

## Chapter 8: The Greek Adventure

### ***8-3 – Geography and Political Development***

More than most societies, Greece was shaped by its geography

In ancient times it consisted of the numerous, small islands of the Aegean Sea, often called the *Cyclades Islands*

- Greece shaped by its geography
  - Many small islands
  - Mountainous mainland
  - Little suitable land for large scale farming
  - Abundant coastline and good harbors
- Greeks were expert sailors
  - Travel and trade by sea easier
- Geography encouraged political fragmentation
  - Each area developed own sense of community and identity
  - Only secondarily shared common culture and language

**Location shaped identity more than culture and language**

### ***8-2 – The Minoan (2000 – 1100 B.C.E.) and Mycenaean (1600 – 1100 B.C.E.) Civilizations***

#### **The Minoans**

Minoan – Ancient civilization on the island of Crete between 2000 and 1400 B.C.E.

Traditionally scholars have traced origins of Greek civilization not to the rock mainland but the island of Crete

- Large island supported an urbanized civilization of its own dating back to at least 2000 B.C.E.
- Minoans established a seaborne commercial network that spanned most of the eastern Mediterranean
- Became wealthy through their mastery of the sea as a highway of commercial transport
- Produced a socially complex society that was organized into tiny states centered on powerful-dwelling kings
- Some of these palaces were artistic and architectural masterpieces
  - Great Palace of Knossos
    - Evidence of skill
- Minos – mythical king of Crete
- Minoans may not have been Greek
- Urbanized
- Written language not deciphered

#### **The Myceneans**

Myceneans – Referring to the history and culture of the earliest known Indo-European inhabitants of the Greek peninsula between 1600 and 1100 B.C.E.

Around 1450 the Indo-European group invaded Crete and destroyed many of the island settlements, aided by volcanic explosions and earthquakes

- Invaded Crete and took its land for themselves, **rebuilding the palace at Knossos and taking over the trading network**

- Myceneans built more war like palaces suggesting they were a more warlike society

Walls were described by some as “Cyclopean” after Homer’s gargantuan Cyclops that surrounded royal graveyards and stone palaces

Included a Megaron (central hearth and mead hall) where kings and their warriors would retreat and drink and feast

**Much of what we know of this period comes from archaeological excavations and literature**

Homer – Legendary author and poet of two epic poems of ancient Greece

Iliad – First of two epic poems written by Homer in 8<sup>th</sup> century Greece

Odyssey – Second of two epic poems written by Homer, detailing the adventures of the homeward bound Ulysses coming from the Siege of Troy

The Iliad deals with the Mycenaean’s war against the powerful city state of Troy, and the Odyssey tells of the adventures of the hero Odysseus (Ulysses) after the war.

- Homers poems were thought to be fiction but digs support his writings
- However, we do not know if Troy was destroyed by the ancient Greeks but there is no reason to believe it was not

Ancient Troy – City on a hill commanding the entrance into the Hellespont Strait (Now called the Dardanelles Strait)

- Some say Greeks and Troy were engaged in a commercial rivalry and made war on Troy

Many societies have oral traditions and stories that are passed down from one generation to another

- It is up to historians to decipher their meaning and how much of the stories are “truth” and not “fiction”
  - Some are purely myths while others offer insight into events that were going on in the time period

Myceneans seemed to have engaged in extensive internal warfare among competing towns

- This weakened them as a whole
  - Dorians (from the north) took hold because of the weakened Myceneans

Dark Age – Period (1100 – 800 B.C.E.) in which Greek arts and crafts, ability to write, and culture declined rapidly

### ***8-3 – Early Hellenic Civilization***

Starting at 800 B.C.E. the Greek mainland slowly recovered the levels of civilization created during the Mycenaean Period and went on to far greater heights with the **institution of the Polis**

Polis – The political and social community of citizens in ancient Greece. Means the community of adult free persons who make up a town or any inhabited place.

- In modern terms it is translated into “city-state”
- More than 200 Poleis (city states) existed

Classical Athens – Largest and most powerful Polis which had almost 300,000 inhabitants at its peak

Each thought of itself as a political and cultural unit, independent of every other. Yet each polis also considered itself to be part of that distinct and superior family of peoples calling themselves Greek.

More than mere territorial unit

- Frame of reference for the entire public life of its citizens and for much of private life as well

Mutual interdependence of the citizenry was exhibited in different ways

- A sense of common life and shared destiny was promoted by governmental policies and techniques

Local format of governing was taken for granted

Polis could have sharply different political and social life from one another

Women, resident aliens, and slaves did not enjoy complete freedom

- Only free men of 20 years of age could actively own land and participate in politics
- About 80 percent of people could not participate in politics

However, each had more or less the same economic and demographic design

- Town of varying size, surrounded by farmland, pasture, and woods that supplied the town with food and other necessities
- Small traders and import-export merchants, intellectuals, philosophers, and artists all lived in the town and made up civilized society
- Most Greeks were peasants, woodcutters, ditch diggers, of which history knows very little about

## ***8-4 – Athens and Sparta***

Two Poleis dominated Greek life and politics

- 1) Athens: Urban, cosmopolitan, commercial, artistic, democratic
  - a. Center of educational, artists, intellectual, and scientific activity
  - b. Birthplace of political democracy
- 2) Sparta: Rural, agrarian, spartan, militaristic, authoritarian
  - a. Held arts and intellectual life in contempt
  - b. Dreaded extension of freedom to the individual or the community

Athens sparked and provoked a war that ruined it

Greeks knew four types of government

1. A **monarchy** (Rule by a single individual, who often claims divine inspiration and protection.) is rule by a single person—a king or the equivalent (either sex)—who has the final word in law by right. Most of the Poleis were monarchies at one time or another, and many of them apparently began and ended as such.
2. An **aristocracy** (A social governing class based on birth.) is rule by those who are born to the leading families and thereby are qualified to rule, whether or not they are particularly qualified in other ways. Aristocrats are born to the nobility, but not all nobles are born aristocrats.
3. An **oligarchy** (Rule by a few.) is rule by a few, who are almost always the wealthiest members of society. Many Poleis were ruled by an oligarchy of landlords whose land was worked by tenant farmers.
4. A **democracy** (A system of government in which the majority of voters decides issues and policy.) is rule by the people—almost always by means of majority vote on disputed issues. Voting rights in executive and legislative acts are limited to citizens. in the Greek poleis this meant freeborn adult males.

## **8-4a – Early Athens**

Athens went through all of these forms of government in the period after 750 B.C.E. which is when we begin to know something definite about its history

- Original Monarchy was pushed aside by the aristocrats, who ruled the polis in the seventh and early sixth centuries (600's and early 500's B.C.E.)
- Aristocrats gave way to the oligarchs in the 500's, some of whom were nobility and some of which were rich commoners
  - Most important oligarch was Solon, who ruled in the early sixth century
- Polis suffered great social and economic crisis by lack of arable land
  - Other oligarchs gave Solon supreme power to quell the discontent
- Solon established a constitution that tried to strike a balance to the demands of the oligarchs and the demands of the impoverished and indebted masses
  - Failed and chaos soon resumed
- Pisistratus succeed in making himself sole ruler and made certain concessions to the common people to gain their support for his plan to start a new monarchic dynasty with his sons as successor
- Sons were not smart and revolt ensued
- Cleisthenes was winner of free for all rebellion in 510

Pisistratus – Aristocratic tyrant who convinced people of Athens to make him sole supreme leader and for his family to be monarchy in Athens

Cleisthenes – Tyrant and true founder of Athenian democracy who believed that the citizens had the last word in their own government. He believed this was just and right and the best way to keep civil peace

- Established political bodies which laid foundation for Athenian democracy

Tyrant – Ruler who gains power illegally

## **8-4b – Athenian Democracy**

Cleisthenes ruled from 508-494 B.C.E. and in effect gave his tyrannical powers to a series of political bodies that were unprecedentedly democratic in character

### **a. Ekklesia (town meeting)**

- General town meeting of all free male citizens that is called when needed to make important decisions affecting the future of the polis
  - All could speak freely in an attempt to win others over
  - All could be elected to any office
  - All could vote at the meetings of the Ekklesia in the center plaza below Acropolis Hill

### **b. Boule (council)**

- Council of 500 citizens who were chosen by lot for one-year terms
  - Served as day to day executive branch
  - Making and implementing legislation under general supervision of Ekklesia
  - Supervised the military affairs of the polis and carried out many functions of a modern-day city council
  - Male citizens were expected to serve in the Boule at least one term

### **c. Deme (Political subdivision)**

- Basic political subdivision of the polis
  - Was a territorial unit, something like a precinct or ward, but smaller in population

- Each deme was entitled to select a number of Boule members and was represented more or less equally among the officers of the polis

Idea of Ostracism – idea of pushing out citizens who did not conform to the will of the neighbors

- a. Had to go into exile and lost all rights of citizenship for a certain length of time – normally ten years

### ***8-4c – Spartan Militarism***

By 500 B.C.E. Sparta differed from Athens in almost every way possible

Spartan polis is located in the southern Peloponnesus about 80 miles from Athens

- Was a small city surrounded by pastoral villages

As population grew in the 700's, the Spartans engaged in a bloody territorial war with Messenians

Messenian Wars – Conflicts between the neighbors Sparta and Messenia that resulted in Messenia conquest by Sparta in about 600 B.C.E.

- Defeated Messenians became near slaves (helotry)
- As Messenians rebelled over and over the Spartans voluntarily abdicated their individual freedoms
  - As a result, the Spartans made themselves into a nation of soldiers and helpers of soldiers so that they could maintain their privileges
  - Helots largely met the Spartans economic needs and they worked in fields and conducted necessary commerce under watchful eye of the Spartans
- Spartans held arts and individual freedom in contempt
- Public life was expressed in total obedience of the state which was headed by a group of elected officers called ephors
  - Under symbolic leadership of dual monarchy (two kingdoms under one monarchy)

Most Greeks admired the Spartan way of life, especially its undoubted self-discipline, courage, rigid obedience, and physical vigor. Even many Athenians thought the Spartan way was superior to their own and envied the single-minded patriotism displayed by the Spartans in all their public affairs.

Despite its military nature, Sparta was a conservative and nonaggressive state

- By 600 its military was so large it rarely had to use it
  - Feared by most

Attention went to keeping political status quo within its own borders

### ***8-5 – Persian Wars***

Throughout the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, the foreign policy interests of Athens and Sparta more or less coincided

- Both were interested in keeping their independence in the face of foreign threats

Threats originated from Achaemenid Persia which had extended rapidly in the 500's

Two Greco-Persian wars ensued

## **First Persian War (490) – Conflict between the Greeks and Persian Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.**

Darius I faced with rebellion among some of his Greek subjects on the Turkish coast

When Darius tried to subdue them, Athens came to their aid

Darius sent an army across the Aegean Sea to the Greek mainland

- Athenians were waiting and defeated the Persian expedition at the **Battle of Marathon in 490**

## **Second Persian War (480 - 478 B.C.E.) – Conflict between Greeks and Persian Empire**

Xerxes (Darius's son) challenges Greeks

Under King Leonidas, Spartan troops lived up to their fame at the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 and again at a decisive defeat for the Persian Empire

Persian Forces at Platea also defeated in 479

Athenian navy routed the larger Persian fleet at Salamis in 480 and established Athens as premier naval force in eastern Mediterranean

## ***8-6 – Peloponnesian War***

Persian wars did not lead to harmony among the Greek Poleis

Athens used its new prestige and growing wealth to form a group of unwilling satellites (The Delian League) among nearby poleis which served as a naval alliance

Pericles – Athenian democratic leader and spokesman who died in the midst of the Peloponnesian War in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.

Pericles was responsible for conflict with Corinth (Sparta's Peloponnesian allies)

Corinth asked Sparta for help and Sparta warned Athenians to back down

Pericles responded with war and started an imperial journey but failed

Peloponnesian War (429 – 404 B.C.E.) – The great civil war between Athens and Sparta and their allies in ancient Greece, eventually won by Sparta

- War lasted long because neither side could last the final blow and long truces were taken for both sides to regain their strength
- Persia's navy helped the Spartans and defeated the Athenians at sea
- Was a loss for all and Athens was torn between discredited democrats and the conservatives favored by Sparta

## ***8-7 – The Final Act in Classical Greece***

Greeks fought intermittently for political supremacy for two generations

Major Poleis of Thebes emerged but was quickly destroyed by others that banded against it

To the north of Greece were the Macedonians, whom the Greeks regarded as savage and barbarian

Philip of Macedonia, the ruler of the northern kingdom turned the backward society into a effectively governed and aggressive state

Absorbs each Polis one by one and made himself the master of the mainland

Athens and Thebes join together to fight Macedonia

Battle of Chaeronea (338 B.C.E.) – Battle between Greek cities of Athens and Thebes against Macedonia

- Was the effective end of the era of polis independence and of the Classical Age
- Under constant rule of foreign rulers

## ***8-8 – Alexander and the Creation of a World Empire***

After Battle of Chaeronea King Philip of Macedonia was assassinated, and his young son, Alexander succeeded to the throne (336 – 323 B.C.E.)

Alexander the Great (356 -323 B.C.E.) – Son of King Philip II of Macedon. Remembered for his conquest of the Persian Empire and most of the Near East

Alexander proved himself to be one of the most remarkable individuals in world history

- His boldness and vigor became the stuff of legend among the Greeks who fought under him
- Defeated Persians at Gaugamela (Iraq)
- Conquered an empire that stretched from Egypt to Bactria and the Indus River Valley in only 10 years
- Turned back when his exhausted military army mutinied
- Died in Babylon at age 33

## ***8-8a – A Mixed Culture***

The vast territories Alexander conquered were split into three major kingdoms

**Hellenistic kingdoms** - (Kingdoms carved out of the empire conquered by Alexander the Great. Blended Greek and Asiatic cultures; extant in the Mediterranean basin and Middle East between 300 and 200 B.C.E.

- Greek participatory polis abandoned for absolutist monarchies
- Indian Hindu/Buddhist world introduced to the Western world
  - Greek realism influenced Buddhist and Zoroastrian plastic arts
  - Direct trade contacts between India and the Mediterranean
  - Influenced formation of Mauryan Dynasty and Kushan Empires in India and Central Asia

## 8-8b Greeks and Easterners in the Hellenistic Kingdoms

Three major kingdoms

1. The **Ptolemaic (tah-leh-MAY-ihk) Kingdom of Egypt** ((tah-leh-MAY-ihk) Egyptian state created by Ptolemy, one of Alexander the Great's generals, in the Hellenistic era.) . A general named Ptolemy (TAH-leh-mee) succeeded in capturing Egypt, the richest of all the provinces of Alexander's empire. There he ruled as a divine king, just as the pharaohs once had. By the 100s B.C.E., the many immigrant Greeks and the Egyptian upper class had intermixed sufficiently to make Egypt a hybrid society. Many Greeks adopted the Egyptian way of life, which they found pleasant. Meanwhile, ordinary Egyptians remained exploited peasants or slaves.
2. The **Seleucid (seh-LOO-sihd) Kingdom of Persia** ((seh-LOO-sihd) One of the three Hellenistic Kingdoms. The successor state to the empire of Alexander the Great in most of the Middle East.) and Central Asia, which was the successor to most of the once-mighty empire of Darius III, reached from India's borders to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. It was founded by a former general named Seleucus (seh-LOOkus), and like Ptolemaic Egypt it lasted until the Roman assault in the first century B.C.E. Many tens of thousands of Greek immigrants came here as officials, soldiers, or craftsmen, and the contact between the locals and Greeks was extensive in the western parts of the kingdom, especially Syria and Turkey. The kingdom was too large to govern effectively, however, and it began to lose pieces to rebels and petty kings on its borders as early as the 200s B.C.E. By the time the Romans were invading the western areas, most of the east was already lost.
3. The **Antigonid (an-TIH-guh-nihd) Kingdom** ((an-TIH-guh-nihd) One of the Hellenistic successor kingdoms to Alexander the Great's empire; included most of Greece and Asia Minor.) . This kingdom was also founded by a general who claimed the old Macedonian homeland and ruled part of what had been Greece as well. The rest of Greece was divided among several leagues of city-states, which vied with each other for political and economic supremacy until both they and the Macedonians fell to the Romans in the middle 100s B.C.E.

### • Ptolemaic, Kingdom of Egypt

- General Ptolemy captured Egypt and ruled as pharaoh
- By 100s BCE, Egypt became a hybrid society - Greeks and Egyptians intermixed

### • Seleucid, Kingdom of Persia

- General Seleucus ruled from India's borders to the Mediterranean
- Kingdom began to lose pieces to rebels because of its large expanse
- Immigrant Greeks mixed with locals especially in Syria and Turkey
- When Romans invaded the western areas, most of the east was lost

### • Antigonid Kingdom

- General claimed the Macedonian homeland and part of Greece
- Rest of Greece divided into city-states vying for political and economic supremacy
- Fell to the Romans in the middle 100s BCE