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Introductory Guide to Ancient Greek Civilization

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Introductory Guide to Ancient Greek Civilization

Helmut Loeffler

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Note

This book is intended to be used together with a presentation or other supportive material. Maps, pieces of art and archaeological evidence have to be presented so that the past can be recreated in context. The individual lecturer and reader need to fill in the missing parts they want to focus on, based on their expertise and interest.

This guide is kept short and simple on purpose; textbooks on ancient civilizations are often expensive and only used periodically throughout the semester. Hopefully this little guide will be of use for beginning students of ancient Greek history.

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1 Introduction

Why study Ancient Greek Civilization?

There is one easy answer for this question: because of the influence the Ancient Greeks had and still have on us.

The Greeks shape our world in many ways: our political system was invented by the Greeks; our language is full of words originating in Ancient Greek; Greek mythology deals with topics that shape our popular culture in many ways; religions such as Christianity adopted and transformed Ancient Greek views and made them their own; Ancient Greek art and architecture shapes our ideas of design.

When we take a look around us, we see first-hand evidence of the Ancient Greeks in museums, archaeological sites and libraries. The art, architecture and literature that we find in these places is familiar to us although created thousands of years ago. Why? Because many of us grew up with them. We can look at movies such as *300*, *Troy*, *Hercules*, *Wrath of the Titans* and so many more, as well as countless books, that provide us with a significant connection with ancient mythology. However, after further studying, we will realize that the topics first discussed by the Greeks and within Greek civilization are far more varied. For example, we can see how our contemporary political process and decision-making are following patterns that have been identified as early as the fifth century BCE by the Greek historiographers Herodotus and Thucydides and by the philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, to name just a few. Additionally, besides the outstanding achievements of the Ancient Greeks, in the course of this book we will discuss negative aspects, such as slavery and their treatment of women.

The purpose of this guide is to bring Ancient Greek civilization back to life in a succinct, yet comprehensive manner. Doing so will rely on the work of archaeologists, numismatists, palaeographers, epigraphists and classicists. What do these professionals do? Archaeologists analyze mostly material objects, such as ancient stones, graves and pottery, while numismatists study coins. Palaeographers study ancient texts written on papyrus or parchment; epigraphists study inscriptions. Classicists first and foremost recover, translate and interpret ancient Greek

and Roman texts, especially literature. All of these professions help us to clarify the past. What the historian does is take the various strands resulting from their work and reshape it into a narrative. This narrative helps us to understand the past, so let us begin this journey by first discovering the location and central characteristics of the Ancient Greek world.

The Greece of today consists of the southern tip of the Balkan Peninsula, and as such is part of the Mediterranean region. Many islands located in two parts of the Mediterranean Sea called Aegean and Ionian Sea, belong to Greece today and were part of the Ancient Greek world as well. However, the territory where the ancient Greeks lived was extended far beyond what we know as modern Greece. The Western coast of modern-day Turkey belonged to the Ancient Greek world, as well as parts of the coast of northern Africa, Southern Italy and Sicily. In general, the Greeks in ancient times saw as their homeland what we today call Greece, together with the coastline of Western Turkey.

The landscape of the Greek world can best be described as rocky and full of hills and mountains. These mountains are usually not very high but are steep, and they divide the land into many valleys. This characteristic of the Greek landscape had far-reaching consequences. The many small islands and the separation into many valleys made travel on land rather difficult. Thus the landscape in Ancient Greece did not support unity; communication between settlements was rather difficult. We will find hundreds of independent cities developing later on; they often shared various traits like language, religion and custom. However, they would guard their own borders or mint their own coins. This lack of unity also resulted in frequent armed conflicts between Greek cities.

Resources in Ancient Greece were scarce. The most important of all resources in ancient times were fresh water and fertile soil. Farming was the foundation for ancient civilizations to develop. Mesopotamia’s advanced civilizations had fertile soil and the rivers Euphrates and Tigris; Egypt relied on the Nile and the plains alongside the river; early civilizations in India started along the Indus River, and China’s civilizations begin along the fertile areas along the Yellow River.

Ancient Greece generally did not enjoy the benefits of fertile soil. Yes, in some places, like Messenia and Thessaly, the Greeks were able to have a productive agriculture, but we estimate

that only twenty to thirty percent of the Greek mainland was good for farming. Grapevines, olives, and certain grains like barley have to be named as being of central importance; in addition there was some pasture land used for sheep, pigs, donkeys, and in a few places cattle and horses. We also see some mineral deposits being exploited like iron, tin and copper, used for weapons mainly. Limestone and marble were used for building structures and silver for jewelry, but all in small numbers.

Another problem besides the lack of suitable farmland and resources in general was the climate which made farming in Greece difficult. We also have to mention here the unpredictable rainfall, leading to common droughts or sudden heavy rainstorms.

We can say that the Ancient Greek world in terms of resources was poor. However, Ancient Greek thinkers interpreted this differently. The Greek historiographer Herodotus, who lived in the 5th century BCE, writes in his *Histories* that the lack of resources and the tough environment brought forth tough soldiers, and Aristotle claimed in his *Politics* that the climate in Greece was partially responsible for the creation of free political institutions, while in the east oppressive climates had supported oppressive governments such as tyrannies.

When we look at the scarceness of resources, the achievements of the Ancient Greeks are even more astonishing. They could not rely on the wealth created at home. The Greeks instead were forced to open up to the world and to travel, because they found better land and resources almost everywhere else. Since the sea was surrounding them and since their land was separated by steep hills and mountains, the easiest way for the Greeks to travel was by ship. The many islands in the Aegean Sea, for example, made it possible for the Greeks to sail within sight of land from the mainland to Asia Minor (modern-day Western Turkey).

This dependence on ships for travel triggered over the centuries a constant improvement in shipbuilding. There is evidence of people using simple small boats in the region to travel between islands (like Melos) and the mainland in the Neolithic period, as early as 7000 BCE.

Sailing the open seas was a dangerous undertaking. It is no surprise that one of the earliest masterpieces in literature, Homer's *Odyssey*, describes the dangers and the threats the sea offers

sailors. Although the Greeks often could sail within sight of land, the Mediterranean Sea proved to be frequently treacherous, especially during the winter months with its sudden storms; therefore travel was usually avoided during those times of the year. Despite these dangers, sea travel played a pivotal part in the development of Greek civilization. The Greeks made contact with the more advanced Near Eastern and Egyptian cultures; traders did not only import products from these places but also new thoughts, technologies, and ideas in general.

The attitude the Greeks had towards the sea can be deduced by looking at how they described their god of the sea, Poseidon. One would assume that, since the sea played such an important part in their lives, Poseidon would receive special treatment among the many gods they worshipped. However, Poseidon did not have many sanctuaries dedicated to him. The myths that have him in an important role are few, and in the few myths we have about him he is usually described as being quick to rage and unpredictable in his behavior. We can safely say that the Greeks respected Poseidon, that they feared him, but that they did not love him like they did Athena or Apollo for example. We can assume that their attitude towards the sea was the same: fear and respect, but no love.

2 Cycladic Civilization

Consisting of around twenty-five islands in the Aegean Sea, the Cyclades are the place where the earliest civilization in the ancient Greek world evolved. The Greeks named these islands, *Kyklades*, because they form a kind of circle around the sacred island of Delos. We do not know what this civilization or these people were called originally, so scholars named the civilization after the place where we found its remains. We date this civilization to the time when the Neolithic Period transitions into the Bronze Age, around 3200 BCE.

The most remarkable finds made by archaeologists on these islands are marble figures. Most of these statues or statuettes depict nude females. These type of statues were created throughout the Neolithic Period in many communities around the Mediterranean out of clay or stone; their purpose is unknown. Most scholars agree that they probably were used in fertility rituals or as a form of worship of a mother goddess. Usually, these statues and statuettes found scattered throughout the Mediterranean are rather crudely made. However, the ones that date to the Cycladic Civilization are by contrast very refined and elegant. They show females with their arms folded across the belly, right arm below the left. It seems that they were painted. Most of them were found in tombs, and their use was probably a ritual one. Remarkable is the fact that a few of the statues discovered on the Cyclades were almost life-sized. The only other places that were creating large-sized statues that early were Egypt and Mesopotamia.

3 Minoan Civilization

Around 2000 BCE the Cycladic culture started to be influenced by another early civilization that evolved further south in the Aegean Sea, the Minoans. It developed on the island of Crete and increased its power so much that at one point it controlled the whole Aegean area and parts of the southern mainland of Greece. Similar to Cycladic civilization, we do not know how the people of this civilization referred to themselves. Archaeologists who excavated the remains of this civilization began using the term *Minoan* to describe them. They used this term because the poet Homer in his epic poems *Iliad* and *Odyssey* frequently refers to a powerful king of Crete called *Minos*, who ruled over a place called Knossos on Crete and had under his command a strong naval power with which he dominated the Aegean. If such a king named Minos ever really existed cannot be known. It is much more likely that *Minos* was the term used for prince, king or ruler of the people during the Bronze Age on the island of Crete.

The excavations on Crete that brought to light the remains of the Minoan Civilization began in the early twentieth century. Arthur Evans, a British archaeologist, is mostly credited for carrying out these excavations, but he relied heavily on the knowledge of local and Greek archaeologists such as Spyridon Marinatos. From these excavations we learned that instead of living in small settlements (like the Cycladic people), the Minoans around 2200 BCE began to construct very large buildings with dozens of rooms which have been referred to as “palaces” by scholars. They are located usually near but not directly on the coast. It seems that the rulers with their families lived in the center of these palaces together with their servants. The many rooms were used mostly for storage purposes. Around these rooms the population would settle in smaller houses which were put up right next to each other.

What is also usually located at the center of this structure is a large rectangular court, surrounded by rooms of different purposes: the quarters of the rulers or storage facilities for example. We also find hallways and even stairways since these structures often had more than one level. For sanitation purposes drainage systems were installed. Some rooms, such as the ones used for rituals and religious offerings, were decorated with art. The rooms used for storage purposes seem to have been used to store raw materials such as olives, olive oil, or grains. In

general, these so-called palace structures grew over the years to have dozens of rooms. There exists a theory that tries to explain the origin of the myth of the Minotaur. In this myth it is told that this monster, half man half bull, was kept in a labyrinth (a very sophisticated maze) which had been designed by the greatest engineer in Greek mythology, Daedalus. The Athenians were under the obligation to send young men and women to Crete every few years as a sacrifice to be devoured by the Minotaur. The Athenian hero Theseus wanted to end this gruesome practice and he went on a quest to Crete to kill the Minotaur. He received help from the daughter of Minos, Ariadne, who fell in love with Theseus. She actually was crucial in his success: she advised Theseus to use a ball of string to navigate the labyrinth by fastening one end to the entrance. The hero was then able to kill the Minotaur and found his way back out of the maze by following the string. However, after leaving and sailing away from Crete, he left Ariadne on a deserted island, thus showing his disregard for the crucial help he had received. The theory examining this myth and its origins claims that the actual palace structure at some point was so large that visitors could get lost or did in fact lose track of where they were; this then stimulated the idea of a labyrinth; the story over the years would then have been embellished and equipped with a monster which threatens civilization.

Ever since Arthur Evans proclaimed that the Minoan civilization was peaceful a theory was in use that said that the Minoans did not build protective walls or any other defensive systems. However, more recently evidence has been found for towers or defensive walls that the Minoans relied on to protect themselves and their wealth, such as the wall at Gournia, one of the palace structures that have been uncovered. In addition, archaeologists have discovered evidence for guard houses, beacons, towers and ramparts. Also, since they had trading connections all over the region, the Minoans could rely on intelligence networks to be informed of any hostile preparations for war.

The notion that the Minoan civilization was peaceful also seems to be supported by the artwork of the Minoans. Often people interpret the art that survived of the Minoans as showing only peaceful activities such as religious rituals, animal life or scenes of nature. While it is true that many frescoes and pottery do not depict warfare, we have found daggers and swords in

Minoan sanctuaries, graves and residences. It also seems that boxing, hunting, archery and bull-leaping were popular sports for men. Seals that have been excavated also frequently show daggers, spears and other weapons. Nevertheless, many beautiful Minoan frescoes give us examples of peaceful activities. We just cannot claim that the Minoans were exclusively peaceful.

The society of the Minoans was a matrilineal one, indicating that wealth passes through the generations by the female line. This custom does not make the Minoans necessarily a matriarchal society. The lawgiver and leader (Minos) seems to have been male. However, women played an important role in religion; many of the artworks and the images show either priestesses or goddesses.

Since most scholars agree that the first use of writing was probably a very practical one, that of keeping track of goods, it is no surprise that the Minoans, who had created a large trading empire, also developed a writing system beginning around 1800 BCE that was presumably early on used for trading and maybe religious activities. It is commonly referred to as Linear A. This is a syllabic script; this means that each sign represents a syllable or short word. Some signs are ideograms or pictorial symbols. We have evidence of Linear A on clay tablets that have been recovered. These tablets give evidence for lists of goods received and handed out. This can be deduced from the fact that there are many numbers to be found on these tablets. However, Linear A still needs to be fully deciphered.

Tablets that had been inscribed with Linear A have been found throughout the Southern Aegean. This shows that Minoan traders were active in this area. These Minoan traders established trading centers which sometimes have been discovered and excavated. A town on the Cycladic island of Thera (today called Santorini) was the victim of a volcano eruption sometime in the 16th century BCE. This town, called Akrotiri, was buried in volcanic ash; this catastrophe helped to preserve many aspects of its culture, such as frescoes and other pieces of art; it also conserved extensive drainage systems and paved streets. These findings give evidence that Akrotiri was a prosperous Minoan trading center, mainly because of its strategic location.

Minoan civilization, like the preceding Cycladic one, is not considered a Greek civilization; both civilizations rather evolved in the region which later was settled on by Greeks. The Minoan

civilization, however, influenced the earliest form of Greek culture, which we call Mycenaean. Around 1400 BCE, this latter civilization dominated Minoan Crete, and there is some evidence of violence, but not enough to show that the Mycenaeans invaded Crete in one sudden attack; the volcano eruption on Thera, the resulting tsunami and, in addition, the deforestation on Crete during the Minoan period, also contributed to the downfall of the Minoans.

4 Mycenaean Civilization

We refer to the period that follows the Minoans as the Mycenaean period. This is the earliest form of Greek culture, because the Cycladic and Minoan civilizations, as has been indicated earlier, are not considered to be Greek. Similar to Minoan civilization, the term that we use to name this civilization, *Mycenae*, is taken from Greek mythology. Homer in his *Iliad* describes Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae, as leader of the Greek army in the war against the city of Troy. Homer also writes that the largest number of Greek troops in this war were sent by this Mycenaean king Agamemnon. Thus, scholars determined that Mycenae must have been the most powerful city at the time, and they decided to name the period after it.

Archaeologists at the end of the 19th century have discovered the remains of the city of Mycenae on the peninsula called the Peloponnese. This city dates back to the Bronze Age. The massive walls that were built as a fortification of Mycenae can still be seen today. Discoveries also showed that Mycenae was a powerful and wealthy place. Archaeologists have excavated several other places like Mycenae on the Peloponnese, but since Homer referred to Agamemnon as its leader, it was decided by modern scholars that Mycenae was the dominant city, although it did never rule the Greek world as a unified state.

The discoveries that were made at Mycenae at the end of the 19th century at Mycenae made international headlines. The archaeologist most known for these excavations, Heinrich Schliemann, grabbed the world’s attention by excavating treasury-filled graves which had been constructed as shafts with stone-lined walls. Schliemann claimed to have found inside these tombs corpses adorned with golden jewelry like necklaces; many gold and silver vessels, bronze weapons and painted pottery were also recovered. Schliemann even claimed that he had found the grave of the legendary Mycenaean king Agamemnon, who supposedly lived sometime during the 12th century BCE. However, after further analysis of the recovered material, the treasures were determined to date back to the 16th century BCE. It has to be noted here that Schliemann was foremost a businessman who had a passion for archaeology; he was not a trained archaeologist. He made mistakes while excavating ancient sites, some people even accused him later of having items forged, so that he could claim findings as fitting in his Troy-centric narrative.

From a very young age Schliemann was influenced by Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and he developed a desire to prove that the stories of these epic poems are based on true events. It seems that at certain points this desire clouded his judgement and pushed him to commit mistakes. His discoveries however contributed to the fact that we began to realize that there really did exist ancient cities called Troy and Mycenae and others, and that there was a conflict between some of the Greek city-states and Troy as mentioned in the poems.

As was discussed earlier, Mycenaean civilization is considered to be the earliest form of Greek civilization. The earliest evidence of written Greek language goes back to this Mycenaean period. This language is called Linear B. In contrast to Linear A, which was used during the Minoan period, Linear B was deciphered in the 1950's. It has also been shown that Linear B is indeed an early or archaic form of Greek language.

The Greek language belongs to the Indo-European language family, which are languages that were believed to be first spoken by peoples in what is today the area of Ukraine and Southern Russia and then spread after 2000 BCE to various parts of Europe and Asia through migration. Examples for Indo-European languages are the Celtic, Germanic, Baltic and Slavic languages which belong to the European branches of Indo-European while Persian, Hittite, Sanskrit for example are part of the Asian branch. We believe that probably around 2000 BCE, there was widespread movement of Indo-European speaking peoples, including the migration of an early Greek-speaking people to mainland Greece. It also seems likely that this was not a violent invasion but a gradual slow migration. Evidence for that is the use of non-Greek Linear A and Greek Linear B simultaneously on the island of Crete for a long time until finally the Greek form of language prevailed.

Another theory that tries to explain the origins of Greek culture, emphasizes that the Mycenaeans originated from within the Greek world and that they became powerful because they exploited trading opportunities.

Based on the material and written evidence, we can say that the Mycenaean period lasted approximately from 1600 BCE to 1200 BCE. As mentioned before, the Mycenaean civilization did not overthrow the Minoans in one sudden invasion, but replaced the Minoan culture gradually.

Some Minoan palaces seem to have suffered destruction after 1500 BCE and the Mycenaeans likely were involved. However, the Minoans were already facing problems due to deforestation and the consequences of the volcano eruption at Thera and the subsequent tsunami.

We also know that the Mycenaeans were deeply influenced by the Minoans. They adopted, for example, the system of placing authority in one central place, the so-called palaces, but there were differences between the Minoan and Mycenaean palace-structures: while the Minoans were built without heavy, massive fortification walls and were located on open ground to allow for growth, the Mycenaean ones were heavily fortified and built on higher ground to provide an overlook over the plains below. At certain points the fortification-walls of the Mycenaean palaces reached about 25 feet. The Greeks in their mythology claimed that no humans were able to lift these stones and that one-eyed giants, the Cyclopes, built the walls of Mycenae.

As usual, when material evidence like this comes to light, we have to ask ourselves: why did the Mycenaeans build such defensive walls? Several theories have been suggested: the various Mycenaean centers were frequently at war with each other; they feared an invasion from the outside; or they built these fortifications to show that they had the means to do it and use it to project power.

Two of the main palace-centers during the Mycenaean period were located at Mycenae and Tiryns. Located on the Peloponnese, these places are constructed in similar fashion: the central feature was the *megaron*, a large hall with four central columns which supported the roof.

Most of our information about the Mycenaeans comes from their graves, primarily because they buried goods alongside the dead. Two circular burial sites that date back to the early Mycenaean period (1600-1500 BCE) give us the following picture: one plot contained 24 graves, the other only six. These graves were most likely the graves of the elite, probably the royal family. The many precious goods that were buried along with the deceased support this theory. The bodies were lowered into deep rectangular pits. Placed there were bronze weapons such as swords, daggers, spearheads and knives, but also pottery and jewelry. The archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, who, as was mentioned before, is credited to have excavated these graves in 1876, claimed that he found gold masks which were placed on the faces of some of the men. Some

scholars question the authenticity of these masks, however, and suggest that they have been forged and do not originate from the Mycenaean period.

When we look at these various goods we can safely say that they give evidence that the Mycenaeans around 1500 BCE had impressive trading connections to places that were located outside of mainland Greece. The origin of some of the jewelry has been traced to the northern parts of Europe, other items came from Crete and the Cycladic islands. The trading network of the Mycenaeans was an impressive feature of the Mycenaean economy; and these trading relations also made sure that techniques of craftsmanship reached Mycenae; we can uncover this by looking at how some of the goods were produced.

The various items that were placed in the graves consist mostly of weapons and pieces of art that, for the most part, display images of war or hunting. This suggests that the life of the Mycenaeans might have been dominated by warfare and the hunt for wild animals such as boars or lions. Different Greek myths, whose origin we trace back to the Mycenaean period, describe hunting operations that involved the killing of beasts that devastated fields. Often these mythological adventures were displayed in the form of vase paintings.

The way the graves were designed changed over the years. An excavated grave that dates back to around 1300 BCE is stunning: it is a dome-construction that is about 50 feet in height and about the same size in diameter. It is known as the “Treasury of Atreus.” Its massive size and design and the goods placed in it clearly show that this tomb belonged to a king of Mycenae who wanted his authority on display after death. Common people also buried goods alongside bodies in the graves; even in the most simple Mycenaean graves we have often found a few vessels. In general, it seems that the burial customs of the Mycenaeans followed a competitive pattern. People tried to show with their graves the social status and wealth they possessed in life. The graves of the elite, such as the king’s clearly display that they were superior in both social and economic terms. Also, the use of the latest technology was hinted at in the graves: only the very top of society could have afforded to use the chariot around 1500 BCE, as is indicated on a funerary stele discovered in one of the grave circles at Mycenae. We can safely say that there

existed a social class system within Mycenaean society, and the levels between the classes were clearly marked, even after death.

The leaders and kings of the Mycenaean civilization are referred to as *Wanax*. After the decipherment of Linear B we discovered that several Linear B tablets identify the ruler or leading person using this term. It means something like Lord. In Homer's epic poems, *Wanax* is used for both kings and gods. In the Linear B tablets, *Wanax* is used as a title, but not with a name.

It is also important to note that the word for slave was also identified on Linear B tablets, and these slaves were either the property of individuals or temples. Linear B tablets thus give evidence that slavery was common in the Greek world by the Mycenaean period, which is not surprising. In most ancient civilizations slavery was common; the largest group among slaves were prisoners of war. If an ancient society, such as early Egypt, did not use slaves or only very few, it was usually a consequence of not engaging in warfare, not a consequence of being a more civilized or humane society.

5 Iron Age (Dark Age)

Mycenaean civilization began to decline around 1200 BCE. This decline is part of a massive disruption that happened all around the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, commonly referred to as the "Late Bronze Age Collapse." This disruption lasted for decades, approximately for 100 to 200 years, 1200 – 1000 BCE, and its consequences could be felt in many regions until around 800 BCE. In general, we can say that this period is shaped by an economic downturn, decline in population numbers, disruption of social life and cultural changes on a massive scale.

Regarding the Mycenaeans, we have evidence for physical destruction at several centers such as Mycenae, Tiryns and Pylos; it seems also likely that Mycenae and Tiryns made their fortifications stronger and prepared for sieges around 1200 BCE. Did they wait for an attack to happen? The archaeological evidence suggests this. Who were the attackers? It could have been outsiders or inhabitants of other Mycenaean cities who were in a fight with each other over power and increasingly scarce resources. It seems that many Mycenaeans were displaced and forced to leave their homes, pushed to go on making a living by raiding other places. It has been suggested that some of the displaced Mycenaeans might have been among the foreigners who invaded Egypt around that time. We also know that the Hittite empire (mostly modern-day Anatolia in Turkey), was invaded and destroyed around 1200 BCE. However, we have little information from the Mycenaeans directly in these chaotic years, and the disruption that engulfed the whole region makes it difficult to gain a clear picture.

Since we know that people left their homeland, we have several possible reasons why this happened: war with foreigners; civil war; economic downturn; climate problems; natural catastrophes; social problems. When several reasons contribute to the downfall of a civilization, it is very difficult for historians to determine which was the most dominant one. That is why often in these situations people talk about mysteries, since no one can know for sure what the most influential factor was that led to the end of civilizations.

The chaos, commotion and migration beginning around 1200 BCE changed the region. For the Mycenaeans this meant that the trading networks that had been established were reduced

or disappeared. The Mycenaeans had trading relations with regions as far away as Spain or Libya; in both places Mycenaean products have been found. After 1200 BCE this trade seem to end.

This reduction in economic activity and trade had another consequence: since Linear B was mainly used for economic administration such as keeping track of goods, it disappeared. Of course, only few people at that time could read and write in the first place, and Linear B was a difficult script to learn. It is highly likely that only some officials were using Linear B, and once one of its main uses came to a standstill, it did not take much for Linear B to vanish. During the following centuries no more Linear B tablets were produced; because of this we commonly refer to this period (ca. 1200 – 800 BCE) as "The Dark Ages" in Greek history. However, more and more information has come to light through material evidence, for example, and we continue to learn more about this period as time goes on. Many historians have started to use the term *Iron Age* as a replacement for Dark Age, since the first use of iron in the area dates back to this time.

The production of iron is different from the production of bronze, which was in use for thousands of years prior, because it requires a very high temperature: to melt iron ore one needs a temperature above 2732 degrees Fahrenheit (1500 degrees centigrade) while for bronze, 1981 degrees Fahrenheit (1083 degrees centigrade) to melt copper ore is enough. This higher temperature can only be reached by burning charcoal. It seems that the earliest places where the production of iron began are the places that were rich in iron ore, such as Cyprus and Crete. Likely one of the earliest uses of iron was in weapon technology, similar to how bronze was used previously. As in modern times, inventions often are made by the military; they later become part of civilian life. Excavations reveal swords and daggers made of iron dating back to 1050 BCE. Agricultural tools were produced shortly thereafter. The use of iron did not immediately replace bronze; both materials were used simultaneously, but iron became the preferred material, especially for weapons, because it is much harder than bronze. This caused poets such as Hesiod in the 7th century BCE to associate iron with death and destruction. Hesiod in his poems, especially the *Works and Days*, tells us about the various ages of mankind: beginning with a Golden Age, he envisions a steady degeneration through the ages of silver, bronze and an age of

Heroes, leading to the age of Iron that he thought he was living in: a period he describes as being filled with warfare, injustice, mistrust and poor living conditions.

Hesiod did not use Linear B to write down his poems, he already possessed a new alphabetic script about which we will talk a little later. As mentioned above, Linear B was not in use after 1200 BCE. However, the Greeks kept legends and myths alive by passing them on orally. In narratives and songs, the stories were later compiled and written down and then slowly became part of history for the Greeks. This oral tradition of the past makes it difficult for today's historians to determine what parts of Greek history belong to the realm of myths and which are based on facts. Often the ways the myths have been formed by later poets, editors and authors tell us more about the past than the events that are described themselves. What parts of the stories are emphasized, embellished, enriched or left out? Why?

Wandering singers repeated the legends for generations orally, surely changing them to the tastes of the time. To recreate the past we rely on these written sources; but, since they are often altered, we use to a larger degree material evidence such as pieces or art and especially ceramic vessels. The latter are the most common items that survive and are found today, and we have many dating back to the Iron Age. This pottery is very helpful and valuable: it often contains paintings that have been put on before the firing process and so they do not fade away. Naturally the majority of vessels that we find are broken to pieces. Archaeologists painstakingly reassemble these vessels. We can use this pottery to establish a chronology: often cities are destroyed and rebuilt multiple times over the course of centuries. When we excavate through the various layers of the soil the pieces of pottery can be used to establish to what particular time a layer belongs. We analyze the different styles of the vessels themselves (for example their shape) and the different style of the decorations applied (the paintings and motifs). This allows us to create a timeline, and in the case of the Iron or Dark Age it is especially important because of the lack of written records.

The close examination of the pottery found going back to the beginning of the Iron Age/Dark Age (1200 BCE – 1050 BCE: the Submycenaean period) shows an increase in different regional and local styles, which probably indicates that settlements now became more isolated.

The number of artists and the goods they produced and which were circulated, decreased during this time. In the following years (1050-900 BCE: Protogeometric period) a recovery takes place that starts slow and picks up strength over the years. Pottery now is found again in distant places, giving evidence that trading links were again established, for example with the Near East. Wealth increased, and the craftsmanship started to become more sophisticated.

This process of ever-increasing prosperity continued. From around 900 to 750 BCE, certain parts of the Greek World reached a high level of prosperity and technical skill. In pottery-making for example the aforementioned Protogeometric period was replaced by the Geometric period. The pieces of pottery now frequently are overloaded with geometrical figures, in contrast to the limited amount of geometric shapes like circles and arcs that we find on Protogeometric pottery. The findings of these vessels show that, for example Attica, the region where Athens is located, flourished during this period. One reason why this prosperity and technical advancement happened at this time seems to be the growing skill to produce tools and weapons made of iron.

The population in many parts in Greece increased again, which in ancient times was often a sign of prosperity. The many findings of vessels and other material clearly show this prosperity in Athens, Attica in general and other places. Also, the large trading networks that existed at the time give evidence that people were again prosperous: Greek Geometric pottery has been found in the Near East (modern-day Syria, Jordan and Israel), in Etruria and near Rome in Italy.

6 Archaic Period

To facilitate widespread trade, the Greeks had to establish trading posts at various places around the Mediterranean. Usually, these posts were put up at places where important goods and material could be found, such as metals or incense or spices. At these locations the Greeks naturally got in contact with peoples from other places. There was not only an exchange of goods but also of technical skills, religious beliefs and many other ideas.

The Phoenicians were among the most active traders of the ancient world around 800 BCE. Phoenicia's location was the coastal area of modern-day Lebanon and parts of Syria. The most important cities of the Phoenicians were Tyre and Sidon. The Phoenicians had many trading posts along various coasts: northern Africa, Spain, Sicily, Sardinia and Cyprus. Because of Phoenicia's trading activity and its location, it served as a link between East and West, between the advanced civilizations that had flourished in Mesopotamia and Egypt for example, and the developing civilizations like Greece. We can see this influence in art where it seems that from around 750 to 650 BCE, motifs of Eastern origin were popular in Greece in the visual arts and also in literature.

One thing becomes clear when we look at the contact between Greeks and foreigners: the Greeks were willing to accept and try new things, which transformed aspects of their own culture in long-lasting ways.

The Greeks adopted something very useful from the Phoenicians directly: the alphabetic script. As discussed earlier, Linear B, the script that was used during the Mycenaean period, was not in use after ca. 1200 BCE, and there seem to be no evidence for literacy after this in Greece. The Phoenicians, however, had used around 1500 BCE a new script (after having used Cuneiform for around 1000 years before) based on 22 characters with no vowels. The Greeks adopted these and introduced vowels creating a largely phonetic (*Phonos* is the Greek word for "Sound") alphabet.

The earliest use of writing by ancient civilizations was most often a practical one: keeping track of goods. If we look at the evidence that we have so far, this seems not to be the case for the Greeks after they adopted and transformed the Phoenician characters. One of the earliest

pieces of evidence for the use of alphabetic script by the Greeks is found on the so-called *Cup of Nestor*. This piece of pottery is a drinking cup that was decorated with geometrical motifs and was produced in the 8th century BCE. Besides the artwork, we also find on this cup one of the oldest examples of written alphabetic Greek script that has been discovered so far. This short poem that we find on the Cup of Nestor is the first original piece of Greek poetry that has ever been discovered; it dates back to when the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Homer's famous epic poems, were presumably composed. This epigram on the Cup of Nestor, extending over three lines, has missing spots (by experts called *lacuna*) and follows a rhythm called *Hexameter*. The lacuna makes recreating the text quite difficult, but it reads something like this:

"I am the cup of Nestor from which one can drink with pleasure but whoever drinks from this cup will immediately be seized by the desire for Aphrodite with the beautiful crown."

This poem with its not-so-subtle hint that the consumer of the content of the cup (presumably wine) will fall in, or rather will want to make love, seems out of place when we examine where this piece of pottery has been found: in the grave of a boy not more than ten years old when he passed away. However, the details about individual burial customs, how each family treated the loss of a loved one, can never be known. Was it buried with the child because it was very valuable? What was the emotional value that the family attached to the cup?

The location of the grave in which the Cup of Nestor has been found informs us about trading networks. The grave is located on an island which today is called Ischia (*Pithekoussai* in ancient times). The cup found there was produced on the Greek island of Rhodes, indicating that the movement of people and goods was again widespread in the 8th century BCE. Prosperity had reached levels in the region that allowed large trading networks to be established and flourish. The resulting population increase in the 8th century led not only to the creation of trading posts, but also initiated colonization activities. Greeks established cities in Sicily, northern Africa and on the coast of the Black Sea. We will discuss these colonization efforts in more detail below.

During the Archaic period the Greeks began to build large monumental stone temples. The *Megaron*, the large central hall of the palace-complexes of the Mycenaean period, influenced the design of temples in the later Archaic and Classical period in Greece. During the Dark Age and

earlier, sanctuaries were usually small, made of mud-brick or wood, and usually consisted of one room. However, during the Archaic Period, especially during the 7th century, the Greeks changed the design of temples, adding colonnades and additional rooms.

The temples were considered to be residences of the gods. This is different from the role of houses of worship today, which are used by people to gather in religious activity. Thus the building of a religious structure is based on the needs of a population. In contrast, the Greeks built their temples so the god to whom the particular temple was dedicated, could take up residence. The Greeks shared in worshipping a group of Gods, some of whom we will discuss in more detail later. However, each city-state usually had a patron god or goddess to whom one or more sanctuaries were dedicated. The central place in the temple would usually contain a cult-statue of this divinity, symbolizing their residency.

In the Archaic period several Greek city-states started to attract worshippers from other cities to participate in their religious activities. These sanctuaries became *pan-hellenic*, which translates to "open to all Greeks". We have to remember that the Greek world at that time consisted of hundreds of independent city-states. Each *Polis* (Greek for "city-state)," as was mentioned above, preferred one or more of the group of gods in whose worship all the Greeks engaged. However, places like Olympia, Delos, Delphi and Dodona, for example, became known around the Greek world and beyond as attractive places of worship, especially during times when they offered festivals.

One of the most famous and popular religious festival in ancient times was the festival of Zeus at Olympia. The name of the god, Zeus, indicates Indo-European origin. This means that the people who migrated to the Greek world from the north worshipped this god before their arrival. According to later sources, like the philosopher Aristotle, the residents of Olympia in the year 776 BCE added athletic contests to an already existing festival dedicated to Zeus. These contests were held every four years, a period called *Olympiad*. This became a unit to measure time for the Greeks. Since various Greek city-states frequently were at war with each other, a truce was usually negotiated between Greek *Poleis* during the time when this festival was held, in order to make sure that the athletes could travel safely from their hometowns to Olympia. The athletes

were usually wealthy men, since it took a lot of leisure time to practice to become an outstanding competitor, time which poor people did not have. There were only a few disciplines in which these men competed against each other: running various distances and wrestling. The short distance run of about 200 yards was the main event. It is fascinating that in the modern Summer Olympics one of the premier events remains the short distance run (the 100 meter dash).

The Greeks called 200 yards a *stadion*; from this term our word “stadium” derives, changing its meaning. Similarly, our word *gymnasium* or *gym* goes back to the Greek word *gymnos,* which translates to “naked” because the athletes at Olympia competed naked against each other; this was also the custom during training and practice throughout Greece. The audience who witnessed the ancient contests at Olympia consisted of mostly wealthy men and possibly unmarried women.

Other big differences between the early athletic contests at Olympia and the modern Olympic Games were that there were no national teams representing countries (city-states); winners didn’t receive medals like today but crowns or rather garlands made of olive leaves. However, material rewards often came later once the successful athletes returned home. In their city-states some of them received free meals provided by the city-state for the rest of their lives. If we compare this to the modern Olympics, there are strong similarities. An athlete today has to spend years of intense every-day training to become a competitor. If these athletes win at the Olympics, the reward is a gold medal which is worth tens of thousands of dollars. After all the hard work that these athletes put in, this compensation, offered through a medal alone, is insufficient. However, many of these successful athletes receive material rewards later on because they become popular and receive profitable sponsorship deals. In the ancient Greek city-states, this fame, based on the success at the contests at Olympia, also helped some of the winners. They were celebrated, and a few even were worshipped in hero-cults by succeeding generations.

The festival at Olympia with its athletic contests became hugely popular. At the peak of its popularity around the second century of the Common Era, we estimate that about 50,000 people

travelled to Olympia, a staggering number considering that across the Greek world only about 4 million Greeks lived at the time.

The growing popularity of the athletic contests at the festival at Olympia led to more athletes competing on a professional level. One of the most famous athletes of ancient times was a man named Milo of Croton, a city located in the south of Italy. He was a wrestler winning first prize six times in a row at Olympia, starting in the year 536 BCE (or 540 BCE) which means that he stayed on top of his sport, competing on the highest levels, for more than 20 years. This achievement led to fame and to many anecdotes and legends being told about him. The Greeks for example claimed that Milo would eat the raw flesh and drink the blood of a bull to put fear into his opponents. The legends about Milo indicate also that he made his fights more interesting and attractive by introducing some elements of show: it was said that Milo snapped a cord that was tied around his head, by holding his breath, which led to the veins on his temples expanding extraordinarily. We can compare this to modern-day athletes who also often invent, either spontaneously or on purpose, so-called “signature-moves” for which they become known, in addition to their athletic prowess.

Milo’s death is also part of legends: he tried to tear a tree apart, but while doing so his hands got stuck and he got trapped. Then either a pack of wolves or a lion ate him.

The question if there was a separate festival where women could compete is difficult to answer. There is only one ancient source, a writer called Pausanias who lived in the second century CE, who claims that unmarried women competed at a different festival in honor of Hera. Supposedly these competitions were called *Heraia*. We must be aware that the Greek world at that time was very patriarchal. Men dominated society, and women of social status rarely left their homes, and the predominant religious conservative beliefs around Greek city-states would not have allowed women to compete against each other, let alone in the nude. The one exception to this rule is Sparta which we will discuss further below.

6.1 The Greek City-State

The Greek term for city or city-state is *Polis* (plural: *Poleis*), as we have discussed already. Their development happened for the most part during the Archaic Period. While during the Mycenaean period central palace-complexes existed, the Dark Age saw a change of settlements to more independent, isolated ones of which some grew later into independent city-states. These *Poleis* were the foundations of Greek civilization during the Archaic and Classical periods in Greek history.

A Polis can be described in this way: they were states that in general were independent and sovereign, meaning its inhabitants guarded their own borders and issued their own coins. Their size was small, if we compare it to modern standards: Greek city-states had usually less than ten thousand residents; there were some exceptions: Athens for example, which had around the time of the Persian Wars approximately 40,000 inhabitants, or Sparta with about half of that.

The Polis consisted of a fortified urban center and villages that were located around it. Generally, the urban center was in reach by foot in one day from any point within the city-state boundary.

The Greek city-states shared common features. There was, for example, the fortified lower town, the urban heart of the Polis. Also, usually near this center, was located an *acropolis*, which translates to something like "elevated city." Actually, it was a hill that was also fortified, separately from the lower town. Originally it seems that the purpose of the acropolis was to be a place where the residents of the town could escape, in case the lower town should fall into the hands of an enemy. Since the acropolis usually marked the highest point in the center of the Polis, the residents also built sanctuaries on top of them. These sanctuaries were often dedicated to the god or goddess which the inhabitants worshipped as their patron or favorite deity.

One of the most important places within a Greek city-state was the *agora*. This was the large centrally located square where residents would gather to hold markets, meetings, elections, festivals, athletic contests, theater performances or military training. It was the space where

people would meet, the principal public space of the Polis. Next to the agora residents would find the buildings in which the administration, necessary to run the city-state, was located.

Being a resident of a Greek Polis with full legal rights meant you were a citizen, a *Polites*. Citizenship was very important. It provided basic levels of legal equality, and a citizen could expect to be treated equally under the law. However, we have to be careful not to apply our modern standards of what we consider equality to ancient societies. As was mentioned before: there existed slavery in Greek city-states; women played in general no role in politics or public life except in religious practices; and many other aspects of what we consider to be necessary for equality were not present in Ancient Greece. However, even the idea of having equality under the law for citizens, and making it not depending on wealth, was remarkable, especially when we compare this to other places in the ancient world. Civilizations in the Near East, for example, or even the earlier Mycenaean civilization in the Greek world, showed strict separations between rich and poor. During the Archaic period this early, very basic (and for our modern eyes, insufficient), theory of equality started to be developed.

Of course social and economic divisions were still very much present in Greek society during this time. Very poor people were not allowed to vote for example, and to become an official depended on your wealth; resident aliens and former slaves never gained citizenship and were thus denied the possibility to be active in politics and governance.

6.2 Slavery

As has been pointed out earlier, slavery existed in the Greek World definitely as early as the Mycenaean period, and the use of slaves continued throughout the Archaic period, Classical period and later. In the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Homer used various terms with the meaning *slave*. The use of these give evidence that there was a system in place which determined the relationship between free people and the ones that lacked freedom.

Usually in the ancient world the largest group that ended up as slaves were prisoners of war, and they were completely dominated by their owners, who earned large profits from their

labor. In the poems of Homer, we have examples of friendship between owner and slave, and it might be the case that the relationship between owner and slave was sometimes not based on total domination. However, we need to be aware that good treatment of slaves was probably just another part of ownership; the master did not want to harm the person who created profit for him.

After slaves were captured, wherever the Greeks were able to find them, they would then bring them from their places of origin (often areas around the Black Sea or Asia Minor) to Greek city-states. Once these people lost their freedom and became slaves, they lost all legal rights and became possessions. There was a set of laws available for slaves, but it only applied to them on the slave-level. An owner could give slaves freedom, and some of these previous slaves had economic success later in their lives, but such instances were very few and far between.

Slaves were used in various different economic areas; women and children mostly worked in households. There they were responsible for carrying water from the public fountains, clean the homes of their owners and cook for them. Some slaves worked in manufactories where they would make pottery, or they had to work on farms. A very difficult task awaited the slave who ended up having to work in a silver or goldmine. In general, we can say that the law did not prohibit abuse of slaves.

The owning of slaves was common in many city-states, and in some cities, which expanded their territory like Athens, it became so widespread that a household with modest means could afford two to three slaves, while the elite and the very wealthy inhabitants, owned up to fifteen.

Some Greek thinkers, like the philosopher Aristotle, who lived in the 4th century BCE, justified the system of slavery (in his work *Politics*), by pointing out that some people are born to be slaves, while others are determined to be masters. He himself supposedly owned thirteen slaves.

6.3 Colonization

As has been pointed out earlier, the Greek landscape, with its many steep mountains and rugged terrain, did not support widespread political unity. Traveling between settlements was difficult, and thus communication between towns was limited. This difficulty favored the development of many isolated city-states. These shared to some extent the same culture and language (with various dialects), but they often did not cooperate.

It also frequently happened that the land that surrounded the urban center of the city-state was not large or fertile enough to feed a growing population. This is one of the main reasons why the Greek city-states were often not larger than one to three thousand inhabitants. Athens at its peak in the classical period (the middle of the fifth century BCE), had probably around 40,000 residents, and it was the exception to the rule, because most of the Greek cities were much smaller.

If the population grew and the land of the city-state was not enough to feed everyone, new policies needed to be implemented. One of them was to colonize other places. This was a very dangerous undertaking, and as such must have been difficult for the residents to begin. Documents survive from this period which show the process of colonization. We have, for example, an inscription from the island of Thera (now called Santorini). In this inscription the residents of Thera decided around 630 BCE to colonize a part of northern Africa called Cyrene (modern Libya). When one reads this inscription, it becomes evident that the people of Thera knew about the dangers involved; the difficult sea voyage and other various unknowns, including the type of welcome they would receive upon arrival and even the possibility that the colonizers would wish to abandon their mission. Being torn from family and friends must have been problematic, not only for those that left on such missions, but also for the family left behind. Usually, the selected colonizers were male, presumably because of the dangers involved, like sailing treacherous seas or possible armed conflict in the new land. These colonizers were expected to find women among the locals. This happened either peacefully through negotiations or with violence through kidnappings. The most famous example of the violent way which colonizers used to secure women in the ancient world, is given by the Roman writer Livy. In his

famous story about the *Rape of the Sabine Women*, he describes how the newcomers/colonizers (the Romans) in Italy kidnapped the daughters of the locals, the Sabini. This goes to show that this practice was not a particular Greek custom but a widespread part of a colonizing process.

The Greeks called the leader of a colonizing expedition *ktistes*, and as such he had a lot of responsibility. He was in charge of figuring out the location of the new city, focusing especially on its ability to provide a solid defensive position; he also established new temples for the gods and was in charge of the fire that had to be delivered from the mother-city to the colony. The word *metropolis* in ancient Greek translates into "mother-city," and it originates in this colonization-movement. The meaning today changed obviously since metropolis now refers to a very large city which was not the meaning originally. While originally quite small, many of the Greek colonies later became very powerful; examples would be cities such as Naples in Italy, Istanbul in Turkey or Marseille in France.

Since going on a colonizing expedition was such a dangerous mission and a difficult decision to make, Greek city-states usually wanted to make sure that the gods approve. It seems that the Greeks especially wanted Apollo's blessing since he was considered, among many other things, the god of prophecy.

6.4 Delphi

Located high up in a mountain range called *Parnassos* in central Greece, Delphi was difficult to reach. The journey to this oracle was burdensome, considering the means of transportation available at the time. However, once the petitioners arrived at their destination they were rewarded with beautiful surroundings.

In the late Bronze Age, around 1200 BCE, Delphi was the home of a sanctuary dedicated to *Gaia*, the Earth goddess. Later it was associated with the god Apollo. During the Archaic period, beginning in the 8th century BCE, Greek city-states and leaders from beyond the Greek world sent representatives to Delphi, because they wanted to secure the approval of Apollo for important decisions, such as sending out colonists or beginning a war, to name just two.

Individuals also sought advice from Apollo over family matters, but the long journey and associated costs allowed only the elite to afford it. Often the visitors tried to secure Apollo's good-will with precious gifts.

It was believed that the *Pythia*, the priestess of Apollo at Delphi, would respond to the questions asked by the visitors, functioning as the medium between the god and humans. Often the answers given were vague, cryptic, and in need of interpretation by the petitioners to figure out their true meaning.

Over the years scholars tried to explain the reason why Delphi became an oracle in the first place. A theory developed that the unique geological location of Delphi played an important part. Various fault lines crossed the area in ancient times, and some scholars claimed that it was likely that hydrocarbon gases evaporated and could have been used to alter the mental states of priests, priestesses and other participants at the oracle at Delphi.

People across the Mediterranean believed that Delphi was an oracle of the gods; its reputation was great in the Greek world and beyond and lasted for centuries, from the early Archaic Period deep into the following Classical era (500 -323 BCE). As one can imagine, Delphi also played an important part in Greek international affairs, since information concerning very important matters was frequently collected there first.

Delphi was one of the most important Pan-Hellenic sanctuaries of the Greek world, and as such was in many ways different from regular city-states such as Athens, Corinth or Sparta. Before we discuss some of these major city-states in more detail, we need to talk about the forms of government that were in place.

6.5 Forms of government

The terms that we still use today to describe forms of government have, for the most part, Greek roots, since these forms of government were either invented or introduced to Western civilization by the Greeks.

During the Archaic period the most common form of government in the Greek world was aristocracy, which translates into “the best rule”. This word hints at the origins of this government: leaders had to excel and earn the privileges that came with being accepted as leaders, often during war. Gradually these leaders made sure that the right to rule remained within their families, so that it became often unnecessary to prove to be “the best,” it was sufficient to be a member of an aristocratic family to enjoy privileges.

Oligarchy as a form of government is closely related to aristocracy. In English, oligarchy means the “few rule.” These few were usually wealthy men or men who had the support of influential affluent backers; they then gathered and used various means to become leaders. The difference between aristocrats and oligarchs is the fact that to be an aristocrat meant mostly that you were born into an aristocratic family, while becoming an oligarch was not dependent on heritage.

The idea of a government of the people, meaning the idea that the people govern themselves, was developed by the Greeks or, to be more specific, by the Athenians at the end of the Archaic period into the beginning of the Classical era (around 500 BCE). The word *democracy* is commonly translated as “people rule.” There were many different stages that in the end led to the first democracy in Athens, which we discuss later when we cover Athens in particular. This first democracy was different from what we call a democracy today, since, for example, slavery was a common feature of democratic Athens, and we would not call a system that allows slavery democratic today; however, we must acknowledge that the idea to allow the people to govern themselves was a very progressive step and a break with tradition at the time.

Some Greek city-states experienced tyrannies. This word is not rooted in Greek but of Eastern origin, and its meaning today is different from its use in the Archaic and Classical periods. During the Archaic period, for example, the word *tyrant* would describe a ruler who came to power by using unconstitutional means and/or who ruled in a way that was unlimited by law or constitution. The term “tyrant” originated most likely in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) and was adopted by the Greeks. The negative meaning that this term carries today, can be traced back to the philosophers Plato (born around 428 BCE) and Aristotle (born in the year 384 BCE). Both

describe tyrants in a very negative way as rulers who abuse power and dominate a populace that is unwilling to be ruled by them.

The term for a constitutional kingdom is monarchy, the ancient Greek word that translates into “one ruler.” After the end of the Mycenaean period this form of government had basically vanished across the Greek world, except in one particular city-state: Sparta. However, the monarchy in Sparta was complicated because it was embedded in a mixed constitution. Let us have a closer look at this unique city.

6.6 Sparta

Sparta is one of the best known city-states of the ancient Greek world. Its popularity increased in recent decades because of movies (for example, *300: Rise of an Empire*, which was released in the year 2014 and was the sequel to the 2007 film *300*; both of which were influenced by an earlier film, the very successful *The 300 Spartans* (1962). These are but a few examples of how Sparta remains popular up to today. We will describe the influence Sparta had on writers and thinkers throughout history a little later; first we need to look at Sparta in more general terms to understand the unique system its citizens developed.

There exists some confusion regarding the terms used to describe Sparta. Without going into more details like the origin and use of the terms, we can simplify it in the following way: The Spartan city-state was located in a region called *Laconia*. The city-state in its entirely is technically called *Lacedaimonia*, while *Sparta* describes the urban center itself. The usage of these terms varies; so, for example, it is often the case that the citizens of Sparta are referred to as *Lacedaimonians* or *Laconians*.

The region where Sparta is located belongs to the Southeastern part of the Peloponnese, the peninsula where other places that we covered already, like Mycenae or Olympia, are to be found. Within this area Sparta lies on a plain in a valley between rugged mountains. This gave the Spartans the advantage of defending their territory more easily. The river Eurotas was close-by and provided a source of fresh water. The Spartans also had access to the sea through a harbor

called Glytheon. This harbor was located about 25 miles south of the urban center. However, this harbor proved to be dangerous because of currents and strong winds; this was one of the reasons why the Spartans did not evolve into a major sea-power early on in their history. On the other hand, this difficult access to the harbor basically meant that it was very difficult to attack the Spartans from the seaside. As a result, the Spartans were interested on developing their strength on land, and they were very successful doing so. Sparta was the most powerful city-state in the Greek world for much of the Archaic and Classical periods.

There is much uncertainty regarding the origins of the Spartans. It seems possible that the ancestors of the Spartans were peoples referred to as *Dorians*, who during an event commonly referred to as the "Dorian Invasion," came to the Southeastern Peloponnese from central Greece around 950 BCE. The invaders overpowered and enslaved the local inhabitants. These slaves are later known in Sparta as *Helots*. Other residents of the conquered areas did not end up as Helots (slaves) of the Spartans but entered into a special relationship with them. They were referred to as *Perioikoi*, which means something like "people who live around," in this case referring to people who dwell around Sparta. These Perioikoi were not citizens of Sparta.

During the late 8th century Sparta expanded its territory to the west. They conquered a region called Messenia; the geography of the region, however, made it difficult for the Spartans to control this territory, because the rugged mountains between Messenia and Sparta delayed any timely response by the Spartans to troubles created by the conquered Messenians; and they proved to be troublesome - whenever the Messenians saw an opportunity to revolt, they did so.

The Spartans thus faced constant threats very close to home: the Helots were hostile to them, since obviously they detested their status as slaves; they also outnumbered the Spartan citizens to a large extent. In addition, the Messenians were a permanent danger next door. The Spartans had to find a way to deal with these threats: they developed a lifestyle that was aimed at creating a very strong army who would keep them safe. This military lifestyle was admired by many over the centuries. It was successful because it not only succeeded in keeping the dangers at bay, but it helped Sparta dominate the Greek World for much of the Archaic and Classical periods. However, all of this came at a high prize. Spartan citizens were expected to contribute

to the welfare of the Spartan state in all aspects of their lives. Obviously, this led to a lack of personal freedom and rather gruesome elements in the organization of their lifestyles. Let us have a brief look at what this lifestyle entailed for the Spartans. Most of the details of what we know about Sparta in this regard derives from a writer named Plutarch, who lived in the first century CE.

The total control over Spartan citizens began at birth. Spartan infants were examined by officials. They would determine if the child was healthy and vital, and would decide if this child was to be raised or abandoned. This meant that the infant would either be left to die or would be adopted by strangers right after birth. Most scholars today think that the widespread notion that the infants were thrown off a cliff into a chasm on Mount Taygetus is a myth.

All Spartan children received the same education; the fathers were generally not involved in educating their offspring. At a young age, around six or seven, boys were taken away from their families. They were then raised by the Spartan state as warriors, until they reached the age of thirty. During their education the boys and young men were organized into groups called *herds* and they were raised and trained according to three basic principles: obedience, group solidarity and the development of military skills. Thus, all aspects of the Spartan education were aimed at creating the perfect soldier, and it seems that if any state ever came close to achieving this goal, it was Sparta. However, it came at the sacrifice of personal freedom and harsh, according to modern standards, untenable demands that the Spartan citizens had to fulfil.

The everyday training of the boys and young men was organized to please the previously mentioned principles. The boys were made to walk barefoot all the time so that they would toughen their feet and be able to go on extensive military expeditions. In order to acclimate them to the elements, boys often had to stay completely naked even in inclement weather; everyone received only one coat to wear throughout the year. It is important to remember that winters in Greece are frequently cold, and these conditions must have been difficult to deal with. Officials called *Ephors* inspected the boys every day, and every ten days they would examine them in the nude.

Spartan boys were not allowed to just talk; they were only allowed to respond when spoken to by superiors. This rule has influenced languages to this day. In English for example the word *laconic* means "not using many words" and it originates in the name of the region where Sparta is located - *Laconia*.

The Spartan state often kept their boys hungry; so much so that the boys, to satisfy their hunger, needed to steal food. However, when the boys were caught stealing, they were severely punished and humiliated. This was intended so that the boys would develop stealth tactics which later was deemed useful when it was necessary to sneak up on enemies.

At some point it became part of the Spartan education that the boys were sent out to live in the wilderness; there it was not only their task to get-by and survive, but also to hunt down and kill helots who had run away and were believed to plan to subvert the Spartan system.

Group solidarity was an important principle of the Spartan education. The Spartan man would spend most of his time with the fifteen members of his army group, not only during military-skill training sessions, but also by taking the meals together and sleeping in the same room with the members of their unit. They slept on rough mats they had to make themselves.

There are many more tough requirements that the Spartan education system required boys and men to fulfil. It goes without saying that not every Spartan boy or young man was able to cope with these. The consequences of this inability were harsh, not only in their private lives but also officially: the ones who did not make it through the training, either physically or mentally, could not become full Spartan citizens, called *homoioi*; this meant that they did not have the same legal rights as their fellow Spartans. They were also stigmatized: they were made to wear clothes that looked ridiculous, and they were not allowed to shave like the Spartan men usually did (long beard but no moustache). Through these measures it was immediately visible to Spartan citizens who had been capable of completing the training and who was not. It seems that even relatives humiliated and made fun of the ones who were not able to fulfill the demands the Spartan society put on them.

However, this tough training and system of education made sure that, in the Greek world, the Spartans became known for being the best warriors. The Spartan soldiers indeed were exceptionally well trained and also well equipped. The goal of the Spartan system was to produce the perfect soldier, who had to be brave and skilled on the fighting grounds and who had to be reluctant to give up and surrender and who ultimately had to be willing to die for Sparta.

Spartan women and girls also helped to achieve the goal of the Spartan education: to produce the perfect soldier. Their education was geared towards making sure that they would give birth to a healthy boy who would grow up to be a soldier. Because of this attitude, Spartan women had more freedom in their daily lives than women of other Greek city-states. Spartan women, for example, were allowed to exercise outdoors, which was impossible for other women around the Greek world. We have to remember that usually women of higher social status rarely left their homes; this was possible because often slaves had to do household work. In the various Greek cities women also frequently received less food than men, but not so in Sparta; here the women were well nourished, and it was even possible for them to drink wine, which was not happening elsewhere. A consequence of the fact that the men were always away receiving military training was that Spartan women were responsible for managing their households.

All around the Greek city-states the women of Sparta were famous for these freedoms, and for some these freedoms were not tolerable. The philosopher Aristotle, for example, gives voice to the patriarchal sentiment that prevailed in the Greek city-states: he wrote in his work *Politics* that Spartan women "live in every sort of intemperance and luxury" (translation by Benjamin Lovett).

The education that the Spartan girls and women received, was provided and paid for by the Spartan state, which was also unusual in ancient times; in most cases in patriarchal societies like the ones in the Greek world, fathers or husbands either educated the girls and women themselves or paid someone to do so, if they wished them to be educated in the first place.

The question might be raised of how men and women would marry in Sparta considering the fact that the Spartan system did not allow for much space and time to organize marriages, let alone meet spouses, since the men were basically constantly engaged within their groups. It

seems that by law men had to marry at around 20 years of age, but they would not live with their wives until much later. The details about sex and marriage in Sparta are mostly based on the accounts of Plutarch, the author previously mentioned, who wrote much later, in the first century of the Common Era. From him we learn that Spartan women married later in life (around 20 years of age) than the women of other Greek city-states, who got married when extremely young, around fourteen. On the Spartan wedding day the hair of the bride-to-be was cut short and she was dressed in the clothes of a man. The bridegroom would leave his group and enter the wedding chamber where the bride was waiting for him. They would consummate the marriage; then the man would leave again to return to his army quarters and the other men of his unit. Thus, the married couple would spend very little time together, especially when the man was still in his prime years when the primary focus remained on his military capabilities.

It is important to remember that marriage, like everything else in Sparta, had to serve the purpose of contributing to the main goal: to provide Sparta with soldiers. It seems that there existed a trial period in the early stages of marriage to see if the couple would be able to have children; it also seems likely, according to various ancient sources, that plural marriages were possible, meaning several men could father children with the same woman.

It is necessary to point out that there existed a tendency already in ancient times to use Sparta as either an ideal state, or as an example of things that were perceived to be wrong. Thus it is difficult to recreate the details surrounding a Spartan marriage, because private customs of the common people were usually not written about. So when later writers discuss Sparta and the lives of regular citizens, they do so frequently by applying their own contemporary standards.

What we know in more detail than private matters is the Spartan constitution. The Spartans attributed their constitution to Lycourgos, a legendary lawgiver. Whether he was a real person or not is a source of scholarly debate. Regardless, the Spartans believed him to be the one who created the constitution that established the austere military lifestyle that they had to follow. This Spartan constitution is a mix between several forms of government; it contains elements of monarchy, oligarchy, and even certain traits of democracy. The monarchy in Sparta was unusual because it allowed for two kings who inherited the throne. This system had the advantage that

one king could remain home and take care of domestic affairs, while the other could take charge of a military campaign. The democratic element of the Spartan constitution was based on an election: the Spartan citizens in the citizen-assembly would elect five officials called *ephors* who functioned as overseers of the kings. Another assembly constitutes the oligarchic element; it was called the *Gerousia*. It consisted of 28 elders and the two kings. In this council most decisions were made; it had more influence in Spartan politics than the other institutions. Other democratic features in the Spartan constitution included the separate citizen assembly that elected the members of the *Gerousia* and could veto legislation. These various features made sure that a system of checks and balances was in place.

Other aspects of Sparta were also unique in the Greek world. Its society did not highly value private property; it was rather looked down upon. As a form of currency, Spartans used pieces of iron, which could be a couple of feet long. In general, we can say that the Spartan economy was designed to serve the overall idea of supporting the welfare of the Spartan state, not individuals.

The entirety of the system, the constitution and the organization of the economy and politics, not only helped Sparta to flourish, but it also provided it with the means to dominate the Greek world for many generations. This domination is one of the reasons why later thinkers frequently looked back in history and used Sparta to support their arguments, and very often while doing so put Sparta up as an ideal for other states to follow. This started already shortly after Sparta had declined. The philosopher Plato, for example, in the 4th century BCE wrote *The Republic*, in which he discusses the questions of what justice is and how a just city-state should function. Plato's ideal city-state contains many features from the Spartans. Accordingly, Plato sees as the foundations of his exemplary state the ideas of total control of the citizens and the necessity of doing everything for the shared common goal. Only the men and women who belong to the elite receive an education; the members of the lowest classes in the society (very likely slaves, although some scholars defend Plato and argue that he did not have slavery in his ideal state) do all the household work. The women of higher ranks have as their main goal to give birth to healthy children. Plato argues that in his perfect state those children that are "weak" have to

be abandoned. Similarly to Sparta, education is provided by the state. The economy in Plato's city-state has no place for private property and currency (money) is not allowed.

Throughout the centuries, aspects of Spartan society have been used and misused; today we at times can hear critics of capitalistic economic systems use Sparta to claim that, although the Spartan economy was not appreciative of private wealth and property and was basically anti-capitalistic, Sparta nevertheless brought forth brave and patriotic citizens who dominated regions for long periods. On the other hand, some people argued in opposition that communism is bad because it includes features that Sparta incorporated, like the negation of private capital.

We also find people who use Sparta to make a point against any regime that aims at total control over its people, and most recently we sometimes hear praise of Sparta because of the (relative) freedom its women enjoyed, especially compared to women living in other Greek city-states. This points to a bigger problem in the field of history: people tend to use only one aspect of a complex issue and use it to make their argument.

6.7 Tyrannies

Sparta's totalitarian system worked for many generations, but this system was unique in the Greek world. The most common form of government during the Archaic period (roughly 800 to 500 BCE) was aristocracy. Oligarchic governments also existed, and sometimes opposition arose to these leaders, especially among ambitious members of the elite who wanted to become rulers themselves. The only way for these men to overthrow the existing government, meaning the landowning families, was by coming to power in an unconstitutional way, resulting in a tyranny. What was usually necessary to overthrow the existing government, was the support of the military. If one of these ambitious men was able to secure the backing of a significant number of soldiers, he could gain control over the city-state and would then rule in his own name, becoming a tyrant.

As mentioned before, in this period the word *tyranny* or *tyrant* didn't necessarily have the negative meaning it carries today. It meant primarily that the leader came to power by not

following the law. Quite often these tyrants became very popular and were beneficial to their respective cities, like the tyrants Cypselus and his son Periander of Corinth. However, there also existed tyrants that were brutal and overreaching. One such tyrant was Polycrates.

The Greek historian Herodotus describes Polycrates as very ambitious and unscrupulous. According to Herodotus' account, he came to power on the island of Samos (probably around 540 BCE) together with his two brothers, with the support of heavily armed soldiers. He then had one of his brothers killed and the other put into exile, establishing himself as the sole leader. While at the helm, his policy was aimed at expansion. It seems that Polycrates was one of the earliest leaders in the Greek world to understand the necessity of having power over the sea; he created a very strong navy with which he strived to conquer the Greek islands and Ionia.

Polycrates seems to have lived in luxury, and he used his wealth to become a supporter of the arts. He invited poets and craftsmen to come to Samos and work there. In general, we learn that Polycrates developed the Samian economy by introducing new techniques and ideas in various areas like agriculture.

The most famous story about Polycrates is delivered to us by Herodotus in book three of his *Histories*. It describes the friendship and alliance that Polycrates made with the Egyptian pharaoh Amasis. According to this legend, Amasis received information about the continuing success of Polycrates. The Egyptian ruler then became worried, believing that no one could have so much success without sooner or later meeting with trouble. In order to help his friend, Amasis sent a letter to Polycrates, telling him that the gods do not like it when mortals are too successful because they get envious, implying that the gods would make sure that Polycrates would suffer. Amasis advised Polycrates to do the following to avoid this: he should identify his most treasured asset, the one it would hurt him the most to lose, and get rid of it. This would help him end his string of successes and good luck. Polycrates likes this advice and acts accordingly: he thinks hard about which asset he treasures the most, and finally he determines that it is a beautiful ring that he owns, which was made by a great artist. He embarks on a boat and throws this ring into the sea. When he returns home he feels sorrow over his loss. However, after a couple of days a fisherman wants an audience with Polycrates to give him a gift, an enormous fish that he had

caught earlier, one that was so large and beautiful that this fisherman thought it would make a nice present for the tyrant. Polycrates is very happy and invites the fisherman to have the fish for dinner. When the fish is prepared by servants, they find the ring that Polycrates had thrown away, in the belly of the fish. When they hand over the ring to their master, Polycrates is full of joy. He immediately writes a letter to his friend Amasis telling him about his good luck. However, Amasis after reading the letter, does something unexpected: he ends his friendship with Polycrates. He writes to him that he does not want to witness how Polycrates will suffer, which undoubtedly will happen since no one can have good luck constantly.

This legend of the ring of Polycrates has been told time and again in various ways over the centuries. Its original purpose seems to have been to inform us about flaws in Polycrates' character. The historian Herodotus suggests that Polycrates should have identified as his most valued and treasured asset not a mere material possession such as the ring; he should have determined that what he desired and valued the most was power and its expansion. Herodotus ends the story of Polycrates by describing how he pays a price for his behavior: Polycrates dies a horrible death by being crucified by a man who lured him into a trap by promising him the potential of even greater power.

In Herodotus' description of Polycrates we find a tyrant who already starts to look like tyrants in our contemporary view of the term. However, we need once again to remember that tyrants during this time (Archaic period) were often good rulers and beneficial to their respective city-states. They often introduced large projects to support the people and make lives easier for them, for example by having new wells and fountains built or by creating new festivals. Of course the tyrants often engaged in these efforts to serve the common good out of self-interest, since they wanted the support of the populace. These tyrants were aware of their unconstitutional status. However, it was also the case that in Greek city-states it was often expected that the wealthy and powerful would give back to the community. This was especially the case in Athens.

6.8 Athens

Along with Sparta, Athens is the most famous of the Greek city-states. The development of democracy as a form of government is closely linked with Athens, but, as we shall see, it also experienced tyranny. Athens faced problems during the Archaic period which other city-states also had to deal with at the time: rivalries between members of the elite (the aristocracy), which often resulted in tyrannies or tensions between the elite and the people at large. Sometimes city-states used unique ways to face these problems. We have heard how Sparta, for example, chose to completely control the life of its residents, so that the state would be strong by having exceptional military capabilities. Athens found its own way: it began to allow more and more people to participate in politics, establishing steps towards a democracy. Before we talk about this development let us have a look at Athens in its earlier period.

During the Late Bronze Age (around 1600 to 1150 BCE), Athens was already the most important and largest settlement in Attica, the east-central region of Greece where it is located. Athens at that time was probably a Mycenaean palace-center possessing some power over other settlements. It seems that Athens escaped the fate of the other major Mycenaean palace-centers such as Mycenae, Tiryns or Pylos: it was not invaded. What Athens could not avoid was the effects of the chaos that hit the area around 1200-1150 BCE. This Dark Age, as we have discussed earlier, witnessed the collapse of the economy, trade and various social structures all over the Eastern Mediterranean, and Athens was not an exception. However, Athens was one of the Greek city-states that recovered. We have some evidence of pottery (called "Protogeometric" because it displays simple ornaments such as broad bands and concentric circles while leaving much of the surface plain) being again produced in Athens around 1050 BCE, which suggests a timeframe for the beginning of the recovery. It also seems that ever since the Late Bronze Age, Athens was a central settlement in Attica without any interruption and continues in this role today.

Once the recovery was underway in Athens, the city-state experienced a period when the economy, trade and as a result, the overall wealth of Athens grew significantly. We have evidence for long-distance trade between Athens and overseas areas from that time in the form of goods

that have been found in graves of rich Athenian individuals, and analysis shows that these gifts were imported.

Population grew in Athens when the economy did well, as is usually the case with pre-modern societies. The phenomenon that we see today, that the wealthiest nations around the world see their populations shrink, is a rather recent development. The growing population in Athens needed shelter, leading to new settlements being constructed throughout Attica. Unlike other city-states, Athens then did not engage in colonization; it did not send out colonists to establish settlements in faraway regions.

Gradually the settlements in Attica ended up under Athenian leadership. This process is called *Synoecism*, Ancient Greek for "living together." Later generations in Athens created myths that attributed this unification to a hero called Theseus. It was common in Greek city-states to do this, to find a hero and claim that he was the founder of their respective settlement. In this way the Greeks were able to put their early history, which belonged to a time before events were recorded, in a written context. It might be that some of these heroes were great leaders of the past, whose status later was elevated to legend.

The Athenians believed Theseus to be the founder, the one who was able to unify Athens with the surrounding settlements in Attica. The writer Plutarch tells us about Theseus and his many adventures. Many of these had to do with eliminating dangers that awaited travelers. So Theseus had to fight robbers and thieves who preyed on travelers to and from Athens. Since this was part of the mythology, these murderers and robbers are described as having extraordinary powers and as using them for harmful and cruel purposes. A famous example of such a dangerous man was Procrustes. He was a smith by trade as well as a robber who lived in Attica and according to myth he was the son of the god Poseidon. He possessed a bed of iron onto which he would place travelers that were passing by. After having forced them to lie on this bed, he would measure: if the victim was too small, Procrustes would use his tools from his work as a smith to fit the body to the bed; if he was too tall Procrustes would begin to amputate limb after limb. Of course, the result was always that the victim died at the end. Theseus took on Procrustes and punished him in the same way: he put him on his own bed and "made him fit." The word

"Procustean" in modern English goes back to this cruelty described by various Greek authors, including Plutarch in his *Life of Theseus*. The word today means a made-up and often ruthless or cruel standard, that does not take into account the facts.

There were many other mythological bandits and thieves that Theseus had to fight in order to secure the region and become the founding father of Athens. Even the name Theseus reminds us of his perceived role in the establishment of Athens: it derives from the Greek word for institution, *thesmos*. According to his status as founder, the Athenians made Theseus their mythological king, who had lived in a palace on the acropolis of Athens.

By the end of the Dark Age and the beginning of the Archaic period (around 800 BCE), it seems that the unification of Athens with the settlements in Attica was successful: no settlement in the region declared independence and all considered themselves Athenian. In contrast to Sparta, which subjugated the former inhabitants and made them slaves (helots), Athens did not engage in this type of treatment of the local populace. However, this unification of Athens and Attica did not happen without creating problems. A big concern was the distribution of the residents. The majority of the people governed by Athens lived in the countryside, and it was quite cumbersome for them to travel to Athens. For some, it might have taken days to get to the urban center, considering the mountainous, rugged terrain and the simple means of transport. Those people that lived far away from Athens found it difficult to engage in the process of governing the city-state, and they gradually began to feel underrepresented. This problem became a bigger concern when free farmers, who lived outside the urban center, became the part of the population that grew fastest. Some of these farmers also accumulated more wealth by owning more and more land. Based on this wealth and their control over the food supply, these landowners demanded a bigger role in governance. Thus we find Athens having an aristocratic government at the beginning of the Archaic period. However, it seems that the population-growth of the farmers living outside of Athens in Attica was so rapid and also included less wealthy small farmers, that gradually demands of participation in governance led to the first democracy being established in Athens. This is quite extraordinary: we have to remember that other city-states of the Greek world faced similar problems at this point in time, having similar

governments (most of the Greek city-states at the beginning of the Archaic period were aristocratic), but none developed a system in which people were ruling themselves. We have seen, for example, how Sparta dealt with its problems: they established a totalitarian system that took freedom away from people instead of giving them more responsibility in governance. But before we talk further about this development of democracy, let us have a look at the earlier form of government in Athens.

The Athenian government in the so-called Dark Age (around 900 BCE) might have been a monarchy with a king ruling over it; however, this is still unclear and based to a large degree on legends. During the early Archaic period, these kings possibly still had a powerful position in Athens, because it seems that they were the leaders among a group of aristocratic wealthy landowners; at this point we begin to think about Athens as an aristocracy. The important institution of this Athenian aristocracy was the council of the Areopagus. This council is named after the location where it would assemble: the hill of Ares, in Ancient Greek called the *Areopagus*. The members of this council were the elite aristocrats of Athens: wealthy landowners who previously held the most important office in Athens called *Archon*. The number of *Archontes* changed over the years; in the early Archaic Period there were three, later we find nine in Athens. Other aristocratic Greek city-states also used these types of officials and referred to them by the same title, *Archon*; their powers, however, were different depending on the circumstances of each individual *Polis*.

In Athens, the *Archontes* were mainly responsible for being the leaders of the government and the military; they were also in charge of solving disputes and issuing verdicts in criminal cases. In addition, they also were involved in the civic aspects of religious affairs. Basically, they were in charge of the executive and judicial branch. As indicated, most often these *Archontes* came from aristocratic families; this was still the case even after some early democratic reforms to the system were made, which we shall discuss later. The *Archontes* were elected by the aristocrats initially for ten-year terms and later (after 683 BCE) for one year. The aristocratic families naturally wanted to keep power; thus they often made deals with each other in order to do so. However, sometimes members of the elite became rivals and began to work against each other.

This led to tyrannies in several city-states, including Athens. One such moment, when a member of the elite in Athens tried, in this instance unsuccessfully, to make himself ruler in an unconstitutional way, happened in the year 632 BCE.

6.8.1 Conspiracy of Cylon

Cylon was an Athenian aristocrat who was very popular in Athens because he achieved a great honor in the Greek world: he won a victory at the festival in Olympia, presumably in the year 640 BCE. Cylon later wanted to become tyrant. In order to do that he gathered support for this project among some of his peers; in addition, he married the daughter of a tyrant of a nearby city called Megara, who helped Cylon by providing him with soldiers. Together with his supporters, Cylon tried to seize the acropolis in Athens in 632 BCE, which would easily have given him control over the city. However, the Athenians thwarted Cylon's attempt to install himself as tyrant. They besieged the attackers on the acropolis. After a while the Athenians were tired of maintaining this siege and many went back to their homes; leaving behind the nine top officials, the *Archontes* to deal with the situation. Meanwhile Cylon and his men were confronted with a lack of food and water and some even died of hunger. Cylon and his brother managed to escape, while others took refuge at the altar of Athena. They were then told that if they would surrender their lives would be spared. However, once Cylon's supporters left the altar of the goddess Athena and her sanctuary, they were put to death. Supposedly the Athenian guards even killed some men who were inside the temple or seated at an altar. Later, the Athenians determined that this deed had offended the gods and they held the officials (*Archontes*) responsible. They punished the offenders and their relatives, both living and dead; the deceased having their graves desecrated and packed off with the living into exile.

The conspiracy of Cylon is one of the earliest events in Athenian history that can be dated. It shows us that the dangers of one man taking over power outside of constitutional means was present in Athens; in addition, we also see the seriousness with which the Athenians and the Greeks in general regarded religious matters at that time. It is often difficult for us today to understand how deeply the Greeks early on believed in the influence of the gods on human affairs, either through oracles, dreams, or other signs. Natural disasters for example, were often

attributed to a perceived offense against the gods; the Greeks would then make amends by pleasing the gods, either through ritual sacrifices and/or punishment of the suspected offenders.

6.8.2 Draco

Another important development in Athens dating to the second half of the seventh century BCE (622-621 BCE) has to do with a man called Draco. He was a legislator (lawgiver) in Athens. We know very little about Draco's life, but it seems very likely that he belonged to the aristocracy, since his laws seemed to be designed to benefit the Athenian nobility, at the expense of the lower classes.

In many modern languages such as English, German, Spanish and others, Draco's name ended up being used as an adjective (Draconian) to describe very harsh laws, meaning laws that triggered severe punishments if broken. For example, according to Draco's laws, the death penalty was given for many violations that we would today consider to be minor, such as stealing vegetables.

Over the long term, the most important law that Draco introduced was the one dealing with homicide. As in most ancient societies, if someone was murdered, it was the right and the duty of members of the victim's family to avenge the death; this could mean either killing the perpetrator or accepting financial compensation. With Draco's law this right and duty was taken away from the victim's family and handed over to the state (in this case the ruling class, the aristocrats), thus increasing their authority. This was probably done to prevent blood feuds – families attempting to punish each other for generations, especially among aristocratic families. It seems that the laws of Draco were generally designed for the Athenian elite, not the lower classes. In any case, most of these laws only remained in place for around thirty years; then another lawgiver named Solon was charged with the task of changing them. This tells us that the contemporaries of Draco were not happy with the laws; the harshness probably helped to destabilize an already declining Athenian political and socio-economic system. The biggest problem in the Athenian city-state at the time was the fact that fewer and fewer wealthy landowners (aristocrats) owned more and more land. This inequality in the distribution of wealth was a very severe problem and gradually brought Athens to the brink of a civil war.

6.8.3 Solon

To understand how this inequality in land-owning became such a problem in Athens, we have to look at the way inheritances were handled. In most parts of the ancient world usually only one child inherited property; this is called the system of primogeniture. In most cases the property consisted of land, and these landowners and farmers wanted to make sure that the land remained large enough so that the inheriting son could feed his family. If the land was divided among all the children, the property would soon become too small for any one family to live off of.

The system of primogeniture was not commonly practiced by the Greeks and in Athens it contributed to the unequal distribution of wealth (land). Farmers whose plots were too small were forced to take on debt and if they later could not pay it back, the land would end up being owned by the wealthier landowners; in some cases the debtors even had to sell themselves as slaves to satisfy their obligations. This was the situation at the end of the seventh century in Athens and the conflict between the rich and poor was putting the peace in Athenian society in danger.

Fortunately for Athens, a member of its aristocracy, who enjoyed a reputation as being honest and wise, ended up as mediator between the two sides. The name of this man was Solon. He was regarded as one of the Seven Sages of Ancient Greece, a group that consisted of philosophers, statesmen and lawgivers that were later, during the Classical period (after 500 BCE), considered extraordinary because of their wisdom and contributions to their respective city-states.

Most of what we know about Solon was written long after his death; that is why we often find authors attributing to Solon achievements that are difficult to independently verify. However, we also possess some writings that go back to Solon himself, because he also was a poet. These poems are often autobiographical and tell us about his experiences, especially in his struggles with the economic and social troubles in Athens. Presumably Solon introduced his laws in the first decade of the 6th century BCE, since it is believed that he became Archon in the year 594 BCE.

Solon's laws targeted especially the economic inequality in Athens, and he writes in his poems that he tried to curb the ambition of the wealthy aristocrats as well as rein in the outsized demands of the poor. As a mediator he looked for the middle ground between these two opposing sides. It is worth pointing out that this mediation is often an important task of all governments throughout history, because inequality in the distribution of wealth, should it become too big of a problem, can lead to social unrest.

The laws that Solon introduced targeted the moral, economic, legal and constitutional issues in Athens: for example, they made sure that all debt was canceled and they prohibited Athenians from selling themselves into slavery to satisfy debt; all Athenians who were enslaved from this practice were released. Additionally, the cultivation of olives was encouraged by law because it was basically the only fruit now allowed to be exported; also, to encourage economic growth, foreign businessmen were given citizenship if they settled in Athens with their families.

With some of the laws Solon redefined the distribution of political power in Athens. For example, he divided the (male) citizens of Athens into four classes; these were based on wealth with the higher the income, the higher the office that could be occupied. From top to bottom these classes were the *Pentakosiomedimni*, the *Hippeis*, the *Zeugitai* and the lowest class of Athenian citizens, the *Thetes*. The latter stood out in not being allowed to become officials. However, Solon's laws made sure that they were allowed to participate in the *Ecclesia*, the assembly of all Athenian citizens from which they had previously been barred. This assembly of Athenian citizens was used to debate and deliberate over the issues of the day. While Solon left the noble families with power over the institutions in Athens, the fact that the *Thetes* were now allowed to participate in the *Ecclesia* paved the way for more power down the road. This gradual expansion of rights became a basic element behind the first democracy being established in Athens; but we cannot refer to Solon's reforms as democratic, because they were at the time designed as a part of an aristocratic system.

Solon's laws also replaced most of the laws that Draco had introduced earlier; it seems only the homicide law of Draco remained in place which, as we have discussed, redistributed legal authority from families to the state.

It was possible for Athenians to read the laws of Solon, since they were put up in a public space, the *Prytaneion* (the seat of the government); this building in the early Archaic period seemed to have been located near or on the Acropolis in Athens. In other city-states the *Prytaneion* is often found near the Agora.

After he introduced his reforms, Solon left Athens for ten years; later authors write that he left because he wanted to avoid being influenced to change his laws. Solon seemed to have travelled extensively during this period, reaching among other places, Egypt and Lydia, a kingdom that occupied parts of what today is Eastern Turkey. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Solon met Croisus, the King of Lydia, and since Solon's reputation as one of the wisest men had preceded him, the Lydian king wanted to ask Solon who was the happiest man on earth. Croisus believed himself to be the happiest, because he was very rich, and expected Solon to answer accordingly. However, Solon named several common people who had died honorably. Croisus was very upset upon hearing this and demanded an explanation; Solon told him that one can only be called happy after death, because up to the last moments of life one can experience something that would lead to unhappiness. Croisus believed Solon to be a fool, but later the Lydian king experienced a string of tragedies (he lost his son and his kingdom) and he came to understand what Solon meant. This story sheds light on a mindset that many ancient Greeks at that time seemed to have shared: life is unpredictable and continuing success needs to be met with humility, because one never knows when it could end. We have to remember that the religious belief that the gods influence human affairs was deeply held; and without being humble and pious gods would make sure that success and happiness would come to an end.

Solon's sayings and poetry later became part of the education of many Athenian and Greek students; besides the work of Solon, students had to memorize long passages from other poets such as Hesiod and Homer. Solon's reputation thus was enhanced over the years. When we read the surviving parts of his poems today, they are highly interesting because they give us a glimpse into Athenian social and economic problems and inform us how a major political figure tried to solve these. The poems of Solon served as a kind of propaganda-instrument, much like when

modern politicians publish books after they leave office to explain their decisions, give their own perspective and try to shape the view that the public takes about their years in office.

6.8.4 Tyranny in Athens

Solon's reforms could not end the frequent rivalries between the leading families or clans, the aristocrats, in Athens. We have already heard how one member of the Athenian aristocracy, Cylon, tried unsuccessfully to put himself up as leader of Athens.

Another aristocrat, Peisistratus, was more successful in making himself tyrant of Athens in the year 561 BCE. It seems that he was a relative of Solon. The reforms of the latter, as we have heard, targeted among other problems the economic inequality in Athens: they for example helped the poor by eliminating debt and they ended the possibility to sell oneself as slave to satisfy debt. These laws made Solon popular among the lower classes (although the aristocrats profited also from the annulment of debt), and he was supposedly offered the tyranny over Athens which he declined. In the case of Peisistratus, his rise to power was based to a large extent on the support from the poorer Athenian residents. He also gained a reputation for being a successful military leader during an earlier conflict with a nearby city-state. However, his rule over Athens was not without problems: he was exiled twice, but Peisistratus managed to come back every time until he finally ruled over Athens until his death; he even managed to establish a dynasty of tyrants, because his sons ruled after him for some time.

We can use the historian Herodotus to provide us with details of Peisistratus' tyranny. In his first attempt to establish himself as ruler in Athens, in 561 BCE, he supposedly injured himself as well as the mules that were used to transport goods and then rode into the Athenian Agora claiming that he had been attacked and demanded bodyguards to protect him. The Athenians provided him with armed men who now followed Peisistratus' command. With these men he seized the Acropolis in Athens and gained full control over Athens soon after. Peisistratus already had the support of a large part of the poorer population who mostly lived on the hilly countryside of Attica; he had promised to alleviate their harsh economic situation. Peisistratus also reminded them of his earlier success as general. However, the rival aristocratic clans were able to unite in their common goal to get rid of Peisistratus, and they did so around 556/555 BCE by forcing him

into exile. Thus Peisistratus' first reign as tyrant of Athens lasted only five years, beginning in 561 BCE.

While he was in exile, the rivalry between factions in Athens once again intensified. Megakles, a leader of one of these factions, urged Peisistratus to return and become tyrant again; offering his personal support under the condition that the former tyrant would marry his daughter, thus securing a prominent position for his family. Peisistratus agreed. The colorful story of how he came to power a second time is once again described by Herodotus, who informs us that Peisistratus found an extraordinarily tall woman living in Attica. She was dressed up to make her look like the goddess Athena. This goddess was usually depicted as being fully armed, so she was provided with full armor. Then Peisistratus placed her on a chariot and she was instructed of how to portray Athena. Meanwhile, Peisistratus had sent out messengers who spread the rumor that the goddess Athena would bring Peisistratus back to Athens, because she believed him to be the best of men, implying that he should become tyrant. The rumor spread fast, and once the Athenians saw Peisistratus standing next to the woman on the chariot riding into Athens, they either believed the story to be true or they approved of the political stunt. The outcome was the same: The Athenians made Peisistratus their tyrant for a second time.

This second tenure as tyrant proved to be brief because Peisistratus lost the support of Megakles, whose support was premised on Peisitratus marrying his daughter. The marriage did not go well, supposedly because Peisistratus and his new wife did not have children. Peisistratus had two sons from a previous marriage, and it seems that Megakles became concerned that his plan to secure a future for his family would not pan out. He stopped supporting Peisistratus, began to organize the enemies of the tyrant, and was able to force him into an exile that lasted about ten years.

While in exile for the second time Peisistratus was able to accumulate considerable wealth which he partially used to assemble a force of mercenaries; with these and with the support of other groups, Peisistratus was able to return to power in Athens in 546 BCE after defeating all resistance within Athens. This time he was able to stay in power until his death in 527 BCE.

The tyranny of Peisistratus was in many areas beneficial for Athens. The city-state at this point became increasingly dominant in the region, and Peisistratus used the opportunities this provided to transform Athens both internally and within the greater Greek world, as we shall see below when we discuss the policies and accomplishments attributed to Peisistratus.

Greek tyrants often tried to get the support of the people. They needed it to protect their position, because other members of the aristocratic families were still their rivals and opponents. Peisistratus thus focused on the economy. It seems that he had significant revenues coming into Athens from mines that Athens controlled. Using these, Peisistratus created job opportunities for the poor by, for example, initiating public building projects such as the construction of public fountain houses. This served another purpose: before Peisistratus the wells were usually controlled by aristocrats; this was obviously a powerful tool in their hands. Now this power was taken away and handed over gradually to the public.

Other projects included the building of roads and temples, such as the reconstruction of the temple of Athena on the Acropolis. Peisistratus also targeted the agricultural sector by subsidizing the cultivation of olives, which Solon in his reforms already had identified as a major crop for export. Regarding trade, Peisistratus made sure that the export of pottery was facilitated. Athenian pottery was popular around the Aegean before Peisistratus, but under his tyranny (around 550 BCE) first the so-called “black-figure style” (pottery that shows figures in black with a reddish background color) and later (around 530 BCE) the “red-figure pottery” (background black), reached places as far as Syria, Cyprus and the Iberian Peninsula.

The economic policies of Peisistratus helped to create prosperity in Athens; and this prosperity reached the lower classes. Now the earlier reforms that Solon had introduced, influenced the political landscape and came to fruition. As we saw earlier, after Solon political power and responsibility was based on income, so now, with the greater prosperity among the populace, power was gradually transferred into the hands of the lower classes. It is important to remember that at this time the aristocratic families still had control over Athenian politics, but Peisistratus’ efforts to weaken his noble rivals by gaining the support of the lower classes started to show its impact on the Athenian political landscape.

A very popular move by Peisistratus was the creation or further enhancement of religious festivals. A festival dedicated to the goddess Athena, called *Panathenaia*, was heavily promoted by Peisistratus, whereas it seems that he introduced festivals for the god Dionysus in Athens, called the *Lesser* and the *Greater Dionysia*. The latter festival became later known all over the Greek world, especially because of the theater competition that was part of it. We will discuss this festival later in more detail. For now, it will suffice to say that under Peisistratus' rule some form of theatrical performance became part of the Greater Dionysia in the 530's BCE which was later expanded. These opportunities for worship and to some extent, entertainment, helped to further increase the reputation of the tyrant.

All in all, Peisistratus was a tyrant who proved to be good for Athens. Although he made himself leader through unconstitutional means, he subsequently seems to have followed the laws and not abused his power; his domestic and international policies contributed to social peace and increased prosperity in Athens. Aristotle, much later in the fourth century BCE, called the period when Peisistratus was tyrant of Athens a "Golden Age."

Peisistratus was also able to secure his succession. After he died in 527 BCE, his eldest son Hippias became tyrant of Athens, possibly together with his younger brother Hipparchus. The latter was assassinated in 514 BCE by two Athenians named Harmodius and Aristogeiton, two men who later became famous for their role as tyrannicides: killers of a tyrant. Although the assassination probably resulted from a personal dispute, the killing of Hipparchus was later used as a propaganda-instrument by the rising democratic movement in Athens.

It seems that Hippias, after the killing of his brother, became a cruel ruler; he had many Athenians executed and turned to harsh policies. He was exiled in the year 510 BCE and fled to Persia from where he had earlier sought help to stay in power, but to no avail. It is important to note that a rival noble family that had been forced from Athens under Peisistratus, the Alcmaeonids, was working behind the scenes to return to Athens. They used their influence to get the Spartans involved, which invaded Athens in 510 BCE and forced Hippias to flee. However, the Spartans viewed the growing democratic movement and the idea of an Athens ruled by the people with concern. They believed it would be easier to keep Athens under control with a tyrant,

so they tried to bring back Hippias and reestablish the tyranny, although the attempt failed. The family of the Alcmaeonids, having returned to Athens, resumed their rivalry with the other aristocratic clans, competing against each other over the political future of Athens.

7 Classical Period

7.1 Democracy in Athens

After Hippias, the last tyrant of Athens, was forced out in 510 BCE, Athens began step by step to introduce a government that allowed more and more people to participate in governance. This system is usually called the first democracy; however, we have to be careful not to use our modern concept of democracy and apply this standard to ancient Athens. Many features that we today consider essential for a democratic government were not in use in Athens: women were not allowed to play any part in politics and slavery was a widespread practice, to name just a few. Nevertheless, we should appreciate the progressive idea of involving as many (male) citizens as possible in the governing process and end, or at least limit, the rule of the aristocratic families. As can be imagined: the implementation of democratic reforms that would diminish the power of the old elite did not happen without a struggle.

As we have seen earlier, the rivalries between the aristocratic clans broke out again once tyranny ended in Athens. The two men that shaped this rivalry the most after 510 BCE were Cleisthenes, a member of the aforementioned Alcmaeonid-family, and Isagoras, who belonged to a rival clan. Both wanted to secure power for themselves and their respective families. The ways they tried to achieve this were different: while Cleisthenes tried to gain the support of the Athenian citizens by promising them more opportunities to participate in government and administration, Isagoras worked against these new democratic ideas. Initially, he had the upper hand. The Spartans, the leading city-state at the time, installed him, after they had helped to get rid of Hippias in 510 BCE, as the head of an oligarchy in Athens that was supportive of Sparta and its goals. Isagoras represented very much the traditional system and he was able to get his rival Cleisthenes expelled from Athens. Isagoras then turned to unpopular policies that led to him being forced out by the Athenians, while Cleisthenes was able to garner their support, especially the middle class, who helped him return to Athens and take up a leading role in politics. Isagoras tried to keep his position in Athens and asked the Spartans to intervene on his behalf; they did

so in 508 and 506 BCE, but to no avail. Instead Isagoras was banished from Athens and with him gone, Cleisthenes now could turn to implement his policies.

Once Isagoras was exiled Cleisthenes began to reform the Athenian government; these reforms led to Cleisthenes being regarded by later historians as the "Father of Democracy." Cleisthenes still had to deal with the rivalries between the traditional elite in Athens, the aristocratic families or clans. In order to limit their influence, he reorganized the population by dividing Athens into *Demes*. This ancient Greek word means something like "division," meaning a certain group of people. There probably already existed around 140 such Demes all over urban Athens and the surrounding countryside. In rural areas a Deme consisted usually of a village or small town, while in the urban center of Athens it represented a neighborhood. Cleisthenes further subdivided these Demes into tribes called *Trittyes*.

The Demes became the foundation of this first Athenian democracy. Athenian citizens began to identify themselves more and more as members of their respective division instead of traditional families. Cleisthenes achieved this by reforming the way names were given: now names were based on the division one belonged to, not the family. Also, members of the same tribe would fight together in battle, under a general from the same division. Thus the bond between Athenian citizens on the level of the Demes (divisions) and Trittyes (tribes) would grow stronger, while the connections to the traditional families weakened.

A very important reform of Cleisthenes aimed at the way many officials were selected. In aristocratic Athens, citizens usually became officials either because they inherited the job or were related to someone. After Cleisthenes, many government officials were selected randomly. This system is commonly referred to as sortition. The idea behind choosing officials through a lottery is to prevent the splitting up of the people into factions, since candidates cannot make promises to an electorate to garner support. Today sortition in the United States is used to select jurors; it is not part of our democracy which is based on elections.

Cleisthenes also reformed institutions in Athens such as the *Boule*. This was an assembly created by Solon and had 400 members. Under Cleisthenes this number was increased to 500, representing the citizen-body of Athens, since the newly organized Athenian tribes were equally

distributed among the 500. By comparison, the Boule under Solon had not been open to the members of the lowest class, the Thetes. In addition, Cleisthenes increased the political influence of the Boule. Previously it was used as an institution in which citizens could appeal decisions of the court. Now it became a place where the agenda was set for the decision-making (legislative) body of Athens, the *Ecclesia*. The Council of the 500 (Boule) was also responsible to carry out some of the decisions which the assembly made.

According to the philosopher Aristotle, Cleisthenes was also responsible for the creation of the *ostracism*. This procedure seemed to have been designed to prevent tyranny, to prevent a man from amassing too much power. During an ostracism broken pieces of pottery (*ostraka* in Greek) were used to scratch the initials of a man who was suspected of rising dangerously above the other Athenian citizens. If 6000 people voted for any such individual, he had to leave Athens for ten years, but was otherwise not charged with any crime and was allowed to keep all his property. The punishment for returning early was death.

We have no evidence of Athenians being ostracized in the early years of its creation (around maybe 506 BCE) until about 20 years later when we hear of Hipparchus, a member of the Peisistratid family, being ostracized in the year 487 BCE. Thereafter we find this procedure used more frequently, and it seems that at times ostracism was instrumentalized by influential politicians in Athens to tarnish rivals and get rid of them. This meaning of the word *ostracize* carries to this day.

As we have seen, after Cleisthenes' reforms many Athenian citizens participated directly in governing their city-state; in the following decades this increased further when other men in Athens introduced other possibilities for citizens to get involved. We will hear about them later.

Little is known about the life of Cleisthenes after he introduced his reforms. We refer to the period after Cleisthenes (from roughly around 500 BCE to the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE) as the Classical period because Athens, especially in the 5th century BCE, experienced the introduction of many achievements that proved to be timeless and of tremendous value, such as the democratic system of government or cultural items such as theatrical works that were performed during the Greater Dionysia. These we will also cover later.

Besides the benefits regarding the military and administration, the new system of government seemed also to provide the Athenians with a sense of being unique among the Greek city-states. No one else allowed people to get involved in government to such a degree as the Athenians did after Cleisthenes. In addition, this idea of being unique was getting unexpected support: the Athenians became involved in an armed conflict with the mightiest empire the world had ever seen up to that time - Persia. To understand the development of Athens and the Greek world in general, we have to more fully introduce the historian Herodotus, whose work, the *Histories*, is the source we mostly rely on in regards of this conflict. Afterwards we will take a brief look at Persia to understand what the Athenians and many other Greek city-states were up against and how surprising and astonishing it was that they successfully withstood several attempts at conquest by this mighty opponent.

7.2 Herodotus

Herodotus was born in Ionia in the first half of the 5th century BCE. Based on various accounts in his books, together referred to as the *Histories*, it seems likely that he traveled to Egypt and Babylon and quite possibly to more places as well. In the *Histories* Herodotus describes the conflict between the Persians and Greeks, especially the expedition under the Persian king Xerxes. Herodotus searches for the origins of the conflict as far back as he believes it is possible to do so with confidence. During his inquiries (the Greek word *Historie* that Herodotus uses to describe his task, means "Inquiry") he not only relates what we today consider matters of historic relevance regarding armed conflicts; Herodotus also conveys anecdotes and short stories that at first glance have nothing to do with the subject at hand; usually, however, these detours in the main narrative give the reader information to better understand and interpret the actions of the protagonists. That is why Herodotus was on the one hand called the *Father of History*, because his *Histories* are the first attempt to systematically inquire about the past that we possess (we know of authors who worked on similar books before Herodotus; unfortunately these are lost); while on the other hand Herodotus has also been accused of lying. Scholarship however has shown that many of Herodotus' anecdotes actually were factual or were at least containing

elements of truth. What Herodotus undoubtably achieves with his method of including anecdotes and short stories is the creation of a very entertaining work.

Most of what we know of early Persia (and many other places in early history), relies on Herodotus' inquiries. Since there is a severe lack of Old Persian sources, we are necessarily presented with a one-sided bias regarding the Greco-Persian wars and early Persian history: Herodotus was a Greek who writes about the enemy and the war a couple of decades after the events he describes. When we read and interpret the *Histories*, we need to be aware of this fact.

7.3 Persia

It is believed that the Persians, an Indo-European people, migrated to the area that is today Iran around 1000 BCE, coming from the north. At that time, the dominant powers and advanced civilizations were located in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq, Syria and Turkey), to the west of the Persians. While these Mesopotamian kingdoms, such as the Babylonians and Assyrians, were by this time in decline, for the Persians, their proximity to such highly productive and advanced civilizations meant that they were deeply influenced by them.

The Persians and their brother-tribe, the Medes, organized themselves into clans early on. Their effectiveness on the military level was largely based on their skills at riding horses and archery. When the Assyrian and Babylonian societies began to weaken around 550 BCE, the Persians began to conquer territory and establish an empire of their own. This empire was governed by four dynasties and lasted roughly 1000 years; of course, the size and shape of the Persian Empire fluctuated, but at certain points in time, however, we see the Persians ruling over the largest empire the world had ever seen at that time.

The first dynasty of the Persians were the *Achaemenids*. They ruled from 559 BCE to 330 BCE. The Achaemenid Cyrus the Great became king of the Persian clans around 559 BCE. At this point we have to emphasize again the fact that we have limited sources for Persian history. We have a severe lack of Old Persian texts, such as their literature. We have discovered inscriptions that praise the deeds of certain Persian kings, but not too many. Most information about early

Persian history originates from non-Persian sources, such as the Greeks or Hebrews. The problem that presents itself here is that these sources sometimes show bias, which makes it difficult to extricate fact from fiction. Much of what we know about the early Persians and their rise to power, as was said before, goes back to the Greek historian Herodotus.

Herodotus, for example, gives an account of how Cyrus was able to convince the various leaders of the Persian clans to make him their king (*Histories*, 1.125-126). Using the style mentioned earlier of taking anecdotes and short stories to support, and further explain, the major historical events he presented, in this instance he shows Cyrus as a capable military leader and a diplomat, which convinces the Persian leaders to accept him as king. First Cyrus and the Persians had to overcome their rival tribe, the Medes, who were dominating over them; then the Persians had to get the area that is today called Iran under control, which they achieved probably around 548 BCE. Cyrus then began to conquer nearby territories such as Lydia, Bactria and various parts of Central Asia. His biggest conquest happened in 539 BCE, when the Persians seized the famous city of Babylon which created a domino effect: once Babylon fell, many other places immediately recognized Cyrus as their king.

Cyrus' campaigns were successful, and he is considered the father of the Persian Empire. His death, however, as described by Herodotus, was an inglorious one. Herodotus describes Cyrus as being killed in battle against a rather small and insignificant nomadic tribe led by a queen, who supposedly dumped Cyrus' head in a vessel filled with blood. It seems Herodotus is biased here; it is likely that he wants to convey his own belief that no one can be considered too happy for too long, as we have already seen in his account of Solon and Croesus.

The Hebrew texts describe Cyrus in a very positive light: in the Old Testament, Cyrus is called one of the Messiahs. He ended the Babylonian exile, allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and helped them rebuild the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, which had been destroyed earlier.

After Cyrus died in 530 BCE, his son Cambyses succeeds him on the throne. Under his leadership, the Persians conquer wealthy Egypt in 525 BCE. Cambyses probably died in Egypt around 522 BCE and in the aftermath a struggle for succession to the Persian throne ensued. The

man who emerged dominant out of this struggle was Darius. He became king of the Persians in 521 BCE.

Darius was a very successful ruler, and he is later referred to as Darius the Great. Under his leadership, Persia became the largest empire that had ever existed up to that time. In the East, the Persians conquered parts of northern India, while in the West he brought Macedonia, parts of the Black Sea coastal areas and Thrace under Persian control. The latter area was part of the Greek world, and we will see shortly how this conquest affected Athens and many other Greek city-states.

Darius' success is traditionally based on the assumption that he was not only a good military strategist, but also a very capable administrator. Considering the vastness of the Persian Empire and its roughly 35 million people, careful administration was necessary; various religious groups, different languages, sets of laws and problems of infrastructure and trade needed to be addressed. Under Darius we see an ambitious road-building program set in place and a new set of coins minted, to name just two ways in which Darius addressed some of these problems.

In general, Darius like many other Persian kings, showed tolerance towards his subjects, as long as taxes were paid and laws were followed, allowing them for example to worship their own gods, although he would claim that his own religious beliefs were superior. Darius, like many other Persians among their elite, was a follower of Zoroaster (in English Zarathustra), a prophet who had initiated a religion in which Ahura Mazda was considered to be the superior god among many others.

Despite this tolerance, it is important to remember that Persia was a monarchy in which power was concentrated in the hands of one man. As we learned previously, in Athens a political movement was on the way that granted more and more people greater say in politics; let us now have a look at how these two opposing societies with different ideas regarding governance came into conflict.

7.4 The Ionian Revolt

Around 500/499 BCE, a group of people who since the time of King Cyrus had lived under Persian rule, desired to get rid of their foreign overlords. These people lived in Ionia, a region that today consists of Western Turkey. These Ionians were actually Greeks, who had at some point migrated to the area but still had close relationships with the Greek city-states in the heartland. The Ionians were often ruled by puppet-tyrants, installed by the Persian rulers, and it is likely that the personal motives and actions of these tyrants played a part in why the revolt broke out; for example, some of these tyrants put onerous tax-burdens on their people to enrich themselves. Later authors described the origins of the revolt as being stimulated by the desire of the Ionians for freedom.

This revolt was not a serious threat for the Persians, and Darius successfully suppressed it. However, the Ionian Revolt triggered events that drew Greek city-states, such as Athens and Sparta, into a war with the Persians in the following manner.

The Ionians during the revolt naturally asked the Greek city-states, such as Athens, Sparta and others, for help. While many declined to get involved, the Athenians, among others, agreed to send a small contingent of ships as a sign of their support. These Athenian ships, together with a small fleet from Eretria, then became part of an operation during which a city that was very important to the Persians, called Sardis, was attacked and burned to the ground (498 BCE). This destruction of Sardis was the result of the only offensive action in the struggle by the Ionians, and Darius wanted to punish the Athenians for their assistance. After a couple of years the Persians were able to suppress the Ionian Revolt in 494 BCE after the Battle at Lade, which now allowed the Persians to turn their full attention to those who had aided the Ionians.

7.5 The Persian Wars

The Ionian Revolt can be described as the first stage in the so-called Greco-Persian Wars. Darius wanted to punish the Athenians for the burning of Sardis; in addition, he seemed to believe that more trouble for the Persian Empire would arise from the Greek-states in the future.

He probably also saw an opportunity for further Persian expansion and gains in the West. Thus, in the year 492 BCE, Darius sent out an expedition to achieve just that: punish Athens and conquer the Greek world.

During this first campaign, the Persians invaded the Greek world and brought parts of it under their control; however, on their way further west a large part of the Persian fleet was destroyed in a storm, preventing additional progress. The Persians did not reach their main target, Athens.

7.5.1 Marathon

Two years later, in 490 BCE, after having sent out ambassadors to the Greeks demanding subjugation, Darius launched a second campaign. Athens and Sparta both had not given earth and water to the Persian messengers, the symbols traditionally used to show submission to Persian control; instead they killed the Persian ambassadors. Almost all the other Greek city-states had accepted the request by Darius because they knew what had happened to Thrace during the first campaign in 492 BCE: in that year the Persians fully subjugated Thrace and it came again under Persian control. (Thrace was part of Persia for a while after being conquered by Darius during an earlier expedition against nomads located in modern-day Southern Russia and Ukraine.) Often the Persians allowed conquered provinces to retain some autonomy if they did not create trouble. To end up under full Persian control like Thrace did was considered by many Greek city-states a horrible fate so they rather chose not to resist.

This second campaign saw the Persians come close to Athens. First, however, they dealt with Eretria, the second city-state that was involved in supporting the Ionians during their revolt. After a brief siege, the Persians took the city and completely destroyed it. They also enslaved its population. In the aftermath, the Persians moved towards Attica to inflict the same punishment on Athens.

On their way to Athens, the Persians landed near a village called Marathon in Attica. The Athenians sent out their troops to meet them there; they also received help from another Greek city called Plataea. The Athenians also sent messengers to Sparta to ask them for support, but

the Spartans were in the midst of a religious festival and declared that they could not get involved until the festival concluded in ten days. Thus the Persians vastly outnumbered their Greek adversaries at Marathon. We estimate that probably ten thousand Greeks were facing around twenty to thirty thousand Persian soldiers. The commanders on the Persian side were Datis and Artaphernes; the most experienced of the Athenian generals present at Marathon was Miltiades.

One of the biggest advantages for the Greeks was that they chose the battleground and the time of the battle in such a way that the Persian cavalry could not get involved in the fight. While there were plenty of mounted soldiers among the Persian forces, they could not get engaged at Marathon because the terrain where the fight took place was mountainous and full of marshes and some of the Persian cavalry was engaged elsewhere on another mission. While in the days before the battle the Athenians followed a defensive strategy, waiting presumably for Spartan help, at some point Miltiades ordered an attack on the Persians, which probably took them by surprise. In addition, Miltiades used a strategy that rendered the best Persian fighters, called the *Immortals*, ineffective. The Athenian soldiers, called *Hoplites*, were heavily armed and organized into formations called *phalanx*, while their opponents were carrying only light weapons, which were no match to the Greek ones. Persian strategy generally relied very much on the use of cavalry, and since they were to play a limited role in this engagement, the result of the Battle of Marathon, in early September 490 BCE, was a thorough defeat of the Persians, many of whom were slaughtered; the rest ignominiously fleeing to their ships.

Despite this victory the situation for the Athenians remained grim, since by bringing their army to Marathon they had left Athens completely unprotected. Persian ships meanwhile sought to take advantage of the situation by sailing directly to Athens. In order to make it back in time to defend their city, the Athenian soldiers, despite having just fought an intense battle that morning, ran fully armed from Marathon to Athens, a distance of about 25 miles. They reached Athens just before the Persian fleet arrived. After the Persians realized that Athenian soldiers were present, they decided not to engage. The trek of these Athenian soldiers is still celebrated in races called marathons today.

With the Persians returning to Persia their second campaign came to an end. Darius had achieved some of his goals, such as conquering parts of the Greek world and punishing Eretria for their previous involvement in the Ionian Revolt; Athens, however, had escaped this fate. As a result, Darius made plans for a third campaign.

For the Athenians on the other hand the victory over the Persian forces at Marathon in 490 BCE had enormous impact: they had given evidence that the mightiest empire of its day could be beaten in battle. For generations prior to this, the Ionian Greeks had been living in subjugation to the Persians, and their attempt to resist had failed, as we have seen. Now the Athenians (and Plataea) had shown that successful resistance was possible. The self-esteem and self-confidence of Athens received a boost, and many scholars see the Battle of Marathon as the beginning of a very productive period in Greek, especially Athenian, history. During the roughly 70 years following the battle of Marathon, Athens experienced a unique period of development in politics, the arts and sciences. The recently installed democracy received further support, especially since the Athenians believed that their military success was evidence that their new political system was superior to the monarchic one in Persia.

The victory at Marathon did not only affect the Athenians; other Greek city-states seemed to realize what can be achieved in unity - they indeed could be masters of their own future. Since this battle against the Persians also was the only armed conflict the Greeks had so far with soldiers that were lightly armed compared to themselves, they now realized the advantage they had on the military level. The hoplite phalanx, the formation of heavily armed soldiers fighting in a disciplined fashion, was now perceived as an excellent tool to fight foreign troops, while thus far it had been used only in battles amongst themselves.

It is important to note, however, that for Darius, and the Persian Empire in general, the defeat at Marathon did not matter in terms of resources; the empire remained rich and powerful. What mattered was the still unfinished business of punishing Athens and Darius continued with his plans to ultimately bring all of the Greek world under Persian control.

7.5.2 Thermopylae and Salamis

Before Darius could execute his plan to invade the Greek world for a third time, he died in 486 BCE. His son Xerxes succeeded him on the throne. Xerxes, however, had to push aside any immediate plans to conquer Greece since he faced more immediate threats with revolts in Egypt (486 BCE) and Babylon (484 and 482 BCE); both of which were successfully suppressed.

Xerxes around 483 BCE began to prepare for the invasion of Greece to execute his father's long held ambitions. Since the Persian army was still engaged in the revolts previously mentioned, additional soldiers needed to be recruited, and the Persian army that invaded Greece under Xerxes was more cosmopolitan than in the past, with Phoenicians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Indians, Macedonians, Greeks and many more mercenaries from various parts of the vast Persian Empire participating. The preparation provides evidence of the scale this invasion would reach: Xerxes had a canal dug through the peninsula called Athos near where the Persian fleet during the first campaign in 492 BCE was decimated in a storm. Along the planned route storage facilities were built and equipped with provisions, especially in Thrace which, as we have seen, was under Persian control. When the time drew near for the expedition to launch, pontoon-bridges (floating bridges) were built, using ships tied together to enable the Persian army to cross over a narrow point that separates Asia from Europe called the Hellespont. This was a difficult task, and it seems that the first attempt to create this floating bridge failed. According to Herodotus, this failure enraged Xerxes to such an extent that he had the Hellespont, the strait that lies between Asia and Europe, whipped, and for good measure had chains and fetters thrown into the water to symbolically subdue it. In Greek religion, waterways (rivers, straits, creeks etc.) were personified as gods, so the Greeks viewed these acts as a religious offense, displaying hybris, which the gods would later punish with the defeat of the Persians.

There is certainly bias if not propaganda in this account from Herodotus who clearly writes from a Greek perspective. As was mentioned before: almost no Old Persian written accounts came down to us to compare, and so we frequently have to rely on only one source. However, knowing this we can try to eliminate the bias and propaganda and find a more neutral interpretation. In this example, we can assume that it was indeed very difficult to build this

floating bridge over a large distance in that particular area of the Hellespont, which even today is often whipped up by strong winds. That a first attempt failed would have been likely.

After the bridge was finally constructed, the provisions gathered and stored along the way, and after the army had been deemed sufficient in terms of numbers, Xerxes launched the third campaign beginning in Sardis sometime in the spring of 480 BCE. As usual in these types of military excursions, not only the combatants themselves were part of the expedition, but also a huge number of merchants and other people who hoped for business. The exact size of these Persian expeditions cannot be given since the numbers noted by Herodotus are certainly exaggerated, and modern attempts to do so are guesswork. It was certainly one of the largest military expeditions the world had seen up to that point.

The scale of the campaign served various purposes: Xerxes wanted obviously to make sure that this time the Persians would be successful and finally conquer the Greek world and punish Athens; in addition, the preparations and numbers of troops on the Persian side became known around the Greek world, and this knowledge had an intimidating effect. In many instances Greek city-states, instead of resisting, gave the Persian ambassadors, who were sent out by Xerxes, earth and water, thus symbolically submitting to the authority of Persia. When the expedition was finally launched, most of the Greek city-states had either submitted to Xerxes or were neutral.

Despite these setbacks a broad Greek resistance to Persian aggression did emerge. We must remember, however, that Greek city-states were independent and sovereign, and some of the members of the Greek resistance were technically at war with each other. As often happens in history: the common enemy united them, at least for a while. Athens and Sparta were the leading city-states in the resistance, with Athens providing their powerful navy and the Spartans their superbly trained army. Athens had been preparing for Xerxes' invasion probably since the mid 480's; the most important decision in this regard was made in 482 BCE, when the Athenian general Themistocles convinced the Athenians to put maximum effort on creating a massive fleet of warships called *Triremes*, ships that carried about 180-200 men each.

The Persian campaign followed a route that was planned in advance, with storage facilities put up well ahead of time. Provisions along the route were years in the making: local people were ordered to grow grains and grind it, or to grow and fatten animals so that everything would be ready when the troops arrive. The Persians advanced for the first three months through Europe more or less unmolested. The Greek resistance meanwhile held a congress to decide the best possible locations to most effectively delay the Persian advance. The resistance finally agreed on a two-part strategy: stopping the Persian army at Thermopylae, a narrow path with steep mountains on one side and the sea on the other, while the Persian fleet should be met in the straits near Artemisium, a cape on the northern part of the second-largest Greek island Euboea. The struggle that took place at Thermopylae is one of the most famous of all ancient battles, the reasons for this will become evident when we look at the details.

If one travels to Thermopylae today, it will not immediately be understood why the Greek resistance chose to make a stand there. It is a rather wide-open space with steep mountains on one side. However, 2500 years ago the sea was much closer to the mountains, so that the path the Persians had to go through was narrower. The name *Thermopylae* translates into "Hot Gates," because of the thermal springs that are located in the area. In preparation for the battle the so-called Phocian Wall, named after the Phocian people that lived in the area, was reinforced.

Between 5000 and 7000 Greek troops were sent there once the decision was made to block the Persian army at Thermopylae. The Spartan King Leonidas was appointed commander of the forces of this operation. His contingent of fighters consisted of the famous 300 Spartans, who were elite soldiers forming Leonidas' bodyguard. The Spartans did not send more troops because they were engaged in a religious festival; they planned on sending a larger army after it was concluded. Leonidas apparently knew that his forces would not be sufficient and that he and his 300 would not return. All of his men were older Spartan veterans who had sons who could become head of households after their deaths. Other Greek city-states such as Corinth, Thebes and Phocis, to name just a few, supplied the remaining soldiers.

The question remains if the Greeks thought that they could block the Persians completely, or if they wanted to delay their advance. It seems unlikely that Greek commanders would have

believed that a small force like theirs could force the Persians to stop and that they would be able to return home. However, they might also have considered that, if the Greeks at Thermopylae put up an extraordinary effort, the Persians might reconsider the strength of the Greek resistance and change their plans. Herodotus implies that part of the strategy, the display of Spartan commitment to the war effort, was to give a boost to the fighting-spirit of the overall Greek resistance and to prevent them from going over to the Persians.

The Persians finally arrived in September 480 BCE and the battle commenced. Greek resistance at Thermopylae stood firm for two to three days against the Persian infantry and cavalry who vastly outnumbered them. Since the fighting took place in a narrow area, the Persians could not use their advantage in numbers since only so many men could fight in hand-to-hand combat. The heavily armed Greek soldiers were able to overwhelm the lines of the Persians who then also had to step on and over their fellow dead soldiers, which must have had an impact on their morale.

A decisive moment leading to the advantage of the Persians was set in motion by a traitor among the Greek resistance who showed the Persians a way through the mountains; they could use this route to get around the blocked path. Leonidas had stationed about 1000 Phocian soldiers as guardians to protect this path. These soldiers, according to Herodotus, were woefully unprepared. They discovered too late that the Persian elite soldiers, the *Immortals*, were approaching. After they had defeated the Phocians, the Persians were able to attack the Greeks from both the front and the rear.

After hearing this troubling news, the Greeks at Thermopylae held a council and Leonidas let the majority of the Greek forces retreat. The ones that remained were his 300 Spartans plus between 1000 and 1500 Thebans and Thespians. Most of these members of the Greek resistance were then killed in the fierce fight by the Persians who, as we have seen, had suffered massive losses themselves. Xerxes had not only lost many of his soldiers; two of his brothers were also killed in combat. Supposedly (based on Herodotus' account) Xerxes was so angry that after the battle he had the body of Leonidas decapitated and the head impaled. This would have been an

unusual act for the Persians, because they traditionally honored courageous soldiers, even if they were fighting on the side of the enemy.

To commemorate the brave Spartan king the Greeks put up a stone lion monument at Thermopylae. They buried their dead on a hill nearby once the Persian forces left Thermopylae. Decades later the Spartans brought the remains of Leonidas to Sparta, where he received another funeral with full honors. Afterwards, every year funeral games were held in his honor in Sparta. The poet Simonides of Ceos, who lived in Athens at the time of the Persian Wars and who was, among other styles, known for composing military commemorative lines, wrote a short poem about the sacrifice of Leonidas and his men. It was inscribed onto a stone at Thermopylae. The translation into prose goes something like this: “Go, Stranger, and tell the Lacedaimonians that here we lie obeying their commands.” If one visits Thermopylae today, a stone with this inscription is still there; it is not the original (which was never found) but a replacement put up in 1955.

The striking heroism of the Greeks, especially from the Spartan soldiers and their commander Leonidas, at Thermopylae contributed to the legend and continuing popularity of this battle. Naturally, the final outcome of this invasion, which ended in success for the Greeks, played an important role as well. The valor, courage, and skill that the Greeks showed at Thermopylae seems (in hindsight) to foreshadow what they were capable of against a far larger enemy force. Now let us have a look at how the allied Greek fleet performed against the Persians.

The Greek fleet met the Persians in battle near Artemisium, a town located at the northern end of an island called Euboea. The weather had a big impact on this battle. A significant number of Persian ships was wrecked in storms, with significant Greek losses as well. The naval battle near Artemisium took place roughly at the same time of the battle at Thermopylae. The ships engaged for two days; in the end both the Greeks and the Persians suffered similar losses. The Persians, however, had a much larger fleet and could endure the losses, while the Greek fleet retreated because they could not replace the lost ships and because they had received the news that the Persians had defeated their forces at Thermopylae. The Greek fleet sailed to an island near Athens called Salamis to regroup and support the efforts to evacuate Athens.

7.5.3 Athens Burning

After Thermopylae, the Persian army made its way towards Athens, along the way conquering and burning down Greek cities that had previously not offered earth and water to the Persian king. News of these events, with the implication that this might soon be the fate of Athens, certainly reached the population of the city, which was for the most part evacuated to Salamis and to Troezen, a city on the Peloponnese.

In September 480 BCE the Persians reached Athens. A small number of Athenian soldiers had positioned themselves on the Athenian Acropolis, but they could not withstand the Persian onslaught. Athens was burned, the temples on the Acropolis destroyed. Archaeologists found remains of this destruction thousands of years later; they named what they found "Trash of the Persians." The evacuated Athenian population on Salamis very likely saw the smoke rising above their hometown, indicating to them the fate of their fellow citizens, who had made a final stand on the Acropolis, and of their homes.

The fleet of the allied Greek resistance after the battle near Artemisium had retreated to Salamis. As was already pointed out above, among the Greek city-states Athens possessed the most powerful navy, after the Greek general Themistocles convinced the Athenians a few years previously to start enhancing their fleet by building a large number of warships, the *Triremes*. Now at Salamis, Themistocles persuaded the other commanders that an offensive strategy would be best. In a council they discussed their options, and it seems that at first the Greek generals wanted to retreat further and hold the line there; Themistocles, however, wanted to meet the Persians in a naval battle as soon as possible. Why was he optimistic about the outcome of such an offensive, considering the greater number of Persian ships? It seems likely that the battle of Artemisium, where the allied Greek ships were able to hold their own against the Persian fleet for quite some time, served as a lesson that the Greek ships, especially the Athenian Triremes, were indeed capable of inflicting serious damage on the enemy. In any case, Themistocles' strategy prevailed and the Greek fleet did not retreat but stayed at Salamis.

After the Persians captured Athens, Xerxes and his commanding officers held council. Some information probably reached them that indicated that the Greek resistance was not fully united.

Herodotus claims that Themistocles engaged in a double strategy: supposedly he sent a message to Xerxes encouraging the Persian king to begin battle as soon as possible to take advantage of the disunity among the Greeks. To give credibility to this information, Themistocles also wrote to Xerxes that he wanted to benefit personally by providing this information. From a Greek point of view Themistocles thus committed treason. In reality however, so Herodotus continues, Themistocles wanted the battle to start as soon as possible because he feared that the Greek resistance might disintegrate. Of course this account cannot be verified; however, it is also likely that the Persians got information about the ongoings among the Greek resistance through spies.

In any case, Xerxes did send his ships to block the entrances into the straits of Salamis to prevent any Greek ships from leaving. He wanted to eradicate the Greek fleet once and for all. Meanwhile the Greeks received indications that the Persian fleet now was deployed and that the battle would indeed take place at Salamis. This gave them some time to prepare for the battle, while the Persian ships were guarding the entrances to the straits of Salamis.

The biggest factor that contributed to the eventual outcome of the battle was the decision by the Persians to enter the straits of Salamis. In this narrow area they could not use their advantage in numbers; in addition, the superior maneuverability of the Persian ships in open waters did not matter. Also, the heavier ships of the Greek fleet, with their heavily armed hoplites on board and equipped with underwater rams, could inflict severe damage. Thus Xerxes watched from his vantage point on a mountaintop nearby as his fleet suffered a massive defeat. According to Herodotus, the Persian King after the battle had the commanding officers executed, blaming them for the defeat.

Once the Persian fleet lost about half its ships at Salamis, the Persians believed that the victorious Greek fleet might now try to destroy the bridges the Persians had constructed to cross the Hellespont and thus keep the Persian army from returning to Asia. As a result, Xerxes decided to return to Persia with a large part of his army, leaving a smaller elite force behind under the command of Mardonius, who was charged with the task of subjugating the still resisting Greek city-states.

The Athenians after the battle at Salamis returned from their places of exile once the Persians had left Attica. Yet after the Athenians turned down a new offer from the Persians to accept subjugation and Persian expansion into their territory in return for peace, the Persian army captured and destroyed Athens a second time in 479 BCE.

A majority of the allied troops of the Greek resistance were still guarding a narrow stretch of land near Corinth (called the *Isthmus*); the Persian army would need to use this route on their way into the Peloponnese. However, the Greek resistance was now in a position to convince more of the Greek city-states of the nature of the Persian threat and to contribute and participate with soldiers. Thus the biggest Greek army yet was mobilized under the command of the Spartan king Pausanias. The Greeks made the decision to force a battle with the Persian army, and in the summer of 479 BCE they marched in great numbers towards Attica under Spartan leadership.

7.5.4 Plataea

After the second destruction of Athens, Mardonius marched with his Persian troops north to Boeotia. He wanted to face the Greek forces on territory that would favor his cavalry forces, the stronger side of his military. When the Greek allies arrived under the leadership of the Spartan king Pausanias, they were then joined by the Athenian hoplites.

Pausanias made camp on high ground near the city of Plataea, so that the Greeks could not easily be attacked. Mardonius tried to lure them to battle on a plain which would favor his mounted forces, but the Greeks did not engage. This situation resulted in a stalemate: there were a few smaller skirmishes, but neither side engaged in an all-out assault. This went on for more than a week during which more Greek soldiers arrived.

After the Persians successfully interrupted the supply-lines of the Greeks, even cutting them off from their source of fresh water, the Greeks decided to move to a different location by night. This strategy failed because of miscommunication, and the Greeks were now spread thin at various points. Mardonius interpreted this movement of the Greeks as a retreat and ordered some of his troops to pursue them. However, other Persian forces seemed to have joined in this

pursuit without orders. The Greeks then decided that the time had finally come to face the Persians and the battle ensued.

As was the case at Thermopylae, the Persian infantry was lighter armed than the Greek hoplites and suffered a defeat during which their commander, Mardonius, was killed. The Persian cavalry could not engage meaningfully in the fight and have an impact. The Greeks killed many Persian soldiers who were still in their camp. They basically destroyed the Persian army and, together with a defeat of the Persian navy near Mycale, that supposedly happened at the same time as the battle at Plataea, ended with these two victorious battles the Persian attempt to invade and conquer the Greek world.

For the Persians, defeat did not endanger their empire in any way. They continued to influence politics in the Greek city-states, even after their military defeat, by supporting some city-states and opposing others, as we will see later. As for the Greeks, those city-states which were part of the resistance cautiously waited and prepared for another Persian invasion. They formed alliances with each other to provide security in case the Persians would return.

The impact of these victories, beginning with Marathon and ending with Plataea and Mycale, was enormous on various levels: many formerly disunited Greek city-states had joined forces to fight and thwart attacks of a common enemy, which happened to be the most powerful empire at that time. The Greeks thus realized what they could achieve when united. Over the long term the consequences of the Greek victories can be seen especially if we look at the two opposing systems that had clashed: Athens was a major contributor to the Greek resistance, because they were also the main target of the Persians. Since Athens had recently begun to implement reforms that led to more direct participation in Athenian politics by as many Athenian citizens as possible, they also defended their system against the idea of absolute monarchy as represented by Persia. If the Persians had conquered Athens, this new development would have stalled; Athens would not have experienced one of the greatest periods of its history during the fifth century BCE, commonly referred to as the “Golden Age.”

7.5.5 The Delian League

After the Persian invasion of Xerxes ended, the Greek city-states that had fought them still felt it necessary to be prepared for further attempts by the Persians to invade their lands. Sparta was the dominant city-state among the ones located on the Peloponnese. These city-states did not officially or formally enter into an alliance with each other, but they acted at various times as one. This is why modern scholars sometimes refer to these city-states as the Peloponnesian League. It seems that Sparta was not initially eager to assume the leadership role and its associated responsibilities, because they constantly had to face revolts back home from the Helots, which made long distance military expeditions a problem. Sparta would eventually become more involved with the League in response to what they saw as a threat arising from the greatly enhanced power of Athens.

Athens' rise depended to a large extent on the availability of income. Massive public building projects and large religious festivals, for example, were expensive. A share of the funds needed for these undertakings came from tributes provided by members of the Delian League and from spoils taken as compensation from city-states previously allied with the Persians. Let us have a look at how this alliance was organized.

In 478 BCE a number of Greek cities formed an alliance called Delian League. It is named after the island of Delos, where the treasury of the alliance was kept. The Athenians assumed the leadership of this alliance since their naval strength was a major factor in the victory against the Persians. The roughly 150 members of the Delian League were mainly city-states in northern Greece, on islands in the Aegean Sea and on the Western coast of modern-day Turkey. These places were close to the Persian Empire and therefore in greater danger should the Persians decide to invade again.

Initially the Delian League made decisions in an assembly of all member city-states; gradually, however, Athens took the lead in initiating more and more of the League's policies, particularly since most depended on naval power. Athens also gained control over the treasury. The Athenian who was mainly responsible for the increasingly advantageous role for Athens within the Delian League, was Aristides.

In the beginning, members paid tribute in the form of goods: they would provide ships or parts of ships or other equipment. Later, they often just paid with money, and Athens was supposed to use these funds to make sure the Delian League could achieve its goals. These goals were the following: to protect its members in case the Persians invaded again; to take revenge on city-states that had sided with the Persians and to punish them by getting compensation. However, Athens actually ended up using the tributes from the Delian League members and much of the spoils gained on campaigns against Persian allies, to increase its own power. A large number of Athenian warships were funded in this manner, which were then also manned by Athenian citizens, many of whom were needed as rowers. In fact, this need for personnel for warships in Athens could only be satisfied by allowing more and more *Thetes* (laborers) on the ships; the lowest income class in Athens, these Thetes would receive better pay as rowers than from their regular jobs. This strengthened their political importance in the newly developed Athenian democracy, which in turn became stronger because of the wider participation of citizens in politics.

As can be imagined, some members did not approve of Athenian dominance within the Delian League. For some it was a heavy burden to pay the tributes. Sensing this growing opposition, Athens provided a harsh lesson for what would happen if a member-state decided to leave the League. In 465 the people on the island of Thasos declared that they were leaving the Delian League. This decision originated in a conflict between Athens and Thasos over who should control goldmines that were located near Thasos on the mainland. Athens, as the de-facto leader of the Delian League, led a fleet consisting of Athenian and other allied ships against the Thasians. They besieged the island for two years, until the Thasians surrendered. The Athenians afterwards imposed brutal conditions on Thasos: they rendered the city-state basically defenseless by ordering the Thasians to hand over their ships and to destroy their defensive walls. In addition, the Athenians demanded extraordinarily high fines. This treatment of Thasos showed to what extent Athens dominated their allies; resentment among some members against this Athenian behavior and dominance began to grow more widespread. In a further contentious step, in 454 BCE, Athens removed the treasury of the Delian League, that had been kept on the island of Delos, to Athens. This action is often described by scholars as the unofficial end of the Delian

League and the beginning of the Athenian Empire. Yet despite all these problems within the Delian League, its major goal, to secure its members from a possible Persian attack, was achieved: There was no significant Persian military action threatening member-states for more than fifty years after Salamis and Plataea.

7.6 The Golden Age of Athens

After Xerxes' invasion and during the years of the Delian League, Athens grew stronger. As has been shown, the tributes paid by the members of the Delian League and the spoils that were gained on campaigns, contributed to making Athens a very wealthy place. In addition, expanding trade led to income through taxes and fees. If we assume that there were between thirty and forty thousand Athenian citizens living in Athens at the time, the wealth available for this relative small number of residents must have been staggering. Suffice it to say that Athens had lots of money at its disposal.

Much of the wealth was spent on the navy: additional warships were built, Thetes as rowers needed to be paid and the fleet maintained. The men who were commanders of the Athenian navy became influential in Athenian politics and society. They often used the spoils from successful campaigns to contribute to the common good in Athens. Cimon, for example, a prominent political figure and naval commander in the first half of the fifth century BCE, used spoils from war to pay for the construction of defensive walls in Athens. This contribution to the common good was expected from wealthy Athenians and will be discussed further below.

It seems that the idea of spending significant amounts on the navy was supported by most Athenians. It was another issue that was dividing the Athenian populace. There were traditionalists in Athens who were not in favor of greater democratization in Athens. We have to remember that the idea of widespread participation of citizens in politics was new; many of the upper class in Athens, the aristocrats, looked at this new development skeptically. They had other examples of government nearby, such as Sparta, which had created a successful system which was based, more or less, on total control over its citizens. So, the issue of further development

of democracy and the relationship with Sparta divided the Athenian citizens. Political figures took positions over this divide: Cimon was in favor of Sparta; he opposed democracy, while Themistocles, on the other hand, argued that the Athenians should further develop their democracy and stand in competition with Sparta. Both men rallied supporters around them and their agendas, and they seemed to have debated this issue hotly.

In 471 BCE Themistocles was ostracized. Despite his contributions to the victory of the Athenians in countering the Persian invasion, his personal life provoked such opposition in Athens that they exiled him. He supposedly was too fond of himself, he often insulted fellow Athenians, and he had a tendency to live in luxury, a trait which the Athenians did not appreciate. While in exile, further accusations were surfacing against Themistocles, such as that he was secretly dealing with the Persian king, made worse when Themistocles fled to Persia.

With Themistocles gone, Cimon at first dominated the political landscape in Athens. His history of military successes earned him the respect of many Athenian citizens and increased his reputation. This was important, because decisions were made in the assembly of the Athenian citizens by majority vote, and individuals had great influence there. We have to remember that there were no political parties in Athens like in modern democracies; instead, men like Cimon had friends and supporters, who were interested in the ambitions of their favorite. This meant that debates in Athens often centered on individuals who stood for certain agendas, with their supporters defending their favorites intensely in debates.

As we have seen, Cimon was in favor of Sparta and what it stood for, connected to which was his desire to stop further democratic development in Athens. After Themistocles was exiled, his new rival was Ephialtes, who argued that Athens was in need of more democracy and that it was also necessary to break with Sparta.

In 462 BCE the tense situation in Athens escalated. Cimon’s proposal that the Athenians should help the Spartans, who in that year sought military help to deal with a Helot revolt, carried the day: the Athenians voted in favor of sending 4,000 heavily armed soldiers to help Sparta, thereby denying Ephialtes’ wish for voters to choose not to help. Cimon himself led the 4,000 Athenian troops to Sparta, but after they arrived the Spartans then sent them back home,

presumably because they did not trust the Athenians or because the Athenians behaved in a way that provoked Spartan antipathy and opposition. Cimon returned to Athens in disgrace. He was held responsible for this disastrous campaign and was ostracized.

After this event, the Athenians and Spartans drew further apart; the unity that had existed between them while fighting the common enemy, Persia, was gone. Ephialtes' agenda of breaking with Sparta and of developing more democracy within Athens, prevailed and he was able to pass democratic reforms in the city-state. Once again, we need to remind ourselves that these early democratic features are not to be compared with what we consider democratic today: in Athens political power was in the hand of only male citizens; there were no voting rights for women; and it was impossible for immigrants to gain Athenian citizenship, to name just a few examples. However, political power was now put on a broader base in Athens; more and more Athenian citizens could and actually chose to participate in Athenian politics. The Thetes, the lowest income class, who, as we have discussed previously, worked in large numbers as rowers on the warships, took particular advantage of these democratic reforms.

One of the reforms of Ephialtes in 462 BCE targeted a traditional institution rooted in the previously aristocratic dominated government in Athens, the Council of the Areopagus. This council functioned as a court and handed down verdicts, for example in homicide cases. It seems that membership was based on the prior holding of high-level positions in the Athenian government, such as Archon. The council previously underwent several reforms, under Solon and Cleisthenes for example. Ephialtes, however, diminished its influence considerably, so much so that some Athenian citizens regarded this as an assault on Athenian traditions; these opponents were probably behind his assassination in 461 BCE. The issue of this reform of the council of the Areopagus was so controversial that it was also portrayed in drama, in the tragedies that Aeschylus brought to stage in Athens in the year 458 BCE. In the set of plays that are referred to as the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus discusses the conflict between tradition and modernization, between old and new, and the final reconciliation between the two. We will analyze these plays in more detail below.

7.6.1 Pericles

After Ephialtes' assassination in 461 BCE, his associate Pericles became the most prominent politician in Athens. The years while he was dominant are traditionally called the "Golden Age of Athens." However, as we have already seen, the foundations that allowed for this flowering were laid earlier, including the expansion of the navy and the organization of the Delian League. Both ensured that Athens had an enormous amount of wealth at its disposal which Pericles could then put to use.

Pericles further developed the democratic system in Athens. What had started under Cleisthenes and Ephialtes now became what today is called the "radical democracy" of Athens of the fifth century BCE. Among its features was not only the right of male Athenian citizens to participate in politics directly but also their desire to do so. They could engage in politics directly, for example, by voting on issues in the assembly by a show of hands and many were able to hold official positions, which were chosen randomly. Also of great importance was the concept that all Athenian citizens were to be treated equally under the law, regardless of wealth (at least in theory, since as in our own legal system in the United States, if one has the resources, it is possible to hire very good lawyers to gain an advantage in court). Ostracism allowed the majority to decide to exile an individual, another example of how a democratic majority possessed authority. We have already explained that in an ostracism 6,000 votes, a large number when we remember that Athens probably had around 40,000 citizens at the time, were necessary to exile an individual for 10 years.

Pericles introduced additional democratic reforms, the most popular being that officials, who already were chosen randomly, would now receive a daily stipend. This allowed jurors, or members of the council of the 500, to be paid for their service; without these stipends it was very difficult if not impossible for poorer citizens, who relied on daily wages, to participate in Athenian government.

Of course not all officials were chosen randomly. The most powerful ones were still elected, for example, the ten generals (in Ancient Greek called *Strategoi*) who were in charge, among other civil responsibilities, with military affairs. Also, men were elected to handle the finances of

Athens. These jobs required experience and specific skills. This in turn led to the fact that only wealthy members of Athenian society ended up holding such critical positions: they were rich enough to be educated to handle such tasks, and since they were not paid for these jobs, they had to use their own resources to sustain themselves and their families while in office. Usually these wealthy men were members of the traditional aristocratic families, the same ones which previously formed the aristocratic government in Athens. Pericles himself was a member of the Alcmaeonids, a very powerful noble family.

Pericles proved to be very popular among the Athenians. It seems that his proposal to pay daily stipends to jurors and lower-level officials only increased this popularity. He was elected several times as general (*Strategos*) along with 9 other men, but none of the others reached Pericles' level of influence. Pericles especially determined decision-making in the Athenian citizen-assembly, the ecclesia. There the decisions were made, often after vigorous debates, by a show of hands. Let us now take a closer look at some of these political institutions during the time of Pericles.

The ecclesia met during those years about once every ten days on a hill called *Pnyx*. The question of how many Athenians would show up and participate, is difficult to answer. If an ostracism were to be decided, 6,000 Athenian citizens would have needed to vote against an individual, but this surely was not the usual level of attendance, and such actions were infrequently taken. It was difficult for Athenians who lived in the countryside to step away from their daily tasks and travel to the urban center; they would only have done so if the matter at hand was of major interest, such as with the aforementioned ostracism.

At the assembly, every adult male Athenian citizens was allowed to vote by show of hand and every Athenian citizen was also allowed to speak at the assembly, but it is safe to assume that some did speak more often than others and some probably never opened their mouths. For active participants, the ability to skillfully speak in public was very important; it had a direct impact on influencing the decision-making process. This is one of the reasons why some of the leading politicians gained greater popularity, as was the case with Pericles.

The most influential officials in the Athenian government were the 10 generals (*Strategoi*). Initially, a high-ranking military career was essential if one also wanted to have a political one; however, after Pericles, this gradually changed, and it became possible to rise in government without a stellar military background.

Many of the lower-level officials in Athens were selected by lottery, as was mentioned before. This random selection was (and remains) a very good tool to fight corruption. Often the term-limit for officials in Athens was one year; this has both advantages (the avoiding of cronyism) and disadvantages (a greater chance for shortsighted policies and lack of gained experience over time).

When we look at the system of justice, we find that the courts during Pericles' time were based on large juries, sometimes consisting of around one thousand jurors. It seems that the size of these juries was designed in this way so that it would truly represent the will of the people, the demos; once a verdict was issued there was therefore no appeal possible. After Pericles' proposal to pay daily stipends to jurors was accepted, jurors began to come from different economic classes, because the poorer citizens in this way could receive some compensation for lost wages.

7.6.2 Liturgies

Wealthy families in Athens were required to contribute to the common good. This system was referred to as *Liturgy*, which means to "work for the people." It basically meant that wealthy men had to finance certain items that were considered beneficial for the Athenians as a whole. For example, funds were given for the training of warship crews and the maintenance of ships; forsupport for the holding of religious festivals or for sending an Athenian delegation to a festival in another city-state, and many more. Through the Liturgies, poorer people could enjoy various benefits of Athenian life, while the rich often used them to increase their reputation and popularity, at times even going beyond what the law required of them. On the other hand, there were others who tried to avoid the obligations of the Liturgies, for example, by concealing their wealth.

7.6.3 Architecture in Athens during the Golden Age

Leaving aside the great public building projects in Athens, which we will discuss later, the private homes of Athenians were not lavish or luxurious but usually quite modest. They were generally built next to one another along narrow streets and followed a certain pattern: all usually had an open courtyard around which rooms were located. The courtyard could not be accessed from the street. Even though we refer to these years of Pericles' dominance in Athenian politics as the Golden Age, there was not much gold or art or luxury to be found in the homes of Athenians. Paintings and pieces of art were not used to make private homes more beautiful.

Public buildings, however, were a different matter: some were paid for through private donations which, as has been discussed, were expected from the wealthy. So, for example, next to the Athenian Agora, a building was donated that became later known as the Painted Stoa. A *Stoa* is a type of narrow building which is open to one side, providing protection against sun or rain. Around the middle of the fifth century BCE, this Stoa near the Agora in Athens was decorated by famous painters, who in their paintings displayed scenes of Athenian history, such as the battle of Marathon. Because of these paintings the structure became known as the "Painted Stoa."

One building project in Athens, however, eclipsed all others in expense, scope and popularity. Pericles in the year 447 BCE initiated the rebuilding of temples on the Acropolis in Athens, whose stunning remains are still seen by millions of visitors every year.

7.6.4 Acropolis in Athens

As we have discussed earlier, many Greek city-states had an acropolis: a citadel on a hill which would function as a place of last refuge and as a sanctuary. The Acropolis of Athens was inhabited during the later Mycenaean period (1300 to 1200 BCE); excavations have brought to light a few remains of a Mycenaean palace that was located there. Throughout the following periods, the so-called Dark and Archaic periods, Athenians frequently added or altered buildings and temples on their Acropolis. Pericles' project, however, was to outshine all previous modifications.

The Persians had destroyed and burned Athens and its Acropolis twice; after these catastrophes the Athenians planned and began reconstruction of certain elements, such as the walls surrounding the Acropolis. Under Pericles the reconstruction of temples began in earnest. Capable artists and architects were chosen and we even have some of their names, like Phidias, Iktinos, Callikrates or Polygnotos.

In 447 BCE construction began on the most famous of all surviving Greek temples - the *Parthenon*, or as the Athenians saw it, the "House of the Virgin Goddess Athena." This temple replaced an older temple as was the case with much of the construction during this period. The Parthenon is the most conspicuous building on the Acropolis; it is still visible from far away because of its sheer size and location on top of the hill. Construction took fifteen years, and it was the most important piece of Pericles' building project. Athena was the patron deity of Athens and at the very center of her worship stood the Parthenon, although all the structures on the Acropolis were seen as being in service to her cult. The design of the Parthenon was different from other monumental Greek temples in that the architect wanted to increase its size not by making each element larger, but by adding additional elements: so, for example, we find eight instead of the usual six columns across the front and back. The style of the Parthenon is Doric, indicating a certain way of how elements were designed, and the material used was marble.

Inside this more spacious Parthenon a statue was erected: it displayed Athena fully armed and was made out of gold and ivory. It reached thirty feet in height and must have been very impressive. We have enthusiastic accounts of travelers who visited the Athenian Parthenon and saw the statue, which is long gone, in person. The artist who created the statue, Phidias, increased his fame tremendously because of this work. He later created a statue of Zeus that was placed in a temple at Olympia; this statue was later considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Besides his statue of the goddess Athena in the Parthenon, Phidias also sculpted another one called *Athena Promachos*, that was placed on the Acropolis outside between the Parthenon and another temple, the Propylaea.

This latter temple is the one through which one entered the Acropolis complex. *Propylaea* is a term that describes gateways in general; however, the one on the Athenian Acropolis became

the most popular version of such an architectural design. The Athenians began construction of this marble temple in 437 BCE, following mostly the Doric and Ionic orders. As a gateway it provided a means to control access to the temple complex. It contained five massive doors through which one stepped into the Acropolis. Certain people were not allowed to enter; slaves, for example, were prohibited.

The temple with the most unusual form and design on the Athenian Acropolis was the Erechtheion. It was built in the later stages of the building project, probably beginning around 421 BCE; its design followed the Ionic style, which made it visually different from the Parthenon which, as has been said, followed the Doric order. Its unusual form is based on contrasting elements, such as with the porches and columns, some of which were free standing, others engaged. As many as seven different deities were viewed as having places for their worship within the Erechtheion besides Athena. A few statues depicting women who carry a part of the roof of the temple on their heads (instead of columns), are called *Caryatids* and can still be seen today. A wooden statue of Athena (the *Palladion*) that supposedly stood in the Erechtheion, was believed by the Athenians to have fallen from the sky; it was very crudely carved. Also on the grounds of the Erechtheion was the olive tree that Athena, according to Greek mythology, had planted there to give the Athenians the gift of the olive.

A smaller temple dedicated to *Athena Nike*, the goddess of victory, was put up around 421 BCE near the entrance to the Acropolis. This marble temple is much smaller than the previously discussed ones and follows the ornate Ionic order. Inside was a statue of *Athena Nike*, which showed unusual features: instead of displaying the divinity called *Nike* with wings as was normally the case, here the statue was wingless. Thus it was referred to as *Athena Nike Apteros*, the "Wingless Athena Victory." Presumably the victory for which the statue stood as a symbol, alluded to victories against the Persians achieved about sixty years earlier. Why *Athena Nike* was shown without wings was explained by a later ancient author by noting that wingless she could never leave Athens.

7.6.5 Visual Arts

When we take a closer look at the statues on the Acropolis, we find various types: as has been indicated before, there were crude wooden ones but also others that used the modern design-techniques of the day. The statue of Athena in the Parthenon belongs to the latter category. It is an example of a free-standing figure. This approach became more common during the Golden Age in Athens, when statues displayed more movement. During the Archaic period the Greeks produced statues similar to those found in Eastern Civilizations like Egypt: statues usually represented a stiff posture. If we look, for example, at male Greek Archaic period statues, they usually follow the same pattern: left foot slightly forward; arms to the side. The faces hint at a faint smile. The introduction of movement in the Classical Era, especially the Golden Age, made the statues look more natural, because now we find bent arms and more weight being put on one leg. Female statues look more relaxed compared to the Archaic period. The faces of these Classical and especially Golden Age statues, however, are usually rather impassive. The materials of choice at the time were marble and bronze, the latter allowing the sculptor to display outstretched arms and legs to a higher degree. The effects of some of these classical statues when seen in museums today (most of the statues found within are copies made in Roman times), is striking: observed from any angle there is a natural feel to them, and a different impression of the person displayed is gained. The famous statue of the discus-thrower created by Myron is a great example; shown in the act of throwing the discus, the athlete seems to be caught in the act, just before release.

There is much energy to be found in such statues, and it indicates the daring spirit that permeated Athens at the time. The victory against the Persians equipped the Athenians with the boldness to innovate: in politics the new form of government based on greater participation of Athenian citizens gained ground, as we have seen; it also led the Athenians to engage in imperialistic politics, which we will discuss in more detail later. In art this mindset of being brave and energetic and daring enough to try new things, in terms of techniques and designs, inspired artists as well.

It goes without saying that the more traditional ways of creating art did not vanish: there were artists who celebrated the older styles just as there were politicians within Athens who did not agree with the new more democratic approach to politics. So, it is no surprise to find statues in the Archaic style that were created during the classical period; the artist just chose to follow the older design for his own reasons, or because he was commissioned to do so.

Temples such as the Parthenon usually also contain visual art on their pediments, the triangular part below the roof that sits atop of columns. These Greek pediments usually display relief sculptures. The pediment of the western side of the Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis tells us visually the myth of the contest between Poseidon and Athena over who becomes patron of Athens. The eastern pediment relates the story of the birth of Athena out of the head of Zeus. Many of the Parthenon pediments were destroyed, and scholars have tried to reconstruct the art. The pediments that have been discovered at the temple of Zeus at Olympia are better preserved and show scenes of mythology as well, highlighted by centaurs and demi-gods.

The most commonly found form of visual art from ancient Greece is vase painting. During the 5th century BCE, these paintings concentrated on the human figure, while in previous eras geometric symbols or plain circles were often displayed. It is difficult to determine which artist painted what vase, so very often these artists are either named after the place where their vases can be seen today (for example, the "Berlin Painter") or after the subject they preferred to paint (for example, the "Achilles Painter"). Because these artists could not go into much detail when painting the faces of their human figures and thus could not give these figures much facial expressions, the latter was not important to them. The character of these human figures was of no interest; what the artists focused on was the story, the myth, the action. The people shown on the vases are often shown while in action; this allows a glimpse at the particular moment the artist wanted to portray.

Most often the many Greek myths provided the pool from which the artists drew their inspiration. Very frequently, they would paint scenes out of Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, both of which were very familiar to the Greeks. Less frequently we find scenes of daily life painted on vases. These depictions give us an idea of how ordinary life looked, what the clothes at the time

looked like, how agricultural and other tools were designed, how a drinking party happened, or what type of musical instruments were used.

According to the color used to paint the figures on vases we speak of either “red-figure” or “black-figure” pottery. The latter was the technique prevalent in Athens before the 6th century BCE. Around 530 BCE Athenians adopted the red-figure style; it gradually became the most popular form of pottery-making in Athens and this type of Athenian pottery was exported on a large scale.

Pottery is of great importance for the historian. It can, for example, shed light on dates: if found within a certain archaeological layer, we learn about the period to which the layer belongs; we also get information on foreign contacts, since pottery was frequently traded; and we can likely determine the activity that the piece of pottery was used for, such as if it was being used for a religious ritual, or private gathering, or as a regular item within a household.

Other frequently found pieces of visual art are grave statues called *stelai*. Most often these statues and grave reliefs depict men, but we also have a few that commemorated women and girls.

Many great artists from various places congregated in Athens during the Golden Age. Pericles’ ambitious building projects provided ample opportunities for many visual artists. Besides these, Athens also was home to great poets and playwrights. They competed against each other during religious festivals, the most notable and popular of which was held every spring called *The Greater Dionysia*. Let us have a look at its origin and the festival itself.

7.6.6 The Greater Dionysia

The tyrant Peisistratus, whom we discussed earlier, probably established this festival during his time as tyrant of Athens in the 6th century BCE. This ruler, who had come to power in an unconstitutional manner, was surely seeking the support of the people, and using a religious festival to assist in this goal offered him two advantages: he could portray himself as a pious man and at the same time provide entertainment for the people.

The Greeks believed that a man called Thespis (from whom our world *thespian* derives) invented drama sometime after 550 BCE. He supposedly won the first drama competition held in 534 BCE during the Greater Dionysia in Athens. No plays of Thespis have survived, nor do we have much information about him or his work.

The Greater Dionysia is also referred to as *City Dionysia*, because it was linked with the urban part of the polis. There existed an older rural festival usually called *Lesser* Dionysia; this festival was held a few months earlier every year. The Greater Dionysia became the second most popular festival in Athens after the *Panathenaiai*, a festival in honor of Athena.

The Greater Dionysia were dedicated to the god Dionysus. He was seen as a god of fertility, vegetation, wine, dance, masks, and drama. The wearing of masks to portray various characters in a play was common; generally masks and wine share certain features: both allow one to leave the everyday life, persona or identity behind. To worship Dionysus meant to let go or step out (the Greek word *ekstasis* literally means stepping out) of your ordinary existence for a moment. The means by which one can achieve this stepping out belongs to the realm of Dionysus. In Greek mythology, Dionysus was described as not being worshipped by the Athenians early on; in retaliation they were hit by a curse which only ended after the Athenians accepted him. During processions the Athenians reminded themselves of this punishment, while also using this as an opportunity to show their strength. Greater Dionysia held during the Golden Age often included processions showcasing weapons.

At the heart of the Greater Dionysia, however, were contests of dramatic performances. Since Dionysus was believed to be the god of drama and theater, these contests were a way to worship him, much like the athletic contests at Olympia were a means to worship Zeus. The Greater Dionysia lasted a few days, probably around five. Three days were needed for tragedies; on other days competitions were held for comedies (after about 487 BCE); competitions in music and poetry (called *dithyrambic*) were held in the early days of the festival (and maybe on a smaller scale after 487 BCE as well).

7.6.7 Aeschylus

The earliest playwright whose plays have survived to this day and who competed at the City Dionysia, is Aeschylus. He lived from around 525 to 456 BCE. His six surviving tragedies are the earliest examples of Greek drama that came down to us. By analyzing the oldest of these six plays, called *The Persians*, we will highlight some aspects of these early dramas that were put on stage in Athens.

There existed a strict set of rules which covered competitions between plays at the Greater Dionysia. One of the archons in Athens would appoint officials to help organize the festival. The financial costs supporting theatrical competitions, such as in rehearsing, stage props, etc. were financed by wealthy Athenian citizens called *Choregos*, as a part of a Liturgy.

Certain officials also had to choose the plays which would compete out of a pool submitted by poets. Each poet had to submit four plays for consideration: three tragedies and one satyr-play. Usually three poets were chosen, so nine tragedies and three satyr-plays were staged over the course of three days. The comedies were performed on the following days.

A satyr-play is named after mythological creatures called satyrs who are usually seen as a mix between human, horse and goat. The satyr-play usually had a chorus of such satyrs who were involved with a hero. Satyrs were known for their animal-like appetites and rowdy behavior; the way the hero dealt with these satyrs was funny, although serious topics were also depicted.

Tragedies seem to have been the focal point at the Greater Dionysia. Tragedy, when translated from ancient Greek, means “Goat-Song.” Goats were the sacred animal of Dionysus. The term might have originally indicated that an actor would dress up as a goat, personifying Dionysus, and sing a song, or that an individual or group would sing a song for a goat/Dionysus as part of a ritual. It might also indicate that a song was sung while a goat was sacrificed for Dionysus by the winner of the contest.

Comedy as a word derives from the Greek word for procession, and may hint at the origin of all theatre, which possibly evolved from processions and the back-and-forth that would go on between the crowd and a leader.

The winners of the competition would be chosen by ten judges who represented the ten tribes of Athens. We know, for example, that Aeschylus with his aforementioned play *The Persians* won the first prize at the Greater Dionysia in the year 472 BCE. Aeschylus, like the other competing poets, not only wrote the plays but also directed them; the playwrights might even have acted in them.

In *The Persians* the production looked as follows: there was a chorus of twelve Athenian citizens who played Persian elders, and two actors who portrayed the Persian king Xerxes, Xerxes' mother, the ghost of Darius and a Persian messenger. The two actors indicated the different characters by using masks. In later plays the number of the members of the chorus increased to fifteen, and three actors were used.

The poetry in *The Persians* and other plays by the Attic playwrights is full of variety. In general, the plays contained elements of singing, talking, reciting, and dancing, sometimes by actors, sometimes by the chorus. The latter especially had a difficult task: not only was the chorus required to sing, but it also had a certain choreography which alone made extensive rehearsal necessary. The chorus functioned sometimes as another actor in the drama and sometimes as commentator. As one can see, an Attic play had much more in common with modern-day musicals and opera than with contemporary plays that emphasize spoken dialogue.

The Persians is also remarkable because there isn't a single Greek individual who is provided with a name by the Persian characters. Considering that this play was put on stage only eight years after the battle of Salamis and seven after the Persians brought their invasion to an end, this is astonishing. It seems that Aeschylus attributes the Greek's victory to the common effort rather than an individual one; he describes in his play the Persian king Xerxes as a megalomaniac who, with his arrogance and hybris, challenged the gods who then in turn use the Athenians as a tool to punish him. The Athenians who saw the play sitting on wooden bleachers on the south slope of the Acropolis liked the play, and Aeschylus received first prize for it. Later, such plays would be performed in a much larger theater with stone seating.

Since we only have *The Persians* as a surviving play from the Dionysia competition of 472 BCE, we do not possess the full body of Aeschylus' submissions for that year. The other two

tragedies and the satyr-play by Aeschylus that he must have submitted are lost. Fortunately, we have from the year 458 BCE, a complete set of his tragedies that were in competition at the City Dionysia. Aeschylus received the first prize for these plays as well. These three tragedies (*Agamemnon, Libation Bearers, Eumenides*) are together referred to as the "*Oresteia*" because they tell the myth of the family of a man called Orestes. In these tragedies Aeschylus has traditional gods (like the Furies, terrifying divinities that haunt evildoers) colliding with the ones who came to power more recently (Zeus and the other Olympian gods, who overthrew their predecessors according to Greek mythology). After these different generations of gods clash, they finally reconcile at the end of the last play. Aeschylus in these tragedies seems to reflect on the contemporary political situation in Athens, where, as we have seen, certain democratic reforms led to conflict between progressives and conservatives.

7.6.8 Sophocles

One of the most successful playwrights in Athens at the City Dionysia was Sophocles. He competed frequently with Aeschylus, who was a little older (Sophocles was born around 496 and died in 406 BCE). According to our sources, Sophocles won first prize eighteen times at the Dionysia. Unfortunately, only seven plays of Sophocles can be read today or seen on stage, because all the others (supposedly he wrote more than a hundred) are lost.

One of his most popular plays today, and the one that Aristotle considered the best drama according to his standards for tragedies, is *King Oedipus* (*Oedipus Tyrannus*). In it Sophocles portrays the myth of Oedipus, who kills his father, marries his own mother and has children with her. While in the play Oedipus does not know what he was doing, Sophocles creates throughout the drama ample opportunities for Oedipus to learn the truth, but he does not. Only at the end, when he finally understands, he stabs his own eyes out, a self-inflicted punishment and symbolic since he did not use his eyes earlier to prevent these horrible deeds.

At the City-Dionysia of (probably) 427 BCE, Sophocles did not win first prize with the set of plays that included his *Oedipus Tyrannus*. However, the play contains many elements that show us Sophocles' genius. Sophocles was, for example, very apt at using dramatic irony, a technique that is built on the idea that the audience knows more than the plot itself allows (a classic

example in modern movies would be the victim, who is entering a room while the audience is aware that the killer waits behind the door with a murder weapon). This technique allows the writer to create suspense. In Oedipus' case there are many situations in the play when spectators want to warn Oedipus not to go through with what he is about to do, like killing his father or marrying his mother. Thousands of years later, Sigmund Freud used this play and the myth it is based upon, to name the subconscious desires and fears of men the Oedipus-complex.

Another play of Sophocles that enjoys enduring popularity describes the fate of Antigone, one of Oedipus' daughters. In the tragedy which bears her name, Antigone faces the difficult decision to either follow the laws of her city-state or the moral and emotional obligations she has towards her family. She decides to break the law and is punished for it. This play is interesting on various levels: it discusses the issues of the laws of government and the boundaries of love and what should prevail over the other. It also exposes some of the male-female dynamics of Athens at the time; Antigone is a very strong character who stands up to the leader of the city-state which was very male-dominated, like the rest of the Ancient Greek world. With this play Sophocles won at the City Dionysia held most likely in 447 BCE.

Besides being very successful with his plays, Sophocles was also innovative with some technical aspects of the theater, such as by increasing the number of actors to three and the size of the chorus to fifteen.

7.6.9 Euripides

Euripides (c. 485-406 BCE) was the least successful of the three great Athenian playwrights at the City-Dionysia, only winning there a few times. However, his plays are still read and performed today. It might be that his style actually became more popular over the years, because he seems to have been a modern writer in the eyes of the Athenians, one that challenged and changed the conventions of drama at the time.

Euripides did not change the myths that poets used as foundations for their plays; it seems that he constructed the plays differently, and that he used new music and dance and incorporated them in different ways than for example Sophocles and Aeschylus. What he

achieved with these changes was that he transferred many of the deep emotional and passionate effects that would traditionally occur on stage, into the hearts and minds of the audience. He is thus considered a psychological writer who challenges the audience through plot-twists, unexpected developments, and shifts of perspectives. The innovative technique of Euripides can best be seen when we look briefly at one of his most popular plays, *Medea*.

Among the seventeen tragedies and one satyr-play that we have today from Euripides, *Medea* is probably the one most often performed on stages around the world. Medea is a princess living far away from the Greek world. She helped her husband Jason retrieve the Golden Fleece by using her extraordinary intelligence and skills in magic, without which Jason would not have succeeded in his quest. She did so against the orders of her father and thus lost everything by helping Jason. Euripides begins his play with Jason deciding to leave Medea after having been married to her with children for years. He wants to marry a new woman, daughter of the king of Corinth, the place where the play is set. At this point in the play the audience clearly is more sympathetic to Medea, since Euripides describes Jason as a very unpleasant man and Medea as the one who suffers. As a result, the decision by Medea to take revenge on Jason for his decision can be understood or even justified by the audience. However, the way Medea is about to take revenge, shifts our sympathies completely: first she kills the young princess that Jason wants to marry; then she kills her own children, because she wants to rob Jason of what he desires the most - heirs. This horrific act surely tested, or rather transgressed the limits of what an audience could endure in Athens in the fifth century BCE. These unexpected shifts in sympathies for a character in a play or movie are still challenging for audiences today; many large production companies for movies, for example, have guidelines that demand certain standards that exclude "violent" turns of plots.

What is also striking about Euripides' Medea is the way she explains her gruesome choices when she debates with Jason. She is very rational and presents organized arguments in well-structured speeches supporting her acts. Some of these debates that Jason and Medea have in the play, in which they refute each other point-by-point through intellectual means and rational

arguments, surely reminded the Athenian citizens of their own debates in the assembly and in the courts of law.

The debates within the play also provide evidence that Euripides was influenced by an intellectual movement that gained ground in Athens during the Golden Age, called *Sophism*. The Sophists were teachers who focused on teaching wisdom in return for compensation. It seems that the most important part of what they considered to be wisdom (the Greek word for wisdom is *Sophia*) was rhetoric, the art of public speaking. The ability to persuade others by non-violent means is the quintessential foundation of a democracy. In Athens it was the most important tool to be successful in public life, ever since the reforms of Cleisthenes led to the involvement of many more Athenian citizens in governance and the decision-making process, as we have seen. The Sophists claimed to be able to teach students to present well-formed arguments in the citizen-assembly and to convince others of the superiority of one's ideas through skillful public speaking. This led to a kind of change in general education within the Greek world. Traditionally, education of youth in Greek city-states centered on and around athletic competition.

The Sophists also challenged the traditional view of the gods, because they asked critical questions about their existence or their influence on mortals. Euripides also gives evidence of this because in his plays, since the gods have less influence on his plots than in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles.

7.6.10 Aristophanes

The most famous playwright of comedies at the end of the fifth century and into the fourth was Aristophanes. Born in the 450s BCE, he achieved what is the goal of all comedies - making people laugh. What the Athenians laughed about and what they considered funny seems to have been to make fun of popular figures in Athens: Aristophanes mocks leading politicians and intellectuals. Pericles, for example, is frequently mocked for the shape of his head; the philosopher Socrates is often portrayed as being engaged in senseless thought-experiments like measuring the length of a flea's jump or determining where the sound a mosquito makes comes from: the rear or the mouth. When we read or see these comedies today, the attacks seem

personal, harsh, and insulting. But they are also signs of the freedom of speech that was allowed in Athens.

This freedom can also be seen when we look at one of the plays of Aristophanes called *Lysistrata*. This comedy is probably the one that is most popular today. It has recently been adapted for the cinema by the director Spike Lee in the move *Chi-Raq*. It was put on stage in 411 BCE during the Peloponnesian War. As we shall see, the Athenians at that time were at war with the Spartans, who by 411 BCE had troops on Athenian territory; the Athenians surely were very worried about defending their city. The play, however, can be interpreted as a plea for peace, or at least an honorable end of the war. The plot describes women refusing to have sex with their men until the war ends. Aristophanes also poked fun at the gender-dynamics of contemporary Athens.

Aristophanes' plays and comedies from this period portrayed everyday characters, including slaves, peasants and non-citizens called *Metics*. These plays are therefore of great importance for the historian, because we can get a sense of how common people lived. Of course, the poet would exaggerate and describe his characters in extreme situations to achieve his goal; knowing this, however, we can try to find the foundation for the exaggeration.

Besides these cultural achievements in theatre, the intellectual development in Athens during the age of Pericles also stimulated advances in philosophy. The philosopher Socrates grew up in this period (he was born around 469 BCE as an Athenian citizen) and with him a new stage begins in philosophy; he introduced new ways of how to question what were considered truths, and he implemented more ethical dimensions into the existing schools of thought. These earlier schools are now commonly referred to as "Pre-Socratic philosophy;" let us first have a look at some of the philosophers who came before Socrates, so that we can understand better the context.

7.7 Philosophy

Most of the philosophers who belong to a group which we refer to as *Pre-Socratics*, came from a region called Ionia. Located in what today constitutes the western part of Turkey, this area functioned basically as a bridge between the older advanced civilizations of Mesopotamia (such as Babylonia) and the Greek world. The Babylonians especially were very knowledgeable regarding astronomy and mathematics, as we have learned from clay tablets excavated by archaeologists. The philosophers who lived in Ionia were influenced by these older achievements in their analysis of the natural world. They were mostly interested in studying nature and discovering the laws that regulate it. They used reason (*logos* in Greek) to do so. Previously, most everything was believed to be the work of the gods. This is why Ionia is often referred to as the birthplace of reason (for Western civilizations). Let us talk about a few of the early thinkers from this region. Most of what we know about them is based on writings of later authors such as Herodotus, Aristotle or Diogenes Laertius.

7.7.1 Thales

Thales was born around 623 BCE in Miletus, a city in Ionia that was home not only to Thales, but also to the philosophers Anaximander and Anaximenes; together these three men are often referred to as the Milesian school.

According to Herodotus, Thales supposedly predicted the solar eclipse that happened on May 28 in 585 BCE. If he was indeed able to do so, he was certainly making this prediction based on knowledge going back to the Babylonians, who, as was mentioned before, were highly advanced in astronomy and mathematics. Thales also made advances in geometry and in his studies of nature in general. Like many thinkers in Ionia, he also thought about the beginnings of all things (known in Ancient Greek as the *arche*) and traced back all matter to one substance - water.

7.7.2 Anaximander and Anaximenes

Anaximander was born around 610 BCE. He became a student of Thales and he continued his teacher's studies. Most importantly, Anaximander further established the idea that a set of

laws governs and regulates the physical world. Like his teacher Thales, Anaximander wanted to find the one substance, matter or principle that became the source for all that followed. While Thales believed water to be this *arche* (beginning), Anaximander believed it to be something immaterial, *apeiron*.

The last of these Milesian thinkers, Anaximenes, was born around 586 BCE. He was a student of Anaximander, and he also searched for this same *arche*, which in his case he identified to be *aer* (air).

Although most of the theories of these three early philosophers belonging to the school of Miletus have been disproved, it is important to note that the way they approached problems and tried to find explanations, had a deep impact on later philosophers, for example, Pythagoras.

7.7.3 Pythagoras of Samos

Most students today know of Pythagoras because of his theorem (the *Pythagorean Theorem*) that is central in the study of geometry. He was born around 570 BCE in Ionia on the island of Samos. As in all the cases of these early thinkers, very little reliable information about his life is known; some accounts connect him with earlier thinkers of the Milesian school. He traveled and at one point arrived in Croton (today southern Italy) where he conducted further research and worked as an educator.

Pythagoras apparently taught that the souls of humans after death migrate into a new body a process that is referred to as *metempsychosis*. Nothing is known however about how Pythagoras described this reincarnation to happen. Pythagoreans, as his followers were known, also believed that mathematics with its principles is the foundation of all things. All things, they believed, are made of numbers.

The school founded by Pythagoras in Croton was more like a monastery. His followers lived a communal lifestyle and were required to adhere to certain restrictions related to diet, secrecy and other aspects of their daily lives.

7.7.4 Xenophanes of Colophon

Xenophanes was a contemporary of Pythagoras, also born around 570 BCE in Ionia, in the city of Colophon. He was a critic of the belief that gods look and behave like humans (the anthropomorphic view of gods). Poets such as Homer and Hesiod in their poems describe gods as having affairs, being vain and petty, stealing and deceiving. According to Xenophanes, gods do not look like humans or act like them, and they do not interfere with human affairs. It seems that Xenophanes had a monotheistic tendency, meaning he argued that one god created all things, but besides this god he accepted that more deities existed.

7.7.5 Heraclitus of Ephesus

Heraclitus was born around 535 BCE in the Ionian city of Ephesus. For him the only constant was change. The two sayings attributed to him make this clear: “No one steps into the same river twice” and “All is in flux” (*Panta Rei*). Accordingly, Heraclitus claimed that everything is made up of fire, determining it as the *arche*, the principle or origin of all things. In addition, Heraclitus also saw opposites as having a regulatory function and a hidden harmony, a union of opposites.

As we can see, these thinkers from Ionia were for the most part developing theories to explain what regulates the world, what causes natural phenomena and what is the beginning or principle of all things. With Socrates a more ethical dimension was added and a new era in philosophy begins.

7.7.6 Socrates

Socrates was born around 469 BCE in Athens. Everything we know about him goes back to writings by others, most importantly his students Plato and Xenophon. We possess no writings authored by Socrates himself. Because some of the accounts of these later writers offer conflicting information, it is often difficult to gain a clear insight into Socrates’ life and thought.

It seems rather certain that he did not leave Athens, except when he participated in three campaigns during the Peloponnesian Wars. In 399 BCE he was accused of corrupting the youth of Athens, worshipping false gods, and not following the state religion. Famously, he was convicted in a trial and executed by way of poisoning.

What the essence of Socrates' philosophy was can only be reconstructed by what we know about it through the works of later authors, especially Plato. Plato usually depicts Socrates as engaged in dialogues, during which certain questions (for example what is love? what is justice?) are discussed. The result of these conversations is usually the acknowledgement by Socrates' interlocutors that what was considered certain knowledge, is actually false or contradictory. This method of refutation (*elenchus*) is used to get closer and closer to the truth. It is important to notice that Socrates is not shown as engaging in teaching a rigid philosophical doctrine; instead, he also questions himself: Socrates famously claimed that the only thing he really knows is that he does not know. This "Socratic method" of questioning is still important in scholarship. Most thinkers realize at a certain stage that what they have learned in their career, is but a small drop in the vast ocean of knowledge.

The trial of Socrates in 399 BCE happened in politically turbulent times. The Athenians in 404 BCE lost a brutal war as we will discuss below. After 404 oligarchic and democratic sides in Athens were struggling for leadership, and it is possible that Socrates became a victim of colliding political groups. However, in Plato's and Xenophon's description of the trial, the religious grounds for his conviction seem prevalent.

7.7.7 Plato

Plato was born in Athens in the 420s BCE. By most he is regarded as one of the most important and influential Greek philosophers, together with his teacher Socrates and his own student Aristotle. He established a school, the *Academy* (named after a legendary Athenian hero called *Akademos*) near Athens in 387 BCE, on ground sacred to the goddess Athena.

Plato's books are written in the form of dialogues or conversations, where Socrates was usually a participant. Often the dialogues deal with one particular topic or question such as, what is justice? what is love? what is the perfect government or state to live in? The most important topic for Plato seems to have been the trial and death of Socrates. Three of Plato's works deal directly with the trial and Socrates' time in prison. Others allude to it frequently. His method of reaching conclusions is a dialectic one, meaning a point is discussed and questioned until one gets a clearer idea on the subject. To this end Plato also employed the use of mythology and

allegories. Most famously he used the allegory of the cave to explain his idea of the visible and invisible world: the visible is difficult to know while the invisible one can be known more easily. He also uses the story of the Ring of Gyges, which makes its owner invisible, to discuss an ethical question: would an owner of this ring with such capabilities commit injustice or be virtuous in its use.

In some of his books, such as *The Republic*, we find Plato's thoughts on politics. While he develops his theoretical version of the ideal state and government, Plato frequently uses Sparta as an example. It needs to be said that, since Plato himself never is a participant in the dialogues in his books, it is difficult to determine what really were his thoughts and which ones go back to Socrates or the other discussants.

7.7.8 Aristotle

Aristotle was one of Plato's students at the Athenian Academy. There he studied for around twenty years, beginning in 367 BCE, after he arrived in Athens at the age of around seventeen. After his time at the Academy, Aristotle left Athens around 343/42 BCE to become the teacher of Alexander the Great in Macedonia. He later returned to Athens and established his own school called the Lyceum (*Lykeion*). It is named after its location, which was near the grounds sacred to *Apollo Lykeios*. Later, another term was used to describe Aristotle's school: *Peripatos*. This term means "walkway" and it probably goes back to an actual walkway with colonnades, which was located at the Lyceum. Aristotle seems to have had many assistants at his school helping him in his research; he certainly could afford them since he was a wealthy man. This wealth, however, would not protect him when after the death of Alexander the Great, anti-Macedonian forces in Athens became dominant and Aristotle was forced to leave.

Aristotle was interested in many areas: we have works from him covering a wide range of topics, such as science, ethics, biology, poetry, politics, metaphysics and rhetoric. It is important to note, however, that all his written works that we possess today were meant by Aristotle for his students only, as they were part of his lectures (referred to today as the *esoteric* scripts). The works which Aristotle wanted to be read by the public (the *exoteric* scripts) are lost.

Aristotle's influence was deep. The Aristotelian school (meaning Aristotle and later thinkers who followed and expanded his ideas) still has an impact on modern science, politics and on the humanities in general. One example would be his discussion of the various forms of government that Aristotle lays out in his *Politics*. This is the first systematic treatment of constitutions that we know of. It is still interesting to read, especially in regards of Aristotle's ideas about democracy. Comparisons between today's forms of democracy and the one that Aristotle developed, are interesting and should help us to understand and improve our own contemporary political systems. We learn, for example, how important it was for Aristotle that nepotism and corruption be prevented by appointing lower-level officials for shorter terms, and by choosing them in lotteries. It is also important to remember that Aristotle and Plato and all ancient philosophers wrote in societies that held certain assumptions that we today simply cannot accept. Aristotle, for example, writes that people are either born to be masters or slaves, and Plato as well accepts slavery as part of a well governed state. These are just two examples from many instances where we have to remember that these thinkers were very much the product of their time, with values that we have abandoned.

7.8 The Peloponnesian Wars

As we have heard earlier, Pericles was the dominant politician in Athens from 461 until his death in 429 BCE. During those years, commonly referred to as the Golden Age of Athens, he had the greatest influence among his peers on politics in Athens. Also during these years a brutal and destructive war broke out between Athens and its allies (the Delian League) and Sparta and its allied forces (called the Peloponnesian League). The war began in 431 BCE; it is frequently divided into three phases. We have already learned that Athens lost this war in 404 BCE. The most important source to learn about this war remains the author Thucydides (born around 460 BCE). He authored eight books (the last one apparently unfinished) about this conflict, ending his account abruptly in the year 410 BCE.

7.8.1 Thucydides

We know little about Thucydides himself. He was a general in the very war he wrote about, and this activity influenced his portrayal of the conflict. Thucydides as a historian differs from his predecessor Herodotus in that he does not allow for divine interference into human affairs. Thucydides also does not include short stories or anecdotes to the extent in which Herodotus uses the same tools in his narrative. According to Thucydides, politics is a process driven mainly by the will to get power. Everything else, such as claiming some action is good or evil, is used to hide the true motive - power. Thucydides expands his analysis sometimes further into general patterns of human nature; for example he identifies three distinct drives behind the decision-making process: the desire for honor and fame (*philotimia*); the desire for wealth and material possessions (*pleonexia*), and fear (*phobos*). According to Thucydides, the latter is the dominant drive.

Scholars used to regard Thucydides as a rather detached analytical reporter of facts who keeps a distance from the events he describes; more recently scholars have begun to see him as a more passionate author who frequently shows an emotional side.

As was mentioned before, the biggest difference between Herodotus and Thucydides is the omission of gods from influencing human action in Thucydides' work. For the most part Thucydides tries to explain everything by finding natural causes and man-made mechanisms as a trigger to events. However, Thucydides is fully aware that there are irrational patterns detectable in the historical process. Instead of attributing these to divinities, he claims that human nature (*physis*) is spontaneous and passionate. As such, humans and their emotional spontaneous actions cannot be predicted. He also sees chance or coincidence (*tyche*) as shaping history at times, which obviously is impossible to calculate or anticipate.

According to Thucydides, the war between Athens and Sparta begins with Athens' rise as a powerful empire, not because of a specific military provocation, which would only be the proverbial spark that lit the powder keg. Instead, the two sides were rivals for a long time before the actual war broke out; what kept this rivalry from becoming serious earlier was the common threat from the great enemy Persia, which had to be neutralized during the Persian Wars. The

events of 465 BCE, when Sparta sent back the Athenian soldiers who arrived to help with a revolt of Helots, as we have discussed previously, ended the state of harmony that might have existed before between the two city-states. In the so-called First Peloponnesian War (460-445 BCE), a conflict between two city-states, Corinth and Megara, drew in the involvement of Athens and Sparta, both of which fought intermittently against each other as a result, until a peace was negotiated in 445 BCE that was supposed to last 30 years. It basically allowed both sides to keep their empires, and Athens continued to dominate the seas while Sparta's strength remained on land.

After various provocations war broke out again in 431 BCE. Sparta made successful use of its land-forces, while Athens achieved important victories at sea. An important factor in eventually weakening Athens was the outbreak of the plague or typhus that killed about one to two thirds of its population. As we have learned earlier, even the leading politician and general Pericles fell victim to the disease. As one can imagine, Athenian manpower was severely hit, and mercenaries could not be bought to fight for a city thus devastated by disease. Even the enemy did not invade at that time because of their fear of catching this scourge.

Ultimately, even if the Athenians had reasonable cause for believing they would come out ahead in a conflict with Sparta because of their far greater naval capabilities, the plague dampened this hope early on. Later costly military campaigns, such as the disastrous Sicilian Expedition (415-413 BCE), during which Athens sent out a massive fleet to Sicily, most of which was lost, contributed to their ultimate defeat, while other factors included the involvement of Persia, which supported the Spartan side due to their resentment of the expansion of Athenian power. The Persians greatly strengthened the Spartan cause by giving them funds to build a fleet to challenge the Athenians and by attacking allies of Athens.

The final blow for the Athenians came in 405 BCE, when they lost a naval battle at *Aigospotami*. This location is in modern-day Turkey where a river, the Aigospotami ("goat-river") was flowing into the Hellespont. There the Spartan commander Lysander brilliantly defeated the Athenian fleet, which lost about 168 ships; around 3,000 Athenian men were captured. Without any means of importing food, the Athenians faced starvation or surrender. Some city-states

(Corinth and Thebes) demanded that Athens should be destroyed and its population sold into slavery; in the end, however, the Spartan decision was to spare Athens from annihilation, because of their past contributions during the Persian invasions. Athens was punished by losing its fleet, its defensive walls were destroyed and its overseas possessions were taken away.

After 404 BCE the Spartans dominated the Greek world. While Sparta had significant material advantages resulting from their victory, their allies within the Peloponnesian League did not enjoy as many benefits. This created animosities and rivalries between formerly allied cities, especially Thebes and Corinth on one side, and Sparta on the other. This would eventually lead to an armed conflict called the Corinthian War (395-387 BCE), during which Thebes, Corinth and Athens, which by that time had recovered somewhat from its earlier defeat, together tried to end Spartan dominance. The Persians at first supported the enemies of Sparta; later however they switched sides after Athens showed renewed strength. Sparta continued to be the dominant city-state after the war but was much weakened. Thebes, which had lost the most after the Corinthian War, gradually recovered and was able to eventually take advantage of a weakened Sparta. In the Battle of Leuctra in 371 BCE, the Thebans were finally able to end Spartan hegemony over Greece.

While the Greek city-states were thus engaged in conflicts with each other, another region was on the rise in the north. This region, Macedonia, will later be able not only to dominate the Greek world but will stretch as far as Persia and parts of India.

7.9 Macedonia

Ancient Macedonia changed its size over the centuries considerably. The original boundaries of the kingdom of Macedonia before expansion were located in what today is northern Greece. And while the Greek city-states for decades after the Peloponnesian Wars were occupied with rivalries among themselves, their Macedonian neighbors to the north ultimately accumulated so much power that they were able in time to not only conquer the Greek city-states, but also the mighty empire of Persia.

The Persians, as we have seen, were influencing Greek politics in major ways: trying to conquer it militarily, but also using the time-tested method of dividing the enemy to weaken or by creating loyal allies by protecting them. In this way the Persians came to be involved with Macedonia. They helped in the expansion of Macedonia's power, and in return the Macedonians were frequently loyal allies of the Persians, exemplified by their support of Xerxes' invasion in 480 BCE.

Macedonia was ruled by monarchs with absolute power over their subjects, ever since the Archaic Period. The people closest to the king were the *Hetairoi*, his companions, men of the Macedonian aristocracy who were raised together with the king. They later became his bodyguards and advisors and served in a cavalry unit that was commanded by the king himself. Because of this closeness to the Macedonian king, we learn about frequent conspiracies in this inner circle; some companions or their families worked against the king to crown themselves or gain an advantage.

Ancient Macedonia was rich in timber and grains, and both were traded extensively, for example with Athens, which relied heavily on Macedonian timber during the expansion of their fleet. The Athenians also needed grain from Macedonia to satisfy demand in their populous city-state. Athenian politics therefore watched developments in Macedonia and tried to influence domestic politics there to make sure that this supply of goods was secure.

Thus, Macedonia became wealthy exporting goods. Some of the Macedonian kings used this wealth to improve the Macedonian military, economy and administration; in addition, some also engaged in a process that is commonly referred to as *Hellenization*. This refers to when non-Greek regions (like Macedonia) chose to adopt aspects of Greek culture, language and religion, the reason being that these places viewed the Greeks and their achievements as far advanced of their own and accordingly wanted to absorb aspects of the Greek world and use it for their own benefit. Archelaus I of Macedon, who ruled from 413 to 399 BCE, was very much involved in improving Macedonia in this manner according to the Greek historian Thucydides. He invited Greek artists to work in Macedonia, such as Euripides, who wrote his tragedy *The Bacchae* there. This Macedonian king also reorganized religious festivals according to Greek patterns. His

reforms of the military and his road-building projects paved the way for his successors' military successes in later years, especially Philip the Second's. This ruler further improved the Macedonian military and was able to consolidate Macedonian power as we shall see below.

7.9.1 Philipp II

Philip was born around 383/382 BCE, the youngest son of Amyntas III, king of Macedonia. At the age of around 15 he was exiled because of a dynastic crisis in Macedonia. Most of the time of his exile (368 to 365 BCE) was spent in one of the leading city-states of the Greek world, Thebes. He had contact there with, and was educated by, military leaders such as Epaminondas, the great Theban general and politician, and Pelopidas, the leader of the Sacred Band of Thebes, an elite force of 300 Theban hoplites. These contacts and experiences in Thebes gave Philip insight into contemporary Greek diplomacy, politics, and military strategies.

In 365/364 BCE he returned to Macedonia after being recalled by his brother, King Perdiccas III. It seems Philip was given a province to rule, until Perdiccas III died in battle in 359 BCE. Philip became king that year, but his hold on the throne as well as the Macedonian kingdom in general, were contested and threatened by rivals and enemies. In the following years Philip secured his position within Macedonia with recklessness, military skill, diplomatic efforts and political skill. For example, like other Macedonian rulers before him, Philip used marriages as diplomatic tools, as was the custom for Macedonian kings who practiced polygamy.

Philip reformed the Macedonian army in various ways. He restructured it by offering a new system of pay and instituted a sort of draft, which created a standing force of soldiers. He also reorganized the composition of the Macedonian phalanx, the formation of soldiers. This phalanx consisted of a large group of soldiers (more than two hundred men) who moved as one unit in a rectangular formation. These soldiers were equipped with a weapon called the *Sarissa*. This was a very long spear (about 15 feet) which, when used by the Macedonian phalanx, enabled the soldiers to create distance between them and the enemy, and strike the first blow. Philip also made the bond between him and his soldiers stronger by fighting among them, and thus leading them on by example. The frequent wounds that he received during battles provides testimony to this. When his tomb and body was discovered in 1977 in Verdina, in today's Greece, forensic

work proved the ancient sources were correct in claiming that Philip lost one of his eyes in battle and suffered many more injuries. With all of these improvements and measures Philip transformed the Macedonian army into a capable, tactically advanced military machine, that had advantages over neighboring armies, such as those of the Greek city-states and Persia.

With the army thus strengthened, and with his and Macedonia's internal position secured, Philip then turned to expanding Macedonia's power to adjoining regions. He did so with military might, diplomacy and political tricks, such as breaking promises made in treaties. He also at times used tremendous brutality to show what became of those who challenged the Macedonians; for example, eradicating whole cities on the Chalkidiki peninsula, which had allied themselves with Athens, an opponent of Macedonia.

The Greek world came under Macedonian dominance in the 340's and early 330's BCE. Philip tried to destroy alliances between Greek city states either through diplomacy or by military force. Anecdotes tell us about some of these encounters: Sparta, for example, supposedly received a message from Philip that said that should he decide to invade Sparta, the Spartans would lose their home forever. The typical (*Laconic*) reply of the Spartans was only one word: "If". Philip invaded Laconia and the Spartans lost parts of their territory.

The Battle at Chaeroneia in 338 BCE was the final blow that secured the Greek world for Philip: there Macedonian forces defeated Thebes and Athens who had allied themselves against Macedonia. Philip, with his twenty year-old son Alexander by his side, personally led the Macedonian troops and after this decisive victory Philip now turned his attention towards the East. He wanted to invade Persia.

Philip was engaged in Persian politics for a long time. He tried to weaken the Achaemenid rulers by supporting rivals to the Persian king. He provided refuge for Persian aristocrats for example who wished to challenge the Achaemenid ruler at the time, Artaxerxes III. While these Persian noblemen were in Macedonia, Philip received valuable information about Persian politics and military strategies through them, very much like Philip himself did when he as a young man lived in exile in the Greek city of Thebes. This knowledge had proven to be valuable in the

confrontation against the Greek world; surely the information Philip obtained from the Persians at his court would help him against Persia.

Philip began the preparation for a large-scale invasion of Persia in 336 BCE; he sent thousands of Macedonian troops into Asia Minor to help the Greek city-states there revolt against Achaemenid rule. These plans came to an abrupt halt when Philip was assassinated later that year. The reasons behind the assassination of Philip in 336 BCE are impossible to determine. It seems very likely that Philip's private life is to blame, and that he was killed in an act of revenge. After his death his son Alexander became king, at the age of twenty.

7.9.2 Alexander

Immediately after Alexander became king of Macedonia he followed a practice of previous Macedonian rulers: he got rid of potential rivals by having them killed. Another task in consolidating his power was to put down revolts that broke out in several Greek city-states, which after receiving the news of the assassination of Philip thought it might provide an opportunity to break free from Macedonian rule. Among these revolting city-states were Thebes and Athens.

Alexander decided to react swiftly. He led about 3,000 Macedonian cavalry south and succeeded. Some city-states surrendered without a fight, and Alexander became leader of the Amphictyonic League, an alliance of Greek city-states. Then he had to turn north to put down revolts by the Thracians and Illyrians. While Alexander was thus engaged in these northern regions, Thebes and Athens revolted. Ever since their defeat at Chaironeia in 338 BCE, these cities, which were among the most powerful Greek city-states at that time, were eager to get rid of Macedonian dominance. Alexander needed to be worried about the situation to the south because he ultimately wanted to realize his father's plan of invading Persia. Accordingly, Alexander raced towards Greece, supposedly covering 300 miles in only two weeks.

Meanwhile many other Greek city-states had declared independence from Macedonia, and Alexander needed to act fast. His sudden appearance in Greece caused many of these city-states to abandon their quest for independence. Athens and Sparta chose to wait and see; they did not want to confront Alexander and his troops. Therefore, Thebes faced Alexander alone. After an

intense battle the Macedonian forces defeated the Thebans: Alexander had all the Theban men executed, the women and kids sold into slavery and the city burned to the ground. Supposedly he left only one house standing: the house of his favorite Greek poet, Pindar. The gruesome end of Thebes set an example for the other Greek city-states. Alexander did not face any other significant challenges from them for the rest of his life.

After Alexander had secured his position to the south, he invaded Persia. He crossed the Hellespont into Asia Minor in 334 BCE. It was a massive undertaking. As was mentioned before, Philip had already sent around 10,000 Macedonian troops there in 336 BCE to prepare for the invasion. Alexander's troops amounted to around 40,000 additional men who came from many different regions; besides his Macedonian troops, many mercenaries, traders and merchants joined the expedition. It could be that the size of the expedition could have reached between 80 to 100 thousand people altogether.

The first of three major decisive battles between Alexander's forces and the Persians took place at the river Granicus in Asia Minor (modern-day Western Turkey) in May of 334 BCE. After Alexander achieved victory there against the Persian satraps (governors) of Asia Minor, he continued southward, besieging and raiding various localities. We always have to remember that large-scale expeditions like Alexander's needed to be planned with an eye on finances: the route was chosen according to the wealth of the places that could be raided. The wealth was needed, among other things, for provisions and payment of troops.

In November of 331 BCE, the second decisive battle was fought. Darius III, the Achaemenid ruler of Persia, had assembled a massive force to stop Alexander at Issus, in modern-day southern Anatolia in Turkey. While at the previous major battle at the river Granicus it was Persian satraps who led the fight against Alexander's troops, this time Darius III commanded the Persians. The Persians outnumbered Alexander's forces by at least two to one. However, Darius III could not take advantage of his larger forces because the geography of the battleground. It consisted of an approximately two-mile narrow stretch between a river and mountains. The battle itself ended in a decisive victory for Alexander who wanted to take Darius III prisoner. This attempt failed, but Alexander captured other family-members, including Darius' wife and daughters, one of whom

he later married. These royal captives were treated respectfully, since Alexander hoped to use this marriage in his plan to legitimize his rule over Persia by being considered a member of the Achaemenid dynasty.

After Issus, Alexander continued further south into Syria and along the coast of the Levante. As usual in need of funds to pay mercenaries and gather provisions, Alexander focused especially on conquering one important target in that area: the very wealthy city of Tyre in Phoenicia. This city was well protected, since it was partially located on an island, which in turn was protected with enormous defensive walls. In the first six months of 332 BCE, Alexander besieged the island-part of Tyre, where the population had taken refuge. This island was located about half a mile from the coast. Alexander had a stone-causeway built to bring his troops closer; however, the causeway did not reach the island because of deep water. Alexander then had towers constructed to attack the defenders on top of the wall of Tyre, but the Tyreans counterattacked by burning and destroying these towers. After further setbacks Alexander finally conquered Tyre with the use of rams, forcing his way in. Supposedly he led the attack personally and once inside, the conquest of the city took place rapidly. Alexander pardoned a few inhabitants who sought refuge in a temple. Men of military age, however, were executed, among them thousands who were crucified on the beach near Tyre. Women and children were sold into slavery.

After Tyre was conquered, Alexander marched further south, facing little resistance, except at Gaza. Here Alexander, as in Tyre, again needed to conduct a difficult siege and in the resulting struggle he was seriously injured. This gives evidence that, like his father Philip, Alexander strengthened the bond between him and his soldiers through his direct involvement in the fighting. Once again, Alexander had the men who were old enough for war executed and children and women were sold into slavery.

After Gaza, Alexander reached Egypt in the second half of 332 BCE. The Egyptians at that time were ruled by Persia; they saw therefore in Alexander the man who could free them. While in Egypt Alexander followed his usual agenda: he paid respect to the local gods by conducting rituals and providing offerings to them in the local temples. By showing his acknowledgement and acceptance of local divinities, Alexander presented himself as a legitimate ruler. He also on

all his expeditions found time for sightseeing: he visited historical places whenever he could, and Egypt gave him ample opportunity, although his stay there was rather short. He went, for example, to the famous oracle of Amun-Ra (Zeus for the Greeks) at Siwa. Supposedly he was told there that he was a descendant of this god. Evidence that is often cited for this divine ancestry of Alexander, is the fact that Alexander, after his visit to Siwa, is portrayed on coins with the horns of a ram, the sacred animal of Zeus.

While in Egypt Alexander founded the city of Alexandria. Alexander actually established dozens of cities which he called Alexandria during his conquest, but Alexandria in Egypt later became the capital during the Ptolemaic dynasty, and it remains a major city in Egypt today.

While Alexander was in the Levante and Egypt, Darius III prepared for another decisive battle. This time Darius III chose the battleground more wisely: at Issus in 333 BCE, as has been pointed out before, the far larger Persian forces could not use their numbers to their advantage because of the narrowness of the battlefield. Now, in 331 BCE, the battle would take place on open terrain at Gaugamela near Arbil (Mosul) in modern-day northern Iraq.

Alexander with his forces won this battle, which proved to be the decisive blow for the Persians. The reason for the victory were the superior strategy undertaken by Alexander and his troops, while Darius III and the Persians made crucial mistakes. The accounts of the battle differ from each other. A Persian account, written shortly after the battle, claims that the Persian troops deserted Darius III, while later non-Persian sources say that Darius himself fled first. What is clear, however, is that Darius III once again escaped after the battle was lost. Alexander pursued him, but he was not able to capture the Persian king. Eventually, Darius III was murdered by his own men, probably by one of his satraps (governors) named Bessus. When Alexander found his enemy dead, he gave him a full burial at the Persian capital Persepolis and he later had Bessus executed. With the death of Darius III, historians consider the Achaemenid dynasty of Persia as coming to an end, although Alexander took over as ruler of Persia as if he was continuing this dynastic rule.

Securing the vast Persian Empire under his rule was an enormous task for Alexander and it took him years. After having control of Persepolis, he needed to lead his troops through most of modern day Iran and Afghanistan and other parts of Central Asia with its inhospitable terrain. He

faced many problems; there were plans to assassinate him, but through diplomacy and military victories Alexander was able to secure the area, so that in 327 BCE he moved further east into India.

During his campaign in India, Alexander first conquered the former Achaemenid province of Gandhara. A year later, in 326 BCE, at a battle near the river Hydaspes (now called Jhelum), he defeated the local king Pontus. With this victory Alexander gained control of the Punjab region in modern-day Pakistan. However, the victory for Alexander at the Hydaspes was hard won: he lost many men, because the Indian army had resisted very strongly and was well organized.

When Alexander led his troops further east they faced the enormous army of the Nanda dynasty in Magadha. Expecting more battles against Indian armies such as the one that gave them so much trouble at the Hydaspes, the exhausted forces of Alexander refused to march further, stopping at the river Hyphasis (now Beas in northern India). Alexander was furious, because he believed the end of the world was actually in reach; but he probably realized that, without the support of his soldiers, he could not go on. Instead, he led them first south and then turned westward to return to Babylon.

During a brutal march through the Gedrosian desert in modern-day southern Iran, many of Alexander's men died of dehydration and heat-stroke. It has been suggested that Alexander chose this route through the desert on purpose to punish his soldiers because of their mutiny; however, this cannot be proven and seems rather unlikely.

After reaching Babylon in 323 BCE, Alexander immediately planned an invasion of the Arabian Peninsula. However, before he could realize his plans, he died sometime around June 10, 323 BCE. The circumstances of his death are unclear. Several theories exist, they usually either involve poisoning or illness. His corpse first seems to have ended up in Egypt; after the passage of hundreds of years the location of his remains and burial site became unknown and still have not been found.

Alexander the Great's achievements and legacy are many and varied. On the battlefield he remained unbeaten: under his command his forces were never defeated, although they

frequently had to fight much larger armies. The empire he created was the largest that existed to that time; large parts of Asia were now exposed to Greek culture. This process of Hellenization continued after Alexander's death.

The matter of succession was not simple: Alexander had no legitimate heir at the time. At first his generals agreed to rule the empire as a group. However, soon afterwards, divisions erupted and the successors of Alexander, referred to as the *Diadochi*, fought each other, eventually leading to the emergence of four dominant kingdoms: Ptolemaic Egypt; Seleucid Persia; Attalid Anatolia and Antigonid Macedonia. The balance of power between these kingdoms provided a relatively stable time referred to as the Hellenistic Period. Let us have a look at how the Greek world fared during this time.

8 The Hellenistic Period

From the time of Alexander's death in 323 BCE until the Romans under Octavian established themselves as the sole rulers of the Mediterranean with their victory at the battle of Actium in 31 BCE, the four previously mentioned powers dominated the region. Hellenization still continued with the fact that many Greeks from various Greek city-states migrated eastwards contributing to this process. They spread their culture and language deep into the East (Orient). This contributed to Ancient Greek, especially the Attic dialect, becoming the universal language (*Koine*), spoken and written in most places around the Mediterranean and in the Middle East. The areas where we find Hellenistic influence is enormous: it reached from Sicily and Southern Italy to Egypt, India and Afghanistan. On the other hand, Greek migrants who headed east also mixed with the locals, adopting local customs, values and ideas. Thus there also emerged growing influence from the Eastern cultures, such as Persia, on the Greek world.

For the Greek city-states, the Hellenistic period continued to show them as having diminished political influence and less cultural dominance. Shortly after Alexander's death, Athens, together with a coalition of Greek city-states, tried to revolt and end Macedonian hegemony. It ended in disaster for the Greeks.

8.1 The Lamian War

After the death of Alexander in 323 BCE there was uncertainty over his succession. During this evolving situation Athens decided to wage war against Macedonia, while Sparta stayed neutral. The reason for them not engaging seems to have been that the Spartans had suffered heavy losses in an armed conflict with the Macedonians a few years earlier, in 331 BCE, at Megalopolis and had little desire to try again.

With a coalition of other cities and hired mercenaries, the Athenians in the first stages of the war were able to defeat allies of the Macedonians such as Boeotia; later Antipater, the leader of the Macedonians, lost a battle at Thermopylae and retreated to the city of Lamia, waiting for more troops and provisions to arrive from Asia. The siege of Lamia proved to be burdensome for

the Athenians and their allies. They could not breach the walls, and during a surprise attack launched by the Macedonians from the city, the Athenian commander, Leosthenes was killed. Later Macedonian reinforcements arrived and the Athenian navy was defeated, giving the Macedonians control of the sea. In 322 BCE, at the battle of Crannon, the Macedonians were victorious and Athens and its allies were required to accept peace on Antipater's terms.

These terms were harsh. They ended democracy in Athens and introduced a plutocratic system: only the richest citizens would now have political power while the poorest citizens were forced into exile. Supporters of democracy were executed and like many Greek cities which had opposed Macedonian rule, Athens received a Macedonian garrison. Independence was lost.

8.2 Cultural achievements

While the Greek city-states gradually lost their independence and weakened during the Hellenistic period, there were plenty of achievements on the cultural level. However, the places of cultural development now widened. Alexandria in Egypt evolved into one of the most important hubs of cultural life during this time. Let us examine the most important cultural institution in Alexandria and the scholars who worked there during this period.

8.2.1 Poetry

The *Museion* in Alexandria was established under Ptolemy I and his son, Ptolemy II. Ptolemy was one of the former generals of Alexander who, in the struggle of the successors after Alexander's death, secured Egypt for himself and became pharaoh there in 305 BCE. Museion literally means "home of the Muses." The Muses were the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. Each represents some form of artistic or intellectual activity. The Museion in Alexandria was different from what we would consider to be a museum today, a place where we can contemplate works of art such as statues, paintings and so forth. By comparison, the Museion in Alexandria was a combination of library, university and center for the arts. Intellectuals from various places gathered at the Museion: one could find native Egyptians, Greeks, Jews and Carthaginians all at work within its confines. One of the purposes of

the Museion was to collect every piece of Greek literature that could be found. The Museion contributed enormously to the fact that Greek became the international language of learning. Also, when we read ancient Greek texts today, we can be sure that they most likely survived because of the Museion in Alexandria, which evolved into the key cultural center of the world at that time.

Besides the collection of manuscripts, the Museion employed scholars who were able to work with them. One of the tasks that these invited scholars had, was to produce an official text of Homer's epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Basically, all of today's versions of these poems derive directly from this edition produced in Alexandria. Quite a few scholars thus employed at the Museion were poets themselves. One became director of the Museion, his name was Apollonius of Rhodes.

Apollonius' most famous work today is his epic poem describing the adventures of Jason and the Argonauts, known as the *Argonautica*. In it, Apollonius describes Jason's quest to retrieve the Golden Fleece, with the help of sailors on the ship called Argo, the Argonauts. While for many years people thought that Apollonius' poetry was of inferior quality, today we believe that he was a rather advanced poet, using modern and new literary styles when he wrote. Some scholars believe that Apollonius had a dispute with another poet who worked at the Museion, Callimachus, but much of this dispute is unclear, even if it happened in the first place.

Callimachus' work is different from that of Apollonius. While Apollonius engaged in writing, among other things, epic poems, Callimachus focused on writing shorter poetic works and he was deeply engaged in other forms of scholarship. His reputation as a great scholar already began in ancient times, reflecting his massive output. The poem for which he is most known is his *Hymn to Zeus*. Unlike Apollonius, it seems that he followed traditional poetic forms, but he introduced here and there modern or contemporary elements like verbal puzzles and allusions.

Another poet who worked in Alexandria at the Museion during the third century BCE was Theocritus. He is considered to have invented the literary genre that we call "bucolic poetry," which translates into "poetry concerning cowherds." In these poems Theocritus celebrates the simple life as experienced in the countryside of his native island of Sicily, and the South of Italy.

Theocritus refers to these poems as "Idylls," another Greek word which we can translate into "little pictures." His targeted audience for these poems seems to have been people who lived in cities and were educated, clearly the elite, who probably rarely had any exposure to the rural life described in these poems.

8.2.2 Theatre

We have seen earlier how Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides with their plays (mostly tragedies) dominated the theatre in Athens during the fifth century BCE, and how Aristophanes made the Athenians laugh. By the end of the fourth century and during the third century BCE, the so-called "New Comedy" emerged. The only playwright from this time for whom we have a work to analyze is the Athenian Menander, who wrote the comedy *Dyskolos*, which means something like "Grumpy Old Man." It survives in an almost complete version and is read and performed today. It provides us with a glimpse of what were common topics in the New Comedy: confusion over identity and the use of characters that were well known. The New Comedy seems to have had big influence on later Roman playwrights like Terence and Plautus.

8.2.3 Historiography

During the Hellenistic period quite a few historians were at work; some created new forms of historiography, such as a focus on local history, while Herodotus and Thucydides, the two best known historians of the earlier Classical era, described events on a much larger scale. This broader approach to history still existed in this period, however, and its most important representative was the Greek Polybius.

Polybius lived during the first half of the third century BCE in Rome for many years as a hostage. In his massive work of about forty books (only five can be read today), he tries to explain the rise of Rome and how this city managed to become an empire. He wanted to seriously discover the truth behind this success, while other authors, such as the second century historian Diodorus, used their works to moralize and offer personal opinions and did not care too deeply for facts. It is still astonishing that, although so many history works were created during this period, so very few survived into later periods.

8.2.4 Hellenistic Philosophy

In the field of philosophy Athens still remained an important center throughout the Hellenistic period. As we have discussed earlier, with the Athenian Socrates, a new era in philosophy began, and his students Plato and Aristotle established very influential schools in Athens.

Out of Plato’s Academy evolved during the Hellenistic period a new field in philosophy called Scepticism. For the sceptics, nothing about the world can be known for certain. Of course, the question arises: how can a sceptic live in such a world when everything is in doubt? The solution for sceptics was the notion that one can create impressions which are plausible; then one has to live assuming that these are actually true in a world that is in chaos.

Another school of thought that emerged during the Hellenistic Period was Cynicism. One of the most commonly known representatives of this school is Diogenes of Sinope, born around 410 BCE. Some scholars today consider him the founder of Cynicism, while others believe Antisthenes to be the one who introduced this school of thought. Diogenes also spent time in Athens. He was called “doglike” (*kynikos* in Greek), hence the term cynics. The reason why he was referred to in this way was his utter disregard for social conventions: he supposedly lived in a barrel, had no clothes, masturbated and urinated in public and defecated in the theatre. With these acts he wanted to show his independence from society and prove that wisdom and happiness do not depend on conventions and common assumptions. He did not own private property and frowned upon the possession of material things. Thus, he gave evidence for his theory that the common desire for wealth, honor, and social status is invalid. He had followers, the Cynics, who travelled from place to place, and made fun of people in power. One tool they used for doing this was called the diatribe, a speech designed to criticize harshly.

Another man later developed a philosophy that argued for a way of life that was completely different to what Diogenes talked about. This man was Epicurus. He spent most of his life (341-270 BCE) in Athens, where he established his own school called “Garden” (*Kopos* in Greek), named so because the garden of Epicurus’ house was where his followers would meet.

We know a lot more about Epicurus' thought than about other Hellenistic philosophies, because of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. This catastrophe was responsible for the preservation of many scrolls containing Epicurean material; in addition, a Roman author called Lucretius in his work *On the Nature of Things* (*De Rerum Natura*) later explained Epicurean ideas.

The part of Epicurus' theory that is best known is his concept of lust. He is often only seen as the philosopher who advocates for a lustful life that will lead to happiness. While it is true that he supported lust, his idea of lust is more nuanced. Actually, he divided lust into a positive lust and negative lust, the latter being the one that he qualified as the absence of pain. Epicurus preferred this negative lust, the absence of pain, to the positive one, because positive lust can cause pain (too much eating or drinking for example) and is only transitory.

The most influential school of thought that was established during the Hellenistic period was Stoicism. Zeno (333-262 BCE) is regarded as its founder. He lived in Athens, where he established his school in the famous *Stoa Poikile*, the famous building near the Agora in Athens which we covered previously. (As a reminder: a *Stoa* was a particular building-type which was open to one side, because columns held up the roof on that side. The Painted Stoa in Athens received widespread recognition because some of the most important artists painted on its wall scenes from Athenian and Greek history, such as the Battle of Marathon). It is after this building that the philosophy, Stoicism, was named.

Most of the ancient philosophers present us with the problem of sources; for the Stoics this is especially problematic: from Zeno himself and his two successors as heads of the Stoa we have almost no original written material. The most extensive collection of Stoic philosophy comes down to us from the Roman period, especially Imperial Rome. Works by Roman Stoics, such as Seneca, Epictetus and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius survived and can be read today. Their works focus mostly on the ethical aspects of Stoicism. The Stoics argue that we can find happiness by following the *Divine Logos*, the god given reason or intelligence (which *Logos* means when translated) that governs the world and determines everything. People have the choice to act according to this Logos. If they choose to go against it, negative consequences follow. If you decide by reasoning to let this Divine Logos guide your life, you follow the intelligence that rules

everything. The Stoics believed that adherence to their ideas would provide the means to achieve reason, therefore they supported an elite that was educated to rule.

8.2.5 Hellenistic Medicine and Science

There were huge advances in the fields of medicine and science after 323 BCE; however many details remain unknown. What we do know is that in Egypt during the Ptolemaic Dynasty, human dissections were allowed and practiced. In Alexandria between 300 and 200 BCE, perhaps earlier, the Greek physician Herophilus (born around 335 BCE) performed public dissections of human corpses; thus he is often referred to as the "Father of Anatomy." His works are all lost because the library in Alexandria was destroyed in 272 CE. However, later authors refer to him and used his ideas. In the field of medicine today many terms, especially concerning the description of the eye, go back to Herophilus.

In the field of mathematics one man's work stands out: Euclid, a Greek who was born around 325 BCE and who came to Alexandria; there he worked on his most famous book, the *Elements*. Of course, Euclid relied on achievements from earlier mathematicians, but he was able to compile and develop them further. The *Elements* contains mathematical proofs that are still the foundation of math today, leading this work to become the second most widely read work written in Ancient Greek after the New Testament.

Another mathematician and scientist active during the Hellenistic Period was Archimedes. Born on the island of Sicily, in Syracuse, around 287 BCE, it is likely that he spent some time in Alexandria. Archimedes' contributions to mathematics and science are plentiful. One of his most famous findings has to do with hydrostatics. He concluded that an object displaces its weight of the fluid it is floating in. This is usually referred to as Archimedes' Principle; most people know about this concept because of a story later told by the Roman author Vitruvius. In this account, Archimedes has to determine if the golden crown of a ruler is actually made of gold or if the craftsman, who was given pure gold to create the crown, made it by mixing in cheaper materials and keeping some of the gold for himself. Archimedes was not allowed to damage the crown (melting it down for example), so he had to find a way to determine the contents without inflicting damage. Supposedly he found the solution while he was sitting in his bathtub and while

he observed how the level of the water rose as it was displaced by his own body. He then concluded that this could be the method to determine the density of the golden crown. He discovered that the goldsmith had indeed used cheaper material while making the crown.

Besides Archimedes' many contributions and achievements in mathematics, he also supposedly developed machines used in warfare. When his hometown of Syracuse was attacked by the Romans, these machines were said to have helped the people of Syracuse fight off the Romans for years, although eventually the Roman troops were able to conquer the city.

9 Addendum: The Olympian Gods

To understand Greek history knowledge of the gods they believed in is essential. The Greeks imagined their world as full of divinities; it would take up too much time to cover even a fraction of them. The poet Hesiod, who lived sometime around 700 BCE, wrote a poem called *Theogony* that gives us an overview of how Greeks imagined their world being ruled and influenced by divinities. He centers this poem around the question of how Zeus became the dominant god among many. Let us accordingly focus on the gods around Zeus who formed the center of Greek religion.

These gods are known as the Olympian Gods. The Greeks believed that these gods dwell on Mount Olympus - hence the name - a mythological peak perpetually shrouded in cloud cover that shields these divinities from human eyes. Today Mount Olympus is the tallest mountain in mainland Greece. The gods who resided on Mount Olympus according to Greek myth varied. (The Romans adopted these gods with most of the same functions; they changed the names, however, for all of them except Apollo. The Roman names are given in brackets). Usually Zeus (Jupiter) and his wife Hera (Juno), Poseidon (Neptune), Hestia (Vesta), Demeter (Ceres), Aphrodite (Venus), Athena (Minerva), Artemis (Diana), Apollo (Apollo), Hermes (Mercury), Hephaestus (Vulcan), Dionysus (Bacchus) and Ares (Mars) at one time or other were believed by the Greeks to dwell on Mount Olympus. These Olympian Gods are immediate family members: they are either brothers and sisters or children of Zeus. Thus, Greek mythology regarding the gods can often be interpreted as stories we hear regarding any extended family where quarrels, arguments and rivalries are quite common.

Zeus became the leader of these gods. According to different Greek myths he either received this position through a lottery or he received support from a divinity that belonged to a previous generation of gods, Gaia. Zeus had two older brothers, Poseidon and Hades, so his becoming the dominant god was not following the usual course. It might be that during early periods of Greek history such as the Mycenaean era, the Greeks looked at the gods as being more equal; only during the Archaic and Classical periods did they then give Zeus a more dominant role among the gods. This dominance of Zeus increased the more children he had who, as gods and

demigods, were loyal to him and secured his position. When we find Zeus being described in myth as having many affairs with mortals and immortals, we have to keep this in mind. He was considered the god of justice and virtue and morality in general, especially regarding sworn oaths and hospitality. The relationship between host and guest was special, and Zeus would watch that obligations were met by both parties. Zeus was a sky-god, one that was in charge of and associated with weather. Homer, for example, often refers to Zeus as the "Cloud-Gatherer" or "Bringer of Rain." His powerful weapon, the lightning-bolt, reminds us of this association as well. Regarding power, we should be aware that compared to the gods of religions such as Judaism, Christianity or Islam, Zeus is not omnipotent or omniscient, meaning he is not all-powerful and all-knowing. He is, for example, subject to the Fates and Aphrodite, the goddess of love and lust, also has sway over him. Depictions of Zeus often portray him with a beard indicating authority and wearing a cloak with magical powers called *Aegis*. The animal most often associated with Zeus is the eagle; the oak tree was sacred to him as well.

The wife of Zeus is Hera, the goddess of marriage, childbirth and matters regarding women in general. She is also described in Greek mythology as a guardian of morality. This has to do with her often scolding her husband for his many affairs. As we have already seen, these affairs usually lead to children, and with each child that Zeus has from women other than Hera he consolidates his power, since usually these children are loyal to him. Certain myths describe Hera as still holding a position of power, especially when we look at the fact that she is described as having the ability to give birth without a male partner. This is referred to as Parthenogenesis, a term that translates into "Virgin-birth." In Greek mythology the first female divinity, Gaia (Earth), gave proof of this immense power by giving birth to Uranos (Sky). Thus Hera's parthenogenic ability reminds us of the powers of female divinities, although these powers can be diminished by male sky-gods such as Zeus.

One child of Hera that was supposedly born out of parthenogenesis was Hephaestus, the god of the forge, or more general, the god of creative and, to a minor degree, destructive fire. He is the divine smith who creates many beautiful and useful things, most famously the shield of the hero Achilles. Hephaestus is the only imperfect god among the Olympians, and for us moderns it

is painful to read Greek myths in which other gods are portrayed laughing at Hephaestus because of his disability. His skills however they admire. This becomes evident in one of the most famous stories that the Greeks told about Hephaestus. His wife, the goddess Aphrodite, goddess of love and lust and described as being very beautiful, was having an affair with Ares, the god of war. Hephaestus creates an invisible net to catch the two in bed to get evidence. Then he shows his captives to the other Olympian gods who have a good laugh at the scene. So, on the one hand we see here Hephaestus being smarter than the mighty god of war, but on the other hand the idea of being laughed at because of betrayal is painful. Hephaestus is often depicted on vase-paintings with tools such as hammer and tongs.

As we have just seen, Aphrodite was married to Hephaestus. She is the goddess of love and all the aspects of love: beauty and lust and sexual desire. This is indicated already by her birth. After the titan Cronus had dethroned his father Uranus by castrating him, the blood of the severed genitals of Uranus dripped into the ocean where it mixed with sea-foam. Out of this mix Aphrodite was born; she then floated on a clamshell ashore. Later Greek thinkers such as Plato divided the various aspects of love that Aphrodite covered into concepts of profane and sacred love. The Greeks considered Aphrodite a very powerful divinity because all mortals and immortals are subject to her will. She can make anyone fall in love or trigger desire. Only three goddesses seem to be able to avoid Aphrodite's powers: Athena, Hestia and Artemis. According to the poet Homer, Aphrodite has a son with Ares named Eros (Cupid), who does not belong to the Olympian gods, but who nevertheless can show up among them as well as anywhere else to shoot his arrows of lust and desire at mortals and immortals alike. Many ideas that people still hold today about love's various aspects can be traced back to Plato's dialogue *Symposion* in which the nature of love is discussed. The nature of Eros, for example, is explained by Socrates in this dialogue as Eros not being a god but a daimon, a spirit that is something in-between, residing between mortal and immortal. His birth is also changed from the version of myth given by Homer. Plato makes Eros the son of Poverty (Penia) and Resourcefulness (Poros). Both make him at the same time hungry for more but also crafty and energetic.

Another goddess who had greater power than Zeus (at least regarding one aspect) was Demeter. The Greeks worshipped her as the goddess of vegetation, agriculture, harvest, grains and in general the fertility of the land. Like most of the other goddesses she was also linked with marriage and childbirth. The most popular myth about her involved her daughter Persephone who was kidnapped by Hades. Missing her daughter, Demeter searched for her everywhere; after searching for Persephone to no avail she finally learned that Hades had taken her. Then Demeter stops giving the gift of agriculture and a famine begins among mortals threatening to wipe out mankind. Zeus then had to give in to save mortals and make Hades give Persephone back, for at least parts of the year. This indicates how the Greeks identified the seasons: when Persephone lives with her mother Demeter the latter grants the gifts of agriculture and fertility of the earth, while when Persephone has to live with Hades, Demeter suffers and nothing grows. In art we find Demeter often depicted with images of the harvest: sheafs of grain, flowers or fruit. She was worshipped (mostly together with her daughter Persephone) all around the Greek world, especially in Eleusis, where mysteries were held at whose center stood the myth of the abduction of Persephone. These Eleusinian Mysteries were open only to initiates; they remained popular over a very long period.

One of Zeus' brothers is Poseidon. He is known for being the ruler of the sea. His instrument of power is the trident which he can use to create storms or earthquakes. As we have discussed before, the sea was very important for the Greeks as a source of life and means to travel. However, sea travel was a dangerous undertaking and ships got frequently wrecked in storms. Thus we find the Greeks not showing particular affectation for Poseidon. They respected him but at the same time they felt rather distant to him. We see that especially in the lack of temples dedicated to Poseidon. Also, in myths describing Poseidon, he is often portrayed as volatile, quick to rage and even violent, all of which can be said about the sea as well.

After Poseidon let us now have a look at one of the most popular gods among the Olympians: Apollo. He is generally associated with light in all its forms. Even in English our word bright links light with intelligence or rationality. This association is represented in Apollo as well. The Greeks believed him to communicate the will of the gods and to be able to see into the

future. This aspect was dominant at his most important sanctuary of Delphi, high up in the Parnassos Mountain range in central Greece. As we have seen earlier, Delphi was an oracle where the god Apollo was believed to answer questions regarding the future through the Pythia. Apollo was considered to be a guardian of intellectual and creative activity. Often we see him depicted with a musical instrument such as the lyre. In contrast to this support of the sophisticated arts, Apollo is also described as a deadly hunter whose arrows never fail to kill its targets. He is at times also cruel as is evident in the myth of Apollo and Marsyas, a satyr who challenged Apollo to a contest in playing the flute under the agreement that the winner could do whatever he wants with the loser. After Apollo defeats Marsyas he flays him alive. Apollo thus was described by the Greeks as having a complex character, and maybe this complexity made him dear to them; after all, we humans are complex as well, and often we see excessive cruelty later paired with great care and compassion, destructive behavior followed by provisions of healing. However, it was his more moderate and rational side that ended up being emphasized by the Greeks. This can be seen in very popular ancient Greek proverbs that were associated with Apollo: “Know Thyself” and “Nothing Too Much.” This emphasis on moderation, self-control and rationality stood in contrast to another god. Let us have a look at this Olympian.

Dionysus is generally portrayed as a male fertility god. This is already evident when we look at his birth: In one version of Greek myth, he is born out of Zeus’ thigh. This emphasizes his connection with the ability to let things grow, especially in vegetation; often we see Dionysus depicted with grapes, vine and the making of vine. Also, Dionysus is linked with birth, death and rebirth, because in nature this circle of life is always present, and the Greeks thus associated Dionysus with both the upper and the lower world. Later a religious cult called Orphism connected Dionysus with the mythological character Orpheus who, according to myth, went into the underworld to rescue his wife Eurydice, symbolically switching between upper and lower world, life and death. Orphism made the worship of Dionysus a centerpiece of its mysteries during which certain secret rituals were celebrated. These Dionysian mysteries became very popular in Greece and later in Italy during Roman times; in fact, these Roman festivities, named Bacchanalia after Bacchus, the Roman name of Dionysus, became so popular in Rome that they were either outlawed or at least much downsized in 186 BCE. One writer claims that the reason

for this step taken by the Roman authorities was the depravity and frenzied partying that was going on during the Bacchanalia. One reason for this popularity was surely the fact that the attendees of these celebrations could, through various means, escape their daily troubles and hardships: enjoying wine, sex, music and dance, even theater performances, allowed these escapes since they offered *ekstasis*: this ancient Greek word translates literally into “stepping out,” meaning the stepping out of one’s ordinary self. This *ekstasis* was considered by the Greeks not to be without dangers though. The drinking of wine was associated with respite from trouble but also with becoming mad and losing one’s mind. Thus we find Dionysus in myth also sometimes described as a pleasant, calm and handsome youth who in an instant can turn into a raging savage animal. Or we find him on vase paintings surrounded not only by vine and grapes but also with beasts ready to kill. One way to escape one’s ordinary life was through a theater play, and Dionysus’ association with the theater was already discussed when we saw how the Athenians celebrated him in festivals such as the Greater (City) Dionysia. At the center of this festival was a theater contest to honor and worship Dionysus. Through acting people can escape, can change their identities and loosen restrictions; however, the audience also is able to do so through compassion and empathy with the characters in a play. This changing of identities is also interesting in the sense that it allows to bridge social barriers: on stage, for example, a common person can become ruler. We need to be aware that the early development of drama and theater is linked with Athens and its democratic tendencies. Dionysus, by tearing down social barriers and allowing everyone to participate in his revelries, is in this way a god of the people.

An Olympian goddess who, like Dionysus, is also born out of Zeus’ body, is Athena. She was considered the goddess of wisdom, as is already indicated by her birth out of Zeus’ head. She is born fully armed, which foreshadows her association with strategic warfare, in contrast to Ares who represents its savage side. Athena was a popular goddess around the Greek world, especially in urban, cultivated areas. Many temples were considered her home, including, as we have discussed previously, one of the most famous ancient Greek temples, the Parthenon in Athens. One of Athena’s most beloved heroes is Odysseus. Homer in his epic poems, especially the Odyssey, describes him as smart, clever, intelligent and wily, and he frequently receives support from Athena. At one point Homer describes the two even engaging in a battle of the minds of

sort, trying to see who is smarter. Normally Greek gods would not endure being challenged by mere mortals, but since Athena has a liking for Odysseus she plays along. Athena is usually depicted fully armed, with helmet and shield.

The goddess Artemis represents a contrast to Athena. While the latter is associated more with urban, cultivated and more civilized areas, Artemis is principally a goddess who is at home in the woods, in rural places where she engages especially in hunting. She is the twin sister of Apollo, and like her brother's, her arrows never miss. Like Athena, Artemis in the Greek tradition remains without partner, thus she often represents chastity. In addition, together with Hera, Artemis was also considered a goddess of childbirth. Her birth foreshadows this connection: In myth, Artemis is born before Apollo, and she then assists her mother in the birth of her twin brother Apollo. Artemis was a popular goddess; many shrines and temples were dedicated to her, most importantly in Ephesus. Her temple there belonged to the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The Greeks portrayed Artemis frequently as being easily offended. Homer, for example, writes that, after Agamemnon, the leader of the Greeks in the war against Troy, shot a deer sacred to her, Artemis stopped the winds from blowing and stranded the Greek fleet on an island called Aulis. Only after Agamemnon agreed to sacrifice his own daughter, Iphigeneia, was Artemis placated.

Another goddess who preferred to be without partner was Hestia. She, Athena, and Artemis were considered 'immune' against the powers of Aphrodite. Hestia is the goddess of the hearth, and in a broader sense all that surrounds the hearth: the home, the household and its organization, and also the state. Every home had a hearth, and these were all sacred to Hestia. Since a hearth is necessarily linked with fire, the treatment of the latter was a sacred duty, often fulfilled in households by the woman with the authority to do so. In the *Prytaneion*, the center of politics and religion in an ancient Greek city state, the flame of the hearth had to be tended to by priestesses at all times. Neglect of the domestic or civic hearth was a severe offense. The flame of the hearth of the metropolis, the city that sent out colonists, had to be carried by the colonizers to their new colony, linking their 'mother-city' with the new one. Most sacrifices of the ancient Greeks included a libation to Hestia because most of them were centered around a hearth. On

vase-paintings and other visual art Hestia early on is depicted as a fully-clothed simply-dressed woman wearing a veil, sometimes with fire or a staff.

A god that the Greeks also associated with their homes was Hermes. While Hestia can be seen as representing the inner area of a home, Hermes covers the outer world that begins once one stepped over the threshold of the house onto the street. He is the messenger of the gods who travels to and is present everywhere. In order to get to all places fast he was portrayed as having winged sandals, a (sometimes winged) hat and a staff with magic powers called the *caduceus* around which two snakes were coiled. Hermes travels between the world of mortals and immortals, and thus he was also believed to guide the dead into the Underworld. Because of his ability to go everywhere and cross borders, even between life and death, Hermes is also the god of boundaries. Many Greek homes had statues of him at the entrances of their homes, often in phallic form, marking the boundary between outer world and domestic space. The association of the phallus and Hermes probably has to do with his association with fertility. As a marker set up at the entrance to the home, Hermes probably was invoked to grant the family children. Hermes' ability to cross borders, especially between life and death, also induced the Greeks to associate him with opposites; thus Hermes was for example the god of merchants but also thieves. In art the depictions of Hermes changed over the years: while in early Greece we find him often portrayed as an older, more authoritative bearded man, in later periods he is seen mostly as a beardless young adult.

Finally, a god that was not much loved by the Greeks was Ares, the god of war. Compared to Athena with her association with strategic warfare, Ares represented the violent savage aspects of war. In Greek mythology Ares plays a very small role, sometimes he is portrayed by poets such as Homer, in rather humiliating situations like the one we covered previously, when Hephaestus traps him in bed with Aphrodite and makes a spectacle out of the pair for the other gods. Although the Greeks obviously did not love Ares, we know that they respected him as an essential part of war. His Roman equivalent Mars, however, received much more love later from the Romans who seemed to have cherished and enjoyed the savage parts of warfare to a greater

degree. This becomes evident in the gladiator fights, which became very popular among the Romans who liked to watch men fight to the death.

Speaking of death, the god of the Underworld, Hades (Pluto for the Romans), a brother of Zeus, does not dwell on Olympus and thus does not technically belong to the Olympian gods. However, since this god and the view of afterlife of the Greeks are important, let us have a brief look at him.

Hades is the god of the Underworld and this name is also used to describe the place over which Hades rules. Hades is not the god who brings or causes death (that task the Greeks considered to be done by the god Thanatos). Hades is simply the ruler over his realm, together with his wife, Persephone. The myth of how she became Hades' wife is the only Greek myth in which Hades plays an important part: He abducts Persephone, the daughter of Demeter. We have heard previously how Demeter made Zeus return her, but not permanently. The myth portrays Hades as making Persephone eat fruit while he has her with him in the Underworld. The eating of fruit in ancient myth is usually the symbol for having sex or consummating marriage. That is why afterwards Persephone has to return to Hades and his realm even if she would prefer to stay with her mother. Hades had made sure that they have consummated marriage and that they are bound to each other. Hades was also known by the Greeks under the name *Plouton*, which means "Wealth-Giver," having to do with valuable minerals such as gold usually found below the surface of the earth in Hades' dominion. The Greeks believed that Hades' realm contained various rivers, most importantly the river Styx; invoking this river when swearing an oath was considered to be the strongest way to make an oath inviolable. The river Acheron marked the boundary of Hades; the shadows of the dead had to cross this river and in order to do so they had to pay the ferryman Charon. A terrifying dog with multiple heads called Cerberus guarded the entrance to Hades. Other divinities that dwell in Hades' realm were Thanatos, the god of death, and his twin brother Hypnos, the god of sleep. The Greeks also believed that the god of dreams, Morpheus, was located there. In general, if one wants to learn more about the view of the afterlife and Hades' realm, the first account in Greek is found in book eleven in Homer's *Odyssey*. There we hear how Odysseus is required to go into the Underworld to find out how to return back home. His visit

and his experiences in Hades shed light on what the Greeks believed their afterlife in and with Hades would be like. In general, it is a rather pessimistic view, especially the idea that one is forced into inactivity. The positive aspect in Homer's depiction is seemingly the idea that the success experienced by one's descendants could bring joy to their dead ancestors. Plato in his final book of his *Republic* also delivers an account of the afterlife and the various scenarios linked with and around Hades. The passage is called *The Myth of Er* and describes the adventures of a soldier named Er who died in war and who, after days of being dead, came back to life and is able to give an account of his experiences: what he saw happen to the souls of the just and evil, the punishments and rewards respectively and so on. Plato seems to rely on previous thinkers among the Greeks and their ideas of the afterlife, especially Pythagoras who, as we have seen, already believed in some form of transmigration of souls after death. Many later authors such as the Roman poet Virgil in his *Aeneid*, or the Italian poet Dante in his *Inferno* used Greek and Roman ideas of the afterlife, and many aspects ended up being part of major religions such as Christianity. One big difference, however, between the Greek idea of Hades and, for example, the Christian description of Satan is important to emphasize: Hades does not fight with Zeus for the souls of mortals like Satan does with God in the Christian tradition. The Greeks did not consider Hades an evil being and he is not portrayed as tormenting the dead, in contrast to Satan. The Greeks in general described him as pitiless. After all: sooner or later everyone will be ruled by him.