Not all of the Great King's subjects appreciated his multicultural aspirations. The Ionian Greek cities of western Asia Minor, far from being economically exploited by an imperial power, were flourishing under Persian rule. Since the seventh century BC the Ionians had enjoyed a profitable trade in luxury goods with the Saïte dynasty of Egypt, thanks to the existence of a communal Ionian trading post at Naucratis in the Nile delta; after 525 BC this trade received a welcome stimulus from the incorporation of Egypt into the Persian empire. Nonetheless, despite these economic benefits, the Persian-backed tyrannical regimes in Ionia were deeply unpopular, particularly since several of the Ionian cities had enjoyed democratic constitutions before the Persian conquest. In 499 BC the Ionian Greeks revolted from Persia with the support of two of the mainland Greek cities, Athens and Eretria. The revolt soon spread to the island of Cyprus, and in the first year of the uprising the Persian satrapal capital in the west, Sardis, was sacked. But once Darius mobilized his Phoenician war-fleet, the Greeks stood little chance. In 494 the Ionian revolt was summarily crushed, and the rebellious cities subjected to horrific reprisals. Miletus, the most populous city of Ionia and the glory of the east Greek world, was wiped off the map: its women and children were enslaved, and the surviving men deported to the Persian gulf.

Next it would be the turn of the Ionians' mainland Greek allies. A punitive seaborne raid in 490 BC succeeded in torching the city of Eretria, although the Athenians successfully repelled a Persian landing on the coastal plain of Marathon. But this minor Greek victory did little more than postpone the inevitable. Over the following few years, along the northern shore of the Aegean, a broad military road was carved out of the landscape, stretching westward from Persian-held Thrace to the borders of mainland Greece. Finally, in 481 BC Darius' successor Xerxes gave the order for a huge Persian army to muster in eastern Asia Minor.

In the mid-sixth century, looking back with satisfaction to the long-vanished empire of the Assyrians, the poet Phocylides of Miletus had written that 'a small and well-governed *polis*, perched on a rock, is greater than senseless Nineveh'. Now, for the first time, that defiant maxim was going to be put to the test.

4

Greece, Europe and Asia: 480–334 BC

Between the Aegean and the Sea of Marmora runs a narrow strait, in places little more than a kilometre wide. This slender strip of water, dividing the Gallipoli peninsula from the main Turkish landmass, was known to the Greeks as the Hellespont. At the narrowest point of the straits, facing one another across the continental divide, lay the Greek cities of Sestos and Abydos. The Greeks said that a young man from Abydos, Leander, had once loved the priestess of Aphrodite at Sestos, Hero. Every night, Leander would swim the straits between the two cities, guided by a lamp burning in Hero's tower. One night, a storm arose, and Hero's lamp was blown out; Leander lost his way in the ocean and was drowned, and Hero is said to have thrown herself from her tower in grief.

Byron at the Hellespont

On 3 May 1810 the 22-year-old Lord Byron swam the Hellespont between Sestos and Abydos in a self-conscious imitation of Leander's nightly journeys. It took him an hour and ten minutes, and the currents were so tiring that he wondered whether 'Leander's conjugal powers must not have been exhausted in his passage to Paradise'. Byron was at this point some seven months into a seventeen-month trip to Greece and Turkey. In *Don Juan*, Byron recalled the impact made on him as a young man by prolonged contemplation of Greece under Ottoman rule:

> The mountains look at Marathon –
> And Marathon looks on the sea;
> And musing there an hour alone,
> I dream'd that Greece might still be free.

Marathon was a well-chosen backdrop for Byron's musings on the freedom of the Greeks. It was at Marathon, in 490 BC, that the Athenians had successfully repelled the first Persian assault on Greece, foreshadowing the greater victories of 480 (Salamis) and 479 (Plataea). John Stuart Mill went so far as to claim that the battle of Marathon, 'even as an event in English history, is more important than the battle of Hastings'. When the Greek War of Independence broke out in 1821, Byron instantly attached himself to the Greek cause, and in January 1824, he travelled in person to Missolonghi, the centre of Greek resistance to the Ottomans in the Adriatic.

At first sight, Byron's contribution to the success of the Greek War of Independence does not look especially impressive. During his three and a half months' stay at Missolonghi in 1824 he never saw action, and the sum total of his military leadership was an abortive attempt to raise a private army to capture the Ottoman fortress of Lepanto in the gulf of Corinth (a plan with romantic associations: it was at Lepanto, in 1571, that a Spanish, Venetian and Genoan fleet had first won a decisive naval victory over the Ottomans). Nonetheless, the talismanic importance of Byron's presence in Greece can hardly be overstated. Byron was at the time the most famous poet in Europe, and his death at Missolonghi of fever in April 1824 focused European attention on the Greek cause more effectively than any Turkish atrocities could have done. Byron is still today a Greek national hero; there are few Greek towns which do not have a street named after him.

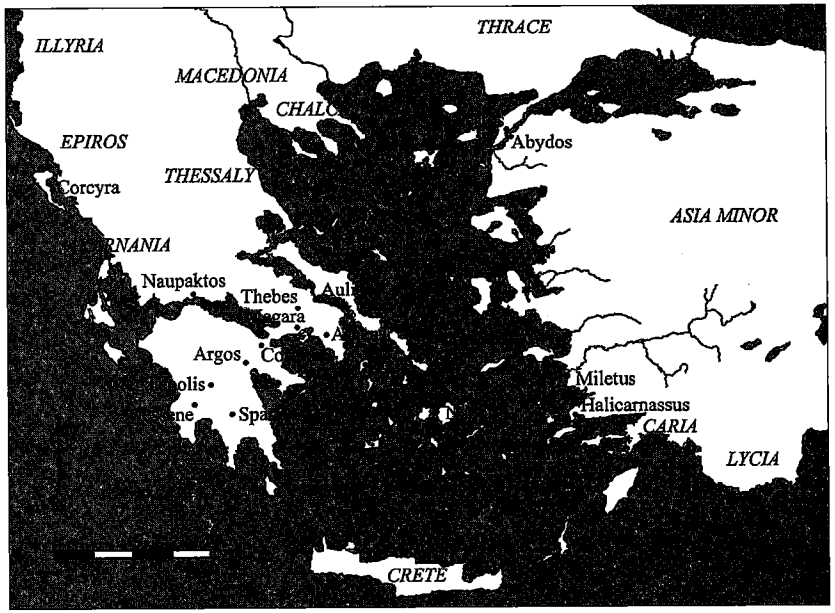
On a winter's day late in 479 BC, a Persian was nailed to a cross on the European shore of the Hellespont. The sea below was thick with Greek warships, fresh from the liberation of Sestos, the Persians' main garrison-town in the region. The crucifixion of Artayctes, the unfortunate Persian governor of the town, was an act heavy with symbolism. Two years earlier, the Persian king Xerxes had led a vast army across those same straits, with the aim of annexing the entire Greek peninsula to the Persian empire. To transport his army across the Hellespont, the Great King had lashed the two shores together with a bridge of boats. As Xerxes marched on into Europe, Artayctes had given the local Greeks a memorable lesson in Persian power by plundering the tomb of a local Greek who had dared to attack the Great King's territory. This Greek was the

hero Protesilaus, whose tomb stood at Elaeus on the tip of the Gallipoli peninsula. According to Homer, Protesilaus had been the first man to fall in the Trojan War, killed as he leaped ashore onto the coast of the Troad.

Xerxes' invasion of Greece was a humiliating failure. Late in the summer of 480 BC, an Athenian-led fleet of 310 ships crippled the Persian navy – probably twice the size of the Greek fleet – in a huge engagement off the island of Salamis. The following year, Xerxes' land army was decisively beaten by an enormous Greek coalition force (some 40,000 infantrymen) at the battle of Plataea. Even before the defeat of Xerxes' army in Greece, an allied Greek fleet had sailed east to take the war into the King's own territory in western Asia Minor. On the very same day as the battle of Plataea, the subject Greeks of Ionia won their independence with a crushing victory over Persian forces in the foothills of Mt. Mycale, just north of Miletus. After the liberation of Ionia, the Greek fleet sailed north to the Hellespont to destroy Xerxes' bridge of boats, only to find that the bridge had already been broken up. After the capture of Sestos, and the brutal execution of its Persian governor, the chariot of the Great King himself was found lying on its side, abandoned in a field near the straits. No Persian King would ever attempt a campaign in the west on such a scale again.

The execution of Artayctes makes a sombre end to the Persian Wars. His cross, overlooking the straits where the bridge of boats had stood, was a mute reminder of the hubris of the Great King, the man who had attempted to yoke two continents together. Protesilaus was avenged. As the Greeks reflected on their extraordinary victory over the Persians, the first time that so many Greek states had combined against a common enemy, the parallels with the Trojan War began to seem ever more striking. Both wars had seen an allied Greek force unite to fight against non-Greeks; both times, first at Troy and now in the heart of Greece itself, the Greeks had won.

It is perhaps not surprising that the Greeks began to entertain the idea of a primordial division of the world into two opposing halves. In the early fifth century, the first attempt at universal geography, the *Journey Round the World* of Hecataeus of Miletus, was divided into two books, the first on 'Europe', the second on 'Asia'. Hecataeus pictured the inhabited world as a circular disc, encircled by the outer ocean. This disc was



Map 16. The Aegean world in the fifth and fourth centuries BC.

divided into two equal halves, Europe and Asia, separated from one another by a single band of water, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, linked by the Hellespont. In 449 BC, when the Athenians inflicted another crushing defeat on the Persian naval and land forces at the island of Cyprus, the Athenian victory monument claimed that no greater victory had occurred 'since the ocean divided off Europe from Asia'. Two years later the Athenians began work on a huge new treasury of the goddess Athena on the Acropolis, the building known to us as the Parthenon. The sculpted panels (metopes) on the four sides of the building, fourteen of which are now in the British Museum, pitted Greeks against Amazons, Greeks stood Trojans, the Olympian gods against the giants, and Greek Lapiths against Centaurs (see Plate 12). The message could not be clearer. Greece stood on one side of a vast cultural divide: order against chaos, civilization against savagery, male against female, west against east. An anonymous medical treatise of the late fifth century, *Airs, Waters, Places*, later attributed to the physician Hippocrates, explicitly argued that Europeans and Asiatics were biologically different. Since Asia has a milder climate than Europe, with fewer extremes of temperature, its inhabitants too are softer and gentler by nature than Europeans. The very fact of

living in Asia renders them feebler, less courageous and more liable to despotic government. The Greeks began to apply a single term for all those unfortunate enough to live in the inferior, Asiatic half of the world: *barbaroi*, the 'barbarians'.

The most sustained attack on this crude ethnic dualism came, unsurprisingly, from a Greek native of the Asia Minor coast. 'Herodotus of Halicarnassus here presents the results of his enquiry, so that the deeds of men may not be forgotten with the passage of time, and that great and wondrous works, some performed by Greeks, some by barbarians, might not lack renown, and in particular to explain why they fought with one another.' So begins Herodotus' enquiry (the Greek word is *historiē*) into the causes of the Persian Wars. In the mid-fifth century BC Herodotus travelled extensively throughout the Mediterranean world and the western half of the Persian empire. By combining oral accounts of the past with his own observation of surviving monuments, natural phenomena and local customs, he produced a prose narrative of unprecedented length, intellectual depth and explanatory power. Herodotus' *Histories*, which reached its final form in the 420s BC, has a far more ambitious aim than simply describing the progress of hostilities between the Greek world and Persia. It is true that it concludes with a detailed and thrilling account of Xerxes' invasion of Greece. But much of the first half of the work consists of long ethnographical essays on the history and customs of the various 'barbarian' races on the fringes of the Greek world: Lydians, Persians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Scythians and Libyans. To the modern reader, these essays can look like digressions from Herodotus' main theme. In fact, they are central to it. In the course of his long ethnographic description of Egypt, Herodotus casually remarks that the Egyptians use the term 'barbarian' for anyone who does not speak their language. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Herodotus was well aware that 'barbarian' is a relative term. One of his major purposes in conducting his enquiries was precisely to combat the crude Eurocentrism which lumped all the non-Greek races together as generic *barbaroi*. In this respect, Herodotus had no successors. No Greek or Roman author would write of non-European peoples with such sympathy and insight again.

Herodotus and the Iroquois

In 1724, Joseph-François Lafitau, a Jesuit missionary from Bordeaux, published a huge two-volume work on the *Customs of the American Savages, Compared with the Customs of the Earliest Times*. The book was based on observations collected during six years' work as a missionary to the Iroquois at Caughnawaga, near Montreal on the St Lawrence river, between 1712 and 1717. Lafitau was by no means the first to attempt an ethnology of the 'savages' of the New World, but, thanks in large part to the influence of Herodotus, he has some claim to being the father of modern ethnology.

In his account of the customs of the Lycians, on the south coast of Asia Minor, Herodotus remarks that the Lycian way of life resembled that of the inhabitants of Crete, where he supposed the Lycians to have originated. 'However, one custom which is peculiar to them, and like nothing to be found anywhere else in the world, is that they take their names from their mothers rather than from their fathers. Suppose someone asks his neighbour who he is: he will describe himself in terms of his mother's ancestry – that is, he will list all the mothers on his mother's side. Also, if a female citizen and a male slave live together as a couple, her children are considered legitimate, whereas if a male citizen, even one of the highest rank, marries a woman from another country or a concubine, his children have no rights of citizenship.' Lafitau accurately observed that Iroquois society, too, was matrilineal: the order of succession lay in the female line, and women had a strikingly prominent role in Iroquois decision-making processes. Lafitau thus conjectured that the Iroquois, like the Lycians, were descended from a hypothetical original group of pre-Greek inhabitants of the Aegean, whose society, Lafitau argued, in contrast with that of the Classical Greeks, was matriarchal.

It is to arguments of this kind – mistaken though they were – that Lafitau owes his reputation as the founder of comparative ethnology. Earlier ethnographers had simply assumed that the American Indians were the descendants of older and superior European societies. In the customs of the New World savages, they saw nothing more than muddled and degenerate perversions of original Judaeo-Christian religious customs. Lafitau, however, refused to grant automatic priority or cultural superiority to the societies of Christian Europe. Instead, he described the structure of

Iroquois society in its own terms; he then compared Iroquois culture to the earliest European societies known to him, those of the Classical Aegean, in order to make deductions about the customs of what we would now call prehistoric societies. This great leap forward in ethnological method (the idea of 'reciprocal illumination') is unimaginable without the influence of Herodotus' clear-eyed and sympathetic descriptions of the non-Greek peoples of his day.

The choices which each Greek state had made in the face of Xerxes' invasion had a long afterlife. Thebes, in particular, would never live down the stigma of having fought on the Persian side at Plataea, and the Thebans were for ever branded as 'Medizers' (the Greeks seldom bothered to distinguish between Persians and Medes). After the liberation of the Greek cities of Ionia in 479 BC, the Peloponnesians brought forward a proposal for a mass exchange of populations between Greece and Asia. The Ionians would move to the Greek mainland, and occupy the cities of those Greeks who had fought on the wrong side in 480–479. In return, the Medizing Greeks would be shipped to Asia to live under the rule of the Great King. The Athenians, however, strongly opposed the abandonment of the Ionian cities, 'feeling', says Herodotus, 'that the Peloponnesians had no right to decide the fate of Athenian colonists'. As we shall see, this particular claim about the origin of the Ionians was by no means an innocent one.

The war against Persia continued under the auspices of a new naval alliance, the Delian League, under the leadership of the Athenians. The original members of this alliance were those states which had most to fear from Persian reprisals: the Greek cities of western Asia Minor and the Hellespont, and the islanders of the central and eastern Aegean. Allied states were required to make contributions to the war effort in the form of ships, or, if they preferred, in cash. From its very outset, this league had a dual identity. On one level, it had the pragmatic purpose of maintaining Ionian freedom from Persia; contributions in silver were ostensibly in order to fund anti-Persian operations in the east Aegean. But the alliance was also framed in terms of a revival of ancient ties between Athens and the Ionians. The Ionians were believed to have migrated to the eastern Aegean from Attica (above, pp. 64–7), and so the Athenians and Ionians could consider themselves as ancient

mythological cousins. Significantly, the League treasury was located on the sacred island of Delos. In earliest times Delos was believed to have been the site of a great festival of all the Ionians, described in the sixth-century *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*; the island was also the birthplace of Apollo, mythological ancestor of all the Ionian peoples. Common Ionian ethnicity was built into the ideology of the league from the outset.

If alliance members had expected the Delian League to be a voluntary association, they were soon disabused of that idea. The first allied state to attempt to leave the league, the island of Naxos, was promptly besieged by an Athenian fleet and, in the words of the Athenian historian Thucydides, 'enslaved'. As the Persians were steadily swept back from the coasts of the Aegean, more and more states were incorporated into the Delian League, including many – Carians, Lycians, Thracians – who were not even Greek, let alone Ionian. By 454 BC at the latest, the League treasury was moved from Delos to Athens. The war with Persia had effectively ceased by 449 BC, when there may have been a formal peace treaty between the Athenians and the Great King. Yet the annual silver contributions continued to be collected just as before; around the same time, the Athenians started referring to the allied states as 'the cities which the Athenians rule'.

Over the seventy-five-year history of the Athenian empire – for so the Delian League had rapidly become – the Athenians developed a sophisticated ideological framework to justify their dominance over large parts of the Greek world. 'We', wrote the Athenian tragedian Euripides in his *Erechtheus*, 'are autochthonous by birth; but other cities, scattered randomly by a throw of the dice, are immigrants from elsewhere.' The Athenians claimed to be the one Greek people who were 'sprung from the soil', always inhabiting the same land since time immemorial. The contrast with the Peloponnesians, recent Dorian immigrants from central Greece, was deliberate and pointed. In earliest times, the Athenians argued, an Athenian mother had borne the mythical figure Ion to the god Apollo. Since Ion was the founding ancestor of the Ionian race, all the cities of Ionia could plausibly be regarded as colonies of Athens.

The Athenians exploited this myth of primordial Athenian colonization to the full. As the universal mother-city of the east Greek world, Athens claimed regular religious offerings from her supposed colonies. Each subject state was required to send a cow and suit of armour to the Greater Panathenaea, the four-yearly 'All-Athenian' festival, as a mark of gratitude.

In the 420s BC the Athenians sent out heralds to all the cities of the Greek world, reminding them that an Athenian, Triptolemus, had been the first to bring the gift of grain to mankind. The tribute-paying states were ordered to send a tithe of their annual grain-harvest to Athens, and the rest of the Greeks were 'invited, though not required' to do likewise. It is unlikely that this invitation went down well in Sparta.

Athenian imperial ideology was based on the understanding that the subject states were all colonies of Athens. Of course, the overwhelming majority were nothing of the sort. As we have seen, several tribute-payers in Thrace and on the south-west coast of Asia Minor were not even Greek. What is interesting about the myth of Athenian colonization is that the Athenians felt the need to justify their empire in terms of the distant past. This way of using the mythological past to assert present-day territorial claims can be seen developing elsewhere in the Greek world during this period. In the early fifth century the Argive plain in the eastern Peloponnese was shared between at least four separate *poleis*: Argos on the western side of the plain, and Mycenae, Tiryns and Midea to the east. The latter three cities worshipped at a common sanctuary of Hera, the Heraion, also on the eastern side of the plain and connected to Mycenae by a Sacred Way. In the early 460s BC an aggressively expansionist Argos destroyed all three of its neighbours, and constructed a new Sacred Way connecting the Heraion directly to Argos, thereby incorporating the whole of the Argive plain into its own territory. In order to justify its activities, Argos promoted a new version of the myth of the return of the sons of Heracles to the Peloponnese (above, p. 107). According to the Argives, once the Heracleidae had reconquered the Peloponnese, the peninsula was divided by lot between the four surviving descendants of Heracles: Kresphontes received Messenia, Sparta went to the two sons of Aristodemos, and Temenos was allotted Argos. In destroying the cities of the eastern Argive plain, the Argives were doing no more than re-establishing the lot of Temenos in its original form. The Heraion was theirs by ancestral right.

By the mid-fifth century the Aegean had essentially become an Athenian lake. This fact cries out for explanation; empires do not happen by accident. Massive Athenian naval dominance is part, though only part, of the answer. Thanks to a furious ship-building programme in the decade before the Persian invasion, the Athenians could draw on a war-fleet of up to 300 triremes, far beyond the resources of any other Greek city. But

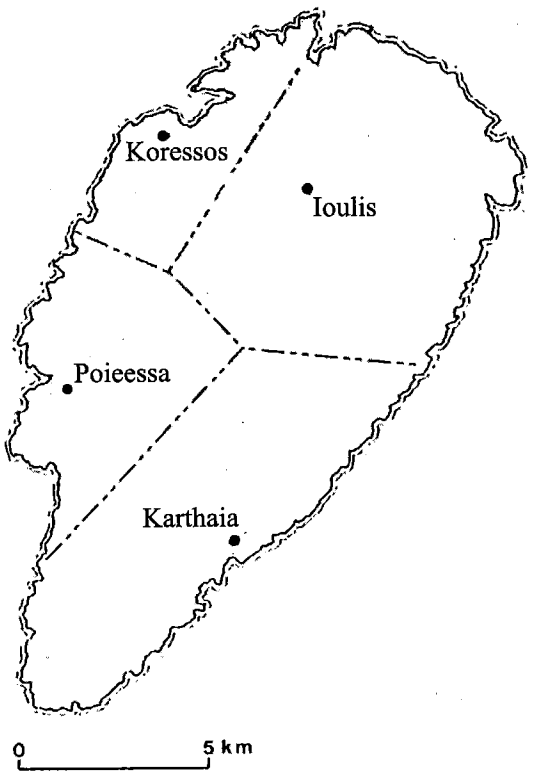


Figure 16. The four *poleis* of Keos.

there were also deeper undercurrents favouring Athenian growth. A glance at a map of the Mediterranean is enough to show that the Aegean presents one of the most fragmented landscapes of the European landmass, characterized by a plethora of tiny islands and rocky peninsulas. This peculiar geography encouraged extreme political fragmentation. It has been calculated that in the year 400 BC the Greek world was home to at least 862 independent city-states or *poleis*, the vast majority of them located in and around the Aegean basin. Most of these individual city-states were extremely small; a *polis* with a population of more than 10,000 was unusual. The island of Keos in the northern Cyclades is fairly typical, with a estimated ancient population of between 4,000 and 6,700, distributed between no fewer than four *poleis* (see Figure 16).

The typical small Aegean island is separated from its immediate

neighbours by a few kilometres of sea at most. Contact and exchange between these densely clustered maritime *poleis* was extremely easy; political fragmentation does not mean isolation. The microcellular geography of the Aegean archipelago created ideal conditions for economic specialization within each individual *polis*. So long as it continued to produce enough grain to feed itself, a little island like Keos could concentrate its energies on specializing in acorns or red ochre, secure in the knowledge that olive oil or pumice stone could always be imported from one of its neighbours. The tiny islands of Peparethos and Ikos, in the northern Sporades, produced enough high-quality wine to service a substantial market as far away as the Black Sea. By the fifth century BC these local networks of specialization and exchange were sophisticated enough to support a total Aegean population probably higher than at any other period before the twentieth century. By way of comparison, the highest recorded population for the island of Keos in modern times is a mere 4,900, as recorded in the census of 1896; today, the permanent population is around 2,400.

The fragility of this prosperous network was ruthlessly exploited by Athens. Once a single large state achieved maritime dominance in the Aegean, the extreme fragmentation of the smaller *poleis* became a disastrous liability. No fewer than 248 states are known to have paid tribute to Athens at one time or another during the fifth century. Most of these were tiny communities like the four cities of Keos, which could never have hoped to resist Athenian naval power. The Athenians were thus able to tap into a ready-made system of production and distribution of goods and natural resources. An aggressive Athenian monopoly on Kean red ochre is attested for the revived Athenian empire of the fourth century. Similarly, we can see Athens developing a monopoly in timber imports from the north Aegean littoral; an alliance with the Macedonian king Perdiccas, probably dating to the 430s or 420s BC, stipulated that Macedonian oar-handles were to be exported to Athens only.

In its complexity and sophistication, the fifth-century Athenian empire was unlike any state which had existed in Europe up to this point. There were said to be 700 Athenian officials permanently serving overseas, more than four times as many as would later be sent out to administer the provinces of the entire Roman empire. Multiple copies survive of a decree published in every subject city imposing uniform coins, weights and measures throughout the empire. One aspect of the imperial

administration deserves particular emphasis. From 454 BC the Athenians began regularly inscribing their financial records on stone. Every year one-sixtieth of the tribute paid by each allied state was set aside as a tithe for the goddess Athena; annual records of these payments were set up on the Acropolis, on the monumental stone tablets today known (somewhat misleadingly) as the Athenian tribute lists. Simultaneously, the Athenians began recording temple inventories, building accounts, property sales and lists of casualties on stone. Athens was the first state in the Greek world to develop a 'documentary habit' on anything like this scale. The importance of this for the modern historian can hardly be overstated. Thanks to this explosion of documentary evidence, the economic history of Classical Athens can be studied to a level of fine-grained detail unimaginable for any other city-state. Athens' contemporaries, by contrast, can seem almost laughably backward in this respect. The other great power of the Greek world, Sparta, has left us a mere handful of fifth-century inscriptions. One of these shows voluntary allied contributions to the Spartan war-fund being paid in the form of raisins; it seems that Sparta's primitive documentary habits reflected an equally primitive local economy.

By the late 450s, imperial revenues collected from 'the cities which the Athenians rule' were openly being spent on purely Athenian projects. A huge building programme on the Athenian Acropolis was initiated in the 440s BC (see Figure 17). The modern visitor is most likely to be impressed by the Parthenon, a spectacular treasury of the goddess Athena, which effectively served as the central bank of the Athenian imperial state. For the Athenians, the true marvel was the Propylaea, the monumental gatehouse to the Acropolis. Unlike the Parthenon, the Propylaea was a secular building with no particular function. The ability to lavish such expense on a mere gatehouse, albeit one of staggering size and beauty, was itself a stark statement of Athenian wealth and power.

Most important of all, the wealth now pouring into Athens created the conditions for a political revolution within the Athenian state itself. Sixth-century Athens had been a loosely federal commonwealth, with much of the Attic peninsula enjoying virtual independence from the urban centre. Around three-quarters of the population of Attica lived outside the city, in villages and hamlets known as demes. Many of these demes, such as the charcoal-burning town of Acharnae in northern Attica, were large enough that they could have been small city-states in their own right. In the last

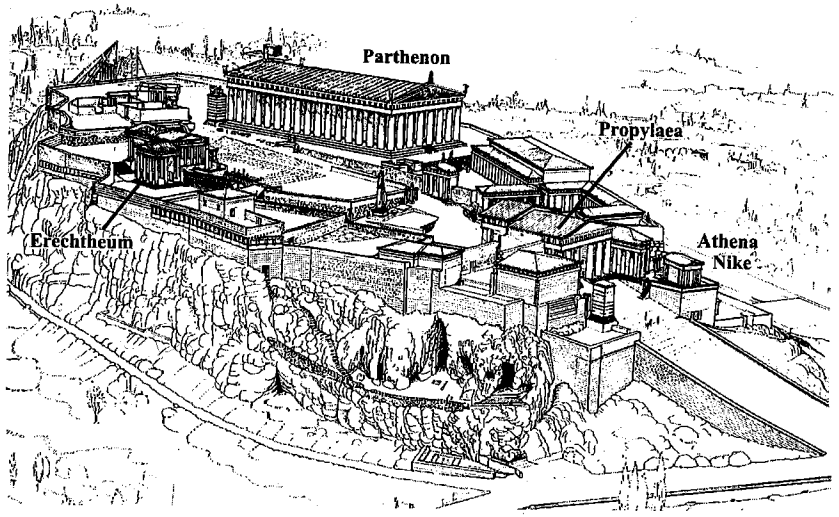


Figure 17. The Athenian Acropolis

decade of the sixth century BC, the Athenian constitution underwent a major overhaul, primarily intended to give the outlying demes a voice in the central *polis*-government. Under the new constitution, drafted by the aristocratic politician Cleisthenes, all major decisions were taken by an assembly open to all adult male Athenian citizens (including inhabitants of the outlying demes). The agenda for the assembly, which met only once or twice a month, was drawn up by a new full-time council of 500, the *boulē*. A fixed quota of elected annual councillors was assigned to each deme in proportion to its population: the largest deme, Acharnae, sent twenty-two councillors each year, while the smallest hamlets took turns to send a councillor every second year.

The Athenian Acropolis

The Athenian Acropolis is today dominated by four great monuments, rising dramatically out of the bare rock: the Parthenon, the Erechtheum, the Propylaea, and the temple of Athena Nikē, all four of them constructed between 447 and 407 BC. It would be all too easy to suppose that the modern Acropolis preserves an unspoiled and changeless image of the Acropolis of the late fifth century BC. But the Acropolis which we see today

is essentially a reinvention of the 1830s. In the early nineteenth century the Acropolis was a densely occupied garrison-village, its ancient monuments overlaid with medieval and modern buildings: the shell of the Parthenon housed a small eighteenth-century mosque, built on top of the ruins of a larger mosque of the 1460s, itself a converted Byzantine church. In the early years of Greek independence from Ottoman rule, it was decided to 'restore' the Acropolis to its pristine Classical form, as a symbol of the national identity of the newly revived Greek state. Over the next fifty years, everything more recent than the fifth century BC was methodically scraped off the surface of the Acropolis: the existing hilltop village, the remains of the Parthenon mosque and a fourteenth-century Florentine tower built into the corner of the Propylaea were all demolished. By the 1890s the excavator could claim to have 'delivered the Acropolis back to the civilized world, cleansed of all barbaric additions, a noble monument to the Greek genius'. From a different perspective, the modern Athenian Acropolis could be seen as an extraordinary act of cultural forgetfulness: in attempting to forge a link between the modern Greek state and the Classical Greek past, the nineteenth-century Greeks violently erased the entire intervening two millennia of Macedonian, Roman, Byzantine, Frankish-Florentine and Turkish rule.

All this is in marked contrast with the behaviour of the fifth-century Athenians. At the time they were built, the Acropolis monuments were carefully fitted in around much older buildings. One corner of the Propylaea is cut off so as not to disturb a short stretch of Mycenaean fortification wall at the western end of the Acropolis (see Figure 18): even though this stretch of wall was rendered invisible by the construction of the Propylaea, the fifth-century Athenians could not bear to damage this modest survival from their heroic past. The temple of Athena Nikē stands on top of a monumental bastion, faced on all sides with smooth ashlar marble blocks, constructed in the 440s BC; buried in the heart of this bastion, a sixth-century altar to the same goddess was lovingly preserved in its original location.

The Cleisthenic constitution had set in place for the first time a truly representative framework for Athenian political activity. However, for the first fifty years of the new constitution, the participation of poorer

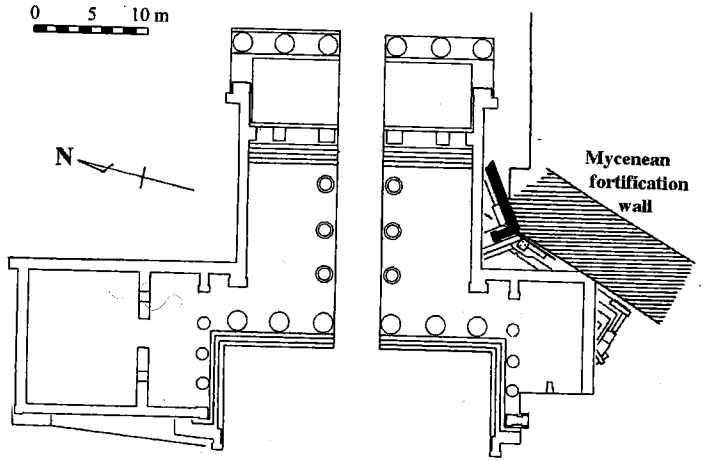


Figure 18. The Propylaea, with the corner of the south-west wing of the gatehouse cut off to accommodate a stretch of Mycenaean fortification wall.

Athenian citizens in politics was limited by the state's inability to pay its officials. Since an entire year's service without pay as a councillor was financially unthinkable for most Athenians, political activity remained, as before, in the hands of a relatively small number of wealthy families. Around the middle of the fifth century the revenues of empire began to be diverted towards daily salaries for councillors, public officials and, eventually, assembly attendees. At the same time, in a stroke of extraordinary boldness, election to public office was abolished, and public officials and councillors began to be appointed by lot from all Athenian citizens. Tenure of office was limited to one year. As a result, probably as many as half of all male Athenians over the age of 30 were required to take their turn on the city's advisory council.

The breadth of political participation under the Athenian radical democracy is unparalleled in world history. Yet in many respects, the Athenian constitution was far more restricted than any modern European democracy. Women had no political role of any kind, though they were recognized as Athenian citizens for the purposes of marriage and childbearing (in order to qualify for citizenship, a boy had to be of Athenian citizen parentage on both sides). In law, women were perpetual minors, unable to own property or represent themselves in court. If a

man died without leaving male heirs, the law required that his daughters be promptly married off to their closest male relatives, in order that their father's property should stay within the extended (male) family. Of course, total seclusion was impracticable for most Athenian households: a daughter was an extra pair of hands, and as the fourth-century philosopher Aristotle remarks in his *Politics*, it was impossible to stop the wives of the poor going out of doors. But it is the Athenian ideal which is revealing here. It is clear from Athenian literature and vase-painting that the ideal Athenian woman was silent, obedient, good at sewing, and pasty-faced from permanent seclusion indoors. The assertive heroines of Athenian tragic drama – Medea, Antigone, Clytemnestra – are effective and shocking precisely because they deviate from these norms.

The world of Athenian civic religion is at first sight a partial exception to this rule. The chief deity of Athens, Athena Polias, was female, and as such (in accordance with normal Greek religious practice) was served by a female priestess and attendants. In Athens, as in other Greek cities, there was a major annual religious festival restricted to women only, the Thesmophoria. The festival had its own female officials, and although women were not officially regarded as deme-members, the various Athenian demes were represented at the Thesmophoria by the wives of fellow-demesmen. Women even seem to have gathered and held assembly-meetings at the sanctuary of Demeter in Athens, in a kind of female mirror-image of the male assembly. However, the Thesmophoria is perhaps best regarded as a classic 'role-reversal' festival, like the Saturnalia at Rome, in which slaves played at being masters for the day. Similarly, at the Thesmophoria, women were granted exceptional licence, and got to play out male roles for the three days of the festival; once the festival was over, the normal gender roles were reasserted.

It is a striking fact that women were considerably worse off in Classical Athens than in most other parts of the Greek world. For example, a fifth-century law-code from Gortyn on Crete shows that Gortynian women could own and inherit property, marry and divorce with relative freedom, and even have free children by a male slave. Similarly, Spartan women enjoyed legal rights and a degree of social liberty which horrified Athenian observers; by the late fourth century two-fifths of Spartan land was said to be owned by women.

We are left with the paradox that the most egalitarian state in the Greek world was also one of the most repressive in its treatment of

women. The explanation may lie in the unusually high value placed on citizenship under the radical democracy. In most Greek *poleis*, as in sixth-century Athens and most other societies in history, social status was determined by wealth. With the opening up of political activity to every adult Athenian male, the only significant status distinction became that between the citizen and the non-citizen. As the gulf between rich and poor was closed, above all through the practice of allotment to public office, the gulf between citizens and non-citizens widened. Those classes in society, like women, who were excluded from the citizenship, thus found themselves worse off than they would have been in a less democratic society. Similarly, it seems that the slave population of Athens increased dramatically in the fifth century BC, as paid labour on another man's behalf came to be seen as unworthy of a citizen.

All that said, the Athenian democracy still strikes us as a radically new and progressive form of constitutional government. The Athenians would have found this a deeply alarming idea. In pretty much any given context, the Athenians liked to believe that they were acting *kata ta patria*, 'according to ancestral custom'. Reform, to the Athenian way of thinking, was something to be resisted as a matter of principle. It is, paradoxically, a measure of the success of Cleisthenes' reforms that the man himself was instantly erased from popular memory. Once the new Cleisthenic system was successfully in place, the Athenians cheerfully claimed that they were not reforms at all, but long-standing elements of their ancestral constitution. By the mid-fifth century at the latest, the incorporation of the rural demes into the Athenian state was attributed to the hero Theseus, slayer of the Minotaur, whose conquest of Attica was commemorated in a new 'Festival of Unification', the Synoikia.

An even more striking example of this retrojection of the new constitution into the distant past is the case of the ten eponymous heroes. As part of the Cleisthenic reform package, the Athenians had been divided into ten new tribes, each named after a national hero of the distant Athenian past: Cecrops, Acamas, Ajax and others. These tribes were entirely artificial and homogeneous in composition, each consisting of three clusters of villages, one from the coast, one from the inland district, and one from the plain of Athens itself. Nonetheless, the tribes and their tribal heroes rapidly developed a central role in Athenian religious life. Statues of the ten eponymous heroes were set up in the Athenian *agora*, and the ten heroes received regular sacrifices as the mythological founders and

ancestors of their respective tribes. The Athenians clearly saw nothing incongruous in treating these thoroughly modern political units as if they were kinship groups of the deepest antiquity. Conversely, any practice which could plausibly be described as 'ancestral' was entirely immune from democratic reform. When new priesthoods were established, such as the priestess of the cult of Athena Nikē in the 440s BC, they were duly appointed on democratic principles (by lot from all Athenian citizens). However, we have not a single case of such principles being imposed on a pre-existing cult. The most important sacred official in Athens, the priestess of Athena Polias – by far the most prominent and authoritative female figure in the Classical Athenian *polis* – continued to be appointed from the members of a single aristocratic clan, the Eteoboutadae, as late as the second century AD.

Perhaps most telling of all, in the Athenian popular mind-set, the establishment of the Cleisthenic democracy in the late sixth century was rapidly elided with the fall of the tyranny of the Peisistratids. Since the mid-sixth century BC political life at Athens had been dominated by the Peisistratid family, who dominated public affairs and ensured that the major annual magistracies were always held by their friends and dependants. In 514 BC, a member of the Peisistratid clan, Hipparchus, brother of the tyrant Hippias, was murdered by two Athenian lovers, Harmodius and Aristogeiton, as a result of a private quarrel. Four years later, in 510 BC, the tyranny of Hippias was at last overthrown, thanks to a Spartan invasion of Attica; it was not until 508 or 507 that the constitutional reforms of Cleisthenes were set in motion. For fifth-century Athenians, the story of the fall of the tyranny and the establishment of representative government was annoyingly unheroic: the tyrants themselves had been expelled by the Spartans, and the new constitution – or rather, in the Athenians' eyes, the restoration of the elusive 'ancestral constitution' – was the work of an unglamorous aristocratic politician. So the lovers Harmodius and Aristogeiton were quickly elevated to the role of revolutionary tyrannicides; it was they, not the Spartans, who had ended tyranny at Athens, thereby re-establishing the traditional Athenian democracy. Hero cult was paid to the two men, and they received the unique honour of a pair of bronze statues in the Athenian *agora*, the only statues of historical Athenians to be set up in the *agora* throughout the entire Classical period (see Plate 11). As the lyrics of a wildly popular fifth-century drinking song have it, 'I shall carry my sword in a branch

of myrtle, like Harmodius and Aristogeiton, when they killed the tyrant and made Athens equal before the law.' This popular myth of the Athenian 'tyrannicides' – already debunked by Thucydides in the late fifth century – had a long and potent afterlife (below, pp. 228–9).

Relations between the Athenians and their mainland Greek neighbours grew increasingly tense over the course of the fifth century. Relations with Sparta had been irreparably damaged by a curious diplomatic incident in 462 BC. In the eighth century BC the Spartans had conquered Messenia, the region to the west of Mt. Taygetos in the south-west Peloponnese. The natives of Messenia were reduced to collective slavery, and were known as helots or 'captives'. Spartan prosperity was founded on the ruthless exploitation of the helots, on whom the Spartans ritually declared war every year. In the wake of a devastating earthquake at Sparta in the early 460s BC, the helots rose in revolt, and the Spartans were forced to spend much of the decade engaged in a gritty guerrilla war against their former slaves. In 462 the Spartans called on Athens for help against the rebels. The Athenians sent a large army to Messenia, but on their arrival, the Spartans had a change of heart, and dismissed the Athenian force without explanation, apparently fearing that the Athenians might decide to support the helots after all. As a result of this insult, the Athenians promptly broke off relations with Sparta and struck an alliance with Sparta's main enemy in the Peloponnese, Argos (which we shall return to shortly). When the helot war was eventually brought to an end, the surviving rebels were received by the Athenians, who settled them at Naupaktos, an Athenian dependency on the north shore of the Corinthian gulf. The settlement at Naupaktos was to be a thorn in Sparta's side, and a source of simmering resentment against Athens, for the rest of the century.

Leonidas at Stalingrad

The ethos of Classical Sparta held a particular appeal for the National Socialists of inter-war Germany. Hitler greatly admired the Spartan custom of rejecting and destroying biologically inferior offspring, thereby preserving their pure and essential racial characteristics. As few as 6,000 Spartans, he claimed, had ruled over 350,000 helots (these numbers are, incidentally, wholly fantastic); the German *Volk* was destined to do the same.

In 480 BC, as Xerxes' army swept southwards through central Greece, a force of 300 Spartans under King Leonidas had mounted a heroic and doomed attempt to hold the pass at Thermopylae. On 30 January 1943, with the German Sixth Army encircled at Stalingrad, Goering explicitly compared the defence of Thermopylae with the defence of Stalingrad, in a stirring speech which received wide circulation in Germany. Quoting Simonides' famous epigram on the 300 Spartan war-dead at Thermopylae ('Go tell the Spartans, passerby, / That here, obedient to their laws, we lie'), Goering confidently predicted that the – by now inevitable – German defeat at Stalingrad would in future days be commemorated in similar terms. Simonides' epigram was rewritten for the occasion: 'If you come to Germany, go tell them that you saw us fight at Stalingrad, obedient to the law laid down for the security of the German people.' The response of the German '300' at Stalingrad was sadly disappointing; on 1 February Field-Marshal Paulus, having no desire for a heroic Leonidas-style death, chose instead to surrender himself and the frozen remnants of the Sixth Army to the Russians.

One of the most powerful responses to the Nazi exploitation of Spartan ideology can be found in Heinrich Böll's short story 'Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa . . . ', first published in 1950. In the last months of the war, a horrifically wounded young German soldier is brought to an improvised field-hospital near the front line, at Benndorf. The boy gradually realizes that the hospital is his own old school, which he had left only three months previously. As he lies in the operating theatre, he sees hanging on the wall a blackboard carrying the truncated beginning of Simonides' epigram on Thermopylae, 'Stranger, if you come to Spa . . . '. The words are in his own handwriting, chalked on the board during a writing lesson only a few months earlier. A moment later, the dying boy realizes that he has lost his own arms and right leg in the fighting; his own, horribly truncated body now mirrors the cynical Nazi slogan, cut off midway through the word 'Sparta'.

In 431 BC full-scale war broke out between Athens and Sparta. The general view at the time was that the war had been sparked by a trade blockade imposed by the Athenians on their small neighbour, Megara. Nonetheless, the real cause of the war was growing fear of Athenian

power at Sparta and, in particular, Corinth. During the 430s BC Athens expanded its sphere of influence into the Adriatic and southern Italy, an area which had traditionally been dominated by Corinth. Athenian alliances with Corcyra (modern Corfu), the Akarnanians (at the mouth of the Corinthian gulf), Rhegium in southern Italy and Sicilian Leontini, posed an unmistakable threat to Corinthian interests in the west. When Athens laid siege to the small city of Potidaea, a Corinthian colony in the north Aegean, it was one provocation too many.

The Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) was fought on a bewildering number of different fronts, from Sicily to the Hellespont. The turning point in the war was a disastrous Athenian attempt to conquer Sicily (415–413 BC); huge numbers of men and ships were committed to this western adventure, which ended in total defeat for Athens. The Athenians struggled on for almost another decade, but when the Persian satraps of western Asia Minor intervened on the Spartan side, defeat was only a matter of time. Athens was forced to surrender in 404 BC.

The Spartans' stated aim of 'freedom for the Greeks' – which effectively meant the dismantling of the Athenian empire – had brought them widespread goodwill in the early years of the Peloponnesian War. By 404 the hollowness of this slogan was all too apparent. Persian support for Sparta had been on the explicit understanding that the Greek cities of Asia Minor, under Athenian control since the Persian Wars, would return to the Persian fold. However, after the defeat of Athens the Spartans tore up their agreements with Persia and set out to regain their reputation as liberators with a grand campaign in western Asia Minor on behalf of the Ionian cities. Evidently, the ideological appeal of the crusade against the barbarian was as potent as ever. In 396 BC, shortly before crossing to Asia, King Agesilaus of Sparta sacrificed at Aulis, in imitation of the sacrifice performed by Agamemnon as the Achaean fleet mustered for the Trojan War. Nonetheless, after limited successes, Sparta was roundly defeated by a Persian naval force at the sea-battle of Knidos; humiliatingly, the commander of the Persian fleet was an Athenian exile in Persian service, Conon. The failure of Sparta's Asiatic ambitions was formalized by a peace treaty with the Great King in 386 BC, in which the King's suzerainty over the cities of western Asia Minor was explicitly recognized for the first time.

The King's Peace of 386 also guaranteed the autonomy of all the Greek states of the mainland and Aegean. The uneasy peace which ensued in

mainland Greece was shattered by an unprovoked Spartan attack on Thebes, the major power in central Greece at this period. Thebes had been a major Mycenaean settlement in the Bronze Age (above, pp. 22–4). In the fourth century BC the remains of the Mycenaean palace were still visible on the acropolis of Thebes; the ruins were understood to be the palace of Kadmos, the alleged Phoenician founder of Thebes, after whom the acropolis was named (the 'Kadmeia'). The main Classical settlement at Thebes lay in the Boeotian plain, below the Kadmeia. The Kadmeia itself, the sacred heart of the city, was largely given over to sanctuaries and civic buildings, many of which were deliberately sited in relation to the remains of Kadmos' palace. In 382 BC, while the Thebans were celebrating the women's festival of the Thesmophoria (during which the Kadmeia was conveniently empty of men), the Spartan general Phoebidas took the opportunity to seize the Kadmeia and install a puppet pro-Spartan government, thus turning Thebes into a Spartan satellite. Phoebidas' actions sent shock waves through the Greek world, and utterly wiped out what little remained of Sparta's moral authority. The Spartan attack on the Kadmeia was more than just the seizure of a convenient fortified citadel, in breach of the truce; it was also an unprovoked violation of a sanctified area. Worse still, Phoebidas must surely have been aware that the Thesmophoria was going on at the time. The religious festival had provided the Spartans with an ideal opportunity to strike, but made their impiety all the more glaring.

Spartan dominance in mainland Greece came to an end when a Spartan army was crushed by the Thebans under the leadership of Epaminondas at the battle of Leuctra in 371. In the wake of the humbling of Sparta at Leuctra, the Thebans took the monumental step of liberating Messenia, the old home of the helots, from Spartan control. With Theban support, a new *polis* of Messene was founded on Mt. Ithome, the centre of the unsuccessful helot revolt of the 460s BC. The new city was ringed with a massive fortification wall, 9 kilometres long, one of the most impressive anywhere in mainland Greece; Sparta was evidently not expected to give up its helots without a fight. Archaeological survey work in Messenian territory shows a significant rise in population at this period, implying that the new state was swelled with immigrants from abroad. Some of these are likely to be the descendants of the helots settled by the Athenians at Naupaktos in the mid-fifth century; others, more controversially, claimed to be the descendants of an original group of diaspora Messenians in Sicily

and southern Italy, who had fled the Peloponnese at the time of the original Spartan conquest of Messenia in the eighth century.

The new Messenian *polis* provides us with a fascinating case of ethnogenesis, a community actively creating its own common memory and history. The Theban liberation of 370/369 BC, and the return of the self-proclaimed Messenian diaspora, was framed as a restoration of the pre-conquest Messenian state. However, there is no real reason to think that any such state had ever existed. True, the Spartans had conquered Messenia in the eighth century BC; but there is no sign that the 'Messenians' of the eighth century had been a unified people with a common Messenian identity, let alone an independent *polis*. When the *polis* of Messene was formed in the fourth century BC, the free, pre-Spartan past out of which the city's traditions and legends were shaped was almost entirely imaginary.

The new Messenian state was divided into five tribes, all of them named after heroes descended from Heracles: Hyllos, Kleolaios, Aristomachos, Kresphontes and Daiphontes. This emphasis on the Messenians' descent from the children of Heracles (the Heracleidae) taps into the same mythological tradition as that used by Argos to justify its conquests in the eastern Peloponnese in the early fifth century. Just as the Argives had done a century earlier, the Messenians legitimized their new state by presenting themselves as the heirs to one of the three 'lots' of the Heracleidae in the Peloponnese. Conveniently, the story was confirmed by the rediscovery of the supposed physical remains of that distant past. The mid-fourth century saw an explosion in the quantity of religious offerings at Bronze Age Mycenaean tombs in the Pylos area of western Messenia. Mycenaean tombs were regarded as evidently pre-Spartan; by implication, they could be understood as belonging to the original Messenians. Stories of heroic resistance to Spartan domination began to crystallize around an early guerrilla hero, Aristomenes of Messene, who was even made the subject of an epic poem, the *Messeniaka* of Rhianus.

Naturally, all of this was furiously denied by the Spartans, who consistently refused to recognize the legitimacy of the state of Messene. Messenia was Spartan land, bequeathed to them by their ancestors, now temporarily occupied by a city of slaves. But Sparta was no longer in a position to affect realities on the ground. The loss of Messenia, even more than the defeat at the hands of Epaminondas at Leuctra, marked the end of Sparta as a major power. To make things worse, in the early 360s the

Arcadians, a fractious and backward people in the central Peloponnese, united together to found a new federal capital on the northern borders of Spartan territory, once again with Theban support: Megalepolis, the 'big city'. Sparta was now encircled by hostile powers. The Thebans promoted the liberation of Messene and the foundation of Megalepolis as part of a general programme for the freedom of the Greeks. 'By my councils, Sparta was shorn of her glory and sacred Messene at last receives her children; by Theban arms Megalepolis is ringed with walls, and all Greece is autonomous in freedom' – so claimed the inscription on the base of a statue of Epaminondas at Thebes.

The creation of a new, autonomous Messenian history in the mid-fourth century tells us a great deal about the ways in which the fifth- and fourth-century Greeks thought about their past. The stories which the Messenians chose to tell about their mythical origins were not new. On the contrary, the return of the Heracleidae to the Peloponnese was one of the few fixed points in the universal Greek mental map of the past. The common genealogies and stories about the heroes of what we call the Bronze Age were used by cities like Messene to justify their place in the Greek world and to describe and explain their relations with their neighbours. These stories were flexible enough to accommodate new political circumstances like the creation of the *polis* of Messene. As we have seen, one of the key turning points in the political history of the fifth century BC was the Athenians' decision in 461 to break off their alliance with Sparta and ally themselves with the city of Argos in the eastern Peloponnese. Three years later, in 458 BC, the tragedian Aeschylus presented his *Oresteia* trilogy at the Athenian dramatic festival of the Dionysia. The trilogy recounts the return of the Trojan War hero Agamemnon to his native Argos, his murder by his wife Clytemnestra, and her own death at the hands of her son Orestes – a story familiar to any Greek, except perhaps for the location of Agamemnon's palace at Argos (most people would have placed it at Mycenae). At this point, Aeschylus strikes out on his own. Orestes, he claims, fled to Athens, where he was tried by the Athenian homicide court on the Areopagus hill; on his acquittal, he swore eternal friendship between Athens and his native city of Argos. A new version of an old story is here used to explain and bolster the new political alliance between the two cities.

The development of historical writing from Herodotus onwards should be set in the context of these sorts of uses of the past. Herodotus is aware

of a difference between the early prehistory of Greece and the historical past, but struggles to express exactly what the difference actually is. At one point he tells us that Polykrates, tyrant of the island of Samos *c.* 535–522 BC, was 'the first of the Greeks we know of who had the plan of ruling the sea – except for Minos of Knossos and anyone before him who ruled the sea. But of the so-called human race, Polykrates was first.' Herodotus recognizes that Minos somehow does not quite count, but is unable to explain why. Is the difference between Polykrates and Minos just a question of the availability of reliable evidence – one of Herodotus' informants was a Spartan whose grandfather had fought against Polykrates – or is there something else about Minos which makes him different in kind from someone like Polykrates? Herodotus' puzzlement is very revealing. For us, this problem is easily resolved: we call Polykrates a 'historical' figure and Minos a 'mythical' or 'legendary' figure. But this distinction would not have meant anything to a fifth- or fourth-century Greek. Myth and history existed on a continuum; it was hard to establish the facts about Minos, because he lived a long time ago, but no one ever seriously doubted his existence.

Part of the problem was that the Greeks had no easy way of establishing how long ago a given event had happened. Each city-state had its own particular calendar, and there was no universally agreed way of distinguishing one year from another. The Athenians named each year after their main civic official, the archon ('the year of the archonship of so-and-so'), but even the Athenians seldom used archon-years as a way of dating a particular past event – after all, not many Athenians carried the entire archon-list around in their heads. The fifth century BC saw the first attempts to create a universal chronology for the past. In the 420s BC Hellanicus of Lesbos compiled the first universal history laid out in strict chronological order, based on the sequence of priestesses of Hera at Argos. The priestesses of Hera are not the most obvious choice as a chronological backbone for Greek history; like the Athenian archons, the Argive priestesses were of little significance outside Argos. Probably Hellanicus believed that the Argive lists of priestesses stretched back further, and were more reliable, than any other city's list of civic officials. Hellanicus' system was not widely adopted, and his method was fiercely criticized by Thucydides. It was not until the third century BC that a commonly accepted way of expressing the date of past events (by Olympiads) came into use.

Instead, the normal way of dating past events was in relation to some significant occurrence: a generation before the Persian Wars, three generations after the return of the Heracleidae to the Peloponnese. The stories of the Trojan War served a crucial function here, by serving as the earliest universal reference point. Few Greeks would have cared to say exactly how long ago the Trojan War happened; that was not the point. Rather, the Trojan War was a fixed point around which other early events could be pegged. It allowed the Athenians to specify that their alliance with Argos went back to the generation after the fall of Troy; it allowed the Messenians to claim a continuous history back as far as the return of the Heracleidae in the second generation after the fall of Troy. The legendary origins of the city of Messene were not simply, as in modern fairy stories, 'once upon a time'; instead, the city's early history was firmly pegged in relation to the universal date-horizon provided by the Trojan War.

Over the last two chapters, we have traced the development of the Greek *polis* from its eighth-century origins down to the mid-fourth century BC. The culture of the Greek city-states was unlike anything that had existed in Europe before. This was, above all, the first truly urban culture to emerge on the European peninsula. Between 40 per cent and 90 per cent of the total population (*c.* 1,200 people) of the little *polis* of Koressos on Keos lived within the walls of the city itself. The total population of Classical Boeotia can be estimated at 165,000–200,000, of whom around 100,000 (50 per cent or more) lived in urban centres. That is a staggeringly high percentage. In AD 1700 the urban population of Europe as a whole was only around 12 per cent of the total population; in the Netherlands, one of the most urbanized parts of continental Europe, the urban population may have reached 40 per cent. Although the comparison is not a wholly scientific one – historians disagree on how large a settlement has to be before it can be called 'urban' – the basic fact, that the Greeks of the fifth and fourth centuries were city-dwellers, is beyond dispute.

More characteristic of the wider European world in this period were the Greeks' northern neighbours, the Illyrians, Thracians and Macedonians. The Illyrians inhabited a large region of the western Balkans, roughly equivalent to modern Albania, Bosnia and Croatia. The upper Adriatic was little known to the Greeks in the Classical period; it was widely believed, for instance, that a branch of the Danube flowed into it, along which one could sail as far as the Black Sea. Illyria is one of the few areas

of Europe in which Greek influence seems actually to have declined over this period. Greek pottery and jewellery is quite common in Illyrian elite tombs from the mid-sixth to the mid-fifth century, but disappears thereafter. Rough hilltop fortresses, probably places of refuge for lowland villages, start to appear in the course of the fifth century, but there are no signs of true urban settlements until the early Hellenistic period (the late fourth and early third centuries BC). The Illyrians seem to have been supremely unaffected by developments only a couple of hundred kilometres to the south.

In Thrace, a huge stretch of the eastern Balkans bordering on the Black Sea, things were different. Southern Thrace, roughly equivalent to modern Bulgaria, was unified in the early fifth century BC under a single royal dynasty, the Odrysians. The Odrysian Thracians co-operated enthusiastically with their Greek neighbours. Greek trading posts, such as the well-excavated site of Pistiros in the upper Maritsa valley (the ancient river Hebros), were established under royal protection in the heart of Thracian territory. In dealing with the Thracians, 'it was', says Thucydides, 'quite impossible to get anything done unless one first produced a present'. From the mid-fifth century BC, Greek prestige goods, particularly precious metalwork, flowed into Thrace in enormous quantities. The Thracians themselves imitated and adapted Greek artistic styles, combining them with Scythian and Persian elements to create a new local culture of startling originality. Nonetheless, it would be quite wrong to say that Thrace was therefore 'Hellenized' during this period. The social structure of Odrysian Thrace seems to have been little affected by the import and creative imitation of Greek luxury goods. As in Illyria, there is little sign of urbanization until the early Hellenistic period. A typical Thracian village of around 400 BC, as described by the Greek historian Xenophon, consisted of a scatter of wooden huts, each surrounded by a fenced enclosure for cattle. The Thracian aristocracies took what they wanted from the Greeks, without being absorbed into the Greek cultural orbit.

To the west of the Thracians, where Greece connects with the Balkan peninsula proper, lay the kingdom of Macedon. The region is divided into two parts: lower Macedonia, a huge coastal plain around the Thermaic gulf in the far north-west Aegean, and upper Macedonia, a sequence of rugged highland plateaux stretching westwards into the Balkan mountains, bordering on Illyrian territory. The culture of the ancient Macedonians was strikingly different from that of their Greek

neighbours to the south. The Macedonians did not share the Greeks' passion for monumental temple-building. Aristocratic wealth was instead directed towards extraordinarily lavish burial-practices. Massive tumuli of the fifth and fourth centuries BC dot the Macedonian landscape. The tombs themselves often contain prodigious quantities of precious-metal vessels and jewellery. 'Warrior-burials' of a kind unknown in Greece since the seventh century, with arms and armour buried alongside the deceased, continue well down into the Hellenistic period. All of this is far more reminiscent of the Celtic elite cultures of central and northern Europe (below, pp. 163–4) than of anything going on in Greece at this point.

The controversy over whether or not the Macedonians were ethnically Greek has a long history. As we saw in the previous chapter, participation in the Panhellenic games at Olympia and elsewhere became a crucial marker of Greek identity in the seventh and sixth centuries BC. When King Alexander I of Macedon attempted to enter for the Olympics, sometime shortly before the Persian Wars, his fellow-competitors objected on the grounds that he was not a Greek. In the event, Alexander successfully argued that the royal house of Macedon (though not, interestingly, the Macedonians more generally) was of Argive descent, and was allowed to participate – he came joint first in the 200 metres. But the general drift of the story is clear. The ordinary Greek view was that the Macedonians were, if not quite barbarians, definitely not part of the club. Alexander himself was later given the rather double-edged epithet 'Philhellene', or 'friend to the Greeks'.

Linguistically, it now seems certain the Macedonians spoke a rough northern dialect of the Greek language, barely intelligible to non-Macedonians. The name 'Philip', we are told, was pronounced 'Bilip'. But 'Greekness' in the fifth and fourth centuries BC was not so much based on a common language as on a shared culture. Speaking Greek was less important than behaving Greek. Similarly, even today, the British are in many respects culturally far closer to their immediate European neighbours, the Dutch or the Germans, than they are to the North Americans with whom they share a language. And Macedonian culture was, as we have seen, radically different from that of its Greek neighbours. The Macedonians were ruled by kings; they were organized into *ethnē* or tribes rather than city-states; wealth was displayed in lavish burials rather than grand religious sanctuaries. In the face of such stark

cultural differences, it is no surprise that both the Macedonians and the Greeks chose to see themselves as ethnically distinct.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The question of the ethnicity of the ancient Macedonians has become inextricably entangled with modern Balkan politics. Under Ottoman rule (from the fourteenth to the early twentieth century), the territory of ancient Macedonia was inhabited by a bewildering mixture of ethnic groups: Greeks, Turks, Albanians, Slavs, to say nothing of substantial Jewish and Gypsy minorities. In 1913 this territory was partitioned between Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia (later Yugoslavia). Both Bulgaria and Greece rapidly adopted a policy of enforced ethnic and linguistic uniformity. The Greeks denied outright the existence of any separate Macedonian ethnic group, in either antiquity or the present day. Both the ancient and modern Macedonians were Greeks, pure and simple. In Yugoslavia, things were different. In 1944 Tito established a separate People's Republic of Macedonia within the Yugoslav federation, with its own distinct Macedonian language (related to, but distinct from, other Slavic tongues) and Macedonian Church. For the Greeks, this Yugoslav 'Macedonia' was a contradiction in terms, inhabited as it was by Slavs who could not possibly possess any claim to the name 'Macedonian'.

With the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991, the 'Macedonian question' entered a new and increasingly acrimonious phase. On 17 November 1991 the Republic of Macedonia declared its independence from Yugoslavia. However, the recognition of Macedonia as an independent state by the European Community and the United Nations was immediately derailed by Greek objections over the country's designation. The Greeks successfully argued that the EC should not recognize any of the former Yugoslav republics which used a name 'that implies territorial claims towards a neighbouring Community state'. The situation was not helped by the stated aim of some extreme Macedonian nationalists to 'liberate' those parts of Macedonia 'temporarily occupied' by Greece. In 1993, a compromise was brokered by which the Republic of Macedonia would provisionally be referred to by all parties (including the EC and the UN) as 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' (FYROM). Confusingly, it was agreed that this should not be understood as the country's official *name*, but merely

as a way of *referring* to the country pending a resolution of the dispute (hence 'former', without a capital letter). Inconveniently, members of the UN General Assembly are seated in the Assembly Hall according to alphabetical order. Greece objected to representatives from the FYROM being seated under 'M', since that would imply that the 'real' name of the country was 'Macedonia'; the Republic of Macedonia similarly objected to its representatives being seated under 'F' or 'Y'. As a consequence, Macedonian delegates to the UN are today seated under 'T' for 'The', between Thailand and Timor.

In 359 BC Philip II succeeded to the throne of lower Macedonia. Not the least of Philip's achievements was the permanent incorporation of the semi-independent principalities of upper Macedonia into his lowland kingdom. Philip's son, Alexander the Great, would later remind these highlanders that they had previously been 'helpless nomads, clothed in animal hides, pasturing a few animals on the mountains'; it was Philip who gave them cloaks to wear instead of skins, brought them down into the plains, and – most tellingly – started the process of turning them into Greek-style city-dwellers. The neighbouring tribes in the central and western Balkans, the Epirots, Illyrians and Paeonians, were swiftly brought into the Macedonian orbit, by means of marriage alliances or military force. Philip then turned his attention eastward, to the vast agricultural and mineral resources of the Greek cities of the Chalcidice peninsula and the Thracian coast. Between 357 and 348, these cities were either incorporated into Philip's kingdom (Amphipolis, Pydna, Potidaea) or annihilated (Olynthus). Simultaneously, Philip was exploiting discord between the Greek states to the south. An exhausting struggle for the mastery of central Greece between Phocis and Thebes (355–346 BC) was brilliantly turned by Philip to his own advantage. A plea from the Thessalians for support against Phocis in 353 had handed Philip effective mastery of Thessaly; by 346, with the break-up of the Phocian state, Philip was left as the dominant player in the central Greek mainland. Finally, in late summer 338 BC Philip shattered the combined forces of Athens and Thebes on the battlefield of Chaeronea. The political independence of the city-states of mainland Greece was at an end; the whole of the southern Balkan peninsula was now effectively subject to Macedonia. Within the space of twenty years, Macedon had grown from

a minor state on the northern fringes of the Greek world to the greatest power of the eastern Mediterranean basin.

Political subjection to Macedon had less impact on the Greek cities than one might have expected. Philip, like his ancestor Alexander I, chose to downplay the cultural differences between Greeks and Macedonians (or at least between Greeks and the Macedonian royal house). Significantly, his silver and gold coinages carry images commemorating his victories in the horse race and two-horse chariot race at the Olympic games, in 356 and 348 respectively; for Philip, as for Alexander I, participation in the Olympic games was a way of signalling his cultural affiliations with the Greek world. Rather than imposing direct Macedonian rule on the Greek states, Philip established a Common Peace, to be enforced by a League of Greek states, with regular meetings at Corinth. Naturally, the dominant position in the League of Corinth, the office of *hegemon* or 'leader', was reserved for Philip and his descendants. Only Macedonian leadership would preserve the unity of the Greek world. The Athenian orator Isocrates, in his pamphlet *Philippus* of 346 BC, had already emphasized the European character of Philip's kingdom – Philip was the 'greatest of the kings of Europe' – as a means of identifying Philip's interests with those of the Greeks without actually having to argue that Philip *was* Greek. It is no coincidence that Philip's youngest daughter, born shortly after his victory at Chaeronea, was given the name 'Europa'. (Philip was well aware of the propaganda value of a well-chosen name: in 351, shortly after bringing Thessaly into the Macedonian orbit, he had named another daughter Thessalonike, 'victory in Thessaly'.)

When Philip was murdered in a court intrigue in 336 BC, he was succeeded by his eldest son, Alexander III ('the Great'). Alexander continued his father's policy of cultural Hellenism. When Thebes rebelled against Macedonian rule in 335 BC, Alexander sacked the city and sold the inhabitants into slavery, presenting his actions as belated retribution for Theban Medizing during the Persian Wars. The house of the Panhellenic poet Pindar, who had written a praise-poem of Alexander's ancestor, Alexander I the Philhellene, was ostentatiously spared. Around the same time, Alexander refounded Plataea, the site of the decisive battle against Xerxes' forces in 479, which had been destroyed by Thebes in 373. It was all too clear where the young king's thoughts were tending. Philip had long been contemplating a pan-European campaign against the Persian empire; indeed, at the time of his death, an advance party of

Macedonians and Greek allies was already ravaging Persian territory in western Asia Minor, under the Panhellenic auspices of the League of Corinth.

Early in his history of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides remarks that the term *barbaros* is nowhere used by Homer, 'because, in my opinion, the Greeks were not yet distinguished from barbarians by means of a single common name'. This is a very acute observation. The *Iliad* shows little interest in ethnic or cultural differences between the Achaeans and the Trojans. Thucydides has grasped the crucial point that the concept of the barbarian is inextricably bound up with the idea of Greekness; only once the Greeks began to see themselves as a single people with shared characteristics – common shrines, common language, common ancestry – did they learn to regard non-Greeks as a single group. Likewise, Homer has no sense of a division of the world into two separate continents. As late as the sixth-century *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, 'Europe' is simply a convenient term for mainland Greece north of the Isthmus, with none of the broader geographical and political connotations which it would develop in the fifth and fourth centuries. The 150 years between Plataea and Chaeronea had seen the emergence of a common Greek identity, forged by the violent encounter with the Persian barbarian. The boundary between Europe and Asia thus took on immense cultural significance. Finally, with the rise of Macedon as the dominant power in the Greek world, being European necessarily came to signify something more than being Greek. Philip and Alexander, in their attempts to link the Greek and Macedonian cultural spheres, could plausibly be claimed as the first self-conscious Europeans.

In 334 BC Alexander marched east from Macedon. Shortly before crossing the narrow straits of the Hellespont, he turned aside to sacrifice at the tomb of Protesilaus at Elaeus. Like Protesilaus, as his ship beached on the shore of the Troad, Alexander made sure to be the first to leap ashore onto Asian soil. The two continents were about to be brought closer together than ever before.

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Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic World: 334–146 BC

In the eighteenth chapter of the Qur'an, an account is given of an enigmatic figure called Dhūl Qarnayn, the Two-Horned One. Allah is said to have given Dhūl Qarnayn power over the earth, enabling him to travel to the outer limits of the world, east and west. Most later Islamic scholars agreed that the figure of Dhūl Qarnayn was an allegory of Al-Iskandar, Alexander the Great. The two horns represented Alexander's rule over the two halves of the world, Rūm (Europe) and Persia. The ancient conquests of Al-Iskandar were understood as prefiguring the Arab conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries AD, which created an Islamic empire stretching from the Atlantic to India. At the city of Cadiz, beyond the straits of Gibraltar, where the Mediterranean and Atlantic meet, Al-Iskandar had built a lighthouse, indicating the point beyond which it was unsafe for ships to sail. In the far north, at the fringe of the central Asian steppe, he had constructed a great iron wall to keep out the unclean races of Gog and Magog. It was Alexander who had fixed the limits of the civilized world once and for all.

The geographical extent of Alexander's conquests was indeed astonishing. Between 334 and 330 BC Alexander overran the Asia Minor peninsula, Syria, Egypt, and the Persian heartlands of Mesopotamia and western Iran. The last Achaemenid king, Darius III, was overwhelmed in two great battles, at Issos and Gaugamela; the passing of the Persian world order was ceremoniously marked by the burning of the palaces of Xerxes at Persepolis in the winter of 331/0 BC. It is telling that after the capture of the four Persian royal capitals, Babylon and Susa in southern Mesopotamia and Persepolis and Ecbatana in western Iran, Alexander dismissed the Greek contingents in his army. The campaign of revenge for the Persian invasion of Greece, ostensibly undertaken on behalf of the League