander's empire shows the imperialistic drive of Greek generals, while also demonstrating the instability of their empires. Historians do not typically engage in counter-factual speculations, but it is very likely that, had he lived longer, Alexander would have seen his empire unravel, as no structure was really in place to hold it together. At the same time, the clash of cultures that Alexander's empire and the successor states produced resulted in the spread of Greek culture and language further than ever before; simultaneously, it also introduced the Greeks to other peoples, thus bringing foreign customs—such as the brother-sister marriages in Egypt—into the lives of the Greeks living outside the original Greek world.

5.11.2 Hellenistic Culture

The Hellenistic kingdoms spread Greek language, culture, and art all over the areas of Alexander's former conquests. Furthermore, many Hellenistic kings, especially the Ptolemies, were patrons of art and ideas. Thus the Hellenistic era saw the flourishing of art and architecture, philosophy, medical and scientific writing, and even translations of texts of other civilizations into Greek. The undisputed center for these advances was Alexandria.

Combining the practical with the ambitious, the **Pharos**, or Lighthouse, of Alexandria was one of the most famous examples of Hellenistic architecture and has remained a symbol of the city to the present day. Constructed in 280 BCE, it was considered to be one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and was one of the tallest buildings in the world at the time. While its practical purpose was to guide ships into the harbor at night, it also exemplified the bold advances and experimental spirit of Hellenistic architecture. Indeed, it was located on a man-made mole off the

coast of the city. The building comprised three layers, the top one of which housed the furnace that produced the light.

The structure of the Pharos shows an interest in straight lines and orderly shapes, while its function symbolized the ability of man to subdue the sea, even by night. Similarly, both the scientific and medical texts from the Hellenistic Period reveal a fascination with an ordered universe and an interest in discovering how it worked. **Herophilus of Chalcedon**, for instance, pioneered dissection in the early third BCE and was especially interested in the human brain and the nervous system. The mathematician Euclid, who lived and worked in Alexandria during the reign of Ptolemy I (323 – 283 BCE), wrote the *Elements*, an encyclopedic work of mathematics that effectively created the discipline of geometry. Going a step further than Euclid in his research, the third-century BCE scientist and inventor **Archimedes of Syracuse** specialized in applying mathematical concepts to create such devices as a screw pump and a variety of war machines, including the heat ray.

The same fascination with studying the order of the universe appears in Hellenistic philosophy and stems ultimately from the philosophy of Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE), considered to be the last Classical Greek philosopher. Aristotle was a prolific polymath, who wrote on political theory, poetry, music, and a variety of sciences, to list just some of his interests. Engrossed in seeing all disciplines as part of a larger world order, Aristotle specifically argued for empiricism, that is, the belief that knowledge is acquired from sensory experiences rather than from intuition. In the sciences, for instance, this approach required experiments and the careful gathering of data. While Aristotle's influence on the Hellenistic

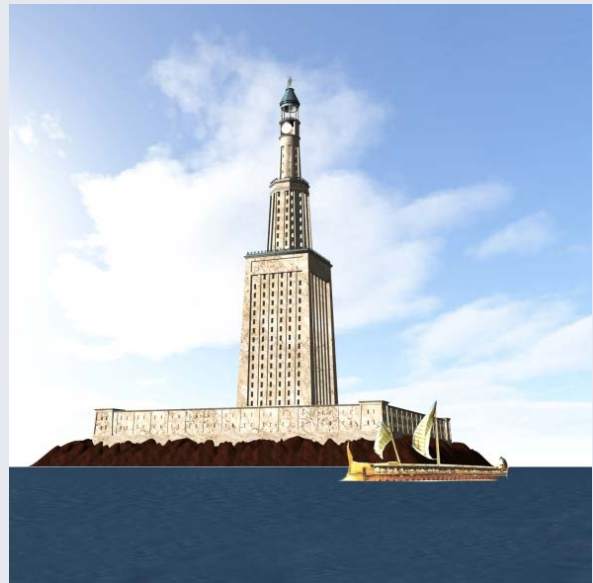


Figure 5.19 | The Pharos, or Lighthouse, of Alexandria

Author: Emad Victor SHENOUDA

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: © Emad Victor SHENOUDA. Used with permission.

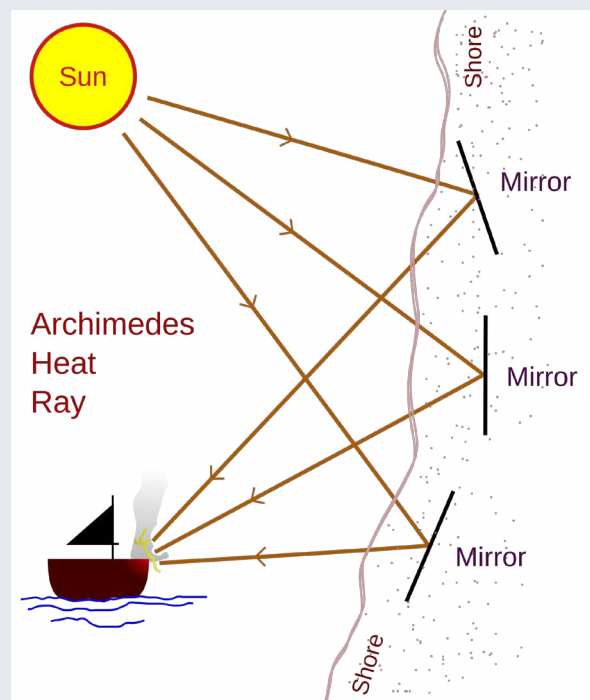


Figure 5.20 | The Archimedes Heat Ray

Author: User "Pbrokos13"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0

philosophers is undeniable, the alternate theories that some of the philosophers developed regarding the structure of the universe and the place of humanity in it differs drastically from Aristotle's view. For instance, **Skepticism**, especially as formulated by Pyrrho in the third century BCE, argued that it was impossible to reach any accurate conclusions about the world and the key to happiness was to stop trying. **Cynic philosophers**, starting in the fourth century BCE, advocated the ascetic life of simplicity and freedom from possessions. A related philosophy, **Stoicism**, argued for letting go of all emotions and developing a self-control that would allow one to live in accordance to nature. On the other hand, the third-century philosophy of **Epicureanism** argued for the absence of pain as the ultimate goal in life and saw the universe as ruled by random chance, separate from the intervention of the gods. All of these philosophies, and many others that co-existed with them, aimed to provide a coherent system that made sense of the world and provided a purpose for human life.

Finally, in a testament to the deep influence of the Hellenistic language culture on the conquered regions, the Hellenistic Period saw the translation of texts of other civilizations into Greek. One particularly influential example was the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. Jews formed a significant minority of the population of **Alexandria**, the capital of Ptolemaic Egypt, as well as other major cities around the Mediterranean, such as Antioch. By the third century BCE, these Jews appear to have largely lost the knowledge of Hebrew; thus, a translation of the sacred texts into Greek was necessary. In addition, as later legend has it, Ptolemy II Philadelphus allegedly commissioned seventy-two scholars to translate the Old Testament into Greek for his Royal Library. Whether indeed solicited by Ptolemy II or not, the translation was likely completed over the course of the third through first centuries BCE. Named after the legendary seventy-two (or, in some versions, seventy) translators, the text was titled the **Septuagint**. The completion of this translation showed the thorough Hellenization of even the Jews, who had largely kept themselves apart from mainstream culture of the cities in which they lived.

5.12 CONCLUSION

“Captive Greece has conquered her rude conqueror,” the Roman poet Horace famously wrote in the late first century BCE. This comment about the deep influence of Greek culture on the Roman world, even after the Roman conquest of Greece was complete, continued to be the case well after the days of Horace. Ultimately, the impact of the Hellenization of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, which started with Alexander's conquests, lasted far beyond the Hellenistic kingdoms, as the Greek language continued to be the language of the Eastern Roman Empire and, subsequently, the Byzantine Empire up until the conquest of that territory by the Ottomans in 1453 CE. In some respects, this spread of the Greeks and their civilization ultimately changed what it meant to be Greek—or, rather, it created a more universal Greek identity, which largely replaced the *polis*-specific view of citizenship and identity that existed before Philip's conquest of Greece. And yet, certain cultural constants persisted.

The first of these was Homer, whose epics continued to be as great an inspiration to the Greeks of the Roman world as they were to their Archaic Age counterparts. For instance, the Homeric

values were likely the reason for the minimal advances in military technology in the Greek world, as honor was more important than military success at all cost. The second cultural constant was the work of the philosophers Plato and Aristotle, in whose shadows all subsequent philosophers of the Greco-Roman world labored. Even as the Greek-speaking portions of the Roman Empire turned to Christianity, they could not abandon their philosophical roots, resulting, for instance, in the Gnostic heresies. Horace's cheeky comment thus proved to be true far longer than he could have expected.

5.13 WORKS CONSULTED AND FURTHER READING

- Burkert, Walter. *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Bury, J. B. and Russell Meiggs. *A History of Greece to the Death of Alexander the Great*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Cartledge, Paul. *Sparta and Laconia: A Regional History 1300 – 362 BC*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Dickinson, Oliver. *The Aegean Bronze Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Gruen, Erich. *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Hanson, Victor Davis. *A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006.
- Horden, Peregrine and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000.
- Kagan, Donald. *The Archidamian War*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- . *The Fall of the Athenian Empire*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- . *The Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- . *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Lane Fox, Robin. *Alexander the Great*. New York: Penguin, 2004.
- Lendon, J. E. *Soldiers and Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Lewis, Naphthali. *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt*. Durham: American Society of Papyrologists, 2001.
- Long, A. A. *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Meiggs, Russell. *The Athenian Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Morkot, Robert. *The Penguin Historical Atlas of Ancient Greece*. London: Penguin Books, 1997.
- Murray, Oswyn. *Early Greece*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Ober, Josiah. *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

de Polignac, François. *Cults, Territory, and the Origins of the Greek City-State*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Pomeroy, Sarah, Stanley Burstein, Walter Donlan, Jennifer Tolbert Roberts, and David Tandy. *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Walbank, F. W. *The Hellenistic World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

5.14 LINKS TO PRIMARY SOURCES

Ancient History Sourcebook at Fordham University (collection of materials from all periods of Greek history)

<http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/asbook07.asp>

Archimedes' Inventions

<http://archimedesjack.weebly.com/discoveries-and-inventions.html>

Aristophanes, excerpt from *Clouds*, making fun of Socrates

<http://www.thenagain.info/Classes/Sources/Aristophanes-Clouds.htm>

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*

<http://drama.eserver.org/plays/classical/aristophanes/lysistrata.txt>

Aristotle on Spartan Women

<http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/aristotle-spartanwomen.asp>

Athens, photographic archive of archaeological materials

<http://web.archive.org/web/20040607030018/www.stoa.org/athens/>

Cyrene, primary sources on founding of the colony

<http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/630cyrene.asp>

Euripides, *The Phoenician Women*

<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~loxias/phoenissae.htm>

The Gortyn Code, selections

<https://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/450-gortyn.asp>

Herodotus, *Histories*, excerpt on the Battle of Marathon

<http://www.thenagain.info/Classes/Sources/Herodotus-Marathon.html>

History of Greek Philosophy

<http://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/320/index.html>

<http://www.uh.edu/~cfreelan/courses/riceanc.html>

Justin, on the beginning of the reign of Philip II of Macedon

<http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/justin-philip.asp>

Linear B Writing

<http://www.ancientscripts.com/linearb.html>

WORLD HISTORY

Plutarch, *Lives*

<http://classics.mit.edu/Browse/browse-Plutarch.html>

Solon, selected fragments from political poems

<http://homepage.usask.ca/~jrp638/DeptTransls/Solon.html>

Sophocles, *Antigone*

<http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/ant/antigstruct.htm>

Thucydides, Pericles' "Funeral Oration"

<http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/pericles-funeralspeech.asp>

Thucydides, "Melian Dialogue" from the *History of the Peloponnesian War*

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/melian.htm>

Tyrants, primary sources documents

<https://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/650tyranny.asp>

Xenophon on the Battle of Leuctra

<http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/371leuctra.asp>

Xenophon on the Spartan Constitution

<http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/xeno-sparta1.asp>