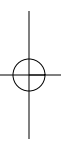
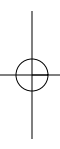




10

Mediterranean Society: The Greek Phase



Early Development of Greek Society

Minoan and Mycenaean Societies
The World of the Polis

Greece and the Larger World

Greek Colonization
Conflict with Persia
The Macedonians and the Coming of Empire
The Hellenistic Empires

The Fruits of Trade: Greek Economy and Society

Trade and the Integration of the Mediterranean Basin
Family and Society

The Cultural Life of Classical Greece

Rational Thought and Philosophy
Popular Religion and Greek Drama
Hellenistic Philosophy and Religion

For a man who perhaps never existed, Homer has been a profoundly influential figure. According to tradition, Homer composed the two great epic poems of ancient Greece, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In fact, scholars now know that bards recited both poems for generations before Homer lived—the mid-eighth century B.C.E., if he was indeed a historical figure. Some experts believe that Homer was not a real man so much as a convenient name for several otherwise anonymous scribes who committed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to writing. Others believe that a man named Homer had a part in preparing a written version of the epics, but that others also contributed significantly to his work.

Whether Homer ever really lived or not, the epics attributed to him deeply influenced the development of classical Greek thought and literature. The *Iliad* offered a Greek perspective on a campaign waged by a band of Greek warriors against the city of Troy in Anatolia during the twelfth century B.C.E. The *Odyssey* recounted the experiences of the Greek hero Odysseus as he sailed home after the Trojan war. The two works described scores of difficulties faced by Greek warriors—not only battles with Trojans but also challenges posed by deities and monsters, conflicts among themselves, and even psychological barriers that individuals had to surmount. Between them, the two epics preserved a rich collection of stories that literary figures mined for more than a millennium, reworking Homer's material and exploring his themes from fresh perspectives.

Quite apart from their significance as literary masterpieces, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* also testify to the frequency and normality of travel, communication, and interaction in the Mediterranean basin during the second and first millennia B.C.E. Both works portray Greeks as expert and fearless seamen, almost as comfortable aboard their ships as on land, who did not hesitate to venture into the waters of what Homer called the "wine-dark sea" in pursuit of their goals. Homer lovingly described the sleek galleys in which Greek warriors raced across the waters, sometimes to plunder the slower but heavily laden cargo vessels that plied the Mediterranean sea lanes, more often to launch strikes at enemy targets. He even had Odysseus construct a sailing ship single-handedly when he was shipwrecked on an island inhabited only by a goddess. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* make it clear that maritime links touched peoples throughout the Mediterranean basin in Homer's time and, further, that Greeks were among the most prominent seafarers of the age.

Already during the second millennium B.C.E., Phoenician merchants had established links between lands and peoples at the far ends of the Mediterranean Sea. During the classical era, however, the Mediterranean basin became much more tightly integrated as Greeks, and later

OPPOSITE: The theater at Delphi.

Romans as well, organized commercial exchange and sponsored interaction throughout the region. Under Greek and Roman supervision, the Mediterranean served not as a barrier but, rather, as a highway linking Anatolia, Egypt, Greece, Italy, France, Spain, north Africa, and even southern Russia (by way of routes through the Black Sea).

Ancient Greece differed from classical societies in other lands. Early in the classical era, the Greeks lived in autonomous city-states. Only after the late third century B.C.E. did they play prominent roles in the large, centralized empire established by their neighbors to the north in Macedon. Yet from the seventh through the second centuries B.C.E., the Greeks integrated the societies and economies of distant lands through energetic commercial activity over the Mediterranean sea lanes. They also generated a remarkable body of moral thought and philosophical reflection. Just as the traditions of classical Persia, China, and India shaped the cultural experiences of those lands, the traditions of the Greeks profoundly influenced the long-term cultural development of the Mediterranean basin, Europe, and southwest Asia as well.

Early Development of Greek Society

Humans inhabited the Balkan region and the Greek peninsula from an early but indeterminate date. During the third millennium B.C.E., they increasingly met and mingled with peoples from different societies who traveled and traded in the Mediterranean basin. As a result, early inhabitants of the Greek peninsula built their societies under the influence of Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Phoenicians, and others active in the region. Beginning in the ninth century B.C.E., the Greeks organized a series of city-states, which served as the political context for the development of classical Greek society.

Minoan and Mycenaean Societies

Knossos

During the late third millennium B.C.E., a sophisticated society arose on the island of Crete. Scholars refer to it as Minoan society, after Minos, a legendary king of ancient Crete. Between 2000 and 1700 B.C.E., the inhabitants of Crete built a series of lavish palaces throughout the island, most notably the enormous complex at Knossos decorated with vivid frescoes depicting Minoans at work and play. These palaces were the nerve centers of Minoan society: they were residences of rulers, and they also served as storehouses where officials collected taxes in kind from local cultivators. Palace officials devised a script known as Linear A, in which written symbols stood for syllables rather than words, ideas, vowels, or consonants. Although linguists have not yet been able to decipher Linear A, it is clear that Cretan administrators used the script to keep detailed records of economic and commercial matters.

Between 2200 and 1450 B.C.E., Crete was a principal center of Mediterranean commerce. Because of its geographic location in the east-central Mediterranean, Crete received early influences from Phoenicia and Egypt. By 2200 B.C.E. Cretans were traveling aboard advanced sailing craft of Phoenician design. Minoan ships sailed to Greece, Anatolia, Phoenicia, and Egypt, where Cretan wine, olive oil, and wool were exchanged for grains, textiles, and manufactured goods. Archaeologists have discovered pottery vessels used as storage containers for Minoan wine and olive oil as far away as Sicily. After 1600 B.C.E. Cretans established colonies on Cyprus and many islands in the Aegean Sea, probably to mine local copper ores and gain better access to markets where tin was available.

*Decline of
Minoan Society*

After 1700 B.C.E. Minoan society experienced a series of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tidal waves. Most destructive was a devastating volcanic eruption



A magnificent fresco from the town of Akrotiri on the island of Thera depicts a busy harbor, showing that Akrotiri traded actively with Crete and other Minoan sites. The volcanic eruption of Thera about 1628 B.C.E. destroyed Akrotiri.

about 1628 B.C.E. on the island of Thera (Santorini) north of Crete. Between 1600 and 1450 B.C.E., Cretans embarked on a new round of palace building to replace structures destroyed by those natural catastrophes: they built luxurious complexes with indoor plumbing and drainage systems and even furnished some of them with flush toilets. After 1450 B.C.E., however, the wealth of Minoan society attracted a series of invaders, and by 1100 B.C.E. Crete had fallen under foreign domination. Yet the Minoan traditions of maritime trade, writing, and construction deeply influenced the inhabitants of nearby Greece.

Beginning about 2200 B.C.E. migratory Indo-European peoples filtered over the Balkans and into the Greek peninsula. By 1600 B.C.E. they had begun to trade with Minoan merchants and visit Crete, where they learned about writing and large-scale construction. They adapted Minoan Linear A to their language, which was an early form of Greek, and devised a syllabic script known as Linear B. After 1450 B.C.E. they also built massive stone fortresses and palaces throughout the southern part of the Greek peninsula, known as the Peloponnese. Because the fortified sites offered protection, they soon attracted settlers who built small agricultural communities. Their society is known as Mycenaean, after Mycenae, one of their most important settlements.

From 1500 to 1100 B.C.E., the Mycenaean expanded their influence beyond peninsular Greece. They largely overpowered Minoan society, and they took over the Cretan palaces, where they established craft workshops. Archaeologists have unearthed thousands of clay tablets in Linear B that came from the archives of Mycenaean rulers in Crete as well as peninsular Greece. The Mycenaean also established settlements in Anatolia, Sicily, and southern Italy.

About 1200 B.C.E. the Mycenaean engaged in a conflict with the city of Troy in Anatolia. This Trojan war, which Homer recalled from a Greek perspective in his *Iliad*, coincided with invasions of foreign mariners in the Mycenaean homeland. Indeed, from 1100 to 800 B.C.E. chaos reigned throughout the eastern Mediterranean region. Invasions and civil disturbances made it impossible to maintain stable governments or even productive agricultural societies. Mycenaean palaces fell into ruin, the

Mycenaean Society

Chaos in the Eastern Mediterranean

Mycenaean (meye-seh-NEE-uhn)

The Polis

The Lion Gate at Mycenae illustrates the heavy fortifications built by Myceneans to protect their settlements.

Sparta

population sharply declined, and people abandoned most settlements. Many inhabitants of the Greek peninsula fled to the islands of the Aegean Sea, Anatolia, or Cyprus. Writing in both Linear A and Linear B disappeared. The boisterous character of the era comes across clearly in Homer's works. Though set in an earlier era, both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* reflect the tumultuous centuries after 1100 B.C.E. They portray a society riven with conflict, and they recount innumerable episodes of aggression, treachery, and violence alongside heroic bravery and courage.

The World of the Polis

In the absence of a centralized state or empire, local institutions took the lead in restoring political order in Greece. The most important institution was the city-state, or polis. The term *polis* originally referred to a citadel or fortified site that offered refuge for local communities during times of war or other emergencies. These sites attracted increasing populations, and many of them gradually became lively commercial centers. They took on an increasingly urban

character and extended their authority over surrounding regions. They levied taxes on their hinterlands and appropriated a portion of the agricultural surplus to support the urban population. By about 800 B.C.E. many *poleis* (the plural of polis) had become bustling city-states that functioned as the principal centers of Greek society.

The poleis took various political forms. Some differences reflected the fact that poleis emerged independently and elaborated their traditions with little outside influence. Others arose from different rates of economic development. A few poleis developed as small monarchies, but most were under the collective rule of local notables. Many fell into the hands of generals or ambitious politicians—called “tyrants” by the Greeks—who gained power by irregular means. (The tyrants were not necessarily oppressive despots: indeed, many of them were extremely popular leaders. The term *tyrant* referred to their routes to power rather than their policies.) The most important of the poleis were Sparta and Athens, whose contrasting constitutions illustrate the variety of political styles in classical Greece.

Sparta was situated in a fertile region of the Peloponnesus. As their population and economy expanded during the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E., the Spartans progressively extended their control over the Peloponnesus. In doing so, they re-



Map 10.1 Classical Greece, 800–350 B.C.E. Note the mountainous topography of the Greek peninsula and western Anatolia. To what extent did geography encourage Greeks to venture into the Mediterranean Sea?

duced neighboring peoples to the status of *helots*, servants of the Spartan state. Although they were not chattel slaves, the helots also were not free. They could form families, but they could not leave the land. Their role in society was to provide agricultural labor and keep Sparta supplied with food. By the sixth century B.C.E., the helots probably outnumbered the Spartan citizens by more than ten to one. With their large subject population, the Spartans were able to cultivate the Peloponnese efficiently, but they also faced the constant threat of rebellion. As a result, the Spartans devoted most of their resources to maintaining a powerful and disciplined military machine.

In theory, Spartan citizens were equal in status. To discourage the development of economic and social distinctions, Spartans observed an extraordinarily austere lifestyle as a matter of policy. They did not wear jewelry or elaborate clothes, nor did they pamper themselves with luxuries or accumulate private wealth on a large scale. They generally did not even circulate coins made of precious metals but, instead, used iron bars

Spartan Society



A painted cup produced in Sparta about 550 B.C.E. depicts hunters attacking a boar. Spartans regarded hunting as an exercise that helped to sharpen fighting skills and aggressive instincts.

for money. It is for good reason, then, that the adjective *spartan* refers to a lifestyle characterized by simplicity, frugality, and austerity.

Distinction among the ancient Spartans came not by wealth or social status, but by prowess, discipline, and military talent, which the Spartan educational system cultivated from an early age. All boys from families of Spartan citizens left their homes at age seven and went to live in military barracks, where they underwent a rigorous regime of physical training. At age twenty they began active military service, which they continued until retirement.

Spartan authorities also prescribed vigorous physical exercise for girls in hopes that they would bear strong children. When they reached age eighteen to twenty, young women married and had occasional sexual relations, but did not live with their husbands. Only at about age thirty did men leave the barracks and set up households with their wives and children.

By the fourth century B.C.E., Spartan society had lost much of its ascetic rigor. Aristocratic families had accumulated great wealth, and Spartans had developed a taste for luxury in food and dress. Nevertheless, Spartan society stood basically on the foundation of military discipline, and its institutions both reflected and reinforced the larger society's commitment to military values. In effect, Sparta sought to maintain public order—and discourage rebellion by the helots—by creating a military state that could crush any threat.

Athens

In Athens as in Sparta, population growth and economic development caused political and social strain, but the Athenians relieved tensions by establishing a government based on democratic principles. Whereas Sparta sought to impose order by military means, Athens sought to negotiate order by considering the interests of the polis's various constituencies. Citizenship was by no means open to all residents: only free adult males from Athens played a role in public affairs, leaving foreigners, slaves, and women with no direct voice in government. In seeking to resolve social problems, Athenians opened government offices to all citizens and broadened the base of political participation in classical Greece.

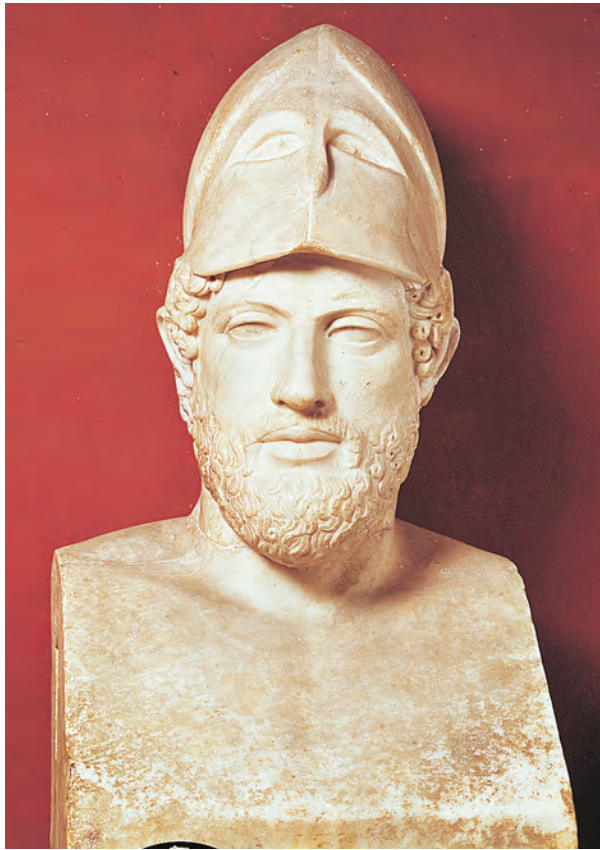
Athenian Society

During the seventh century B.C.E., an increasing volume of maritime trade brought prosperity to Attica, the region around Athens. The principal beneficiaries of that prosperity were aristocratic landowners, who also controlled the Athenian government. As their wealth grew, the aristocrats increased their landholdings and cultivated them with greater efficiency. Owners of small plots could not compete and fell heavily into debt. Competitive pressures often forced them to sell their holdings to aristocrats, and debt burdens sometimes overwhelmed them and pushed them into slavery.

By the early sixth century B.C.E., Attica had a large and growing class of people extremely unhappy with the structure of their society and poised to engage in war against their wealthy neighbors. Many poleis that experienced similar economic conditions suffered decades of brutal civil war between aristocrats and less privileged classes. In Athens, however, an aristocrat named Solon served as a mediator between classes, and he devised a solution to class conflict in Attica.

Solon forged a compromise between the classes. He allowed aristocrats to keep their lands—rather than confiscate them and redistribute them to landless individuals, as many of the less privileged preferred—but he cancelled debts, forbade debt slavery, and liberated those already enslaved for debt. To ensure that aristocrats would not undermine his reforms, Solon also provided representation for the common classes in the Athenian government by opening the councils of the polis to any citizen wealthy enough to devote time to public affairs, regardless of his lineage. Later reformers went even further. During the late sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E., Athenian leaders increased opportunities for commoners to participate in government, and they paid salaries to officeholders so financial hardship would not exclude anyone from service.

Those reforms gradually transformed Athens into a democratic state. The high tide of Athenian democracy came under the leadership of the statesman Pericles. Though he was of aristocratic birth, Pericles was the most popular Athenian leader from 461 B.C.E. until his death in 429 B.C.E. He wielded enormous personal influence in a government with hundreds of officeholders from the common classes, and he supported building programs that provided employment for thousands of construction workers and laborers. Under the leadership of Pericles, Athens became the most sophisticated of the poleis, with a vibrant community of scientists, philosophers, poets, dramatists, artists, and architects. Little wonder, then, that in a moment of civic pride, Pericles boasted that Athens was “the education of Greece.”



The image of Pericles, wearing a helmet that symbolizes his post as Athenian leader, survives in a Roman copy of a Greek statue.

Solon and Athenian Democracy

Pericles

Greece and the Larger World

As the poleis prospered, Greeks became increasingly prominent in the larger world of the Mediterranean basin. They established colonies along the shores of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and they traded throughout the region. Eventually, their political and economic interests brought them into conflict with the expanding Persian empire. During the fifth century B.C.E., a round of intermittent war between the Greeks



Map 10.2 Classical Greece and the Mediterranean basin, 800–500 B.C.E. All the Greek colonies were located on the coastlines of the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea. In what ways did the colonies serve as links between Greece and the larger Mediterranean region?

and the Persians ended in stalemate, but in the next century Alexander of Macedon toppled the Achaemenid empire. Indeed, Alexander built an empire stretching from India to Egypt and Greece. His conquests created a vast zone of trade and communication that encouraged commercial and cultural exchange on an unprecedented scale.

Greek Colonization

By about 800 B.C.E. the poleis were emerging as centers of political organization in Greece. During the next century increasing population strained the resources available in the rocky and mountainous Greek peninsula. To relieve population pressures, the Greeks began to establish colonies in other parts of the Mediterranean basin. Between the mid-eighth and the late sixth centuries B.C.E., they founded more than four hundred colonies along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea.

The Greeks established their first colonies in the central Mediterranean during the early eighth century B.C.E. The most popular sites were Sicily and southern Italy, particularly the region around modern Naples, which was itself originally a Greek colony called Neapolis (“new polis”). These colonies provided merchants not only with fertile fields that yielded large agricultural surpluses but also with convenient access to the copper, zinc, tin, and iron ores of central Italy. By the sixth century B.C.E., Greek colonies dotted the shores of Sicily and southern Italy, and more Greeks lived in these colonies than in the Greek peninsula itself. By 600 B.C.E. the Greeks had ventured even farther west and established the important colony of Massalia (modern Marseilles) in what is now southern France.

Greek colonies arose also in the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Hundreds of islands in the Aegean Sea beckoned to a maritime people such as the Greeks. Colonists also settled in Anatolia, where their Greek cousins had established communities during the centuries of political turmoil after 1100 B.C.E. During the eighth and

Greek Colonies

seventh centuries B.C.E., Greeks ventured into the Black Sea in large numbers and established colonies all along its shores. These settlements offered merchants access to rich supplies of grain, fish, furs, timber, honey, wax, gold, and amber as well as slaves captured in southern Russia and transported to markets in the Mediterranean.

Unlike their counterparts in classical Persia, China, and India, the Greeks did not build a centralized imperial state. Greek colonization was not a process controlled by a central government so much as an ad hoc response of individual poleis to population pressures. Colonies often did not take guidance from the poleis from which their settlers came but, rather, relied on their own resources and charted their own courses.

Nevertheless, Greek colonization sponsored more communication, interaction, and exchange than ever before among Mediterranean lands and peoples. From the early eighth century B.C.E., colonies facilitated trade between their regions and the poleis in peninsular Greece and Anatolia. At the same time, colonization spread Greek language and cultural traditions throughout the Mediterranean basin. Moreover, the Greek presence quickened the tempo of social life, especially in the western Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Except for a few urban districts surrounding Phoenician colonies in the western Mediterranean, these regions were home mostly to small-scale agricultural societies organized by clans. As Greek merchants brought wealth into these societies, local clan leaders built small states in areas such as Sicily, southern Italy, southern France, the Crimean peninsula, and southern Russia where trade was especially strong. Thus Greek colonization had important political and social effects throughout the Mediterranean basin.

Conflict with Persia

During the fifth century B.C.E., their links abroad brought the poleis of the Greek peninsula into direct conflict with the Persian empire in a long struggle known as the Persian Wars (500–479 B.C.E.). As the Persian emperors Cyrus and Darius tightened their grip on Anatolia, the Greek cities on the Ionian coast became increasingly restless. In 500 B.C.E. they revolted against Persian rule and expelled the Achaemenid administrators. In support of their fellow Greeks and commercial partners, the Athenians sent a fleet of ships to aid the Ionian effort. Despite that gesture, Darius repressed the Ionian rebellion by 493 B.C.E.

To punish the Athenians and forestall future interference in Persian affairs, Darius then mounted a campaign against peninsular Greece. In 490 B.C.E. he sent an army and a fleet of ships to attack Athens. Although greatly outnumbered, the Athenians routed the Persian army at the battle of Marathon and then marched back to Athens in time to fight off the Persian fleet.



Two Greek ships under sail, a merchant vessel (left) and a galley (right) powered by oars as well as sails.

Effects of Greek Colonization

The Persian Wars

Ten years later Darius's successor, Xerxes, decided to avenge the Persian losses. In 480 B.C.E. he dispatched a force consisting of perhaps one hundred thousand troops and a fleet of one thousand ships to subdue the Greeks. The Persian army succeeded in capturing and burning Athens, but a Greek fleet led by Athenians shattered the Persian navy at the battle of Salamis. Xerxes himself viewed the conflict from a temporary throne set up on a hillside overlooking the narrow strait of water between Athens and the island of Salamis. The following year a Greek force at Plataea routed the Persian army, whose survivors retreated to Anatolia.

Greeks and Persians continued to skirmish intermittently for more than a century, although their conflict did not expand into full-scale war. The Persian rulers were unwilling to invest resources in the effort to conquer small and distant Greece, and after Xerxes' reign they faced domestic problems that prevented them from undertaking foreign adventures. For their part, the Greeks had neither the resources nor the desire to challenge the Persian empire, and they remained content with maintaining their independence.

The Delian League

Once the Persian threat subsided, however, serious conflict arose among the Greek poleis themselves. After the Persian Wars, the poleis created an alliance known as the Delian League to discourage further Persian actions in Greece. Because of its superior fleet, Athens became the leader of the alliance. In effect, Athens supplied the league's military force, and the other poleis contributed financial support, which went largely to the Athenian treasury. Indeed, those contributions financed much of the Athenian bureaucracy and the vast construction projects that employed Athenian workers during the era of Pericles' leadership. In the absence of a continuing Persian threat, however, the other poleis resented having to make contributions that seemed to benefit only the Athenians.

The Peloponnesian War

Ultimately, the tensions resulted in a bitter and destructive civil conflict known as the Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.E.). Both in peninsular Greece and throughout the larger Greek world, poleis divided into two armed camps under the leadership of Athens and Sparta, the most powerful of the poleis and the principal contenders for hegemony in the Greek world. The fortunes of war favored first one side, then the other, but by 404 B.C.E. the Spartans and their allies had forced the Athenians to unconditional surrender. Sparta's victory soon generated new jealousies, however, and conflicts broke out again. During the decades following Athenian surrender, hegemony in the Greek world passed to Sparta, Thebes, Corinth, and other poleis.

The Peloponnesian War was both a debilitating and a demoralizing conflict. The historian Thucydides wrote a detailed history of the war, and even though he was himself a loyal native of Athens, he did not hide the fact that Athenians as well as other parties to the conflict adopted brutal tactics. Athenians bullied smaller communities, disregarded the interests and concerns of other poleis, insisted that allies resolutely toe the Athenian line, and subjected insubordinate communities to severe punishments. When the small island of Melos refused to acknowledge the authority of Athens, for example, Thucydides reported that Athenian forces conquered the island, massacred all the men of military age, and sold the women and children into slavery. As a result of that and other atrocities, Athens lost its reputation as the moral and intellectual leader of the Greek people and gained notoriety as an arrogant, insensitive imperialist power. Meanwhile, as the Peloponnesian War divided and weakened the world of the Greek poleis, a formidable power took shape to the north.

The Macedonians and the Coming of Empire

The Kingdom of Macedon

Until the fourth century B.C.E., the kingdom of Macedon was a frontier state north of peninsular Greece. The Macedonian population consisted partly of cultivators and



Pericles organized the construction of numerous marble buildings, partly with funds collected from poleis belonging to the Delian League. Most notable of his projects was the Parthenon, a temple dedicated to the goddess Athena, which symbolizes the prosperity and grandeur of classical Athens.

partly of shepherders who migrated seasonally between the mountains and the valleys. Although the Macedonians recognized a king, semiautonomous clans controlled political affairs.

Proximity to the wealthy poleis of Greece brought change to Macedon. From the seventh century B.C.E., the Greek cities traded with Macedon. They imported grain, timber, and other natural resources in exchange for olive oil, wine, and finished products. Macedonian political and social elites, who controlled trade from their side of the border, became well acquainted with Greek merchants and their society.

During the reign of King Philip II (359–336 B.C.E.), Macedon underwent a thorough transformation. Philip built a powerful military machine that enabled him to overcome the traditional clans and make himself the ruler of Macedon. His military force featured an infantry composed of small landowners and a cavalry staffed by aristocrats holding large estates. During the fourth century B.C.E., both elements proved to be hardy, well trained, and nearly invincible.

When Philip had consolidated his hold on Macedon, he turned his attention to two larger prizes: Greece and the Persian empire. During the years following 350 B.C.E., Philip moved into northern Greece, annexing poleis and their surrounding territories. The poleis recognized the Macedonian threat, but the Peloponnesian War had poisoned the atmosphere so much that the poleis could not agree to form an alliance against Philip. Thus as he moved into Greece, Philip faced nothing more than small forces patched together by shifting and temporary alliances. By 338 B.C.E. he had overcome all organized resistance and brought Greece under his control.

Philip intended to use his conquest of Greece as a launching pad for an invasion of Persia. He did not have the opportunity to carry out his plans, however, because an assassin brought him down in 336 B.C.E. The invasion of Persia thus fell to his son, the young Alexander of Macedon, often called Alexander the Great.

At the age of twenty, Alexander succeeded Philip as ruler of an expanding empire. He soon began to assemble an army of about forty-eight thousand men to invade the Persian empire. Alexander was a brilliant strategist and an inspired leader, and he inherited a well-equipped, well-disciplined, highly spirited veteran force from his father. By

Philip of Macedon

Alexander of Macedon

Alexander's Conquests



Wearing a lion skin around his head, Alexander the warrior plunges into battle with Persian forces in this carving from his sarcophagus.

333 B.C.E. Alexander had subjected Ionia and Anatolia to his control; within another year he held Syria, Palestine, and Egypt; by 331 B.C.E. he controlled Mesopotamia and prepared to invade the Persian homeland. He took Pasargadae and burned the Achaemenid palace at Persepolis late in 331 B.C.E., and he pursued the dispirited Persian army for another year until the last Achaemenid ruler fell to an assassin. Alexander established himself as the new emperor of Persia in 330 B.C.E.

By 327 B.C.E. Alexander had larger ambitions: he took his army into India and crossed the Indus River, entering the Punjab. He subjected local rulers and probably would have continued to campaign in India except that his troops refused to proceed any farther from home.

By 324 B.C.E. Alexander and his army had returned to Susa in Mesopotamia, where they celebrated their exploits in almost continuous feasting. Alexander busied himself with plans for governing his empire and for conducting further explorations. In June of 323 B.C.E., however, after an extended round of feasting and drinking, he suddenly fell ill and died at age thirty-three.

During the course of a meteoric career, Alexander proved to be a brilliant conqueror, but he did not live long enough to construct a genuine state for his vast realm or to develop a system of administration. He established cities throughout the lands he conquered and reportedly named about seventy of them Alexandria in his own honor. Alexander also toyed with some intriguing ideas about governing his empire, notably a scheme to marry his officers to Persian women and create a new ruling class of Greek, Macedonian, and Persian ancestry, but his early death prevented him from turning that plan into a coherent policy. So long as he lived, he relied on established institutions such as the Persian satrapies to administer the lands he conquered.

The Hellenistic Empires

When Alexander died, his generals jockeyed for position in hopes of taking over choice parts of his realm, and by 275 B.C.E. they had divided the empire into three large states. Antigonos took Greece and Macedon, which his Antigonid successors ruled until the Romans established their authority in the eastern Mediterranean during the second century B.C.E. Ptolemy took Egypt, which the Ptolemaic dynasty ruled until the Roman conquest of Egypt in 31 B.C.E. Seleucus took the largest portion, the former Achaemenid empire stretching from Bactria to Anatolia, which his Seleucid successors ruled until the Parthians displaced them during the second century B.C.E.

The Hellenistic Era

Historians refer to the age of Alexander and his successors as the Hellenistic age—an era when Greek cultural traditions expanded their influence beyond Greece (*Hellas*) to a much larger world. During the centuries between Alexander's death and the expansion of the Roman empire in the eastern Mediterranean, the Hellenistic empires governed cosmopolitan societies and sponsored interactions between peoples from Greece to India. Like imperial states in classical Persia, China, and India, the Hellenis-

Sources from the Past

Arrian on the Character of Alexander of Macedon

One of the earliest surviving accounts of Alexander's life and career is that of Flavius Arrianus Xenophon, better known as Arrian. Although Greek, Arrian served in the armies of the early Roman empire and developed a strong interest in military history. About the middle of the second century C.E., he composed his work on Alexander, drawing on contemporary accounts that no longer survive. Here he assesses Alexander's character.

He had great personal beauty, invincible power of endurance, and a keen intellect; he was brave and adventurous, strict in the observance of his religious duties, and hungry for fame. Most temperate in the pleasures of the body, his passion was for glory only, and in that he was insatiable. He had an uncanny instinct for the right course in a difficult and complex situation, and was most happy in his deductions from observed facts. In arming and equipping troops and in his military dispositions he was always masterly. Noble indeed was his power of inspiring his men, of filling them with confidence, and, in the moment of danger, of sweeping away their fear by the spectacle of his own fearlessness. When risks had to be taken, he took them with the utmost boldness, and his ability to seize the moment for a swift blow, before his enemy had any suspicion of what was coming, was beyond praise. No cheat or liar ever caught him off his guard, and both his word and his bond were inviolable. Spending but little on his own pleasures, he poured out his money without stint for the benefit of his friends.

Doubtless, in the passion of the moment Alexander sometimes erred; it is true that he took some steps towards the pomp and arrogance of the Asiatic kings: but I, at least, cannot feel that such errors were very heinous, if the circumstances are taken fairly into consideration. For, after all, he was young; the chain of his successes was unbroken, and, like all kings, past, present, and to come, he was surrounded by courtiers who spoke to please, regardless of what evil their words might do. On the other hand, I do indeed know that Alexander, of all the monarchs of old, was the only one who had the nobility of heart to be sorry for his mistakes . . .

. . . As for his reputed heavy drinking, Aristoboulos [one of Alexander's generals who composed an account of the conqueror that was available to Arrian but

that does not survive] declares that his drinking bouts were prolonged not for their own sake—for he was never, in fact, a heavy drinker—but simply because he enjoyed the companionship of his friends.

Anyone who belittles Alexander has no right to do so on the evidence only of what merits censure in him; he must base his criticism on a comprehensive view of his whole life and career. But let such a person, if blackguard Alexander he must, first compare himself with the object of his abuse: himself, so mean and obscure, and, confronting him, the great King with his unparalleled worldly success, the undisputed monarch of two continents [Europe and Asia], who spread the power of his name over all the earth. Will he dare to abuse him then, when he knows his own littleness and the triviality of his own pursuits, which, even so, prove too much for his ability?

It is my belief that there was in those days no nation, no city, no single individual beyond the reach of Alexander's name; never in all the world was there another like him, and therefore I cannot but feel that some power more than human was concerned in his birth; indications of this were, moreover, said to be provided at the time of his death by oracles; many people saw visions and had prophetic dreams; and there is the further evidence of the extraordinary way in which he is held, as no mere man could be, in honour and remembrance. Even today, when so many years have passed, there have been oracles, all tending to his glory, delivered to the people of Macedon.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

On the basis of Arrian's characterization, do you think Alexander had strong potential to become an effective governor as well as a talented conqueror?

SOURCE: Arrian. *The Campaigns of Alexander*. Trans. by Aubrey de Sélincourt. Rev. by J. R. Hamilton. London: Penguin, 1971, pp. 395–98.

tic empires helped to integrate the economies and societies of distant regions. They facilitated trade, and they made it possible for beliefs, values, and religions to spread over greater distances than ever before.



Map 10.3 Alexander's empire, ca. 323 B.C.E. Compare the boundaries of Alexander's empire with those of the Achaemenid empire as depicted in Map 7.1. How was Alexander able to bring such extensive territories under his control?

The Antigonid Empire

Although the Antigonid realm of Greece and Macedon was the smallest of the Hellenistic empires, it benefited handsomely from the new order. There was continual tension between the Antigonid rulers and the Greek cities, which sought to retain their independence by forming defensive leagues that stoutly resisted Antigonid efforts to control the Greek peninsula. The poleis often struck bargains with the Antigonids, offering to recognize their rule in exchange for tax relief and local autonomy. Internal social tensions also flared, as Greeks wrestled with the perennial problem of land and its equitable distribution. Yet cities such as Athens and Corinth flourished during the Hellenistic era as enormous volumes of trade passed through their ports. Moreover, the overpopulated Greek peninsula sent large numbers of colonists to newly founded cities, especially in the Seleucid empire.

The Ptolemaic Empire

Perhaps the wealthiest of the Hellenistic empires was Ptolemaic Egypt. Greek and Macedonian overlords did not interfere in Egyptian society, but contented themselves with the efficient organization of agriculture, industry, and tax collection. They maintained the irrigation networks and monitored the cultivation of crops and the payment of taxes. They also established royal monopolies over the most lucrative industries, such as textiles, salt making, and the brewing of beer.

Alexandria

Much of Egypt's wealth flowed to the Ptolemaic capital of Alexandria. Founded by Alexander at the mouth of the Nile, Alexandria served as the Ptolemies' administrative headquarters, but it became much more than a bureaucratic center. Alexandria's enormous harbor was able to accommodate 1,200 ships simultaneously, and the city soon became the most important port in the Mediterranean. Its wealth attracted

Ptolemaic (TAWL-oh-may-ihk)



Map 10.4 The Hellenistic empires, ca. 275 B.C.E. Note the differences in size between the three Hellenistic empires. Consider the geographical conditions and economic potential of the three empires.

migrants from all parts of the Mediterranean basin and beyond. Alongside Greeks, Macedonians, and Egyptians lived sizable communities of Phoenicians, Jews, Arabs, and Babylonians. The city was indeed an early megalopolis, where peoples of different ethnic, religious, and cultural traditions conducted their affairs. Under the Ptolemies, Alexandria also became the cultural capital of the Hellenistic world. It was the site of the famous Alexandrian Museum—a state-financed institute of higher learning where philosophical, literary, and scientific scholars carried on advanced research—and of the equally famous Alexandrian Library, which supported the scholarship sponsored by the museum and which, by the first century B.C.E., boasted a collection of more than seven hundred thousand works.

It was in the Seleucid realm, however, that Greek influence reached its greatest extent. The principal channels of that influence were the numerous cities that Alexander and his successors founded in the former Persian empire. Most of them were small settlements intended to serve as fortified sites or administrative centers, though some developed into thriving commercial centers. Greek and Macedonian colonists flocked to these cities, where they joined the ranks of imperial bureaucrats and administrators. Though few in number compared with the native populations, the colonists created a Mediterranean-style urban society that left its mark on lands as distant as Bactria and India. Emperor Ashoka of India had his edicts promulgated in Greek and Aramaic, the two most commonly used languages of the Hellenistic empires.

Archaeological excavations have thrown considerable light on one of those Greek settlements—the Hellenistic colony at Ai Khanum on the Oxus River in ancient Bactria

The Seleucid Empire

Greeks in Bactria

(modern-day Afghanistan). The colony at Ai Khanum was founded either by Alexander of Macedon or by Seleucus shortly after Alexander's death. As an integral part of the Seleucid empire, Bactria was in constant communication with Greece and the Mediterranean world. After about 250 B.C.E. the governors of Bactria withdrew from the Seleucid empire and established an independent Greek kingdom. Excavations at Ai Khanum show that the colony's inhabitants spoke the Greek language, dressed according to Greek fashions, read Greek literature and philosophy, and constructed buildings and produced works of art in Greek styles. At the same time, while honoring Greek gods at Greek shrines, residents of Ai Khanum also welcomed Persian and central Asian deities into their midst. Indeed, some Greeks even converted to Buddhism. Most prominent of the converts was King Menander, who ruled in Bactria approximately 160 to 135 B.C.E. In many ways, like the Achaemenids before them, the Hellenistic ruling classes constituted a thin, supervisory veneer over long-established societies that largely continued to observe inherited customs. Nevertheless, like classical states in Persia, China, and India, the Hellenistic empires brought distant lands into interaction by way of trade and cultural exchange.

The Fruits of Trade: Greek Economy and Society

The geography of the Greek peninsula posed difficult challenges for its inhabitants: its mountainous terrain and rocky soil yielded only small harvests of grain, and the southern Balkan mountains hindered travel and communication. Indeed, until the construction of modern roads, much of Greece was more accessible by sea than by land. As a result, early Greek society depended heavily on maritime trade.

Trade and the Integration of the Mediterranean Basin

Trade

Although it produced little grain, much of Greece is ideally suited to the cultivation of olives and grapes. After the establishment of the poleis, the Greeks discovered that they could profitably concentrate their efforts on the production of olive oil and wine. Greek merchants traded these products around the Mediterranean, returning with abundant supplies of grain and other items as well.

By the early eighth century B.C.E., trade had generated considerable prosperity in the Greek world. Merchants and mariners linked Greek communities throughout the Mediterranean world—not only those in the Greek peninsula but also those in Anatolia, the Mediterranean islands, and the Black Sea. The populations of all these communities grew dramatically, encouraging further colonization. In the colonies merchants offered Greek olive oil and wine for local products. Grain came from Egypt, Sicily, and southern Russia, salted fish from Spain and Black Sea lands, timber and pitch from Macedon, tin from Anatolia, and slaves from Egypt and Russia. Merchant ships with a capacity of four hundred tons were common in the classical Mediterranean, and a few vessels had a capacity of one thousand tons. Some cities, such as Athens and Corinth, relied more on commerce than on agriculture for their livelihood and prosperity.

Commercial and Economic Organization

Large volumes of trade promoted commercial and economic organization in the Mediterranean basin. In Greece, for example, shipowners, merchants, and moneylenders routinely formed partnerships to spread the risks of commercial ventures. Usually, a merchant borrowed money from a banker or an individual to purchase cargo and rented space from a shipowner, who transported the goods and returned the profits to the merchant. In the event of a shipwreck, the contract became void,

leaving both the merchant and the lender to absorb their losses.

The production of cultivators and manufacturers filled the holds of Mediterranean merchant vessels. Manufacturers usually operated on a small scale, but there are records of pottery workshops with upward of sixty employees. One factory in fourth-century Athens employed 120 slaves in the manufacture of shields. Throughout the trading world of the Mediterranean basin, entrepreneurs established small businesses and offered their wares in the larger market.

Trade links between the Greek cities and their colonies contributed to a sense of a larger Greek community. Colonists recognized the same gods as their cousins in the Greek peninsula. They spoke Greek dialects, and they maintained commercial relationships with their native communities. Greeks from all parts gathered periodically to participate in panhellenic festivals that reinforced their common bonds. Many of those festivals featured athletic, literary, or musical contests in which individuals sought to win glory for their polis.

Best known of the panhellenic festivals were the Olympic Games. According to tradition, in 776 B.C.E. Greek communities from all parts of the Mediterranean sent their best athletes to the polis of Olympia to engage in contests of speed, strength, and skill. Events included footracing, long jump, boxing, wrestling, javelin tossing, and discus throwing. Winners of events received olive wreaths, and they became celebrated heroes in their home poleis. The ancient Olympic Games took place every four years for more than a millennium before quietly disappearing from Greek life. So, although they were not united politically, by the sixth century B.C.E. Greek communities had nevertheless established a sense of collective identity.

During the Hellenistic era, trade drew the Greeks into an even larger world of commerce and communication as colonists and traders expanded the range of their operations throughout Alexander's empire and the realms that succeeded him. Caravan trade linked Persia and Bactria to the western regions of the Hellenistic world. Dependent on horses and donkeys, caravans could not transport heavy or bulky goods but, rather, carried luxury products such as gems and jewelry, perfumes and aromatic oils. These



Harvesting olives. In this painting on a vase, two men knock fruit off the branches while a third climbs the tree to shake the limbs, and another gathers olives from the ground.

Panhellenic Festivals

The Olympic Games

goods all had high value relative to weight so that merchants could feed themselves and their animals, pay the high costs of overland transport, and still turn a profit. Traffic in bulkier goods traveled the sea lanes of the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Arabian Sea.

Family and Society

Homer's works portrayed a society composed of heroic warriors and their outspoken wives. Strong-willed human beings clashed constantly with one another and sometimes even defied the gods in pursuing their interests. These aggressive and assertive characters depended on less flamboyant individuals to provide them with food and other necessities, but Homer had no interest in discussing the humdrum lives of farmers and their families.

Patriarchal Society

With the establishment of poleis in the eighth century B.C.E., the nature of Greek family and society came into clearer focus. Like urban societies in southwest Asia and Anatolia, the Greek poleis adopted strictly patriarchal family structures. Male family heads ruled their households, and fathers even had the right to decide whether to keep infants born to their wives. They could not legally kill infants, but they could abandon newborns in the mountains or the countryside where they would soon die of exposure unless found and rescued by others.

Greek women fell under the authority of their fathers, husbands, or sons. Upper-class women living in poleis spent most of their time in the family home, and they ventured outside in the company of servants or chaperones and often wore veils to discourage the attention of men from other families. In most of the poleis, women could not own landed property, but they sometimes operated small businesses such as shops and food stalls. The only public position open to Greek women was that of priestess of a religious cult. Sparta was something of a special case when it came to gender relations: there women participated in athletic contests, went about town by themselves, joined in public festivals, and sometimes even took up arms to defend the polis. Even in Sparta, however, men were family authorities, and men alone determined state policies.

Sappho

Literacy was common among upper-class Greek women, and a few women earned reputations for literary talent. Most famous of them was the poet Sappho, who composed nine volumes of poetry around 600 B.C.E. Sappho, probably a widow from an aristocratic family, invited young women into her home for instruction in music and literature. Critics charged her with homosexual activity, and her surviving verse speaks of her strong physical attraction to young women. Greek society readily tolerated sexual relationships between men but frowned on female homosexuality. As a result, Sappho fell under a moral cloud, and only fragments of her poetry survive.

Aristocratic families with extensive landholdings could afford to provide girls with a formal education, but in less privileged families all hands contributed to the welfare of the household. In rural families, men performed most of the outside work and women took care of domestic chores and wove wool textiles. In artisan families living in the poleis, both men and women often participated in businesses and maintained stands or booths in the marketplace.

Slavery

Throughout the Greek world, as in other classical societies, slavery was a prominent means of mobilizing labor. Slaves came from differing backgrounds. Some were formerly free Greeks who entered slavery because they could not pay their debts. Many came from the ranks of soldiers captured in war. A large number came from the peoples with whom the Greeks traded: slave markets at Black Sea ports sold semi-

nomadic Scythians captured in Russia, and Egyptians provided African slaves from Nubia and other southern regions.

Greek law regarded all slaves as the private chattel of their owners, and the conditions of slaves' lives depended on the needs and the temperament of their owner. Physically powerful slaves with no special skills most often provided heavy labor in mines or on the estates of large landholders. Other unskilled slaves worked at lighter tasks as domestic servants or caretakers of their owners' children. Educated slaves and those skilled at some craft or trade had special opportunities. Their owners often regarded them as economic investments, provided them with shops, and allowed them to keep a portion of their earnings as an incentive and a reward for efficient work.

In some cases, slaves with entrepreneurial talent succeeded well enough in their businesses to win their freedom. A slave named Pasion, for example, worked first as a porter and then as a clerk at a prominent Athenian bank during the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C.E. Pasion developed into a shrewd businessman who worked efficiently and turned considerable profits for his masters, who in turn entrusted him with greater responsibilities and rewarded him for successful efforts. Ultimately, Pasion gained his freedom, took over management of the bank, outfitted five warships from his own pocket, and won a grant of Athenian citizenship.

The Cultural Life of Classical Greece

During the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E., as Greek merchants ventured throughout the Mediterranean basin, they became acquainted with the sophisticated cultural traditions of Mesopotamia and Egypt. They learned astronomy, science, mathematics, medicine, and magic from the Babylonians as well as geometry, medicine, and divination from the Egyptians. They also drew inspiration from the myths, religious beliefs, art motifs, and architectural styles of Mesopotamia and Egypt. About 800 B.C.E. they adapted the Phoenician alphabet to their language: to the Phoenicians' consonants they added symbols for vowels and thus created an exceptionally flexible system for representing speech in written form.

During the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E., the Greeks combined those borrowed cultural elements with their own intellectual interests to elaborate a rich cultural tradition. The most distinctive feature of classical Greek culture was the effort to construct a consistent system of philosophy based purely on reason. Greek cultural figures also exercised enormous influence over art, literature, and moral thought in the Mediterranean basin and western Europe.

Rational Thought and Philosophy

The pivotal figure in the development of philosophy was Socrates (470–399 B.C.E.), a thoughtful and reflective Athenian driven by a powerful urge to understand human

Socrates



A slave carrying a lantern guides his drunken master home following a party.



Tradition holds that Socrates was not a physically attractive man, but this statue emphasizes his sincerity and simplicity.

beings and human affairs in all their complexity. During his youth Socrates studied the ideas of Greek scientists who pursued the interests of their Mesopotamian and Egyptian predecessors. Gradually, however, he became disenchanted with their efforts to understand the natural world, which he regarded as less important than human affairs.

Socrates did not commit his thought to writing, but his disciple Plato later composed dialogues that represented Socrates' views. Nor did Socrates expound his views assertively: rather, he posed questions that encouraged reflection on human issues, particularly on matters of ethics and morality. He suggested that human beings could lead honest lives and that honor was far more important than wealth, fame, or other superficial attributes. He scorned those who preferred public accolades to personal integrity, and he insisted on the need to reflect on the purposes and goals of life. "The unexamined life is not worth living," he held, implying that human beings had an obligation to strive for personal integrity, behave honorably toward others, and work toward the construction of a just society.

In elaborating those views, Socrates often played the role of a gadfly who subjected traditional ethical teachings to critical scrutiny. This tactic outraged some of his fellow citizens, who brought him to trial on charges that he encouraged immorality and corrupted the Athenian youths who joined him in the marketplace to discuss moral and ethical issues. A jury of Athenian citizens decided that Socrates had indeed passed the bounds of propriety and condemned him to death. In 399 B.C.E. Socrates drank a potion of hemlock sap and died in the company of his friends.

Plato

Socrates' influence survived in the work of his most zealous disciple, Plato (430–347 B.C.E.), and in Plato's disciple Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.). Inspired by his mentor's reflections, Plato elaborated a systematic philosophy of great subtlety. He presented his thought in a series of dialogues in which Socrates figured as the principal speaker. In the earliest dialogues, written shortly after Socrates' death, Plato largely represented his mentor's views. As time passed, Plato gradually formulated his thought into a systematic vision of the world and human society.

The cornerstone of Plato's thought was his theory of Forms or Ideas. It disturbed Plato that he could not gain satisfactory intellectual control over the world. The quality of virtue, for example, meant different things in different situations, as did honesty, courage, truth, and beauty. Generally speaking, for example, virtue required individuals to honor and obey their parents. But if a parent engaged in illegal behavior, virtue required offspring to denounce the offense and seek punishment. How was it possible, then, to understand virtue as an abstract quality? In seeking an answer to that question, Plato developed his belief that the world in which we live was not the only

Sources from the Past

Socrates' View of Death

In one of his earliest dialogues, the Apology, Plato offered an account of Socrates' defense of himself during his trial before a jury of Athenian citizens. After the jury had convicted him and condemned him to death, Socrates reflected on the nature of death and reemphasized his commitment to virtue rather than to wealth or fame.

And if we reflect in another way we shall see that we may well hope that death is a good thing. For the state of death is one of two things: either the dead man wholly ceases to be and loses all sensation; or, according to the common belief, it is a change and a migration of the soul unto another place. And if death is the absence of all sensation, like the sleep of one whose slumbers are unbroken by any dreams, it will be a wonderful gain. For if a man had to select that night in which he slept so soundly that he did not even see any dreams, and had to compare with it all the other nights and days of his life, and then had to say how many days and nights in his life he had slept better and more pleasantly than this night, I think that a private person, nay, even the great king of Persia himself, would find them easy to count, compared with the others. If that is the nature of death, I for one count it a gain. For then it appears that eternity is nothing more than a single night.

But if death is a journey to another place, and the common belief be true, that all who have died dwell there, what good could be greater than this, my judges? Would a journey not be worth taking if at the end of it, in the other world, we should be released from the self-styled judges of this world, and should find the true judges who are said to sit in judgment below? . . . It would be an infinite happiness to converse with them, and to live with them, and to examine them. Assuredly there they do not put men to death for doing that. For besides the other ways in which they are happier than we are, they are immortal, at least if the common belief be true.

SOURCE: F. J. Church, trans. *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, 2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1886, pp. 76–78. (Translation slightly modified.)

And you too, judges, must face death with a good courage, and believe this as a truth, that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life, or after death. His fortunes are not neglected by the gods, and what has come to me today has not come by chance. I am persuaded that it is better for me to die now, and to be released from trouble. . . . And so I am hardly angry with my accusers, or with those who have condemned me to die. Yet it was not with this mind that they accused me and condemned me, but rather they meant to do me an injury. Only to that extent do I find fault with them.

Yet I have one request to make of them. When my sons grow up, visit them with punishment, my friends, and vex them in the same way that I have vexed you if they seem to you to care for riches or for anything other than virtue: and if they think that they are something when they are nothing at all, reproach them as I have reproached you for not caring for what they should and for thinking that they are great men when in fact they are worthless. And if you will do this, I myself and my sons will have received our deserts at your hands.

But now the time has come, and we must go hence: I to die, and you to live. Whether life or death is better is known to God, and to God only.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

How does Socrates' understanding of personal morality and its rewards compare and contrast with the Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Hindu views discussed in earlier chapters?

world—indeed, it was not the world of genuine reality, but only a pale and imperfect reflection of the world of Forms or Ideas. Displays of virtue or other qualities in the world imperfectly reflected the ideal qualities. Only by entering the world of Forms or Ideas was it possible to understand the true nature of virtue and other qualities. The secrets of that world were available only to philosophers—those who applied their rational faculties to the pursuit of wisdom.

A mosaic from the Italian town of Pompeii, near Naples, depicts Plato (standing at left) discussing philosophical issues with students. Produced in the early first century C.E., this illustration testifies to the popularity of Greek philosophy in classical Roman society.



Though abstract, Plato's thought had important political and social implications. In his dialogue *Republic*, for example, Plato sketched an ideal state that reflected his philosophical views. Because philosophers were in the best position to understand ultimate reality, and hence to design policies in accordance with the Form or Idea of justice, he held that the best state was one where either philosophers ruled as kings or kings were themselves philosophers. In effect, then, Plato advocated an intellectual aristocracy: the philosophical elite would rule, and other, less intelligent, classes would work at functions for which their talents best suited them.

Aristotle

During the generation after Plato, Aristotle elaborated a systematic philosophy that equaled Plato's work in its long-term influence. Though originally a disciple of Plato, Aristotle came to distrust the theory of Forms or Ideas, which he considered artificial intellectual constructs unnecessary for understanding the world. Unlike Plato, Aristotle believed that philosophers could rely on their senses to provide accurate information about the world and then depend on reason to sort out its mysteries. Like Plato, Aristotle explored the nature of reality in subtle metaphysical works, and he devised rigorous rules of logic in an effort to construct powerful and compelling arguments. But he also wrote on biology, physics, astronomy, psychology, politics, ethics, and literature. His work provided such a coherent and comprehensive vision of the world that his later disciples, the Christian scholastic philosophers of medieval Europe, called him "the master of those who know."

The Greek philosophers deeply influenced the development of European and Islamic cultural traditions. Until the seventeenth century C.E., most European philosophers regarded the Greeks as intellectual authorities. Christian and Islamic theologians alike went to great lengths to harmonize their religious convictions with the philosophical views of Plato and Aristotle. Thus, like philosophical and religious figures in

other classical societies, Plato and Aristotle provided a powerful intellectual framework that shaped thought about the world and human affairs for two millennia and more.

Popular Religion and Greek Drama

Because most Greeks of the classical era did not have an advanced education and did not chat regularly with the philosophers, they did not rely on systems of formal logic when seeking to understand their place in the larger world. Instead, they turned to traditions of popular culture and popular religion that shed light on human nature and offered guidance for human behavior.

The Greeks did not recognize a single, exclusive, all-powerful god. Their Indo-European ancestors had attributed supernatural powers to natural elements such as sun, wind, and rain. Over the course of the centuries, the Greeks personified these powers and came to think of them as gods. They constructed myths that related the stories of the gods, their relations with one another, and their roles in bringing the world to its present state.

In the beginning, they believed, there was the formless void of chaos out of which emerged the earth, the mother and creator of all things. The earth then generated the sky, and together they produced night, day, sun, moon, and other natural phenomena. Struggles between the deities led to bitter heavenly battles, and ultimately Zeus, grandson of the earth and sky gods, emerged as paramount ruler of the divine realm. Zeus's heavenly court included scores of subordinate deities who had various responsibilities: the god Apollo promoted wisdom and justice, for example; the goddess Fortune brought unexpected opportunities and difficulties; and the Furies wreaked vengeance on those who violated divine law.

Like religious traditions in other lands, Greek myths sought to explain the world and the forces that shape it. They served also as foundations for religious cults that contributed to a powerful sense of community in classical Greece. Many of the cults conducted ritual observances that were open only to initiates. One especially popular cult known as the Eleusinian mysteries, for example, sponsored a ritual community meal and encouraged initiates to observe high moral standards.

Some cults admitted only women. Because women could not participate in legal and political life, the cults provided opportunities for them to play roles in society outside the home. The fertility cult of Demeter, goddess of grain, excluded men. In honor of Demeter women gathered on a hill for three days, offered sacrifices to the goddess, and took part in a celebratory feast. This event occurred in October or November before the planting of grain and sought to ensure bountiful harvests.

Women were also the most prominent devotees of Dionysus, the god of wine, also known as Bacchus, although men sometimes joined in his celebration. During the spring of the year, when the vines produced their fruit, devotees retreated into the hills to celebrate Dionysus with song and dance. The dramatist Euripides offered an account of one such Dionysian season in his play *The Bacchae*. Euripides described the preparations for the festival and the celebrants' joyful march to the mountains. Spirited music and dance brought the devotees to such a state of frenzy that they fell on a sacrificial goat—and also a man hiding in the brush in an unwise effort to observe the proceedings—ripped the victims apart, and presented them as offerings to Dionysus. Though he was a skeptic who regarded much of Greek religion as sham and hypocrisy, Euripides nonetheless recognized that powerful emotional bonds held together the Dionysian community.

During the fifth century B.C.E., as the poleis strengthened their grip on public and political life, the religious cults became progressively more tame. The cult of

Greek Deities

Religious Cults

The Cult of Dionysus

Tragic Drama

Dionysus, originally one of the most unrestrained, became one of the most thoroughly domesticated. The venue of the rituals shifted from the mountains to the polis, and the nature of the observances changed dramatically. Instead of emotional festivals, the Dionysian season saw the presentation of plays that honored the traditions of the polis, examined relations between human beings and the gods, or reflected on problems of ethics and morality.

This transformation of Dionysus's cult set the stage for the emergence of Greek dramatic literature as dramatists composed plays for presentation at annual theatrical festivals. Of the thousands of plays written in classical Greece, only a few survive: thirty-two tragedies and a dozen comedies have come down to the present in substantially complete form. Yet this small sample shows that the dramatists engaged audiences in subtle reflection on complicated themes. The great tragedians—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—whose lives spanned the fifth century B.C.E., explored the possibilities and limitations of human action. To what extent could human beings act as responsible agents in society? What was their proper role when they confronted the limits that the gods or other humans placed on their activity? How should they proceed when the gods and human authorities presented them with conflicting demands?

Comic dramatists such as Aristophanes also dealt with serious issues of human striving and responsible behavior. They took savage delight in lampooning the public and political figures of their time. The comedians aimed to influence popular attitudes by ridiculing the foibles of prominent public figures and calling attention to the absurd consequences of ill-considered action.

Hellenistic Philosophy and Religion

As the Hellenistic empires seized the political initiative in the Mediterranean basin and eclipsed the poleis, Greek philosophy and religion lost their civic character. Because the poleis no longer controlled their destinies but, rather, figured as small elements in a large administrative machine, residents ceased to regard their polis as the focus of individual loyalties. Instead, they inclined toward cultural and religious alternatives that ministered to the needs and interests of individuals living in a large, cosmopolitan society.

The Hellenistic Philosophers

The most popular Hellenistic philosophers—the Epicureans, the Skeptics, and the Stoics—addressed individual needs by searching for personal tranquility and serenity. Epicureans, for example, identified pleasure as the greatest good. By *pleasure* they did not mean unbridled hedonism but, rather, a state of quiet satisfaction that would shield them from the pressures of the Hellenistic world. Skeptics refused to take strong positions on political, moral, and social issues because they doubted the possibility of certain knowledge. Rather than engage in fruitless disputes, they sought equanimity and left contentious issues to others.

The most respected and influential of the Hellenistic philosophers were the Stoics, who considered all human beings members of a universal family. Unlike the Epicureans and the Skeptics, the Stoics did not seek to withdraw from the pressures of the world. Rather, they taught that individuals had the duty to aid others and lead virtuous lives. The Stoics believed that individuals could avoid anxieties caused by the pressures of Hellenistic society by concentrating their attention strictly on the duties that reason and nature demanded of them. Thus, like the Epicureans and the Skeptics, the Stoics sought ways to bring individuals to a state of inner peace and tranquility.

Religions of Salvation

Although the philosophers' doctrines appealed to educated elites, religions of salvation enjoyed surging popularity in Hellenistic society. Mystery religions promised eternal bliss for initiates who observed their rites and lived in accordance with their

doctrines. Some faiths spread across the trade routes and found followers far from their homelands. The Egyptian cult of Osiris, for example, became extraordinarily popular because it promised salvation for those who led honorable lives. Cults from Persia, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Greece also attracted disciples throughout the Hellenistic world.

Many of the mystery religions involved the worship of a savior whose death and resurrection would lead the way to eternal salvation for devoted followers. Some philosophers and religious thinkers speculated that a single god might rule the entire universe—just as Alexander and his successors governed enormous empires on earth—and that this god had a plan for the salvation of all humankind. Like the Hellenistic philosophies, then, religions of salvation addressed the interests of individuals searching for security in a complex world.

Greek travelers linked the regions of the Mediterranean basin in classical times. Although they did not build a centralized empire, the Greeks dotted the Mediterranean and Black Sea shorelines with their colonies, and their merchant fleets stimulated both commercial and cultural interactions between peoples of distant lands. Greek merchants, soldiers, and administrators also played prominent roles in the vast empires of Alexander and the Hellenistic rulers. Quite apart from their political and economic significance, the Greeks also left a remarkably rich cultural legacy. Greek philosophy, literature, and science profoundly influenced the intellectual and cultural development of peoples from southwest Asia to western Europe. The Greek poleis and the Hellenistic cities provided nurturing environments for rational thought and academic pursuits, and the frequent travels of the Greeks promoted the spread of popular religious faiths throughout the Mediterranean basin and beyond. Like classical Persia, China, and India, the Mediterranean basin became an integrated world.

C H R O N O L O G Y	
2200–1100 B.C.E.	Minoan society
1600–1100 B.C.E.	Mycenaean society
800–338 B.C.E.	Era of the classical Greek polis
ca. 600 B.C.E.	Life of Sappho
500–479 B.C.E.	Persian Wars
490 B.C.E.	Darius's invasion of Greece
490 B.C.E.	Battle of Marathon
480 B.C.E.	Xerxes' invasion of Greece
480 B.C.E.	Battle of Salamis
479 B.C.E.	Battle of Plataea
470–399 B.C.E.	Life of Socrates
443–429 B.C.E.	Pericles' leadership in Athens
431–404 B.C.E.	Peloponnesian War
430–347 B.C.E.	Life of Plato
384–322 B.C.E.	Life of Aristotle
359–336 B.C.E.	Reign of Philip II of Macedon
336–323 B.C.E.	Reign of Alexander of Macedon

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