

ANCIENT GREECE

THE MINOANS (2000- 1375 BC)

The Minoan thalassocracy (rule of the sea) was based on two features: its commercial empire and its palace-cities.

Origins Founded by a mixture of settlers from Greece, Syria and Anatolia, Minoan civilization was based on royal palatial centers located principally in central and eastern Crete. Although elements of Minoan culture began to appear on Crete as early as 2600 BC, the fully developed palatial civilizations began only around 2000BC.

Maritime Empire Minoan kings exploited Crete's strategic geographical location in the eastern Mediterranean. This allowed them to engage in an extensive and profitable import and export trade with Egypt and states in west Asia.

Palace-Cities Minoan society seems to have been a confederation of cities united under the leadership of the high king – the “Minos” at Knossos. Many of the major cities were characterized by a palace complex: a combination of royal residence, economic center, barracks and religious shrine. For the most part unfortified, these palace-cities seemed to have relied on their naval power for security. This left them open to eventual attacks from the Mycenaeans in the fifteenth century.

The Thera Eruption and Minoan Decline About 1500 BC the volcanic island of Thera – home to one of the Minoan palace-cities – exploded in one of the largest volcanic eruptions in history. Many of the Minoan palace-cities were destroyed in related earthquakes: thousands of people died. The layer of ash from the volcano may have caused long-term damage to the region's agriculture. Minoan civilization never recovered from the disaster; within decades it was overwhelmed by Mycenaean conquerors from mainland Greece.

THE MYCENAEANS (1550-1150 BC)

Origins Around 1800 BC Greek-speaking Indo-European warrior tribes from the Balkans or Anatolia displaced and absorbed many of the neolithic inhabitants of Greece. Most of these tribes settled in southern Greece, where the mountainous terrain kept them politically divided. By 1500 BC several small independent states, each centering around a strongly fortified citadel (acropolis), had been formed under tribal warrior-kings.

Maritime Empire Several of the rising city-states, including Mycenae – home to the king Agememnon – exploited their strategic locations along the Aegean Sea to engage in maritime trade. Some of them founded colonies in Cyprus, Rhodes and Miletus. Mycenaean city-states held political and commercial domination over most of the Aegean for the next three hundred years.

Conquest of Minoan Crete Realizing the strategic advantage of the island of Crete had over trade in the eastern Mediterranean, by 1500 BC the Mycenaeans had entered into a trading partnership with the Minoans of Crete. Within fifty years, however, they began to conquer their weaker trading partner. The great palace-cities were conquered and destroyed between 1450 and 1375.

The Siege of Troy Around 1220 the Mycenaean confederation achieved their greatest military victory. The confederation defeated their greatest rival, the city-state of Troy. Legendary accounts of this siege were passed down in oral epic poetry and describes the battles and sacrifices made in the defeat of Troy.

THE FALL OF THE MYCENAEANS

The Collapse The Mycenaean triumph at Troy was short-lived. The confederation of city-states collapsed in bitter civil wars over who should be in charge of the new power. The wars destabilized the region and ruined their trading economies. In addition, non-Mycenaean Greek-speaking tribes may have also invaded

at this time and contributed to the political chaos. Mycenae itself fell around 1120, bringing an end to the empire and signaling a beginning of chaos on the peninsula which will continue until 700 BC.

CLASSICAL GREECE (700-323 BC)

The Classical Age of Greece was one of the golden ages of mankind. (???) Although politically fragmented and chaotic, the Greek world produced a cultural and philosophical movement which laid one of the principal foundations for Western civilization.

GREEK RELIGION

Greek religion derived from the worship of archaic Indo-Aryan tribal gods and goddesses. The vast array of gods and heroes were worshiped in various forms throughout the Greek world, with each city focusing on a patron deity of its own. There was no creed, no formal system of religious ethics, and little concern with the afterlife. Greek religion was fundamentally public and civic, worship centered on seeking temporal blessings from the gods by offering sacrifices, gifts to temples, and prayers. Almost every aspect of life and culture centered around the worship of the gods and/or actions taken by the gods. The Olympics were first held to honor the gods, while plays and art centered on the gods and their interactions with human life. To bring dishonor to the gods was a public offense. This was what caused the great philosopher Socrates great problems, including his death.

The Pantheon. The Greek gods were organized into a hierarchy of the twelve Olympians (gods residing on Mt. Olympus) under the leadership of Zeus, god of heaven and storms. Each Greek god was sovereign over an element of nature or human life. Worshipers seeking blessings for a particular aspect of life would pray and sacrifice to the god or goddess who ruled over that function. Thus, Ares was the god of war, Poseidon the god of the sea, and Apollo the god of the sun. Aphrodite was the goddess of sexuality and reproduction, and Athena the goddess of wisdom. Many minor gods, goddesses, spirits and heroes were also placed in regional settings where they were thought to exercise some influence. The Greek gods, though immortal, were not seen as all-powerful. They too were subject to Fate; they had once rebelled and overthrown an earlier dynasty of gods, and would perhaps one day cease to rule the universe.

THE ARCHAIC AGE (700-500 BC)

In the two centuries called the Archaic Age, Greece was transformed from a chaotic cultural and political backwater into dynamic center of wealth and power, which rivaled the older centers of civilization in the Near East.

The Greek City-State The defining feature of Classical Greece was the political, economic and cultural centrality of the city-state (polis). Each city in Greece was an independent state, which included an urban center and surrounding agricultural villages. The territorial size of Greek city-states could range from 1,000 to 3,000 square miles. The population and strength of Greek city-states could vary widely, and frequently larger cities would dominate the smaller, which would then fall under the hegemony (influence) of the more powerful city-state.

Greek Democracy By the end of the Archaic Age, most Greek city-states had rejected their traditional tribal kingship, choosing instead an equally important Archaic tradition of tribal democracies. During the Archaic Age many Greek city-states experimented with various forms of democracy. Greek democracy was limited in many ways. Only adult males with a certain amount of wealth and who performed military service were permitted to vote. Thus, in Athens in the late fifth century, although there were over 300,000 people living in the city, only about 30,000 were qualified to vote. There were many variations of Greek democracy, but they generally had large governing councils with rotating membership, and smaller executive councils with elected membership. Many Greek city-states wrote formal constitutions in an attempt to clearly indicate the respective powers of the various government councils and officials.

Although democratic institutions had existed in many ancient civilizations, the Greek democratic experiment, because of its longevity, served as an important source of inspiration for the rise of modern Western democratic movements in the United States and France in the late eighteenth century AD.

THE RECOVERY OF GREECE

Trade Archaic Greece was a period of tremendous economic growth. Greece became a maritime and colonial civilization for a combination of several important reasons. The irregular coastline of Greece, with its numerous fine harbors, made it a natural home for mariners. The rough terrain of the country was unsuited for growing grains, but perfect for wine and oil. This geography led naturally to the export of wine and oil, and the import of grain. Finally, the limited arable land of Greece was insufficient to feed the steadily growing population. Thus, beginning in the eighth century, many Greeks began to migrate to other parts of the Mediterranean in search of new lands to farm and markets for Greek products. Thus, the strength of the Greeks increased throughout the Mediterranean as new colonies had to conquer native populations to settle the land.

The rise of Athens The most important center of Greek civilization was Athens. Athens was blessed with the discovery and exploitation of the silver mines at Laurium, which provided an important source of income for the Athenian economy. With heavy government incentive for the establishment of trade routes, the competition among Athenians was fierce. However, it also allowed for the commercial value of Athenian trade to increase exponentially. To protect the trading routes of its citizens, the Athenian government placed a heavy emphasis on the buildup of a navy instead of providing food for its citizenry.

The rise of Sparta The major rival of Athens was Sparta, in the Peloponnese (southern Greek peninsula). Whereas Athenian power derived from its silver mines and maritime empire, Spartan power derived from its militaristic culture. During the seventh century the Spartans conquered many of the Greek city-states of the Peloponnese. The Spartans established their own citizens as an elite military caste whose full attention was devoted to warfare as dictated by the dual monarchy. The conquered Greeks of the Peloponnese became serfs who farmed the land to support the Spartan war machine. The life of the Spartan males was devoted entirely to perfection in war. The Spartans thus created the most formidable military force in Greece. So great was the strength of the Spartan military that they felt it unnecessary to fortify their capital city of Sparta.

Persian conquest of the Ionian Greeks By the end of the sixth century Greece had become an extremely wealthy center of commerce. As such, it offered an irresistible temptation for conquest by the great power of the near east, the Persian empire. By 512, the Persians had successfully absorbed all of the Greek colonies in the Ionian region (eastern Aegean Sea). Because of the economic implications, most of the city-states on the Greek mainland were drawn into conflict with Persia. In 499, the Ionian city-states revolted against Persian rule, but in 494 the revolts were crushed. The Persians correctly recognized that the mainland Greeks would continue to support the Ionian Greeks and prepared an expedition to punish and conquer them. The first Persian army conquered Thrace and Macedonia easily, however, the fleet was destroyed by a storm in 492. A second force was quickly organized, but the Greeks were ready and a war was begun.

The First Persian War (490) Underestimating the strength and resolve of the Greeks, the Persian Emperor, Darius, prepared a relatively small expeditionary force of around 25,000 men. The Athenians, under their brilliant general Miltades, quickly mobilized a force of some 10,000 men and marched from Athens to meet the Persians at the coast of the city-state Marathon. While the Persians were unloading their men, horses and equipment, the Greek armies surprised the Persians with an attack. Grossly unorganized, the Persians were forced back onto their ships and retreated back to their main bases at Anatolia.

The Second Persian War, 480-479 Although the Greeks had been victorious at Marathon, the Persians were by no means completely defeated. A second army was mobilized by Xerxes, Darius' son. By 480 this new force, well over 100,000 men strong with hundreds of ships, was prepared to march into Greece. This time the Persian army moved over land and down the east coast of Greece. All independent Greek

cities realized that unless they united against this massive military force, they would be conquered one by one. While the Greeks organized, Sparta volunteered to meet the Persians at the mountain pass of Thermopylae and delay their advance, hopefully until the Greeks could defeat the Persian army. After a valiant defense, the Spartans were overwhelmed by the strength of the Persian army. The Persians continued their march down the coast. They marched to Athens, which had been evacuated, and sacked the city.

The Battle of Salamis Realizing the Greek strength was at the sea, The Greeks attempted to turn the war into a naval battle. If the Persians were unable to supply their huge armies during the winter, they would have to withdraw. Under the leadership of Themistocles, the Athenians had used their wealth from their silver mines to build a massive fleet of two hundred ships. Together with the combined fleets of all other independent Greek cities, the Athenians met the Persian navy at the bay of Salamis near Athens on September 20, 480 BC. Claiming the Athenian navy was ready to surrender to the Persians, Themistocles laid an ambush; as the Persian navy entered into a narrow channel to accept the surrender of the Athenians, the Athenians attacked the drawn together Persian fleet. The surprise attack threw the Persians into chaos, and most of its fleet was destroyed.

The Greek Victory The great Greek naval victory at Salamis, although of crucial importance, had not destroyed the Persian land forces, which occupied most of northern Greece. However, Greek control of the sea meant that much of the Persian army would not be adequately supplied during the coming winter; most of the Persians were withdrawn. Under Spartan leadership, the Greeks succeeded in defeating the remaining Persian troops at Plataea in August 479, which resulted in the complete withdrawal of Persian troops from the Aegean Sea region.

ATHENIAN SUPREMACY

The Greek victory in the Persian Wars had not only secured Greek independence from outside invaders, but left Athens with the strongest fleet in the eastern Mediterranean.

The Delian League In 478 the Athenians formed 200 Greek city-states into the Delian League, a maritime alliance against possible future Persian invasions. The Persian threat never materialized, and the Athenians quickly turned the Delian League into a maritime empire, which expanded the wealth of Athens and allowed them to rebuild their city in grand fashion.

THE PELOPONNESIAN WARS 431-404

Greek opposition to the overwhelming power of Athens began to coalesce around Sparta, the traditional rival to Athens and upset about not getting enough recognition for their role in the defeat of the Persians. By 431 the Greek world had become divided into two opposing camps; war soon broke out.

Stalemate, 431-421 The first ten years of the war resulted in a stalemate. The Athenians were supreme at sea, and raided ports and commerce of the Spartan allies. However, the Spartans were superior on land. Thus neither power was able to defeat the other.

The Sicilian Expedition, 415-413 Unable to break the stalemate in Greece, the Athenians decided to send an expeditionary force to attempt to conquer the Greeks in Sicily, who were friendly with the Spartans. The extra wealth and resources from their Sicilian conquests could then be used against a weaker Sparta. After initial victories along the coast, the Athenians were forced into an extended battle for the Sicilian capital of Syracuse. The Spartans sent assistance to the Syracusans, and managed to blockade and destroy the Athenian fleet. Stranded and without supplies, the Athenian army was forced to surrender. As news of the disaster spread, many cities began to question their alliance with Athens.

The Spartan Victory, 408-404 The Spartans, with victory in their grasp, turned to the Persians for financial and military assistance. Delighted to see their old enemies slaughtering themselves, the Persians allied with the Spartans in 408. With the help of Persia's navy and money, the Spartans crushed the Athenian navy in several battles and then surrounded the city of Athens and blocked all access in and out of

the city. The Athenians attempted to hold out, but a plague wiped through the city and destroyed the spirit of the city, which led to the Athenian surrender to Sparta.

SPARTAN ASCENDANCY 404-362

The Spartans managed to maintain an uneasy hegemony over Greece for the next half century. However, many Greek city-states were unwilling to have Athenian domination replaced by Spartan domination, which would include the dismantling of the democratic governments. Although Athens had been defeated in 404, it had not been completely destroyed, and its numerous excellent mercantile connections allowed the city to slowly make a partial recovery.

The Rise of Thebes, 371-362 In 378 an anti-Spartan league was formed under the leadership of Thebes and Athens. With help from a recovering Athens, Thebes defeated Sparta in a military battle at Leuctra. However, this victory was soon eclipsed by the growing power of the Macedonians in northern Greece.

THE MACEDONIANS

Although Macedonia (in northeastern Greece) had been increasingly incorporated into Greek into Greek culture during the fifth century, many Greeks still looked down on the Macedonians and considered them semi-barbarians. Under the dynamic leadership of Philip II, Macedonia managed to unite all Greeks into a single political state for the first time in history.

PHILIP II, 356-336

The Rise of Macedonia The rise of Macedonia to military prominence was based on several factors. The discovery of new gold mines provided the funds necessary for Philip to accomplish his plans. Hiring a wide array of the finest minds in Greece – including Aristotle as tutor for his young son Alexander – Philip set about turning his capital at Pella into a splendid new center of Greek culture. At the same time, he completely reorganized his army in preparation for the conquest of Greece.

The Macedonian Military System While most Greek city-states were squandering their resources fighting each other in the endless struggle for dominance, Macedonia (the city-state Pella) was left free to develop a new military system. Improving on the standard equipment and tactics of the Greek hoplite (armored spearmen), Philip devised the *phalanx*, a formerly organized corp of 16,000 men equipped with spears twice the length of the ordinary Greek spear. Marshaled in ranks of 16 deep, this formation presented a thick wall of spears which was impenetrable to standard Greek tactics. In order to protect the flanks of his phalanx, and to deliver swift charges on enemy formations, Philip paid special attention to the creation of a strong cavalry arm, which had been neglected in traditional armies. Philip also mobilized light troops specializing in missiles to harass and pursue his enemies.

The conquest of Greece As the wars between Sparta and Thebes exhausted the old centers of Greek power in the south, Philip managed to turn Macedonia into the strongest power in the north through a combination of skilled diplomacy, alliances, threats, and military intervention. By the time the southern Greeks realized the danger of this new threat, Philip was on the march. Skillfully exploiting the old city-state rivalries, Philip advanced southward. When southern Greeks finally allied together to stop the Macedonians, Philip destroyed their army at the battle of Chaeronea in 338. Thereafter, most of Greece was occupied by the Macedonians. Philip was planning an invasion of Ionia and the liberation of the Greek cities that had been reoccupied by the Persians, but was assassinated in 336 before he could begin the next phase of his conquests. This would be left to his brilliant twenty-year-old son Alexander.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT, 336-323

One of the great generals in history, Alexander the Great led the combined Macedonian and Greek army in the conquest of the Persian empire. Following the assassination of his father, Alexander took determined steps to carry out his father's plan for the liberation of the Ionian Greek city-states under the leadership of the Persian dynasty.

Decay of Persia The Persian empire in the late fourth century was a decayed shell of the former greatness it had enjoyed under Cyrus, Darius and Xerxes. Ruled by an incompetent emperor, divided by internal feuds and plagued by provincial revolts, the Persian state was in a condition of severe weakness.

Alexander's conquests Through a combination of the powerful new Macedonian phalanx military system, brilliant generalship, the weakness of the Persians, and good fortune, Alexander conquered the entire Persian empire in an epic campaign of ten years. Driven by megalomania and a conviction he was an instrument of the gods to inaugurate a new golden age, Alexander was victorious in all his battles. Upon reaching the Indus River, Alexander was prepared to cross the river and continue his conquests to the end of the world. His armies mutinied, however, refusing to campaign further. Alexander returned to Babylon, which he established as the capital of his new empire, but fell ill and died at age 33.

THE HELLENISTIC WORLD AFTER ALEXANDER

As Alexander lay on his deathbed with his generals gathered around him, he was asked, "to whom do you leave your empire?" His reply was "To the strongest." Alexander's legendary words proved prophetic. Civil war over power split the empire. For the next three hundred years, power struggles in the old Persian empire, Egypt and mainland Greece kept the area from being a consistent power. This would be brought to an end in the first century when Rome conquered all of Alexander's old empire, which proved Rome to be the strongest!!!