

Chapter 8: The Greek Adventure: 8-7 The Final Act in Classical Greece

Book Title: World Civilizations

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8-7 The Final Act in Classical Greece

After the war, the Greeks fought intermittently among themselves for political supremacy for two generations. Whenever a strong contender emerged, such as the major polis of Thebes, the others would band together against it. Once they had succeeded in defeating their rival, they would begin to quarrel among themselves, and the fragile unity would break down once again. The Greek passion for independence and individuality had degenerated into endless quarrels and maneuvering for power, with no clear vision of what that power should create.

To the north of Greece were a people—the Macedonians (ma-sih-DOH-nee-ans)—whom the Greeks regarded as savage and barbarian, although they were ethnically related. Philip of Macedonia, the ruler of this northern kingdom, had transformed it from a relatively backward society into an effectively governed, aggressive state. One by one, he began to absorb the northern Greek poleis, until by the 340s he had made himself the master of much of the mainland.

After much delay, the Athenians finally awoke to the danger and convinced Thebes to join with them against the menace from the north. In the battle of Chaeronea (KAYR-oh-NEE-ah) in 338 B.C.E., however, Philip's forces defeated the allies. The former city-states became provinces in a rapidly forming Macedonian Empire. Chaeronea was the effective end of the era of polis independence and of the Classical Age. From the latter part of the fourth century B.C.E. onward, Greeks were almost always under the rule of foreigners to whom the daring ideas of polis democracy were unknown or inimical.

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