Map 1. Greece: Physical
Map 2. Greece: Political
Map 4. Asia Minor: Political
Approaching Greek History 1: the land and limits of the Greek World

When considering the history of any pre-modern society, we can usefully contemplate its physical features and their relationship to its history and social organisation. By looking at a map of modern Greece, it is easy to recognise some of its important features: rugged coastlines, islands and mountains. While lines of communication across Greece (in the shape of roads and passages) have been transformed in recent years, the contours of Greek topography (notwithstanding the effects of quarrying and both natural and man-made changes to coastlines and sea-levels) are largely as they were in classical antiquity. We should, of course, consider carefully the extent of the world inhabited by Greeks: it included not only the Greek mainland and the lands in and around the Aegean Sea, but also Sicily, southern Italy, the west coast of Asia Minor, much of the coastline of the Black Sea and a number of cities in south France, Spain and north Africa (see below, map 7). Greeks lived in cities right across the Mediterranean and Black Sea areas. We must also bear in mind that, while the environment was an important factor in shaping the nature of Greek civilisation, the Greeks were, by irrigating and fortifying their land, able to change and adapt their environment in their own interests.

Greece: sea, mountains and islands

Many ancient Greek city-states (*poleis*: see below, Approaching section 4) were situated close to, or were easily accessible by, the sea. This facilitated seafaring and trade with communities in other parts of the Greek world and beyond; conversely, access to a port was an important factor in the location of many Greek city-states. Corinth, in the North-East Peloponnese, is a good example of a city-state built with access to the sea: it was located about 3 miles away from the coastline with easy access to two ports. In the eighth century BC it appears to have been involved in sea-based trade with other Mediterranean settlements. This is suggested by the thousands of fragments of Corinthian ceramics which have turned up in Sicily and Southern Italy; it was claimed that Corinthians in the 730s BC founded the city of Syracuse, the largest city of Sicily, which became the most important settlement in the Western Greek world. Not all cities possessed easy access to the sea, however: Thebes and Sparta are examples of cities that were built inland. Like Argos, they appear to have sustained their power by the exploitation of the lands and people around them. The fact that there are very few navigable rivers in Greece meant that travel to inland regions was often difficult and slow.

The sea was important to the Greeks as a source of natural resources (primarily fish and salt), but also as a means of communication: in a world where transport by land across a mountainous terrain was slow, difficult and dangerous, it was naturally easier to transport goods by sea. Merchant shipping, then, is known from the ninth century onwards, dominated
first by the Phoenicians and then Greeks; it had become a big business by the fourth century BC, and there is evidence for its regulation by some city-states. The Greeks, as seafarers, appear to have been aware of the dangers of the sea, with Sophocles reminding us of man’s constant battle with it: ‘Many things are formidable, and none more formidable than man! He crosses the grey sea beneath the winter wind, passing beneath the surges that surround him!’ (Antigone, 332-7). Plato, in the fourth century BC, wrote of the sea as giving rise to ‘shifty and distrustful habits of soul’ (Laws, 4.705a). Such statements are not politically neutral, however: Plato envisaged that Magnesia, his utopian city, would be founded inland, away from the ‘corrupting’ sea. This was, of course, a reaction to the association between maritime civilisation with democratic forms of government (see, most blatantly, the author know as the ‘Old Oligarch’, published as LACTOR 2, 2nd edition; see also Approaching, section 15).

The political significance of holding control of the sea by way of a large navy was demonstrated by the nature of Athenian power, which asserted control over the Aegean area in the period from the end of the Persian wars to the end of the Peloponnesian war (see below, Approaching, section 12). Thucydides, in sweeping fashion, perceived this as a historical constant: the introductory sections of his history are dedicated to illustrating the ways in which great powers established rule on the basis of control of the sea (Thucydides 1.4-18).

Greeks were well aware that the fluctuations of wind and wave were seasonal: awareness of this was all the more vital in days before the emergence of motorised navigation: in particular, the Greeks knew about the seasonal Etesian (in modern Greek, the Meltemi) winds, which blow in the summer months from north to south across the Aegean sea (skirting the coast of Asia Minor; see Map 5), making navigation difficult for north-bound ships.

Map 5. Prevailing Summer Winds
Some environmental features were extremely localised: the Euripos Straits, for instance, dividing Attica from Euboia, feature one of the strongest tidal currents in the eastern Mediterranean, with water flow peaking at about 7 miles per hour, and the direction of the current changing four times per day.

Navigation of the Aegean was facilitated by the large number of islands, their arrangement (in particular their physical proximity and mutual visibility) and their form (the availability of natural harbours, south-facing, or sheltered from winds blowing from the north). These factors enabled trade, seafaring, and the emergence of nautical spheres of influence. The Greek islands differ widely in terms of size and importance. On the one hand, there is the tiny island of Delos, located at the centre of the Cycladic archipelago. Its area is 3 ½ square kilometres, and its resources – not least drinking water -- were scarce. It constituted an independent political unit in its own right, though one whose political significance was constantly subject to the will of whichever city ruled the sea. Yet Delos was regarded by ancient Greeks as possessing great mythological and religious significance, and was thought of as the birthplace of the deities Apollo and Artemis. It was chiefly for this reason that it was used as the headquarters of the post-Persian war confederation of Greek states allied to the Athenians, the Delian League; at later times it had great importance as a centre for exchange and commerce.
The largest of the Greek islands is Crete, the area of which is about 8,300 square kilometres. Its fertile soil was an excellent resource, irrigated in the spring and early summer by the melting snow of the mountainous interior, and, from the archaic period, supported many independent city-states (though not as many as the 100 claimed by Homer, *Iliad* 2.649 and followed by other ancient authors!).

The mountains are another significant feature of the Greek landscape. We can think of them in many ways: on the one hand, they are barriers which impede communication but also provide a natural barrier against other communities.
They provide important resources: not only do they provide minerals (such as marble in Attica, Naxos, Paros, Thasos - and elsewhere -- a hard but workable stone used for statues, inscriptions, and important buildings) and metal ores (such as gold and silver in Thrace; silver in Attica; iron in Lakonia), but the melting snow of high mountains in the spring and summer provides an important source of water, irrigating the plains and valleys below and filling springs. Rich alluvial soil is washed down from mountains and makes agricultural land more productive.

**Cities and Territories**

The urban characteristics of communities varied between the different areas of the Greek world. What follows is a short discussion of a number of areas of Greece, by reference to their political affiliations. Running the risk of Athenocentrism, we start with the polis of Athens and Attica and its neighbours.

**Athens and Attica**

The city-state (*polis*) of the Athenians consisted of the city (*asty*) of Athens and the countryside (*chora*) of Attica and its villages: it was one of the larger city-states, covering an area of 2,500 square kilometres (for comparison, Greater London covers about 1,500 square kilometres). It was encircled by mountain ranges: Parnes formed part of the barrier between Athens and Boiotia (the area dominated at times by the city-state of Thebes); the city of Athens itself was encircled by the ranges of Hymmetos, Pentelikon and Aigaleos. The Athenians appear to have attempted to plug the gap between Parnes and Aigaleos in antiquity by constructing a 4 km wall between the two. A fourth-century writer, Xenophon, put the following words into Socrates’ mouth, giving us an impression of an ancient Greek view of the significance of the landscape in constituting the natural lines of defence of a city:

‘You see, Perikles, how our country is barricaded by great mountains, which extend into Boiotia and have steep and narrow passes into our country, and how the interior is also circled with steep mountains.’

Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.5.25 = LACTOR 12, no. 4.
The plain of Athens was cultivated during antiquity (today it is entirely built up), and there were important plains in the west of Attica (the Eleusinian plain) and the north-east (the plain of Marathon). However there were some limits on the agricultural productivity of Attica: it possesses one of the lowest annual rates of rainfall in Greece, averaging some 375 mm per annum (compare London’s 600 mm and Rome’s 800 mm). On the one hand, some fifth-century comic writers, and Plato the philosopher, praised its fertility and productivity; Thucydides, however, claimed that the poverty of its soil explained its political stability (Thucydides 1.2.3-6): its lack of fertility, he argued, meant that it didn’t attract the interest of new conquerors. On Attica’s resources, see also LACTOR 12, nos. 3-8. But the most important resource of Attica was probably silver ore, most famously mined and processed at Laurium from the late Bronze age. By the early years of the fifth century BC it generated a surplus which the Athenians used to fund the construction and maintenance of a navy which was eventually used in the conflict against the Persians (Herodotus 7.144). As well as its marble (Hymentos and Pentelikon were both famous for this), its other natural resource was its coastline: there was a natural bay at Phaleron and a harbour at Piraeus which the Athenians developed later in the fifth century. A number of other locations in Attica, such as Oropos (from which there was a ferry running to Euboia), and Sounion, were evidently used as ports too.

Whatever our interests are in history (they may be focussed upon political, military, social, or cultural aspects), geographical and environmental constants are influential upon the degree to which communities are isolated, connected with others, or able to form networks. The Athenian Empire of the fifth century (see Approaching, section 12) took its shape – primarily consisting of islands and communities on the west coast of Asia Minor – owing to the prominence of the sea and islands in the Greek world and the Athenians’ ability to dominate them through naval power. On the other hand, geography and the human understanding of it is vital also for short-term developments: Themistocles, the Athenian commander in 480 BC, argued that the Greeks should take advantage of the inferior numbers of their ships by luring the Persian fleet to the narrow straits between Salamis and the mainland of Attica (Herodotus, 8.60).
Territorial disputes were common occurrences in the ancient Greek world. To the west of the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis, a portion of sacred land was periodically disputed with the Megarians; conflict blew up in the run-up to the Peloponnesian war of the 430s BC and again in the 350s; the island of Salamis was in a similar position down to the sixth century, though it remained Athenian thereafter. There are occasional references in our sources to inscribed boundary-markers (horoi) which marked out the territorial limits of cities. But there were no checkpoints or border-guards, and territories, on the whole, appear
to have been delineated by natural features. Sanctuaries devoted to particular deities were often located at the peripheries of territory, perhaps as a way of staking the claims of a particular city-state.

To the south of Athens was the island of Aegina, an independent polis in its own right and often hostile to the Athenians. Pericles, the fifth-century Athenian statesman, with famous rhetorical posturing, branded it the ‘eyesore of the Piraeus’ (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 3.10.7). In the early sixth century, it appears to have rivalled Athens in terms of regional supremacy: Herodotus, followed by Thucydides, says that the Athenians first constructed their fleet with the intention of going to war against the people of that island (Herodotus 7.144; Thuc. 1.14). To Athens’ west was the territory of the Megarians, whom many Athenians appear to have regarded with contempt. To the north of Athens was the area of Boiotia. Similar in geographical extent to Attica, this consisted of a number of independent city-states. At times, they were dominated by the Thebans, the most powerful of them, who were at the head of the alliance known as the Boiotian Confederation. The Thebans pursued a foreign policy often hostile to that of Athens, and did not join in the resistance to the Persians at the start of the fifth century BC, and even collaborated with the invaders (Herodotus 9.2). Some Boiotian city-states, such as Plataia and Eleutheraia, however, became politically aligned to the Athenians in the classical period. Like most Greek city-states, the main source of livelihood of these city-states was agricultural activity. To the north of Boiotia, we encounter the Thessalians, some, but not all of whom, were organised as poleis; others were organised loosely around the idea of an ethnic group. Still further north were the Macedonians, who were Greeks by virtue of their language and religious practices, but who were often dismissed by the classical Greek writers as barbarous.

**The Peloponnese**

Travelling west from Athens, one passes through Megara and reaches the isthmus of Corinth. A canal was completed in 1893 through this 6 km-wide passage of land connecting central and southern Greece, which created a navigable pass between the Corinthian Gulf and the Saronic Gulf. Attempts to create such a canal in antiquity met with little success, though in the archaic period the Corinthians developed a paved roadway (the *diolkos*) which led across it, enabling the amphibious conveyance of cargo-ships. After crossing the isthmus, one reaches the Peloponnese, a mass of land which is highly diverse in its terrain. Among the many city-states, the most important were Argos and Sparta (see *Approaching*, section 16). Argos was the chief rival of the Spartans in the Peloponnese: with a power base of two fortified hills (the Larissa and the Aspis), it appears to have gradually extended its territory so as to occupy the whole of the triangular Argive plain by the 460s. Its territorial limits to its north-west were marked by temple of Hera, the ‘Argive Heraion’. Argos remained neutral at the time of the Persian invaders, thought it was not, in Herodotus’ words ‘the worst of offenders’ (he may well have been comparing the Argives favourably with the Thebans:
Herodotus 7.152). While we think of Argos as a Peloponnesian city, it is important to bear in mind that, as a city with relatively easy access to the sea, it had important links with the rest of the Greek world: a mid-fifth century inscription from Tylissos on Crete (C. Fornara, *From Archaic Times to the end of the Peloponnesian War*, no. 89) attests to some form of Argive intervention in that city’s relations with neighbouring Knossos: the connection between Argos and Crete may have derived from a real or perceived act of settlement by Argives on that island.

**Beyond Greece**

The Greek world is far bigger in its extent than Aegean Greece, and there were Greek settlements across the coastline of the Eastern Mediterranean, South Italy and Sicily, the Black Sea area, and North Africa. The west coast of Asia Minor was dominated by Greek city-states. Of these, the richest of the archaic and classical period was Miletus. Further east, there were Greek cities around the coast of the Black Sea, founded during the archaic and classical period. Greek settlements known as *emporia* (trading-posts) were established further afield, in Egypt (e.g. Naukratis) and northern Syria (e.g. those at Al Mina at the delta of the Orontes, attested only archaeologically, and Ras al-Bassit, which may be the site of ancient Poseideion: Hdt. 3.91). To the west, Magna Graecia is the term used to describe the Greek cities of southern Italy (Taras, Sybaris, etc.) and sometimes Sicily too. During the archaic period, travellers founded Greek settlements in Sicily, most notably Syracuse and also in the Black Sea area. These often became known as *apoikiai* (‘settlements far from home’, sometimes translated as ‘colonies’) and city-states developed elaborate traditions which justified the maintenance of political and diplomatic relations between mother-city and *apoikia*. Ancient literary texts preserve a wealth of stories about the process of establishing colonies: accounts link the city of Parion, in Asia Minor, for instance, with three separate mother cities, Paros, Miletos and Erythrai. Individuals from these settlements would themselves found ‘colonies’ of their own: a number of Greek settlements in Sicily were associated with Syracuse. Of all the ancient Greek cities, Corinth, Megara and Miletos were associated with a high number of settlements beyond mainland Greece (see below, Table 1). The Athenians were not prolific colonisers in the archaic period. However, the renowned wealth and enduring attraction of Sicily continued into the fifth century and was a factor that led the Athenians to embark on the ultimately disastrous Sicilian expedition in 415BC.

For a highly important study of overseas settlement in archaic Greece, drawing an important distinction between modern, state-sanctioned colonisation, and archaic Greek settlements (which were inspired often by individual merchants and even political exiles), see R. Osborne, ‘Early Greek colonisation? The nature of Greek settlement in the West’, in N. Fisher and H. van Wees (eds), *Archaic Greece: New approaches and New Evidence*, 1998, 251–70.
Map 7. The Mediterranean, marking Greek cities and some Greek overseas settlements

Table 1. A selection of examples of overseas settlements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother-City</th>
<th>Colony</th>
<th>Traditional Date</th>
<th>Ancient Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athens</td>
<td>Sigeion</td>
<td>Late 7th century BC</td>
<td>Herodotus 5.94-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corcyra</td>
<td>Epidamnus</td>
<td>627 BC</td>
<td>Thuc. 1.24-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corinth</td>
<td>Syracuse (in Sicily)</td>
<td>733 BC</td>
<td>Thuc. 6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corinth</td>
<td>Corcyra (mod. Corfu)</td>
<td>8th century BC</td>
<td>Thuc. 1.24-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miletos</td>
<td>Panticapaeum (eastern Crimea)</td>
<td>c. 590-70 BC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megara</td>
<td>Byzantium (later Constantinople, modern Istanbul)</td>
<td>657 BC</td>
<td>Pseudo-Skymnos 715 f.; Herodotus 4.144.1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phokaia</td>
<td>Massalia (mod. Marseille)</td>
<td>c. 600 BC</td>
<td>Eusebios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thera</td>
<td>Cyrene</td>
<td>631 BC</td>
<td>Herodotus 4.150-9; (Pindar, Pythian 5, lines 55-97).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A note: the Greeks and their past

Stories about colonial foundations of the archaic era are very much based upon legends which emerged in the classical period to support the fabrication or maintenance of political relations: accordingly, they should never be taken at face value! Perhaps the clearest example of the use of a story about colonisation for political purposes derives from the decision of the Therans, in the fourth century BC, to request the grant of citizenship from the people of Cyrene: in order to persuade them that they were worthy of this, they appealed to a story about their ancient establishment of Cyrene as a colony. The positive response of the Cyreneans was recorded upon an inscription which told the story of the purported act of settlement (see C. Fornara, *From Archaic Times to the end of the Peloponnesian War*, no. 18). We cannot be sure about the accuracy of the inscribed account, though we know that Pindar (Pythian Odes 4) and Herodotus (4.145-60) told stories which bore similarities to it: a common element was the role of Delphi in advising the establishment of Cyrene. What we can be certain of is that the Therans and Cyreneans agreed that they possessed an ancestral kinship. The Greeks of the classical period told stories about their past: they did so because they had relevance to contemporary issues and claims.

Further Reading:


Approaching Greek History 2: Periods, Calendars and Money

Some modern chronological definitions:

The main period of interest of this book is the classical era of the ancient Greek city-state. Modern scholars have divided the historical period of the ancient Greek city-state into three distinct periods:

Archaic period: c. 800 (emergence of city-state civilisation)—479 BC (end of Persian wars)
Classical period: 479 (end of Persian wars)-323 BC (death of Alexander the Great)
Hellenistic period: 323 BC (death of Alexander the Great) – 31 BC (battle of Actium)

These three periods are generally defined as ‘historical’: that is to say they are attested by written evidence (the earliest in the form of short inscriptions and verses recorded in the literary tradition). The period before c. 800 BC is ‘prehistoric’: our literary sources offer us little in terms of concrete knowledge about these periods, though archaeologists have taken great strides in producing studies of the prehistoric civilisations of the Bronze Age, especially the palace-based civilisations of Crete and Mycenae. In antiquity, however, there was no universally-agreed definition of the ‘historical’ period of the past.

Counting Years:

A number of systems of counting years appear to have co-existed in the Mediterranean of the fifth century BC: Herodotus was aware of the Egyptian habit of counting by generations (Herodotus 2.142); Thucydides counted forward from the date of the fall of Troy (Thucydides 1.12). Later historians appear to have devised a system of counting by Olympic games, drawing upon a list of Olympic victors that was first drawn up by Hippias of Elis in the late fifth century BC: they were held at four year intervals, and so one ‘Olympiad’ lasted four years. The most common way of counting years within Greek cities, however, was by reference to a particular office-holder who would give his or her name to the year in which he served. This meant that each city had a different way of counting the years: this comes across clearly in Thucydides’ (2.1-2) account of the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War:

‘We now come to the actual outbreak of war between Athens and her allies … The Thirty Years’ Peace which was made after the reconquest of Euboia went on for fourteen years. In the fifteenth year, the forty-eighth year of the priestess-hood of Chrysis at Argos, the year when Aeinesias was ephor at Sparta, and two months
before the end of the archonship of Pythodorus at Athens, six months after the battle at Potidaia, just at the beginning of spring… ’ (tr. R. Warner, adapted).

Pythodorus was Athenian archon from June/July 432 to June/July 431, and this allows us to date the actions described by Thucydides to spring 431.

Calendars:

Ancient Greek city-states, for the most part, based their calendars on ‘lunar cycles’, according to the movement and visibility of the moon: each new month was supposed to coincide with the new moon. This is quite different from the modern Western (Gregorian) system (but bears resemblances with the Islamic lunar and the Hebrew lunisolar calendar), which measures a year by the time which it takes the earth to travel round the sun. In Athens, each month lasted 29 or 30 days, which necessitated the use of a leap year which was created by inserting an additional month every fourth year, though this was not a universal practice.

Months of the Athenian civil calendar, with modern equivalents:

Hekatombaion: June/July
Metageitnion: July/August
Boedromion: August/September
Pyanepsion: September/October
Maimakterion: October/November
Poseideon: November/December
Gamelion: December/January
Anthesterion: January/February
Elaphebolion: February/March
Mounichion: March/April
Thargelion: April/May
Skirophorion: May/June

In Athens, this calendar provided the basis for the points at which administrative and political magistrates would take or leave office: Athenian archons would begin their office on 1st Hekatombaion, which was timed after the summer solstice. Another important function of the
calendar was to specify when festivals were to be held: the annual Great Dionysia, for instance, began on the 10th day of Elaphebolion. Local, village, calendars of religious events and sacrifices existed too: for a calendar from the deme Erchia, see LACTOR 12 no. 234. To ignore or misrepresent (see Lysias’ speech Against Nikomachos!) sacrificial calendar would amount to an act of impiety.

The Athenians possessed two further calendars: a festival calendar, but also a ‘prytany’ calendar’, which divided the year into ten parts according to the 36-day offices of the prytaneis (the 50-strong ‘presidents’ of the council of 500: see below Approaching, section 15); this calendar was used in the dating of state documents.

Systems of months varied from city to city: the Peace of Nikias of 421 BC, according to Thucydides’ text, came into effect at Sparta ‘on the 27th day of Artemisium, when Pleistolas was ephor; and at Athens on the 25th of Elaphebolion, when Alkaios was archon’ (Thuc. 5.19). As a way of getting round the problems of variety in Greek calendars, Thucydides used his own system, counting dates from the start of the war, and then dividing according to winter (which included both spring and autumn!) and summer.

Money and other standards

Each Greek city-state had its own currency and its own coins, though, usually, Greeks would accept coins as currency whatever their minting authority if they were deemed to be worth their weight in pure metal terms. Over the course of the fifth century BC, the political and military power of Athens meant that Athenian currency became the most important one in the Greek world. A decree of the Athenians of the mid- or late- fifth century BC appears to have imposed Athenian silver coins and standards upon other Greek cities (LACTOR 1, 4th edition, 198, discussing the interpretation of this decree).

Athenian Currency:

6 obols = 1 drachma
100 drachmai = 1 mna
60 mna = 1 talent
6000 drachmai = 1 talent

It follows, therefore, that:

1 talent = 60 mna = 6000 drachmai = 36,000 obols
The *per diem* wage of a carpenter or a stone-craftsman in fifth-century Athens was 1 drachma. The wage of a rower in the same period ranged between $\frac{1}{2}$ and 1 drachma; in the late fourth century, a medimnos (see below) of wheat was priced at 5 drachmai in Athens.

Ancient Greek coins were made out of precious metals such as silver, alloys (such as electrum, a gold-silver combination), or even gold. They were made out of a regulated weight of metal and were stamped with a design, usually on both faces. (The Athenian mna was supposed to weigh 436.6 grams and, accordingly, the Athenian drachma 4.3 grams; the drachma of Aegina weighed 6.3 grams; that of Corinth 2.9 grams). The design indicated the issuing authority, which was usually a city-state, and indicated that it would be accepted among members of that community. The design of Athens’ 4-drachma coin (the tetradrachm; see right, Fig. 4) featured a head of Athena on one side and an owl on the other: accordingly, they were known as ‘owls’. Other city-states adorned their coins with flora, fauna, mythological scenes, deities, sculptures, portraits, or buildings. The iconography of the coins of ancient Greek city states often punned on their names: the rose the on Rhodian coins came from the Greek word for ‘rose’ (*rhodon*) and the seal of the Phokaia joked on the word for ‘seal’ (*phoke*).

The evidence of coins can tell us a great deal about the history of city-states and their ties with other areas of the Mediterranean. Each city-state produced its own distinctive coinage. The evidence of hoards of coins across the Greek world reveals trading patterns and economic connections: the discovery, for instance, of Corinthian coins in that city’s colonies in south Italy suggests that Corinthian coinage was widely disseminated to these settlements. The extensive circulation of Athenian coinage in the fifth century reflects her widespread power across the Greek world and beyond in that era.

**Weights**

Weights differed from city to city, and their physical remains have shown considerable fluctuation from a norm. The following, then, is an approximation of the Attic-Euboic standard:

1 obol = 0.72 g.

1 drachma = 4.31 g.

1mmana = 431 g
1 talent = 25.86 kg

**Dry measures**

Grain was measured in ‘dry measures’

1 medimnos = 52.18 litres or 40.38 kilograms.

**Distance**

The Greek stade is about 200 metres

**Further Reading**


Approaching Greek History 3: Greek Names

The study of names and naming-systems can tell us a great deal about the attitudes of Greeks to individuals, whether they be male citizens, women, slaves or other foreigners. This introductory section introduces some of the most important aspects of Greek (in particular Athenian!) naming-systems.

Citizens

Greek names were, in the classical period, formed out of three elements: a personal name, the patronymic (‘son of X’) and the name of their home city or locality. In Athens, after Cleisthenes’ reforms of 508/7 BC, this was the deme (see below, Approaching, sections 4, 9 in which they were registered as a citizen). For example: Perikles son of Xanthippos of (the deme) Cholargos.

But in some, especially literary contexts, reference was made only to the personal name and the home city:

‘Thucydides the Athenian wrote the history of the war fought between Athens and Sparta’ (Thucydides, 1.1).

Athenian inscriptions tended to refer to non-Athenians by their home city. In this Athenian inscribed Athenian honorific decree, Herakleides’ patronymic is lost (the stone is worn away) but the name of his home city is preserved well enough to be restored:

‘Herakleides son of G[---] of [Klazo]menai, proxenos and benefactor’.

(LACTOR 1, 4th edition, no. 62).

Greek names have a wide range of meanings. One common category was the ‘theophoric’ name, which was based upon the name of a god or a hero: Dionysios, derivative of the God Dionysos, was the most common name in the ancient Greek world. But other names corresponded to concepts with glorious connotations (‘Perikles’ = ‘Surrounded by Glory’; ‘Demosthenes’ = ‘Strength of the People’) or other qualities. First-born sons were often named after their paternal grandfather.

Women took their fathers’ patronymic: for example, Philinna daughter of Aristarchos. Women’s names often took a feminine version of a male name: Timostratos, for instance, was the masculine form, and gives the feminine Timostrate. But other names are found only in feminine form: Neaira, Myrrhine.

The name of an ancient Athenian did not, however, tell his or her whole story: one would not know, for instance, that Kleisthenes the son of Megakles of Athens was a member of the
prominent Alkmaionid family from his name alone. Family connections were broadcast by claimed genealogies and through reputation rather than by designation alone.

**Non-Athenians in Athens**

Foreigners and metics (resident aliens) would be referred to by their name and the ‘ethnic’ of their city: for instance, the metic speech-writer Lysias was known in Athens as ‘Lysias of Syracuse’.

Slaves were sometimes given names that derived from their countries or areas of origin: Aigyptios (‘Egyptian’) or Thraissa (‘Thracian Woman’); others took names that corresponded to virtues: Harmonia (‘Harmony’); others took names that were indistinguishable from those of free citizens.

In one interesting example, a decree of Athens honouring a man called Oiniades, the Athenians initially referred to him as ‘Oiniades of Skiathos’ but later changed this to refer to ‘Oiniades of Palaiiskathi (lit. = Old Skiathos)’: presumably they initially upset Oiniades by offering him an erroneous designation! For the inscription, see LACTOR 1, 4th edition, no. 238.

**Further Reading:**

On ancient Greek names and naming practices, see the website of the Lexicon of Greek Personal Names:

http://www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/names/practices.html
**Approaching Greek History 4: The Polis**

In ancient Greek History, it is not meaningful to talk about a ‘Greek nation’ (although on ethnic identity, see below, section 8). It is even less meaningful to talk of a ‘Greek Empire’. The *Polis* (plural = *poleis*) was, across the Greek World of the archaic and classical periods, the most important political unit. Indeed, it was the dominant form of community organisation in mainland Greece, the Greek islands, and the west coast of Asia Minor from the early eighth century BC (c. 800 BC) until the end of the fourth century BC (300 BC). Modern historians have collected evidence for more than 1,000 *poleis* in archaic and classical Greece. Much of this evidence takes the form of passing remarks in literary sources or inscriptions, such as the inscribed Athenian Tribute Lists: see below, *Approaching* section 12.

**What was a polis?**

Ancient Greeks often referred to themselves living in the polis. But this word is notoriously difficult to translate. It can be thought of as a physical space (‘city’) or as a political entity (‘citizen-state’ or ‘city-state’); another view, which emphasises the lack of distinction between the government and body of male citizens in Greece, defines it as a ‘city-community’. In the ancient Greek world, *poleis* were characterised by physical and non-physical features (see, for some ancient definitions, LACTOR 5, nos. 1-3). Typically, *poleis* consisted of a small urban area (known in Greek as the *asty*) and a larger rural area (the *chora*). Urban areas contained places land set aside for commercial activities (usually known as the agora, or market-place), places for political meetings and sessions of the law-courts, and often fortified hills (known as the *acropolis* (= ‘summit of the polis’)). Spaces dedicated to the gods (such as temples and sanctuaries) were located both within cities and in the countryside.

In the archaic period, public buildings would have been few and far between, and most of those that did exist would have served a primarily religious function. Especially in the late fifth century and fourth century, some cities were able to invest in building. In some cities, stone theatres were constructed, which provided permanent, monumental, venues for the performance of comedies, tragedies and other performances. Many cities fortified their central urban areas: after the Persian wars, the Athenians, eager to defend their city from future incursions, built walls in a very short time, using any stone that was available to them, including grave-markers and fragments of sculpture (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.93). However, every *polis* was different; indeed, one *polis*, that of Sparta, never developed an urban centre, and remained, throughout the classical period, a loosely-connected association of villages (on its lack of monumental building, and the dangers of too readily drawing conclusions from it, see Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.10).
Outside the city-centre, the countryside (chora) of a Greek polis was used primarily for agricultural purposes (on the natural resources of Attica, see LACTOR 12 3-19), and, particularly in peripheral areas, pasturage. Land-owning farmers, some of whom were wealthy enough to own slaves (though the extent of agricultural slavery is a subject of much debate), cultivated a range of crops, most commonly the ‘Mediterranean triad’ of grain, grapes and olives. In marginal areas or borderland regions, sheep and (more commonly) goats would graze. The sources suggest that rural inhabitants lived both either in isolated settlements or in small villages, but it seems to be the case that in Attica, at least in the fourth century BC, it became more usual for rural dwellers to live in clustered settlements. In Attica, these villages were known as demes, and possessed facilities and administrative organisations of their own.

City-states, as politically autonomous entities, possessed their own political, financial, military and legal infrastructures. Evidence from a number of city-states suggests that most of them possessed a sovereign decision-making body, the assembly (known as an ekklesia in Athens), which citizens were allowed to attend in order to vote on important questions such as treaty-making, declarations of war, the governance of the city, or the granting of honours to foreigners. Other important elements to city-state organisation were law-courts, used for the arbitration of disputes according to interpretation of the legislation of the city-state; magistrates, who were selected by lottery or by voting, and a council (in Athens, the boule), which met throughout the year and set the agenda for the assembly.

Most city-states were small and weak (some of them, like Mykonos, consisted solely of small, resource-poor islands) and, owing to the pressures exerted by bigger city-states (Athens, Sparta, Thebes, Argos), most of them struggled to formulate their own independent policies. The fortunes of some city-states fluctuated over time: Corinth, for instance, appears to have been important and strong throughout the archaic period and fifth century, but weak and insignificant from the start of the fourth.

The Community

The other defining aspect of the polis was the community of people who lived inside it. Most city-state communities appear to have closely checked the status of the people who lived within the area of the polis and to have monitored the admission of new citizens to their groups very carefully.

In Athens, there were three main status groups: citizens, metics and slaves (on these groups, see Approaching, section 12). Male citizens of the age of 20 and above were the most privileged group of all. They had the right to speak at the assembly, and, from the age of 30, to sit, for the duration of a year, at two points in their life, at the council. They were also able to launch prosecutions in the lawcourts. Perhaps their most important right was to own land in the city-state: this was a privilege restricted to citizen men and only a few foreigners who were granted it as a special award in recognition of some deed. On the other hand, being a citizen male meant brought with it significant obligations, including fighting on behalf of the
When, how, and why did the polis emerge?

Ancient sources and modern scholars often talk about the ‘synoicism’, the coming-together of small communities to form a more significant political entity, in the shape of the polis. Despite the existence of ancient Greek accounts of synoicism (often preserved in traditions and commemorated in festivals), several factors make it hard for the modern historian to understand the emergence of the polis. With the exception of a few inscriptions and Homer’s Iliad (which we cannot use straightforwardly as a historical source), there are few surviving written sources from the eighth century BC; in other words, there are no written primary sources for the emergence of the polis. Moreover, later Greek accounts show that the Greeks themselves were extremely confused about their ancient past. The fifth-century BC historian Thucydides, for instance, wrote of King Theseus’ re-organisation of Attica, his abolition of local administration, and his establishment of Athens as a political centre (Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 2.15). However, no modern historians today believe that King Theseus ever existed; his story was one that the Athenians told about their own past as a way of explaining it to themselves and to others.

Instead of looking to the literary sources for understanding the emergence of the polis, modern historians instead look at the archaeological evidence. In Attica, this suggests a growth in the number of occupied settlements in their eighth century BC, while increased evidence for burials suggests that a growing proportion of those who died were receiving marked interments in organised, discrete cemeteries. Increased evidence for religious activity at sanctuaries of the gods in both the centres of poleis and on their peripheries also suggests a growing conception of clearly-delineated space of the city-state was emerging in the eighth century BC.

The fourth-century philosopher Aristotle suggested that humans formed city-states out of a natural inclination to form communities. But it is clear that this is not the full explanation for the emergence of this form of civilisation. Modern historians have suggested a number of explanations for the emergence of the polis. Some have suggested that communities came together to pool resources, or to facilitate trading with other communities. Others have suggested that communities may have become associated with particular territories as they protected cult sites (both those in their city centres and those at the frontiers with other states) where they worshipped or made dedications to the gods.

Alternatives to the polis
The *polis* remained the most important political or community grouping throughout archaic and classical Greek history. But at a number of points, city-states got together to create stronger, bigger forces. At some point, perhaps in the middle of the sixth century BC, the Spartans organised an alliance of states allied to Spartan interests, which is known to us as the Peloponnesian League and functioned intermittently for some 150 years. During the Persian Wars (499-479 BC), Greek city-states came together to resist the Persians, creating an organisation we know as the Hellenic League. They commemorated their efforts by scratching the name of most of these communities on the Serpent Column (C. Fornara, *From Archaic Times to the End of the Peloponnesian War*, 2nd edition, 1983, 59; see Figure 6, right) set up at Delphi. After the end of the Persian Wars, the Athenians formed the Delian League (478-404 BC) which brought together Greek city-states in an alliance which originally aimed both to permanently liberate the Greeks from Persian domination and to take vengeance on the Persians ‘by ravaging the territory of the King of Persia’ (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.96). In some areas of Greece, particularly central and northern Greece, it was known for cities and villages to come together on ‘ethnic’ lines to form bigger, federal, political entities: the most historically significant of these was the Boiotian Confederacy; its most significant element was the city of Thebes, which normally dominated the union. With her Boiotian allies, the Thebans were a formidable central Greek rival to the Athenians.

In the fourth century BC, there were a number of attempts by city-states (among them Sparta, Olynthus, Athens) to establish political confederations of largely subordinate allies, but these were short-lived. The political significance of the city-state was eclipsed after the emergence of Macedonian power in the 340s and 330s BC. After Philip II of Macedon defeated the Athenians and other Greek states on the battlefield of Chaironea in 338 BC, it was left for Alexander the Great to secure the subordination of the city-states of Greece to Macedonian control. Alexander embarked upon an expedition against the Persians which would create a vast territorial empire within which the political significance of the *polis* was subject to royal power.

**Further Reading:**

K. Freeman, *Greek City-States*, 1950.

Approaching Greek History 5: the Physical Legacy

The physical remains of ancient Greek civilisation are highly accessible: they can be visited in archaeological sites and museums (both in Greece and in cities across Western Europe), and are widely published and deployed by modern historians. The remains are extensive enough both to contribute to our understanding of the literary sources and sometimes even to offer alternative views of phenomena. In this section I will discuss chiefly some of the remains of Athens as a way of introducing in detail some of the physical aspects of the ancient Greek city. Material objects bearing writing, known as inscriptions, are discussed in section 7.

Cities

Many towns and cities of modern Greece (among them Athens, Corinth, Sparta, Argos, Megara) bear the names of their ancient predecessors. In some cases, the modern settlement has been built on top of the ancient remains (this is so in the cases of Athens and Megara), in other cases it is located some way away from its ancient version (Corinth), while in the case of Sparta, there is little, other than a low hill and Hellenistic theatre, that remains from antiquity. In the case of Sparta: this may be owing to the fact that the inhabitants of the archaic and classical period built relatively few durable (i.e. stone) buildings (see Thucydides 1.10 for a view of the potentially distorting nature of the absence of monumental buildings).

In Athens, the most striking remains are those of the complex of religious sanctuaries and temples that was the acropolis. On its south slope, there are extensive classical remains in the shape of the fourth-century theatre of Dionysus and of the religious sanctuary of the healing deity Asclepius. The existence of constructions like the Theatre of Herodes Atticus attest to the expenditure of wealthy foreigners in the Hellenistic and Roman. But there is much more too: enough remains of the ancient assembly-place, the Pnyx, for us to get some impression of how it would have felt to address the Athenian citizens massed together. Since the 1930s, excavations of the Athenian agora have, perhaps controversially, cleared away modern residential and commercial areas for the sake of uncovering the Athenian market-place, the lawcourts, and other buildings and monuments constructed from the archaic period down to the era of the Roman power. Excavations at the agora and elsewhere have uncovered the remains not only of sanctuaries and public buildings but also of ancient houses, industrial, and commercial areas, and have enabled historians to gain some understanding of the domestic conditions of the everyday people.

The countryside

Rural Greece also offers much in terms material remains. In Southern Attica, excavations close to Laurium have uncovered the washeries and kilns where silver was extracted from its
ore. The excavation of villages and, to a lesser extent, farmhouses, enables us to build up an impression of how ancient Greeks lived (many of them in villages and communities; fewer in isolated residences). There is an ongoing debate about how people lived in the Attic countryside: see below, Approaching, section 9.

The evidence for ancient terracing (see left for terracing in Ikaria in the early 2000s) suggests that there was direct human intervention to increase the productivity of the soil.

Survey archaeology is an important means of determining the uses of land in antiquity: typically, this would involve a group of field-walkers making detailed observations of what they encountered over the course of a survey of a particular area. The aim is often to identify both sites and artefacts, but also to detect manufactured objects, buried features and organic matter. Surveys have been carried out in a number of areas of Greece: starting in 1992, a survey of Lakonia in the Peloponnese (the Laconia Rural Sites Project) explored an area of 70 square kilometres to the east of Sparta, and pointed to the abandonment of smaller sites coinciding with the proliferation of many medium- and larger-sized sites during the period of 550-450, suggesting a trend towards nucleation during the period of Spartan dominance, though it is hard to identify what initiated these changes.

Religious Sanctuaries

The lives of ancient Greeks were dominated by religion and a concern for safeguarding their community. This is reflected in the physical legacy of ancient Greek history. Every ancient Greek city-state contained temples and sanctuaries (portions of land which were reserved for religious activity). In most cities they made up the most expensive, well-built and durable buildings; this is reflected in the archaeological record too. The temples and architecture of the Athenian acropolis were a showcase of Athens’ wealth and architectural innovation in the second half of the fifth century BC. The largest and most conspicuous of these is the Parthenon, designed by the architects Iktinos and Kallikrates, which was constructed between 447 and 432 BC. Built using high-quality marble from the quarries of Pentelikon, 16 kilometres to the north of Athens, it was decorated with a highly coloured frieze, pediment, and metopes, which represented accounts of Athenian mythology; it housed a gold-and-ivory cult statue of Athena, the virgin deity to whom it was dedicated. While the Parthenon was constructed in the plainer Doric Order, other acropolis temples, such as that of Athena Nike,
built a little later, used the visually more elaborate Ionic order. Why did the Athenians invest so much in the construction work on the acropolis? One answer is piety: these buildings were dedicated to the deities, with a particular emphasis on Athens’ patron, Athena. But they were also constructed in order to make an impression and to demonstrate the wealth and power of the Athenian community on both Athenian citizens and foreign visitors. For more on fifth-century building see below, *Approaching*, section 9).

The most important religious sanctuaries for the Greeks were located away from the major city-states. The sites of Panhellenic games at Olympia, Delphi, and, to a lesser degree, Isthmia and Nemea, were impressively adorned with statues, sanctuaries, temples, and storehouses (treasuries) of the city-states who participated at the games. As part of their shared identity, the Ionian cities of western Asia Minor celebrated a festival and games at the Panionion sanctuary, sacred to Poseidon, close to Mykale (Herodotus 1.148).

**Map 8. Important Sanctuaries**

**Defence**

The classical Athenians and other Greek city-states invested heavily in fortifications and other military installations. In the fifth century, Athenian efforts were concentrated upon fortifying their harbours, their city, and the construction of long walls that connected the city with the ports Phaleron and Piraeus. These defences allowed the Athenians, in the early years of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) to evacuate the population of Attica within the city
walls as a means of minimizing the impact of the incursions of the Spartans and their allies (see below, *Approaching*, section 13). In the fourth century, the Athenians spent more money on constructing fortifications further afield in Attica, probably with the intention of protecting their land from the threat of Thebans from the north. Other cities too invested heavily in fortifications, and there are impressive remains of classical fortifications from a number of cities, such as Messene and Amphipolis.

**Archaeology of death (see also below, *Approaching*, section 20)**

Material evidence provides us with the foundations for understanding how ancient Greeks lived their daily lives, but it also offers us a view of how they treated and commemorated the dead. From the eighth century BC, there is increasing evidence for the burial of the dead: this suggests that a wider section of society was receiving marked graves. For reasons of religious purity, Greeks tended to bury the deceased (sometimes in the form of incinerated remains) outside their city walls; the Athenians, for instance, placed many of their dead in the area known as the Kerameikos (the Potters’ Quarter). In the archaic period, the wealthy commemorated them with the erection of statues and other grave monuments. In Athens, during the fifth century BC, these monuments for individuals disappear from the archaeological record, though from the end of the century and increasingly in the fourth century, we see the emergence of grave *stelai* whose scenes of the dead and their relatives can tell us about broader societal attitudes, especially towards women. The Athenians started listing the names of those who had died in battle upon large stone slabs, often known as ‘casualty lists’ (see, for instance, LACTOR 1 (4th edition), nos. 41-2). It is just possible that this was viewed as more egalitarian (a form of political equality among male citizens was a key value of fifth-century Athenian democracy), than individual forms of commemoration, and may have been in tune with the democratic political ethos of the fifth-century Athenians. In the 1990s, during excavations associated with the construction of the Athenian underground railway system, extraordinary discoveries of mass graves were made close to the Kerameikos: it is thought that these interments were made during the great plague which struck Athens in the early years of the Peloponnesian war, a time when, according to Thucydides, normal arrangements for the treatment of the dead broke down (Thuc. 2.52).

**Pottery**

As a hard substance that, when fired, does not decompose, the evidence of ceramic production is valuable for the historian of Greece. On one level, the remains of pottery (drinking cups, crockery, decorative vases, grave offerings, beehives…) indicate human presence in particular regions. But the fact that particular styles of vase can be associated with particular periods and particular cities, and the existence of local markings on the handles of trading amphorae, means that pots provide evidence of long-distance trade and demonstrate which parts of the Greek world were in touch with one another. The wide distribution of pottery deriving from Athens or Thasos, for instance, suggests strongly that
their communities traded their goods across the eastern Aegean. The Athenians produced decorative pots which were much admired by the Etruscans of Italy: a large proportion of the decorated pottery on display in Western museums – so much of it illustrates mythological scenes – today derives from Etruscan tombs; they appear to have been designed with their tastes in mind.

Ancient Greek pottery possesses its own rich history. Historians of Art often talk of an ‘Orientalising’ period of Greek art from the seventh century BC, when Greek artists and potters imitated the designs (often based upon representations of fauna and flora) of artists of the near east. But by the end of the seventh century, a style known as black-figure developed, with figures painted upon the shaped but unfired vessel with a ‘slip’ (a solution of clay: areas painted with this would turn black upon completion of a three-stage firing process) in silhouette upon the orange clay, with details added by incision (so that the colour of the clay would show through) and colour added as a final detail. In the sixth century, the Athenians appear to have developed this technique further, and dominated the production of decorative vases: the most popular scenes were those with mythological content. In the late sixth-century, the red-figure technique emerged, with the figures being left in the orange tone of the clay, and the background washed with the slip so that it turned black after firing. Scenes from daily life became more common. Red-figure reached its artistic peak in the fifth century BC. A further development was the production of oil-flasks for use in funerary ritual: these objects were produced on white-painted clay and were decorated with low-key illustrations.

**Sculpture**

The fifth century BC saw the emergence of naturalistic art in Greece, especially in the form of idealised athletic bodies such as Polycleitus’ Doryphorus. The development from the rigid frontality of archaic kouroi and korai figures, to the relaxed stance of the Doryphorus, looking off into the mid-distance, has been linked to changes in political regime (from tyranny to democracy), and to Greek interest in sport and the gymnasium. Statues could be set up as votives in the sanctuaries of the gods, as thanks-offerings or in commemoration of military or athletic victories. With the exception of a few rare bronzes, however, (such as the early Classical Riace bronzes found off the coast of southern Italy, or the Delphic charioteer), we are sadly lacking many of the original statues, though we often have their inscribed bases. Indeed, even such famous statues as the Doryphorus and Myron’s Discobolus are known only from Roman copies and literary sources, and caution is often needed, as the old tendency to see all classicising works of the Roman period as direct copies of famous Greek works has now been discredited.

Other sculptural works came in the form of architectural sculpture, such as the reliefs and pedimental sculptures which decorated the Parthenon or the temple of Zeus at Olympia. These allow us to trace the development of classical style, and also to set the images into their original contexts (on the Parthenon, see below, *Approaching*, section 9).
**Coins**

On numismatic evidence, see above, section 2.

**Further reading:**


Writing

Written evidence from ancient Greece can be divided into two types: on the one hand, literary texts (see Approaching section 7) which are preserved owing to a process of copying manuscripts in a tradition which went on throughout classical antiquity and thereafter down to the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century. On the other hand, there are those which are preserved on the materials upon which they were written in antiquity: the most important of these are papyri and inscriptions. A huge quantity of writings, both literary and documentary, of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, survives on papyri from Egypt (a particularly rich source is the rubbish dumps at Oxyrhynchus). Some papyri preserve pieces of Greek literature (a fragmentary papyrus preserved in the John Rylands library, Manchester, illustrated left, contains a passage which says that the Spartan ephor Chilon, in the mid-sixth century, was responsible for ending tyrannies in Athens and Sikyon: see Fornara, Archaic Times 39B); other, ‘documentary’ papyri, record financial dealings, letters, warrants and other forms of transaction.

Inscriptions, pieces of writing inscribed on stone or metal objects, make up the overwhelming majority of ancient Greek writing: they derive from all parts of Greece, the Greek West, and Asia Minor. In what follows, we will touch upon some forms of inscription and ask what they contribute to understanding Greek History and how we can start to think about them critically.

Inscriptions and individuals

Many inscriptions were written down on hard surfaces by, or on behalf of, individuals or families. The vast majority of funerary inscriptions appear to fall into this category. They tell us a great deal about how the ancient Greeks commemorated their dead. From the archaic period onwards, individuals from wealthy families were commemorated with gravestones: Phanodikos of Prokonnesos (an island in the Propontis) was commemorated with an inscription written in two dialects of Greek (see Fornara, Archaic Times 20). But, as already
noted, in Athens, from the early fifth-century, there are fewer grave-markers for individuals, while there is an increased tendency for the state to commemorate, upon inscriptions bearing lists of names, those who had died in war (see, for instance, LACTOR 1, 4th edition, 41-2).

The ancient Greeks incised words upon objects, as a way of marking ownership; they marked dedications to the gods, made at temples, with the names of the donors and sometimes the divine recipients. A quite different use of writing was in curse tablets: the Athenians scratched the names of their enemies upon lead tablets, together with a curse, rolled them up, and placed them below the ground or in graves. Such curses invoke magic spirits against rival lovers, businessmen, sportsmen, enemies in the law-courts, wishing on them a range of ailments including amnesia, insomnia, humiliation, defeat, impotence, illness or even death. One curse-tablet, from Athens, reads as follows:

‘(I bind) Lysanias the blower from the silver works – him and his wife and (his) possessions and whatever work he produced and (his possessions), and hands and feet and mind and head and nose … curse … of the sacred Earth’ (tr. Gager, Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World, 1992, 164.)

Writing appears also to have been used as a mode of communication: lead letters have been discovered from around the Greek world which indicate the use of writing in commercial transactions, while others offer us valuable insight into a world beyond the political and economic elite. A letter from the Athenian agora, scratched onto lead, suggests that Lesis’ despair at his working conditions (it is unclear whether he is a slave or a free man) has led him to write (or have written on his behalf) a message to his mother and a male associate:

‘Lesis is sending a letter to Xenocles and to his mother by no means to overlook that he is perishing in the foundry but to come to his masters and find something better for him. For I have been handed over to a man thoroughly wicked. I am perishing from being whipped; I am tied up! I am treated like dirt – more and more!’

**Inscriptions and the State**

The production of inscriptions is extremely varied across the whole Greek world. The Cretans were exceptionally prolific producers of public inscriptions during the early fifth century BC. At some point in the early fifth century BC, the Cretan city-state of Gortyn published an extensive set of laws on the walls of a public building in its civic centre (agora). Some 600 lines of text are preserved in 12 columns; the inscribed area measures 5 feet high by 30 feet wide. The inscription consists of regulations concerning the family, property and slaves. It represents the most important evidence piece of evidence for non-Athenian classical law. From it we glean information about the regulation of disputes concerning the ownership of slaves, and also a separate status-group of serfs, who could marry free women. While using it as a source for the regulation of human behaviour and the procedures which those who ignored those regulations faced, we must remember to ask why the Gortynians wanted to write up this document: did it provide guidance to the magistrates who would implement the
procedures? Did it constitute advice on human behaviour written up for the benefit of all citizens (a plausible interpretation only if we envisage high literacy rates)? Or did they write up such regulations as a way of making a statement to visitors about how well-regulated their city was?

At some point in the late sixth century, the Athenians started to write down some of their official transactions on stone tablets. Although they never went as far as trying to produce a comprehensive lawcode, with increasing frequency over the course of the fifth and fourth centuries, they recorded decisions of the popular assembly upon stone, and set them up in public places. In the middle and later fifth century BC, the Athenians appear to have frequently written up on stone decisions concerning the organisation of their empire; they also wrote up on stone treaties and agreements with other states. These stones therefore tell us a great deal about the Athenian treatment of their imperial subjects in the fifth century BC, and they add aspects of detail that are not discussed in the literary sources. For instance, were it not for the record of inscriptions, we would know little about the ways in which the Athenians treated those allies who had revolted from their empire (see, for instance, LACTOR 1, 4th edition, 216A-B, 217, 218, 21) nor would we know as much about their financial exploitation of the allies (see, for instance, LACTOR 1, 4th edition, nos. 136, 137B, 138).

While they tell us a great deal about daily life and its regulation, there is also a very important sense in which inscriptions were religious objects. The Athenians of the classical period set up their public decisions upon stone slabs in sacred places, most frequently the acropolis: it seems very plausible that they were trying to lend some kind of religious justification to their decisions. Of direct religious significance are the Athenian Tribute Lists. After moving the treasury of the Delian League to Athens in c. 454 BC, the Athenians started dedicating 1/60th of the imperial tribute to the treasury of the goddess Athena Polias. They wrote up the amounts dedicated in this way by each contributing community. Accordingly, it is possible to work out from these lists precisely what the Athenians received in any year when the amount was written down and survives. For more on the use of the Tribute Lists as historical sources, and their physical form, see LACTOR 1, 4th edition, pages 86-97.

Some historians take the view that the Athenian state, from the late sixth century onwards, adapted writing increasingly for the purposes of democratic administration. This is strongly suggested by the institution of ostracism, a means of exiling a citizen for ten years, which appears to have been held from 487 BC onwards. An annual vote was put to the assembly as to whether a vote on ostracism should be held. If it went ahead, any citizen who wished wrote – or had written on his behalf -- the name of a citizen he wanted banished from the city on a piece of broken pottery (an ostrakon; plural ostraka). Plutarch offers an account:

‘The procedure was, in outline, like this. Each voter took a potsherd (ostrakon) and after writing on it the name of whichever citizen he wished to remove, he took it to a place in the Agora which was fenced round with barriers. The archon first counted the
total number of ostraka cast; for if there were fewer than 6,000 voters, the ostracism was invalid. Then they sorted the ostraka by names, and the one whose name had been written by the greatest number of voters was sent into exile for ten years, though he retained the income from his property’.

(Plutarch, Aristides 7.4f; tr. LACTOR 5 no 32)

An alternative view of a fourth-century local historian of Attica, Philochoros, is that one individual had to receive 6,000 in order to be sent away. Many such ostraka have been discovered in Athens, and one particularly interesting find is that of a group of 190 bearing the name of Themistokles written by only a small number (14, in fact) of hands. It is plausible that Themistokles’ opponents conspired to distribute these ostraka among voters.

Figure 9. Ostrakon of Megakles (early fifth century BC) from the Kerameikos in Athens

One of the most spectacular inscriptions from fifth-century Greece is the Serpent Column, a bronze column, moulded so as to represent intertwined snakes, offered by the Greeks to Apollo at Delphi as a thank-offering for their victories in the Persian Wars (see C. Fornara, From Archaic Times to the End of the Peloponnesian War, 2nd edition, 1983, 59; see above, figure 6). The names of 31 Greek communities who contributed to the war effort are incised upon the coils. The inscription still exists, and is set up at the ancient Hippodrome in Istanbul (it was removed by Constantine I to Constantinople in AD 324). The dedication of this column was an act of piety by the Greek states to the god Apollo as a thank-offering in recognition of his intervention in the Persian wars. But literary sources preserve a very rich account of the history of the inscription, telling us that it supported a golden tripod, and was appropriated by the Spartan regent Pausanias (the victor of Plataia) with a boastful epigram (Thucydides 1.132). In this case, our understanding of an inscription is enriched by the literary testimonia. While inscriptions can be useful as documents of ancient Greek life and political transactions, we have to be aware that they were objects liable to political manipulation by the humans – or human groups – who created them.
Further Reading


Attic Inscriptions Online: a fast-growing site translating all inscriptions of ancient Attica: atticinscriptions.com
Approaching Greek History 7: Literary sources

The manuscript tradition preserves a vast amount and wide range of literature from ancient Greece, and traditionally, historians are reliant upon it for the outlines of ancient Greek history. But the story of its preservation is far from straightforward. Works of classical Greek literature were collected and preserved at libraries like the one at Alexandria in Egypt in the Hellenistic period. As the Roman Empire broke down, these collections disintegrated, and anything that survives did so because it was painstakingly preserved by scribes in libraries and monasteries throughout the Middle Ages, who copied them out by hand, at least until the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century AD. The selection of ancient literature was reliant upon a host of factors: texts were selected for preservation for the sake of their literary quality, or because they preserved examples of linguistic usage, rather than their usefulness as historical sources.


Homer and Hesiod

The most famous and important epic poetry of the Greek world, the Iliad and the Odyssey, are connected with the shadowy figure of Homer, and are generally placed in the late eighth century BC. The Iliad, organised into 24 books, consists of an account of fighting during a short period of the Trojan war, and begins with the quarrel between the great fighter Achilles and Agamemnon, King of the Achaians. The Odyssey tells the stories of Odysseus’ voyages and return to Ithaka after the end of the war. Regardless of the authorship of these poems (they came together in a stable form at probably some point during the seventh century BC, before which time they were preserved only by word of mouth), it is clear that they formed the basis of any Greek education. Accordingly, many of the values and ideas which appear in these poems have relevance to our understanding of the ethics and views of Greeks of the classical period.

While the Greek word for the ‘love of honour’ (philotimia) does not appear in the Iliad, it is a value that is deeply embedded into its ethos. It is one of those forces which motivates the aggressively masculine heroes of the epic poem, such as Hector, as he charges through the gates of Troy,’ bent on combat’, together with his brother, whom he has just attacked for his reluctance to fight:

Iliad 7.1-7: ‘Vaunting, aflash in arms, Hector swept through the gates with his brother Paris keeping pace beside him. Both men bent on combat, on they fought like wind when a god sends down some welcome blast to sailors desperate for it, worked to
death at the polished oars, beating the heavy seas, their arms slack with the labour – so welcome that brace of men appeared to the Trojans desperate for their captains.’

In the *Iliad*, it is undoubtedly the case that fighters and commanders were unequivocally lovers of honour won on the battlefield. But on the other hand, we must never accept that a work as rich as the *Iliad* presents us with completely straightforward or simplistic windows onto ancient concepts. The *Iliad* is not just an epic of the Trojan war, but is also an account of internal conflict between Greeks: the core theme of the work, as announced in its proem the wrath of Achilles, the countless losses of the Achaians, and the row between Agamemnon and Achilles:

*Iliad* 1.1-7: ‘Rage – Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus’ son Achilles, murderous, doomed, that cost the Achaians countless losses, hurling down to the House of Death so many sturdy souls. Great fighters’ souls, but made their bodies carrion, feasts for the dogs and birds, and the will of Zeus was moving toward its end. Begin, Muse when the two first broke and clashed, Agamemnon lord of men and brilliant Achilles.’

Any time, then, when we think of the glory-loving pursuits of Greek fighters, we have to take into account then, the losses, the waste, and the contradictions they entail; we also have to bear in mind the excessive acquisitiveness (*philokteanotate*: 1.122) which has led Agamemnon to seize one of Achilles’ prizes (Briseis) in order to replace his own, Chriseis, who he was forced to return to Troy. It is clear, then, that even to the Homeric narrator, human competitiveness was far from unproblematic; the love of honour remains throughout Greek history as a was the case for much of Greek history.

Hesiod is usually thought of, alongside Homer, as the oldest of the Greek poets. His verses present himself as a shepherd who was called by the Muses to sing songs about the Gods (*Theogony* 22-35). His two most extensive poems are very different: the *Theogony* tells stories about the origins of the Gods and stories about the successions of divine rulers, while the *Works and Days* offers advice to its audience on agricultural tasks, addresses his impoverished brother Perses, and exhorts local nobles to just behaviour.


**Other Poetry**

Of other forms, lyric poetry (which was normally accompanied by the music of the lyre) is an important source for the Greek historian. Pindar, for instance, was commissioned to write praise poems (*Victory Odes*) for victorious competitors at the Panhellenic games. His 5th Pythian Ode, which celebrated the victory of the chariot sponsored by King Arcesilaus IV of
Cyrene in 462, celebrates his patron’s achievement by singing of his city’s foundation by the Theran king Battos (known also as Aristotles: Pindar, *Pythian Ode* 5, lines 55-97), an event traditionally dated to 631 BC.

Another form of poetry was elegy (sung in couplets) which may have been recited at symposia, aristocratic drinking parties. Fragments of the elegiac poetry of Tyrtaeus survive in the work of later writers. Believed to have been a native of Sparta, the fragments of his work sang of the divine heritage of the Spartan kings, of the oracle which set out certain details of the Spartan constitution and encourages soldiers to fight fearlessly. The largest preserved collection of archaic elegy is that attributed to Theognis of Megara (perhaps hailing from Megara in Greece or Megara in Sicily), who composed both love poems and also addressed political and ethical concerns.


**Historiography**

Herodotus of Halicarnassus (a Dorian city in Caria, Western Asia Minor), c. 484-425 BC, was the inventor of this genre. His work is a history of the wars between Greeks and non-Greeks and much else; it is informed by an enormously rich knowledge of history and legend. Its focus is on the wars between the Greeks and Persians between 499 and 479 BC. His perspective is very much that of a Greek, albeit one with a very sympathetic view of the ways in which non-Greeks live. These are the opening lines of his work:

‘Here are the results of the enquiry (historie) carried out by Herodotus of Halicarnassus. The purpose is to prevent the traces of human events from being erased by time, and to preserve the fame of the important and remarkable achievements produced by both Greeks and non-Greeks; among the matters covered is, in particular, the cause (or, ‘responsibility’) of the hostilities between Greeks and non-Greeks’ (tr. Waterfield, Oxford World’s Classics, 1998, adapted).

Herodotus was among the first prose writers of the Greek world to make the past his subject. Herodotus used the term *historie* (‘enquiry’), which gives us the term ‘history’, to refer to his work. His opening paragraph suggests an aspiration to preserve ‘important and remarkable’ achievements, with a focus upon the wars they fought against each other. Herodotus’ work certainly contains a wealth of accounts of remarkable activity: book 2 (on the Egyptians) and book 4 (on the Scythians) contain rich accounts of how non-Greek peoples live; such accounts may well have led the first-century BC orator, Cicero, to brand Herodotus ‘the father of lies’. We must also remember that ancient historiography was influenced by other genres, notably poetry. The fact that Herodotus dedicated so much of his work to the history of a war may owe a lot to the themes of Homer’s *Iliad*.
Reading Herodotus’ work impresses upon us many differences between ancient and modern modes of writing history. Herodotus and other Greek historians made extensive use of speeches, as a way of impressing upon their readers the motives and thoughts of historical characters. But ancient historians never ventured to claim that these speeches contained the words actually spoken. There was a strong sense in which Herodotus, and other ancient historians, did something that we might approximate to historical research: they consulted the works of predecessors, travelled to places (such as Delphi, the most important religious centre in the Greek world) and collected accounts of events, they accessed archives and they looked at inscriptions. Many of the accounts Herodotus reproduces are derivative of polis-community traditions: the stories, for instance, recorded in his account of the colonisation of Cyrene in north Africa, reflect traditions both of the Therans and of the Cyrenians themselves about the history of their links (3.150-9). Ancient historiography, moreover, is characterised by a deeply moral motivation. Herodotus’ work may be viewed as a warning that power is constantly in flux: great empires, like that of the Persians, come and go.

Thucydides of Athens (c. 460 BC- c. 395 BC) wrote what he described as an account of the war between the Athenians and the Peloponnesians (Thucydides 1.1), which is usually known as ‘The History of the Peloponnesian War’. Like Herodotus before him, he focussed his efforts in creating an account of a war, but one with which he was contemporary. But his style was rather different: he concentrated upon military detail and political affairs, removing the religious element from his history, and has little to say upon the ways in which people live. Thucydides was a man of strong views, and these come across clearly in his work. He believed that the Peloponnesian War was the greatest war in the whole of human history, and for that reason he thought it was worth writing about. Accordingly, he presented his work as a ‘possession for all time’ for those who want to understand past events and, given human nature, patterns that would be repeated in the future (Thucydides 1.22). He prided himself on using a number of different sources (1.21), and his selection of the most accurate source (1.22). Particularly worthy of attention are the speeches in his history, which, though they may be not thoroughly historically authentic, represent an important part of Thucydides’ historical view. At 1.22, he wrote:

‘Of the various speeches made either when war was imminent or in the course of the war itself, it has been hard to reproduce the exact words used either when I heard them myself or when they were reported to me by other sources. My method in this book has been to make each speaker say broadly what I supposed would have been needed on any occasion, while keeping as closely as I could to the overall intent of what was actually said.’


Perhaps the most famous of these is the funeral speech of Pericles, which was made over the bodies of those who had fallen at the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War (Thuc. 2.34-46). As with any speech appearing in the work of an ancient historian, we can never be
sure that the words were those spoken at the time. In fact, they are best viewed as an idealistic view of Athenian power and politics at the start of the Peloponnesian War. Pericles’ speech is followed immediately by a description of the plague of Athens. Thucydides’ vivid account of this illness impresses upon his reader its devastating nature and one aspect of the effect of war on Athenian life (2.47-54). Among Thucydides’ greatest skills is his ability to make general points about human nature through his description of particular episodes: his account of civil war on Corcyra (modern Corfu) (427 BC: 3.82-3) is a dramatic example in which we are led to feel the impact of warfare on human nature.

Thucydides was elected an Athenian general for the year 424/3 BC; after failing to save Amphipolis from the Spartan general Brasidas, he was sent into exile, and appears to have been able to draw upon Peloponnesian sources for his history. His assessment of Athenian politics in the age after Pericles (who died in 429 BC) suggests that he never forgave the Athenian people for sending him away and that he bore a grudge against those leaders of Athens who succeeded Pericles (foremost among them was Cleon):

‘Pericles’ successors were more on a level with one another, and because each was striving for first position they were inclined to indulge popular whim even in matters of state policy. The result – inevitable in a great city with an empire to rule – was a series of mistakes, most notably the Sicilian expedition. The error here was not so much a mistaken choice of enemy as the failure of those at home to relate their further decisions to the interests of the force they had sent out. Instead they allowed personal accusations made in the pursuit of political supremacy to blunt the effectiveness of the military, and for the first time there was factional discord in the city.’

(Thuc. 2.65, Tr. Hammond, Oxford World’s Classics, 2009).

The charges that Thucydides levels against Perikles’ successors are clear: as demagogues, they sacrificed the security of the city in order to win the support of the people. It is a criticism of the Athenian form of democracy as well as its politicians. But of course we must remember that Pericles also appealed to the masses for popular support, and Plutarch’s Life of Perikles (e.g. at section 14) offers a portrayal of that politician appealing to the people for their support in the face of his opponents’ criticisms.

Thucydides died before completing his history. The work of Xenophon, an aristocratic Athenian, Hellenika (‘Greek history’, sometimes translated as ‘A History of My Times’) picks up where Thucydides’ account breaks off. Xenophon’s history offers us an account of the wars and inter-state diplomacy between the Greek states, and Graeco-Persian relations, from 410-362 BC. There were other Greek historians whose work concerned classical Greek history: Ephorus of Kyme wrote a history of the known world in the fourth century BC, but the only parts that survive are those which were quoted by later writers like Diodorus of Sicily (first century BC). Other works survive in papyrus fragments preserved in the sands of Egypt: one example, known as the Hellenika Oxyrhynchia (the name of the author or its work are not preserved) appears to have constituted another and superior attempt to carry on from
where Thucydides left off). For some ancient literary views of Greek historiography, see
LACTOR 12, pages 140-1.

D. Cartwright, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*. A Companion to Rex Warner’s
Translation, 1987


J. Luce, *The Greek Historians*, 1989


J. Moles and A. Woodman, *Greek and Roman Historians*, 1989


**Political Histories**

At some point in the late fourth century, a student or associate of the philosopher Aristotle
(the author is usually referred to as [Aristotle] or Pseudo-Aristotle) wrote a work entitled
‘The Constitution of the Athenians’ (*Athenaion Politeia*). The first half of this work offers us
a political history of the Athenians down to 403 BC, and provides an extremely useful source
for Athenian political history. The second half of the work consists of a description of the
working of the Athenian democracy in the 330s BC, and offers a uniquely-detailed account
of the administration and management of the Athenian democracy. (It is perhaps ironic that,
despite the usual translation of the Greek term *politeia* as ‘constitution’, the idea of a fixed,
comprehensive, set of political guidelines (or a constitution) does not seem to have been a
widespread phenomenon in the cities of the classical Greek world).

Another important work, attributed in the manuscript tradition to Xenophon, bears the same
title ‘The Constitution of the Athenians’ (*Athenaion Politeia*). The unknown author of this
work is referred to usually as The Old Oligarch, [Xenophon], or Pseudo-Xenophon; he is
placed usually in the late fifth century but heretically (by Hornblower in the *Oxford Classical
Dictionary*) in the early fourth. He takes on the view of someone who feels aggrieved by the
Athenian democracy but at the same time accepts the reason behind of popular rule. These
words open his work:

‘As to the constitution of the Athenians, I give no praise to their choice of this form of
constitution, because this choice entails preferring the interests of bad men to those of
good men; this is why I do not praise it. But since this is their decision, I shall
demonstrate that they preserve their constitution well, and manage well even the other
things which the rest of the Greeks think are a mistake.’

(The Old Oligarch, 1.1: tr. Osborne, LACTOR 2, 2nd edition).
The Old Oligarch provides evidence for the connection in Greek thought between sea power and democracy. Although the pamphlet (and one wonders in what context it was circulated, if it was) takes an anti-democratic stance, it offers interesting perspectives on sea-power, democracy and Athens’ behaviour towards her subjects.

In the fourth century BC, Xenophon wrote a work called ‘The Constitution of the Lakedaimonians’ (Lakedaimonion Politeia; sometimes translated as ‘Spartan Society’). It is an excellent source for the constitution and lifestyle of the Spartans in the classical period, one written by an Athenian with great enthusiasm for the Spartan system but who was ultimately disappointed with its decline.


**Tragedy and Comedy**

Fifth-century Athens was an age of great artistic production. It was the period during which the comedian Aristophanes flourished, as did the tragic dramatists Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Many of their plays survive. How can we appreciate them? First by reading or performing them, but second, by considering the context within which they were performed: in front of Athenians and other Greeks at religious festivals. We should bear in mind that the judges were ordinary citizens (selected by officials) who would find it hard not to be influenced by the reactions of those who were watching them. For more discussion, see LACTOR 12 pages 105-6.

How does one use Athenian tragedy and comedy for understanding ancient history? With great caution! A few tragedies, such as Aeschylus’ *Persians* of 472, relate to actual historical events and might reflect popular views of the events. Others refer to political developments: Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* (458 BC) refers to the Areopagus council, which had, some years previously, had its political powers curtailed. It is hard, however, to decipher how, if at all, Aeschylus was reflecting upon straightforwardly political events. In some ways it is easier for the historian to deploy comedy as evidence. Plays like Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* (425 BC) or *Lysistrata* (411 BC) offer a view of Athenians’ frustration with the ongoing war against Sparta; others, like the *Knights* (424 BC) or *Wasps* (422 BC) offer criticisms of Athenian political activity; the *Clouds* (423 BC) parodies Socrates. They may well offer us an insight into some of the controversies and anxieties that the Athenians of the late fifth century experienced. One device of interest is the *parabasis*, by which the chorus would take centre
stage, addressing the audience on a matter of interest. In the parabasis of his Wasps (lines 1009-1121), the chorus presented Aristophanes’ complaints about the Athenians’ treatment of him. Central to this were his complaints at the politician Cleon, who was represented as a ‘jagged-toothed monster’, ‘from whose eyes shone terrible rays like those of the Bitch-star, while all around his head licked serpent-like a hundred head of accursed flatterers; he had the voice of a torrent in destructive spate, the smell of a seal, the unwashed balls of a Lamia, and the arse of a camel’ (lines 1032-5; tr. Sommerstein, Aristophanes’ Wasps, 1983).

M. Baldock, Greek Tragedy: An Introduction, 1989

P. Cartledge, Aristophanes and his Theatre of the Absurd, 2nd edition, 1999

Figure 10. The Theatre of Dionysos at Athens, located on the south slope of the Akropolis. It was a sanctuary sacred to the God Dionysos. Much of what can be seen today is that which the Athenians made when they reconstructed the theatre in the 330s BC.
Oratory

As already noted, Thucydides of Athens reported speeches in his history of the Peloponnesian War, reporting what he thought would be the words appropriate for the occasion, while sticking as closely as possible to what was indeed said (see above, on 1.22). Apart from those speeches preserved in the work of the classical historians, more than 100 speeches survive from classical Athens. The vast majority of these were written for performance in the assembly, lawcourts, or over the corpses of those who had died in battle; most of them date to the fourth century BC. They provide extremely important sources for understanding the workings and ideologies of Athenian democracy. The seventeen surviving assembly speeches attributed to Demosthenes (most of which are thought to be genuine compositions of that orator), for instance, give us an idea of the modes of argumentation he employed in the assembly, as he urged the Athenians to take military action in the 350s against the emergence of Philip of Macedon.

Figure 11. The speaker’s platform at the Pnyx, the venue of the Athenian assembly in the classical period. Image: Cornell University Library

There survive many more examples of lawcourt (forensic) oratory, spoken in the courts in the Athenian agora and elsewhere, survive. One notable is the speech On the Murder of Eratosthenes, penned by the metic orator Lysias in the early fourth century BC for an obscure
individual, Euphiletos. Euphiletos had allegedly caught his wife in bed with an adulterer, and had killed him. Charged with murder, he defended himself by reference to an Athenian law which entitled a husband to kill his wife’s lover, provided that he could convince the jury he had caught them in the act. Over the course of his speech, Euphiletos gave an account of his family life: we must bear in mind that this portrayal is ideal and should not be accepted at face value (the division of house between male and female space at sections 9 and 10 of the speech, should be considered an ideal arrangement rather than the norm).


Biography

Plutarch of Chaironea, who lived in the late first and early second century AD, is the most important biographer of antiquity. He wrote a series of Parallel Lives, comparing the lives of Greek and Roman statesmen. Though heavily moralistic, he drew on many high-quality (and some of them now lost) classical writers, and his work is a vital source for many aspects of Greek and Roman history.


Geographical/Antiquarian Writings

The most famous work of Strabo of Amaseia (first century BC) was a Geographia in 17 books: this is a fine source for ancient geography and historical details (e.g. the Greek colonisation of Sicily: Strabo 6.2.2 (267), drawing upon the fourth-century historian Ephorus of Kyme). Yet more significant for the Greek historian is the work of the traveller Pausanias from Magnesia (2nd century AD). His Description of Greece survives in ten books and is a wonderful source for the physical shape of Greece at the time of the Roman Empire and the stories that circulated about its historical and mythical past. Organised as a tour of the city-states, he describes temples, statues and buildings in detail, draws upon and quotes inscriptions, and preserves stories and mythology of city states. His account of the Athenian acropolis is particularly rich (Pausanias 1.22-8) and is a vital resource for the identification of
buildings and shrines; another highlight is the detailed description of Olympia in books 5 and 6.


**Philosophy**


**Letters**

There is a rich tradition of letters attributed to famous Greek statesmen (Themistocles, Demosthenes, and others), but these are usually thought to be forgeries, and, accordingly, are of limited immediate use to the Greek historian. On privately-commissioned lead letters, however, see above, *Approaching*, section 6, Inscriptions.

**Fragments**

Many ancient works of literature do not survive complete in the literary tradition. Papyri from the sands of Egypt preserve a few fragments of lost works. Many more fragments of ancient literature are preserved thanks to references made to them in the work of later writers like Plutarch or Athenaeus of Naukratis (author of a work entitled ‘The Philosophers at Dinner,’ a dialogue that is a storehouse of references to sometimes fictitious writers, but also antiquities on food, wine, and much more; thus work dates to the late 2nd-early 3rd-century AD): from later writers, for instance, that an Athenian called Philochorus wrote a history of Athens in the late fourth and early third centuries BC; this work survives only in fragments quoted by later authors. Many other fragments of such local histories (containing accounts of Athens and other cities too) are preserved by later writers.


For further notes on ancient authors, see LACTOR 12, pages 17-19
Approaching Greek History 8: Greek Identity and the Persian Wars

Human behaviour is motivated by several factors: in the ancient Greek world, the pursuit of honour and avoidance of shame were very important; the return of favours and grudges was vital too. Moreover, self-interest loomed large, as did ideology and religion, and the belief that one should do things because they are the right thing to do; but vitally important (not least because it is influential upon the ways that humans identify self-interest and form ideologies) is identity. Human identity is made up of a number of related aspects, among them are geographical origins, ancestry, the founders of one’s community; religious beliefs; language and dialect. Greek individuals and Greek communities formed several types of ethnic affiliation, and their expression of that identity was often adapted to suit a particular situation. The notion of Greek identity, that is, thinking of oneself and one’s behaviour as identifiably Greek, appears to have emerged in during periods when the Greeks were engaged in fighting wars against groups which they perceived as non-Greek.

On another level, citizens identified themselves as citizens of a polis: this was reflected in their full designation (see above, Approaching, section 3, names); some cities claimed the existence of an ancestor who sprang from the earth (e.g., among the Athenians, Eriechthonios: see below, section 9, Athens). In many city-states, there existed sub-polis communities: in Athens, these consisted of the deme (village), but citizens were also (from 508/7 BC) a member of one of the ten tribes (phylai), a phratry (brotherhood) and sometimes of a clan (genos). Membership of such groups enabled Athenians to develop a set of co-existed ‘nested’ identities, which could be called upon at particular times.

Expressions of ethnic identity

Greeks also identified themselves with tribal identities that cut across the polis-organisation of the Greek world: the most important of these were those of the Ionians and Dorians. It was believed that, some time after the Trojan Wars, the Dorians of central Greece migrated southwards and, together with the descendants of Herakles, took control of the Peloponnese (Thucydides 1.12). This story was compatible with the belief that there was a period during which the Ionian cities of Greece established colonies on the west coast of Asia Minor and also in South Italy and Sicily (Thucydides 1.2). Greeks identified themselves as Dorians or Ionians with appropriate religious festivals, such as the Apatouria (Ionians) or Hyakinthia and Kameia (Dorians). In the early stages of the Delian League, the Athenians championed the interests of the Ionians who lived in Asia Minor as they were ‘not happy to see Greek rule in Ionia ended, nor to have the Peloponnesians taking decisions about people who were Athenian colonists…. It was in this way that they brought the Samians, Khians, Lesbians and other islanders who had fought on the Greek side into the alliance’ (Herodotus 9.106 = LACTOR 1, 4th edition, no. 2). At the time of the Athenian expedition to Sicily in 415 BC, this rhetoric of identity resurfaced. The Athenians claimed that they were helping their Ionian kinsmen in Sicily against the threat of the Dorian Syracusans (Thucydides 6.76 = LACTOR 1, 4th edition, 160) and were also worried that the Dorians of Syracuse (the most important
city of Sicily and one of the most important cities in the Greek world) would join in the Peloponnesian War with their Dorian allies against the Athenians (Thucydides 6.6).

In the classical period, linguistic dialect was an important mode through which identity was expressed. Many Greek city-states in the fifth century wrote down their inscriptions in forms of Greek (or using letter-forms) that were distinctive of their particular areas. Aristophanes, the Athenian playwright, made his non-Athenian characters use forms of dialect which would have been intelligible to an Athenian but at the same time distinctive.

**Greek identity**

The existence of some form of Greek identity is suggested by the appearance of the phrase ‘Panhellenes and Achaians’ at *Iliad* 2.530 but also by the reference in the work of the mid-seventh-century poet Archilochus (fr. 102) to the ‘sorrow of the Panhellenes’, perhaps at a time when they encountered the Lydians of central Asia Minor. The wars against the Persians of the late sixth and early fifth centuries appear to have given rise to an even stronger sense of Greek identity. Despite the fact that some states, like Argos and Thebes, chose not to join in the alliance in the war against the Persians, many others came together to resist the Persian attack. Herodotus offers an account of this in a speech which he attributes to the Athenians who justify continuing the struggle against the Persians:

‘There isn’t enough gold on earth, or any land of such outstanding beauty and fertility, that we would accept it in return for collaborating with the enemy and enslaving Greece. Even if we were inclined to do so, there are plenty of important obstacles in
the way. First and foremost, there is the burning and destruction of the statues and homes of our gods; rather than entering into a treaty with the perpetrator of these deeds, we are duty-bound to do our utmost to avenge them. Then again, there is the fact that we are all Greeks – being of the same blood and speaking one language, with temples to the gods and religious rites in common, and with a common way of life. It would not be good for the Athenians to betray all this shared heritage.’

Herodotus 7.144, tr. Waterfield, adapted.

In championing Greek identity, then, the Athenians point to religion, language and a common way of life as the elements that made them Greeks. But at the same time, some Greeks were not stirred by such appeals. Moreover, the pliability of appeals to shared ethnic identity is demonstrated in a message that the Persians sent to the people of Argos in which they claim descent from the Greek hero Perseus, and for this reason claimed to be ‘of the same blood as yourselves’ (Herodotus 7.150).

The prominence afforded to discussions of ethnic affiliation by Herodotus is, to an extent, the product of his own thought-world, that of a Greek who originated in Caria (and was said to have been the son of Lyxes, a Carian), on the fringes of the Persian sphere of influence, and was writing in the middle of the fifth century BC. But, given the clash of cultures that took place in the Persian wars, there is good reason to think that the ideas he discusses were ones which came to prominence during these events.

**Background to the Persian Wars**

The Persian Wars can be approached in the light of increasing organisation of large, territorial, states to the east of the Greek world and their encounter with the Greeks who dwelt in the areas peripheral to their empires. According to Herodotus, Croesus, king of the Lydians, was said to have been the first to subject the Greeks to foreign rule (Herodotus 1.6). When his empire passed into the hands of the Persians, who rose to great power under the rule of Cyrus II (Cyrus the Great 559-30), the Persians enslaved the Ionians of western Asia Minor (Herodotus 1.165-70; see also LACTOR 16 nos. 1-42). Under the reign of Darius, 522-486 BC, the Persians consolidated their rule of Asia Minor and Egypt, overcoming armed risings (see LACTOR 16 nos. 43-60). The Persians established a system of imposing area-governors (satraps) in regions subjected to Persian rule, a system by which subject communities paid tribute to the King (Herodotus 7.51). They constructed a Royal Road connecting the western regions of the empire with the capital at Susa (Herodotus 5.52-3). Sometimes, as a way of reinforcing their domination of Greek cities, they introduced garrisons (Herodotus 1.164-5) or even tyrants friendly to Persian interests (Herodotus 4.137; cf. 6.43 for the imposition of a pro-Persian democratic government).
The Persian wars had their origin in the revolt of the Ionian cities of Asia Minor against Persian rule. Much of what we know about them has its origins in the work of Herodotus. He was writing in the 430s or later, some 40 years after the end of the wars. Given its chronological and geographical reach, much of his account drew widely upon a range of oral accounts (see above, section 7): he must have been reliant upon a wide range of traditions and stories; he summarised those events (such as the succession of Assyrian, Median and Persian kings) that were peripheral to his interests. Herodotus offers us great insights into the Greek view of the Persian Wars and also the motives of the Persians and Greeks and their behaviour at the time of the Wars. But what is vitally important to remember is that he was a historian writing in Greek, for a Greek audience, whose interests were ultimately focussed upon interactions between Greeks and non-Greeks.

While there are no Persian accounts of these wars that we can use to offer an alternative perspective, we can, by looking at inscriptions produced on behalf of the Persian kings, get a sense of some of the monarchical and imperial ideas that were characteristic of the Achaemenid Royal family (see LACTOR 16, The Persian Empire from Cyrus II to Artaxerxes I). Of the documents in that collection, two spring out: the Cyrus Cylinder and the Bisitun inscription, both of them dating to the sixth century BC.

The Cyrus Cylinder (LACTOR 16, The Persian Empire from Cyrus II to Artaxerxes I, no. 12), a clay cylinder discovered in Babylon in the late nineteenth century presents Cyrus II (559-530 BC) as a tolerant ruler who ensured the expansion of Persia through its acceptance of its subject-peoples’ customs. This was an image that surfaces both in Biblical accounts of Cyrus as a divinely-appointed leader too (Isaiah 45.1-6) and in Greek accounts, which stress
his wisdom and his subjects’ reverence for him (Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus*, written in the fourth century BC).

But among the most spectacular inscribed monuments of the Persian empire is perhaps the Bisitun inscription (LACTOR 16, *The Persian Empire from Cyrus II to Artaxerxes I*, no. 44), which was cut into the face of Mount Bisitun in northwest Iran during the early part of the reign of Darius I (522-486 BC). The inscription gives an account of the events that led to the accession of Darius I. It emphasises his grandeur and ancestry: ‘I (am) Darius, the Great King, king of kings, king of Persian, king of lands, the son of Hystaspes, the grandson of Arsames, an Achaemenid’, the divine sanction of his rule (in the shape of the ‘Greatest of the Gods’ Ahura Mazda), his repression of enemies and the breadth of the countries he claimed to rule (Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, (the People)-by-the-Sea, Lydia, Ionia, Media, Armenia, Cappadocia, Parthia, Drangiana, Aria, Chorasmia, Bactria, Sogdiana, Gandara, Scythia, Sattagydia, Arachosia, and Maka). What comes across from this and many other inscriptions of the Persians is the centrality of monarchy and imperialism to their political organisation.

**Ionian Revolt**

Herodotus of Halicarnassus presented the Ionian revolt of 499 against Persian rule as the effect of the self-seeking policies of Aristagoras and Histaios of Miletus (Herodotus 5.35). Nevertheless, it is likely that the readiness of the Ionian states to join in the revolt reflected resentment against Persian rule. The Ionians appealed to the Greek states; the Athenians and the Eretrians sent help. One vital development was the involvement in the burning of the temple of Cybele at Sardis: this led King Darius to swear to take revenge against the Athenians, and he had an attendant remind him three times daily, whenever a meal was being served ‘Master, remember the Athenians’ (Herodotus 5.102, 105). The Ionian Revolt was brought to an end in 493 BC after the destruction of Miletus: the depth of sorrow that this roused among the Athenians is reflected in the fact that when the playwright Phrynichus put on a play (now lost) called *The Fall of Miletus*, the audience burst into tears and fined him a thousand drachmai for reminding them of this disaster (Herodotus 6.22).
First Persian Invasion of Greece

The first Persian campaign against Greece was launched in 492 BC, as Darius I sought to punish the Athenians for the burning of Sardis; the Persian fleet was wrecked in a storm off Mt Athos (Herodotus 6.44). A second campaign was sent in 490 BC, with Darius demanding ‘earth and water’, symbols of submission, from Greek states (Herodotus 6.48). The Athenians led to resistance to the Persians, whom they, with help from Plataians, defeated on the plain of Marathon (Herodotus 6.94-120).

Second Persian Invasion of Greece

After the death of King Darius in 486 BC, his successor Xerxes was persuaded into seeking vengeance on the Athenians (Herodotus 7.5-6). Xerxes, like his father, sent demands for earth and water (Herodotus 7.132-7: perhaps a symbolic demand for surrender of the earth and sea); some Greeks submitted, but others, aware that Xerxes was targeting the whole of Greece, resisted. The Persian invasion was stalled by the brave Spartan resistance at the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC (Herodotus 7.201-33). At the same the Persian fleet was blocked by the Greeks at the strait of Artemision, where they inflicted losses on the Greeks that could ill-afford but their progress was halted (Herodotus 8.1-26). Nevertheless, the Persians regrouped and they advanced through Boiotia and Attica. The Athenians, following
Themistokles’ interpretation of an oracle from Delphi, abandoned Athens and withdrew to Salamis.

The Athenian leader Themistokles urged the Ionians to revolt from their Persian masters, setting out messages which urged them not to fight against, and not to contribute to the enslavement of, fellow Greeks (Herodotus 8.22). As the Peloponnesians fortified the Isthmus of Corinth as a way of protecting themselves against the Persian expedition, Themistokles persuaded the Greek fleets to remain at Salamis where, in 480 they defeated the Persians (Herodotus 8.84-96). In late summer 479, the Greeks inflicted upon the Persians a huge defeat at Plataia (Herodotus 9.58-75), and at the same time the Greeks defeated the Persians in a battle at Mykale in Asia Minor, which led to a revolt of the Ionians (Herodotus 9.102-5). The Persians fled from Greece. Herodotus’ account of the Persian wars places emphasis on the role that the Athenians played in resisting the incursion of the Spartans (Herodotus 7.139). Nevertheless, the fact that a number of Greek city-states, including Sparta and her allies were able to come together to resist the Persians was crucial. Herodotus notoriously downplayed the role of the Corinthians: Hdt. 8.94; cf. Plutarch, Moralia 870, in a work the title of which can be translated as ‘On the Malice of Herodotus’.

The Aftermath

For some years after Mykale, those Greeks states who came together with the Athenians to form the Delian League continued to fight against Persians in Asia Minor; indeed, an ostensible purpose of the alliance was to take revenge against the Persians by ravaging the lands of the Great King (Thucydides 1.96); another was to secure the Greek states in a permanent state of liberation from the Persians combined with alliance with the Athenians (perhaps symbolized by the lumps of iron thrown into the sea as an oath of alliance was sworn with the Ionians: [Aristotle] Athenaion Politeia 23.5). Athenian efforts against the Persians only came to an end in the middle of the fifth century (after the important battle of Eurymedon in 466 or 469 and a disastrous expedition to Egypt: Thucydides 1.100, 110). Some sources suggest that the Athenians made a peace-treaty, known as the Peace of Callias, with the Great King, according to which he agreed that the Persians would sail no further west than the Chelidonian islands, just southeast of the Hieron promontory on the southwest coast of Lycia. Some sources place the treaty in the 460s, others at 449, while others claim that the Persian king would never have concluded such a treaty (LACTER 1, 4th edition, nos 50-56; Fornara, Archaic Times, no. 95.).

In the years following the Persian wars, the Greeks, and in particular the Athenians, represented the Persians in literature and iconography as defeated and weak. Such views are clear in Aeschylus’ prize-winning play of 472BC, The Persians, though the play could be read either as sympathetic to the Persians or as a celebration of Greek victory. The Greek sense of Persian defeat is also visible in a fifth-century artefact, the Eurymedon Vase, which depicts a bearded figure, holding his erect penis as he approaches a figure who, bending over,
is represented, given his attire, as a non-Greek. It bears the inscription ‘’My name is Eurymedon; I stand bent over’. The image may, or may not represent the Greek attitude to defeated barbarians, and their view of them as luxurious, decadent, and subservient. Despite these representations, the Persians continued to be a significant presence in the Greek east. Indeed, the Spartans were only able to build a fleet in the last years of the Peloponnesian war (411-404 BC) owing to Persian financial support.

Further Reading:


E. Hall, Inventing the Barbarian, 1989. A work which emphasises literary constructions of Persian ‘otherness’.

J. Sharwood Smith, Greece and the Persians, 1990. Focuses on the second Persian wars, but offers some important broader perspectives.
Approaching Greek History 9: Athens

Athens and Attica

The polis of Athens was among the biggest and most powerful of classical Greece. It consisted of an urban area (asty) known as Athens, and a rural area, known as Attica. Athens and Attica covered a total of c. 2,500 km², of which only c. 211 ha. was enclosed within the city walls at the time of Themistocles. Geographically, it is bounded by mountains to the north-west (the Geraneia range between Attica and the Megarid) and the north (the Parnes range between Attica and Boiotia) and by the sea to the south-west, south, and east. It is well-equipped with natural harbours: both Phaleron and Piraeus were important to Athens’ naval history (see LACTOR 5, 35-36; LACTOR 12 nos. 12-13).

The city-centre featured the acropolis, a fortified hill which was sacred to the goddess Athena, the agora (market place for commercial, political and judicial activities), the Areopagus hill (home of the Areopagus council, later a homicide-court), and the Pnyx hill (the usual location of the Athenian assembly in the fifth and fourth centuries: see above, figure 11).

Figure 12. The Athenian Akropolis

The polis of Athens contained many significant settlements: many of these were based on the 139 demes (in Greek, demoi) dotted across Attica. Every Athenian citizen was a member of a deme, and inherited his or her deme membership from his father: accordingly, the deme was a ‘descent-group’. There was no requirement of residence in one’s home deme, and citizens could acquire land outside their deme. Each deme was allocated, by Cleisthenes’ reforms of
507, to one of the ten tribes (phylai). Demes were rather heterogeneous, varying enormously in terms of their territorial size, demography and resources. They possessed their own financial, religious and administrative systems, choosing an annual chief magistrate (demarch), and selecting priests. They bore responsibility for regulating the admission of young men into the citizen-body and contributing to the working of democracy by selecting the representatives of their tribe who would, as councillors (bouleutai), take part in the Council of 500. Thucydides offers the view that the deme felt, to its inhabitants, like a polis in miniature (Thuc. 2.16).

Two views of the settlement of the Athenian countryside have emerged in recent scholarship. There is the view of Osborne, which is that the Athenians primarily lived in close-knit communities, and that in all likelihood demes provided such a context for this. On the other hand, Lohmann takes the view that in certain areas of Attica (such as Atene, in southern Attica) there is evidence that points to the existence of isolated residences and farmsteads. In all likelihood, there were different patterns of residence across Attica. The debate is an important one, because it has serious implications for the way in which we think about access to the decision-making bodies that met in the demes, and, it follows, access to local democracy.

The ‘Vari House’, excavated at Vari, in south-east Attica, offers us a view of a privileged, upper-class residence in Athens: this is a house built, as many larger houses in Attica were, based on a central courtyard, which controlled access to the rooms around it. What is interesting is that while the valleys to the side of the building would offer cultivable land, the only evidence for agricultural development is that of shards of ceramic beehives: it seems that this was a villa, rather than a long-term residence or a rural farm. For a 3D-reconstruction of the Vari House in virtual reality, and much more, see http://www.learningsites.com/VariArticleModels/Varihomepage.htm

Apart from the city centre, the most important settlement, however, was the port of Piraeus. Thucydides claimed that the soil of Attica was poor, which meant that no enemies ever attempted to invade (Thucydides 1.2); it did, however, produce fine olives and honey. Its most important resources were its harbours and mineral resources (silver, marble, and building clay): see LACTOR 12 nos. 3-11.

Athenian Power

Archaeological evidence suggests that Athens emerges as the most important settlement in Attica from the eighth century BC onwards. The Athenians appear to have believed that the unification of Attica was a political programme engineered by King Theseus (Thuc. 2.15). However, few historians today believe that Theseus was a historical figure: the Athenians told stories about him as a way of explaining their political unity. They also celebrated him in the fifth century through inclusion in the iconography of their public monuments, showing
him on the metopes of the Athenian treasury at Delphi, and in the paintings of the Theseion at Athens (described by Pausanias, 1.17).

Athens was an important trading state in the archaic period, but was not as prominent as other cities like Corinth, Chalkis and Eretria. It was only after the discovery of exceptional amounts silver in 483 BC at Laurion in Southern Attica (Herodotus 7.144) that they were able to construct a naval fleet which would contribute the vital ingredient to the defeat of the Persians off the island of Salamis in 479 BC, and would act as the foundation of the Delian League and Athenian Empire of the fifth century BC (see Approaching 12).

**Athenian Wealth**

It is clear that the Athenians, in the fifth century, became wealthy on the basis of their silver mines, commercial activity at Piraeus, and from the proceeds of empire, including tribute and other charges levied upon allies (Old Oligarch 1.17-20 = LACTOR 2 2nd edition). It is likely that most tribute was spent on military campaigns, and there is nothing to prove that tribute was used for paying individual Athenians to hold political offices or sit on the juries. Only some of the 1/60th dedicated to Athena was spent on the building programme (LACTOR 1, 4th edition, nos. 195-7). Even if little of the tribute was spent directly upon domestic expenditure, it is likely that the surplus created by the tribute freed up other monies.

**Fifth-century developments**

There were significant temples on the acropolis in the archaic era, but many of these were destroyed by the Persian occupation of 480 BC. Many of these had not been reconstructed, perhaps for religious reasons.

Between 449 and 406 BC, an impressive building programme was commenced in Athens. The main elements on the acropolis were as follows:

- The Odeion, an enclosed venue for musical contests on the south slope of the acropolis (Plutarch, *Life of Perikles* 13 = LACTOR 5 no. 54)
- The Propylaia, an impressive gateway to the acropolis (Plutarch, *Life of Perikles* 13 = LACTOR 5 no. 54). Its north wing included paintings on the walls and was known as the Pinakotheke (‘Art Gallery’). Perhaps the Propylaia was designed to impress those allies who brought offerings (consisting usually of a hoplite (see below, *Approaching*, section 13) panoply (and a heifer) to the four-yearly Great Panathenaia. See below, fig. 13.
• The small temple of Athena Nike (Victory) on the acropolis (ML 44 = LACTOR 12 no. 353), built in the Ionic style.

• The Parthenon, embellished, as Pausanias (second century AD) describes: ‘As one enters the temple called the Parthenon everything on the pediment bears upon the birth of Athena; the other end is the quarrel of Poseidon with Athena over the country. The statue itself is made of ivory and gold. On the middle of the helmet is set a sphinx … and griffins worked on each side of it … The statue of Athena is upright in an ankle-length tunic, and the head of Medusa is engraved in ivory on her breast, and she has a Victory about four cubits high, and a spear in her hand and a shield lying at her feet, and near the spear is a snake which might be Erichthonios. On the plinth of the statue is worked the birth of Pandora.’ (Pausanias 1.24.5 = LACTOR 12 no. 360). It replaced the earlier buildings dedicated to Athena, which had been destroyed by the Persians in 480. Despite Pausanias’ emphasis on the cult statue, which is now only known in reduced scale copies, modern emphasis has been on the architectural decoration of the Parthenon. The long frieze which ran around the temple shows a religious procession, probably that of the Panathenaia festival in honour of Athena, though other interpretations have also been suggested. The metopes on the four sides of the building showed the Gigantomachy, Amazonomachy, Fall of Troy and Centauromachy. These were all battles which pitched the forces of Greek civilisation against the barbarian or inhuman ‘other’ and can be seen as an allegory of the more recent battles against the Persians. The pediments honour Athens’ patron goddess, showing the birth of Athena, and her rivalry with Poseidon for patronage of Athens. See below, fig. 14.
The Erechtheion, with the famous Caryatid porch, a shrine to Athena *Poltis* and Poseidon *Erechtheus* (LACTOR 12 no. 357; see below, fig. 15)

In the middle of the fifth century, the Hephaisteion was constructed on the West side of the agora, a temple in the Doric style built to the honour of the deity Hephaistos.
In addition, there were the long walls connecting Athens with Piraeus and a great Hall of Initiation (Telesterion) at Eleusis in Western Attica (Plutarch, Life of Perikles 13 = LACTOR 5 no. 54)

As for the cost, the evidence to link the expenses incurred with the tribute the Athenians took from their allies is weak: it consists in part of an anecdote from Plutarch, who was writing some 600 years after the events (Plutarch, Life of Perikles 12 = LACTOR 5 no. 57) and some rather optimistic modern speculation (LACTOR 5 p. 35 notes). Thucydides (2.13 = LACTOR 5 no. 55) suggests that at least 1,700 Talents was drawn from silver stored on the acropolis for the building project, but the total must have been much more, at least 2,000 Talents for the Parthenon, Propylaia and Athena Nike temple. In later periods, in the first and the second centuries AD, sources like Pausanias and Plutarch looked back upon the buildings as a reflection of the great achievements of a golden era: they saw Athens as the centre of an artistic movement spearheaded by the sculptor Phidias (LACTOR 12 nos. 354-6, 358-68). Athens was also thought of as the centre of an explosion of talent in other visual arts like painting (LACTOR 12 nos. 370-5).

In the fourth century BC, the Athenians looked back upon the buildings constructed at great expense as a way of glorifying their own past (Demosthenes 3.25-6 = LACTOR 12 no. 349); Plutarch offers later perspectives on the significance of the building programme (Life of Perikles, 12-13).

It is tempting to view the still spectacular remains of the buildings on the acropolis as an indication of Athenian power. Certainly, when we consider the absence of comparable building projects during the fifth century in other parts of the Greek world, this would seem reasonable. But we should bear in mind the warning of Thucydides:
‘If the city of the Spartans were to be abandoned and only the temples and the foundations of buildings were left, distant generations would, I think, find it very hard to believe that their power had matched their fame … whereas if the Athenians should suffer the same fate, posterity would infer from the appearance of the city that their power had been twice what it is’

(Thucydides 1.10 = LACTOR 5 no. 53)

Athenian Reputation and Self-image

During the extraordinary fifth century, the reputation of Athens was unsurpassed: the description that Thucydides put into the mouth of the Corinthians, who encouraged the Spartans to go to war in 432, presented them as ‘revolutionaries, quick both to conceive and to execute a plan … bold beyond their power, daring against their better judgement, and full of hope in danger … Ceaseless acquisition allows them very little enjoyment of what they have. Their idea of a holiday is taking necessary action. Peaceful inactivity they regard as more of a misfortune than laborious business’ (Thuc. 1.70 = LACTOR 12 no. 71). Upon panegyric occasions like the funeral speech, Athenian views were wholly positive, stressing their spirit of freedom, their plentiful leisure and ‘daily joy … in both the goods produced here than those produced abroad’, their openness, bravery, nobility, magnanimity; Perikles, in the funeral speech attributed to him by Thucydides, went as far as saying ‘the city as a whole is an example to Greece’ (Thuc. 2.37-41; LACTOR 12 nos. 74-8). The Athenians, like other communities, including the Arcadians (Hdt. 8.73.1), claimed that they were indigenous ‘authochons’, literally, sprung from the earth (LACTOR 12 nos. 72-3).

Sources for Athens

Athens is by far the best attested city state in classical Greek history. The literary and inscriptional leftovers are unparalleled: there remain thousands of inscriptions, more than one hundred speeches penned by orators for the law-courts and assemblies, and many tragedies and comedies. Herodotus’ work promotes the prominence of the Athenians in the Greek efforts against Persia, Thucydides’ history of the Peloponnesian war is Athenocentric; Xenophon’s Greek History is less interested in Athens but still says much about the Athenians particularly in the opening two books of his work. There also survive quotations of other lost Athenian histories, like that of Philochoros. What this means is that we know more about classical Athens than about any other classical Greek city-state within the Athenian league. When, therefore, we try to understand the history of Greece, we have to be aware than much of what we know is about Athens, which was, owing to its riches and power, a very atypical city state.

Further Reading:


Website of the Athenian Agora excavations:

http://www.agathe.gr/
Approaching Greek History 10: Women

Along with the widespread acceptance of human slavery (see below, Approaching, section 11), one of the huge gaps between the ancient Greek and modern worlds is the Greeks’ (largely) uncritical view of the subordinate nature and position of women. In Thucydides’ version of the funeral speech for those who had died at the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian war, Perikles, the Athenian statesman, claimed, at an Athenian public funeral, that the most admired virtue of a women was to be least talked about (Thucydides 2.45). This is one side of the picture: women in ancient Greek city-states took a back seat in most public matters. However, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the sources for ancient Athenian history were written by men, it is possible to build up a detailed picture of the roles that women played in ancient Greek communities by reference to passing references in the works of historians, dramatists and orators, and through the visual evidence of grave stelai and vase paintings, which show the limited roles women were perceived as capable of fulfilling.

Subordination of women?

The rights and obligations of an individual in any ancient Greek city-state were largely determined by his or her status: the distinction between citizens and non-citizens was of great importance. But even citizen women lacked the political rights of their male counterparts: they were not able to vote at the assembly, nor at meetings of their deme, and they could hold neither seats on the council nor public office. Legally, too, they were subordinate to their male kyrios (in the first place her father or nearest male relative; after marriage, her husband): in the law-courts, therefore, the kyrios would carry out the woman’s defence and make prosecutions on her behalf. Women, like children, were not allowed to make any contract above the value of a medimnos of barley (Isaeus 10.10 = LACTOR 12 no. 112).

Some sources, as a way of demonstrating their domestic orderliness and adherence to traditional values, tend to emphasise the seclusion of women within the family, and even the separation of male and female space within the household (e.g. the speaker of Lysias speech 1 = LACTOR 12 no. 129). Other, upper-class, sources offer details of activities that the women carried out indoors (LACTOR 12 nos. 127-8, 139). The reality, particularly for the poor, was probably very different: one lawcourt speech tells us that the defendant’s mother, though a citizen, worked as a wet-nurse:

‘Even if being a wet-nurse is demeaning, I will not shirk the truth. … Poverty forces free citizens to take up many slavish and humiliating occupations, which should prompt pity rather than further disaster. I hear that, because of the fluctuating fortunes of the city in those days, many female citizens have become wet-nurses or weavers or grape-pickers, and many are now rich instead of poor.’ (Demosthenes 57.45 = LACTOR 12 no. 141).
Moreover, recent explorations of the archaeological evidence for ancient Greek houses has suggested that the division between male and female space was far from universal: it is much more plausible that the architecture of most homes, especially those in built-up areas, was more concerned with determining a division between public and private space and allowing inhabitants a degree of privacy.

**Women’s rights?**

Citizen women did possess a number of privileges which elevated their status above that of non-citizen women. A new regulation of 451/0 BC demonstrates their importance in terms of the definition of the citizen body: this law, which was a proposal of Perikles, said that a man should be a citizen only if he was born of ‘two astoi’ (‘ex amphoin astoin’ ([Aristotle], *The Constitution of the Athenians* 26)): this meant that both his parents had to be ‘astoi’, a term which may well equate to the citizen (though some have claimed otherwise: see below, *Approaching*, section 11). Grave *stelai* for citizen women referred to them by their personal name and the name of their father or husband, and the representation of the deceased gave a family an opportunity to demonstrate its orderliness and adherence to civic values.

It is clear that women had a degree of public visibility. We know that they attended funerals of relatives -- a clear opportunity to socialise (LACTOR 12 no 129) -- and that women played an important part in funerary ritual and mourning (LACTOR 12 no. 114). They may have been able to attend the festivals at the Dionysia and to watch the tragedies and comedies, but the evidence is indecisive.

Women had significant roles in religion: there exists a huge amount of evidence for their dedications to the gods and other religious activity. Men and women both took part in the Panathenaia festival. Citizen women were the only people entitled to publicly celebrate the Thesmophoria in honour of Demeter and Kore (Persephone) in Athens, while the priestesshood of Athena Nike was selected from Athenian citizen women (Fornara, *Archaic Times*, no. 93). At the Anthesteria festival, the wife of the archon *basileus* was ritually given as a bride to the god Dionysus. The religious privileges that Athenians reserved for their citizen women meant that they took pains to monitor the admission of women into the citizen body. Adulterers, on the other hand, were excluded (LACTOR 12 no. 99). To be involved in religious activity elevated the status of a woman. Take, for instance, the words of the Chorus of Women in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*:

‘When I was seven I carried the sacred symbols; then at ten I was grinder of Athena’s barley; then at the Brauronian festival of Artemis, I was the Bear-girl in the saffron robe; and when I had grown up handsome, I carried the sacred basket, wearing a necklace of dried figs. Surely I have a right to give good advice to the city. But don’t hold it against me that I’m a woman if I produce something to cope with the present situation. I do my bit; I pay my contribution in men.’

(LACTOR 12 no. 121)
This passage suggests that religious activity could be presented as an elevation of status, while a woman’s contribution to the city consisted of ‘paying a contribution in men’. On the other hand, as Melvin Cooley suggests, her contribution might have been seen as mundane, with Aristophanes making a deadpan joke to a largely male audience (we might compare the faux-pas committed by the UCAS applicant bragging about brownie badges or Grade 1 flute on their personal statement!).

Marriage

Marriage was an essential aspect of a citizen woman’s life; there was a strong pressure upon an Athenian citizen male to marry a citizen female, and vice versa (LACTOR 12 no. 97). ‘A child born of a mixed marriage between Athenian and non-Athenian, or of a liaison between a married Athenian and an Athenian woman other than his wife, would have no claim to inheritance or kinship, and would be excluded from the important religious observances of the family’ (LACTOR 12 page 45). Usually, the family of the bride would provide a dowry (LACTOR 12 no. 90); this sum would be returned to them if the marriage ended or if there were no children to inherit the sum. Divorce and remarriage were permitted. If a husband died leaving not sons but only daughters by his wife, a daughter would become an heiress (epikleros) and inherit his property. She, in turn, was expected to marry a member of the husband’s family in order to ensure that the property remained within the family (LACTOR 12 nos. 73-4, 76); some families avoided this problem by adopting a male heir (LACTOR 12 no. 77-8).

Sexual activity

There was a general expectation that marriage would lead to the birth of children. However, there was no expectation that sexual activity was confined to the arena of marriage. It was seen as normal for married men to have liaisons with prostitutes (LACTOR 12 n. 92), particularly at symposia (drinking parties). However, it was considered disrespectful to one’s wife to bring them into the house (LACTOR 12 no 101) and the Athenians worried about the consequences of getting them pregnant (LACTOR 12 no. 79). See also, on prostitutes, LACTOR 12 132-4.

In Athens (and other areas such as the Peloponnese and Crete) the most common form of homosexual relations was between a man and an adolescent; it was known as pederasty. Such relations would be pursued alongside marriage: it is clear that there was no stringent division between a ‘heterosexual’ and ‘homosexual’ identity. For literary sources on homosexual relations, see LACTOR 12 nos. 104-111). Though such relations were considered normal, some sources suggest that an older man’s love for a young boy might be ridiculous or embarrassing. This is the candid plea of a fourth-century litigant:

‘If I am in the wrong, Councillors, I do not ask for pardon: but if I prove that in this matter I am not guilty of what Simon has sworn to but have merely shown myself
rather foolish for my age in my attitude to the young lad, then I ask you to think none
the worse of me, realising that all men are naturally desirous and that respectability
lies in handling these desires as decorously as possible.' (Lysias 3.4: see LACTOR 12
no. 111).

Another view of male-male sexual relations is preserved in the stories which survive about an
elite infantry unit based in Thebes, known as the Sacred Band. This fighting group consisted
of 150 pairs of lovers who were supported by the state and were deployed as a special unit in
battles of great importance. The real significance of the band is hard to assess (this may be
one of those occasions when our sources over-emphasise the unusual or bizarre), but the role
of male-male emotional and physical proximity and sexual relations as a way of
strengthening bonds within a military unit is highly plausible.

The evidence for female-female sexual relations is even more sparse, but there may be
relevant implications in the poetry of Alcman of Sparta or Sappho of Mytilene (on the island
of Lesbos) which extol the beauty and attractiveness of other women.

Women in control?

Three comedies of Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusai* (411 BC), *Lysistrata* (411 BC) and
*Ekklesiazusai* (390s) envisage worlds in which the women wield extraordinary political
power. In the *Lysistrata*, the women refuse to have sex with their husbands until they
curtailed warfare; in the *Thesmophoriazusai* they convene an assembly-meeting of the
women to decide what retribution they would take against Euripides for his negative
portrayal of women, and in the *Ekklesiazusai*, disguised as men, they take over the assembly
and establish a state where property is held in common. To a predominantly-male audience,
the idea of women being in charge must have been very funny.

Outside Athens

The status of women differed from city to city. Aristotle, a philosopher writing in the fourth
century BC, took the view that the women of Sparta lived more freely and luxuriously than
was good for the community as a whole; they appear to have retained control over their
dowries after the end of a marriage, and they were able to become owners of inherited
property (Aristotle *Politics* 1269-70). The connection between wealth and profile is
demonstrated by the example of Kyniska, the sister of King Agesilaos II. She sponsored the
victorious team the chariot races at Olympia in 396 and 392 BC, and celebrated this with an
expensive and prominent monument described by the second-century AD travel-writer,
Pausanias (Paus. 6.1.6): for discussion, see S. Hodkinson, ‘New Approaches to Classical
Further Reading:


L. Nevett, *Domestic Space in Classical Antiquity*, 2010


Diotima is an excellent resource for the study of women and gender in the Greek world: http://www.stoa.org/diotima/
Approaching Greek History 11: Citizens, Slaves, Metics; Greek Values

Class and Status

Modern approaches to communities offer two principal modes of analysis. One way argues that it is better to analyse groups and individuals according to wealth, economic productivity, and their position in the production networks of the city (a class-based analysis, broadly Marxist; see, primarily, G. de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, 1981). The other suggests that it is better to think in terms of the rights and obligations of particular groups: this is the status-group approach to ancient history, propounded in the work of Moses Finley. A balanced view acknowledges the value of both approaches. A recent, excellent and concise study of this subject is D. Kamen, *Status in Classical Athens*, 2013, which takes the view that there existed a ‘spectrum’ of statuses in classical Athens, and outlines the roles, rights, restrictions, and responsibilities experienced by 10 separate status groups. The groups are as follows: chattel slaves, privileged chattel slaves, freedmen with constitutional freedom, metics, privileged metics, bastards, disenfranchised citizens, naturalized citizens, and both female and male citizens. But for the sake of conciseness, I shall take a broader-brush approach in these notes, while acknowledging that there existed considerable capacity for variation of experience and social mobility (both upward and downward) within these groups.

Divided Communities

The conventional division of the community in Athens and many other city-states was between the free and unfree. In Athens, free people consisted both of citizens (of whom population estimates vary: Hansen suggests c. 50-60,000 adult males in c. 431 and c. 25-30,000 in the fourth century; Osborne suggests something closer to 20,000 in the fourth century) and metics (of whom there may have been between 5,000 and 10,000): the latter were tax-paying foreigners resident in Athens for more than one month who were granted special privileges. The unfree consisted of slaves. The three groups have been known, since Finley, as ‘status groups’. The vast majority of surviving evidence on status at Athens (and elsewhere) was produced by citizens in various capacities, which means that the perspective of the citizen is dominant. It is difficult, but not impossible to get a sense of the slave’s or metic’s experience of life in an ancient Greek community. The situation in Sparta was different, where there were the Spartans (the ‘homoioi’), the free communities of *periíkoi*, and the enslaved helot populations of Laconia and Messenia. Whatever the details of the servitude, slavery was a phenomenon universal in the Greek world.

Solon and status

The reforms of Solon of 594 BC are vital to any understanding of status at Athens. Solon introduced several changes which appear to have made status-groups more distinct. For one thing, Solon abolished the status of the *hektemoroi*, the ‘sixth-parters’. The true identity of
this group is unknown, but they may well have been poor farmers who were forced to hand over 1/6th of their agricultural produce to wealthier farmers; alternatively, they may have been landless farmers who worked the land of big landowners in exchange for keeping 1/6th of their agricultural produce. Second, Solon abolished the practice of debt-slavery, whereby citizens could secure a loan upon the guarantee of their services as a slave if they defaulted. From the time of Solon, it was no longer permitted to enslave a citizen or to offer oneself up for slavery. Additionally, Solon introduced a four-fold division of citizens according to their agricultural productivity (the pentakosiomedimnoi, zeugitai, hippets, and thetes). These groups were significant up to the end of the fifth century BC in terms of defining those citizens who were permitted to hold particular political offices. According to Aristotle, Solon ‘provided that all officials were to be drawn from the notable and the rich – the pentakosiomedimnoi, and the zeugitai and from a third order called hippeis. The fourth order, thetes, were excluded from office’ (Aristotle Politics 1274 = LACTOR 5, no 44).

Citizens: privileges and rights

The Athenians regulated carefully those who took up citizen rights: new citizens were required to undergo full scrutiny at the age of eighteen in front of assembled demesmen ([Aristotle], Athenaios Politeia 42). As noted above (Approaching, section 10), from 451/0 BC, a proposal of Perikles directed that a man should only be a citizen if both he was born ‘ex amphoin astoin’: conventionally, this is taken to mean that both his parents had to be citizens. (One scholar, Edward Cohen, has offered an alternative interpretation of this passage, arguing that ‘astoi’ refers instead to ‘locals’: the implications of his unorthodox interpretation are significant, as they suggest that Perikles was actually broadening the spread of citizens to those who could claim to be ‘locals’ rather than restricting it to citizens. However, though it cannot be disproved, his interpretation has convinced few scholars.)

Aristotle defined a citizen as follows:

‘A citizen pure and simple is best defined by his right to decide legal cases and to hold public office. Some offices are of limited tenure, so that some of them may never be held twice by the same man, or only after a certain interval of time. Other offices, like membership of a jury or an assembly, enjoy limited tenure.’ (Aristotle, Politics, 1275 = LACTOR 5 no. 4).

Aristotle’s definition of the citizen concentrates on the privilege of office-holding. But there were other privileges or rights that were restricted to citizens.

- Speaking, proposing decrees, and voting in the assembly.
- Sitting as a councillor in the Athenian boule (council).
- Sitting as a dikastes (pl. dikastai) in the Athenian law-courts. A dikastes acted like a modern juror in that he would vote on a verdict, but, like a modern judge, he would also ultimately decide on the penalty imposed on a guilty party (in the trial of
Socrates, famously, the dikastai decided between two alternative penalties proposed by the defendant and his accusers)

- Prosecuting in the law-courts and defending oneself (in person, though sometimes with the speech of a professional speech-writer like Lysias or Demosthenes) from prosecution (although foreigners could defend themselves too).

Additionally, other protections for Athenian citizens include: freedom from being executed without trial, freedom from torture, exemption from corporal punishment. Among the most important rights of an Athenian citizen was the right to own land, and was something they awarded to foreigners who had performed exceptional services for the Athenians.

**Citizens: obligations**

The other side of the coin were the obligations of citizens: military service was compulsory for all citizens over the age of 18; the charges of evasion of service, leaving the ranks during battle, or throwing away one’s shield were all extremely serious. Other obligations, which are generally compatible with the wider Greek ethic of ‘helping friends and harming enemies’, included:

- Looking after one’s parents in old age.
- Paying the *eisphora*, an emergency war-tax levied at times of crisis.
- For very rich citizens, funding the equipment and upkeep of a trireme in the Athenian navy.
- For the very rich citizens, funding Athenian festivals through a form of competitive sponsorship known as the *choregia*.
- Remaining in the city at a time of crisis.

Citizens performed these obligations competitively and boasted about them:

‘I served as a trierarch five times and I fought in four naval battles. I paid the capital levy many times during the war, and I performed my other public services as well as any citizen. My purpose in spending more than the city required was that you should think better of me, and that if some reverse should befall me, I should give a better account of myself in court.’ (Lysias 25.12f = LACTOR 5 no. 227).

(We should note that in this case, Lysias, a metic, wrote a speech on behalf of a citizen and crafted to his circumstances.)

There was an expectation that the wealthy, in return for their economic status and prominence, would make generous contributions to the well-being of the city (LACTOR 12 nos. 25, 28; LACTOR 5 no. 52). This didn’t stop some wealthy people from complaining:

‘In the funding of choruses and athletic teams and in the maintenance of warships, they (the common people) know that it is the rich who fund the choruses while it is the common people for whom they are funded, and it is the rich who fund the athletic teams and maintain the warships while it is the common people for whom the warships are maintained and the teams funded. The common people certainly see fit
to take money for singing, running, dancing and sailing with the fleet, so that they may become rich and the rich poorer.’ (Old Oligarch 1.13 = LACTOR 5 no 68)

Nevertheless, the very great lengths to which the Athenians went to monitor entrance to the citizen body and to ensure the exclusivity of citizenship shows that its perceived advantages greatly outweighed the burdens that it entailed.

**Metics at Athens (see LACTOR 12 nos. 43-8)**

In the Thucydidean funeral speech, Perikles claims that the Athenians positively welcomed foreigners (Thucydides 2.39; the Spartans, on the contrary, were said to practice, on some occasions, *xenelasia* (the expulsion of foreigners: Thuc. 1.144; Xenophon *Spartan Constitution* 15.2-4). The existence of a status-group of metics supports this ideal. Metics were resident foreigners at Athens who had some legal rights and protections. Their status came at a price: payment of a metic tax (a relatively small sum: male metics were expected to pay 12 *drachmai*; female metics 6 *drachmai* per annum) and service in the land forces (Thucydides 2.31). A great deal of manufacture and commercial activity was in the hands of metics. The Old Oligarch hypothesised that the Athenians allowed metics freedom because there was a commercial need for metics:

‘In the matter of freedom of speech we have put slaves on equal terms with free men, and metics with citizens, for the city needs metics because of all its skilled activities and because of the fleet’ (Old Oligarch 1.12 = LACTOR 2 second edition).

The Old Oligarch wasn’t the only writer to think of the metics as an important resource: Xenophon too pointed out that the tax they paid and the services they rendered the Athenians benefited the city (Xenophon *Poroi* 2.1-2, 5 = LACTOR 12 no. 44). Such views may have gone some way to counterbalancing the prejudices that were felt towards foreigners.

The commercial activity of metics was monitored along the same lines as that of citizens. As a way of protecting their grain supply, the Athenians had a law banning any Athenian citizen or metic from facilitating the movement of grain to any city other than Athens (LACTOR 12 no. 17; see above, *Approaching* section 17). Only a few metics were allowed to share in the Athenian citizens’ right of owning land: this was an elevated status granted as a reward for some extraordinary service for the Athenians. It meant that non-citizens in Athens were obliged to rent property if they wanted to stay in Athens. Furthermore, foreigners would find it impossible to make money by farming or renting property: most resident foreigners in Athens made their living through commercial activity.

As a status-group, the metic was a distinctively Athenian arrangement. But other similar groups are known in around 70 other Greek states: a third-century BC inscription from Dyme, in the Peloponnese, mentions a group of *epoikoi*, resident foreigners, who were offered the right to purchase citizenship.
Slaves

A fundamental difference between ancient and modern conceptions of man is that the ancient Greeks lacked any concept of human rights. Accordingly, they had little compunction in viewing large numbers of human beings as the possessions (chattels) of others and as little more than implements of labour or menial tasks. Whereas it is largely outlawed in the modern world (but still exists: think of the conditions suffered by the domestic staff of modern Dubai or the slaves imported from Mali and Burkina Faso to pick cocoa beans in Ghana or even the Bangladeshi strawberry-pickers in the Peloponnese), slavery was universal among the city-states of classical Greece, and this short outline can do no justice to its complexity (for a selection of sources, see LACTOR 12 nos. 49-70). It is, however, important to emphasise both its significance for conceptions of citizenship and also its diversity.

From the time of the Persian Wars, ancient sources present a basic distinction between freedom and slavery: the ideal was that freedom was experienced by living as a citizen in a city-state, free from any kind of external intervention. Accordingly, citizenship was the requirement for an individual to realize the fullest extent of freedom. Some ancient Greek thinkers thought that non-Greeks were naturally slaves (for instance, Aristotle, at Politics 1255a = LACTOR 12 no. 53; Plato, Laws 264). But among the slaves in any Greek city-state there would have been Greeks of other city-states who had been enslaved in warfare: the dichotomy between slave and citizen, in this sense, was rather permeable. Nevertheless, an idealistic aversion of free Greeks to carrying out paid labour (LACTOR 12 40-1) was made plausible by the existence of slaves who carried out menial tasks.

In Sparta, the helot population was made up of the enslaved peoples of Laconia and Messenia: accordingly, they possessed a collective identity, which may well have been a significant factor in the fomenting of revolts. Famously, the helots, together with the perioikoi revolted in 464 BC, causing the Spartans to curtail other overseas ventures (Thucydides 1.101). There is very little evidence for the revolt of slaves elsewhere in the Greek world. Helot slaves lacked political or legal rights, were expected to surrender much of their produce to the Spartans, and were subjected to an ongoing reign of terror. In Athens, they may have been less physically distinguishable, though situation, may have been distorted by the Old Oligarch for the sake of reinforcing his complaints about Athenian society:

‘It is slaves and metics who lead the most undisciplined life in Athens; there, one is not permitted to strike them, and a slave will not stand out of the way for you. I will explain why this is their local custom. If the law permitted a free man to strike a slave or a metic or a freedman, he would often think that the Athenian was a slave and would have hit him; for, so far as clothing and general appearance are concerned, the common people are no better than the slaves and metics. If someone is surprised at this, that they allow their slaves to live in the lap of luxury, and some of them indeed to live a life of real magnificence, this too is something that they can be seen to do with good reason. For where power is based on the navy, because of the need for money there is no choice but to end up enslaved to slaves, so that we can take a share of their earnings, and to let them go free. And where there are rich slaves, there is no
longer any point in my slave fearing you. In Sparta my slave would have been afraid of you, but if your slave is afraid of me, he is quite likely to avoid personal danger by handing over some of his own money.’

Old Oligarch, *Constitution of the Athenians* 1.10-12; see LACTOR 2, 2nd edition.

The Old Oligarch, as a way of criticising democracy in Athens, probably underplays the differences between citizens and slaves at Athens, but the overlaps he observes, such as the similarity of appearances, are thought-provoking. Nevertheless, the laws of Athens put emphasis on the distinguishing between slaves and citizens: evidence from slaves could be considered in the lawcourts only if it was extracted under torture (LACTOR 12 nos. 168-70), and slaves were, unlike citizens, subject to corporal punishment. Individuals, too, were able to count their slaves, along with their oxen and their land, as property (LACTOR 12 no. 29, 313).

The experience of a slave would be determined heavily by his or her occupation. State-owned slaves would carry out a range of tasks, including, at the upper end of the scale, clerical work or testing the quality of silver coins (LACTOR 12 nos. 54-6). Slaves worked in agriculture (not all farmers would have been able to afford slaves, and many menial tasks would have been carried out by free labourers), as teachers, in domestic positions, in manufacturing, in the silver mines, as public workers, and as prostitutes (LACTOR 12, nos. 57-62, 69, 188-9, 357). Owning multiple slaves was a sign of wealth and status (LACTOR 12 nos. 66-9). The treatment of slaves was very much dependent on the master and the status of the slave. One of Xenophon’s Socratic dialogues contrasts ‘slaves who are in chains, but still frequently run away’ with those who ‘are unconfined, but are willing to stay and work’ (Xenophon *Oikonomikos* 3.4 = LACTOR 12 no. 63).

**Greek Values**

What were the values and ideas that motivated individual and community behaviour in the period of classical Greece? To begin with, we can point to a significant absence: the notion of human rights. In a world where slaves had no privileges, where women had few rights, and the treatment of outsiders was directed by the question of their status, it is wrong to talk of ‘human’ rights. Any rights that a Greek possessed were entirely reliant upon possession of a privileged status: that is, being a citizen by birth, being a naturalized citizen, or an outsider who had been deemed worthy of privileges by a community. The notion of rights, or entitlements, like other strands of Greek ethics, was entirely bound to the status of the claimant. The notion of human equality was similarly absent. While in democratic Athens, all male citizens in theory had access to political and judicial activity, they made no attempt to address social and economic inequality. The idea of redistributing wealth for the sake of evening up fortunes appears to have generally been feared and was seldom advocated.

The notion of ‘helping one’s friends’ and ‘harming one’s enemies’ underlay the whole system of ethics. At their background was the notion of reciprocity, the idea that one should
repay a favour, and, at the same time, that one bad service should be responded to with another. While these ethics are visible in the way that Greek city-states went to war with each other or made alliances with one another, they are visible also in the way that individuals relate to their wider communities: litigants in the Athenian lawcourts would boast of the liturgies they had paid as a way of staking claims about the treatment that they deserved from the jury of Athenians. Standing up for one’s kinsmen was a widely-respected motivation, and it is clear that one’s immediate family was counted among one’s friends (philoi). There was an expectation in Athens at least that, as long as one’s father had ensured that his son had a profession or trade to grow into, there was an obligation on that offspring to look after his parents in their old age. Piety for deceased relatives was expressed also in the ways in which they were commemorated.

In important senses, individuals in the period of classical Greece were as obsessed by the accrual of honour (time) and avoidance of shame as were the heroes of Homeric epic (See Approaching, section 7). These motivating factors led individuals to subsidize community activities, to fund the equipment and upkeep of warships, and to sponsor the performance of dramatic competitions.

One value that was expected of all, whether citizen or outsider, male or female, was a degree of piety. This took the shape of participation in religious activities such as sacrifice and the offering of dedications to the gods at their sanctuaries. After victorious battles, Greeks offered thank-offerings, often in the shape of the share of the spoils of battle; the first-fruits of the harvest was also offered to the appropriate deity. It was important to a Greek to ensure the visibility of such pious offerings: they were an important part of his profile among the community and a sure way of gaining honour within it.

Further Reading:


D. Kamen, Status in Classical Athens, 2013.


T. Wiedemann, Greek and Roman Slavery, 1981. A sourcebook on slavery.
Approaching Greek History 12: The Delian League and Athenian Empire

After the Persian wars, the Athenians gradually appear to have asserted their power over the other Greek city states. The question of why the Spartans took a back-seat in Greek affairs immediately after the Persian wars is a difficult one. Some sources say that the Athenians seized the leadership; others suggest that the Athenians took it owing to Spartan willingness; others point to the arrogant behaviour of the Spartan regent Pausanias which made the Greeks reluctant to pursue alliance with the Spartans.

But it is clear that after the Persian Wars, there was no clear consensus on the best direction for the city-states of Greece, and the origins of the division of the Greek world between the Athenians, the Spartans, and their respective allies lie in these crucial years.

Map 13. The Delian League and Athenian allies, c.440 BC

The Sources

The history of the Delian League and its transformation into an Athenian Empire is richly documented by the literary and epigraphical (inscriptional) sources. LACTOR 1 is a comprehensive resource which translates a huge quantity of material. Note in particular the essays on the Tribute Lists at pages 86-101.

On the one hand, we have Thucydides, who offers us an account of the earliest years to 439BC (Thuc. 1.89-139). Later chapters of his work offer us a view of the behaviour of
Athens and her allies in the period of the Peloponnesian War, and offer us a view of the way in which the Athenians controlled their allies ever more tightly as the war went on. The evidence of inscribed decrees of the Athenian assembly offers a variegated picture, with the Athenians imposing some regulations upon their allies, while at other times pursuing a more diplomatic approach: they awarded the title of ‘Proxenos of the Athenians’ to particular individuals who they reckoned would represent Athenian interests in their home city (e.g. LACTOR 1, 4th edition, nos. 235-8); this may represent a reward for good behaviour or may have provided an incentive. A third kind of evidence is that of the Athenian Tribute Lists, which listed the 1/60th of the tribute received by the Athenians and given as a dedication to the treasury of Athena. These give us a view of the amount of money which the Athenians took from their alliance, while other inscribed decrees offer a view of their administration of the gathering the money.

**The early years of the Delian League**

At the point of its foundation in 478 BC, the allied states were initially independent. They were divided between those who contributed ships to the fighting force of the league and those who contributed a sum of money (tribute=phoros) to the treasury of the league. That treasury was initially based on the tiny island of Delos, in the centre of the Aegean (its political insignificance, its location and the fact it was sacred to Apollo may have been the factors in the choice of Delos); initially, meetings of the league took place there (Thucydides 1.96). These factors, together with the intention of the league to ravage the territory of the Persian king (Thucydides 1.96) make it look like a relatively liberal alliance. Signing up to such an alliance may have been relatively appealing to Greek states, particularly those of the Aegean islands and the west coast of Asia Minor, who still felt that the Persians posed a threat. Moreover, it must have been attractive to leaders of particular city-states who felt their political interests to be represented by the Athenians.

*Figure 16. The Terrace of the Lions at Delos, a dedication of the Naxians of c. 600 BC: the sanctuary of Apollo at Delos had a long history as a centre for cult activity and ostentatious display*
However, the nature of the confederation changed as time went on. Among the earliest actions of the league was continued hostility towards the Persians. The battle of Eurymedon in Pamphylia of the Athenian general Kimon in 469 or 466 BC was an important victory both by land and by sea (Thuc. 1.100; Plutarch, Life of Kimon 12-13), and Plutarch connected it with a Peace of Callias: see above, Approaching, section 8). But action was taken against allies those cities which had not signed up to the alliance, and those who revolted. Of those who resisted, Karystos, at the southern tip of Euboea, was a city-state in close proximity to Athens (it can be reached by a modern ferry from the eastern harbour of Rafina in about an hour); it had resisted Athenian power in the late 470s (Thuc. 1.98.3), and was forcibly brought into the alliance. The first community recorded as revoltling by Thucydides was the Naxians, who were forced back into the alliance (Thuc. 1.98.4).

Thucydides (1.97-117) is the main source for these developments, but it should be borne in mind that he did not intend to create a comprehensive account of the Delian League: his main aim in telling its story is to demonstrate the growth of Athenian power and the fear that it struck into Sparta and her Peloponnesian allies. Thucydides’ account (1.100-101) of the revolt and siege of Thasos gives us one impression of how the Athenians treated rebellious allies. He says that the Thasians revolted after a dispute had arisen with the Athenians over the control of markets on the Greek mainland. The Athenians besieged the Thasians, who in turn appealed to the Spartans for help. Only after a siege which lasted for three years did the Thasians surrender: they were forced by the Athenians to pay reparations and annual sums of money to the Athenians, and they also surrendered their claims to mining rights on the mainland. Even before 454, it is clear that the Athenians were exerting careful control over their allies, and this tendency intensified after the 450s.

**After 454 BC**

At some point around 454 BC, the Athenians moved the treasury of the Delian League to Athens. Thereafter the tribute paid by allies was kept at Athens. The money contributed by the allies seems to have been spent by the Athenians on military campaigns rather than domestic expenditures (which would have been considerable in the 440s when the Athenians were developing monumental buildings upon the akropolis)

From 454/3 BC onwards, the Athenians began to inscribe details, upon stone slabs (stelai), of the 1/60th portion of tribute which they dedicated to the treasury of the goddess Athena. They are now known to today’s scholars as the Athenian Tribute Lists (ATLs). Details were organised by contributors (usually they were city-states): therefore the inscriptions allow us to work out what Athens received each year from each ally.

These stelai were set up at the complex of sanctuaries that was the Athenian acropolis, and perhaps represented a dedication to the gods (though, just like the Parthenon and Propylaia, they may also be interpreted as grand statements of imperial power).
The inscriptions tell us many things: they give us the names of 248 city-states who paid tribute; on the other hand, the probably excessively-optimistic Reassessment Decree of 425/4 BC (LACTOR 1, 4th edition, no. 138), in which the Athenians set out the amounts that they demanded from their subject states, suggests that by this date the tribute may have totalled as much as 1460 Talents. They tell us also about the amounts of tribute actually paid: a large number of city-states paid relatively small amounts (for details, see LACTOR 1, 4th edition, p. 89), and only 24 allies paid more than 5 Talents. The lists tell us that allies sometimes resisted Athenian demands, and the fact that names of city-states drop out of the lists suggest very strongly that there was disaffection among the allies from the late 450s onwards. It is also possible to note fluctuating amounts of tribute from contributing states: in 453 the Karystians are recorded as having paid 12 Talents; in 450, 7 Talents 3000 drachmas, and then 5 Talents in 449 and thereafter. It may well be the case that Athenian settlers were sent to Karystos in 450: a reduction in tribute may reflect the confiscation of land from Karystians. Other payers of tribute, like ‘the Milesians in Leros’ and the ‘Milesians in Teichiousa’ in the list of 453 may represent loyalist communities to the Athenians, who, while the rest of their city-state (in this case Miletus) revolted from Athens, remained tributary subjects of Athens.

The ATLs offer us snapshot-views of the history of the Athenian empire, and they must be interpreted with care and precision. Their physical remains do bring with them interpretative
problems: in the inscription that covers the period 449-6 BC, it seems to be the case that there is room on the stone for one list fewer than there are years: one possible solution is that the Athenians appear not to have set up a list in either 449/8 or 447/6. A number of different explanations have been offered for this: does it suggest widespread disaffection with the Athenians in the 440s given that war with Persia (according to Thucydides, the *raison d’etre* of the league) was no longer being pursued? Or perhaps the Athenians decided that no tribute would be payable for one year? Or perhaps they put the monies received to some other use? One can only hope that some new discovery may shine some light on such matters.

Other inscriptions, recording decrees, give us other views of the history of the Athenian Empire. Probably in the late 450s, a set of Athenian regulations published for Erythrai (LACTOR 1, 4th edition, no. 216A) describes their religious duties to the Athenians: they were to bring grain to the Great Panathenaia festival at Athens, and there was to be a council of 120 selected by lot which was to administer affairs in that city. One interpretation of this document is that the Athenians were introducing a democratic administration which was based along the lines of that which existed in Athens (on Athenian democracy, see *Approaching*, Section 15). In the Athenian arrangements for Chalkis, probably of 446/5 (LACTOR 1.78), all Chalkidians over the age of 18 were forced to swear the following oath:

‘I will not revolt from the people of Athens by any means or device whatsoever, neither in word nor in deed, nor will I obey anyone who does revolt, and if anyone revolts will denounce him to the Athenians, and I will pay to the Athenians whatever tribute I persuade them to agree, and I will be the best and fairest ally I am able to be and will help and defend the Athenian people, in the event of anyone wronging the Athenian people, and I will obey the Athenian people’.

The Athenians interfered in other aspects of their allies’ affairs, at one point in the 420s or 410s imposing Athenian silver coinage on their allies, and charging them commission on exchanging their coins for those of Athens. The Athenians sent this decree out to be announced in the cities of the confederacy on papyrus documents, and also required cities to write up the regulations on stone inscriptions and set them up in the agora of each city, as part of an attempt to make the regulations permanent (LACTOR 1, no. 198).

But however harshly the Athenians seem to have treated their allies (in 421, for instance, putting to death the men of military age and enslaving the women and children of the rebellious Skionaians (Thuc. 5.32)), it should be remembered that there was disagreement within Athens about imperial policy. The best example of this is given in Thucydides’ account of the debate of 427 BC about how to treat the rebellious Mytileneans (Thuc. 3.36-50). The original Athenian decision – to execute all the citizen men of Mytilene and enslave the women and children – was overturned the next day, after a debate in the assembly, in favour of a milder punishment (execution of the ringleaders).
The Athenians sent out to their subject states cleruchies, groups of Athenian citizens who would be allocated a portion of land, in the late fifth century. These settlers retained their citizenship: Plutarch (*Life of Perikles* 11 = LACTOR 5 no. 61) says that that Perikles sent out settlers to Khersonese, Naxos, Andros, Thrace, Italy, ‘to relieve the city of its lazy and consequently meddlesome mob, to remedy the poverty of the people, and to give the allies a neighbouring garrison to deter revolt’. One decree says explicitly that settlers were to be drawn from the *zeugitai* and *thetes* (see above, *Approaching* section 11), suggesting that the sending of a cleruchy was done with the aim of granting land to poor Athenian citizens (LACTOR 5 no. 62). For more evidence on cleruchs and cleruchies, see LACTOR 1, 4th edition, index s.v. cleruchies.

**How did members fare?**

Many of the members of the Delian League were small *poleis*, some of which had very scant resources. We know the names and locations of many of these members, as they are found on the Athenian Tribute Lists. On the one hand, members may have been grateful for the reinforcement against the threats of Persians and pirates. Importantly, communities may have valued the support to democratic organisation that the Athenians appear sometimes to have supported (e.g. at Erythrai: LACTOR 1, 4th edition 216A) and protection against oligarchs (though for a sceptical view of the Athenian oligarch Phrynichos, late on in the Peloponnesian War, see Thuc. 8.48). They may have been happy with the sense of belonging to a bigger community. On the other hand, significant proportions of the population of larger, wealthier, members, who would have held their own in a free Aegean, like Thasos or Mytilene, may have felt resentment at the lack of freedom and the obligations imposed upon them. Historians have observed that among many of the member-states, there was a noticeable lack of building activity during the period of the Athenian empire: this may indicate either impoverishment, or a lack of desire to build monumental structures on a scale of those being constructed in Athens.

Since Russell Meiggs’ monumental work on the Athenian empire, which posited the view that Athenian imperialism became harsher and more interventionist in the 440s, the redating of many key inscriptions to the 430s and 420s has led historians to take the view that the transformation took place in the 420s, perhaps in connection with the politicians of that era. See, below, Further Reading, in particular the articles of Papazarkadas and Rhodes.

**Further Reading:**

R. Meiggs, *The Athenian Empire*, 1972. An authoritative study of the institutions and history of the empire. Unsurpassed, but it should be noted that current research has redated many of the inscriptions believed to have originated in the mid-fifth century to a later period in that century. See Papazarkadas’ contribution to Ma (et al.)


Approaching Greek History 13: Warfare

Warfare was an almost continuous pursuit of ancient Greek city-states and was the perennial destiny of its peoples. Some, like Plato, thought that warfare was the natural condition of the Greek city-state (Plato, *Laws* 626a). It had a profound effect upon the nature and organisation of Greek communities. It was expensive both in terms of finances and the lives of citizens; by the fifth century, the Athenians had built a navy which was expensive to maintain. The ancient sources offer us very rich accounts of its causes and the nature of fighting: Thucydides claimed that his work of history was inspired by the unsurpassed magnitude of the war (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.1); in taking war as his subject, he followed in the footsteps of Homer’s *Iliad* (which offers a snapshot of the story ten-year Greek siege of Troy) and Herodotus’ *Histories* (the Persian Wars). Thucydides’ war is now known as the Peloponnesian War, which lasted for 27 years (431-404 BC).

Causes of war

Why was warfare so prevalent in Greece? It may be related to the fact that Greece was divided between independent communities, each of which had their own particular interests, and strived to maintain them in the face of weaker or stronger neighbours. But living in the *polis* does not explain everything. Some scholars take the view that warfare was primarily a mode of acquisition, and that Greek communities went to war in order to make profits through plunder or to damage through ravaging the economies of other city: this is the ‘predatory’ or ‘economic’ view of Greek warfare. Others take the ‘agonal’ view, that warfare was about the maintenance of honour and status: communities went to war out in order to uphold a culturally significant sense of pride. What about in practice? How did wars and conflicts break out in ancient Greece? The causes of war can be divided into several categories. On the one hand, some wars broke out when expansionist powers attempted to undermine the independence of city states: in 491 BC, for instance, Darius sent heralds to the Greeks, demanding the symbolic gifts of surrender, ‘earth and water’ (Herodotus 6.48). But Darius may well have been motivated by a desire to take vengeance upon the Athenians and other Greeks for the burning of Sardis during the Ionian Revolt (499-93 BC): Herodotus says that he ordered one of his servants to repeat to him three times, whenever a meal was served, ‘Lord, Remember the Athenians’ (Herodotus 5.105). And while the Athenians were, in the fifth century, preoccupied with building up a thalassocracy (leadership of Greece based on rule of the sea), they were driven not only by profit, but also by fear and a desire to win honour in the eyes of others (Thucydides 1.75, 76). Indeed, Herodotus has his Persians express surprise at their realisation that Greeks go to battle for reasons of competitive virtue rather than money (Herodotus 8.26). Some years later, just before they slaughtered the non-compliant Melians, Thucydides’ Athenians claimed that it was within human nature to ‘rule whatever one can’ (Thuc. 5.105). But many conflicts were caused by disputes between city-states about the use of land: among the earliest wars between city-state powers was the
conflict between the Eretrians and Chalkidians of Euboea over the fertile Lelantine plain (Thuc. 1.5; Fornara no 7); the use of the sacred land on the borders was a continuous bone of contention between Athens and her neighbour to the west, Megara.

Thucydides’ account of the causes of the Peloponnesian War is something of a riddle: on the one hand, he presents his ‘truest explanation’: that what made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which it caused in Sparta (1.23); on the other hand, he presents the ‘openly expressed grounds of complaint’, which were the reasons for the ending of the previous Thirty Years’ Peace (Thuc. 1.23-65 (the complaints of the Corinthians), 1.67 (the complaints of the Aeginetans and the Megarians)). There are many ways to reconcile this paradox: perhaps Thucydides was distinguishing between apparent and underlying causes of war? Perhaps between the long-term and short-term causes of war? Or was he distinguishing between self-justificatory propaganda and objective causality? Maybe was he portraying the Spartans as paranoid and delusional? Plutarch’s Life of Perikles (29-31) offers a rather different account of the origins of the war, one which places emphasis on the complaints of the Megarians and the role of Perikles. While some of Plutarch’s account is based on comic slander, it does offer us a very different set of perspectives to those of Thucydides.

Map 14. The Peloponnesian War, 431-404 BC

What is generally known as the ‘Peloponnesian War’ refers to the conflict between 431 and 404 between then Athenians and their allies, and the Spartans and their allies. It should be distinguished from the conflict known as the First Peloponnesian War, a conflict between the Athenians and Corinth between 461 and 446, provoked by an Athenian alliance with Megara, which was terminated, after the defeat of a massive Athenian expedition to Egypt, by the Thirty Years’ Peace (Thuc. 1.103-15).
For a detailed account of the Peloponnesian War, the reader should refer to V. Hanson, *A War Like No Other. How the Athenians and the Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War*, 2006 or L. Tritle, *A New History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2010. Of course, the best (and, down to 410 BC, the only) narrative of the war is Thucydides’ work; for the period after 410, we are reliant upon Xenophon’s *Hellenika*. Perhaps one point is worth noting: the idea that the Peloponnesian War (or, as he knows it, the ‘war of the Athenians and Peloponnesians’) was a 27-year continuum is the idea of Thucydides (5.26). It might sensibly be divided into the following blocks: the Archidamian War (431-21 BC); the Peace of Nikias (421-415 BC); the Sicilian Expedition (415-13 BC); Ionian or Dekeleian War (413-404 BC).

War was ignited in 431 when the Thebans with the Boiotians, allies of the Spartans (Thuc. 2.9), attacked the Plataians, allies of the Athenians, during peace-time. There are a number of features of the war that deserve mention: its early stages consisted of an annual invasion of Attica, lasting no more than forty days, by the Spartan forces with her Peloponnesian allies. The Spartans ravaged the Athenian countryside, burning and cutting down crops and attempting to cause damage to Athenian infrastructure. We should bear in mind both the ‘agonal’ and ‘economic’ interpretations: on the one hand, the Spartans were motivated by the hope that they would damage Athenian morale and their economy (V. Hanson has argued that the economic effects of agricultural devastation have been overstated), but they also hoped to bring out the Athenians to face them in battle. The Athenians, on the advice of Pericles, retreated within the walls of the city and those long walls which connected the ports of Piraeus and Phaleron with the city of Athens (see below, map 15); in the early years of the war they were devastated by the plague (Thuc. 2.47-54). Between 431 and 424, though, the Athenians twice-annually raided the Megarid (Thuc. 2.31; 4.66). Peloponnesian invasions of Attica went on until 426 BC, at which point the theatres of war were extended from the Peloponneso to the north Aegean area. Important developments took place in 425 at Pylos (the Athenian occupation of which led to them capturing Spartan soldiers on the island of Sphacteria, a factor in the Spartan acceptance of peace terms in 421), in 424 (the seizure by the Athenians of Kythera, an island off the coast of the Peloponnesse; the capture by the Spartan Brasidas of the Athenian colony Amphipolis; the Boiotian defeat of Athens at Delion) and 422 (the defeat of the Athenians at Amphipolis and the death of the Athenian Kleon and Spartan Brasidas). These developments meant that both sides were happy to agree peace in 421 BC

This ‘Peace of Nikias’ (for its terms, see Thuc. 5.22) did not bring peace to Greece, but outright conflict between Athens and Sparta was toned down. The Athenian expedition against Syracuse in 415 eventually re-kindled the outright conflict between the two states. Things got off to a bad start when, on the eve of its launch, the Athenians discovered that the busts of Hermes across the city had been mutilated and the religious rituals of the Eleusinian Mysteries had been profaned: the resulting witch-hunt led to the exile of the charismatic Athenian leader. Moreover, the Spartans established a fortification within Attic territory at Dekeleia, as a basis for ravaging her territory, in 413 BC (Thuc. 7.13). This, combined with Athens’ defeat in Sicily, and the readiness of the Persians to fund the construction of a Spartan navy, meant that the Athenians were defeated at Aegospotami in 405 BC. The
Spartan terms included the destruction of the Athenian navy, her empire, and the imposition of a narrow oligarchy (the Thirty Tyrants) on the Athenians.

Citizenship and fighting

In the Greek city-states, the fighting group was often identified with the group of male citizens (though there is plenty of evidence to show that foreigners (both metics and slaves) fought together with Athenians). In Athens, citizens were liable to be called up for fighting between the ages of 20 and 60, though on occasion they called up superannuated citizens (Thuc. 1.105). It is surely no coincidence that the group of citizens who made decisions about the policies of their city-state were the same ones who went to fight for it. Moreover, in a strong sense, citizens who went to war were fighting to protect their own landowning interests: Thucydides depicts the distress felt by the Athenians when they abandoned their homes at the start of the Peloponnesian war (Thuc. 2.14, 16). The timing of campaigning seasons would have been influenced by the availability of fighters: manpower may have been less available during sowing time or harvest time (in Southern Greece, grain is harvested in May–June; grapes in August; olives in November – which practically ruled out the possibility of land-fighting in Greece until the arrival of Philip of Macedon in the 350s); ironically, however, these periods were those during which the technique of invading and pillaging an opposing community’s land would have had most impact: the Spartans invaded Attica in the first years of the Archidamian war ‘when the corn was ripening’ (Thuc. 2.19.1.). Of course, the Spartans, who had the helots to harvest their grain, were exceptional: Thucydides tells us that in 428 BC the Spartans organised an invasion of Attica at the end of August, but that the harvest (of grapes) slowed the preparations of her Peloponnesian allies (Thuc. 2.15).

Hoplite Warfare

Land-warfare in classical Greece appears to have been dominated by the heavy-armed infantryman. The Greek term was hoplites, derived from the word for shield, hoplon. Hoplites fought with a shield, but their main weapon was the spear (used primarily for stabbing, not throwing); they held also a (less important) sword; these and the other armour (consisting of a Corinthian helmet, greaves, breastplate), which made up the panoply, were provided by the individual fighter: it could be acquired through inheritance, or by collecting booty from the battlefield. Training, with the exception of Sparta, appears to have been very limited. In hoplite warfare, teams of soldiers advanced in a formation known as a phalanx until the front-line met with the opposition. The kind of fighting that followed combined shoving, fighting and grappling with the enemy. Thucydides 5.63-74 offers the most detailed account of a hoplite battle at Mantinea in 418 BC: among the phenomena he notes is the tendency of the phalanx to shift from the left to the right, as each soldier edged in that direction in an attempt to gain protection behind his comrade’s shield. It is hard to assess how high the casualty rates really were for hoplite warfare. But it is clear that there is something ritualistic about hoplite warfare: communities fought each other not with the aiming of
wiping out their opposition, but in an attempt to force them to retreat. Greek warfare seems to have been a bloody business: recent estimates suggest that the average casualty rate of a Greek hoplite battle was about 5% for the winning side, and as much as 14% for the losing side (compare Herodotus’ words at 7.8).

This reconstruction shows hoplites in the tight formation, a view advocated by Crowley. Van Wees, on the other hand, takes a different view of the hoplite phalanx, who takes the view that soldiers did not necessarily stand so close together. Nevertheless, both historians agree that hoplites lacked individual mobility, and were expected to remain in formation.

Apart from Sparta, where there was organised training for all male citizens, Greek communities appear to have done little to prepare individuals for the technicalities of war. By the late fourth century, 18- and 19- year old Athenian citizens received two years’ training in hoplite fighting. However, for much of the classical period, hoplite fighters were essentially amateurs and would have learnt how to fight on the field of battle. Perhaps it was the case that life as a citizen in the city-state, where groups of male citizens came together for all kinds of reasons (theatre, assembly meetings, sessions of the lawcourt) may well have given rise to the types of comradeship vital to the success of the fighting force on the battlefield; most citizens would have supported themselves and their families through physical labour, so lack of fitness would hardly have been endemic. At the same time, our sources give us accounts of cowardice and the charge of throwing away one’s shield (it was a liability when on the retreat) was well-known.

**Other forms of warfare**

While hoplite conflict was widespread, it is clear that in the fifth century BC, a range of other modes of warfare were used. Light-armed troops, such as stone throwers, slingers and archers fought around the main hoplite formations (Thucydides 6.69), and Herodotus (7.75) describes a group of Thracian soldiers known as peltasts, who wore foxskin hats, deerskin boots, javelins, small daggers and a light shield known as a *pelte*. For other uses of light-armed troops, see the campaigns of the 420s detailed in Thucydides 3.94-8 and 4.32-5.

89
Cavalrymen appear to have been marginal to Greek warfare, partly because the roughness of Greek terrain made fighting on horseback impractical. Nevertheless, during the Peloponnesian War, the Athenians used cavalrymen to hinder enemy patrols close to their territory (Thuc. 2.22), and later in the war the Spartans found it necessary to form a cavalry legion in order to protect their territory (Thuc. 4.55).

Naval Warfare

In 483 BC, the Athenians discovered an especially valuable vein of silver at Laurion in Southern Attica (Herodotus 7.144). This enabled them to build a navy of 200 ships. Though built allegedly with the intention of fighting Athens’ neighbour Aegina, the Athenians deployed them in the defeat of the Persians in the naval battle off Salamis (479 BC). From this point onwards, the navy was a central preoccupation of Athenian policy. They used it to reinforce the strength of the Delian confederacy, and it played an important part in the development of Athenian power. The writer often designated the ‘Old Oligarch’ identified the poor as the people who were responsible for manning Athens’ navy:

‘It seems fair enough that in Athens the poor and the common people should have more power than the noble and rich, because it is the common people who row the ships and so render the city powerful; indeed, the steersmen, the boatswains, pursers, look-out men, and shipwrights render the city powerful, far more than the hoplites, the noble and the good. Since this is so, it seems fair that they should all share in the offices of state by the processes of lot and election, and that anyone of the citizens who wishes should have the right so speak.’ (Old Oligarch 1.2 (LACTOR 2, 2nd edition)).

The trireme was the most important instrument in the Athenian armed forces. A three-tiered rowing ship, manned by 170 oarsmen and thirty sailors, rowed by citizens (especially on the upper levels) and slaves (among those on the lowest), it acted as a manned torpedo: its main strategy was to drive the bronze prow into the vulnerable shell of the opposing boat. A modern reconstruction of a trireme, the Olympias, has reached speeds of some 9 knots, and demonstrated its ability to manoeuvre quickly in tight spaces.
The reconstructed trireme (above, figure 19) is based partially on the Lenormont Relief (below, figure 20). A dedication of the late fifth century BC, discovered near the Erechtheion in the nineteenth century, it depicts a trireme with 9 rowers.
Fortifications

The idealistic view of how to protect one’s community was by human effort: Nikias, in a battle exhortation, urged the Athenians to take the view that ‘men make the city – not walls’ (Thuc. 7.77). In reality, Greek cities often fortified their urban areas (the asty). In Athens, the urban areas of the city were fortified under pressure from the Spartans immediately after the Persian wars (see above, Approaching, section 8). In the 450s, the Athenians built the Long Walls which extended from the city to the ports of Piraeus and Phaleron (Thuc. 1.107; see also 2.13 and map 15, below). The reinforcement of the wall to Piraeus with a parallel wall, built far enough apart to allow carts to pass one another, enabled the Athenians to communicate with their main port securely.
Figure 21. Fourth-century fortifications at Aegosthena, Megarid
At the start of the Peloponnesian war, the Athenians evacuated the Attic countryside, sending their livestock to Euboea and the islands, and settled in the city centre (Thuc. 2.14). Relying on imported grain and periodic agricultural activity, they were able to weather Spartan incursion into Attica (these invasions, which aimed to devastate Athenian agriculture, took place in five out of the seven years between 431 and 425) for the initial period of the Peloponnesian war. The Athenians survived the crisis, but suffered from an outbreak of plague, which may have been caused or exacerbated by over-crowding in the city-centre (Thuc. 2.47-55). Later in the war, the Athenians were damaged by the Spartan tactic of *epiteichisms*, by which they established a fortification, manned by a garrison, within Attica at Dekeleia (Thuc. 7.19-30). The Spartans forced the Athenians to pull down their walls at the end of the Peloponnesian war. Early on in the fourth century, however, the Athenians rebuilt their city walls and those protecting the Piraeus. Over the course of the fourth century, the Athenians constructed fortifications in the Athenian countryside, which have been seen by some as indicative of a more defensive approach to warfare.

**Commemoration of the dead**

Although Greek states were almost continuously at war with one another, some historians present the results of warfare as upsetting the natural balance: Herodotus recorded King
Croesus of Lydia’s saying that ‘No-one is so stupid that they prefer war to peace: in peace, sons bury their fathers; in war, fathers bury their sons’ (Herodotus 1.87).

Most Greek states appear to have buried their dead on the field of battle; the Athenians, however, brought them back to Athens. Those who had been killed in battle were, in the fifth-century, cremated at public expense, and a prominent statesman was chosen to give a speech praising their accomplishments and the lifestyle of the Athenians. Thucydides offers a version of the Athenian practice and Perikles’ speech at the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War in 431 BC: see Thuc. 2.34-46. In addition, the Athenians commemorated their dead by writing up lists of the names of those who had died in battle by tribe (see, for instance, LACTOR 1, 4th edition, nos. 41-43); annually, war orphans were paraded before the assembled audience at the Dionysia (Aeschines 3.154), perhaps as a way of honouring their families. They were supported by the state until adulthood: this provision may have acted as a public reassurance to fathers who went to war about the welfare of their children.

**Mercenaries**

It was far from the case that all fighting was carried out by citizens. Slaves and metics were frequently employed as rowers in the Athenian navy, for instance: between 60 and 70% of those listed on an Athenian catalogue of naval personnel of the late fifth century (*IG* I 3 1032) appear to have been non-citizens. There appears to have been demand for specialist troops in the fifth century: the Athenians, for instance, hired peltasts (light-armed troops) for their anti-Spartan activity at Pylos during the Peloponnesian War (Thuc. 4.28) and employed Cretan archers and Rhodian slingers in the expedition to Sicily (Thuc. 6.43). But what makes it difficult to detect the extent of mercenary activity in the fifth century is the fact that Greek communities appear to have been reluctant to acknowledge its extent: deployment of mercenaries was associated by some with the erosion of civic values and the poverty of those who fought in return for pay. By the end of the fifth century, Persia appears to have been a source of employment for Greek mercenaries: Cyrus, the brother of the Persian king, hired Greek mercenaries in his attempt to usurp the kingship in 401 BC. Xenophon’s *Anabasis* tells the story of the return of 10,000 of them after the death of Cyrus in battle had left them, far from home, without anyone to fight for.

**Further Reading**


V. Hanson, *A War Like No Other. How the Athenians and the Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War*, 2006


Approaching Greek History 14: Diplomacy

Warfare was a common occurrence between the city-states of classical Greece. However, Greek states did not live in an absolutely constant state of war with one another. States came together in a number of different ways, forming agreements: sometimes these had the goal of pursuing hostilities with common enemies, but at other times they resolved or brought an end to conflict.

Negotiation

In a world without high-speed communication, negotiation was sometimes a slow process: it relied upon the sending of heralds or ambassadors between states, who would represent the decisions or interests in their home states. In 490 BC, just before the Battle of Marathon, the Athenians dispatched Pheidippides, a long-distance runner to the Spartans to ask for their help. Herodotus claims that, remarkably, he completed the journey to Sparta (140 miles) the day after he set out (Herodotus 6.105-6): but this was an exceptional achievement. Ambassadors, given that they were merely representatives of their community’s decision, rarely had significant powers of negotiation or bargaining. This was an impediment even at meetings or conferences where representatives of a number of communities would gather (see for instance the debate at Sparta in 432: Thuc. 1.66-88).

Negotiations often stalled when heralds were lost or killed (e.g. Herodotus 7.133-4 – the Athenians threw the Persian heralds into a pit; the Spartans threw them into a well; Herodotus comments on the divine retribution that they would have faced for harming heralds) or when ambassadors represented a policy which was deemed ultimately to be contrary to the interests of their home community (as King Agis of Sparta did in 419/8, making a peace with the Argives contrary to the desire of the Spartans at home to launch a conquest of Argos (Thuc. 5.59-60, 63)).

Proxenoi, vital to negotiations between different city-state communities, were citizens of one city-state who were deemed, by another polis, to be its representatives in their home city. In the fifth century BC, the Athenian general Cimon, was said to have been Sparta’s proxenos at Athens; unsurprisingly, he appears to have advocated a pro-Spartan policy. Sometimes proxenoi were chosen as ambassadors to travel to the cities in which they had interests. Their families often had a history of links with the other polis. In 371, the Athenian Callias was sent to Sparta as one of the Athenian ambassadors in the negotiations of a peace-treaty. As Sparta’s proxenos in Athens, he advocated peace between the two cities, speaking thus:

‘Spartans, I must remind you that I am not the only one of my family to hold the position of your diplomatic representative in Athens. No, my father’s father received it from his father and handed it down to his descendants.’

Xenophon, A History of My Times, 4.3.4, tr. Warner.
Though they were usually residents in their cities of origin, *proxenoi* were the closest ancient Greek equivalent of the modern consul. In the time of the Delian League, the Athenians would appoint members of subject communities to be proxenoi of Athens, presumably as a way of ensuring that Athenian interests were represented by an insider: see the examples in *LACTOR* 1, 4th edition, nos. 235-6, 238.

**Decision-making**

It is often misleading to talk about the ‘policy’ of a given city-state community: the fact that decision-making in Greek states was carried out by the vote of a larger or smaller group of citizens meant that policies were liable to fluctuation. Moreover, there was often plain disagreement about the best policy to pursue (note the debate between King Archidamus and the Ephor Sthenelaidas at Sparta in 432 (Thuc. 1.79-88) or the debate at Athens between Cleon and Diodotos about how to treat the revolting Mytileneans in 427 (Thuc. 3.36-50)): in the latter case, the original Athenian decision – to execute all the men of Mytilene and enslave the women and children – was overturned on the day after it was decided, after a debate in the assembly, in favour of a milder punishment (execution of the ringleaders). The discussion on the Sicilian expedition in Athens (Thuc. 6.6-32) provides an example of opposing policies; as things turned out, the advocate of peace, Nikias, ended up leading an expedition about which he appears to have held profound misgivings.

**Alliances**

In one sense, alliances were a key aspect of Greek warfare. Some of the key wars of Greek history were pursued by teams of city-states acting as a unit. The Greeks in late 481 BC organised an alliance against the march of the Persians. The organisation that was created, simply known as ‘the Hellenes’ (although many modern books refer to it as the ‘Hellenic League’); its members decided to bring their disputes to an end (Herodotus 7.145), to wage war together (9.106); they appointed Eurybiades (a Spartan!) as the commander of their fleet (8.2).

Another alliance was that of the Delian League, created in 478 BC with the intention of taking revenge upon the Persians by ravaging the territory of the Persian King (Thucydides 1.96-97). Although this was initially said to have been a free alliance, the Athenians and Ionians sank lumps of iron to symbolise as permanent (or as long-living as the Persian threat to the Greeks) the oath that the ‘should have the same friends and enemies’ (Pseudo-Aristotle *Constitution of the Athenians* 23). In addition to the Delian League, the Athenians made alliances with other states, particularly cities of Sicily. In 415 BC, Thucydides reports, the (non-Greek) Segestans reminded the Athenians of an alliance they had made with them ‘in the time of Laches in the former war’ (viz. 427-4 BC) (Thuc. 6.6). How can we reconcile Thucydides’ claim with the existence of an inscription recording an Athenian alliance with the Segestans (ML 37 = Fornara 81) which used to be dated to 458/7, but is now, thanks to
laser-enhancement techniques and careful re-examination, put at 418/7? Why didn’t Thucydides make the Segestans refer to the 418/7 alliance? One possible solution, proposed by the Greek scholar Angelos Matthaiou, is that the inscription of 418/7 is a new version of an old alliance, written up on stone as a way of confirming its provisions.

But the Greeks were very flexible about the kind of alliances they made: in addition to offensive alliances, a number of defensive pacts are known. The earliest known version is one between the Athenians and the Corcyreans (of modern Corfu) in 433 BC: they agreed to come to the aid of the other if one party or its allies were attacked by another (Thucydides 1.44). Another example of a defensive alliance is the one-hundred year alliance between Athens, Argos, Mantinea and Elis of 420: this alliance was made after the Athenians and Spartans had failed to make up their differences. The signatories agreed not to bear arms against each other and promised also to defend each other in the case of assault by an external aggressor (Thucydides 5.47): this is rather reminiscent of the article 5 of the NATO treaty of 1949, by which the signatories “agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all”.

All alliances, like peace treaties, were ratified as decisions of the sovereign bodies of particular city states. But there was recourse to a higher authority too: all such agreements were guaranteed by religious sanctions and were sworn as oaths to the gods. Records of treaties and alliances, as decisions of the community, were stored in city archives, but they would sometimes also be set up on stone, often in a religious sanctuary: in Athens, the most common place for such inscriptions to be set up was the acropolis.

**Peace Treaties**

Peace was hardly a stable state of affairs in classical Greece. Nevertheless, Greek states brought periods of hostility to an end by coming to arrangements which were mutually acceptable (although they were often far from equal in terms of their substance). Peace treaties were usually of limited duration, and aimed at a duration of one hundred, fifty, thirty, or fewer, years. One of the most detailed peace treaties known from classical Greece is the Peace of Nikias of 421 BC (Thuc. 5.18-20). It was made possible both by extended negotiations between Athens and Sparta, the death of the chief proponents of war on each side, Cleon and Brasidas, and made necessary by the losses suffered by both sides (Thuc. 5.16-17). The states agreed to restore their former possessions to one another and the Athenians agreed to restore autonomy (the freedom both to conduct internal affairs as a state wished and to enjoy independence from external interference) to certain cities; there was an agreement that prisoners would be returned. The Spartans and Athenians intended to impose this agreement on their allies, but, as things turned out, the Spartans were unable to persuade the other states to return Athenian key possessions. As a consequence, the impact of the Peace of Nikias was extremely limited, despite the fact that it was set up on marble slabs at
the Panhellenic sanctuaries of Olympia, Delphi, the Isthmus, and on the acropolis at Athens and at the statue of Apollo at Amyklai at Sparta.

Peace treaties were often less than equal: that between Sparta and Athens in 404 BC, for instance, forced the Athenians to demolish the Piraeus and the Long Walls, to recall exiles, to have the same enemies and friends as Sparta, to follow Sparta’s leadership, and to abolish the navy (Xenophon, *A History of My Times*, 2.2.20).

**Further Reading**


Approaching Greek History 15: Democracy and Its Opponents

Democracy and *Demokratia*

In many classical Greek city-states, a proportion of the body of adult male citizens was involved in the decision-making and administrative processes of the legal and political spheres. Generally speaking, the decision-making or sovereign body in the Greek world was an assembly, made up of those citizens who were politically enfranchised; such bodies varied in size. On the whole, Greek states lacked either career-civil servants or sitting governments that were distinctive in any meaningful way from the community of citizen males; this is why some historians feel unease in applying the notion of ‘state’ to the Greek style of political organisation.

But it was in fifth-century Athens that this unity of community and government came together in its most radically democratic form. The ancient Greek word *demokratia* was a term used to describe the form of government in which, in some sense, the *demos* (the people) held *kratos* (power). One interpretation is that *demokratia* is a government in which the majority of the citizens is the sovereign political body, though recently, the American scholar, Josiah Ober, has argued that it refers to the capacity of the people to make things happen (he suggests translating the word as ‘the empowered demos’). Either way, by the middle of the fifth century, in Athens, the male citizens, gathered at the assembly, were able to make binding decisions, such as the declaration of war, the making of a truce, the bestowal of honours, or the review or confirmation of judicial matters.

Some important terms:

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Demokratia</em></td>
<td>Democracy; rule of the many, or, ‘the empowered demos’</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Oligarchia</em></td>
<td>Oligarchy; rule of few</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Tyrannis</em></td>
<td>Tyranny; rule of a tyrant/dictator</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Isonomia</em></td>
<td>Equality before the law</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Isegoria</em></td>
<td>Equality of Speech (chiefly in the public, political, sphere)</td>
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<td><em>Parrhesia</em></td>
<td>Freedom of Speech</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Aristokratia</em></td>
<td>Aristocracy; rule of the ‘best’</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Ekklesia</em></td>
<td>An assembly (sovereign decision-making body)</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Ostrakismos</em></td>
<td>Ostracism (a form of exile by popular vote, practiced in fifth-century Athens)</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Boule</em></td>
<td>The Athenian Council of 500 (post 507 BC)</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Archontes</em></td>
<td>Officials (essentially, civil servant). At Athens, selected by lottery.</td>
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Development of democracy
Early Greek politics appears to have been dominated by elite groups. Aristocratic families, claiming heroic or sometimes even divine descent, are believed to have held positions of power in most Greek cities. Some of these aristocracies took on a monarchical organisation, with hereditary kings (basileis) as absolute rulers. The *Iliad* portrays an aristocratic society, with Agamemnon as the authority, the king, though his power is challenged by the behaviour of prominent nobles like Achilles and Odysseus. Constitutional monarchy (the like of which has emerged since the late eighteenth century in the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands, and elsewhere) did not exist in ancient Greece; in many states, kings were overthrown by usurpers, often themselves drawn from the aristocratic classes: these were known as tyrants (Thuc. 1.13). In some Greek cities, like Corinth, tyranny became a hereditary and brutal institution (see, for instance, Herodotus 5.92 on the reign of Kypselos and his son Periander; on the use of the word ‘tyrant’, see Fornara, *Archaic Times*, no. 8).

Political regulations which restricted the power of the wealthy are known to have existed in a number of cities in Greece from the archaic period onwards. Early laws were inscribed upon temple walls at Dreros in Crete in the seventh century BC (this is among the earliest inscribed laws in Greek: Fornara, *Archaic Times*, no. 11), while an inscription from Chios offers the first example of a regulation imposed upon a city council (Fornara, *Archaic Times*, no. 19). In Sparta, the popular assembly, which voted by acclamation (the loudest cheer was decisive) upon questions of importance, constituted a popular (but not democratic) element to its governance; the ephors and gerousia were elected by the assembly.

It was, however, at Athens, that democracy emerged in its most extensive form. Some, such as Aristotle, took the view that the origins of democracy lay in the reforms of Solon (594 BC) which made the law-courts extremely powerful:

‘Some people consider that Solon was a good lawgiver who put an end to undiluted oligarchy, liberated the people from slavery and established the traditional democracy with a skilful blending of the constitution: the council of the Areopagus being an oligarchic element, the elective offices aristocratic, and the jury courts democratic. In the case of council and the election of officials, Solon seems merely to have preserved existing institutions, but by his creation of jury courts drawn from all the citizens, he does seem to have founded democracy. Accordingly, some blame him for having ruined the rest of his work by making the jury court, which was picked by lot, sovereign over all. For as the jury courts grew strong, men humoured the people like a tyrant and so converted the constitution into the existing democracy.’

Aristotle *Politics* 1273b = LACTOR 5 no. 44.

However, in the period after Solon, Athenian politics was still dominated by a number of aristocratic families, and she experienced a long period of tyranny under Pisistratus and his sons (546-510 BC). After the Pisistratids were expelled by the Spartans, Athens endured a period of civil war. The Spartans supported Isagoras; Kleisthenes of the aristocratic Alkmaionid family championed a popular resistance ([Aristotle], *Constitution of the Athenians* 20; Herodotus 5.66 = LACTOR 5 nos. 26, 30). On establishing himself in 508/7
BC, his reforms were thought by many, such as Herodotus (6.131 = LACTOR 5 no. 23), to be the foundation of democracy.

Kleisthenes created a new structure to the political organisation of Athens ([Aristotle], *Constitution of the Athenians* 21 = LACTOR 5 31):

- Citizens were allocated to new 10 tribes (Erechtheis, Aigeis, Pandionis, Leontis, Akamantis, Oineis, Kekropis, Hippothontis, Aiantis, Antiochis), superseding the 4 old, Ionian, tribes.
- He created a new council of 500 (*boule*), which drew 50 representatives per annum from each of the ten tribes. By the classical period (it is unclear whether or not this innovation is Kleisthenic), each group of 50 served as *prytaneis* (presidents) for 1/10th of the year (i.e. 35 or 36 days), during which time they would be on duty every day, dealing with whatever business arose.
- He created demes, of which every citizen was also a member: by the fourth century there were 139 of these.
- The demes were divided into thirty ‘third parts’ (*trittyes*). These consisted of ten in the area around the city, ten in the coastal region, and ten in the interior. Each tribe had assigned to it one of each of the three types of *trittys* by lot, so that each tribe should have a share in each region.
What was democratic about the organisation of Attica? The representation of citizens at the *boule* was one element of democracy: a restriction on holding a seat on the council for more than a year at a time and no more than twice in a lifetime and not in successive years meant that a broader section of the population was represented. The same system meant that citizens were drawn from across Attica to take part in the administration of the city, which may have in itself offered an education in the workings of city administration. It is claimed also that Kleisthenes’ reforms ‘mixed up’ the people so that aristocratic influence within the tribes was reduced (LACTOR 5 no. 29). However, some historians have taken up the controversial view that Kleisthenes’ intention was in fact to reduce the influence in the tribes of aristocratic families rival to his own Alkmaionid clan.

But the development of democracy was far from over at the time of Kleisthenes. The institution of ostracism (see above, *Approaching*, section 6), according to which citizens could, by popular vote, send a citizen into exile for ten years, is connected with Kleisthenes by some sources but did not come into play until some years later (see LACTOR 5, nos. 31-2).

Further reforms were introduced by Ephialtes and Pericles in the fifth century (LACTOR 5, nos. 44-52). The first of these reforms took place in 462/1 BC, with the curtailment of the
powers of the Areopagus and its conversion into a homicide court, and, after the assassination of Ephialtes (LACTOR 5 nos. 46-7), the introduction of payment for jury service (LACTOR 5 nos. 45, 52; 212-220), which allowed a wider range of citizens to be involved in the courts. Payment for magistrates was also introduced in the fifth century BC. It is possible that the fact that military expenditure would now be covered by the allies’ tribute meant that funds were freed up for the provision of democratic pay (LACTOR 5 nos. 69-70).

One important democratic allowance, payment for attending the assembly was introduced only in the fourth century. Aristotle in the Politics (1292b-1293a) realised the importance of payment in allowing the poor to partake in political activity (LACTOR 5 no. 20).

The Athenians faced upheavals in 411 (LACTOR 5 no. 147, 310-19) and again in 404 BC, when democracy was suspended. One view of the form of democracy after it was restored in 403 BC is that the power of the assembly was more limited: it was left with the power to make decrees, but the power of law-making was removed from it and passed to a board of law-makers selected from the pool of 6,000 jurors; the process of ostracism fell into abeyance.

The lawcourts

The American constitution, and much of the political thought in its background, makes much of the importance of the separation of powers in the administration of government: that is, the division of executive, legislative, and judicial power between different bodies. While the historian Mogens Hansen has made a case for such a division in the workings of ancient Athenian democracy, there was no such division in terms of participation: the citizens who turned up, voted, and made proposals at the assembly and council were drawn from the same group of people who manned the lawcourts. This is one aspect of the ‘Hansen-Ober’ debate, which concerns the significance of the place of institutions in the analysis of Athenian democracy.

Along with the assembly, the most important body of Athenian democracy were the lawcourts. They were manned by groups of citizens selected for each session from a pool of 6,000 jurors themselves chosen, by lottery, from the people as a whole (LACTOR 5 nos. 203-241): acting as both judge and jury, the people decided on the verdict of the trial, and voted on the punishment too; there was no system of appeal against the decision of the popular courts.

The people also asserted their power through the law courts in several ways: they judged cases concerning political offences, but from about 415 BC, they offered a route of challenging new legislation. The process called graphe paranomon (indictment for illegality) was commenced in the courts when a citizen claimed that a new law or decree contradicted the accepted procedures of Athenian democracy or contravened current legislation. Moreover, all public officials were liable to a dokimasia (preliminary scrutiny) before the council on the eve of their taking up office and the process of euthuna (check on
accountability) after on termination of their office. Another aspect of the Athenian lawcourts which enabled the people to hold considerable power was the right of any Athenian citizen to act as a volunteer prosecutor (ho boulomenos, literally, ‘the one wishing/willing’). Accordingly, any Athenian citizen was empowered to bring prosecution against someone they perceived as a wrongdoer – or someone against whom they bore a grudge. On the one hand, in a society lacking a police force or all-encompassing prosecution, this offered a path to the reconciliation of disputes; on the other, it offered the opportunity for vexatious prosecutors (‘sycophants’) to draw up malicious indictments, perhaps with the intention of blackmailing an opponent.

What was democratic about the workings of Athenian democracy?

Modern representative democracies allow their citizens to exercise political rights through the election of representatives or, less frequently, referenda. The Athenian assembly elected a number of important officials, such as the generals and certain treasurers (LACTOR 5 nos. 189-94). Public officials were important agents in the administration and smooth-running of the city, but their powers were constrained by the popular assembly and the lawcourts (LACTOR 5 nos. 22, 186-202). Unlike most modern western democracies, in which the defining democratic constitutional activity is the election of representatives by the people, ancient city-states were direct, rather than representative democracies: they allowed their citizen body to formulate proposals (in Athens through the Council/Boule of 500: see LACTOR 5 nos. 150-185) and to approve or reject them in the assembly. Many political offices were filled not by election but by a form of lottery (LACTOR 5 nos. 199-202): this ensured that a broad spectrum of the population was drawn into political activity. Political leaders emerged on the battlefield, in the assembly, and as orators in the lawcourts. But democratic accountability was ensured by the fact that they were subjected to scrutiny before taking up office (LACTOR 5 no. 200), and their accounts were examined after they had finished office. The fact that leaders’ proposals had to be approved by the people before becoming authoritative meant that every politician was only as powerful as his previous speech was persuasive. Perikles was one such individual who, elected year-after-year to the office of general, dominated politics in the third quarter of the fifth century BC: Thucydides wrote that ‘in what was nominally a democracy, power was in fact in the hands of one man’ (Thuc. 2.65 trans. Warner; cf. LACTOR 5 nos. 56-8). But what mattered was that Perikles, like the so-called demagogues who succeeded him, formulated only policies the feasibility of which they would be able to convince the people (LACTOR 5 nos. 104-49; for the Aristophanic view of demagogues as flatterers of the all-powerful people, see LACTOR 5 nos. 264-270). Unlike the situation in modern democracies, there was no fixed government or civil service: leadership and governance was very flexible and liable to sudden change. Modern critics of democracy (see, for instance, L. J. Samons, What’s Wrong with Democracy, 2007) have pointed to episodes like the launching the Sicilian expedition in 415 BC or execution of the generals for failing to rescue those drowning after the battle of Arginousai (see Xenophon, Hellenika, 1.6-7) in 406BC as indicative of a tendency of rash,
popular decisions, to undermine the interests of the Athenian community. But one must bear in mind that there was a tendency among ancient writers, who were largely critical of the behaviour of the Athenian democracy (one thinks of the Old Oligarch, Thucydides and Plato), to highlight its blunders and brutality.

There was much that was undemocratic about Athenian democracy: women and slaves had no political rights. They lacked any firm legal rights too, though they could be represented by a male Athenian citizen in a court proceedings. As some modern scholars have suggested, the ancient Athenians may well have thought of the form of democracy practised in modern Britain, where the government consists of a small number of representatives chosen for their apparent virtues and diligence and advised by career civil servants, to be oligarchic. However, it is worth acknowledging that the limited capacity of the Athenian assembly, the Pnyx, in the fifth century BC, strongly suggests that they did not expect anything like the whole body of citizens to regularly attend the assembly.

**Capacity of the Pnyx: Hansen’s figures:**

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<tr>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pnyx 1 – c. 500 BC</td>
<td>c. 2400 sq m</td>
<td>6000 max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pnyx 2 – c. 400 BC</td>
<td>c. 2600 sq m OR</td>
<td>6500 OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. 3200 sq m</td>
<td>8000 max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pnyx 3 – c. 330 BC</td>
<td>c. 5550 sq m</td>
<td>13,800 max</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Capacity of the Pnyx: Stanton’s figures:**

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<th>Development</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pnyx 1 – c. 500 BC</td>
<td>c. 2400 sq m</td>
<td>10,400 max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pnyx 2 – c. 400 BC</td>
<td>c. 2400 sq m</td>
<td>14,800 max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pnyx 3 – c. 330 B</td>
<td>c. 5550 sq m</td>
<td>24,100 max</td>
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For discussion, see G. Stanton, ‘The Shape and Size of the Athenian Assembly Place in Its Second Phase’ and M. Hansen, ‘Reflections on the Number of Citizens Accommodated in the Assembly Place on the Pnyx’, in B. Forsen and G. Stanton (Eds.), *The Pnyx in the History of Athens*, 1996
Ideas about Democracy

There survives no single treatise which offers a theoretical justification of democracy. But passing remarks in a number of literary sources allow us to reconstruct a number of ancient democratic ideals: particularly important are Herodotus’ Constitutional Debate (Herodotus 3.80-3: this set of speeches was made up of Greek-style political speeches put into the mouths of a number of Persian grandees at a time of political upheaval), Euripides’ *Suppliant Women* and Thucydides’ Funeral Speech of Pericles (Thuc. 2.34-46).

- *Isonomia* (‘equality of rights’ or ‘equality before the law’): Thucydides 2.37; Herodotus 3.80 = LACTOR 5 nos. 7, 8)
- Government in the interests of the majority, not just the few: Thucydides 2.37
-Advocation of popular participation (Thuc. 2.40 = LACTOR 5 n. 9) as a means of making good decisions (Thuc. 6.38-9; Euripides *Suppliant Women* 238-45; 399-441; Aristotle Politics 1281a = LACTOR 5 nos. 10-12, 18)
- Freedom (which consisted of ruling in turn and living, in private, as one likes) and equality (of political rights but not financially or economically) (Aristotle Politics 1310a, 1317a = LACTOR 5 nos. 16-17)
- Freedom of speech (LACTOR 5 nos. 79-81)

While the rule of the people through participation in the assembly and lawcourts was radical, there were elements of democracy that were conservative. No classical democrat ever advocated the redistribution of wealth; in fact, Josiah Ober has proposed the view that, in exchange for a privileged political and economic position, the wealthy citizens of democratic Athens were happy to pay the liturgies (semi-voluntary financial donations) which supported the Athenian festival and military systems, though others, such as Matthew Christ, have emphasised that some Athenians did their best to shirk their duties both financial and military.

When we survey the values of Athenian democracy, we start to see some overlap with some of the ideas spoken of with approval by modern western democrats. Freedom of speech and expression is highly valued in both; equality in terms of political and judicial rights are also shared. Traditionally, historians have argued that the Athenians valued positive notions of liberty (that is, the freedom to do certain things, and to realize one’s capacity as a human being by activity in the polis) more than they valued negative liberty (the freedom to live one’s live as one pleased, without incursion by the instruments of state), though the Danish historian Mogens Hansen has emphasised that the Athenians respected aspects of negative liberty too. In modern Western democracies, on the other hand, more value is generally placed on the negative form of liberty, and the right to, within limits, live one’s life as one pleases.

Opponents of democracy
One fifth- (or early fourth-) century attack on democracy survives: this is the *Athenaion Politieia* (=Constitution of Athens) attributed to Xenophon. Its style and tone suggest that the author is someone other than Xenophon, and so its author is usually identified as ‘The Old Oligarch’ (See LACTOR 2, 2nd edition). While there is little to suggest he is old, many of his views are critical of democracy, so it is appropriate to label him as an ‘oligarch’ (*oligarchia* was a political view which advocated the rule of the few). The Old Oligarch felt that the rich and well-born were disadvantaged by the workings of Athenian democracy, though he saw little prospect of an end to democracy (Old Oligarch 3.12-13). Indeed, there was little resistance to democratic change after the reform of the Areopagus in 462/1: Thucydides mentions an oligarchic group in 457 (Thuc. 1.107 = LACTOR 5 no. 48), but we hear little more of opponents to democracy the latter stages of the Peloponnesian War. Democracy was briefly abolished in 411/10 and in 404 the Spartans imposed a narrowly oligarchic regime with a garrison, but in Athens oligarchs were able to hold on to power only at times of crisis that had been brought on by the Peloponnesian War. Athens’ democracy was restored in 403 BC and continued until 322 BC when, after defeating them, the Macedonians imposed a garrison upon the Athenians.

**Beyond Athens**

While democracy appears to have reached its most sophisticated and most carefully-documented form in Athens, it is a mistake to think that it is an exclusively Athenian phenomenon. As we remarked above, popular institutions are known from Chios and Sparta in the archaic period. It is worth acknowledging that while it is possible to locate common institutions elsewhere, such as restrictions on office-holding, election by lot, the power of the people to punish and scrutinise office-holders, and the attachment to the ideas of freedom and equality. But other democratic cities demonstrated more restricted forms of democracy: in Mantinea during the fourth century, for instance, important powers were delegated to smaller groups of citizens. While Athens was not uniquely democratic, hers was not the only form of Greek democracy.

**Further Reading**


M. H. Hansen, *Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes*, 1999


Demos: the Classical Athenian Democracy. A website offering resources on Athenian democracy. It is growing into a digital encyclopaedia of Athenian democracy.

Physical aspects of Peloponnese and Sparta

The Peloponnese (‘The Island of Pelops’) is the landmass that makes up southern Greece. In ancient times, it was joined to central Greece by the Isthmus of Corinth. The Isthmus made it impossible to sail between the Corinthian Gulf (to the North-West) and the Saronic Gulf to the South East); from the sixth century, there is evidence for land transport across the Isthmus, by means of a diolkos (a paved trackway), a basic form of railway, by means of which they hauled ships from one sea to the other. In 1893, the completion of the Corinth Canal, which cut across the Isthmus at its narrowest point (c. 6km), meant that it was possible to sail from one Gulf to another, and the Peloponnese effectively became an island.

The landscape of the Peloponnese is extremely diverse: it ranges from the fertile plains of Argos, the thickly-forested hills and mountains of Eleia and Arkadia, to the rocky terrain of the southernmost promontories. Of great significance is the Taygetos range, which towers above ancient Sparta and separates it from Messenia to the west.

Sparta was located among low hills in the fertile Eurotas valley, bounded by the Taygetos range to the west and Mt. Parnon to the east. Physically, Sparta was unremarkable: there are remains of a low acropolis (c. 25m) with a Temple of Athena Chalkioikos, but there was nothing of an urban centre; its political centre was based upon 5 villages (Pitana, Mesoa, Limnai, Cynosoura and, a little further afield, Amyklai, where, at a sanctuary of Apollo, the
important festival of the Hyakinthia was celebrated). In the Hellenistic period a stoa, theatre, and agora were constructed near the acropolis; the circuit wall was completed late in the second century BC. Remains of the temple of Athena and of the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia on the west side of the Eurotas constitute all that there is of archaic and classical Sparta. Pausanias the second-century AD travel-writer dedicates some space to a description of Sparta, and reports the existence of a ‘Persian Stoa’, funded by spoils of the Persian wars (Pausanias 3.11-17).

Recent survey archaeology has uncovered a number of sites across Messenia and Laconia, demonstrating the tendency of rural communities to form nucleated settlements from the mid-fifth century BC onwards. Thucydides commented on the absence of magnificent buildings among the Spartans, and doubted that future generations would be able to recognise its power by looking at its physical remains:

‘If the city were to become deserted, with only the temples and foundations of buildings left to the view, I imagine that with the passage of time future generations would find it very hard to credit its reputed power. And yet the Spartans occupy two-fifths of the Peloponnes and lead the whole, as well as many external allies: but their dispersed settlement, devoid of temples or expensive buildings, more a collection of villages in the old Greek way, would seem rather disappointing. If the same happened to Athens, people would assume from the overt appearance that the city’s power was twice what it is. So there is no cause for disbelief, nor should we judge cities by their appearance rather than their power.’


Probably in the eighth century, the Spartans gained control of the valley to the west of Taygetus (bounded to the east by Mt Ithome). This area, known as Messenia, was dominated by Sparta for much of the classical period (there were revolts probably in the seventh century, and again in 464 BC (Thucydides 1.101, 103) until Messenian independence in 369 BC). Spartan domination of Messenia meant that she had tremendous agricultural resources.
Seventh-century poetry attributed to the Spartan poets Tyrtaios and Alkman is a valuable source for understanding the nature of archaic Sparta. However, apart from very few inscriptions (only two fifth-century state inscriptions are known from Sparta), no Spartan writings of the classical period survive. Probably the best-informed writer on Sparta was the Athenian Xenophon (c. 427-355 BC), who spent years in exile in the Peloponnese, and wrote a work which bears the title ‘The Constitution of the Spartans’. The lack of primary classical
sources for Sparta means that Spartan history is at best, enigmatic. Many of the literary sources, subscribing to the ‘Spartan Mirage,’ seem convinced that Sparta is an odd place where citizens lived in barracks, and were governed with an old-fashioned and conservative political system connected with the mythical law-maker Lycurgus. Plutarch, in his Lives of Lycurgus, Lysander, Agis, Cleomenes, and in a number of essays, also offers views of Sparta, but we must bear in mind that his views were coloured by earlier Greek views and also a later, Roman, view of Sparta as a theme-park of bizarre ancient customs.

Politics

The absence of contemporary evidence means that the origins of the Spartan political system are fraught with debate. A much later source, Plutarch, Life of Lycurgus, 6, gives us important insight into the ‘Great Rhetra’, the foundation decree of the Spartan constitution:

‘So eager was Lycurgus for the establishment of this form of government, that he obtained an oracle from Delphi about it, which they call a 'rhetra'. And this is the way it runs:

‘Establish a Gerousia of thirty including the Archagetai (founders, i.e. the Kings), then from time to time ‘appellazein’ between [the months] Babyka and Knakion, and there introduce and repeal measures; but the People must have the decision and the power….

When the multitude was assembled thus, no one of them was permitted to make a motion, but the motion laid before them by the Gerousia and Kings could be accepted or rejected by the People.

Later, however, when the People, by additions and subtractions perverted and distorted the sense of motions laid before them, the Kings Polydoros and Theopompos inserted the following clause in the rhetra:

If the People should choose badly, the Gerousia and Kings shall be 'apostateres': that is, they should not ratify the vote, but dismiss and dissolve the Assembly outright, on the ground that it was perverting and changing the motion contrary to the best interests of the state.’

(tr. Perrin)

According to Plutarch (who may – or may not – be using a document with archaic origins), then, the Spartan constitution was established by Lycurgus, a mythical law-maker. The Gerousia, an elected council of old men, together with the two kings of Sparta, each drawn from one of the two royal families (see below for a table of kings), appear to have set out proposals which the people would vote upon. It seems that the power of the people was limited at a later point by Kings Polydoros and Theopompos. One element not mentioned in
Plutarch’s version of the Great Rhetra, and the rider he mentions, is the office of the Ephors, elected magistrates who were very influential on policy, as the debate between King Archidamus and the ephor Sthenelaidas (Thuc. 1. 79-87) shows.

Authority in Sparta, therefore, was divided between the people, who made up the assembly (voting on matters by acclamation and appointed commanders), the Kings (leading the Spartans on the battlefield: see also Hdt. 6.56-9; Xen Lac.Pol. 13-14), the Gerousia (who, together with the kings, were responsible for putting (or not putting!) proposals to the people for vote) and the ephors (who called up the army and checked the power of the kings). The actual location of power depended upon the charisma and persuasive powers of those involved: on at least occasion, a member of the Gerousia was important: Hetoemaridas in 478, for instance, persuaded the Spartans to hand leadership of the Greeks to the Athenians (Diodorus Siculus 11.50).

Society: citizens, helots, perioikoi

A widely-held belief was that all male Spartan citizens were peers (‘homoioi’ = ‘same-ish’), by virtue of a common system of upbringing, education, common dining and participation in the phalanx on the battlefield. Allotments of land were distributed to newly-born citizens (providing that they were healthy: see Plutarch, Lycurgus 16 on the infanticide of deformed or weak babies). Young boys were enrolled into the agoge, a system of upbringing in which they would be trained in discipline and hardiness, supervised by the ephors. There are stories of a notorious krypteia (‘secret service’) by which young men would be sent into the mountains, maintaining themselves by theft, and perhaps hunting down and killing helots.

Sparta’s conquest of Messenia was of great importance to its social shape. In addition to the citizens, there were two subordinate groups, known as the helots and the perioikoi (the ‘dwellers about’). It is clear that the helots were a subject population. In all likelihood, they were enslaved by the Spartans during the conquest of Messenia, though some of them were probably the descendants of non-Spartan Laconians. Helots appear to have lived in families or communities of their own, but worked as serfs on land owned by Spartans and were required to hand over a proportion of their produce to their Spartan masters. Spartan society lived in a constant fear of a helot uprising. The most dramatic of these in the fifth century lasted for ten years (Thucydides 1.101, 103), and the Athenians attempted unsuccessfully to incite an uprising in the 420s (Thuc. 4.41). As well as oppression, the Spartans used a number of devices to ensure helot loyalty, voting, for instance, in 421, to liberate those helots who volunteered to fight with the Spartans in their army (Thuc. 5.34).

The other subordinate community in the Sparta was that of the perioikoi, who, like the helots, may have been a conquered people, but they enjoyed a higher level of freedom. They were farmers, they contributed to Sparta’s fighting forces, they produced shields, swords and pots,
and they were engaged in trade. Isokrates, writing in the fourth century, took the view that the perioikoi were a subordinate group of conquerors (Isokrates, XII Panathenaic Speech, 177-9, tr. by P. J. Rhodes, *The Greek City States. A Source Book*. 2007, no. 75). Another fourth-century writer, the historian Ephorus, quoted by Strabo, takes the view that the perioikoi were an enslaved people, and that helots were those of them who rebelled:

‘All the perioikoi were obedient to the Spartiates, but nevertheless were equal in rights to them, with a share in citizenship and offices. Agis the son of Eurysthenes took away this equality in rights and made them subject to Sparta. The others obeyed, but the Heleans, the people of Helos, revolted, were subdued by force in war and were sentenced to be slaves on fixed terms, so that their masters could neither liberate them nor sell them beyond the borders. This is known as the war against the Helots.’


**Sparta and the Peloponnese**

Sparta was often at odds with her Peloponnesian rivals. The Argives were the Spartans’ greatest rivals and the second most powerful city-state of the Peloponnesse; during the archaic period the two went to war over the disputed plain of Thyrea, which was taken by the Spartans (Herodotus 1.78-79 on the Battle of the Champtions and its aftermath). Whereas the Messenians were under their control until the fourth century, other areas, such as Arkadia to the north of Sparta, held out against the Spartans. One can read about the Spartans’ attempts to bring the Tegeans of Arkadia under their control at Herodotus 1.65-68: having found it impossible to subdue them by force, they turned to the Delphic oracle, and were told first to bring home the bones of Orestes, Agamemnon’s son. Probably in the sixth century BC, the Spartans established the Peloponnesian League, which allowed states to have their own internal autonomy, but forced them to have the same friends and enemies as the Spartans. Member-states of the Peloponnesian League formed an important part of the Peloponnesian War effort. The League, however, was not without its difficulties: Corinth, Megara and the Boiotians of central Greece left the league temporarily in 421, enraged by the terms of the Peace of Nikias (Thuc. 5.25-62).

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agoge</td>
<td>The Spartan education system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephors</td>
<td>High-ranking officials, annually-elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerousia</td>
<td>Council of Elders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homoioi</td>
<td>‘Peers’: a term used to describe the Spartan citizen-body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helot</td>
<td>A Messenian or Laconian serf. The Helots were collectively subject to the Spartans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>There were two Spartan kings at a time, each drawn from one of two</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
families.

Krypteia  ‘Secret service’, by which young Spartans would maintain themselves by theft, perhaps hunting and killing Helots

Lakedaimon  The official name of Sparta

Laconia  South-eastern district of the Peloponnese, the central area of Spartan power

Messenia  South-western district of the Peloponnese, conquered by the Spartans by c. 700 BC

Perioikoi  ‘Dwellers about’: another population group in ancient Laconia and Messenia, who lacked full citizen rights.

Rhetra  Legislation of the Spartan assembly; on the ‘Great Rhetra’, see above.

Spartiate  A Spartan citizen

Spartan kings, eighth- fourth centuries BC:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agiads</th>
<th>Euryponitids</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archelaos c. 785-760</td>
<td>Nikandros c. 750-720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teleklos c. 760-740</td>
<td>Theopompos c. 720-675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alkamenes c. 740-700</td>
<td>Anaxandridas I c. 675-660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polydoros c. 700-665</td>
<td>Archidamos I c. 660-645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurykrates c. 665-640</td>
<td>Anaxilas c. 645-625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaxandros c. 640-615</td>
<td>Leotychidas I c. 625-600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurykratidas c. 615-590</td>
<td>Hippokratidas c. 600-575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon c. 590-560</td>
<td>Agasikles c. 575-550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaxandridas II c. 560-520</td>
<td>Ariston c. 550-515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kleomenes I c. 520-490</td>
<td>Demaratos c. 515-491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonidas I 490-480</td>
<td>Leotychidas II 491-469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleistarchos 480-459</td>
<td>Archidamos II 469-427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleistoanax 459-409</td>
<td>Agis II 427-399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pausanias 409-395</td>
<td>Agesilaos II 399-360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agesipolis I 395-380</td>
<td>Archidamos III 360-338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kleombrotos I 380-371</td>
<td>Agis III 338-331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agesipolis II 371-370</td>
<td>Eudamidas I 331-305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kleomenes II 370-309</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


We should remember that these dates, particularly for the archaic period, are approximate, and that accounts of the earlier kings are bound up with legend and invented tradition.

**Further Reading:**


118
Approaching Greek History 16: Economy and the Food Supply

The Ancient Economy

Every historian of antiquity is faced with assessing the extent to which the past society he or she is thinking about is similar or different from the one in which he or she lives. For several decades, studies of the economic activity of the ancient Greek world were preoccupied with a dichotomy: did ancient Greeks possess sophisticated notions of economic activity? (To put it another way: how important were notions like profit, or investment? to what extent, and with what aims, did authorities intervene in commercial activity?) Or was economic activity subsumed by ethics that were more broadly embedded in society (and thus bound up with ideas about status and equal exchange). In other words, were the economies of ancient Greek communities (bearing in mind that the organisation of Greece meant that there was a degree of economic as well as political fragmentation) ‘modernist’ or ‘primitivist’? Modern studies of the economy tend, in more recent years, to place emphasis on interpreting the economic activity pursued in particular regions and by particular groups, and have shown that there is no one economic model that can be applied to the Greek world as a whole. Nevertheless, one aspect of economic activity that was universally of interest to every ancient Greek community was the securing of access to and maintaining a supply of food.

What did they consume?

The diet of individuals in the classical Greek world would have been very much determined by the available resources. Pre-industrial Mediterranean diets are dominated by pulses (lentils/peas/beans), grain (often in the form of bread), seasonal fruit and vegetables, grapes (and their products) and olives. One must remember that there are significant differences between ancient and modern Greek cuisine: the tomato, the potato, and the aubergine were unknown in ancient Europe.

For many, meat was a rarity: in the early fourth century BC the comic poet Aristophanes, in his play Peace (374-5) mentions that a piglet cost 3 drachmas (3 days’ wages for a worker). Meat, however, was distributed at sacrifices (e.g. Homer Iliad 1.456-68 for a kebab feast at a sacrifice); this would be the main occasion upon which the poor would have access to it, though those who lived in the countryside had access to game. Fish, mostly picked or salted, was regarded as a delicacy but its price depended upon its quality and availability. The Greeks knew how to preserve fruit and fish, developing methods of salting, drying and preserving in honey. The Athenian rowers who were sent to Mytilene in 427 (Thucydides 3.50) were fed on a mixture of barley mixed with oil and wine, which may have formed some kind of biscuit.

In ancient Sparta and other communities, diets would have varied tremendously according to the status of the individual. Plutarch says that Spartan males lived in groups to which each member would contribute monthly ‘a bushel of barley-meal, eight gallons of wine, five pounds of cheese, two and a half pounds of figs, and in addition to this, a very small sum of money for such relishes as flesh and fish’ (Plutarch Lycurgus 12). But, he went on as follows:
‘Of their dishes, the black broth is held in the highest esteem, so that the elderly men
do not even ask for a bit of meat, but leave it for the young men, while they
themselves have the broth poured out for their meals. And it is said that one of the
kings of Pontus actually bought a Spartan cook for the sake of having this broth, and
then, when he tasted it, disliked it; whereupon the cook said: ‘O King, those who
relish this broth must first have bathed in the river Eurotas.’

As the citizens dined on black broth, Spartan kings would have been allocated double-
portions of meat at feasts.

How did they get food?

In a world before processed food, refrigeration or supermarkets, much food consumed would
have been produced locally; families would have pooled their resources and would have
dined together as groups. All Greek states were able to produce crops of some kind, but
subsistence farming would have been hard on a dry, rocky island like Mykonos (a city-state
in its own right), which was renowned for its poverty.

Figure 23. Cape Glossida, Mykonos: a rocky landscape

Farmers were been reliant upon the pasturage of goats and cultivation of grapes, and would
have supplemented their incomes with fishing.
Even Attica, which, according to Thucydides, was known for the poverty of its soil (Thucydides 1.2), is able to produce fruit, olives, barley (and to a lesser extent, with irrigation) legumes and wheat. On the natural resources of Attica, see LACTOR 12, 3-11. But the relative density of Attica’s population, and the Athenian preference for wheat, which is harder to grow than barley, meant that the Athenians of the classical period probably imported grain in quantities from a number of regions, including the areas around the Black Sea.

As with everything, there was a religious element to agriculture. The Athenians claimed that they were the people to whom Demeter had granted the gift of cultivating cereals (LACTOR 12 no. 226). The fifth-century Athenians drew out the implications of this belief in a decree of c. 422 BC which obliged Athenian farmers to make offerings to the cults of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis in Western Attica in return for favourable harvests: this regulation stated that the Athenians should ‘give first-fruits of the harvest to the two goddesses according to the ancestral practice and according to the oracle at Delphi at the rate of not less than a hekteus per 100 medimnoi of barley [i.e. 1/600th of the produce] and not less than half a hekteus per 100 medimnoi of wheat [i.e. 1/1200th of the produce of wheat].’ Importantly, the decree makes it clear that the allied cities of the Athenians were expected to make the same offering to the granary at Eleusis (LACTOR 1, fourth edition, no. 205, with Osborne’s commentary on pages 110-1.).

Importation and Trade

The extent to which they were reliant upon imported grain is a subject of scholarly controversy: the most balanced view is that while the Athenians were probably not totally reliant upon it, there is evidence for the importation of grain.

Control of the sea enabled them to import food in times of crisis (which were frequent in Greece, where rains frequently fail) and also to import luxury goods. The Old Oligarch says:

‘Diseases sent by Zeus against crops affect land powers severely, but sea powers hardy at all; the whole earth does not suffer disease at the same time, and supplies come in to sea powers from areas that are flourishing. If one might mention more trivial matters, because they rule the sea they have discovered different kinds of festival goods by mingling with different people in different places. Whatever is pleasing in Sicily, Italy, Cyprus, Egypt, Lydia, Pontus, the Peloponnese, or anywhere else, all these have been brought together in one place, through rule of the sea.’

Old Oligarch, Constitution of the Athenians, 2.6-7 = LACTOR 2

Thucydides, in his Periclean Funeral Speech, claimed:
'The size of our city attracts every sort of import from all over the world, so our enjoyment of goods from abroad is as familiar as that of our own produce.'

Thuc. 2.38 (tr. Hammond, Oxford World’s Classics)

It should be remembered that Athens’ food supply was an important factor in their survival during the Peloponnesian War. From the start of war in 431 BC, the Spartans planned to invade Attica annually, laying waste to her agricultural land. The Athenians, under Perikles’ guidance, retreated within the city walls and the long walls connecting Athens with the Piraeus. Again, in 413 BC, the Spartans were able to occupy and fortify a position at Dekeleia, again damaging the Athenians’ ability to use the agricultural resources of Attica (Thuc. 7.27). These developments meant that the Athenians were more reliant upon imported grain than they were during peace time: Xenophon Hellenika 1.3.15-21 describes King Agis of Sparta observing numerous grain ships bringing food to Attica. The Athenians lost the Peloponnesian war when they were starved into submission by a Spartan blockade of the Hellespont (Xenophon Hellenika 2.2.10), which interfered with their grain supply from the Black Sea area.

It seems, therefore, that there was some state intervention in the securing of the grain supply. Always anxious about the availability of grain, the Athenians had a law banning any Athenian citizen or metic from facilitating the movement of grain to any city other than Athens (LACTOR 12 no. 17).

Naturally, the Athenians imported substances other than food. Old Oligarch emphasises the relationship between Athens’ power and the nature of her commercial activity:

‘They [the Athenians] alone are able to take possession of the wealth of the Greeks and of the foreigners. For if a city is rich in timber for shipbuilding, where can it dispose of it, unless it persuades the power that rules the sea? Now these are just the materials from which I build my ships from one place I get my timber, from another iron, and from yet others copper, flax and wax. In addition, the Athenians will not allow our competitors to take their produce elsewhere; if they try to, they will be barred from the sea. Thus I, doing nothing, get possession of all of these products of the earth through control of the sea. No other city possesses two of these substances: you will not find timber and flax in the same country, for, where a city is rich in flax, you will find that its territory is a treeless plain.’

Old Oligarch, Constitution of the Athenians, 2.11-12 = LACTOR 2. On other imports to Attica, see LACTOR 12 12-19

**Beyond Athens**
This account of the search for food has, so far, focussed on Athens. Athens was an exceptionnal polis which engaged in a huge amount of economic activity; her geopolitical power went hand in hand with the emergence of the Piraeus as a centre for commercial activity. Economic exchange, of course, was important in other states too. The Spartans were reliant for their supply of agricultural produce on the subjugated helots; the production of armour and weapons (as well as the procurement of metals -- both by mining and processing of iron and the import of copper and tin) for their production -- appears to have been in the hands of the perioikoi). The Spartan economy was, therefore, reliant upon lines of exchange within the Peloponnese.

The engagement of other classical Greek states in the importation of consumable goods is visible from the evidence. A set of marble stelai originating from the coastal city of Teos in Ionia places a curse on any person (and his family) who prevents grain from being imported (‘by any pretext or device’) into its territory (Fornara, Archaic Times, no.63): it seems to be the case that the community of the Teians is taking an active role in securing its grain supply.

**Beyond the ‘Consumer’ City**

Moses Finley, who did more for the study of the ancient economy than any other historian of the mid-twentieth century, developed the view which portrayed the ancient city as ‘consumer’ rather than ‘producer’. So far, we have explored ways in which ancient Greek communities (primarily the Athenians) went about obtaining products with which they would support themselves. While viewing the ancient Greek city-state as a ‘consumer’ society is a fruitful approach, there are other approaches too. While the literary sources place emphasis on the Athenian importation of materials, it is important to remember that Athens was a predominantly rural society, and that most citizens’ livelihoods would have been reliant on farming, producing, and selling. Athens was a producer not only of raw products like silver (the state leased the right to extract silver from mines to individual contractors, and the likes of Nikias made money from the m: Plutarch, Life of Nikias, 4) and olive oil, but also processed them, to create prestigious silver coins and high-quality olive oil. Processing and craft-work was carried out often in small workshops, though the wealthy would have organised production on a larger scale: Lysias speech 12 Against Eratosthenes 8, 19 (Rhodes, Greek City States, no. 304), offers a view of the property confiscated by the regime of Thirty in 404 from the workshop of the metic Kephalos: it consisted of 700 shields, silver, gold, bronze, jewellery, furniture, clothing, and 120 slaves.

**Regulation of commercial activity**

Whatever we make of the law attributed by Plutarch (Life of Solon, 24.1-2) to Solon, which forbade the Athenians from exporting products other than olive oil (this may well have been a temporary measure which addressed a food-crisis; alternatively, it may have aimed to promote the production and export of olive-oil), it is clear that Greek communities went
about regulating economic behaviour in their own interests: in the late fifth century, for instance, the Thasians wrote up on a stone slab a law which regulated the production and purchase of wine, forbade its dilution, forbade the import of foreign wine (thus protecting the place of a Thasian product within its domestic market), and also regulating the collection of wine-duties (Fornara, *From Archaic Times*, no. 169).

**Economic Modernism?**

A ‘modernist’ view of the ancient economy is supported by evidence of economic regulations: such interventions were motivated by the interests of particular communities. There are other indications that profit was a significant motivating factor both for individuals and communities. Greek temples appear to have lent money at interest: in Attica, the temple of Nemesis at Rhamnous made loans in the mid-fifth century (Fornara, *From Archaic Times*, 90B), and the Athenians borrowed money from the treasury of Athena Polias during the Peloponnesian War (Fornara 134): the interest rate was 1 drachma per diem for 5 Talents; the Delian temples also lent out money in the 430s (Fornara 121). There is fourth-century evidence for private individuals acting as profit-making bankers. The most famous of these in Athens was Pasion, who started out as a banker’s slave, and was awarded Athenian citizenship. His son, Apollodoros, was an important orator, and his speech Against Timotheos makes claims about his attempts to recover outstanding loans made to him ([Demosthenes] 49.31-2 = Rhodes, *Greek City-States*, 321).

In fourth-century Athens, loans on maritime trade formed a special category of credit. Maritime loans enabled a lenders to charge a particularly high rate of interest (between 12 ½ and 30%); the other side of the bargain was that they were obliged to write off their losses in case of shipwreck. Demosthenes’ speech 35, *Against Lakritos* is a speech written in support of an Athenian, Androkles and Nausikrates, from Karystos, who had lent money to merchants from Phaselis, for a voyage from Athens, via Mende (where, according to the lender’s contract, they would collect wine), to the Black Sea (where, in exchange for wine, they would purchase cargo to be brought to Athens for the creditors). On their return to Athens, the merchants failed to produce any cargo which Androkles and Nausikrates could take as repayment for their loan. The merchants claimed that their ship was wrecked on the voyage back to Athens; the lender claimed that this was a lie, that they had disobeyed their contract and had entered Athens through the ‘Thieves’ Harbour’ which lay outside the main ports of Piraeus, beyond the reach of Athens’ commercial authorities. For more details, see C. Carey, *Trails from Classical Athens*, translation of Demosthenes 35).

**Piracy etc.**

The process of acquisition was not always strictly legal or above board. While the process of collecting spoils from the dead on the battlefield appears to have been socially acceptable, the practice of raiding weak communities was considered by some disgraceful, though
Thucydides claimed that it as a normal way of life among Greeks such as the Aetolians, Acarnanians and Ozolian Locrians (Thuc. 1.5). Piracy appears to have been a big problem, but its definition was contested: the Athenians may well have justified their seizure of the island of Skyros in the 470s on the grounds that its inhabitants were pirates (Plutarch, *Life of Kimon*, 8, associating Kimon with clearing the Aegean of pirates). Indeed, Athenian power was at points effective against the actions of privateers and pirates: Thucydides tells us about the Athenians ending a commander to hinder privateers from attacking merchant ships from Phaselis and Phoenicia (Thuc. 2.69).

On coinage, see above, *Approaching*, section 2

**Further reading:**


To reside in an ancient Greek city-state was to live in an organisation strongly defined by religious practices. Families, clans, villages, tribes and the whole community of citizens came together with great frequency on occasions at which they would sacrifice to the gods: these took the form of blood-sacrifice of animal victims or of liquid libations. In fact, a great deal of our evidence about ancient Greek life was produced in religious contexts: most monumental architecture had some kind of religious significance, most of the surviving public inscriptions were set up in religious places (such as, in Athens, the acropolis), and the surviving comedies and tragedies of ancient Athens were produced for competitive performance at the Great Dionysia, the annual festival in honour of Dionysus. Major festivals like the Olympic Games (which featured a sacrifice of a hecatomb (100 cattle) to Zeus) were as much about religion as about competition. Reading some authors gives a clearer impression of the status of religion: Herodotus’ history of the Persian wars is pervaded by religion and awareness of the supernatural. Thucydides’ history of the Peloponnesian War, on the other hand, is marked by a striking lack of interest in not only in religious activity but also its role as a motivating factor in human behaviour (but he shows awareness in its significance, for instance in his account of the second ‘Sacred War’: Thuc. 1.112).

Gods

Ancient Greek religion was polytheistic: Greek communities recognised many deities (both Gods and Goddesses). Most important of these seem to have been the Olympian deities (usually there were twelve of them, but not always the same twelve) who were said to live on Mount Olympus: in Athens, an altar to the Twelve Gods was set up, apparently under the Pisistratid tyrants, in 522/1 BC (Thuc. 6.54). By the fifth century BC, the Gods most commonly worshipped across Greece (the ‘Panhellenic’ deities) were Zeus, Hera, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Poseidon, Aphrodite, Hermes, Hephaistos, Ares, Demeter and Hestia, who was sometimes replaced by Dionysus. The Gods were thought to act rather like humans, their characters possessing both generous and malicious aspects: Zeus was at the head of his family; Hera was his wife and sister; the others were his children or siblings. Another type of god was made up of those of the underworld, such as Hades and his wife Persephone. Stories and ideas about the Gods were passed down among Greeks in many ways, but among the most potent sources were the works of Homer (in the Iliad and Odyssey) and Hesiod (in the Theogony).

Greek religion varied from state to state. Some states claimed that they possessed protection from a specific deity (the Athenians claimed Athena as their patron). One story, represented on the west pediment of the Parthenon, was that there had taken place a contest between Athena and Poseidon over control of Attica. Greek states often worshipped particular gods in particular forms, attaching a particular description or epithet: among other forms of Athena,
the Athenians worshipped Athena Polias (Athena The Protector of the City), Athena Promachos (Athena Frontline Fighter) and Athena Nike (Athena of Victory).

Many aspects of Greek religion remained constant throughout the classical period. However, there is also evidence for development. On occasion, new cults appear to have been introduced to the city: the Athenians appear to have set up a new sanctuary for the healing cult of the god Asklepius in 420/19 BC:

‘The returning god was escorted to the temple of Eleusis with the Great Mysteries, and after sending for a snake from home (Epidaurus), he brought his chariot. Telemachus met him, and at the same time came the cult of Hygieia (Health) and thus was founded the whole shrine in the archonship of Astyphilos (420/19).

(LACTOR 12, no. 233)

Heroes

In addition to the Gods, Greek communities recognised other forms of supernatural power. One was the Hero. Heroes were individuals associated with a point or set of developments in the distant past, and were held to have been, at an earlier point, humans who lived on earth. Their heroization was usually the result of a specific deed or set of deeds. Heroes were usually specific to local places or communities; each of the 10 post-Cleisthenic tribes possessed an eponymous hero (Aias (Ajax), for instance, was the hero of the Aiantis tribe). Among the heroes of Attica was Theseus. In fifth-century Athens, he was accredited with having expelled the invading Amazons (female warriors) who had occupied Athens and had sacrificed on the Areopagus Hill in central Athens. In the 470s, the Athenian politician Cimon, after conquering the island of Skyros, claimed, in response to an ancient oracle from Delphi, claimed to have discovered the bones of Theseus buried there; he brought them back to Athens (Plutarch, Life of Kimon, 8) and placed them in a cult-place known as the Theseion). Herakles was important to many Greek communities. In Sparta, the kings were said to have been his descendants.

Piety

There existed no holy book of ancient Greek religion; nor did there exist a core set of dogmas. There was no head of religion; nor was there a Church or any body of religious authority. Nevertheless, there existed a number of expectations: at the heart of these was a respect for ancestral traditions. All Athenian citizens were expected to maintain a hereditary cult of Zeus Herkeios (Of the Forecourt), an Apollo Patroos (Of Ancestors) and Athena Phratria (Of the Brotherhood). But there was also a concept of impiety: removing religious objects from their rightful place, damaging religious property, or spreading controversial opinions were the kinds of thing (see LACTOR 13 nos. 295, 296, 297) that could be deemed sacrilegious.
It was possible to display one’s piety by making dedications to the gods at religious places (sanctuaries and temples). Individuals would make dedications, as deliberate statements of their own piety. Communities likewise would make offerings to the gods: the Athenians, for instance, during the Peloponnesian War, dedicated a bronze plate to the sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona, with the following inscription:

‘The Athenians made this offering after defeating the Peloponnesians in a sea-battle’
(LACTOR 12 no. 264)

Another important form of religious activity was sacrifice: animals were sacrificed to a god over an altar. The thighs were burnt as an offering to the gods, but the rest of the meat was distributed to the participants in the sacrifice: this must have been one of the few occasions upon which meat was widely eaten. Many deities received, additionally or alternatively, bloodless offerings of spices, vegetables, and cakes.

Priests (and priestesses) and other religious officials played an important role in Greek religion: they conducted sacrifices, oversaw the organisation of festivals and the upkeep of sanctuaries. Many of them were drawn from particular families with a special connection to a cult; in fifth-century Athens, certain priesthoods were drawn from the people as a whole, suggesting a democratic aspect to certain cults.

**City-state Festivals**

There were more than forty community-wide festivals which had a permanent place in the Athenian calendar in the classical period. Thucydides (2.38) made an important point about their significance for the recreation of the Athenians, and the Old Oligarch remarked that the Athenians celebrated more festivals than any other Greek city (LACTOR 2, 3.2)

The Great Dionysia, held in honour of Dionysus, was one of the most lavish of the Athenian festivals. It went on for five days, during which time tragedies, comedies and other plays were performed, and the festival drew to a close with processions and celebrations. The Panathenaia celebrated the unity of Athens, and ended with a procession which finished on the Athenian acropolis. At this festival, there were athletic contests, large sacrifices, and the presentation of a peplos (robe – renewed every fourth year) to the statue of Athena: the handing over of this garment is depicted in the frieze of the Parthenon (see below, figure 24). There was a wide range of other state festivals: for some of the literary evidence on these, see LACTOR 12 nos. 223-235
How seriously did ancient Greeks take their religion? Famously, the Spartans turned up late for the battle of Marathon on account of waiting for the full moon (Herodotus 6.107); later in the Persian wars they were delayed by their celebration of a festival (Herodotus 9.7). But it is hard to tell whether these were genuine explanations or excuses: but we can note that Herodotus appears to have accepted them as genuine reasons. On the one hand, we could take the view that religious belief, devotion, and piety were deep-seated; on the other hand, we could take the view that what was important was to be seen to be pious by the wider community of Greeks as a whole.

**Panhellenic religion**

In addition to polis-specific religious activity, a good deal of Greek religious life was ‘Panhellenic’, meaning that it was common to much of the Greek world. Competitors from Greek settlements all around the Mediterranean took part in the athletic festivals which were held at the sanctuaries of Olympia, Delphi, Nemea and Isthmia; victorious sportsmen were crowned with wreaths and their fame was spread across the Greek world. Several such sanctuaries, such as the ones at Delphi and Dodona, were the seats of oracles (see LACTOR 12, nos. 258-66). In 415 BC, Alkibiades boasted about the success of his sponsorship of seven teams in the chariot races at the Olympics in the previous year, taking the leading places (Thucydides 6.16.2). Games were not limited to the inter-state sanctuaries, and, in the fifth century, the Panathenaic games at Athens gained prominence (LACTOR 12 nos. 455-466).

Oracles were consulted by individuals and communities at times of crisis. Delegates from city-states would travel to Delphi and present a question. The priestess, sitting upon a tripod
over a chasm in the earth at the temple of Apollo, would rant and rave, and her utterances would be ‘translated’ by the Delphic priests, who would compose a response in hexameter poetry. The priests, we presume, were well-informed, perhaps gleaning information by word of mouth from visitors to the sanctuary.

Famously, the Athenians sought advice from the Delphic oracle when they were faced with a Persian invasion in 480 BC: they were told that Zeus would give them a ‘wall of wood’ to protect them (Herodotus 7.141). As with many oracular responses, the advice was ambiguous, and, as Herodotus explains, the interpretation of what this ‘wall of wood’ was open to debate: Themistocles persuaded the Athenians that it referred to the reliance upon triremes for the city’s wellbeing.

**Religion and the Athenian Empire**

Given the fact that religion pervaded politics on all levels (domestic rivalries and inter-state relations), it is no surprise that there was a strong religious element to the Athenian Empire. The tribute sent by the allied states to the Athenians was brought in at the City Dionysia (LACTOR 1, 4th edition, 192-4), and a 1/60th of the amount received was dedicated to the treasury of Athena, and recorded on stone slabs which were erected on the acropolis. Athens’ subject states were required to bring offerings to Athenian state festivals: the Erythraians, for instance, brought grain to the Panathenaia (LACTOR 1, 4th edition, 216A) and the Breans a cow and set of armour to the Panathenaia and a model of a phallus to the Dionysia (LACTOR 1, 4th edition, 323). During the Peloponnesian war, the Athenians required members of the Delian League, and invited other city-states, to make offerings of grain to Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis (LACTOR 1, 4th edition, 205). In the fifth century, the Athenians tightened their participation of the religious sanctuaries at Delos, and the Athenian politician Nikias was known to have made outstanding dedications on the island of Delos, including an impressive bronze palm tree (LACTOR 1, 4th edition, 209).

**Religion and Warfare**

As already noted, Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian war dwelt little on its religious aspects. But it is clear that in ancient Greece, warfare was an activity with a great deal of religious significance. Sacrifice before battle was commonplace, as was the dedication of a proportion of the spoils of war as a thank offering to the Gods. Wars were motivated by human actions which had religious implications: the Greeks’ destruction of a temple of Cybele at Sardis was used by the Persians as a pretext for their burning of Greek temples (Herodotus 5.102) and in the middle of the fifth century BC, Thucydides reports that the Delphians and the Phokians were at war about the control of the temple of Apollo at Delphi (Thucydides 1.112). However, the notion of the crusade, ‘holy war’, or of warfare emerging out of a clash of religious beliefs was more or less foreign to the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean.
Religion and Politics

Image to right: Herm of c. 341 BC, Delos

Intertwined with every aspect of daily life, it is no surprise that religion pervaded political activity in many senses. It was there in a routine and ritualistic sense: at Athens, meetings of the assembly were preceded by prayers, a sacrifice, and the dragging of the entrails of the sacrificial pig around the outskirts of the assembly-place; the view was that this was a way of purifying the space within which momentous decisions would be made. Politicians like Demosthenes would volunteer to serve as the sponsor of choruses who sang in the Dionysiac festival, as a way of raising their profile and demonstrating their religious piety (Demosthenes 21.16-17). But there were times when religion and politics appear to collide with explosive effect. In 415 BC, on the eve of the Athenian expedition to Sicily, the Athenians woke up to find that ‘nearly all’ of the square stone busts of Hermes (which, bearing erect phalli, were placed along roadsides, in the agora, and outside private homes) had been mutilated overnight. They took the view that, given that Hermes was the deity of travel, this was an ill omen for the expedition. On further investigation, they discovered that another act of impiety had been committed: the Eleusinian Mystery cults had been profaned (perhaps by their celebration in private homes or by the uninitiated). Some took the view that these profanities, which may well have been acts of drunken revelry, were the manifestation of a conspiracy to overthrow democracy. Thucydides’ view is that this was a paranoid, partisan, view of the Athenian people (Thuc. 6.60-61). Rivals of the Athenian politician Alkibiades claimed that he was implicated in such a plot. Though he was able to set sail for Sicily, he was soon recalled, and when the Athenians were unable to bring him back to Athens, his property was confiscated. Fifty or so other wealthy citizens and metics, however, who were implicated, were executed for their alleged involvement. As Thucydides concluded, ‘it was unclear whether the victims were justly punished, but there was no doubt of the beneficial effect on the city at large’ (Thuc. 6.60). What appears to have been important to the Athenians was that they had placed
the blame for this act of impiety on someone; moreover, they had addressed the political threat to democracy too. For the sources on this episode, see LACTOR 4, 301-307.

**Further Reading:**


J. Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion*, 2005


Approaching Greek History 19: Philosophy and Ideas

Education

Education in ancient Greece was far from universal. Where it was available, it concentrated on establishing skills of literacy and reciting poetry, in particular the epics of Homer. Literacy rates are disputed; in ancient Greek cities, many of those whose education was limited may have developed ‘functional’ literacy, by which they would have been able to read and perhaps even write their name or words which were important to their daily work. The first-century-historian Diodorus Siculus claims that a law in Thurii in South Italy made it compulsory for all sons of citizens to learn to read and write and that teachers would be paid by the city (Diodorus Siculus 12.12-13): if Diodorus’ claims are accurate, this would be an extraordinary piece of legislation. It may be the case that Thurii was exceptional, or it may be the case that Diodorus has mixed fantasy with reality. But regardless of literacy rates, the verses of Homer were widely known and their impact upon Greek ethics (in particular values of honour) is widely visible in literature and behaviour. For sources on education, see LACTOR 12, nos. 184-208).

Ideas in early literature

Greek literature contains the seeds of many important social and philosophical ideas. The Odyssey of Homer, for instance, described the Cyclopes as ‘arrogant, lawless men’ who did not cultivate the land, and lacked both laws and organised assemblies (Odyssey 9.106-15). They were, accordingly, held up as representing the antithesis to the ideal Greek way of living in a community. Hesiod’s Theogony contains important statements on the behaviour of just leaders, who were expected to correct wrongs ‘with ease and gentle persuasion’ (Hesiod, Theogony, 88-95). From Homer’s Iliad we get a sense of basic medical techniques, which we encounter in the description of Patroklos bandaging the wounded Eurypyllos (Iliad 11.842-8).

Early Philosophy

Greek philosophy is traditionally divided between a period of philosophers who predate Socrates (399 BC) and those who came after him (for Socrates’ philosophy, trial and death in 399, see LACTOR 12, nos. 423-449). In the sixth century BC, the main developments of the Pre-Socratic philosophy were those of the Ionian philosophers, who appear to have speculated upon the elemental makeup of all objects. Later sources offer accounts of Thales of Miletus, for instance (c. 625-545 BC), who argued that water, or humidity, was the basic atomic particle out of which everything was constructed. Anaximander and Anaximenes, Milesians of the sixth century, proposed that the basic particle was ‘apeiron’, a ‘boundless substance’ or air. Pythagoras of Samos was said to have migrated to the West in c. 530 BC, and was the founder of the Pythagorean school of theology and ethics. The Pythagoreans are
accredited with the discovery of the theorem that the internal angles of every triangle are equal to two right angles (180°).

Figure 26. Representation of Pythagoras’ theorem. Drawing by Terry Abbot

\[ a^2 + b^2 = c^2 \]

The Sophists and Socrates

In the fifth century BC, the focus of philosophical activity switched from Miletus to Athens, which, probably owing to her wealth and political pre-eminence, became the most important centre for developments in philosophy and education. Teachers of rhetoric, known as Sophists, came to Athens and offered, in return for a fee (LACTOR 5 nos. 278-81, courses on public speaking. Perhaps they were targeting customers who were interested in developing skills in oratory that would benefit them in the assembly or lawcourt (LACTOR 5 nos. 285-6). Some politicians were even said to have learnt their art of political skills from a sophist: Perikles was said to have been associated with Damon (LACTOR 12 no. 211). Much of what we know about the sophists is derived from the work of Plato, who was a strong critic of their activity:

‘Look at Gorgias, the sophist of Leontini – he came to Athens on a public embassy from Leontini as being the most efficient of his countrymen in handling politics. People thought he spoke very well in the assembly, and in private by giving oratorical displays and teaching the young he made a lot of money and took it home with him from Athens. Or take if you like our friend Prodicus: he often came here on public missions, but when he last came here recently on a public mission from Keos, he won high repute for a speech in the Council, and by his private displays and his instruction to the young received a staggering sum of money.’

(Plato, Hippias Major 282 = LACTOR 12 no. 214; cf. LACTOR 5 no. 287).

This passage distinguishes the sophists from Socrates, who did not charge a fee for his conversations. It is likely that the charges that these sophists levied on their courses aroused a great deal of hostility especially among those who could not afford them or advocated a sense of political equality (LACTOR 12 nos. 216-8). Some politicians, their oratory informed by complex arguments, addressed the people in terms that would appeal to a view prejudiced
against the sophists. This style of oratory is suggested in Thucydides’ account of the speech of Cleon of 427 BC, in which he advocated punishment of the rebellious Mytileneans:

‘You are easily deceived by any new argument and unwilling to comply with a proven one, slaves of every topical paradox, despisers of tradition; each one wishing that he could speak himself, but, failing that, competing with those who can speak by evidently following the argument immediately and by applauding a sharp remark before it is made; eager to anticipate what is said but slow to foresee its consequences; seeking, as it were, a different world from the one we live in, and insufficiently attentive to existing circumstances; quite overcome by the pleasures of the ear and more like the audience of a sophist than the government of a city.’

(Thucydides 3.38 = LCTOR 5 no. 135).

Thus did Cleon attack those who wanted to reverse the Athenian decision to execute the Mytileneans. A couple of books later, the point-by-point argument of the Athenian ambassadors to the Melians (5.85-112), show signs of challenges to conventional views of justice.

Popular resentment against the sophists can also be detected in a play of Aristophanes, The Clouds. This brings us, then, to Socrates, and his execution of 399 BC. According to Aristophanes, Socrates – an Athenian who appears to have spent some of his time quizzing his fellow citizens and demonstrating that they were considerably more ignorant than they thought they were – was parodied as a natural scientist who denied that the gods were real and as a sophist who charged a fee for lessons in which they trained their pupils in rhetoric. Socrates was portrayed as the keeper of two arguments, that of the stronger and the weaker, and was able to make the weaker argument, even when it was wrong, prevail (see LCTOR 12 no. 218; cf. LCTOR 5 nos. 290). The Weaker Argument was said to advocate living in accordance with nature and ignoring laws and conventions, thus justifying adultery and hitting one’s father (LCTOR 5 no. 292-3). Socrates trained his pupils in these arguments, equipping them with amoral rhetoric.

According to Plato’s Apology, when Socrates was tried in 399 BC, he was charged with not recognising the Gods of the polis, of having introduced new gods and corrupting the youth. The religious charges may be related to his talk of a ‘daimon’, a divinely-inspired voice, which Socrates claimed was his motivation and inspiration for his behaviour; ‘corrupting the youth’ referred to Socrates’ close associations with the notorious Alkibiades and Critias, a leading figure in the bloody regime of Thirty Tyrants who assumed control of Athens for a short time after her defeat at the hands of the Peloponnesians in 404 BC. Crucially, the Athenians had agreed an amnesty on the restoration of democracy in 403/2 BC, and so they were unwilling to make straightforward claims about Socrates’ political inclinations. But Socrates’ life in democratic Athens appears to have been law-abiding, and he resisted illegal commands given to him by the Thirty. The Athenians found Socrates guilty and voted to execute him. Why did they treat him in this way? Was he a scapegoat for the behaviour of the Thirty? That is possible, but it is just as likely that their verdict, influenced by Aristophanes’
misleading and negative portrayal of him as a sophist and impious scientist (see LACTOR 12 nos. 423-449), was inspired by an alarmed concern to drive out a potentially impious oddball from their city.

**A Sophistic Movement?**

Some modern scholars have suggested the existence of a ‘sophistic movement’ in fifth-century Athens. Did the sophists hold a coherent set of views? It is hard to tell, given that sources, above all the fourth-century philosopher Plato, are, on the whole, hostile to the sophists and attribute to them a very wide range of challenges to traditional Greek ethics (LACTOR 5 nos. 295-6). Of the sophists, Protagoras of Abdera was one who had a good reputation with Plato and among others of his time. According to one source, he was asked to draft laws for an Athenian colony at Thurii (LACTOR 5 no. 276). Plato’s dialogue *Protagoras* makes him claim that if a student comes to him, ‘he will learn good sense in private affairs – how to best manage one’s estate; and good sense in public affairs – how to speak and act most effectively in politics’ (Plato, *Protagoras* 319 = LACTOR 5 no. 277; cf. 278-9).

Plato was more cynical about other sophists. In the *Republic*, he attributed a ‘might is right’ view of Greek ethics to Thrasymachos: Thrasymachos argues that traditional justice is rather pointless because it advocates the interests of the government (LACTOR 12 no. 421). Plato attributes to Callicles the ‘might is right’ philosophy, which held that according to nature, ‘the principle that morality means the rule to their own advantage of the strong over the weak’ (LACTOR 12 no. 422). But the fifth century BC saw new questions raised in a wide range of contexts. Historians, dramatists, poets and philosophers questioned traditional religious views (did the gods exist in reality or according to convention? See LACTOR 12 nos. 274-9) and the universality of values (should one live according to law or according to nature? how separable are the two? See LACTOR 12 nos. 410-22)).

If the sophists have anything in common, it is that they were ready to question traditional views of justice and at the very least questioned the idea that standards of law were natural (this is the ‘physis-nomos’ (‘nature-custom’) debate: see LACTOR 12 nos. 410-422; LACTOR 5 nos. 289). However, the view that laws and customs were human inventions rather than universal values was not restricted to the sophists: in his discussion of Cambyses, mad king of the Persians, Herodotus quoted approvingly the early fifth-century poet Pindar’s maxim that ‘custom is king of all’ (Herodotus 3.38); however, for a view of Herodotus as a sophist, see R. Thomas, *Herodotus in Context*, 2000).

**Further Reading**


Approaching Greek History 20: Death and Commemoration

There survives a huge amount of evidence for the ancient Greek treatment and commemoration of the dead. In fact, the practices associated with remembrance of the deceased provide us with a huge amount of evidence for understanding Greek attitudes not only towards the dead, but also towards the living.

Treat ing the dead

The treatment of corpses was closely regulated by law and custom. An Athenian law directed that if a citizen was to die and his body were left unburied, the demarch (village mayor) would order a relative (or, in the case of a slave, the master) to collect the body and to arrange for its burial (Demosthenes 43.57-8 = LACTOR 12 no. 237). One later source offers a more general reflection that the Athenian practice was that ‘anyone who came across the corpse of a man unburied was to throw earth on it without more ado, and bury it facing the sunset’ (Aelian, Varied History 5.14). According to Athenian custom, the corpse of the dead would be laid out inside the house (this was known as the prothesis), and would be carried out the day after death before sunrise (the ekphora). A funeral procession to the cemetery consisted of men in front, with the women following. The only women permitted to enter the room where the corpse was laid out or to follow the funeral procession were relatives and those over 60 years of age (Demosthenes 43.62-3 = LACTOR 12 no. 114). Cremation or interment then followed, sometimes in a public cemetery, often at a family burial-plot. From the eighth century onwards, most Greek cities appear to have buried the corpses of the dead outside the city walls: while the dead were revered, their remains were associated with a kind of pollution which communities wanted to keep at arm’s length.

The collection of the bodies of those who had died was extremely important to ancient Greek city-states. Normally, only those who were convicted of some great act of impiety like temple-robbery or treason were exempted from burial within Attica. The plot of Sophocles’ play Antigone centred around Antigone’s efforts to secure appropriate treatment for her brother, Eteokles, whose body lay outside the city walls. Her uncle, Creon, forbade the burial of Eteokles because he had pursued a campaign against the city. The recovery of bodies after battle was, alongside the setting up of a trophy, a normal part of the post battle ritual (for an example of the lengths that to which the Athenians went in 424 BC after the battle of Delion to get the bodies of their slain back, see Thucydides 4.97-101). In 406 BC, the Athenians, after the Athenian victory at the Arginousai Islands, were furious with the generals who had failed to collect the bodies of those who had died in the battle and had failed to rescue sailors who were shipwrecked. They decided to execute six of the eight generals who had commanded them in that battle (the other two wisely stayed away), although they later regretted putting to death these men, and condemned the proposers. For a detailed perspective on these events, see Xenophon, Hellenika 1.7 (= LACTOR 5, nos 324-7, with commentary).
Remembering the deceased

In terms of treatment of the body, burial or cremation was the norm. Corpses were sometimes dressed in shrouds or cloaks, and weapons and jewellery were sometimes placed alongside the deceased. Those who could afford it marked the site of burial with a stone inscription, which sometimes bore the name and even a representation of the deceased. Burial sites were, before the end of the fifth century, often marked with a lekythos, a small vase with a narrow neck (or sometimes a huge marble sculpted lekythos), which would usually contain oil. These vases are richly illustrated with funerary scenes, and themselves offer evidence for the kinds of activity associated with burial of the dead.

In times of crisis, normal practices may have been set aside: when a great plague struck Athens in 430 BC, relatives disposed of the corpses of loved ones in any way that they could (Thucydides 2.53): archaeological evidence from Athens (uncovered during the construction of the Athens Metro in 2000) suggests that corpses were thrown into large burial chambers with scant regard for ritual or memorials.

There is a large amount of evidence from Athens and other city-states of inscriptions and monuments set up for the commemoration of the dead, much of it in the form of inscriptions, occasionally with sculptured and painted images, which marked the burial place of the dead. The stele (inscription) commemorating Demokleides (see figure 27, right) depicts the deceased in a contemplative pose (contemplating his own death?), next to his shield and helmet. The fact he sits at the prow of a ship suggests that he died at sea, perhaps as a hoplite on board a trireme.
A stone model of a *lekythos* of c. 420 BC (see above, figure 28) commemorating Myrrhine, a priestess of Athena Nike, depicts her, perhaps heroically, substantially larger than the other figures represented as waving to her.

In fifth-century Athens, there was a great deal of public commemoration: those who died in war had their names written up, according to tribe, on stone slabs which were set up in the city. One list survives which bears 188 members of one Athenian tribe (LACTOR 1, 4th edition, 41-5, 67, 72, 95). There is also evidence for non-Athenians being buried in Athens, especially those who fought on behalf of Athens (LACTOR 1, 4th edition, 45). Athenian practices of the fifth century suggest that they placed emphasis on the public commemoration of the dead, and showy private commemoration is less frequent: this may well be viewed as an expression of the ideology of equality which, in Athens, was at its strongest during the fifth century BC.

Those who died in battle were given great respect. In the fifth and fourth centuries BC, the Athenians commemorated the war-dead by bringing the cremated remains of the deceased back to Athens, and laying their remains out in public, a procession, and a speech by a man chosen for his gifts and reputation. This speech, known as the *epitaphios logos*, praised the war-dead and also extolled the virtues of the Athenians. Thucydides’ history of the Peloponnesian war contains a speech which he presents as one given by Perikles over the Athenian dead at the end of the first year of that war. Much of the speech may be Thucydides’ own fabrication, but many of the themes raised are shared by other, fourth-century, funeral speeches (Thucydides 2.34-46; cf. those of Lysias, Hypereides and Demosthenes). Other communities may have buried and commemorated their war-dead where they fell. Spartan mothers were said to have told their young men, as they went to war ‘to come back with your shield or on it’, but Herodotus says that after the battle of Thermopylai, King Leonidas was brought back to Sparta, but other 298 were buried at the site of the battle (Herodotus 7.228).

Those who died heroically were given higher status. Greek cities bestowed special honours on those they thought of as heroes, and thought of them as another form of divine power (see above, *Approaching*, section 18). The Athenians, for instance, paid special homage both to the soldiers who fell at the Battle of Marathon in 490 (the *Marathonomachoi*) to Harmodios and Aristogeiton, whose deaths they connected with the end of the sixth-century tyranny of the Pisistratids (Thucydides 6.53-9).

Commemoration practices differed from city to city. Restrictions on the size of monuments and the kinds of funerals were relatively common. In Sparta, the treatment of the dead reflected the hierarchies and ideologies of society: on the one hand, the death of a king was celebrated with widespread compulsory mourning (Herodotus 6.58); on the other hand, the only citizens who were permitted a marked grave were men who had died in battle and women who had died in sacred office (or ‘in childbirth’ – the evidence is controversial:
Plutarch *Life of Lycurgus* 27.3 can be read either way). Helots, meanwhile, in all likelihood, were denied the right of a marked grave.

**Using the evidence**

The evidence for the way the Greeks treated their dead tells us a great deal about their reverence for the dead, the ways that they dealt with grief, for the kinds of commemoration that they practised. But it also tells us a great deal about the ideals and practices of the living. Modern historians have suggested, on the basis of the evidence for a growth in archaeologically-visible commemoration during the eighth century BC that a stronger concept of polis-identity was developing, alongside a growing feeling of equality among citizens. Before 750 BC, burial was a privilege restricted to those of high status, but after that point, it was practised by families of a wider social spectrum. Thucydides’ Periklean funeral speech (Thucydides 2.34-46) itself provides evidence for the way that the Athenians, upon specific occasions, presented the ideals of freedom and equality.

**Further Reading:**


Questionnaire

I would like to improve this book in the future, and to produce a revised or expanded version in the future. To this end, I should be grateful if all readers were to respond to any of the questions below: send responses to the author: peter.liddel@manchester.ac.uk

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