

A Survey of Greek History

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- 750 **Invention of the Hoplite Phalanx**
Spartan conquest of Messenia - Sparta subjects the inhabitants of the neighboring area of Messenia to slave status, calling them helots
War of the Lelantine Plain - many of the fledgling *poleis* from throughout the Greek world take sides in a war between Chalkis and Eritrea over the Lelantine plain, which separates them
- 650 **Second Messenian War** - Sparta reacts to a Messenian resurgence by imposing a strict military regime on its own citizens
- 650-550 **Rise of Tyranny** at Sicyon, Corinth, and Miletus - individual aristocrats, with popular support, seize power from other aristocrats by unconventional means
- 633 **Conspiracy of Cylon** - an attempt to seize power by a would-be tyrant in Athens is brutally suppressed
- 622 **Lawcode of Draco** - Athens' first law code, which is known for the severity of its punishments
- 594 **Reforms of Solon** - an Athenian moderate brings in wide-ranging reforms in order to defuse strife between Athens' rich and poor
- 566-511 **Tyranny of Peisistratus** and his sons - Peisistratus seizes power three times and promotes Athenian unity and commerce
- 508 **Reforms of Cleisthenes** - constitutional changes relieve regional tensions in Athens and form the basis of Athens' democracy
- 490 **Battle of Marathon** - without Spartan help, Athenian hoplites repulse a Persian invasion
- 480 **Battle of Salamis** - led by the genius of the Athenian Themistocles, the Greek fleet defeats its much larger Persian enemy
- 431-404 **Peloponnesian War** - Sparta reacts to Athenian imperial ambitions by fighting Athens in an on again, off again war that ends in total Athenian defeat
- 395-387 **Corinthian War** - Greek cities unite with Persian help to contain Spartan imperial ambitions
- 371 **Battle of Leuctra** - led by the genius of Epaminondas, Thebes defeats Sparta and puts an end to Spartan military dominance
- 362 **Battle of Mantinea** - Theban ambitions are checked by the death of Epaminondas
- 357-355 **Social War** - Athens' allies revolt, checking Athens' power
- 355-346 **Sacred War** - seizure of the Panhellenic sanctuary at Delphi embroils every Greek power and leads to the entrance of Philip of Macedon in Greek affairs
- 338 **Battle of Chaeronea** - Philip of Macedon defeats a combined army of Greek *poleis*, ending the age of the *polis*
- 323 **Death of Alexander the Great** - after leading Greek and Macedonian to victory over the entire Persian empire, Alexander dies in Babylon

1. Introduction

Greek Politics and the *Polis*

The Greeks' greatest accomplishment in the area of politics was the *polis* itself. It so dominated the lives of the Greeks during the period 800-323 BCE that Aristotle (384-322), one of the greatest philosophers of all time, assumed that a human being was by nature a *political* animal; the *polis* was for him the natural way for humans to live. The *polis* was both a city and an independent state, and there were hundreds of *poleis* littered around what we know today as Greece, as well as the western coast of Turkey, the Black Sea, North Africa, Sicily, Italy and even southern France.

Inspired by the acquisition of writing from the Near East, the *polis* emerged with Greek civilization itself. It did not yield as the primary form of political organization in the Greek world until it was overrun by the Macedonians and their kings Philip and Alexander in the mid to late fourth century BCE. The indomitable pride that the Greeks took in the economic and political autonomy of their *poleis* stemmed not only from their geography, which isolated many settlements on the Greek peninsula, but also from the pride that each individual Greek took in owning his own land, working it, and defending it. The coming of the Iron Age in Greece in the eighth century BCE enabled individual farmers to bring more land under cultivation and thus to provide more wealth. It also allowed them to arm themselves with the iron weapons (*hopla*) that made them a fighting force surpassing the aristocratic chieftains who had done the fighting before and had thus dominated the rest of the people. Soon it was discovered, moreover, that the hoplite soldier fought most effectively in a tightly packed formation, a phalanx.

This phalanx became the basis for political organization in Greece. The soldiers who donned their armor and defended their *polis* could not be denied political rights. Because everyone in the phalanx was tightly linked together and shared equal responsibility for its success, equality was an essential idea for the Greek *polis*. Different cities developed this system in different ways, however, and Greece saw

aristocracies, oligarchies, tyrannies and democracies, all based on differing notions of equality. The Spartans, for instance, who faced a native slave population, devoted themselves almost entirely to hoplite training as a means to ensure their security. The Athenians, on the other hand, found room for their own lower classes, eventually by finding them a significant military role in the manning of their fleets of triremes, which were the basis of their naval empire. Even without the financial means to own armor, the rowers won political claims for themselves, which gave Athens the most thoroughgoing democracy the western world has ever seen. Though the Athenians had slaves, and their women enjoyed only limited political rights, the Athenian experiment in direct voice and vote in both the assembly and the popular law courts and their distribution of administrative responsibilities through lotteries went further in empowering the people than any modern system ever has.

Early Greek Civilization

As early as 2000 BCE, the Greeks settled a mountainous country with a jagged coastline in which arable land was largely confined to small pockets able to sustain only small settlements. Mountain passes within Greece were largely impassable, except by foot and pack animal, and each settlement developed a keen sense of independence. Few were very far from the sea, and the Greek desire to supplement their meager food production from vines, olives and cereals, as well as their need for metals and timber, led them to trade far beyond the confines of Greece itself, mostly to the Black Sea, Egypt and Sicily. Most of the settlements extended over a combination of coastline, arable land and hillside or mountain, many of the people migrating through the year from one area to another. Many families came to possess a combination of small parcels of land at different elevations and with differing climatic conditions; this diversity lessened the risks associated with varying weather conditions from year to year. In some settlements, however, where people migrated less, divisions were created among coastal people, farmers and mountain herdsmen.

When the Greeks looked back from the historical period (after 800 BCE) to the legendary origins of their own civilization, they could trace a few vestiges of the Minoan civilization of the second millennium BCE in the stories of King Minos, his labyrinthine palace at Knossos on the southern island of Crete, and the half-man/half-bull monster, the Minotaur, that dwelled in it. Perhaps they also had some access to remains of the art of the Minoans, in which the bull is prominent. But most of the stories of early Greek legend take place on the Greek mainland at places like Argos, Mycenae, Tiryns, Thebes, and Athens. And of course, the greatest legend of all, that of the Trojan War, drew in a city from across the Aegean sea, Troy. These were the stories of Heracles and his Twelve Labors, who was born in Thebes to a family from Argos; Perseus of Argos and his quest to slay the Gorgon; Oedipus of Thebes and his tragic involvement with his mother and father; and of course, Theseus of Athens, who slew the Minotaur.

Heracles fought with the club and bow and arrow, protected by an invincible lion skin draped over his head and back. His traditions thus go back probably to a time before the use of bronze, which was used for the earliest swords and spears. He was very much the individualistic hero who fought alone, not as part of, or even at the head of, an army. Perseus' far-flown adventures against the Gorgon take him to several locations in the Near East and reveal influences from these areas. After the revelation of Oedipus' killing of his father and incestuous marriage to his mother, his sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, fought over the kingship of Thebes and assembled other kings with their armies from various parts of south and central Greece to fight over the fortified walls of Thebes. Like the fortified walls of Troy, this image of large fortification walls protecting a central citadel is one that later Greeks and we ourselves can witness as remains of the Mycenaean civilization of 1600-1200 BCE. Theseus' triumph over the Minotaur may be symbolic of the triumph of mainland Greek civilization over the Minoans. The archaeological record bears out the fact that the mainland Greeks overcame the Minoans, even though they adopted many of the advanced aspects of their civilization. These legendary events recall in a vague way

the events of the Greek Bronze Age (3000-1200 BCE). It came to a sudden end about 1200 BCE, after which Greece spent four centuries in what are now called the Dark Ages.

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2. The Renewal of Greek Civilization

The Politics of Homer

Toward the end of the eighth century the epic poetry of Homer took shape in its final form. For several generations before, oral poets had composed and sung epic poems celebrating various aspects of the legendary war against Troy. Now two parts of that epic cycle took shape through the skill of a poet, or poets, whom we call Homer. The first, the *Iliad*, focuses on the anger of Achilles, the greatest fighter among the armies amassed against Troy. This anger, which is directed at Agamemnon, the expedition's commander, leads to Achilles' petulant withdrawal from fighting, with disastrous consequences for his friends and allies, including his best friend, Patroclus, whose death leads Achilles to rejoin the fight and kill the Trojans' leading warrior Hector in the climax of the epic. The second epic, the *Odyssey*, relates the ten-year voyage home of Odysseus, the craftiest of the fighters among the armies amassed against Troy, and the struggles of his family anxiously awaiting his return. Along the way he has fantastic adventures, loses all his ships and crew, and arrives to find his home under siege by men who want to take his place.

The poems of Homer look back several centuries through legend to record events from quite a different world. To the extent that their legendary stories do reflect historical events, these must be from the time of the Mycenaeans. Not since that time had the Greek world been organized into the sort of fortified palaces that Homer describes. In fact the archaeological record has even borne out Homer's description of a palace at the site of Troy. But the details of Homer's story can hardly extend back five hundred years. They are probably descriptions inspired by the social and political organization from Homer's own time, and from that of the oral poets from whom he inherited so much of his material.

Near the same time that Homer was composing his poetry, Hesiod employed the same metrical pattern in writing two poems with an altogether different focus. In the *Theogony* he adopted several stories from Near Eastern traditions in order to

systematize and explain the origins of the Greek gods. In his *Works and Days*, he reuses some of these myths in an elaborate lesson in morals addressed to his disloyal brother.

In order for the poetry of Homer and Hesiod to be preserved in a set form (and in the case of Hesiod perhaps even for it to be composed at all) there had to be writing. The syllabic Linear B script of the Mycenaeans had died out with them. The epic poetry of Homer had been developed by oral poets, but with Greek contacts with the Near East came the adoption of an alphabetic writing system. There are debates about where exactly the transmission of the alphabet took place and who was involved, but it is clear that once the transmission was made, the alphabet spread quickly throughout the Greek speaking world, from southern Italy to Cyprus. Unlike Linear B, which was apparently used largely only for administrative reasons and for trade, the new Greek alphabet shows signs of having been devoted largely to poetry, especially Homer's. One of our earliest samples, from Pithecussae, an island off southern Italy, makes a reference to Nestor, one of Homer's characters, and to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. It seems likely that the cup was used for drinking parties, which included the recitation of Homer's poetry.

The social and political organization in Homer's poetry is a mixture of institutions, some of which extend back to the Mycenaeans while others must reflect his own times. For one thing, Homer didn't know anything about "Greeks" (Hellenes), the people of later times who were united by language and religion. The collected armies that attack Troy are variously called Achaeans, Argives, or Danaans, and individual groups among them are identified from their home areas, such as Crete, Sparta, or Salamis. But they speak the same language and worship the same gods as their enemies the Trojans and many of the Trojans' allies, though some of the Trojan allies, like the Carians, are foreign speakers.

The army consists of a collection of groups led by individual noblemen, called "kings" or *basileis*. Homer also uses the Mycenaean term *wanax*, "lord", but it is not used by any other sources from that time. Agamemnon as *wanax* is the commander in

chief, but in some ways he is simply a first among equals. He has the greatest wealth and the most soldiers and ships of any of the Argive commanders, but they are all more or less free to follow his leadership or not. They are there to serve their own interests and as a favor to him, not because he can compel them. They have meetings before the assembled armies in which various leaders take up a scepter, which signifies the right to speak. They want to achieve a consensus, but because of the size of Agamemnon's army, what he himself ultimately decides carries great weight. Nevertheless, a commander like Achilles can disagree with him vehemently and go off to sulk without Agamemnon being able to coerce him. On the other hand, when Thersites, an upstart commoner without the support of an army, tries to dress down Agamemnon and the other Argive leaders, he is silenced with a box around the ears. Free speech had its limits in the Homeric world.

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus marks the mid-afternoon by saying that it is "when a man rises from the *agora* (the assembly place) for dinner after deciding disputes of young men seeking judgment" (*Od.* 12.339-440). The public day was then over. It is significant that judicial activity played such a large role in the public life of Homer's time that he used it as a way to establish the time of day. In the *Iliad*, when the god Hephaestus decorates a new shield for the hero Achilles, he inscribes two cities (*poleis*), a city at war and a city at peace. In the city at peace he illustrates two scenes, one a wedding procession and the other a judicial scene, further confirmation of the centrality of justice for early Greek civic life.¹

In the modern world homicide is a criminal matter and prosecuted by the state. In Homer's world it is a matter between the killer, who seems in the Shield scene to have accepted blame for the man's death and wants to make reparation (rather than go into exile), and a survivor of the dead man, who has up to now refused any compensation, or blood-price. There is no question of his trying to take vengeance on his own. In cases where the killer was really evil and considered a threat to the community, it would not have been a judicial matter at all: the man would simply have been driven out, or killed. Here the men have been unable to reconcile their differences, but they

both seek out a third party in the assembly place to render a judgment and bring their dispute to an end. Although the procedure seems to be recognized by all, there are no laws to govern what should be done. The tradition of paying a blood-price might have played a role, but it did not determine the situation. Instead, a group of elderly aristocrats each propose their own judgment. The two men in dispute have each contributed a weight of gold, and they themselves will decide which of the judgments they can both live with.

Greek Expansion

As the economy and population of the Greek world grew in the eighth and seventh centuries, various changes occurred in the political landscape. Increasing population created pressures on the land base, and increasing economic activity created a wealth of various goods for trade, as well as a hunger for new goods and raw materials. Despite the Greek determination for self-sufficiency, the economic activity of the individual household, or *oikos*, no longer satisfied the needs of its members. There was thus more trade between households and an increased specialization of trades. The need for a central, urban market where these new, specialized goods could be traded gave rise to an urban population and thus an identification with a particular urban center. The Greek *polis* was born, an autonomous population based on an urban core, what we usually understand as the “city-state”.

The principal characteristic of the *polis* was the agora, the gathering place or market. It was normally located close to a religious sanctuary, where people gathered for festive occasions anyway. The original function of the agora was as a gathering place for trading between households and for discussion of common points of interest. It was essentially an open area upon which various temporary structures might be set up, like tables and booths for trading or a tent structure for dramatic presentations or festive dancing. It had to remain open, however, for common use. Any privatization would frustrate its function as a communal gathering place. Manufacturing was also

done close to this area, where bronze, iron, ceramics and leather might be worked more economically than they could be in an individual house.

Rising population levels and interests in trading led many Greek cities to resettle parts of their populations away, in less populated areas on the fringes of the Greek world, on the borders with other peoples, in North Africa, Sicily, France, Spain, and the Black Sea. These were not colonies on the later, Roman model, in which the new settlements were largely governed by the home cities. Each new settlement immediately became an independent *polis*. It certainly had ethnic and traditional ties with its mother city, but in general these were quickly forgotten if the interests of the new settlement were contrary to those of its parent. The methods of selection for the settlers and the way they organized their settlements could vary a great deal. The settlements thus offered an area for experimentation in the way that the *polis* was governed. For instance, the privileges of large, landed wealth that tended to keep power in the hands of relatively few aristocrats in the original cities were not present in the new settlements, where land tended initially to be divided evenly. Those with ability and leadership skills could rise to the top more easily.

Another consequence of the resettlement movement was that as the Greeks came into contact increasingly with non-Greek speaking peoples, they gained a heightened sense of their own Greek identity, their language, religion and cultural commonalities. The oracular shrine of the god Apollo at Delphi was regularly consulted about where new settlements should be located. Since Greeks considered Delphi the center of the world and gathered there for consultation about many issues, the oracle could serve as an important clearinghouse of information. Greek self-consciousness gave an added boost to the great festival games also. Participants in the Olympic Games, which were held every four years at Olympia in the northwest Peloponnese from 776 BCE, had to speak Greek and worship the Olympian gods.

The political structure of the *polis* was also greatly transformed by the technology of warfare. The affordability and strength of iron weapons meant that every Greek farmer of moderate means could own his own weaponry. The aristocrats who had

formerly dominated because only they could afford durable weaponry now found that their advantage was neutralized. Moreover, the new middle-class farmers who owned their own weapons, the hoplites, found that they could fight most effectively when they were tightly massed in a phalanx formation, their overlapping shields providing maximal mutual protection. With military force came political demands: the hoplites demanded a say in government.

In many of the most economically active cities, where social and economic mobility most undermined the traditional political power structure, the way was opened for a particularly ambitious person, usually one of the aristocrats, to champion the cause of this new class against the aristocrats. The experience of Cypselus at Corinth was typical. Corinth was thriving as a result of its strategic trading location on the isthmus between central Greece and the Peloponnese. Travelers by land and sea used the isthmus, and the Corinthians developed strong trading relationships. Cypselus used his position as a military leader to topple the domination of the city by his mother's family, the Bacchiads. Like Pheidon of Argos, Cypselus took power in an unprecedented way. He thus earned the designation "tyrant". But he was a champion of the people and was able to concentrate the city's resources on public enterprises, public works and festivals. In time, the usefulness of the institution of the tyranny as a protector of the popular interests wore out. The tyrant, or his son or grandson, had to spend more time protecting his own power than in doing truly useful things for the people. He often resorted to cruel means, which left the Greeks with a bad taste regarding tyrants. But tyrants usually had popular support at the beginning.

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3. The Challenges of the Archaic World

Sparta and Athens came up with very different solutions to the challenges facing the early Greek *poleis*. In the eighth century the two were in many ways similar, both dominated by aristocratic families who led the cities both militarily and culturally. But the two cities had differences too. The Attic countryside surrounding Athens was very accessible from the outside, and the political identification of its citizens was fairly weak. Despite the *synoikism*, the political unification of Attica under the legendary Theseus, only the ancient religious ties to Athena and her sanctuary on Athens' Acropolis drew the Athenians together. Economic inequalities among those living along the coast, those on the larger inland plains and those in the hills seemed more important than Athenian identity and unity. Sparta, on the other hand, was in Laconia, an out of the way corner of the Peloponnese, the large peninsula that forms southern Greece. It had a large, indigenous population of slaves, the helots, whom the Spartans had suppressed in their earliest history and on whose labors they depended for their livelihood. Although Laconia is relatively large, only those living in the few closely neighboring settlements in its center on the Eurotas River were recognized as Spartans. Although ethnically similar, the people inhabiting the surrounding areas were referred to as *perioikoi*, "those living around".

In the course of the eighth and seventh centuries, instead of sending out settlements abroad in order to alleviate population pressures and develop trading opportunities, the Spartans took another strategy. They conquered the neighboring area of Messenia, on the western side of Mt. Taygetus, in a war that lasted about twenty years (740-720 BCE). But when they attempted to overpower their northern neighbors in Argos, the Spartans lost a disastrous battle at Hysiae in 669 BCE. They lost so many men that they were almost powerless when Messenia revolted, and they were forced into another thirty-year war against the Messenians (650-620 BCE) during which they committed themselves to military pursuits in an extraordinary way. Sparta became a very closed society, intensely jealous of its security and suspicious of outside influences.

The Second Messenian War also brought political reforms. The wealth of Messenia, which had originally been allotted only to the wealthy, was now allotted equally to every male Spartan at birth. They considered themselves *homoioi*, “equals”. There were no doubt still inequalities, which became painfully clear in times to come, but equality among the Spartans was the great idea of the Spartan political system. As in other Greek *poleis*, it stemmed from the idea that within the Spartan hoplite phalanx each man was equal. Each Spartan male was assigned to one of a number of eating clubs, *sysitia*, to which he made contributions from his land allotment, and he identified himself more with them than with his family or geographical area.

Sparta's constitution was ascribed to a legendary lawgiver, Lycurgus, who was inspired by an oracle of the god Apollo. The ancient sources differ widely over when Lycurgus lived and what exactly he did, but Plutarch provides the text of an early document, known as the Great Rhetra, which seems genuine, if not altogether clear.²

Sparta had a mixed constitution. Within groupings of “tribes” and “obes”, the specific configurations of which remain a mystery, their constitution had royal, aristocratic and democratic elements. Its two kings, who came from the same two families generation after generation, the Agiads and Eurypontids, provided the royal element. They led Sparta's armies in war and were given various other privileges. The Gerousia, or senate, had twenty-eight members, besides the kings. They were all over sixty years of age and elected for life by the assembly from the most noble households. In providing the aristocratic element, the Gerousia prepared measures for discussion before the assemblies. It also heard criminal cases. As the Rhetra's later clause suggests, the Gerousia also gained the power to overturn decisions of the assembly. So the democratic element (“*damos*” is the form of *demos* in the Spartan dialect, which is called Dorian), which was originally sovereign, later had its powers checked. All male Spartan citizens over thirty who had completed Sparta's famously rigorous training and education, known as the *agogê*, and were members of one of the *sysitia* formed the assembly. The Babyca and Knakion were locations. The biographer Plutarch speculated that the assembly should be held in a somewhat remote spot, so

that there would be no distractions. The Assembly did not officially discuss the measures presented to it by the Gerousia; it only voted for or against. But some informal discussion must have taken place.

Missing from the Great Rhetra but well known in the historical period was the annually elected board of five *ephors*, who were “overseers” of the kings. Each month they exchanged oaths with the kings to uphold their rule so long as the kings reigned according to the laws. Most scholars believe that the *ephors* were established sometime later than the Great Rhetra. However, their office may have existed from the beginning but been seen originally only as an accessory to the kingship, as a sort of unofficial means of communication between the kings and the deliberative bodies in executive matters.

The Development of Athens

Athens developed more slowly than many other Greek states, including Sparta, but once its development gathered momentum, the size of its population and landmass led it to become one of the most dominant *poleis*. Evidence for the clearing of graves from the Athenian *agora* about 700 BCE suggests that Athens' identity as a civic center was increasing about this time. At some point, alongside or in place of the traditional office of *basileus*, “king”, there developed that of the annually elected *archon*, “ruler” or “magistrate,” who had executive responsibility. Originally elected for life, then for ten years, by 682 BCE, the archonship became an annually elected office. In time, Athens selected three such annually elected archons, the eponymous *archon*, who gave his name to the year in which he served, the *archon basileus*, who took over many of the traditional and religious roles of the king, and the *polemarch*, who had responsibility for war. However, only members of the wealthiest families could be elected to these offices. They were the Eupatrids, “sons of good fathers.” After their year of elective office the archons joined the Areopagus Council, which ruled the city. Later, six more annually elected magistrates were added, the *thesmothetai*, whose name suggests that

they originally had some responsibility connected with recording laws or judicial decisions.

Besides their geographical divisions, Athenians were also divided ethnically into four divisions that were common to all Ionian Greeks. Athens had no indigenous slave population like the Spartan helots, so there was only social stratification among the Athenians themselves. Some Athenians were enslaved to others. The slaves were referred to as *hektemoroi* or “sixth-parters”, though the exact meaning of this term is unclear. Presumably they paid a rent of one-sixth, or perhaps five-sixths, of the harvest on the land they worked. If they got behind, they could be sold as slaves, even away from Athens.

Athens was also being challenged by its neighbors, like Megara, and had a need for the sort of hoplite soldiers that could only be supplied by a thriving middle class. This created tensions of the sort that were being resolved in many *poleis* by the seizure of power by tyrants, who championed the causes of the common people against the aristocrats. In Athens, about 630 BCE, an aristocrat and Olympic victor named Kylon, who was married to the daughter of the tyrant of Megara, tried to seize power by taking control of Athens' Acropolis. After his coup had failed, Kylon's supporters sought refuge as suppliants, invoking the protection of the gods. They were told by Athens' magistrates that their suppliance was recognized and that they should come down from the Acropolis. But when they did so they were massacred. A trial was held and the eponymous archon Megacles and his entire family, the Alcmeonids, were banished from Athens in order to rid the city of the religious pollution, or *miasma*. Even the family's graves were dug up and their contents removed from Athenian territory. In time the Alcmeonids returned to Athens, and many of Athens' most illustrious leaders, including Cleisthenes, Pericles and Alcibiades belonged to this family, which was nonetheless haunted by the *miasma*.

One consequence of Kylon's attempted coup was the setting down for the first time of a set of laws for Athens, the so-called Constitution of Draco. This now written form of Athens' traditional laws was a major step in the administration of justice and might

have lessened the power of Athens' aristocrats, but the laws were later regarded as having been very harsh (which resulted in the English word "draconian" referring to harshness). Draco's laws did little to alleviate the tensions that Athens faced. Only one part of his law code survived, that concerning homicide, a part of which was later inscribed during a reorganization of Athens' laws.³

As tensions continued to rise, relief was sought finally in 594 by turning the city over temporarily to a single man as both "archon and reconciler." This man was Solon. He used poetry to communicate his ideas about the nature of Athens' problems and his solutions for them. Much of this poetry survives. In it, Solon talks about the marker stones, or "horoi", that indicated that land was "enslaved", about Athenians who were enslaved and sold abroad, about the "crooked judgements" that led to this enslavement. His principal methods of solving the problem were the *seisachtheia*, the "shaking off of burdens" by which he presumably cancelled debts, his reorganization of the class system by wealth rather than birth, and his empowerment of the courts as a check against the power of the magistrates.

The *seisachtheia* forbade the enslavement of Athenians resulting from debt, and it freed and repatriated many who had been enslaved. The reorganization of Athens' classes broke down some of the antiquated power structures and gave recognition to the upwardly mobile members of the new mercantile and manufacturing classes. According to Solon's system, the Athenians were divided into four classes by wealth. The pentacosiomedimnoi, or 500-bushel class, were the wealthiest. The Hippeis, or Knights, could produce at least four hundred bushels from their land. The Zeugitae, or Yoke Class, could produce two hundred bushels, and the Thetes, or Laborers, were the lowest, and most numerous class. Although only members of the highest classes could be elected to office in Athens, Solon allowed "anyone who wishes" (not just the victim) to seek restitution for injustices. He also allowed for appeal of any decision to the law courts, in which all the classes participated, and he gave many more rights to the lower classes. In the law courts, the poorer classes could use their numbers to check the power of the rich.

Solon might have used his enormous powers to become tyrant, but he consciously resisted that temptation. After reforming Athens' political system, he left the city for ten years. Despite the breadth of Solon's reforms and the huge respect that his name was given in later generations, however, Athens' political strife, or *stasis*, continued, based mainly on geographical inequalities. In some years no chief magistrate, or *archon*, was elected. One *archon* who was elected to the annual office attempted to stay on, and did so for three years before he was removed. From 580 BCE a temporary solution was found through the appointment of a board of ten, who served jointly as *archon*. The board consisted of five aristocrats, three farmers and two laborers. The three groups represented not just economic divisions but also Athens' geographical divisions. These were the central plain, where the wealthiest landowners were, the shore line, with its less wealthy farm land, and those from "beyond the hills," whose leaders likely came from the towns beyond the ring of mountains surrounding Athens itself. The last group actually included a wide range of people, laborers, tradesmen, those freed from slavery by Solon's cancellation of debts, and recent immigrants. Many were refugees from the prosperous and advanced coastline of Asia Minor, which was coming under the control of the Lydians, and, after 547 BCE, the Persians.

Peisistratus' rise to power as tyrant was by no means smooth. He rose first through a bit of political chicanery, staging an assault on himself to justify getting a bodyguard and then using it to seize power in 561 BCE. After five years he was thrown out, but he soon returned with the help of a marriage alliance with the daughter of the leader of the shore group. When he refused to consummate the marriage after six years, however, he was again driven out. He returned finally in 546 BCE at the head of an army of friends and mercenaries and drove out his opponents. During his ten years away from Athens, Peisistratus had fostered a great number of connections throughout Greece, which he continued to utilize during his tyranny.

The Peisistratid tyranny, that of Peisistratus and his sons Hippias and Hipparchus who succeeded on his death in 527, was obviously not a time in which Athens' politics

could develop at an institutional level very much. Peisistratus and his friends and family were in control even though he allowed the normal mechanisms instituted by Solon to function. The archons were always elected under their supervision and usually from their ranks. This meant that the Areopagus Council, which had effective legislative control, was gradually filled up with Peisistratus' people. But in less obvious ways their tyranny was crucial for the development of Athens' democracy. Peisistratus imposed a tax of five percent on all produce and used the proceeds to finance a large public works program. This served to increase the role of the *polis* in Athens' economy, to provide a new sort of employment, and to achieve a great degree of economic stability and prosperity. Peisistratus also cleared Athens' *agora* of private dwellings in order to achieve a proper civic center. He began the minting of Athenian coinage, and he also used legislation and loans at especially good rates to keep all agricultural land under production in the most effective ways. Under his leadership Athens' farmland shifted somewhat away from grains and into olives, whose oil could be processed and sold abroad at a much higher added value. He also sent out travelling courts through the countryside of Attica, so that the *polis* took over judicial functions from local aristocrats. Besides building programs on the Acropolis and in the central *agora*, Peisistratus and his sons also put *polis* money behind the large festivals, like the yearly Panathenaia, which was celebrated with extra vigor every fourth year, and the Dionysia, where Athens' theatrical traditions were born. Besides making him popular, these actions fostered a stronger sense of Athenian identity than had existed before. Instead of relying on the aristocrats, Athenians now relied on their *polis* to pursue prosperity.

In 514 Athens' tyranny changed. One of the sons of Peisistratus, Hipparchus, was assassinated, and as a result, his brother Hippias imposed harsh measures on the Athenians, harsh enough for the Athenians ever after to condemn even the notion of tyranny. The family of Alcmeonids, which had led the shore group in Athens before being driven out by Peisistratus, managed to persuade the Spartans to rid Greece of

tyrants, so the Spartans marched on Athens and eventually forced Hippias to withdraw. He went to Asia Minor and enjoyed the protection of the Persians.

In Athens, with the withdrawal of the Peisistratids, Athens' old regional conflicts began to resurface. Legislation was introduced to outlaw “those of impure descent”, which meant the immigrants from Asia Minor and the Alcmeonids, whose family still suffered from the miasma associated with the massacre of the followers of Cylon over a century before. The legislation was resisted, but tensions remained, principally between the Alcmeonids and the other old aristocrats. These tensions were resolved when Cleisthenes, the leader of the Alcmeonids, “brought the *demos* into his *hetairia*.” At least this is the language that was later used. In this context, “*demos*” refers to the mass of citizens in the lower classes; “*hetairia*” refers to the aristocratic social clubs that formed the basis of political alliances in Athens. The *demos* had been the backbone of the Peisistratids' support until their tyranny became despotic. Now it would govern itself.

Despite attempts by aristocrats to reenlist the Spartans to drive the Alcmeonids out, the *demos* insisted on its independence, and after shedding some aristocratic blood and besieging the Spartans on the Acropolis, they allowed the Spartans to withdraw and won their democracy. Cleisthenes was the reformer who gave Athens' democracy its definitive shape, although we know very little about his life, especially after he was elected *archon* in 508. His most important step was to redefine Athenian citizenship. From now on, the Athenians would no longer be divided by the traditional divisions into four tribes, which were dominated by the aristocrats with their brotherhoods, or phratries, and their control of many of Athens' priesthoods. Instead, the Athenians now had ten tribes, membership in which depended entirely on geography, on which *demos* (town or area) they lived in. (The word for town was also “*demos*”, but modern scholars call these towns or areas “*demes*” [pronounced “*deems*”] in order to distinguish them from the *demos*, which became either the mass of citizens of the lower classes or the entire citizen body. Since Athenian politics increasingly worked on the principle of one man/one vote, and the lower classes greatly outnumbered the

upper classes, these two meanings were not that distinct in practice.) To cut through Athens' geographical strife, Cleisthenes constructed each of his ten tribes from the 139 or so demes in the city center, along the shore, and from the rich plains areas. The three thirds of each tribe consisted of demes from each of these areas. To cut across Athens' old family squabbles, Athenians began to identify themselves not with their patronymic, their father's name, which identified their family, but with their demotic name, which identified their deme.

At eighteen years of age, every Athenian male was taken by his father before his local deme assembly, which voted on whether to accept him as a member. Once accepted, he spent the next two years in military training and on garrison duty with the other members of his tribe, drawn from all three of Athens' regions. The sort of close male bonding that this arrangement encouraged, which was maintained through entire lifetimes, served to break down Athens' geographical tensions.

Each of Athens' ten tribes elected fifty members to Athens' Council, or *Boulê*, which was expanded from four hundred to five hundred members. To make up the fifty, each deme elected a specific number of Council members each year. This Council met very regularly and oversaw the administration of the *polis*, as well as preparing motions to go before Athens' Assembly, or *Ecclesia*, which was the sovereign body, making all the important decisions. All Athenian males over eighteen took part in the Assembly. The political year was divided into ten "months", during each of which the Council members from each tribe formed an executive body, a *prytanis*, which governed the city. Each day one of the fifty would officially be "president".

Athens' courts were also selected by tribes. Each year 6000 Athenians took the Heliastic oath to serve as judges, and each day the courts sat, up to 5000 of them were called to serve in courts that could number from hundreds to thousands. A very elaborate lottery system was used for the selection of judges, or *dikastai*, immediately before they heard and decided their cases. This procedure, and the great numbers involved, ensured that the judges could not be bribed.

Cleisthenes is also said to have introduced ostracism, no doubt to prevent the return of tyranny. Each year at the same time, the Athenian assembly voted whether to conduct an ostracism. If the vote passed, then one month later every Athenian citizen went to the agora and deposited a piece of broken pot, an *ostrakon*, on which he had written the name of someone he wanted to see ostracized. If enough votes were cast, then the “winner” was required to leave Athens for a period of ten years. He need not have done anything wrong. In fact, some sources report that the individual was ostracized simply because his greatness disturbed the political balance of the democracy. Except for the period 480-450 BCE, however, few people were ever actually ostracized in Athens. But the potential for the use of ostracism was thought to be an indication of the strength of Athens' democracy.

In the early years of Athens' Cleisthenic democracy, much power must still have been in the hands of the Areopagus, whose members, as former magistrates, all belonged to the wealthiest classes. Its role was to protect the constitution, which could give it quite far reaching powers. The power of the *demos*, the “democracy”, although officially sovereign through the Assembly of all Athenian citizens, still had to establish itself in practice. But the label that Cleisthenes' reforms took, *isonomia*, “equality before the laws” or “a legal system based on equality”, laid the foundation for Athens' *demos* to achieve its sovereignty in practice as well as formally.

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4. The Greeks and the Persians

In 490 BCE at Marathon, on the northern coast of Attica, the Athenians repulsed a task force of Persians intent on gaining their submission and on re-imposing on them the rule of the tyrant Hippias, who had been forced from Athens 21 years before. That Athens could block both the Persians and the return of tyranny gave a tremendous morale boost to their still budding democratic constitution. They had adopted it in 506, but they still had jitters about those who might aim at tyranny. That they won this victory without the help of the Spartans, the foremost warriors of the Greek world and the leaders of the Hellenic League, helped establish the Athenians' own claim to be an effective, independent fighting force. Athens was clearly the leading city among the Ionian Greeks, who lived on the central islands of the Aegean and on the coast of Turkey, and the Athenians had already established influence around the Hellespont and on Lemnos. But they had lacked confidence in themselves in comparison to the Spartans, their superior Dorian cousins. After Marathon, they were much more confident.

In 480 the Persians attacked again, this time with a much larger force. There were questions about where to meet them in battle. Many from the Peloponnese thought that the Greeks should withdraw to their southern peninsula and block the Persians at the isthmus. That would have left Athens and many other *poleis* out. But the Spartan king Leonidas heroically led his elite bodyguard of 300 experienced hoplites north to Thermopylae, a narrow pass between north and central Greece. If he were killed, he thought, the Spartans would have to fight to the end to avenge him. For a time Leonidas' force, with contingents from several other *poleis*, managed to hold the pass. But after several days the Persians found a way around the pass. The Greeks would soon have been surrounded. Leonidas sent the other Greeks away and made a desperate stand against the Persians, sacrificing himself and his men for Greek unity.

Afterwards, at the island of Salamis, near Athens, a combined Greek navy managed to defeat a much larger fleet of ships under Persian command. Although Sparta

technically commanded the Greek fleet, it was recognized as a united fighting force. The Athenians had provided the most ships, their naval rivals from the island of Aegina were recognized as having fought best, and the tactical guile of one Athenian commander, Themistocles, was given large credit for the Greek victory and for maintaining Greek unity in trying circumstances.⁴ The fact that the Athenians first abandoned their city to the ravages of the Persians and then still fought alongside the rest of the Greeks gave them even more respect. They put Greek interests before their own.

In 479 the Greeks met and defeated the much larger Persian land forces at Plataea, on the border between Attica and Boeotia. Here again the Greek forces worked effectively together, the Athenians showing themselves to be every bit as competent on the field as the Spartans. At almost the same time, across the Aegean at Mycale, the Greek fleet again defeated the Persians. While the Persians could still dominate the many Greek cities that spotted the coastline of western Turkey, they would never again attempt an assault on the Greek mainland.

At the next Olympic games, in 476, which were the preeminent event to be shared by the entire Greek-speaking world, everyone, from every Greek *polis*, applauded Themistocles as the brains behind the Greek victory. There were criticisms only against the *poleis* that had refused to participate in the combined Greek forces, like Corcyra and Syracuse, and those cities that appeared to have given up to the Persians without an adequate fight, like Thebes.

The stage seemed to be set for a period of prosperous Panhellenism, the idea of a united Greece. And there are many indications that these united accomplishments held a strong psychological grip over the Greek world. Long after there would be references to “the Marathon men” who had repulsed the Persians. The Athenian Acropolis, whose monumental buildings had been destroyed by the Persians, was left unreconstructed for a long time in commemoration of what “the barbarians” had done. And even when its buildings were rebuilt, conscious memorials of the conflict with the Persians were included. The columns of the old Parthenon were embedded in

a prominent place on the side of the Acropolis, and 192 figures were included in the new Parthenon's frieze, one for each of the Athenian dead at Marathon. The metope sculptures celebrate the battles of Greek heroes against monsters, forces of savagery that represent the barbarian threat. Persia had become a point for comparison for the Greeks: from now on the world was divided into Greeks and barbarians, non-Greeks, who were understood to be the Persians.

So the Greeks gained a sense of Greece, Hellas, and what it meant to be Greeks, Hellenes.

Greek Disunity

After the Greek victories at Plataea and Mycale in 479 BCE, the Hellenic League was poised to pursue a vendetta against the Persians and drive them out of the Greek world entirely. The Athenians then organized the Delian League, which united the Ionians of the Aegean islands and the coast of Asia Minor. Sparta and its Peloponnesian allies, who were mostly Dorian, did not join. The Hellenic League continued to exist until 462 BCE, but the Delian League took over the fight against Persia, and Athens was its *hegemon*, or leader.

Athens had no political parties, so it is impossible to look for a cohesive policy with which any group can be identified. But in the early years of the Delian League there were at least four areas in which Athenian views could diverge. The first was in regard to pursuing antagonisms against Persia. Sparta, with its large helot population to control at home and its commitment to land-based hoplite warfare, had left the field open for the Athenians to assume leadership in this area. Following Aristides, the Athenians accepted Greek hegemony, or leadership, against the Persians without exception. But there were nuances to this: some states in 480 had gone over to the Persian side; were they to be punished, excluded from the Greek councils? One of these was the Amphictyonic Council, which administered the sanctuary and oracle at Delphi. The Spartans wanted to expel the "medizers" from this Council, those who had collaborated with the Persians, or Medes. Themistocles used up a great deal of the

goodwill the Spartans felt for him after Salamis by opposing the Spartans on this point.

The second area for divergence was with regard to Sparta and the Greek alliance. The Persians had sacked Athens twice, in 480 and 479, and the city had been in ruins. Although the Acropolis was left largely unrestored as a memorial of the Persian destruction, which the Spartans encouraged, Themistocles took a leading role in re-fortifying Athens despite Spartan opposition. But he also suggested burning the Greek fleet in order to ensure Athenian naval dominance. In this his sometime friend and enemy Aristides stood against him. Sparta soon withdrew from involvement in the Greek alliance because its regent, Pausanias, misbehaved and discredited the Spartans. A related area involved attempts by Athens to achieve influence beyond its borders. Even before the Persian incursions, the Athenian Miltiades established a principality in the Chersonese. Miltiades then won great acclaim by leading the Athenians at Marathon. But his further attempts at expansionism, at Paros, had been a failure, and he died in disgrace long before the battle of Salamis in 480.

The fourth area of divergence was in politics at home. In the aftermath of Salamis, the aristocratic council of the Areopagus, consisting of former archons, had the upper hand. Its leadership had proved decisive in organizing the Athenian resistance to the Persians. But there was a change in the offing. In 487, the selection of magistrates was changed from election to selection by lottery. This meant that although the older members of the Areopagus had all enjoyed sufficient popularity, at least at one time, to have been chosen to lead the Athenians, the more recent members held their positions only by the luck of the draw. They had no political capital upon which to base their Council's authority. On the other hand, Athens' new naval dominance gave its navy's rowers huge new political importance. Democratic politicians, like Themistocles, made use of this new political force. They had to act through the mechanisms of the *polis*, since they had no money of their own. Aristocratic politicians could dispense largesse as they wished, and they could themselves finance ships for Athens' fleets.

After organizing the Delian League, Aristides faded quickly from the scene. Themistocles held the upper hand. But his arrogance toward the other Greeks and his lack of a pure Athenian aristocratic pedigree quickly led to a loss of political support, especially in a city still dominated by the aristocratic Areopagus. The new political and military star was Cimon, the son of Miltiades, who had impeccable aristocratic credentials and ambitions for Athens and the Delian League. After expelling the Spartan renegade Pausanias from Byzantium, he had captured Eion, in northern Greece and then the island of Skyros, near Euboea. These two places had perhaps been pockets of particularly pro-Persian sympathizers. Nevertheless, they were Greek states, and there was some unease about the Greek alliance attacking other Greeks. Then Cimon moved against Carystos and finally Naxos, which revolted in the early 460s. The first great battle against the Persians after Mycale in 479 did not occur until the naval battle of the Eurymedon River in 467. But the possibilities of exploiting this victory were forestalled. The Greek fleet turned back to suppress a revolt by the island of Thasos in 465.

Themistocles was ostracized sometime in the mid-470s, just as he had had Aristides ostracized some years before. Once out of the city he was powerless to act against those at home who brought charges against him. The playwright Aeschylus produced his *Persians* in 472 celebrating Themistocles' moment of triumph at Salamis. But it was not enough. Themistocles was forced to flee from his sanctuary at Argos, and after an epic chase across the Greek world in search of refuge, he finally ended up in the Persian king's court.

Cimon had rock solid support among Athens' upper classes. He was one of them, he was enormously successful as a general, and he managed to allay the tendencies of some in the state to provoke the inevitable confrontation with Sparta over the manner of Athens' leadership over the Greek states. Sparta cannot have been very pleased when Cimon led the Delian fleet against Carystos and Naxos, but it was powerless to do anything. However, when Cimon and the fleet besieged Thasos in 465 and the island's inhabitants appealed to Sparta for help, the Spartans "secretly" offered to

invade Attica, which would have forced Cimon to break off his attack. Thus one pillar of Cimon's support was undercut. His leadership could no longer be seen to exclude the possibility of Spartan aggression. The small landowners in the Attic countryside, the backbone of Athens' hoplite class, must have protested loudly, and started looking for someone to take a more militant line against the Spartans.

The Spartans were prevented from attacking Attica by a revolt of their helot population in their own hinterland, at Ithome in Messenia, and by an earthquake. These events also gave Cimon an opportunity: he would lead the Athenians to Sparta's aid and thereby win back their goodwill. In their moment of distress, the Spartans invited him to come. Cimon led 4000 troops into Spartan territory, but the actual appearance of this unprecedented sight, Athenian soldiers in Spartan territory, spooked the Spartans, who were now in any case recovering on their own. The Athenians were a potentially subversive presence, and they were shamefully told to go home.

The Athenian demos itself got spooked, which caused a great change in policy. Alliances were forged with Sparta's rival Argos and with Thessaly. Antagonism with Megara, on the border with Attica and thus a potential buffer, came to an end. Cimon was ostracized. The Areopagus, which had championed Cimon, lost many of its political and legal functions, which were shifted to the Council and Assembly. Aeschylus, the playwright who had earlier celebrated the Athenian victory over Salamis in order to ease anger against Themistocles, now wrote about how the Areopagus was originally instituted as a homicide court, which was now the only function it had left. The Areopagus had had sweeping powers "to preserve the constitution" by hearing cases against magistrates and generals. These were now given to the more representative assemblies. So were the *dokimasia* and the *euthyna*, by which magistrates were scrutinized and audited at the beginning and end of their terms. And the senior magistrates would no longer try cases at all; all legal proceedings would now go straight to the popular law courts.

The author of these democratizing reforms in 462 BCE was Ephialtes, an aristocrat with an impeccable record, but a devoted democrat. Soon after his reforms, however, he was assassinated. His role as the champion of the democrats was taken over by Pericles, who went on to dominate Athenian politics for more than thirty years. One of Pericles' first reforms was to introduce payment for participation in Athens' juries. Unlike in our own day, Athenian jurists could not be compelled to participate, so unless they received some compensation, only those who could afford to take time away from their other responsibilities could participate. With jury pay, Pericles saw to it that the lower classes could judge cases as well. In 457 he opened the holding of the senior magistracies to the *zeugitae*. In 451 he introduced a law requiring that to be recognized as an Athenian citizen, a man had to show that both his parents had been Athenians.

Under Pericles' leadership, Athenian relations with Sparta continued to sour. Athens' assistance to Megara in severing its ties to the Spartans and the other Peloponnesians led to what is now called the First Peloponnesian War (460-445 BCE). Athens now built its Long Walls, which connected Athens with its harbor at Piraeus. In 457, the Spartans marched north into Boeotia in an attempt to shore up their allies in Thebes. The Athenians confronted them at Tanagra and lost, but the Spartan losses were also considerable and forced them to withdraw. The next year Athens retook Boeotia and dominated it for the next ten years.

Athens' hostility to Persia had not yet wavered. In 459, 200 Athenian ships ventured to Egypt to support a revolt against the Persians. Like other revolts against the great Persian king, this one enjoyed temporary success, but in 454 it collapsed and Athens' entire expedition, including fifty more ships that had been sent out as reinforcements, were lost. It was a huge disaster, which led to two significant events. First, citing the possibility of a renewed Persian threat, Athens moved the treasury of the Delian League from Delos to Athens. Second, in about 450 Athens ended its hostilities with Persia with the so-called Peace of Callias. Despite the end of the war

against Persia, however, Athens continued to insist that its allies contribute to the upkeep of its fleet. The Delian League had become the Athenian Empire.

In 447 Athens' ambitions to maintain a hold over Boeotia and thus hold an empire on land as well as on the sea were ended when the Spartans again defeated them, this time at Coronea in Boeotia. Soon a peace treaty was also concluded. Sparta was to lead the Greeks of the Peloponnese and Boeotia, and Athens was to have its naval empire. The peace treaty required that trials involving Athenians and allies be held at Athens, and it imposed Athenian silver coinage, weights and measures on all its allies. Those allies that were deemed recalcitrant could expect to have a colony of Athenian *cleruchs*, stakeholders, placed nearby. The cleruchies allowed the Athenians to keep an eye on things and provided a home for some of Athens' burgeoning population.

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5. The Great Peloponnesian War

The peace treaty concluded between Athens and Sparta in 446 interrupted hostilities without resolving the causes of the dispute between the two powers. It gave Athens a free hand to dominate its subject allies, one that it exercised quite brutally against the island of Samos in 440. But in general the Athenians did not try to extend their domination over new areas. Pericles, who was both Athens' leading politician and its most authoritative general, was quite happy to let Athens' enjoy the wealth and dominance it already had. In the mid 440s he embarked on a massive building program that gave Athens the physical attributes to match its imperial power, buildings like the Parthenon and Propylaea on the Acropolis and the Hephaestion near the agora. There are suggestions that he sent bribes to the Spartans to soften their hostility. But the Spartans themselves had little reason to react. The Athenians were not imposing on their territory. The Spartans' austere lifestyle, which included avoiding the outside world as much as possible, meant that Athens was little direct threat to them.

But Sparta did lead an alliance of states known as the Peloponnesian League, which included Thebes, which saw itself as the leader of Boeotia, Megara, which bordered Athens, and Corinth, which, as a maritime trading state had ambitions that naturally conflicted with Athens' from time to time. Boeotia also bordered on Attica, Athens' territory, and the Athenians had strong relations with the Boeotian state of Plataea, which was near the border with Attica and resented Thebes' ambitions.

Corinth lay the groundwork for war. Athens had allied itself in 434 with Corcyra, an island colony of Corinth that lay on the route between Greece and the rich trading area of Sicily and southern Italy. The Athenians then joined the Corcyraeans in a sea battle against Corinth, which allowed the island to sever its ties to its mother city. Since Corinth had been very active in the colonization movement of previous centuries, this scenario was likely to repeat itself. In fact, Potidaea, one of Athens' subject allies on the coast of the northern Aegean area known as the Chalcidice, was

also a colony of Corinth, and it still received its annual magistrates from the mother city. The Athenians demanded that Potidaea sever these ties with Corinth, and made several other demands besides. The Potidaeans refused and they and the Corinthians appealed to Sparta for help. The Spartans probably could have been dissuaded from declaring war if Athens had softened its antagonism against Megara, whose markets it was blockading as a result of a border dispute. Nevertheless, the contemporary Athenian historian Thucydides is probably right that war could ultimately not be avoided so long as Athens' ambitions threatened the other Greeks. Modern historians have seen these ambitions in economic terms, citing Athens' needs for grain from the Black Sea, minerals from the northern Aegean, and timber from Thrace and Macedonia.

Thebes and Plataea caused the actual outbreak of war. The Plataeans, after repulsing a Theban attempt to seize control of their city, massacred 180 Theban prisoners. Anticipating a Theban reprisal, the Plataeans sought Athenian help, while the Thebans turned to Sparta. Pericles dictated Athens' strategy at the beginning of the war. The Athenians would counter the Spartans' advantage in hoplite warfare by refusing to meet them on the battlefield. Instead, the Athenians would discipline their impulses to fight, abandon most of the Attic countryside and withdraw behind the walls that connected Athens and Piraeus. Its navy and trading fleets would keep the city fed and supplied. This discipline would have been difficult under any circumstances, but the Athenians had not engaged in war on their own territory for over a generation, and many of the men of combat age had never experienced war of any kind. They had grown up in a city that had seen itself as the foremost power of Greece. The first two years of the war (431-430) proceeded according to Pericles' plans. The Spartans invaded Attica during the campaigning season, laid the country waste, and withdrew, and the Athenian fleet sailed around the Peloponnese on raiding expeditions.

In 429 Athens experienced something entirely unexpected: a plague broke out. The crowded conditions of the city and a total lack of knowledge about how to deal with the

disease caused the deaths of one quarter to one third of Athens' population, including Pericles'. Despite this catastrophe, however, Athens' military situation remained much as it had been. What changed was Athens' leadership. Thucydides tends to see the change in moral terms, and modern historians tend to follow his assessment that Athens' political and military leadership was not up to the standard set by the great general who had given Athens leadership for over thirty years. The new leadership, which is associated with the names of Nicias and Cleon in particular, is described as being led by "demagogues" who pandered to the desires of Athens' *demos*.

Pericles' death in 429 brought a power vacuum in Athens. He had largely eliminated his political opponents from the scene. Capable men of the aristocracy who felt a calling to public service went into the military, where they were often away from Athens for lengthy periods, unable to build popular support with the *demos*. In Athens what had arisen instead was a new kind of politician, not from the traditional, landholding aristocracy, but of the *demos*. The new politicians gained their wealth through trade and manufacturing. Their policies were belligerent and they appealed to the basest motives of the *demos*, its jealousy and rapacity. Cleon was one of these new politicians. He was the son of a wealthy leather tanner.

The historical tradition is universally hostile to Cleon. But in 425 he was handed an extraordinary piece of luck. His bravado and aggressiveness were rewarded with his being able to take credit for the capture of several hundred Spartans on the island of Sphacteria, which led the Spartans to sue for peace. Although their plea was rejected, because of Cleon, the prisoners prevented the Spartans from attacking Attica for the next four years. The Athenians responded by increasing the tribute they demanded from their allies, and times were good for the Athenian *demos*. Attempts were even made to make incursions by land into Boeotia.

Despite Cleon's successes, he was not able to win over everyone. Some believe that Athens with its authority invested in an amateur, democratic assembly, had need for people, like Cleon, who devoted themselves to mastering the intricacies of the empire and its administration. As Cleon is made to say in the Mytilenean Debate, which was

recorded by the historian Thucydides, “a democracy cannot run an empire.” Cleon knew how much money and resources were needed for the empire, especially for his generous doles to the jury courts. In this context, the comic poet Aristophanes renewed his attacks on Cleon. He had criticized him in his earlier plays, been sued by Cleon and convicted, but he went at it again.

The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition

The deaths of Cleon and Brasidas at Amphipolis in 422 BCE removed the most belligerent leaders from both Athens and Sparta. Nicias, who had made windfall profits from silver mining, took over the leadership of Athens. Although he catered to the will of the *demos* as much as anyone, he was sympathetic to the aristocrats and farmers who wanted peace. Since the Spartans wanted peace also, he was able to achieve a peace treaty in 421 BCE without much trouble, and the peace was named for him. Although there are disputes about this what was achieved in this first, ten-year part of the Peloponnesian War, it seems pretty clear that despite the losses of the plague the Athenians were the winners. All they had wanted was to continue to hold their empire, and they had achieved this.

But there were restive people in Athens, anxious to put their own mark on Athens' glory. Although Athens and Sparta had achieved a peace treaty, the issues that separated them were still present. A protégé of Pericles, Alcibiades, organized a coalition of *poleis* in the Peloponnese to check Sparta's dominance over that peninsula. In 418, the armies of Argos, Mantinea and Elis fought the Spartans at Mantinea and lost. In 416 the Athenians approached almost the only Aegean island that was not part of its alliance, Melos, and demanded that it join. The Melians were ethnically Dorian, in fact they were very closely tied with the Spartans. They refused an Athenian ultimatum in a debate that was dramatized by the historian Thucydides as the “Melian Dialogue”. After a siege, the Athenians killed all the Melian men and sold their women and children into slavery.

The expedition against Melos was only a preliminary, however, for Athens', and Alcibiades', greatest ambition: the launching of a fleet to take control of the island of Sicily. Nicias opposed the expedition. But his estimate that it would require too many ships, men and resources, which he exaggerated in an attempt to discourage the Athenians, was to his surprise approved. And to make matters worse, he was chosen, against his wishes, as one of the three generals to lead the expedition of 94 triremes, 4500 hoplite soldiers, and countless supporting vessels. Nicias, Alcibiades and Lamachus made preparations to set off on the largest naval expedition ever by any Greek *polis*. Shortly before the expedition left, however, accusations were made against Alcibiades that he had profaned the mystery rituals of the cult of Demeter at Eleusis by performing them as part of a drunken party. It was also taken as a bad omen that somebody cut the phalluses off of many of the small statues of the god Hermes, called "herms", that were located throughout the city.

Alcibiades was able temporarily to face down the accusations against him, but once the expedition was launched and he was away, they resurfaced and Alcibiades was recalled. Because so many of his political supporters were with the fleet, he knew he would have a bad time of it at home, so instead of going to Athens, he went to Argos, and eventually to Sparta. Without him, the expedition to Sicily suffered from indecisiveness. Nicias had to lead it, and he opposed the whole venture. The Athenians attacked Syracuse, on the east coast of Sicily, and they might have won. But the Syracusans called on the Spartans for help, and the Spartans were quite happy to renew their war against Athens. By 413 the entire expedition to Sicily was wiped out, including further reinforcements sent out from Athens.

Meanwhile in Sparta, Alcibiades recommended that in their renewed war the Spartans set up a permanent garrison in Athenian territory at Decelea, and they followed his advice. From Decelea the Spartans were able to harass the Athenians continuously for the next ten years, preventing them from making use of the countryside of Attica.

Oligarchy of the Four Hundred

The Sicilian disaster led to turmoil both within Athens and among its allies, who now saw the city as weak. With Persian and Spartan help many revolted. At Athens there was anger at the democratic leaders and at the fortune-tellers who had urged on the expedition. Ten men were appointed as *probouloi* to preside over measures of economic stringency, a move taken to be a first step toward oligarchy. The reserve of 1000 talents set aside on the Acropolis was employed.

The reasons for the move to oligarchy are explained by Thucydides. There was a perception that Athens could not survive unless the Persian king stopped financing the Spartans and began helping the Athenians. The Persian king would not do this, it was argued, unless Athens adopted an oligarchic government. Alcibiades, who had fled from the Spartans and was now advising the Persian governor Tissaphernes, put the plan to the aristocratically minded generals with the Athenian forces at Samos, like Pisander. He hoped that the plan might bring about his return to Athens. Initially the democrats both at Samos and at Athens were timid. Androcles, a leading democrat who had been responsible for the exile of Alcibiades, was assassinated. The oligarchs were highly organized, employing the connections cultivated in their drinking clubs, the *hetairiai*.

A special Assembly was called outside Athens at Colonus, which voted to hand over power to a new Council of Four Hundred. The conservative politician and sophist Antiphon was in charge. The number 400 was selected because it echoed that of the Solonian Council that predated Cleisthenes'. The new Councilors showed up at the Council House in Athens with a large armed escort and dismissed the democratically selected Council of 500. There was a promise given that power would ultimately be in the hands of an Assembly of 5000, a number limited to those who could serve the city either financially or by bearing hoplite weapons. The lower class *thetes* who manned the fleet were thus to be excluded.

The oligarchs hesitated over recalling Alcibiades, so he made approaches to the democrats at Samos, and took his Persian patronage with him. The oligarchs also

encouraged those cities that were still subject to them to adopt similarly oligarchic governments, but they tended to revolt instead. And although the oligarchs had claimed that they would pursue the war against Sparta more efficiently than the democrats, once in power they made overtures of peace to the Spartans at Decelea. The navy at Samos elected from its numbers Thrasybulus to lead a democratic reaction. They elected Alcibiades general, who served as a conciliator. Some of the oligarchs were accused of fortifying Eitioneia, near Athens' harbor, to help a Spartan invasion. Soon the Four Hundred were deposed, and Athens was again a democracy.

The Tyranny of the Thirty

Led by Alcibiades, the Athenian navy achieved many successes in the years following 411. The Spartans were even led to offer peace. But the newly restored democracy, which was under the influence of a demagogue named Cleophon, only wanted to pursue war. Alcibiades was welcomed home a hero in 407, but his popularity with Athens' fickle democracy did not last long.

Leaving the main body of his forces under the command of his friend Antiochus, with orders not to risk a battle, Alcibiades went off with a few of his ships to reconnoiter. Although the exact circumstances are unknown, Antiochus was drawn into battle and was defeated. The loss was relatively insignificant, but Alcibiades was made to take the blame. He was not re-elected general the next year and chose to retire.

Despite the loss of this great general, the Athenians enjoyed one last great victory. The Spartan commander Lysander put together a fleet of 140 ships and managed to destroy 30 Athenian ships in a battle near the island of Lesbos. In response, the Athenians took extraordinary steps to assemble the funds necessary to put together a new fleet of their own, 150 ships strong. The two fleets met at Arginusae, near the Turkish coast, and the Athenians won a decisive victory.

In the aftermath of the battle, however, a storm prevented the Athenian generals from staying to recover the dead from the twenty-five ships that were lost. The

democratic Assembly responded by convicting the generals of impiety and executing them. This procedure was completely unconstitutional, as the philosopher Socrates, who happened to be one of those chairing the Assembly meeting that day, tried to point out: Athenians could not be condemned to death by the Assembly but only by a law court. The execution of the generals, one of whom was actually the son of the great general Pericles, had disastrous consequences for Athens' military prospects, which were already precarious after the retirement of Alcibiades. Athens simply did not have sufficient depth in strategic talent to be able to afford the loss of these men.

The Spartan commander Lysander took advantage of a lapse in Athenian strategy in the Hellespont to surprise the Athenian navy and destroy it in the battle of Aegospotami in 405. Only twenty of 180 Athenian ships managed to escape, and many of them fled to Cyprus. With the loss of its fleet and three to four thousand men, Athens was defenseless. But Lysander did not move immediately to demand Athens' surrender. Instead, he moved through the Aegean, replacing democratic governments loyal to Athens with oligarchic governments loyal to himself and Sparta and forcing the Athenians who lived in and near the various *poleis* as cleruchs to move back to Athens. With its grain supplies cut off by a Spartan embargo, the new arrivals simply exacerbated a famine in Athens.

The Athenians held out for eight months, urged on despite the famine by the demagogue Cleophon. But finally the city capitulated and its Long Walls were torn down. The Spartans were not as severe as some of their allies wanted: they were demanding Athens' total destruction. Instead, Lysander, as he had done with many of the *poleis* that had been Athens' allies, replaced Athens' democratic constitution with an oligarchy of thirty, select Athenians. Because of their brutal behavior toward their fellow citizens and others living in Athens, this group became despised and known simply as the Thirty or as the Thirty Tyrants.

The erratic behavior of Athens' democracy in the last years of the war, as well as the fatigue caused by the war itself, must have made the change in Athens' constitution quite appealing to many Athenians. The Thirty were appointed both to run the

government and to write new laws according to the “ancestral constitution” (*patrios politeia*), which would severely limit the franchise, essentially only to the hoplite class, and reform the courts. One of the ways for attacking political opponents in the democracy was malicious prosecution, or *sykophantia*, which the oligarchs promised to end.

There were differing views among the Thirty, however. Critias led an extremist group that wanted the franchise strictly limited to 3000 citizens and sought to purge not only the most extreme democrats and sykophants, most of whom had at any rate already fled, but also almost anyone who had prospered under the democracy, whether citizen or resident foreigner (metic). Theramenes led a more moderate group, which was willing to broaden the franchise and rejected the wholesale violence of Critias. For his trouble, Theramenes was himself identified as an enemy of the oligarchy and executed, along with approximately 1500 other victims of the Thirty.

A group of democratic exiles had found refuge in Thebes. In 403, led by Thrasybulus, a relatively small group set out for Athens. After defeating a small army at Phyle, on the border of Attica, Thrasybulus' group grew and moved on to Athens. The Thirty responded by stationing a Spartan garrison on Athens' Acropolis, which made the Athenians even more hostile to them. In a battle fought near Athens' port in Piraeus, Critias was killed. Led by their king Pausanias, the Spartans withdrew and after some negotiations a reconciliation was achieved among the Athenians. Athens' democracy was restored again.

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6. The Decline of the Polis

Spartan Hegemony

The restoration of democracy in Athens in 403 had little effect in the rest of Greece, where Sparta's power was unchallenged. We refer to this as the period of Spartan hegemony. The word "hegemony" is based on the Greek word *hegemonia*, which means leadership. But hegemony is stronger than leadership. It does not quite mean domination, but it tends in that direction.

Through the strategy of their commander Lysander, the Spartans largely inherited Athens' empire, with the contributions of its subject allies, to add to its own considerable holdings in the Peloponnese. Under Spartan governors, or *harmosts*, councils of ten local citizens, called *decarchies*, ruled the affairs of the *poleis* in accordance with Spartan interests.

But the Spartans had some decisions to make. In order to defeat the Athenians, they had sought and received help from the Persians in exchange for the Persians receiving a free hand to dominate the Greeks who lived on the coast of Turkey. Would the Spartans abide by their agreements with the Persians, or would they renew their role as champions of the Greek world and pursue war against Persia? The obstacles to their doing this were no less true in 400 BCE than they had been in 479 BCE. The basis of their livelihood was still the labor of the large population of helots, against whom the Spartans had to stay ever vigilant. And the Spartan *agoge*, or training, which produced such effective soldiers, also seemed to depend on the Spartans living only within their very controlled lifestyle at home. Outside influences could quite easily corrupt. Spartans dealing with money for the first time succumbed to the temptation to steal. Harmosts given command over foreign populations for the first time quickly became tyrants. But the involvement of many Greek mercenaries in a rebellion led by Cyrus the Younger in an attempt to seize the Persian throne from his brother Artaxerxes II in 401 showed the potential strength that a united Greek army might have against the Persians. Cyrus' mainly Greek force managed to defeat a Persian

army at Cunaxa, deep in Persian territory in Babylonia. Only the death of Cyrus at Cunaxa prevented the ten thousand Greek mercenaries from asserting control

The successes of the Spartan commander Lysander became his own undoing. The personal loyalty that he enjoyed in so many of the cities he had captured was resented by the Spartans back home. Because he was not one of Sparta's two kings, his extraordinary personal power and prestige were viewed as a threat to Spartan government. He was recalled, and the citizens who formed the many local decarchies were dismissed as if they were his personal clients. In 397 BCE, however, Lysander returned to some prominence when his boyhood friend Agesilaus was able to become king after a disputed succession.

Agesilaus had great plans to pursue war against the Persians. Modeling himself on Agamemnon and the legendary Greek expedition against Troy, in 396 he assembled an army in the same location in Boeotia where Agamemnon's fleet had disembarked. But by this time Sparta's former allies were growing weary of Spartan hegemony, and the Thebans marched out and interrupted Agesilaus' preliminary sacrifice. The expedition set off nevertheless and won several victories in northwest Turkey.

Agesilaus' successes were cut short, however, by two developments. First, in 395 an Athenian general Conon, who had escaped the disaster at Aegospotami in 405 by sailing to Cyprus, returned at the head of a Persian fleet and defeated the Spartans at Cnidus in the southeastern Aegean. Second, in Greece, the cities of Thebes, Athens, Corinth and Argos put aside their differences and united against Sparta. Agesilaus had to be called home.

Because so much of the fighting took place near the isthmus of Corinth in an attempt to restrict Spartan influence to the Peloponnese, the new war has been called the Corinthian War. Besides the four Greek *poleis*, the Persians also joined in opposing Sparta. Athens was the prime beneficiary of the Persian aid: it rebuilt its Long Walls and refortified its port at Piraeus. Soon the Athenians reestablished their influence in many parts of the Aegean, especially in regaining a corridor to the Black Sea for its grain supplies. Their renewed power and their imposition of taxes on all

maritime trade by their allies made the Persians and the Thebans worried, however, and both these powers turned their support to Sparta. By 387 the Spartans had managed to block Athens' access to the Black Sea again, and the Athenians were forced to accept a peace brokered by the Persian king. Since it was dictated by the Spartan Antalcidas, it is variously known as the "King's Peace" or "Peace of Antalcidas".

The terms of the King's Peace assured the Persians their control of the Greek cities in Asia Minor. It was thus seen by many as a betrayal of Greek interests. Within Greece, its guiding principle was autonomy: no *polis* was to impose itself on any other. This principle was directed mainly at the Athenians, but it also prevented the Thebans from dominating the other cities of Boeotia. It did nothing, however, to check Sparta's domination of Messenia. In fact Sparta became the enforcer of the Peace. In 382 a Spartan commander on his way to northern Greece to break up a league of states loyal to Olynthus took the opportunity afforded by a religious celebration in Thebes to seize the city's acropolis, which was known as the Cadmeia. The unprovoked nature of the attack and its transgression against religious customs led the Spartans to punish the commander, but they held on to the Cadmeia. This sort of Spartan highhandedness led the Thebans to join with the Athenians and many of Athens' former allies again to form what is now called the Second Athenian League. The terms of the League were very carefully formulated to abide by the terms of the King's Peace: no *polis* would surrender its autonomy to another. Unlike the Athenian Empire of the fifth century, this League was governed not by the Athenian Assembly but by an independent congress, or *synhedrion*. At its peak, the League had up to seventy members. Although the Athenians were clearly the strongest member, especially with their navy, they allowed the *synhedrion* a veto over their actions, and they did not impose any cleruchies on their allies.

The Battles of Leuctra and Mantinea

Despite the pious sentiments of 378 BCE establishing the Second Athenian League while preserving the autonomy of its individual member states, the tendency for the stronger states to dominate the weaker was impossible to escape. Thebes took advantage of its alliance with Athens to consolidate its hold over Boeotia through the Boeotian Confederacy, and Athens itself took greater and greater advantage of its hegemony over the maritime *poleis*. The Spartans were intent on putting a stop to Thebes' ambitions. In 375, however, the Thebans under Pelopidas stunned the Greek world by defeating a relatively small force of Spartans in a battle at Tegyra. In 371, after a failed peace conference in which the Spartans had refused to allow the Thebans to settle terms on behalf of all the Boeotians, the Spartans came north with a force of over 10,000 hoplites to destroy the Boeotian Confederacy. The Thebans under Epaminondas met them at Leuctra.

Epaminondas had revolutionized hoplite fighting. He massed his hoplite phalanx 50 men deep on his left, directly against the Spartan strength. An elite force, called the Sacred Band, was in the front ranks of Epaminondas' phalanx. By carefully timing his cavalry attack, and taking advantage of Spartan confusion at his unusual formation, Epaminondas charged the Spartans at the right moment, killing their king and forcing the Spartans to withdraw with heavy losses. The Battle of Leuctra marked the end of Spartan military dominance in Greece. Economic problems in Sparta had led to a drop in population. Even if they had had the will, the Spartans could no longer field an army of sufficient size to dominate. Several cities in the Peloponnese could celebrate their liberation from Spartan hegemony.

The next year Epaminondas followed up his victory by invading the Peloponnese. But instead of attacking Sparta directly, he led his forces to Messenia, the source of Sparta's economic prosperity. He freed Messenia and reestablished it as a unified *polis*. In subsequent years he invaded the Peloponnese repeatedly while Thebes enjoyed its brief period of hegemony over the Greek world. Loosely following the model that the Thebans had adopted for their Boeotian confederacy, Epaminondas

initially encouraged the development of the Arcadian Confederacy as a buffer to the Spartans. It had its capital at Megalopolis and included an assembly of ten thousand, a council, and magistrates selected according to the size of their home *polis*. Soon, however, the Confederacy became fragmented and its members, encouraged by Athens, began to resist Theban control. In 362, in an attempt to put down unrest in the Peloponnese, Epaminondas was killed in the Battle of Mantinea. In many ways, the battle was a Theban victory, but with the loss of its most decisive leader, Thebes' time of hegemony was over.

The Social War (357-355 BCE) and the Sacred War (355-347 BCE)

The historian Xenophon (c. 440-360 BCE) ends his *Hellenica*, a history of the period 411-362, by noting the uncertainty that followed the Battle of Mantinea.⁵ Sparta's time as a dominant military power had been finished after the Battle of Leuctra in 371 BCE. Now Thebes' period of hegemony had passed. Athens was once again the leading Greek *polis*, but without ambitions to pursue a war against either a Greek power or the Persians. With no threat from any of these quarters either, its justification for maintaining an empire seemed to have gone. For the Second Athenian League had become an empire. The Athenians were increasingly interested in recovering Amphipolis, a strategic commercial and mining center on the north coast of the Aegean, but this goal would have served only the Athenians, not their allies.

Discontent among Athens' allies grew until finally, in 357 BCE, Rhodes, Cos, Chios and Byzantium revolted in what is now called the Social War, from the Latin word *socii* for "allies". These states were helped and encouraged by Mausolus, the king of Caria who acted as the Persian governor, or satrap, for the area. The Social War certainly prevented the Athenians from thinking about pursuing a campaign against the Persians. The Athenian citizens had long enjoyed the ⁶revenues generated by their League to finance ships and mercenaries to fight on their behalf. They no longer had the heart to pursue a war to maintain an empire after their navy lost a major battle at Embata in 356 and the Persian king threatened all out war if the Athenians did not

restrain their general Chares. Although Athens kept a remnant of its League in tact, the loss of four of its major allies -- as well as Lesbos shortly after the war -- marked the end of an important chapter in Greek history and politics. The Athenians were no longer in a position to export their democratic ideas to other *poleis*. It was only a matter of time before its own democracy was threatened.

The Athenians were not the only *polis* to rely heavily on mercenaries in the fourth century BCE, and this had enormous consequences for Greek political institutions. The basis of *polis* government had been the phalanx of hoplite citizen soldiers and, in the case of Athens' democracy, the trireme of citizen rowers. When the soldiers and rowers became hired non-citizens, mercenaries, the connection between citizens' political rights and military service was broken. Constant warfare led many Greek citizens to abandon their farms and drift into service as mercenaries, which had agricultural and thus economic consequences, as well as military and political.

The preeminence of the hoplite soldier was also being challenged by changes in military technology and tactics. The citizen farmer had sufficient wealth to be able to purchase his own weapons. Now light-armed tactics, which were pioneered by Pelopidas of Thebes and Iphicrates of Athens, called for more specialized skills in archery, slinging, siege operations and the use of the lighter javelin and shield, or *peltê*, of the peltasts. Citizen soldiers rarely had the time or interest to develop these skills. Tyrants like Jason of Pherae and Dionysius of Syracuse, as well as the Persian king, hired many Greek mercenaries for their armies, an indication that soldiers were now fighting less for their *poleis* and more for individuals, and for money.

In 355 BCE, in response to demands that it stop cultivating sacred land, the federation of Phocis, which lay between Boeotia and Delphi, seized the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi with the tacit support of Athens. The sanctuary was protected by a group of *poleis* known as the Amphictyonic Council, which included most of the Greek *poleis* but which was dominated by those in Boeotia and Thessaly. This meant that it fell to Thebes, as the leader of Boeotia, to recover the sanctuary. But with the sanctuary and its huge treasury in their hands, the Phocians had ample funds with

which to hire mercenaries. Led by their generals Philomelus and Onomarchus, the Phocians fought the Thebans in a long war, which was very costly for the entire Greek world. Because it was fought over the religious sanctuary at Delphi, it is called the Sacred War. Many of the war's largest battles were fought in Thessaly, where the Phocians entered the sphere of Philip of Macedon. By the end of the war, both Phocis and Thebes were exhausted, and Philip of Macedon had become the dominant power over the Greek world.

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7. Philip of Macedon and the Macedonians

To most Greeks, Macedonia was not part of the Greek world. Most of the Macedonians did not speak Greek, and their social organization was closer to that of the Homeric world, with its hereditary kingships and clan chiefs, than it was to the contemporary world of the Greek *polis*. Macedonia was an area rich in timber and metals. As far as the Greeks were concerned, its people simply provided a buffer between themselves and the even less civilized people who lived beyond Macedonia. In fact Philip of Macedon first came to power in 359 BCE after his brother was killed in battle against the Illyrians, the inhabitants of modern-day Albania. The Macedonian kingship was held by the family of Philip, the Argeads, who traced their ancestry back to the great Greek legendary hero Heracles. On that basis, Philip could claim some Greekness.

As a boy, Philip spent time in Thebes during the height of that city's power. (He was actually a hostage, in Thebes to assure his people's friendliness to the Thebans.) He was able to observe how Thebes functioned, and in particular some of the strategic and tactical ideas of the general Epaminondas, including his use of the deep hoplite phalanx. During the early part of his reign, Philip devoted himself to reorganizing his army, instilling greater discipline and modifying their fighting style and equipment. Besides the deeper phalanx, Philip introduced the use of the sarissa, a much longer spear (perhaps 14 feet long) than that used by the other Greek hoplites. It gave his men the advantage of striking their opponents first as their phalanxes clashed. The sarissa required both hands, however, so Philip's soldiers had to use a different sort of shield, one that rested on the upper left arm without needing the left hand for support. His soldiers had no breastplate. By creating this sort of blended soldier, between the hoplite and the more lightly armed peltast, Philip blurred the lines between citizen and non-citizen soldier. His soldiers could also be much less expensively armed. Since Macedonia was a much wider, more open area than most Greek centers, there were

also many more horses available for cavalry. Philip integrated all these different elements into a very new fighting force.

For several years after his accession and reorganization of his armies, Philip was engaged in securing his northern and western borders. He also took advantage of Athens' difficulties in its Social War (357-355 BCE) to capture Amphipolis, which held a strategically important location on the river Strymon. Since the Macedonians practised polygamy, he made several marriage alliances, one of which, to Olympias, a niece of the king of Epirus, bore him a son, the future Alexander the Great. One of his most important ventures in the shorter term brought him the region known as the Krenides, which he reorganized under the name Philippi after himself and colonized with Macedonians. Philippi was rich in gold mining, and provided Philip with a vital supply of bribe money, which he was able to use very effectively.

Philip entered the Sacred War between Thebes and Phocis in 353. After an initial setback, he won a great victory in 352 in the Battle of the Crocus Field, which gained him control of Thessaly, an area rich in agriculture and in cavalry. From there he besieged Olynthus in 349, the most important city on the northern peninsula known as the Chalcidice. Despite several speeches to the Athenian Assembly urging the Athenians to come to the aid of Olynthus, the Athenian orator Demosthenes was unsuccessful and Olynthus capitulated.⁷ Athens had been officially at war with Philip since his seizure of Amphipolis in 357, but except by patrolling the Aegean coast and checking Philip's advance into central Greece at Thermopylae in 352, the Athenians had been unwilling to take decisive action against Philip's increasing power. Demosthenes' political opponent Eubulus had made it illegal even to propose using the state's funds for any military expedition unless Athens itself was directly threatened. Demosthenes finally even had to urge support of peace negotiations with Philip; They were concluded in 346 as the Peace of Philocrates.

Some Athenians, notably the intellectual Isocrates, saw Philip as the true leader of a united Greece and urged him to use persuasive tactics to unify Greece for a renewed campaign against Persia. But Demosthenes regarded Philip as a threat both to Athens

and to the entire Greek political culture that had endured since the eighth century BCE. Philip was an autocrat, and he represented a dictatorial form of politics that was quite foreign to the Greek world. For instance, he arbitrarily moved great portions of his Macedonian population into new settlements in order to achieve his economic and strategic goals. Isocrates seems to have had little trouble accommodating himself to such a culture, but Demosthenes saw no compromise.

In 342 BCE Philip began a campaign to the east of Macedonia, going beyond Amphipolis and Philippi to subdue all of Thrace. While besieging Byzantium, near the entrance to the Black Sea, Philip intercepted 230 grain ships, 180 of which were destined for Athens. Because of this direct attack on Athens' vital food supply, Demosthenes was finally able to rouse the Athenians to decisive action, and the Persians also joined in. They saw which direction Philip's campaigns were heading. But Philip was not greatly worried. He turned his attention first to his northern borders and attacked the Scythians, where he was injured.

By 338 Philip had recovered and Demosthenes had managed to put together a coalition of almost all the Greek *poleis*, including Sparta, Corinth and Thebes, as well as Athens. But at the Battle of Chaeronea, near Thebes, the coalition army was no match for Philip's seasoned troops, and his cavalry, led by his son Alexander, was able to defeat Thebes' Sacred Band, the Greeks' best fighters, who were wiped out. Philip's highly maneuverable phalanxes then defeated the largely defenseless Athenian hoplites. Demosthenes himself was among them, but he escaped to attempt to fortify Athens' defenses.

As it turned out, Philip did not need to attack Athens. The city surrendered. Philip might have been much more vindictive to the Athenians, but the city still had something he did not, a fleet. He did not want it to fall into the hands of the Persians. He imposed a new political order on the Greeks, however, the League of Corinth, a sort of federated state with Philip himself as its *hegemon*, or leader. Philip had plans to attack the Persian Empire, so he needed Greek help. He guaranteed the Greek *poleis* freedom from attack and freedom in the running of their own affairs and in

commerce so long as they accepted his hegemony. Shortly before the Battle of Chaeronea the king of Persia had been assassinated, and the instability of the Persian empire made it a good time for Philip to attack the Persians. A year later, in 337, the Congress, or *Synhedrion*, of the League of Corinth declared war on Persia and Philip sent an advance force to prepare the way for an invasion. But internal politics got in the way. In 336 Philip was assassinated by a fellow Macedonian as a result of court intrigues and jealousies.

The Campaign of Alexander the Great

Although Alexander the Great is rightly famous for his campaign in Asia, the beginning of his reign was devoted to asserting his right to succeed Philip, eliminating real and potential rivals, and demonstrating once again Macedonia's dominance over Greece. As the only fit son of Philip, and one who had demonstrated his skills both on and off the battlefield, Alexander was really the only choice. But his father had been assassinated, and Alexander took steps to eliminate any potential threats to himself, which was a common device in the Macedonian succession. After marching south late in 336 BCE to reassert his hegemony over the Corinthian League, Alexander returned in 335 to crush a revolt by the city of Thebes. He is said to have destroyed every house but that of the famous poet Pindar as a lesson to the rest of the Greeks. Alexander was clearly planning to carry out his father's ambition to attack the Persian Empire, and he did not want to have to worry about any further uprisings in the Greek world.

When Alexander set out to cross the Hellespont into Asia in the early spring of 334, it is estimated that he had about 50,000 troops, 43,000 foot soldiers and more than 6000 cavalry. He also had about a thirty-day supply of food, which was carried by his fleet. He depended on being re-supplied from the lands that he would conquer. The Persian army took up a defensive position on the far side of the Granicus River, where steep riverbanks made it very dangerous for the advancing Macedonians. But Alexander's cavalry met this challenge and drove the Persians back from the riverbank, allowing the foot soldiers to cross the river safely. Alexander took a very direct part in the

cavalry fighting. He was injured and had to be rescued by his men. But nine out of ten Persians fell in the battle, the remaining two thousand were taken prisoner, and the Persian commander committed suicide. After the battle, Alexander made a point of visiting the ancient site of Troy. He wished to associate himself as much as possible with the legendary hero Achilles, who had been the greatest of the warriors fighting against Troy.

Since he was running short of funds, Alexander dismissed his fleet. From now on his strategy was based largely on taking away the ports that the Persian navy needed, and from which it recruited its ships and men. He established himself at Ephesus, about halfway down the coast, and began to lay siege to Halicarnassus to the south, in Caria. The siege was successful, except for a few Persians who held out in the citadel for several months, and here Alexander adopted a method that he would use throughout his conquered territory. He reinstated a woman named Ada, whose rule had recently been usurped, and had himself adopted as her son. As with the Greeks, Alexander was able in this way to employ the form of local government that was familiar to the local people. The Persians had also used this method.

Over the winter 334-333 BCE, Alexander dispersed his army, sending the recently married men back to Macedonia, another part to Sardis, and taking most of the men south along the coast to Lycia, where it was warmer. In this way, no area was overly burdened by the presence of his army. The next spring, he assembled his army at Gordium, the ancient capital of Phrygia, which had reached its greatest fame under the famous king Midas in the eighth century BCE. In Gordium there was a famous knot of rope with an ancient prophecy: whoever could untie the rope would rule Asia. Tradition has it Alexander “cut the Gordian knot” with his sword, giving us the source of our expression for solving unsolvable problems.

From Gordium Alexander marched south again to the Mediterranean coast in Cilicia. Here he was delayed for several months, and he almost died from a fever. This delay gave the Persian king Darius time to collect his forces. Like Alexander Darius had become king in 336, and he was still consolidating his rule. Many in Darius'

army were Greek mercenaries. The two armies maneuvered and delayed, each wanting to fight on a field that would give it greater advantage. Since the Persians had a much larger army, they wanted to fight on an open plain. Alexander wanted to fight in a narrow pass. As it turned out, the Persian army circled behind Alexander and the two armies met at a relatively narrow point on the coast at Issus in late 333 BCE. It was a great victory for Alexander. Although they are probably exaggerated, the ancient reports say the Persians lost 100,00 and the Macedonians only 500. Alexander's forces even managed to capture Darius' wife and mother, along with his royal camp.

Darius offered peace, but when Alexander demanded that Darius surrender and recognize Alexander as lord of Asia, the war had to go on. Darius had to retreat to attempt to reorganize his armies, but Alexander did not pursue him. Instead, he continued his strategy of moving along the Mediterranean coast. Byblos and Sidon quickly surrendered, but the city of Tyre, which was situated on an island just off the coast, withheld a siege for seven months. Alexander had his men build a land bridge out to the island. And when ships from Rhodes, Lycia, Byblos, Sidon, and especially from Cyprus, joined his siege, the city was finally captured. Much of the rest of 332 BCE was then devoted to a siege of Gaza, further south along the coast, where Alexander was again wounded.

Egypt was the home of the oldest civilization in the world, and it had long resented Persian domination. Alexander was welcomed there as Pharaoh, and after a visit to an oracle of Ammon (Zeus) at an oasis in the Libyan desert, he was recognized as a son of the god, and thus a god himself, at least in the eyes of the Egyptians. The Greeks and Macedonians in his army were not very happy about Alexander claiming to be a god, since that conflicted with their traditions, but Alexander seems to have accepted this status in the same way that he adopted the rule and customs of other peoples he had captured. On an island in the mouth of the Nile River, Alexander also found the first, and most successful, of many cities that he named for himself. Here he was able to settle many of his retired or disabled veterans, Macedonians, Greeks and others. After

Alexander's death, Alexandria became the capital of the Ptolemaic Empire, which lasted until the death of Cleopatra in 31 BCE.

Darius again offered peace terms. Alexander could have all the land he had conquered and a marriage alliance with the Persian king. But Alexander rejected these terms too. He not only wanted revenge for the Persian attacks on Greece, but he wanted to take over the entire Persian Empire. Since the direct path to Persia would have led through an impenetrable desert in modern-day Jordan and Iraq, Alexander retraced his steps up the Mediterranean coast and crossed over modern-day Syria to the upper Tigris River.

This time when the armies met in late 331 BCE, Darius chose the battlefield. It was at Gaugamela, near the ancient Assyrian capital of Nineveh. The area was wide and level and Darius had even had the land smoothed out to allow for the use of special scythed chariots. They were ineffective, however, since Alexander's light foot soldiers were able to attack their horses with javelins, and the hoplite phalanxes could allow them to pass harmlessly by, kept at a distance by their long sarissas. Alexander's cavalry was able to drive a hole through the middle of the Persian line and forced the Persian king to flee. This time Alexander chased him, leaving the battlefield. He did not catch Darius, but his absence from the battle was of no consequence. His army won another great victory. With the Persian king in flight, the great cities of the Persian Empire with all their huge wealth, Babylon, Susa, Pasargadae, Persepolis, and Ecbatana, were now Alexander's for the taking. Alexander took some time seizing these capitals. He had to be careful to keep track of the enormous wealth that now came into his possession. At Persepolis in 330, he finally let his troops help themselves: they looted the city, killed the men and enslaved the women. As a final act, Alexander burned the royal palace, which had been built during the reign of Darius I in the late sixth century BCE. This was certainly a symbolic act of retribution against the Persians.

But now great questions arose. Would Alexander's army be content and return to Macedonia, or would Alexander really take the place of the Persian king and continue

his campaign to the east, to the borders of the Persian Empire, and perhaps beyond? An Old Guard among his Macedonians wanted to return home. They saw contact with Persian culture as a corrupting influence. They objected to Alexander behaving like a Persian king. In 330 this led to a series of executions within Alexander's own ranks.

The Persian king was taken prisoner and subsequently executed by one of his eastern governors, Bessus. Alexander now pursued this pretender to the Persian throne. When he caught him, he had him brutally executed. That was in 329 BCE. In the very eastern part of what had been the Persian Empire (modern-day Afghanistan and Pakistan), stubborn resistance by local peoples kept Alexander campaigning there for the next three years. Many of his soldiers were not very happy about having to fight so far from home, and Alexander's method of dealing with local resistance, the founding of several cities of his veterans in these areas, caused even more resentment.

Alexander fought his last great pitched battle in 326 BCE on the Hydaspes River against an Indian king, Poros. Here his forces even met elephants, but the result was the same: Alexander's forces won a great victory. King Poros had taken an active part in the fighting, but when he surrendered Alexander welcomed him as a new ally. The two fought together against Poros' other enemies. But this was finally too much for Alexander's men. They had been away from Macedonia for eight years. The clothing they had brought from home was worn out, and their equipment was rusting in the monsoon rains. Alexander agreed to turn back.

The return trip was not easy, however. As his troops traveled south along the Hydaspes River they faced a hostile population, and Alexander was wounded by an arrow that pierced his lung. After recovering he chose a very difficult route back, through the Gedrosian desert on the coast of the Arabian Sea. Many of his people died. Back in Persia Alexander found that those he had left in charge were mistreating the local populations, desecrating temples and tombs, and conspiring in treasonous activities. He reasserted control and executed many of the worst offenders.

His own idea was to achieve a blending of cultures. He saw himself not only as king of Macedonia and leader (*hegemon*) of Greece, but also as a successor to the kings

of Persia. At Pasargadae, he therefore took care to restore the plundered tomb of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire. At Susa, he held a mass wedding between his own leading men and women of the Persian aristocracy, which was possible because of Macedonians allowed polygamy. He himself married two Persian women, daughters of Darius and his predecessor, so that his children might have Persian royal pedigrees. Altogether there were some 10,000 mixed marriages, which Alexander had performed according to Persian customs. He also enlisted 30,000 Persian youths into his army, dressing them in Macedonian uniforms and giving them Macedonian weapons.

The last two years of Alexander's life were spent in Mesopotamia. There were further rebellions among his Macedonian followers, feelings of resentment at being pushed aside by Persians, whom they had conquered. Alexander was able to deal with these through threats and bluffs. Slowly the accommodation of the two cultures to each other began to take hold. Many ambitious plans were attributed to him, against Arabia, the western Mediterranean, and the Caspian Sea, but in 323 BCE Alexander fell ill once more with a fever and he died.

The legacy of Alexander has been enormous. The period after 323 BCE is known as the Hellenistic Period because it was a time in which the language, culture and institutions of Greece, *Hellas*, were spread throughout the Middle East. It became "hellenized". But the time for the *polis*, the independent city-state that was the central political institution of the Greek world, was passed. Alexander's top generals carved up the territory he had conquered and continued to govern until the Romans and Parthians eventually pushed their successors aside centuries later.

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Glossary

- agogê - the term used for the Spartan training or upbringing that emphasized strict military discipline.
- agora - the gathering place or market, the commercial and political center of the polis.
- archon - lit. "ruler", in Athens a magistrate in one of the senior offices.
- Areopagus - the "Hill of Ares", where Athens aristocratic council of former archons met.
- aristocracy - rule by "the best", whether morally, economically or militarily.
- basileus - the king, whether the King of Persia or a magistrate in Athens responsible for religious matters.
- cleruchs - Athenian "stakeholders" who received a parcel of land near a potentially hostile ally as part of a colony
- decarchy - a council of ten local rulers who formed an oligarchic government loyal to Sparta.
- dikastai - judges in the Athenian courts, who served as both judge and jury.
- dokimasia - the scrutiny performed by the Athenian council of new citizens and magistrates.
- ephors - the "overseers" who served with the Spartan kings.
- Eupatrids - "sons of good fathers", the term used to describe early Athenian aristocrats.
- euthyna - the audit performed on all magistrates in Athens as they gave up their duties.
- Gerousia - the council of twenty-eight elders, plus the two kings, at Sparta.
- harmosts - "arrangers", the term for the Spartan governors of subject cities.
- hectemoroi - "sixth-parters", the indentured poor in Athens before the reforms of Solon.
- hegemon - a leader or ruler.
- helots - the local slave population in and around Sparta.
- hetairia - an aristocratic club.
- homoioi - "equals".
- hoplite - a soldier armed with the full set of weapons (hopla).
- isonomia - "equality in the law", an early term used to describe Athenian democracy.
- Linear B - a syllabic form of writing used by Mycenaean Greeks.
- metic - lit. "one dwelling with", a resident foreigner.
- oikos - the Greek household, which included slaves.
- oligarchy - rule by a few.
- ostracism - the Athenian process of banishing a citizen for ten years in order to preserve political stability.
- Panhellenism - the idea of a united Greece.
- peltast - a lightly armed soldier.
- perioikoi - "those dwelling around", ethnically akin to the Spartans but not enjoying Spartan citizenship.
- phalanx - a closely packed formation of hoplite soldiers.
- polis - the self-governing city-state.
- politeia - the constitution of a polis.
- probouloi - councilors given extraordinary powers.
- prytanis - a sort of presidency, elected by lot to head the Athenian state.
- satrap - a Persian governor.
- stasis - political strife.
- sykophantia - troublesome litigation, brought for the sake of politics or intimidation rather than to right wrongs.
- synoikism - the unification of a large area into a single polis.
- sysitia - the common dining centers of Sparta.
- thesmothetai - senior magistrates in Athens with judicial responsibilities.
- trireme - a Greek military ship powered by three banks of rowers on each side.
- tyranny - a form of government formed outside the existing constitution.
- wanax - an early Greek term for a lord.

End Notes

¹ **A Homicide Trial in the Homeric World**

“The people were gathered together in the assembly place, and there a dispute had arisen, and two men were disputing about the blood-price for a man who had died. The one made a claim to pay back in full, declaring publicly to the village, but the other was refusing to accept anything. Both were heading for an arbitrator to get a limit; and the people were speaking up on either side to help both men. But the heralds restrained the people, as meanwhile elders were seated on benches of *polished* stone in a sacred circle and took hold in their hands of scepters from the heralds who lift their voices. And with these they sprang up, taking turns, and rendered their judgments and in their midst lay on the ground two weights of gold, to be given to the one among them who pronounced a judgment most correctly.”
Iliad 18.497-508

² **The Spartan Constitution**

“Having established a sanctuary of Syllanian Zeus and Athena, having “tribed tribes and obed obes,” and having established a Gerousia (Senate) of thirty members, including the (two) chief leaders (kings), from season to season, they are to hold Assemblies between Babyca and Knakion in order to introduce and reject measures. And the *damos* is to have lordship and power.” Later a clause was added: “if the *damos* takes a crooked decision, the elders and chief leaders are to be removers.”

³ **The Law Code of Draco**

Even if a man kills another unintentionally, he is exiled. The kings are to adjudge responsible for homicide either the actual killer or the planner; and the Ephetai are to judge the case. If there is a father or brother or sons, pardon is to be agreed to by all, or the one who opposes is to prevail; but if none of these survives, by those up to the degree of first cousin, if all are willing to agree to a pardon; the one who opposes is to prevail; but if none of these survives, and if he killed unintentionally and the fifty-one, the Ephetai, decide he killed unintentionally, let ten phratry members admit him to the country and let the fifty-one choose these by rank. And let also those who killed previously be bound by this law. A proclamation is to be made against the killer in the agora by the victim's relatives as far as the degree of cousin's son and cousin. The prosecution is to be shared by the cousins and the cousins' sons and by sons-in-law, fathers-in-law, and phratry members.

⁴ **Themistocles: A Leader with Foresight**

The most controversial figure in Greece's struggles against the Persians was Themistocles (c. 524-459 BCE). One historian, Herodotus, accused him of corruption; another, Thucydides, admired him for his far-sightedness and thought him one of the greatest men of his generation.

He began the development of Athens' harbor at Piraeus and in 482 he took a decisive hand in directing a large surplus from Athens' silver mines to the enlargement of Athens' fleet of triremes to 200 ships. In 480 he interpreted a saying of the oracles of Apollo that

predicted Greek victory over the Persians so long as the Greeks put faith in Athens' "wooden wall", its fleet of ships. He then led Athens' forces at Artemisium and at Salamis and managed to lure the Persians into fighting in the narrow straits of Salamis, where their superior numbers only caused confusion. He won tremendous honors around the Greek world for these accomplishments.

Despite this glory, within ten years Themistocles lost favor and was ostracized from Athens. When evidence appeared that he might have been conspiring with the Persians, he was condemned to death by the Athenians and chased out of his refuge in Argos. He fled first to the west and then to the east. In a strange twist of irony, he finally found refuge again with the king of Persia, his former enemy, who made him a provincial governor. Themistocles is one of a number Athenian leaders whose great accomplishments only seem to foreshadow their downfall at the hands of their own people.

⁵ **Uncertainty After Mantinea**

"When these things had taken place, the opposite of what all men believed would happen was brought to pass. For since well-nigh all the people of Greece had come together and formed themselves in opposing lines, there was no one who did not suppose that if a battle were fought, those who proved victorious would be the rulers and those who were defeated would be their subjects; but the deity so ordered it that both parties set up a trophy as though victorious and neither tried to hinder those who set them up, that both gave back the dead under a truce as though victorious, and both received back their dead under a truce as though defeated, and that while each party claimed to be victorious, [27] neither was found to be any better off, as regards either additional territory, or city, or sway, than before the battle took place; but there was even more confusion and disorder in Greece after the battle than before." Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 7.5.26-7.

⁶

⁷ **Demosthenes: A Champion of the Democratic Polis**

Demosthenes (384-322 BCE) was the most important politician of fourth-century BCE Athens and perhaps the greatest orator of the ancient world. Since his father died when he was only seven, his first task once achieving legal age was to sue his guardians in order to recover his estate. The skills that he demonstrated in preparing and arguing his case before Athens' popular courts led to his being in high demand as a logographer, or speechwriter, for many others who saw themselves entangled in legal disputes.

Demosthenes also began to use his skills assisting in prosecutions against public figures and then in taking on prosecutions himself. By the time he entered politics, however, Athens had been on the losing side of the Social War (357-355 BCE), which entailed a loss both of power and resources. When threats appeared first from Persia and later from Thebes and Macedon, Demosthenes had to advocate restraint and the need for the Athenians themselves to commit more resources and decisiveness of their own to their military affairs. Nevertheless, his voice became the strongest opponent of the growth of Philip of Macedon's power as he delivered a series of speeches, the *Philippics*, which have become classics of political condemnation.

As it turned out, Demosthenes was on the losing side, Philip of Macedon and his son Alexander the Great were victorious, but Demosthenes' voice was an important one for stating the ideals of Athens and of the Greek city-states.