



A superb statue of the god Apollo from the west pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. In a commanding gesture, the god controls a centaur and symbolically brings Hellenic rationality to bear over an undisciplined universe. The statue combines the power and dignity of a god with the ideal perfection of a human being.

Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Chapter Three

CLASSICAL AND HELLENISTIC GREECE

CLASSICAL GREEK CULTURE (CA. 500–323 B.C.) • THE RISE OF MACEDONIA
• THE HELLENISTIC AGE (323–30 B.C.)

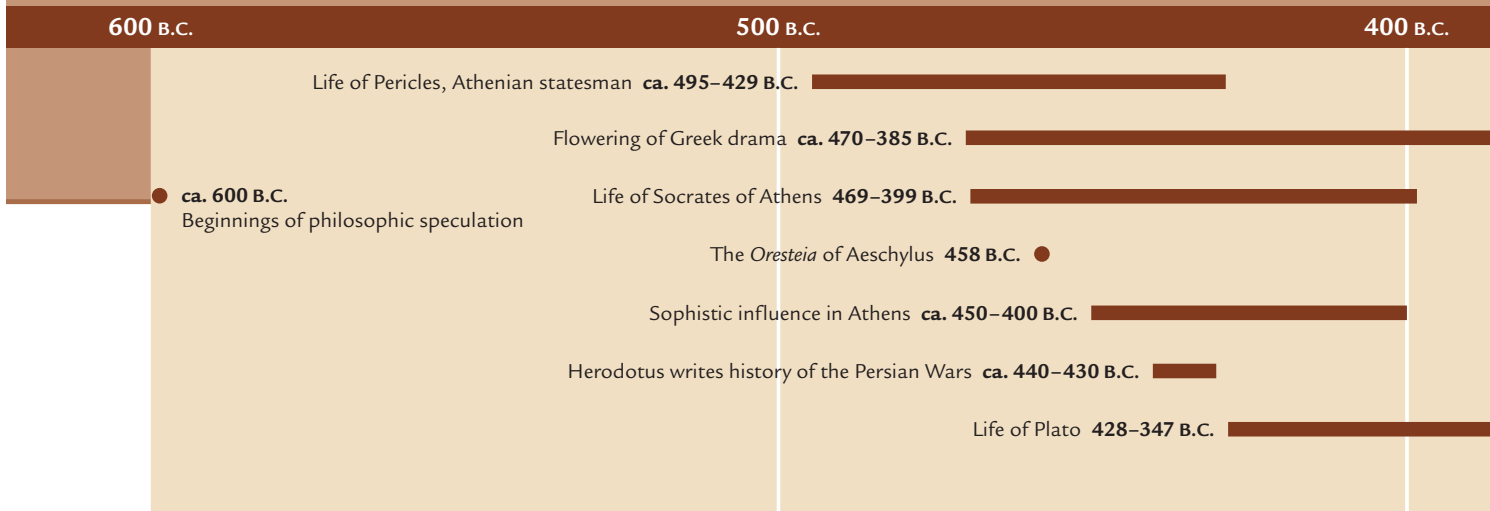
The Peloponnesian War left the two main Greek political alliances, those built around Athens and Sparta, weak and demoralized. The war thus prepared the way for the conquest of Greece in the next century by the Macedonian king Philip II. His son, Alexander the Great, went on to conquer Egypt, Persia, and vast stretches of Asia Minor.

Despite the tumultuous conditions of Greek politics—and perhaps because of the uncertainties and upheavals—the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. gave the world an extraordinary flowering of intellectual and artistic achievement. This burst of creative energy was concentrated in time and space to a degree that had never been seen in history and, some would argue, has never been duplicated. The theme that runs through Greek civilization was now the inquiry into philosophy and analytical thought. At about the same time,

Confucius, a philosopher in China, which the Greeks never visited, formulated his own rules for living by correct ethical standards.

In these centuries the Greeks wrote their greatest tragic dramas; they invented historical writing and developed firm dating systems for historical events. Within society, the classical structure of the family and the several roles of women now become visible.

During the last decades of the fourth century, the Greeks, having lost the world of the independent polis, entered the world of Alexander's empire, which brought them into contact with peoples outside Greece. There followed a series of intellectual experiments, especially in science and technology, art and literature, philosophy and religion. The Greek language sank deep roots in the Near East and ultimately became the language for the Christian Bible, or New Testament.



CLASSICAL GREEK CULTURE (CA. 500–323 B.C.)

In less than two centuries, Greek society went through a profound intellectual transformation, apparent above all in literature, philosophy, drama, and historical writing. In all these spheres, reasoned argument became supreme. This cultural trait was hardly to be found among their older eastern neighbors. This era was one of Athenian preeminence, and the study of this “golden age” inevitably focuses on Athens.

Greek Philosophy

The Inspiration for Philosophic Thought The supreme intellectual invention of the Greeks is the special search for knowledge called philosophy—the attempt to use reason to discover why things are as they are. Philosophy is born when people are no longer satisfied with supernatural and mythical explanations of the world or of human behavior. It is hard to say just why Greeks gradually became skeptical about the accounts that they inherited in their own mythology, but around 600 B.C. they began to suspect that there was an order in the universe beyond manipulation by the gods—and that human beings could discover it.

Life in Greek poleis was conducive to argument and debate, and such conditions encouraged rational inquiry and even dispute. Philosophy, like drama and history, became a means to analyze and understand change and upheaval. Yet philosophy never turned its back on religion. The earliest philosophers were seeking nothing less than a cosmic plan, a divine world order.

The Beginnings of Philosophy in Miletus The first Greek philosophers lived in the city of Miletus, a

prominent trading center on the western shore of Asia Minor in the region of Ionia. Its citizens had direct contact with the ideas and achievements of the Near East, and these intellectual currents must have helped form the city as a center of thought. Soon after 600 B.C., certain Milesians were discovering a world of speculation in an apparently simple yet profoundly radical question: What exists? They sought their answer in some single primal element. One philosopher, Thales, for example, taught that everything in the whole universe was made of water, a notion that echoes Babylonian myths of a primeval flood. He may have reasoned that water is found in several states—as ice, as mist, and as water itself. Moreover, all the first civilizations—Sumer, Egypt, Babylonia—were nourished by great rivers.

The hypothesis of Thales inspired various replies. For example, one of his pupils, Anaximander of Miletus, held (probably about 560 B.C.) that the origin of everything was an infinite body of matter, which he called “the boundless.” A whirling motion within the boundless divided its substance into the hot, which rose to form the heavens, and the cold, which sank and assumed form in the earth and the air surrounding it. A further separation into wet and dry created the oceans and the land. Human beings, he thought, had emerged from the sea; in this way he expressed a primitive theory of evolution. This theory points toward a common later classification of all matter into four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. Moreover, he said, all things will pass away into that from which they came: Thus—a dark but clearly religious statement—“will they pay one another the penalty and the fine for their wrongdoing according to the ordinance of time.”

Pythagoras and Numbers Among the theories proposed to explain the order or substance of all things were those of Pythagoras of Samos (around 530 B.C.),

300 B.C.

200 B.C.

30 B.C.

ca. 287–212 B.C.
Life of Archimedes

● 306 B.C. Epicurus establishes school in Athens

● ca. 312 B.C. Zeno founds Stoicism in Athens

Hellenistic Age 323–30 B.C.

336–323 B.C. Reign of Alexander the Great in Macedonia; invasion of Persia and Egypt

359–336 B.C. Reign of Philip II in Macedonia

384–322 B.C. Life of Aristotle



AN ATTIC RED-FIGURE VASE (CA. 470 B.C.), SHOWING SCENES FROM A SCHOOL

At left, a master teaches a boy to play the lyre; at right, a boy learns to recite poetry from a scroll held by a master while another master supervises the class.

Johannes Laurentius, 1992/BPK Berlin/Art Resource, NY

who developed a strikingly different theory to explain the structure of the world. He saw the key to all existence in mathematics and approached the universe through the study of numbers. He discovered the harmonic intervals within the musical scale and stated

the Pythagorean theorem in geometry about the area based on the sides of a right triangle. Pythagoras went on to say that all objects are similar to numbers, by which he probably meant that objects always contain a numerically balanced arrangement of parts. He

lacked, of course, the experimental methods of modern physicists; yet his theory is remarkably similar to the modern discoveries of mathematical relationships within all things, including even the genetic code in our bodies.

The Atomic Theory Yet another way of looking at the universe came from Leucippus (home uncertain) and his contemporary, Democritus of Abdera, about 450 B.C. They saw the world as made up of invisibly small particles, or atoms (*a-toma* in Greek, meaning “things that cannot be divided”), which come together and cohere at random. Death, according to this theory, leads simply to the redistribution of the atoms that make up our body and soul and thus need hold no terror for humanity. The validity of the atomic theory was eventually to be recognized in the modern era. It is another example of the astonishing ability of Greek theorists to hit part of the scientific truth, even though they could not prove it in laboratories.

The Sophists Around 450 B.C. philosophers turned away from speculations about the structure of the universe and toward the study of human beings and the ways they led their lives. The first Greeks to undertake this study were those commonly known as **Sophists** (*sophistés* in Greek means “expert” or “learned man”). They came to Athens from various places and challenged nearly all accepted beliefs. One of the early Sophists, Protagoras, declared that “man is the measure” of everything; that is, human beings and their perceptions are the only measure of whether a thing exists at all. The very existence of the gods, whom people cannot really perceive, is only an undemonstrable assumption. From such a statement it is only a short step to the belief that it is almost impossible to know anything; in the absence of objective knowledge, the only recourse is to make your way through the world by coolly exploiting to your own advantage any situation you encounter.

The Sophists also drew an important distinction between human customs on the one hand and the law of nature on the other. Thus they argued that what was made or designed by people was arbitrary and inferior; what existed naturally was immutable and proper. This argument called into question all accepted rules of good behavior. Freed of moral constraints, the Sophists suggested that intellectual activity was valuable only in helping one succeed in life. They accepted pupils and said they could train these pupils for success in any calling, since in every line of work there are problems to be solved through reasoning. They taught the art of rhetoric, persuasive speech making that could be used to sway an assembly or to defend oneself in court. Their pupils, they implied, could gain power by analyz-



The olive was one of the basic crops in Greek agriculture. In this black-figure vase (the figures are painted black, while the background is the natural red of the clay), two men knock olives off a tree at harvest time, while another climbs the branches and a boy gathers the fruit.

© British Museum (PS227411)

ing the mechanics of politics and by using the skills the Sophists taught them.

Socrates of Athens The main critic of the Sophists was Socrates (469–399 B.C.). He was active during the intellectually dynamic period before and during the Peloponnesian War. Socrates faulted the Sophists for taking pay for teaching, yet failing to recognize moral absolutes and teach ethically right behavior. In the course of his critique, Socrates transformed philosophy into an inquiry about the moral responsibility of people. His basic questions were not, What is the world made of and how does it operate? but rather, What is right action and how can I know it is right? His mission was to persuade the young men of Athens to examine their lives in the pursuit of moral truth, for “the unexamined life is not worth living.”

His technique was to engage his pupils in a dialogue of questions and answers and to refute, correct, and guide them by this “Socratic” method to the right answers. He held that no one is wise who cannot give a logical account of his or her actions and that knowledge will point to the morally right choices; this belief led to his statement that “knowledge is virtue,” one of several Socratic theses that seem paradoxical, for even ignorant men may be virtuous. Another such paradox is his statement that he was the wisest of men because he knew that he knew nothing. It was through ironic statements like these that he made people think critically and thus discover moral truths. The Roman orator and essayist Cicero said that Socrates had brought philosophy down from the heavens and placed it in the cities of the world.

Socrates’ Trial and Death Socrates had political critics, for he was the tutor of several Athenians who had opposed democracy during the last years of the Peloponnesian War. One, Critias, was a member of the pro-Spartan oligarchy known as the Thirty Tyrants, who ruled Athens after the war. Alcibiades, who joined the Spartan side during the war, was another of his followers. As a result, Socrates was suspected of sympathy with the enemies of Athenian democracy, and in 399 B.C. he was brought to trial on charges of “worshiping strange gods and corrupting the youth”—a way of implying that Socrates had connections with enemies of the democratic state.

One can understand why Athenian jurors, who had just regained their democratic constitution from a short-lived oligarchy that fell in 403, would have wanted to punish anyone who had collaborated with the oligarchs. But there is little reason to think that Socrates was disloyal to the state. Nevertheless, persuaded by Socrates’ enemies and acting in misguided patriotism, the jury convicted him. He proposed as his penalty a fine of 100 drachmas, which was about two months’ pay, thus not a trifling sum; but when he also ironically requested the honor of dining rights at the town hall, the jury reacted in anger by voting for the death penalty (see “Socrates Is Sentenced to Death,” p. 70).

Socrates accepted his fate and declined to seek exile. Perhaps he thought that life outside his polis, at age seventy, offered little pleasure. He may also have wanted to show his young followers that the duty of a good citizen was to obey the laws of the state. He drank a cup of poison with simple courage.

Plato: What Is Reality? Our knowledge of Socrates’ thought comes mainly from the writings of his most famous pupil, Plato (428–347 B.C.), for Socrates wrote nothing. Plato continued Socrates’ investigation of moral conduct by writing a series of complex and pro-

found philosophical books, mainly in the form of dialogues in which Socrates is the main speaker. In these works, Plato went far beyond the ironic paradoxes proposed by Socrates and sought truth through a subtle process of reasoning and inquiry that modern readers still endlessly discuss and probe.

Plato made his greatest impact on the future of philosophy with his theory of knowledge. Socrates’ answer to the question, How can I know what is right? was simply that one must listen to one’s conscience. Such reliance on the inner voice within each human being did not satisfy Plato, who believed that we must go beyond the evidence of our senses to find ultimate reality and truth. Moreover, Socrates thought that everyone could recognize and practice right behavior; but Plato believed that moral goodness was restricted to the elite who could master it through philosophic study. He developed and taught his theories in his school in Athens called the **Academy**.

The Republic According to Plato, we see objects as real, but in fact they are only poor reflections of ideal models, or “forms,” which are eternal, perfect originals of any given object or notion.¹ In his *Republic*, Plato illustrates our lack of true perception with a famous metaphor. Imagine men sitting in a cave, facing a wall, with a fire behind them. As others carry objects through the cave, in front of the fire, the men see only vague shadows of the objects and therefore cannot make out the reality. Everything that we see is like these imprecise shadows; so what we see as justice, for example, is nothing but an approximation of the true “form” of justice. Only through long training in philosophy can we learn how to perceive and understand the true ideal forms, which exist outside our world.

Plato presents this thesis in several dialogues, of which the most widely read is *The Republic*. Like other Athenian intellectuals, Plato opposed democracy as a political system dominated by emotion rather than logic. His repudiation of democracy intensified when a jury was persuaded to condemn Socrates to death, even though he had served the state as a soldier and had committed no crime. Socrates is the main speaker in the *Republic*, and in the work’s long debate over the right form of state he expresses severe criticisms of democracy as a volatile, unpredictable, and ineffective system. Yet it is by no means certain that these opinions were really those of the historical Socrates. It is probable that Plato was the real antidemocrat and that he put these opinions into the mouth of Socrates for dramatic purposes. Whatever its source, Plato’s denunciation of

¹ Plato used the Greek word *idéa*, which means an image that one can see. Thus “form” is a better translation than the English “idea,” even though the latter is widely used.



SOCRATES IS SENTENCED TO DEATH

Plato's version of Socrates' words to the jury that sentenced him to death:

"You too, gentlemen of the jury, must look forward to death with confidence, and fix your minds on this one belief, which is certain: that nothing can harm a good man either in life or after death, and his fortunes are not a matter of indifference to the gods. This present experience of mine has not come about mechanically; I am quite clear that the time had come when it was better for me to die and to be released from my distractions. . . . For my own part I bear no grudge at all against those who condemned me and accused me, although it was not with this kind intention that they did so, but because they thought they were hurting me. . . . However, I ask them to grant me one favor. When my sons grow up, gentlemen, if you think that they are putting money or any-

thing else before goodness, take your revenge by plaguing them as I plagued you; and if they fancy themselves for no reason, you must scold them just as I scolded you, for neglecting the important things and thinking that they are good for something when they are good for nothing. If you do this, I shall have had justice at your hands, both I myself and my children.

Now it is time that we were going, I to die and you to live; but which of us has the happier prospect is unknown to anyone but God."

From Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, Hugh Tredennick (tr.), Penguin Classics, 1954, 1972, 1980, p. 76.

broad participation by the people in governing has remained a challenge to political theorists ever since.

Aristotle: Form and Matter Plato had a pupil of equal genius, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), who was for a time the teacher of Alexander the Great of Macedonia. Aristotle founded a school within a grove in Athens called the **Lyceum**. His investigations, in which he was assisted by his pupils in Athens between 336 and 322 B.C., embraced all fields of learning known to the ancients, including logic, metaphysics, astronomy, biology, physics, politics, and poetry.

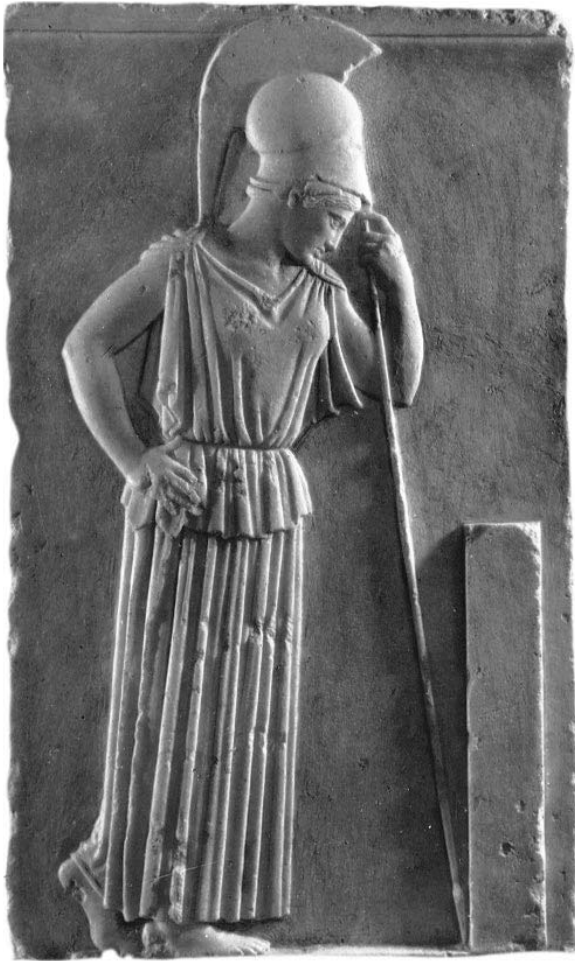
Aristotle departed from Plato's theory of an ideal reality that cannot be perceived by the senses. Rather, he saw reality as consisting of both form and matter. In this way, he turned his pupils to empirical sciences, the study of what can be seen to exist. He also had an overall theory of the world of nature. For Aristotle each object has a purpose as part of a grand design of the universe. "Nature does nothing by accident," he said. The task of the philosopher is to study these individual objects to discover their purpose; then he may ultimately be able to determine a general pattern.

Aristotle and the State Like Plato, Aristotle wanted to design the best state. In one of his works, the *Politics*, he classified the types of political constitutions in the Greek world and distinguished three basic forms: monarchy, aristocracy, and moderate democracy. He warned that monarchy can turn into tyranny; aristocracy, into oligarchy; and moderate democracy, into radical democracy, or anarchy.

Of the three uncorrupted forms, Aristotle expressed a preference for moderate democracy—one in which the masses do not exercise too much power. The chief end of government, in his view, is a good life for both the individual and the community as a whole. This idea is an extension of the view expressed in his *Ethics*, that happiness is the greatest good of the individual. To achieve this end, people must seek moderation, often called the Golden Mean: a compromise between extremes of excessive pleasure and ascetic denial—a goal that reflected the Greek principle of harmony and balance in all things.

Aristotle's Physical Theories Aristotle's conception of the universe remained influential in scientific speculation for two thousand years. By 350 B.C. philosophers generally recognized four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. Aristotle gave the elements purpose and movement. Air and fire, he said, naturally move upward; and earth and water, downward. He explained movement by saying that elements seek their natural place. Thus, a stone falls because it seeks to return to the earth. It also seeks to be at rest; all motion is therefore involuntary and unnatural and must be accounted for by an outside force.

To the four elements Aristotle added a fifth, ether, the material of which the stars are made. He explained that the stars move in a natural circular motion, and outside the whole universe there exists an eternal "prime mover," which imparts movement to all the other parts. This prime mover, or God as Aristotle finally designates him, does not move or change; God is



An Attic relief, showing the goddess Athena leaning on her spear and gazing at a tablet, perhaps a list of men fallen in battle. If so, this would justify the name often given to this relief, the “Mourning Athena.”

Pentelic marble, ca. 460 B.C. Acropolis Museum, Athens

a kind of divine thought or mind that sets the whole universe in motion.

Greek Tragedy

One of the most lasting achievements of the fifth century B.C. was the creation and perfection of a new literary and theatrical form, tragedy. Greek dramas were written in the most sublime poetry since Homer, and they first appeared in Athens, at religious festivals honoring the god Dionysus. At these celebrations, also marked by dancing and revelry, dramatic performances addressed increasingly profound moral issues.



THE SO-CALLED TEMPLE OF CONCORD FROM AGRIGENTO, SICILY

Superb example of a fifth-century Doric temple. The stone was of inferior quality and was originally covered with stucco, still visible on some columns.

John Snyder/Corbis Stock Market

Themes in Greek Tragedy Writers of tragedies drew most of their plots from tales of gods and heroes in Greek mythology. They used these characters to ask some of the basic questions of human life: What is our relationship to the gods? What is justice? If the gods are just, why do they allow people to suffer? How can worldly success lead to destruction? Greek tragedies are still performed and filmed, and they continue to inspire operas, plays, and ballets more than two thousand years after their creation.

Aeschylus: Fate and Revenge Playwrights presented dramas in sets of three, accompanied by a comic playlet known as a **satyr play** (probably meant to relieve the heavy emotion of the main drama). Only one such “trilogy” has survived: the *Oresteia*, the tragedy of Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, by Aeschylus, which was produced in 458 B.C. Its central theme is the nature of justice, which Aeschylus explores in a tale of multiple murders and vengeance. Agamemnon, the leader of the war against Troy, found his fleet becalmed and had to sacrifice his daughter to revive the winds so that he could fulfill his oath to make war on Troy. On his return, his wife, Clytemnestra, kills him and is in turn killed by her son, Orestes, who is finally tried and acquitted in an Athenian court presided over by the goddess Athena. The cycle of retribution runs its course as the themes of fate and revenge focus on the family, all developed through majestic poetry and intense emotion.

Sophocles: When Is Civil Disobedience Justified? Sophocles wrote mainly during the Peloponnesian War of 431–404 B.C. He changed the form of drama by



OEDIPUS' SELF-MUTILATION

In Sophocles' tragedy King Oedipus, Jocasta, the mother of Oedipus, hangs herself after learning that she has married her own son. An attendant then narrates what follows. (Those he "should never have seen" are the daughters Oedipus fathered by his mother-wife.)

"We saw a knotted pendulum, a noose,
A strangled woman swinging before our eyes.
The King saw too, and with heart-rending groans
Untied the rope, and laid her on the ground.
But worse was yet to see. Her dress was pinned
With golden brooches, which the King snatched out
And thrust, from full arm's length, into his eyes—
Eyes that should see no longer his shame, his guilt,
No longer see those they should never have seen,
Nor see, unseeing, those he had longed to see,
Henceforth seeing nothing but night. . . . To this wild
tune
He pierced his eyeballs time and time again,

Till bloody tears ran down his beard—not drops
But in full spate a whole cascade descending
In drenching cataracts of scarlet rain.
Thus two have sinned; and on two heads, not one—
On man and wife—falls mingled punishment.
Their old long happiness of former times
Was happiness earned with justice; but to-day
Calamity, death, ruin, tears, and shame,
All ills that there are names for—all are here."

From *Sophocles, The Three Theban Plays*, E. F. Watling (tr.), Penguin Classics, 1971, pp. 60–61.

adding a third actor (Aeschylus never had more than two actors on the stage at any time) in order to concentrate more on the interplay of characters and the larger issues of society that they explore. He also shows a greater interest in personality than does Aeschylus.

His *Oedipus the King* is perhaps the most nearly perfect specimen of surviving Greek tragedy; its central concern is the relationship of the individual and the polis. The play is about Oedipus, the revered king of Thebes, who has unknowingly committed the terrible crimes of killing his father and marrying his mother. As the play opens, some unknown offense has brought a plague on his people. Oedipus orders a search to discover the person who has caused this pollution. As the search narrows with terrifying logic to Oedipus himself, he discovers that his crimes of patricide and incest, though unintentional, have disturbed the order of the universe and his polis in particular. The only remedy is for him to serve justice and atone for his offenses. When the truth emerges, Oedipus' wife-mother hangs herself and Oedipus, in a frenzy of remorse and humiliation, plunges the brooches from her robe into his eyes and begins a life of wandering as a blind outcast; the once powerful monarch is now a broken, homeless fugitive (see "Oedipus' Self-Mutilation," above).

Sophocles' *Antigone* continues the saga of Oedipus' family as his daughter Antigone grapples with another dilemma about justice. One of her brothers has been killed while attacking his own city, Thebes. Antigone wants to give him a traditional burial despite his trai-

torious actions, but the ruler of Thebes forbids such honor for an outlaw. Antigone must therefore decide which laws to obey—those of the gods or those laid down by a man.

Antigone defies the ruler by burying her brother and thus willingly goes to prison, where she hangs herself in heroic loyalty to her beliefs. The play, like most Greek tragedies, raises moral questions that still resonate: When is civil disobedience justified, and is it our duty to resist laws that we consider wrong?

Euripides: Psychology and Human Destiny The Athenian poet Euripides, a contemporary of Sophocles, emphasized above all the psychology of his characters. Reacting to the violence of his times, he throws his characters back on their own searing passions. They forge their own fates, alienated from their societies. As a result, we see in Euripides how the workings of the mind and emotions shape a person's destiny. His intense, even fanatical, characters determine the course of events by their own often savage deeds. Compared with Aeschylus and Sophocles, Euripides seems less confident in a divine moral order. In this uncertainty, he reflects the wavering spirit of his age.

In Euripides' *Medea*, for example, Jason, Medea's husband, has deserted her for a princess of Corinth. Driven by overwhelming emotion to take revenge, Medea kills the Corinthian girl and then turns on her own children. As love and hatred battle within her, she weeps over her children but, despite a momentary weakening of will, completes her vengeance and kills



Roman wall paintings often show scenes from Greek drama and mythology; this painting shows Medea, in Euripides' play, about to kill her children. "My friends, I am resolved to act, to slay my children quickly and depart from this land." Naples, Archeological Museum. Photo © Luciano Pedicini/Index

them. The powerful woman has found her own way of dealing with the terrors of the world. We should note that she is not punished for her horrible crime, as probably would have happened in a tragedy of Aeschylus or Sophocles.

Greek Comedy: Aristophanes

Comedy abandoned these serious themes and satirized contemporary situations and people in the real world. Almost the only comedies that have come down to us are those written by the Athenian Aristophanes, a younger contemporary of Sophocles and Euripides. Again and again he emphasized the ridiculous in individual lives as well as in society at large. Aristophanes used fantasy and burlesque to satirize the Peloponnesian War, political leaders, intellectuals—including Socrates—and the failings of democracy. Whatever his political motives in writing his satires, they sometimes exposed the folly of human behavior more devastatingly than the tragedies did. And they were particularly cutting in their depiction of the absurdities of arrogant persons in Athenian society.

The earliest of Aristophanes' eleven surviving plays is *The Acharnians* (425 B.C.), an antiwar comedy from the early years of the Peloponnesian War (Acharnae was an Athenian village). Aristophanes continued his antiwar theme in other plays, notably *Lysistrata*, which he wrote after the disastrous Athenian expedition to Syracuse. In this comedy the women of Athens, despairing of any other means of ending the long war, go on a sex strike that humiliates their blustering menfolk, and they succeed in enlisting the other women of Greece in their cause.

Aristophanes reserved some of his sharpest attacks for the democratic leaders who succeeded Pericles. In *The Knights* (424 B.C.) a general tries to persuade an ignorant sausage-seller to unseat Cleon, one of those leaders:

Sausage-Seller: Tell me this, how can I, a sausage-seller, be a big man like that?

General: The easiest thing in the world. You've got all the qualifications: low birth, marketplace training, insolence.

Sausage-Seller: I don't think I deserve it.

General: Not deserve it? It looks to me as if you've got too good a conscience. Was your father a gentleman?

Sausage-Seller: By the gods, no! My folks were scoundrels.

General: Lucky man! What a good start you've got for public life!

Sausage-Seller: But I can hardly read.

General: The only trouble is that you know anything. To be a leader of the people isn't for learned men, or honest men, but for the ignorant and vile. Don't miss the golden opportunity.²

Historical Writing

Drama is one way of examining the human condition; writing history is another. The constant wars in the fifth century B.C. prompted some men to seek to explain why war was their perpetual companion. They looked to the past to understand what causes war and how people behave during conflict. In so doing, they invented a new literary form: history.

Herodotus: Father of History Herodotus, a Greek from Asia Minor, is rightly called the "Father of History." In his history of the Persian Wars, he laid down forever the historian's main question: Why do events happen? The most impressive dimension of his work is his recognition that all the cultures of the ancient world were connected. Much as a modern anthropologist does,

²From L. S. Stavrianos, *Epic of Man to 1500*, 1970.



THUCYDIDES: THE MELIAN DIALOGUE

In 416 B.C., the Athenians mercilessly inform the people of the small island of Melos that they must join the Athenian Empire. Thucydides presents the cold logic of their demand.

Athenians: We will use no fine phrases saying, for example, that we have a right to our empire because we defeated the Persians, or that we have come against you now because of the injuries you have done us. And we ask you not to imagine that you will influence us by saying that you have never done us any harm. You know as well as we do that the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.

Melians: So you would not agree to our being neutral, friends instead of enemies, but allies of neither side?

Athenians: No, because it is not so much your hostility that injures us; rather, if we were on friendly terms with you, our subjects would regard that as a sign of weakness in us, whereas your hatred is evidence of our power.

Melians: We trust that the gods will give us fortune as good as yours, because we are standing for what is right against what is wrong.

Athenians: Our opinion of the gods and our knowledge of men lead us to conclude that it is a general and necessary law of nature to rule wherever one can. This is not a law that we made ourselves, nor were we the first to act upon it when it was made. We found it already in existence, and we shall leave it to exist forever. We are merely acting in accordance with it, and we know that you or anybody else with the same power as ours would be acting in precisely the same way.

From *Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War*, Rex Warner (tr.), Penguin Classics, 1954, 1980, pp. 403–404 abridged.

Herodotus described the character of the several peoples of the Near East, without the help of any earlier narrative. He explained the Persian Empire as the work of powerful monarchs, constantly striving for a larger realm. He showed his Greek heritage with his verdict that the Greek triumph was the inevitable triumph of a free society over a despotic one. He also brought the supernatural into his work through dreams, omens, and oracles, and he declared that the Athenians—“next to the gods”—were mainly responsible for the victory.

Thucydides: Analyst of War The Athenian Thucydides is said to have heard Herodotus read from his work, and this experience may have inspired him to write the history of the Peloponnesian War, in which he served as an officer. He did not live to finish his work, which breaks off in 411 B.C., seven years before the end of the war. He has a narrower theme than Herodotus, but he is the more profound inquirer into causation and evidence.

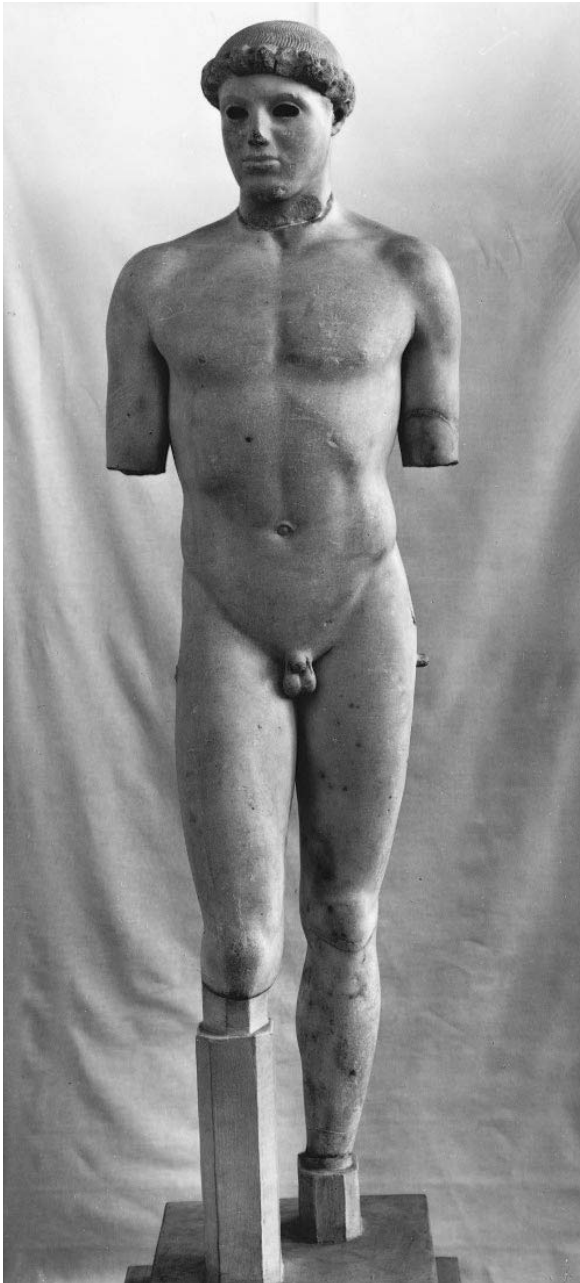
He brought to bear on events the kind of logical analysis that philosophers developed in the late fifth century. He presented a series of speeches and debates about various issues and decisions, in which the speakers sweep aside all arguments based on justice and mercy. It is by no means clear that Thucydides himself rejected compassion, but he presented the whole war as a cold pursuit of power.

In his view, the Athenian state was in good order under Pericles because he could control the Athenian democracy. His successors, by contrast, played to the masses with disastrous results, including above all sending a force to Sicily in 415 B.C. Thucydides combined accuracy and concentration on detail with descriptive powers that rival those of the dramatists and were perhaps drawn from them. No reader can avoid feeling a chill when reading his clinical description of the plague that attacked Athens in 430 B.C. or the shattering defeat of the proud armada that sailed against Syracuse. He is the undisputed master among ancient historians, and for gripping narrative power and philosophical breadth he remains unequalled (see “Thucydides: The Melian Dialogue,” above).

The Family in Classical Greece

Recovering Greek Attitudes Greek society assigned certain roles to people according to their sex. Men were the rulers and leaders, and in no Greek state did women vote or hold offices, with the exception of certain priesthoods. They were, however, citizens and so could not be violated or sold into slavery.

Thus, roughly half the citizens of Greek poleis must have been women, but to reconstruct their place in Greek society is not easy, mainly because nearly all our sources were written by men. Probably there was no



An Attic kouros, or young man, called the Kritios boy, leaning on one foot; it shows a movement away from the severe toward a more natural style.

Hirmer Fotoarchiv

single view of women in Greek society, as we can see from our oldest source, the Homeric poems. In the *Iliad*, the story opens as Achilles and Agamemnon quarrel over a concubine who is nothing but a sexual

slave, while the Trojan hero Hector honors and cherishes his wife, Andromache; equally, in Homer's *Odyssey* Penelope, the wife of the absent Odysseus, is an admired model of wisdom and fidelity.

As we look from the idealized figures of Homer to the women of the polis, we see a much less benign attitude toward women. Certainly there was no equality between the sexes. A woman was always under the control of her *kyrios*, or master—at first her father, then her husband, then her father again if she became divorced or widowed. Her father gave her in marriage with a dowry, normally at about age fifteen, to a man perhaps ten to fifteen years her senior. Xenophon describes the education of a young wife in obedience and household skills, and the picture is like the training of a young animal (see “The Training of a Wife,” p. 76).

Women and Property A wife's main duty, apart from managing the household, was to provide a male heir in order to maintain the family's hold over its property. In Athens, if the family had no male heir, the property came to a daughter, but she held it only temporarily. The heiress must then be married to the nearest available male relative, thus preventing the property from passing from the family. In this respect Athenian women were far less privileged than, for example, Egyptian women. Yet the duty of women to provide heirs did not cause Greeks to think of a woman as a mere breeding machine. On the contrary, the power, possessed only by women, to bear children seems to have made them objects not only to be cherished but also to be feared.

Restrictions in Women's Lives Widows and heiresses had to be given new husbands in order to maintain control of property within the family. Since women could thus be transferred from one husband to another, Greeks were not sure about their fidelity; adultery by women was a grave threat because it could bring outsiders into the family and threaten the preservation of property within the correct line. It is always clear who a child's mother is, but doubts can exist about the identity of a father. Such suspicions may partly account for some passages by Greek poets and philosophers in which women are viewed as undisciplined, emotionally unstable, and sexually inexhaustible. By contrast, infidelity in men was looked on as permissible.

To preserve a woman's fidelity, the door of the home was considered her proper frontier, but such restrictions were not possible for families without servants; yet even when women did go out, they were normally accompanied by a handmaiden, a slave, or a relative. The statesman Pericles, in a speech given him by Thucydides, says that the most honored woman is she who is least talked about in society.



THE TRAINING OF A WIFE

The Athenian writer-soldier Xenophon wrote a work (The Deconomicus) in which one Ischomachus explains how he trained his wife in her duties. He instructs her as follows.

“Your duty will be to remain indoors and send out those servants whose work is outside, and superintend those who are to work indoors, and to receive the incomings, and distribute so much of them as must be spent, and watch over so much as is to be kept in store, and take care that the sum laid by for a year be not spent in a month. And when wool is brought to you, you must see that cloaks are made for those that want them. You must see too that the dry corn [i.e., grain] is in good condition for making food. You will have to see that any servant who is ill is cared for.

“There are other duties peculiar to you that are pleasant to perform. It is delightful to teach spinning to a maid

who had no knowledge of it when you received her; to take in hand a girl who is ignorant of housekeeping and service; to have the power of rewarding the discreet and useful members of your household, and of punishing anyone who turns out to be a rogue. The better partner you prove to me and the better housewife to our children, the greater will be the honour paid to you in our home.”

From *Xenophon*, E. C. Marchant (tr.), Vol. 4, Harvard University Press, 1979, 7. 35–42 abridged.

Some Greek thinkers were able to rise above such a limiting view of a woman's place. Plato, in his *Republic*, recommended that women share in education with men, although he stopped short of what we would call a truly liberal attitude regarding sexual equality.

The Power of Women in Myth In several ways, then, men could feel uncertain about their control over women. If we have rightly understood some of this uncertainty, we may be near to understanding why women of Greek drama such as Clytemnestra, Antigone, and Medea are such powerful characters, far stronger and more dangerous than the men in Greek plays. Again, in mythology the Furies, who could drive people mad, were female; Greeks tried to appease them by calling them the “kindly ones.” Female too were the powers called Nemesis and Ate, which brought punishing destruction on those who became too arrogant and self-confident; so were the three Fates, who spun out the thread of life and cut it off at the end.

Men, Women, and Sex Men, unlike women, were allowed to find sex where they liked. Elegant single women were paid companions at men's social affairs; the most famous courtesan of all, Aspasia, had a long affair with the statesman Pericles and bore him a son. Only these women could participate in the refined intellectual life of the city. Poorer women worked, for example, as seamstresses, nurses, or sellers in the market. Prostitutes, who were normally slaves or foreigners, were not difficult to find; a man might have sex with a slave whom he owned. Homosexuality between men

was tolerated and is often illustrated in ribald scenes on Greek pottery.

Yet we must not expect perfect consistency where such emotions are at play. By modern Western standards, and even some ancient ones, Greek women suffered severe restrictions. On the other hand, women whose households had slaves may have had to work less than many women in modern emancipated societies. Our museums contain copious statues of beautiful Greek maidens. And many of the most revered deities are women: Athena, who was respected for her warlike nature and never had lovers in myth, was also the protecting goddess to the Athenians, who held her in affection and built for her one of the world's architectural masterpieces, the Parthenon. Aphrodite, who could involve human beings in ruin through sexual passion, was treasured as the model of ideal beauty and was so portrayed in hundreds of statues.

It is impossible to estimate in scientific terms the emotional love between Greek men and women. The recommendation of Plutarch, that a man should sleep with his wife three times a month, suggests that love played only a modest part in marriage. On the other hand, gravestones from many poleis show the affection in which some women were held; typically, a woman is seated, members of her family stand nearby, and a son or her husband takes her hand in a quiet farewell.

THE RISE OF MACEDONIA

The Peloponnesian War had caused terrible losses in manpower for the Greek city-states. Instead of the



Unknown, perhaps a pupil of Lysippos
STATUE OF A VICTORIOUS YOUTH, LAST QUARTER OF FOURTH
 CENTURY B.C.

Surviving bronze statues from Greece are rare.

Bronze, H: 151.5 cm. Collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum,
 Malibu, California (77.AB.30)

needed healing period, there followed decades of interstate warfare—the perennial tragedy of Greece—that further weakened the poleis. These battles opened the way for an old kingdom from the north of Greece, Macedonia, to become the leading power in the Greek world. Moreover, the Macedonian king Alexander the Great drove the Greek language and many features of Greek culture deeply into Asia Minor and Egypt.

The Decline of the Independent Poleis

Athens had lost the Peloponnesian War and Sparta had imposed on the Athenians a puppet regime, known as

the Thirty Tyrants, in 404 B.C.; but within a few months popular opposition swept this group away. As the Athenians sought to regain power, they revived their naval league in 394 B.C., though with many fewer members than it had had in the fifth century. But their arrogance had not subsided. Despite their promises to respect the independence of the league's members, the Athenians began to demand tribute from them as they had done under the Delian League. Rebellions followed, and this second league collapsed about 355 B.C.

By now there were no longer only two dominant cities in Greece. The polis of Thebes was becoming an important power, siding now with Athens, now with Sparta, in a series of never-ending quarrels. There was no clear trend in these struggles except that the constant intrigue and war, spanning several decades, drained the energies of all the antagonists. In 371 B.C. the brilliant Theban general Epaminondas won a victory over Sparta and thus finally exploded the long-held belief in Greece that the Spartan infantry was invincible. The Thebans liberated Sparta's slaves, the helots, and helped them to found their own city, called Messene, in the Peloponnese.

The Spartans thus lost much of their territory and many of the slaves who had worked their land. A shortage of manpower accelerated the decline in Sparta's strength. Aristotle informs us about 335 B.C. that Spartan armies in the field had fewer than one thousand men, rather than the four or five thousand who had gone into battle during the wars of the fifth century. Epaminondas himself died in another battle near Sparta in 362 B.C., and no comparable leader in any polis took his place. The era of independent city-states was all but over, doomed by the constant wars of the fourth century.

Philip II of Macedonia

The Rise of Philip Macedonia, a kingdom in northern Greece, emerged as a leading power under an ambitious, resourceful king, Philip II, who reigned between 359 and 336 B.C. With shrewd and ruthless political skill Philip developed his kingdom, built up a powerful army, and planned a program of conquest.

Using both aggression and diplomacy, Philip added poleis and large territories to his kingdom and extended his influence into central Greece. The great Athenian orator Demosthenes (384–322 B.C.), in a series of fiery speeches called **Philippics**, beginning in 351, called on his countrymen to recognize the danger from Macedonia and prepare to make war against it. But by the time the Athenians responded, it was too late to halt the Macedonian advance.

Philip's Victory and Death Philip won a decisive battle against Athens and several other poleis at Chaeronea



MAP 3.1 MACEDONIA UNDER PHILIP II, 359–336 B.C.

King Philip II greatly increased the territory controlled by the once isolated kingdom of Macedonia. He brought his power southward into central Greece and greatly extended his domain to the north. What was the eastern limit of his kingdom?

◆ For an online version, go to www.mhhe.com/chambers9 > chapter 3 > book maps

in 338 B.C. All the city-states of southern Greece, except isolated Sparta, now lay at his mercy. He could have devastated many of them, including Athens, but his sense of tactics warned him not to do so. Instead, he gathered the more important poleis into an obedient alliance called the League of Corinth, which recognized Philip as its leader and agreed to follow him in his next project, an invasion of Persia.

But before Philip could open his Persian war, he was murdered in 336 B.C. by one of his officers who apparently had a personal quarrel with the king. Some historians have wondered whether Philip's wife or his son,

Alexander, may have been involved in a plot to kill Philip and put Alexander on the throne; but tempting as such speculations may be, the sources do not give them clear support.

Alexander the Great

The empire built by Philip now passed to his son, Alexander III (r. 336–323 B.C.), known as Alexander the Great, and never has a young warrior prince made more effective use of his opportunities. During his brief reign Alexander created the largest empire the an-



MAP 3.2 THE EMPIRE OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND THE ROUTE OF HIS CONQUESTS

Alexander formed the largest empire known down to his own time. He even conquered some territory across the Indus River in India. What were the two major Persian cities near the Persian Gulf?

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cient world had known and, more than any other man, became responsible for the eastward expansion of the Greek world.

Alexander's Invasion of Persia In the next year, 335, a rumor of Alexander's death caused a democratic revolution in the city of Thebes. Alexander marched on Thebes and sacked it with the utmost brutality, destroying every building except temples and the house of the poet Pindar. Having thus warned the Greek cities against any further rebellions, Alexander began the invasion of the Persian Empire. The Persia that he attacked was a much weaker state than the one that had conquered Babylon or the one that Xerxes had led against the Greeks in 480 B.C. Intrigue and disloyalty had weakened the administration of the empire. Moreover, the king, Darius III, had to rely on Greek mercenary soldiers as the one disciplined element in his infantry, for native troops were mainly untrained. The weakness of Persia helps explain Alexander's success, but in no way does it diminish his reputation as one of the supreme generals in history. His campaigns were astonishing combinations of physical courage, strategic insight, and superb leadership.

Alexander in Egypt Alexander swept the Persians away from the coast of Asia Minor and in 332 B.C.

drove them out of Egypt, a land they had held for two centuries. The Egyptians welcomed him as a liberator and recognized him as their pharaoh. He appointed two Egyptians to administer the country, along with a Greek to manage the finances; he was to follow this pattern of dividing power throughout his reign.

While he was in Egypt (also in 332), Alexander founded the city of Alexandria. He intended this city to serve as a link between Macedonia and the valley of the Nile, and he had it laid out in the grid pattern typical of Greek city planning. Although he did not live to see it, Alexandria remained one of the conqueror's most enduring legacies: a great metropolis throughout history.

Victories and Death of Alexander In the next season, 331 B.C., Alexander fought Darius III at Gaugamela, winning a complete victory that guaranteed he would face little further opposition in Persia. Darius III was murdered by disloyal officers in 330 B.C., and Alexander assumed the title of king of Persia. Again he followed his policy of placing some areas in the control of natives: Babylonia, for example, was given to a Persian named Mazaeus.

The expedition had now achieved its professed aim; yet Alexander, for whom conquest was self-expression, continued to make war. During the next few years he campaigned as far east as India, where he crossed the



THE VENUS OF CYRENE IN ROME (EARLY THIRD CENTURY B.C.)
A most elegant, graceful depiction of ideal female beauty.
Scala/Art Resource, NY

Indus River (see map 3.2), and finally, in 326 B.C., he began his march back. But at Babylon in 323 B.C., he caught a fever after a bout of heavy drinking, and within a few days he died, not yet thirty-three.



THE HEAD OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT IN HEROIC PROFILE
The obverse of a silver coin issued by Lysimachus, one of Alexander's bodyguards, who after his master's death became king of Thrace.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Mrs. George M. Brett. Reproduced with permission. © 2001 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All Rights Reserved.

The Reputation of Alexander Alexander is a figure of such stature and power that he defies easy interpretation, and even today radically different biographies are written about this most famous man in Greek history. Part of our difficulty is that our best narrative source for his life, the Greek historian Arrian, lived four centuries after Alexander's death, and Arrian, for all his merits, was not the kind of probing historian who might have given us a rounded psychological portrait of the king. Yet it is clear that along with Alexander's courage and drive, perhaps as their necessary accompaniment, came a personality sometimes barely containing a raging animal. He ordered the execution of a number of his friends for supposedly being aware of conspiracies against him; another friend he murdered himself in a sudden fury. On the other hand, Arrian tells the moving story of Alexander's pouring a cup of water, offered him by his parched troops, into the desert because he refused to drink if his men could not.

Alexander's Rule Alexander established democratic regimes in the Greek states in Asia Minor that he had freed from Persian rule. But he also established some policies that brought Persians and their ways into his



A scene from the magnificent “Alexander Sarcophagus” found at Sidon, now in the Archaeological Museum, Istanbul; fourth century B.C. Alexander, left, is shown hunting, accompanied by a Persian. Although we have no reason to think Alexander was ever buried in this sarcophagus, the scene symbolizes Alexander’s heroism and virility and calls attention to his conquest of the Persian Empire.

C. M. Dixon

regime. We have seen that he used Persians as administrators. He also had young Persians trained in Macedonian style and even enrolled them within Macedonian regiments. These measures were intended to strengthen his empire by enlisting support from natives. Some historians have gone further and have declared that Alexander had a vision of the unity of the human race and was trying to establish an empire in which different peoples would live in harmony as within one family, but this view is widely, and rightly, rejected as sentimental and too idealistic.

Other historians focus on his acts of cruelty and vindictiveness and see him as a paranoiac tyrant. In any case, no portrait of him should overlook his patronage of scholarship, which extended even to his bringing scientists and geographers with him as he invaded Persia. His foundation, Alexandria, became the intellectual center of the next age. However we interpret Alexander, he has remained the prototype of a world conqueror. Some of his successors sought to maintain his memory by putting his portrait on their own coins, and even Roman emperors issued medallions portraying him, as if to borrow his glory and power for their often threatened reigns.

THE HELLENISTIC AGE (323–30 B.C.)

The Classical Age of Greek civilization began about 500 B.C. and ended in 323 B.C., with the death of Alexander the Great. The next period, the **Hellenistic Age**, began with that event and extended to the death

of Cleopatra VII of Egypt in 30 B.C. During this period the Greeks carried their culture throughout the Near East in the movement known as Hellenization. Broadly speaking, Hellenization refers to the increasing use of the Greek language and customs among non-Greeks. This movement had begun well before the death of Alexander, but his invasion of the Persian Empire gave a decided stimulus to such a widespread acceptance of Greek culture. The Greeks in turn received legacies, especially in religion, from the peoples whom they met in this age.

The Dissolution of Alexander’s Empire

New Kingdoms Alexander’s empire was shattered almost at once after his death, as his generals seized various parts for themselves. By about 275 B.C., after years of warfare and diplomatic intrigue, three large kingdoms emerged. These were the kingdom of Macedonia and its territories in Greece; Syria, formed by the Macedonian Seleucus; and Egypt, governed by the Macedonian Ptolemy and his successors. A fourth kingdom was formed about 260 B.C. around the city of Pergamum in western Asia Minor (see map 3.3).

In the Hellenistic kingdoms the richer classes gained more and more influence, but they sometimes used their wealth to endow spectacular temples and other buildings and to sponsor games and festivals. We may guess that they were acting partly to indulge in prideful display, partly to gain favorable public opinion. In Athens, for instance, Attalus II of Pergamum (r. 158–138 B.C.) donated a magnificent stoa, or colonnaded building, that was rebuilt in A.D. 1956.



MAP 3.3 HELLENISTIC KINGDOMS AFTER ALEXANDER, CA. 240 B.C.

After the death of Alexander, three of his generals (Antigonus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy) became rulers of large portions of his empire and formed kingdoms of their own. A fourth kingdom, Pergamon or Pergamum, appeared about 260 B.C. Which kingdom controlled the area of Palestine about 240 B.C.?

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Kingdoms and Leagues The subsequent history of these kingdoms is one of continual warfare until they were all eventually absorbed by the Roman Republic. The king of Macedonia controlled northern Greece. The poleis in the south retained their autonomy, and some of them formed defensive leagues to protect their independence from the monarchy. The most influential were the Aetolian League in western Greece and the Achaean League on the northern coast of the Peloponnese.

These leagues tried to strengthen themselves by awarding citizenship in the league to all citizens of their member cities; but this principle of confederation for mutual security arrived too late in Greek history to take firm root before Greece fell to the expanding Roman Republic. As to the Egyptians and inhabitants of the Near East, they had long seen their rulers as divine or semidivine beings, and the Hellenistic kings in these areas exploited this tendency and established themselves as absolute monarchs who owned the kingdom.

Hellenistic Rulers Remarkably, considering the military roots of these kingdoms, the Hellenistic Age witnessed the reemergence of women as rulers. Their power first became evident in Macedonia, where

Olympias, the mother of Alexander, was a more important political figure than any other woman in classical Greece. The most famous and skillful of all Hellenistic queens was Cleopatra of Egypt, who manipulated such Roman military leaders as Julius Caesar and Mark Antony to the advantage of her kingdom.

Hellenistic monarchs ruled through strong armies and large bureaucracies, and their systems of taxation were extremely efficient. Certain products, such as oil in Egypt, were royal monopolies and could be traded only at official prices. Greeks usually held the chief public offices in the army and bureaucracy, and rulers did allow some democratic institutions, such as a town council, to function in Near Eastern cities, but the autonomy of these cities was limited to local affairs. The king collected tribute from the cities and controlled all foreign policy, and he alone granted and could cancel such rights of self-government as the cities enjoyed.

Economic Life

Agriculture and Industry One of the sharpest contrasts between the classical and Hellenistic worlds was the scale of economic activity. In classical Greece,



Panels from the altar to Zeus at Pergamum, in the Pergamon-Museum, Berlin, showing gods in combat with giants. Greek art preferred abstraction to reality, and such scenes probably represent the triumph of Greek civilization over non-Greek peoples. The violence and dramatizing are in the “baroque” tradition of Hellenistic art of the second century B.C.

C. M. Dixon

farmers worked small plots of land, and industry and commerce were ventures of small entrepreneurs. In the Hellenistic states of Egypt and the Seleucid Kingdom, vast estates predominated. Industry and trade operated throughout the Near East on a larger scale than ever before in the ancient world, requiring the services of bankers and other financial agents.

The Hellenistic world prospered as ambitious Greeks, emigrating from their homeland to make their fortunes, brought new vigor to the economies of Egypt and the Near East. They introduced new crops and new techniques in agriculture to make production more efficient. For example, Greeks had long cultivated vines, and they now enhanced the wines of Egypt. At the same time, they improved and extended the irrigation

system and could thus devote more acreage to pasturing animals, which provided leather and cloth for the people and horses for the cavalry.

Hellenistic Cities Agriculture remained the major industry in the vast lands of the new kingdoms, but it was in the numerous Greek cities founded by Alexander and his successors that the civilization that we call Hellenistic took form. Most of these new cities were in western Asia, in the Seleucid Kingdom. Alexander had founded the brilliant city of Alexandria, in Egypt, but the Ptolemies who ruled Egypt did not follow his example by founding many cities. They considered a docile, rustic civilization far easier to control than citizens of a politically active urban society.

Some Hellenistic cities were magnificently ornate and spectacular. Besides their political institutions, the Greeks brought from their homeland many of the amenities of polis life—temples, theaters, gymnasiums, and other public buildings. Pergamum, an outstanding example of city planning, contained a stupendous altar to Zeus, a renowned library, and a theater high above the main city with a superb view. The city may have had as many as one hundred thousand inhabitants (under the Roman Empire its population was about two hundred thousand), while Alexandria, the largest of all, had at least a half million people.

Local families in the upper classes copied Greek ways and sent their children to Greek schools. Moreover, a version of Greek, *koiné* (“common”) Greek, became an international tongue. Now, for the first time, people could travel to virtually any city in the Mediterranean world and make themselves understood.

Literature, Art, and Science

Libraries and Scholars The most significant literary achievements in the Hellenistic Age were in the field of scholarship. The kings of Egypt took pride in constructing a huge library in Alexandria that probably contained, by 200 B.C., a half-million papyrus rolls. Along with the library, they built the Museum, a kind of research institute, where literary, historical, and scientific studies flourished, each employing its own experts. One of the main interests of literary scholars in Alexandria was the literature of the classical period, and among their achievements was the standardization of the Greek text of Homer. By comparing the many versions that had been handed down in manuscripts over the centuries, scholars were able to establish the text on which modern editions of Homer are based.

The specialization of scholars was characteristic of the growing professionalism of the age. The citizen of fifth-century Athens could be a farmer, a politician, and a soldier at the same time, but now each of these roles was filled by a professional. The army consisted of professional soldiers, while professional bureaucrats ran the government.

A New Spirit in Art Hellenistic rulers also wanted to glorify their cities and provided generous subsidies for art and architecture. The architecture of the age sometimes emphasized size and grandeur, as compared with the simplicity and human scale of classical architecture. Thus, the Altar of Zeus from Pergamum, now in Berlin, included a great stairway, flanked by a frieze four hundred feet long. The figures on the frieze, typical of Hellenistic sculpture, are carved in high relief, with an almost extravagant drama and emotionalism



BRONZE STATUE OF A BOXER FROM ROME, SECOND CENTURY B.C.

Greek sculptors had abandoned statues of ideal beauty and were now experimenting with scenes of frank realism. Note the boxer's battered face and bandaged hands.

Scala/Art Resource, NY

that make them seem to burst out of the background. Hellenistic sculpture also differed from that of the classical period through its devotion to realism. Instead of creating figures of ideal perfection, artists now showed individuality in faces and bodies (see picture of bronze statue of boxer), even depicting physical imperfection or frank ugliness.

Hellenistic Science Advances in the field of science drew strength from the cross-fertilization of cultures in the Hellenistic Age. The Greeks had long speculated about the nature of the universe, and the Near East had an even longer scientific tradition, particularly in the fields of astronomy and mathematics. After Alexander's conquests joined the two cultures, other condi-

tions favored scientific advance: the increased professionalism of the age, the use of Greek as an international language, and the facilities of the Museum in Alexandria. The result was a golden age of science that was not surpassed until the seventeenth century.

Euclid's Geometric Theorems Unlike their eastern neighbors, Greeks had a strong desire for theoretical understanding, even beyond the solving of immediate mathematical and engineering problems. Their work in the realm of theory descends from their skill in philosophical debate.

In mathematics, Euclid (home unknown, about 300 B.C.) compiled a textbook that is still the basis for the study of plane geometry. Some of his theorems were already known, and others (for example, his demonstration that nonparallel lines must meet somewhere) may seem obvious. His accomplishment was to construct a succession of elegant proofs for these theorems, each based on earlier proofs, starting with the simple proposition that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. The analytical method of his proofs is a characteristic of Greek thought, for Greek philosophers believed that knowing something entailed being able to prove it. The restatement of Euclid's theorems through the study of geometry in schools around the world has made him perhaps the most widely read Greek author.

Archimedes: Advanced Mathematics and Engineering

The greatest mathematician of antiquity—indeed, one of the greatest ever, in the class of Newton and Einstein—was Archimedes of Syracuse, who also lived during the Hellenistic era (ca. 287–212 B.C.). He calculated the value of π (the ratio between the circumference and diameter of a circle); he developed a system for expressing immensely large numbers, by using 100 million as the base (as we use 10); and he discovered the ratio between the volumes of a cylinder and a sphere within it, namely, 3:2. In a testament to his love of theoretical knowledge, he wanted this proportion engraved on his tombstone.

Archimedes was also a pioneer in physics; he demonstrated that a floating body will sink in a liquid only to the point at which it displaces its own weight. He understood the principle of using the lever for lifting massive weights and is said to have proclaimed, "Give me a place where I can stand and I will lift the earth" (that is, standing outside the earth entirely and with a long enough lever). He also invented the water screw, still used for irrigation in Egypt. As the Romans besieged Syracuse in 212 B.C., he devised engines to fight them off; but, tragically, he was murdered by a Roman soldier as the city fell—while he sat drawing a mathematical figure in the sand.

Aristarchus and the Orbit of the Earth About 280 B.C., Aristarchus of Samos, an astronomer and mathematician, advanced a heliocentric theory of the movement of the planets. The view that the earth revolves around the sun was not new, but Aristarchus refined it by stating that the earth revolves on its own axis while it, together with the other planets, circles the sun. Not until the sixteenth century did astronomers prove the soundness of Aristarchus' system; meanwhile, the Greek astronomic tradition continued to follow an older geocentric theory, which held that the earth was the center of the solar system and that the sun revolved around it. The false geocentric theory was, however, the basis for the most important Hellenistic text on astronomy, the *Almagest* of Ptolemy of Alexandria (about A.D. 140). This book systematized the Greek study of astronomy and remained the accepted text on the subject for more than one thousand years.

Other Mathematical Discoveries Hellenistic scientists also made important advances in the realm of measurements. Hipparchus calculated the length of the average lunar month to within one second of today's accepted figure. Eratosthenes of Cyrene about 225 B.C. computed the circumference of the earth to be about twenty-eight thousand miles, only three thousand miles more than the actual figure. Other scientists worked out the division of time into hours, minutes, and seconds and of circles into degrees, minutes, and seconds.

Philosophy and Religion

Philosophies of Comfort The change in lifestyle from the relative security of the polis to the increasing uncertainties of a larger world shifted the direction of Greek philosophy. Plato and Aristotle had been philosophers of the polis in the sense that they were concerned with the individual's role in the intimate world of the city-state; the ideal state in their theories would have only a few thousand citizens. But when the city-state came to be governed by a large kingdom headed by a remote ruler, individual men and women could hardly influence its policies even though they were caught up in its wars and its many changes of fortune.

Moreover, the large Hellenistic cities lacked the cohesiveness, the sense of belonging among citizens, that had made the classical poleis internally united. In such conditions, philosophers sought means of accommodation with the larger Hellenistic world that was shaping their lives. They tried to provide people with guidance in their personal lives and were less concerned about the nature of the political framework. Thus, the two most important schools of Hellenistic philosophy, Epicureanism

and Stoicism, were philosophies designed to provide comfort and reassurance for the individual human being.

Epicurus and Atomism Epicurus of Samos (341–270 B.C.), who taught in Athens, believed that people should strive above all for tranquillity, which he sought to provide through the atomic theory of Democritus. Our bodies and souls, Epicurus taught, are made up of atoms that cohere only for our lifetimes. When we die, the atoms will be redistributed into the universe again, and nothing of us will remain behind to suffer any desire for the life we have lost. Because death therefore holds no terrors, we should concern ourselves only with leading pleasurable lives, above all avoiding physical and mental pain. Sensuality, gluttony, and passionate love, in Epicurus' view, are equally unrewarding, since they may lead to disappointment and pain. Thus, the wise person withdraws from the world to study philosophy and enjoy the companionship of a few friends. Some later Epicureans came close to advocating an almost heedless pursuit of pleasure, but such was not the message of Epicurus, whose philosophy was intended as a powerful antidote to anxiety and suffering.

Zeno and the Universe of Stoicism Zeno of Cyprus, who was a contemporary of Epicurus, taught a different approach to life's problems. He founded a philosophical school known as Stoicism, so named because he taught his pupils in a building in Athens called the Stoa. Zeno was a man of Semitic ancestry, and the fact that he taught at Athens is a notable example of the mixing of cultures that took place in the Hellenistic Age. A later Stoic, Chrysippus of Soli, stated Stoicism in its best-known form: One must act in accordance with nature, choosing one's actions with attention to reason. Such a program will lead one to virtue. A successful life includes pleasure; good health is desirable, provided one uses it in the pursuit of virtue. If one acts in accordance with nature, one cannot be other than happy.

To **Stoics**, the universe was wholly created and held together by a force sometimes called fire, sometimes *pneuma* or "breath." At certain intervals, the universe is destroyed by fire, but it is born again, and we are reborn with it. Because a single divine plan governs the universe, to find happiness one must act in harmony with this plan. One should be patient in adversity, for adversity is a necessary part of the divine plan and one can do nothing to change it. By cultivating a sense of duty and self-discipline, people can learn to accept their fate; they will then become immune to earthly anxieties and will achieve inner freedom and tranquillity.

Ethical Duties of the Stoics The Stoics did not advocate withdrawal from the world, for they believed that all people, as rational beings, belong to one family. Moreover, to ensure justice for all, the rational person should discover his or her place in the world and consider it a duty to participate in public affairs.

The Stoics advanced ideas that were to have a profound influence on later Western history, especially as they were interpreted in the Roman and Christian visions of civilization: the concept that all humanity is part of a universal family; the virtues of tolerance; and the need for self-discipline, public service, and compassion for the less fortunate members of the human race. Stoicism is thus part of a great intellectual revolution that led some thinkers to consider similarities among humans more important than differences.

Again, while most earlier Greeks had accepted without question the institution of slavery, the Stoics believed that the practice of exploiting others corrupted the owner (the slave could endure bondage by achieving inner freedom). Stoicism became the most influential philosophy among the educated of the Hellenistic Age and achieved great influence among the Romans, who adopted with conviction the ideals of discipline and fulfillment of public and private duty.

New Religions The search for meaning in life preoccupied all levels of Hellenistic society, but none so painfully as the great masses of the poor. The answers of philosophy were addressed to an intellectual elite: wealthy scholars, as it were, meditating in the study. But the poor—lacking the education, leisure, and detachment for such a pursuit—looked elsewhere for spiritual and emotional sustenance in their daily encounters with the problems of life. For many, religion answered their need for escape and consolation.

Among the new religious practices were the Near Eastern mystery cults that had some features in common as a result of the frequent intermingling of cultures in the cosmopolitan Near East. They are called mystery cults because they centered on the worship of a savior whose death and resurrection would redeem the sins of humanity; their rituals were secret, known only to the participants, and were elaborate, often wildly emotional; and they nourished hope by promising an afterlife that would compensate for the rigors of life on earth. One of the most popular mystery cults was the worship of the Egyptian deities Isis and Osiris. In Egyptian mythology, Osiris had been murdered and dismembered but was reassembled and saved by Isis, his devoted wife; he then became the god of the underworld. Thus, the myth suggested that its followers might also attain salvation and life after death.

Summary

All these political, scientific, and intellectual explorations were parts of the legacy of Alexander, the Macedonian who brought Greek civilization and the Greek language into the world beyond the Mediterranean Sea. Greek was to be the language in which the New Testament was written, and therefore some historians have also seen his campaigns as preparing the way for Christianity and have even called Christianity his most important legacy. Be this as it may, the Greeks and Macedonians could not maintain permanent control over the remains of Alexander's empire. Not Greece but Rome became the uniting force that passed the legacy of classical civilization to medieval and then to modern Europe.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

1. The Greeks invented historical writing. In looking at the past, what are the most important questions a historian should ask?
2. The Greek city-states and their system of alliances gave way to the rising power of Macedonia. How might the Greek states have preserved their strength and political power?

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