Introducing Early Greece

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Overview of Lecture

1. Key historical moments
2. Primary Sources
3. Models for Greek identity
4. Significance
5. Mechanics

Key Historical Moments

Troy

300 (Thermopylae -ish)

Mycenaean Greece

- Palace Culture
- Myths and realities
  - The Theban saga
  - The Trojan War
- Collapse c. 1200
- The 'Dark Ages' of Greece, c. 1150–750
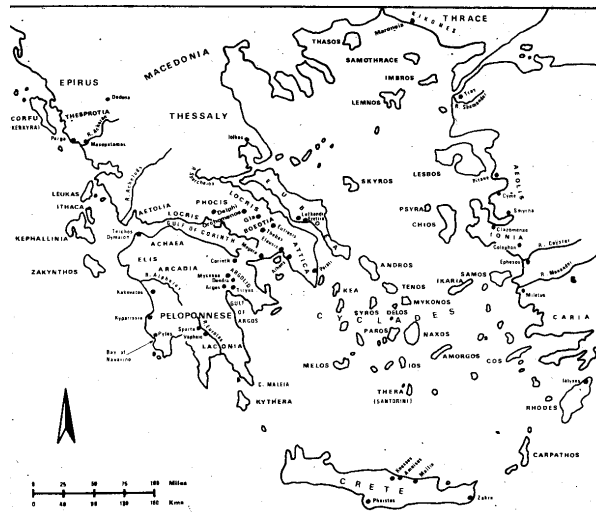- The importance of Homer (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*)

The Warlike Mycenaeans

Where does all this happen?

Persian Invasion

- Ionian Revolt (499–94): Greeks disunited
- Marathon, 490: Athens stands alone (almost)
- The Persian Invasion (481–79)
    - Thermopylae: freedom, duty and heroic self-sacrifice
    - Salamis: naval democracy in action
    - Plataea: Greece united
- Myths of resistance (?)
- Why resist? The politics of Greek identity
- The importance of Herodotus

Primary Sources

Homer's *Odyssey*

- Early seventh century (c. 700–675?)
- Possibly by the same author as the *Iliad*
- Odysseus' return from Troy (a *nostos*)
- The suitors in the household (*oikos*)
- Becoming a man (Telemachus) and being a wife (Penelope)
- Ithaca as social model
- Phaeacia as social model
- Dystopian societies (Laestrygonians, Cyclopes)

Hesiod

- didactic poetry
- 'wisdom literature'
- same poetic tradition as Homer
- date: late eighth century (?)
- *Theogony*
    - the family affairs of the gods
    - explaining and justifying the cosmic order
- *Works and Days*
    - how to run a small farm — and when
    - a harsh cosmic order

Herodotus' *Histories*

- *historiē*: an *enquiry*
- story-telling
- the clash of cultures
- the rise of Persia
- human and divine
- narratives of freedom
    - Spartan identity
    - Athenian identity
- Explaining the Fifth Century

Greek Lyric

- choral and personal poetry
- elegy, iambos and melic (sung) poetry
- festival and symposium
- public and personal

Aristotle (?)

- *The Athenian Constitution*: political history
- part of a research project informing Aristotle's *Politics*
- probably not by Aristotle himself
- explaining Fourth-Century democracy
- the propaganda value of Athenian history

Art and Architecture

- Vase-painting (subjects and styles)
- Idealism and naturalism (sculpture)
- Function and context
    - Civic and individual
    - Public and private
- Economics and identity
- Visual and poetic representations

Greek Identity . . .

- is a construct
- is a product of material and ideological factors (landscape, myth, religion, politics, . . .)
- is developed in many media (poetry, art, history)
- competes with other identities (Athenian, Spartan, etc.)
- is continually evolving (throughout 776–479)
- has material consequences for Greek history
- has material consequences for European history

Idealising and Exemplarity

- Idealising the heroic past
- Idealising specific characters or groups:
    - Odysseus
    - Penelope
    - Eurycleia
    - Phaeacians
- Idealising character development (Telemachus)

Speech and Action

No more — or enormous sorrow comes to all Achaea!
How they would exult, Priam and Priam's sons
and all the Trojans. Oh they'd leap for joy
to hear the two of you battling on this way,
you who excel us all, first in Achaean councils,
first in the ways of war.

Homer, *Iliad* 1.254–8 (tr. Fagles)

Complex Examples

- Negative examples
    - the suitors
    - the cyclopes
    - Perses and the local lords (Hesiod, *WD*)
- More complex examples:
    - Menelaus and Helen
    - Hesiod's autobiographical representations

Comparison and opposition

- Greeks and others
- Ethnicity (Greeks and *barbaroi*)
- Sex and gender
- Class
- Human and divine
- Human and non-human (monstrous, animal)

The Nature of Greek Gods

And now, as the high gods bantered back and forth,
Diomedes, loosing his war cry, charged Aeneas—
though what he saw was lord Apollo himself,
guarding, spreading his arms above the fighter,
but even before the mighty god he would not flinch.
Tydides reared and hurled himself again and again,
trying to kill Aeneas, strip his famous armor.
Three times he charged, frenzied to bring him down,
three times Apollo battered his gleaming shield back—
then at Tydides' fourth assault like something superhuman,
the Archer who strikes from worlds away shrieked out—
a voice of terror—"Think, Diomedes, shrink back now!
Enough of this madness—striving with the gods.
We are not of the same breed, we never will be,
the deathless gods and men who walk the earth."

Homer, *Iliad* 5.431–442 (tr. Fagles)

The Pessimistic View

. . . as Hector grappled a boulder, bore it up and on.
It stood at the gates, huge, blunt at the base
but spiked to a jagged point
and no two men, the best in the whole realm,
could easily prize it up from earth and onto a wagon,
weak as men are now—but he quickly raised and shook it
as Zeus the son of Cronus with Cronus' twisting ways
made it a light lift for Hector all on his own.

Iliad 12.445–50

See also 1.260–72, 5.302–4, 12.447–9, 20.285–7

Gender and Ethnicity

Now closer, closing, front to front in the onset
till Paris sprang from the Trojan forward ranks,
a challenger, lithe, magnificent as a god,
the skin of a leopard slung across his shoulders,
a reflex bow at his back and battle-sword at hip
and brandishing two sharp spears tipped in bronze
he strode forth, challenging all the Argive best
to fight him face-to-face in mortal combat.

Homer, *Iliad* 3.15–20 (tr. Fagles)

"Paris, appalling Paris! Our prince of beauty—
mad for women, you lure them all to ruin!
Would to god you'd never been born, died unwed.

Homer, *Iliad* 3.39–40 (tr. Fagles)

Prescription and Theory

- Prescription: Hesiod's *Works and Days*
- Growth of scientific enquiry
    - the material of the world
    - basing models on experience
    - logic vs. experience: the beginnings of scepticism
    - science, medicine, history

Abuse

- Hesiod, *Works and Days*
    - Perses
    - women
    - nobility
- Iambic poetry
    - political enemies
    - social roles (women again)
    - self-abasement

Becoming Greek

- multiple models and contexts
- very few *ideal* models
- multiple aspects
- competing claims
- social and religious practice
- demands of landscape
- a core set of Greek values and ideals emerges
- motivates both resistance and cultural development
- politically useful in modern cultures . . .

Key Documents

- Course Document
- Classics Handbook
- Both are on moodle: http://moodle.gla.ac.uk
- Other resources on moodle . . .

Lectures and Seminars

- Lectures
  - three lectures per week until week seven; afterwards two lectures per week
  - rooms vary: check MyCampus and MyTimetable (plus room finder)
  - for the topics, see course document
- Seminars
  - Weekly from week two
  - All seminars in 65 Oakfield Avenue
  - Check MyCampus for your seminar group (and location)
  - Rooms and tutors are also in the course document

Assessment

1. Formative (practice) commentary (one passage of the *Odyssey* from a choice of two): due Friday of week five at 4.30pm

2. Essay (2500 words), due Friday of week nine at 4.30pm: 60% of the assessment

3. Commentaries (four out of five choices; 1800 words): 40% of assessment

   - The exercise will only be released on Monday of week 11 at 4.30pm, and due on Monday of week 12 at 4.30pm

   - Note the video guides for writing commentaries