The sixteen centuries from 1000 B.C.E. to 600 C.E. mark a new chapter in the story of humanity. Important changes in the ways of life established in the river-valley civilizations in the two previous millennia occurred, and the scale of human institutions and activities increased.

The political and social structure of the earliest river-valley centers reflected the importance of irrigation for agriculture. Powerful kings, hereditary priesthods, dependent laborers, limited availability of metals, and very restricted literacy are hallmarks of the complex societies described in Part One. In the first millennium B.C.E., new centers arose, in lands watered by rainfall and worked by a free peasantry, on the shores of the Mediterranean, in Iran, India, Southeast Asia, and in Central and South America. Shaped by the natural environments in which they arose, they developed new patterns of political and social organization and economic activity, and moved in new intellectual, artistic, and spiritual directions, though under the influence of the older centers.

The rulers of the empires of this era took steps intended to control and tax their subjects: they constructed extensive networks of roads and promoted urbanization. These measures brought incidental benefits: more rapid
communication, the transport of trade goods over greater distances, and the broad diffusion of religious ideas, artistic styles, and technologies. Large cultural zones unified by common traditions emerged. A number of these cultural traditions—Iranian, Hellenistic, Roman—were to exercise substantial influence on subsequent ages. The influence of some—Hindu, Chinese, African, Buddhist—persists into our own time.

The expansion of agriculture and trade and improvements in technology led to population increases, the spread of cities, and the growth of a comfortable middle class. In many parts of the world iron replaced bronze as the preferred metal for weapons, tools, and utensils. People using iron tools cleared extensive forests around the Mediterranean, in India, and in eastern China. Iron weapons gave an advantage to the armies of Greece, Rome, and imperial China. Metal, still an important item of long-distance trade, was available to more people than it had been in the preceding age. Metal coinage, which originated in Anatolia, was adopted by many peoples. Metal coins facilitated commercial transactions and the acquisition of wealth along new trade routes crossing the Indian Ocean and Central and Inner Asia.

New systems of writing also developed. Because these systems were more easily and rapidly learned, writing moved out of the control of specialists. The vast majority of people remained illiterate, but writing became an increasingly important medium for preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge. The spread of literacy gave birth to new ways of thinking, new genres of literature, and new types of scientific endeavor.
CHAPTER OUTLINE
Ancient Iran, 1000–500 B.C.E.
The Rise of the Greeks, 1000–500 B.C.E.
The Struggle of Persia and Greece, 546–323 B.C.E.
The Hellenistic Synthesis, 323–30 B.C.E.
DIVERSITY AND DOMINANCE: The Persian Idea of Kingship
ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY: The Farmer’s Year
The Greek historian Herodotus* (ca. 485–425 B.C.E.), chronicler of the struggles of the city-states of Greece with the Persian Empire in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E., teaches a lesson about cultural differences. The Persian king Darius I, whose vast empire stretched from eastern Europe to Pakistan, summoned the Greek and Indian wise men who served him at court. He first asked the Greeks whether under any circumstances they would be willing to eat the bodies of their deceased fathers. The Greeks, who cremated their dead, recoiled at the impiety of such an act. Darius then asked the Indians whether they would be prepared to burn the bodies of their dead parents. The Indians were repulsed; their practice was to ritually partake of the bodies of the dead. The point, as Herodotus noted, was that different peoples have very different practices, but each regards its own way as “natural” and superior.

Distinguishing between what was natural and what was cultural convention created much discomfort among Greeks in Herodotus’s lifetime, for it called into question the validity of their fundamental beliefs. Herodotus’s story also reminds us that the Persian Empire (and the Hellenistic Greek kingdoms that succeeded it) brought together peoples and cultural systems that previously had known little direct contact, and that this new cross-cultural interaction could be alarming even while it stimulated new and exciting cultural syntheses.

In this chapter we look at the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia in the first millennium B.C.E., emphasizing the experiences of the Persians and Greeks. The rivalry and wars of Greeks and Persians from the sixth to fourth centuries B.C.E. are traditionally seen as the clash of the civilizations of East and West, of two peoples and two ways of life that were fundamentally different and thus almost certain to come into conflict.

Ironically, Greeks and Persians had far more in common than they realized. Both spoke in tongues belonging to the same Indo-European family of languages found throughout Europe and western and southern Asia. Many scholars believe that all the ancient peoples who spoke languages belonging to this family inherited fundamental cultural traits, forms of social organization, and religious outlooks from their shared past.

As you read this chapter, ask yourself the following questions:

- How did geography, environment, and contacts with other peoples shape the institutions and values of Persians and Greeks?
- What brought the Greek city-states and the Persian Empire into conflict, and which factors dictated the outcome of their rivalry?
- In what ways were the lands and peoples of the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia influenced—culturally, economically, and politically—by the domination of the Persian Empire and the Greek kingdoms that succeeded it?

**Ancient Iran, 1000–500 B.C.E.**

Iran, the “land of the Aryans,” links western Asia and southern and Central Asia, and its history has been marked by this mediating position (see Map 4.1). In the sixth century B.C.E. the vigorous Persians of southwest Iran created the largest empire the world had yet seen.

Relatively little written material from within the Persian Empire has survived, so we are forced to view it mostly through the eyes of the ancient Greeks—outsiders who were ignorant at best, usually hostile, and interested primarily in events that affected themselves. (Iranian groups and individuals are known in the western world by Greek approximations of their names; thus these familiar forms are used here, with the original Iranian names given in parentheses.) This Greek perspective leaves us unaware of developments in the central and eastern portions of the Persian Empire. Nevertheless, recent archaeological discoveries and close analysis of the limited written material from within the empire can supplement and correct the perspective of the Greek sources.
Iran is bounded by the Zagros Mountains to the west, the Caucasus Mountains and Caspian Sea to the northwest and north, the mountains of Afghanistan and the desert of Baluchistan to the east and southeast, and the Persian Gulf to the southwest. The northeast is less protected by natural boundaries, and from that direction Iran was open to attacks by the nomads of Central Asia.

The fundamental topographical features of Iran are high mountains at the edges, salt deserts in the interior depressions, and mountain streams crossing a sloping plateau and draining into seas or interior salt lakes and marshes. Humans trying to survive in these harsh lands had to find ways to exploit limited water resources. Unlike the valleys of the Nile, Tigris-Euphrates, Ganges, and Yellow Rivers, ancient Iran never had a dense population. The best-watered and most populous parts of the country lie to the north and west; aridity increases and population decreases as one moves south and east. The Great Salt Desert, which covers most of eastern Iran, and Baluchistan in the southeast corner were extremely inhospitable. Scattered settlements in the narrow plains beside the Persian Gulf were cut off from the interior plateau by mountain barriers.

In the first millennium B.C.E. irrigation enabled people to move down from the mountain valleys and open the plains to agriculture. To prevent evaporation in the hot, dry climate, they devised underground irrigation channels. Constructing and maintaining these subterranean channels and the vertical shafts that provided access to them was labor-intensive. Normally, local leaders oversaw the expansion of the network in each district. Activ-
ity accelerated when a strong central authority was able to organize large numbers of laborers. The connection between royal authority and prosperity is evident in the ideology of the first Persian Empire (discussed below). Even so, human survival depended on a delicate ecological balance, and a buildup of salt in the soil or a falling
water table sometimes forced the abandonment of settlements.

Iran’s mineral resources—copper, tin, iron, gold, and silver—were exploited on a limited scale in antiquity. Mountain slopes, more heavily wooded than they are now, provided fuel and materials for building and crafts. Because this austere land could not generate much of an agricultural surplus, objects of trade tended to be minerals and crafted goods.

**The Rise of the Persian Empire**

In antiquity many groups of people, whom historians refer to collectively as “Iranians” because they spoke related languages and shared certain cultural features, spread out across western and Central Asia. Several of these groups arrived in western Iran near the end of the second millennium B.C.E. The first to achieve a complex level of political organization was the Medes (Mada in Iranian). They settled in the northwest and came under the influence of the ancient centers in Mesopotamia and Urartu (modern Armenia and northeast Turkey). The Medes played a major role in the destruction of the Assyrian Empire in the late seventh century B.C.E. and extended their control westward across Assyria into Anatolia (modern Turkey). They also projected their power southeast toward the Persian Gulf, a region occupied by another Iranian people, the Persians (Parsa).

The Persian rulers—now called Achaemenids—because they traced their lineage back to an ancestor named Achaemenes—cemented their relationship with the Median court through marriage. **Cyrus** (Kurush), the son of a Persian chieftain and a Median princess, united the various Persian tribes and overthrew the Median monarch sometime around 550 B.C.E. Cyrus placed both Medes and Persians in positions of responsibility and retained the framework of Median rule. The differences between these two Iranian peoples—principal differences in the dialects they spoke and the way they dressed—were not great. The Greeks could not readily tell the two apart.

Like most Indo-European peoples, the early inhabitants of western Iran had a patriarchal family organization: the male head of the household had nearly absolute authority over family members. Society was divided into three social and occupational classes: warriors, priests, and peasants. Warriors were the dominant element. A landowning aristocracy, they took pleasure in hunting, fighting, and gardening. The king was the most illustrious member of this group. The priests, or Magi (magush), were ritual specialists who supervised the proper performance of sacrifices. The common people—peasants—were primarily village-based farmers and shepherds.

Over the course of two decades the energetic Cyrus (r. 550–530 B.C.E.) redrew the map of western Asia. In 546 B.C.E. he prevailed in a cavalry battle outside the gates of Sardis, the capital of the kingdom of Lydia in western Anatolia, reportedly because the smell of his camels caused a panic among his opponents’ horses. All Anatolia, including the Greek city-states on the western coast, came under Persian control. In 539 B.C.E. he swept into Mesopotamia, where the Neo-Babylonian dynasty had ruled since the collapse of Assyrian power (see Chapter 3). Cyrus made a deal with disaffected elements within Babylon, and when he and his army approached, the gates of the city were thrown open to him without a struggle. A skillful propagandist, Cyrus showed respect to the Babylonian priesthood and had his son crowned king in accordance with native traditions.

After Cyrus lost his life in 530 B.C.E. while campaigning against a coalition of nomadic Iranians in the northeast, his son Cambyses* (Kambujya, r. 530–522 B.C.E.) set his sights on Egypt, the last of the great ancient kingdoms of the Middle East. The Persians prevailed over the Egyptians in a series of bloody battles; then they sent exploratory expeditions south to Nubia and west to Libya. Greek sources depict Cambyses as a cruel and impious madman, but contemporary documents from Egypt show him operating in the same practical vein as his father, cultivating local priests and notables and respecting native traditions.

When Cambyses died in 522 B.C.E., **Darius I** (Daryavausch) seized the throne. His success in crushing many early challenges to his rule was a testimony to his skill, energy, and ruthlessness. From this reign forward, Medes played a lesser role, and the most important posts went to members of leading Persian families. Darius (r. 522–486 B.C.E.) extended Persian control eastward as far as the Indus Valley and westward into Europe, where he bridged the Danube River and chased the nomadic Scythian peoples north of the Black Sea. The Persians erected a string of forts in Thrace (modern-day northeast Greece and Bulgaria) and by 500 B.C.E. were on the doorstep of Greece. Darius also promoted the development of maritime routes. He dispatched a fleet to explore the waters from the Indus Delta to the Red Sea, and he completed a canal linking the Red Sea with the Nile.

*Achaemenid* (a-KEY-muh-nid)

Cambyses (kam-BIE-sees)  Scythian (SITH-ee-uhn)
Imperial Organization and Ideology

The empire of Darius I was the largest the world had yet seen (see Map 4.1). Stretching from eastern Europe to Pakistan, from southern Russia to Sudan, it encompassed a multitude of ethnic groups and many forms of social and political organization, from nomadic kinship group to subordinate kingdom to city-state. Darius can rightly be considered a second founder of the Persian Empire, after Cyrus, because he created a new organizational structure that was maintained throughout the remaining two centuries of the empire's existence.

Darius divided the empire into twenty provinces. Each was under the supervision of a Persian satrap, or governor, who was likely to be related or connected by marriage to the royal family. The satrap's court was a miniature version of the royal court. The tendency for the position of satrap to become hereditary meant that satraps' families lived in the province governed by their head, acquired a fund of knowledge about local conditions, and formed connections with the local native elite. The farther a province was from the center of the empire, the more autonomy the satrap had, because slow communications made it impractical to refer most matters to the central administration. This system of administration brought significant numbers of Persians and other peoples from the center of the empire to the provinces, resulting in intermarriage and cultural and technological exchanges.

One of the satrap's most important duties was to collect and send tribute to the king. Darius prescribed how much precious metal each province was to contribute annually. This amount was forwarded to the central treasury. Some of it was disbursed for necessary expenditures, but most was hoarded. As more and more precious metal was taken out of circulation, the price of gold and silver rose, and provinces found it increasingly difficult to meet their quotas. Evidence from Babylonia indicates a gradual economic decline setting in by the fourth century B.C.E.

Well-maintained and patrolled royal roads connected the outlying provinces to the heart of the empire. Way stations were built at intervals to receive important travelers and couriers carrying official correspondence. At strategic points, such as mountain passes, river crossings, and important urban centers, garrisons controlled people's movements. The administrative center of the empire was Susa, the ancient capital of Elam, in southwest Iran near the present-day border with Iraq.

The king lived and traveled with his numerous wives and children. The little information that we have about the lives of Persian royal women comes from foreign sources and is thus suspect. The Book of Esther in the Hebrew Bible tells a romantic story of how King Ahasuerus' (Xerxes' to the Greeks) picked the beautiful Jewish woman Esther to be one of his wives and how the courageous and clever queen later saved the Jewish people from a plot to massacre them. Greek sources show women of the royal family being used as pawns in the struggle for power. Darius strengthened his claim to the throne by marrying a daughter of Cyrus, and later the Greek conqueror Alexander the Great married a daughter of the last Persian king. Greek sources portray Persian queens as vicious intriguers. However, a recent study suggests that the Greek stereotype misrepresents the important role played by Persian women in protecting family members and mediating conflicts. Both Greek sources and documents within the empire reveal that Persian elite women were politically influential, possessed substantial property, traveled, and were prominent on public occasions.

Besides the royal family, the king's large entourage included several other groups: (1) the sons of Persian aristocrats, who were educated at court and also served as hostages for their parents' good behavior; (2) many noblemen, who were expected to attend the king when they were not otherwise engaged; (3) the central administration, including officials and employees of the treasury, secretariat, and archives; (4) the royal bodyguard; and (5) countless courtiers and slaves. Long gone were the simple days when the king hunted and caroused with his warrior companions. Inspired by Mesopotamian conceptions of monarchy, the king of Persia had become an aloof figure of majesty and splendor: “The Great King, King of Kings, King in Persia, King of countries.” He referred to everyone, even the Persian nobility, as “my slaves,” and anyone who approached him had to bow down before him.

The king owned vast tracts of land throughout the empire. Some of it he gave to his supporters. Donations called “bow land,” “horse land,” and “chariot land” in Babylonian documents obliged the recipient to provide military service. Scattered around the empire were gardens, orchards, and hunting preserves belonging to the king and the high nobility. The paradrayadami (meaning “walled enclosure”—the term has come into English as paradise), a green oasis in an arid landscape, advertised the prosperity that the king could bring to those who loyally served him.

Ahasuerus (uh-HAZZ-yoor-uh-uhz)  Xerxes (ZERK-seez)
Surviving administrative records from the Persian homeland give us a glimpse of how the complex tasks of administration were managed. The Persepolis Treasury and Fortification Texts, inscribed in Elamite cuneiform on baked clay tablets, show that government officials distributed food and other essential commodities to large numbers of workers of many different nationalities. Some of these workers may have been prisoners of war brought to the center of the empire to work on construction projects, maintain and expand the irrigation network, and farm the royal estates. Workers were divided into groups of men, women, and children. Women received less than men of equivalent status, but pregnant women and women with babies received more. Men and women performing skilled jobs received more than their unskilled counterparts.

Tradition remembered Darius as a lawgiver who created a body of “laws of the King” and a system of royal judges operating throughout the empire, as well as encouraging the codification and publication of the laws of the various subject peoples. In a manner that typifies the decentralized character of the Persian Empire, he allowed each people to live in accordance with its own traditions and ordinances.

The central administration was based in Elam and Mesopotamia. This location allowed the kings to employ the trained administrators and scribes of those ancient civilizations. However, on certain occasions the kings returned to one special place back in the homeland. Darius began construction of a ceremonial capital at Persepolis (Parsa). An artificial platform was erected, and on it were built a series of palaces, audience halls, treasury buildings, and barracks. Here, too, Darius and his son Xerxes, who completed the project, were inspired by Mesopotamian traditions, for the great Assyrian kings had created new fortress-cities as advertisements of wealth and power.

Darius’s approach to governing can be seen in the luxuriant relief sculpture that covers the foundations, walls, and stairwells of the buildings at Persepolis. Representatives of all the peoples of the empire—recognizable by their distinctive hair, beards, dress, hats, and

Persepolis (Per-SEH-poe-lis)
footwear—are depicted in the act of bringing gifts to the king. Historians used to think that the sculpture represented a real event that transpired each year at Persepolis, but now they see it as an exercise in what today we would call public relations or propaganda. It is Darius's carefully crafted vision of an empire of vast extent and abundant resources in which all the subject peoples willingly cooperate.

What actually took place at Persepolis? This opulent retreat in the homeland probably was the scene of events of special significance for the king and his people: the New Year's Festival, coronation, marriage, death, and burial. The kings from Darius on were buried in elaborate tombs cut into the cliffs at nearby Naqsh-i Rustam.

Another perspective on what the Persian monarchy claimed to stand for is provided by the several dozen inscriptions that have survived (see Diversity and Domination: The Persian Idea of Kingship).

These inscriptions make it clear that behind Darius and the empire stands the will of god. Ahuramazda, the good lord, made Darius king and gave him a mandate to bring order to a world in turmoil, and, despite his reasonable and just disposition, the king will brook no opposition. Ahuramazda is the great god of a religion called Zoroastrianism, and it is nearly certain that Darius and his successors were Zoroastrians.

The origins of this religion are shrouded in uncertainty. The Gathas, hymns in an archaic Iranian dialect, are said to be the work of Zoroaster (Zarathushtra). The dialect and physical setting of the hymns indicate that Zoroaster lived in eastern Iran. Scholarly guesses about when he lived range from 1700 to 500 B.C.E. He revealed that the world had been created by Ahuramazda, "the wise lord," and was threatened by Angra Mainyu, "the hostile spirit," backed by a host of demons. In this dualistic universe, the struggle between good and evil plays out over twelve thousand years, after which good is destined to prevail, and the world will return to the pure state of creation. In the meantime, humanity is a participant in the cosmic struggle, and individuals are rewarded or punished in the afterlife for their actions.

In addition to Zoroastrianism, the Persians drew on the purity of the body. Corpses were exposed to wild beasts and the elements to prevent them from putrefying in the earth or tainting the sanctity of fire. The Persians still revered major deities from the polytheist past, such as Mithra, associated with the sun and defender of oaths and compacts. They were expected to keep promises and tell the truth. In his inscriptions at Persepolis, Darius castigated evildoers as followers of "the Lie.

Zoroastrianism was one of the great religions of the ancient world. It preached belief in one supreme deity, held humans to a high ethical standard, and promised salvation. It traveled across western Asia with the advance of the Persian Empire, and it may have exerted a major influence on Judaism and thus, indirectly, on Christianity. God and the Devil, Heaven and Hell, reward and punishment, the Messiah and the End of Time all appear to be legacies of this profound belief system.

**The Rise of the Greeks, 1000–500 B.C.E.**

Because Greece was a relatively resource-poor region, the cultural features that emerged there in the first millennium B.C.E. came into being only because the Greeks had access to foreign sources of raw materials and to markets abroad. Greeks were in contact with other peoples, and Greek merchants and mercenaries brought home not only raw materials and crafted goods but also ideas. Under the pressure of population, poverty, war, or political crisis, Greeks moved to other parts of the Mediterranean and western Asia, bringing their language and culture and exerting a powerful influence on other societies. Encounters with the different practices and beliefs of other peoples stimulated the formation of a Greek identity and sparked interest in geography, ethnography, and history. A two-century-long rivalry with the Persian Empire also played a large part in shaping the destinies of the Greek city-states.

**Geography and Resources**

Greece is part of a large ecological zone that encompasses the Mediterranean Sea and the lands surrounding it (see Map 3.5). This zone is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the several ranges of the Alps to the north, the Syrian desert to the east, and the Sahara to the south. The lands lying within this zone have a roughly uniform climate, experience a similar sequence of seasons, and
Our most important internal source of information about the Persian Empire is a group of inscriptions commissioned by several kings. The most extensive and informative of these is the inscription that Darius had carved into a cliff face at Behistun (Beh-HISS-toon), high above the road leading from Mesopotamia to northwest Iran through a pass in the Zagros mountain range. It is written in three versions—Old Persian, the language of the ruling people (quite possibly being put into written form for the first time); Elamite, the language native to the ancient kingdom lying between southern Mesopotamia and the Persian homeland and used in Persia for local administrative documents; and Akkadian, the language of Babylonia, widely used for administrative purposes throughout western Asia. The multilingual inscription accompanied a monumental relief representing Darius looming over a line of bound prisoners, the leaders of the many forces he had to defeat in order to secure the throne after the death of Cambyses in 522 B.C.E.

I am Darius, the great king, king of kings, the king of Persia, the king of countries, the son of Hystaspes, the grandson of Arsames, the Achaemenid . . . from antiquity we have been noble; from antiquity has our dynasty been royal . . .

King Darius says: By the grace of Ahuramazda am I king; Ahuramazda has granted me the kingdom.

King Darius says: These are the countries which are subject unto me, and by the grace of Ahuramazda I became king of them: Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, the countries by the Sea, Lydia, the Greeks, Media, Armenia, Cappadocia, Parthia, Drangiana, Aria, Chorasmia, Bactria, Sogdiana, Gandara, Scythia, Sattagydia, Arachosia and Maka; twenty-three lands in all.

King Darius says: These are the countries which are subject to me; by the grace of Ahuramazda they became subject to me; they brought tribute unto me. Whosoever commands have been laid on them by me, by night or by day, have been performed by them.

King Darius says: Within these lands, whosoever was a friend, him have I surely protected; whosoever was hostile, him have I utterly destroyed. By the grace of Ahuramazda these lands have conformed to my decrees; as it was commanded unto them by me, so was it done.

King Darius says: Ahuramazda has granted unto me this empire. Ahuramazda brought me help, until I gained this empire; by the grace of Ahuramazda do I hold this empire.

King Darius says: The following is what was done by me after I became king.

A lengthy description of the many battles Darius and his supporters fought against a series of other claimants to power follows.

King Darius says: This is what I have done. By the grace of Ahuramazda have I always acted. After I became king, I fought nineteen battles in a single year and by the grace of Ahuramazda I overthrew nine kings and I made them captive . . .

King Darius says: As to these provinces which revolted, lies made them revolt, so that they deceived the people. Then Ahuramazda delivered them into my hand; and I did unto them according to my will.

King Darius says: You who shall be king hereafter, protect yourself vigorously from lies; punish the liars well, if thus you shall think, ‘May my country be secure!’ . . .

King Darius says: On this account Ahuramazda brought me help, and all the other gods, all that there are, because I was not wicked, nor was I a liar, nor was I a tyrant, neither I nor any of my family. I have ruled according to righteousness. Neither to the weak nor to the powerful did I do wrong. Whosoever helped my house, him I favored; he who was hostile, him I destroyed . . .

King Darius says: By the grace of Ahuramazda this is the inscription which I have made. Besides, it was in Aryan script, and it was composed on clay tablets and on
parchment. Besides, a sculptured figure of myself I made. Besides, I made my lineage. And it was inscribed and was read off before me. Afterwards this inscription I sent off everywhere among the provinces. The people unitedly worked upon it.

This is an extremely important historical document. For all practical purposes, it is the only version we have of the circumstances by which Darius, who was not a member of the family of Cyrus, took over the Persian throne and established a new dynasty. The account of these events given by the Greek historian Herodotus, for all its additional (and often suspect) detail, is clearly based, however indirectly, on Darius’ own account. While scholars have doubted the truthfulness of Darius’s claims, the inscription is a resounding example of how the victors often get to impose their version of events on the historical record.

The Behistun inscription is certainly propaganda, but that does not mean that it lacks value. To be effective, propaganda must be predicated on the moral values, political principles, and religious beliefs that are familiar and acceptable in a society, and thus it can provide us with a window on those views. The Behistun inscription also allows us to glimpse something of the personality of Darius and how he wished to be perceived.

Another document, found at Persepolis, the magnificent ceremonial center built by Darius and his son Xerxes, expands on the qualities of an exemplary ruler. While it purports to be the words of Xerxes, it is almost an exact copy of an inscription of Darius from nearby Naqsh-i Rustam, where Darius and subsequent kings were buried in monumental tombs carved into the sheer cliff. This shows the continuity of concepts through several reigns.

A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this excellent thing which is seen, who created happiness for man, who set wisdom and capability down upon King Xerxes.

Proclaims Xerxes the King: By the will of Ahuramazda I am of such a sort, I am a friend of the right, of wrong I am not a friend. It is not my wish that the weak should have harm done him by the strong, nor is it my wish that the strong should have harm done him by the weak.

The right, that is my desire. To the man who is a follower of the lie I am no friend. I am not hot-tempered. Whatever befalls me in battle, I hold firmly. I am ruling firmly my own will.

The man who is cooperative, according to his cooperation thus I reward him. Who does harm, him according to the harm I punish. It is not my wish that a man should do harm; nor indeed is it my wish that if he does harm he should not be punished.

What a man says against a man, that does not persuade me, until I hear the sworn statements of both.

What a man does or performs, according to his ability, by that I become satisfied with him, and it is much to my desire, and I am well pleased, and I give much to loyal men.

Of such a sort are my understanding and my judgment: if what has been done by me you see or hear of, both in the palace and in the expeditionary camp, this is my capability over will and understanding.

This indeed my capability: that my body is strong. As a fighter of battles I am a good fighter of battles. When ever with my judgment in a place I determine whether I behold or do not behold an enemy, both with understanding and with judgment, then I think prior to panic, when I see an enemy as when I do not see one.

I am skilled both in hands and in feet. A horseman, I am a good horseman. A bowman, I am a good bowman, both on foot and on horseback. A spearman, I am a good spearman, both on foot and on horseback.

These skills that Ahuramazda set down upon me, and which I am strong enough to bear, by the will of Ahuramazda, what was done by me, with these skills I did, which Ahuramazda set down upon me.

May Ahuramazda protect me and what was done by me.

**QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS**

1. How does Darius justify his assumption of power in the Behistun inscription? What is his relationship to Ahuramazda, the Zoroastrian god, and what role does divinity play in human affairs?

2. How does Darius conceptualize his empire (look at a map and follow the order in which he lists the provinces), and what are the expectations and obligations that he places on his subjects? What does his characterization of his opponents as “Lie-followers” tell us about his view of human nature?

3. Looking at the document of Xerxes from Persepolis, what qualities (physical, mental, and moral) are desirable in a ruler? What is the Persian concept of justice?

4. To what audiences are Darius and Xerxes directing their messages, and in what media are they being disseminated? Given that Darius himself is, in all likelihood, illiterate, and that so are most of his subjects, what is the effect of the often repeated phrase: “Darius the King says?”

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**Sources:** Behistun inscription translated by L. W. King and R. C. Thompson, *The Sculptures and Inscription of Darius the Great on the Rock of Behistun in Persia,* London, 1907; document from Naqsh-i Rustam (http://www.livius.org/s/xerxes/xerxes_texts.htm#daeva)
are home to similar plants and animals. In the summer a weather front stalls near the entrance of the Mediterranean, impeding the passage of storms from the Atlantic and allowing hot, dry air from the Sahara to creep up over the region. In winter the front dissolves and the ocean storms roll in, bringing waves, wind, and cold. It was relatively easy for people to migrate to new homes within this ecological zone without having to alter familiar cultural practices and means of livelihood.

Greek civilization arose in the lands bordering the Aegean Sea: the Greek mainland, the islands of the Aegean, and the western coast of Anatolia (see Map 4.2). The small islands dotting the Aegean were inhabited from early times. People could cross the water from Greece to Anatolia almost without losing sight of land. From about 1000 B.C.E. Greeks began to settle on the western edge of Anatolia. Rivers that formed broad and fertile plains near the coast made Ionia, as the ancient Greeks called this region, a comfortable place. The interior of Anatolia is rugged plateau, and the Greeks of the coast were in much closer contact with their fellows across the Aegean than with the native peoples of the interior. The sea was always a connector, not a barrier.

Without large rivers, Greek farmers on the mainland depended entirely on rainfall to water their crops (see Environment and Technology: The Farmer’s Year). The limited arable land, thin topsoil, and sparse rainfall in the south could not sustain large populations. In the historical period farmers usually planted grain (mostly barley, which was hardier than wheat) in the flat plain, olive trees at the edge of the plain, and grapevines on the terraced lower slopes of the foothills. Sheep and goats grazed in the hills during the growing season. In northern Greece, where the rainfall is greater and the land opens out into broad plains, cattle and horses were more abundant. These Greek lands had few metal deposits and little timber, although both building stone, including some fine marble, and clay for the potter were abundant.

The difficulty of overland transport, the availability of good anchorages, and the need to import metals, timber, and grain drew the Greeks to the sea. They obtained timber from the northern Aegean, gold and iron from Anatolia, copper from Cyprus, tin from the western Mediterranean, and grain from the Black Sea, Egypt, and Sicily. Sea transport was much cheaper and faster than overland transport.

**The Emergence of the Polis**

The first flowering of Greek culture in the Mycenaean civilization was largely an adaptation of the imported institutions of Middle Eastern palace-dominated states to the Greek terrain. For several centuries after the destruction of the Mycenaean palace-states, Greece lapsed into a “Dark Age” (ca. 1150–800 B.C.E.), during which Greece and the whole Aegean region were largely isolated from the rest of the world.

Within Greece, regions that had little contact with one another developed distinctive local styles in pottery and other crafts. With fewer people to feed, the land was largely given over to grazing flocks of sheep, goats, and cattle. While there was continuity of language, religion, and other aspects of culture, there was a sharp break with the authoritarian Mycenaean political structure and centralized control of the economy.

The isolation of Greece ended around 800 B.C.E. when Phoenician ships began to visit the Aegean (see Chapter 3). By reestablishing contact between the Aegean and the Middle East, the Phoenicians gave Greek civilization an important push and inaugurated what scholars now term the “Archaic” period of Greek history (ca. 800–480 B.C.E.). Soon Greek ships were also plying the waters of the Mediterranean in search of raw materials, trade opportunities, and fertile farmland.

Various evidence reveals the influx of new ideas from the east, such as the appearance of naturalistic human and animal figures and imaginative mythical beasts on painted Greek pottery. The most auspicious gift of the Phoenicians was a writing system. The Phoenicians used a set of twenty-two symbols to represent the consonants in their language, leaving the vowel sounds to be inferred by the reader. To represent Greek vowel sounds, the Greeks utilized some of the Phoenician symbols for which there were no equivalent sounds in the Greek language. This was the first true alphabet, a system of writing that fully represents the sounds of spoken language. An alphabet offers tremendous advantages over systems of writing such as cuneiform and hieroglyphics, whose signs represent entire words or syllables. Because cuneiform and hieroglyphics required years of training and the memorization of several hundred signs, they remained the preserve of a scribal class whose elevated social position stemmed from their mastery of the technology. An alphabet opens the door for more widespread literacy because people can learn an alphabet in a relatively short period of time.

Some scholars maintain that the Greeks first used the alphabet for economic purposes. Others propose that it originated as a vehicle for preserving the oral poetic epics so important to the Greeks. Whatever its first use, the Greeks soon came to employ the new technology to produce new forms of literature, law codes, religious dedications, and epitaphs on gravestones. This
Perhaps the first Greek we can get to know as an individual is Hesiod (HEE-see-uhd). Hesiod lived near a village in Boeotia, in central Greece, around 700 B.C.E. In his poem *Works and Days*, we learn about his work as a farmer and about his relationships with family members and neighbors. The poem is presented as advice to his good-for-nothing brother, stressing the necessity of hard and perpetual work in order to survive. Much of the poem is a kind of farmer’s almanac, describing the annual cycle of tasks on a Greek farm.

As Hesiod makes clear, it was very important for farmers to perform work at the right time. How did Greeks of the Archaic period, with no clocks, calendars, or newspapers, know where they were in the cycle of the year? They oriented themselves by acute observation of natural phenomena such as the flowering of plants and trees and the behavior of animals, the migration of birds and changes in the weather, and the movements of planets, stars, and constellations in the night sky.

Hesiod gives the following advice for determining the proper times for planting and harvesting grain:

> Pleiades rising in the dawning sky,  
> Harvest is nigh.

> Pleiades setting in the waning night,  
> Plowing is right.

The Pleiades (PLEE-uh-dees) is a cluster of seven stars visible to the naked eye. In Greek mythology, the Pleiades were seven sisters whom the gods placed in the sky to help them escape from the hunter Orion. The ancient Greeks observed that individual stars and constellations (groups of stars perceived by the human eye to form images in the sky) moved from east to west during the night and appeared in different parts of the sky at different times of the year. (In fact, the apparent movement of the stars is due to the earth’s rotation on its axis and orbit around the sun against a background of un-moving stars. To earthly observers, however, the stars appear to move.) Hesiod is telling his audience that, when the Pleiades appear above the eastern horizon just before the light of the rising sun makes all the other stars invisible (in May on the modern calendar), a sensible farmer will cut down his grain crop. Some months later (in our September), when the Pleiades dip below the western horizon just before sunrise, it is time to plow the fields and plant seeds for the next year’s harvest.

Other events in nature provide similar indicators:

> Mind now, when you hear the call of the crane  
> Coming from the clouds, as it does year by year:  
> That’s the sign for plowing . . .

does not mean, however, that Greek society immediately became literate in the modern sense. For many centuries, Greece remained a primarily oral culture: people used storytelling, rituals, and performances to preserve and transmit information. Many of the distinctive intellectual and artistic creations of Greek civilization, such as theatrical drama, philosophical dialogues, and political and courtroom oratory, are products of the dynamic interaction of speaking and writing.

One indicator of the powerful new forces at work in the Archaic period was a veritable explosion of population. Studies of cemeteries in the vicinity of Athens show that there was a dramatic population increase (perhaps as much as fivefold or sevenfold) during the eighth century B.C.E. Its causes are not fully understood but probably include the more intensive use of land as farming replaced herding and independent farmers and their families began to work previously unused land on the margins of the plains. A second factor was increasing prosperity based on the importation of food and raw materials. Rising population density led villages to merge and become urban centers.

Greece at this time consisted of hundreds of independent political entities. The Greek *polis* (usually translated “city-state”) consisted of an urban center and the
And even the stern Hesiod allows himself a break at the height of summer:

But when the thistle’s in bloom, and the cicada
Chirps from its perch in a branch, pouring down
Shrill song from its wings in the withering heat,
Then goats are plumpest, wine at its best, women
Most lustful, but men at their feeblest, since Sirius
Scorches head and knees, and skin shrivels up... .
Time to drink sparkling wine
Sitting in the shade, heart satisfied with food,
Face turned toward the cooling West Wind...

Sirius (SIH-ree-uh-s), the brightest star in the sky, rose with the sun in late July. The ancients believed that the addition of its heat to the heat already provided by the sun accounted for sizzling temperatures at this time of year. (The ancient Egyptians connected the rising of Sirius with the beginning of the Nile flood.)

It is clear to any reader of Hesiod’s poem that he and his fellow Greek farmers were intimately attuned to their environment. Their extensive knowledge of the natural world provided them with information vital for survival.

fought in close formation. Protected by a helmet, a breastplate, and leg guards, each hoplite held a round shield over his own left side and the right side of the man next to him and brandished a thrusting spear, keeping a sword in reserve. In this style of combat, the key to victory was maintaining the cohesion of one's own formation while breaking open the enemy's line. Most of the casualties were suffered by the defeated army in flight.

Recent studies have emphasized the close relationship of hoplite warfare to the agricultural basis of Greek society. Greek states were defended by armies of private citizens—mostly farmers—called up for brief periods of crisis, rather than by a professional class of soldiers. Although this kind of fighting called for strength to bear the weapons and armor, and courage to stand one's ground in battle, no special training was needed by the citizen-soldiers. Campaigns took place when farmers were available, in the windows of time between major tasks in the agricultural cycle. When a hoplite army marched into the fields of another community, the enraged farmers of that community, who had expended a lot of hard labor on their land and buildings, could not fail to meet the challenge. Though brutal and terrifying, the clash of two hoplite lines did offer a quick decision. Battles rarely lasted more than a few hours, and the survivors could promptly return home to tend their farms.

The expanding population soon surpassed the capacity of the small plains, and many communities sent excess population abroad to establish independent “colonies” in distant lands. Not every colonist left willingly. Sources tell of people being chosen by lot and forbidden to return on pain of death. Others, seeing an opportunity to escape from poverty, avoid the constraints of family, or find adventure, voluntarily set out to seek their fortunes on the frontier. After obtaining the approval of the god Apollo from his sanctuary at Delphi, the colonists departed, carrying fire from the communal hearth of the “mother-city,” a symbol of the kinship and
religious ties that would connect the two communities. They settled by the sea in the vicinity of a hill or other natural refuge. The “founder,” a prominent member of the mother-city, allotted parcels of land and drafted laws for the new community. In some cases the indigenous population was driven away or reduced to a semiservile status; in other cases there was intermarriage and mixing between colonists and natives.

A wave of colonization from the mid-eighth through mid-sixth centuries B.C.E. spread Greek culture far beyond the land of its origins. New settlements sprang up in the northern Aegean area, around the Black Sea, and on the Libyan coast of North Africa. In southern Italy and on the island of Sicily (see Map 3.5) another Greek core area was established. Although the creation of new homes, farms, and communities undoubtedly posed many challenges for the Greek settlers, they were able to transplant their entire way of life, mostly because of the general similarity in climate and ecology in the Mediterranean lands.

Greeks began to use the term *Hellenes* (Graeci is what the Romans later called them) to distinguish themselves from *barbaroi* (the root of the English word barbarian). Interaction with new peoples and exposure to their different practices made the Greeks aware of the factors that bound them together: their language, religion, and lifestyle. It also introduced them to new ideas and technologies.

Another significant development was the invention of coins in the early sixth century B.C.E., probably in Lydia (western Anatolia). They soon spread throughout the Greek world and beyond. In the ancient world a coin was a piece of metal whose weight and purity, and thus value, were guaranteed by the state. Silver, gold, bronze, and other metals were attractive choices for a medium of exchange: sufficiently rare to be valuable, relatively lightweight and portable (at least in the quantities available to most individuals), seemingly indestructible and therefore permanent, yet easily divided. Prior to the invention of coinage, people in the lands of the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia weighed out quantities of gold, silver, or bronze in exchange for the items they wanted to buy. Coinage allowed for more rapid exchanges of goods as well as for more efficient recordkeeping and storage of wealth. It stimulated trade and increased the total wealth of the society. Even so, international commerce could still be confusing because different states used different weight standards that had to be reconciled, just as people have to exchange currencies when traveling today.

By reducing surplus population, colonization helped relieve pressures within the Archaic Greek world. Nevertheless, this was an era of political instability. Kings ruled the Dark Age societies depicted in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, but at some point councils composed of the heads of noble families superseded the kings. This aristocracy derived its wealth and power from ownership of large tracts of land. Peasant families worked this land; they were allowed to occupy a plot and keep a portion of what they grew. Debt-slaves, too, worked the land. They were people who had borrowed money or seed from the lord and lost their freedom when they were unable to repay the loan. Also living in a typical community were free peasants, who owned small farms, and urban-based craftsmen and merchants, who began to constitute a “middle class.”

In the mid-seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. in one city-state after another, an individual *tyrant*—a person who seized and held power in violation of the normal political institutions and traditions of the community—gained control. Greek tyrants were often disgruntled or ambitious members of the aristocracy, backed by the emerging middle class. New opportunities for economic advancement and the declining cost of metals meant that more and more men could acquire arms. These individuals, who already played an important role as hoplite soldiers in the local militias, must have demanded some political rights as the price of their support for their local tyrant.

Ultimately, the tyrants of this age were unwitting catalysts in an evolving political process. Some were able to pass their positions on to their sons, but eventually the tyrant-family was ejected. Authority in the community developed along one of two lines: toward oligarchy”, the exercise of political privilege by the wealthier members of society, or toward *democracy*, the exercise of political power by all free adult males. In any case, the absence of a professional military class in the early Greek states was essential to broadening the base of political participation.

Greek religion encompassed a wide range of cults and beliefs. The ancestors of the Greeks brought a collection of sky-gods with them when they entered the Greek peninsula at the end of the third millennium B.C.E. Some of the gods represented forces in nature: for example, Zeus sent storms and lightning, and Poseidon was master of the sea and earthquakes. The two great epic poems, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which Greek schoolboys memorized and professional performers recited, put a distinctive stamp on the personalities and characters of...
these deities. The gods that Homer portrayed were anthropomorphic— that is, conceived as humanlike in appearance (though they were taller, more beautiful, and more powerful than mere mortals and had a supernatural radiance) and humanlike in their displays of emotion.

The worship of the gods at state-sponsored festivals was as much an expression of civic identity as of personal piety. **Sacrifice**, the central ritual of Greek religion, was performed at altars in front of the temples that the Greeks built to be the gods’ places of residence. Greeks gave their gods gifts, often as humble as a small cake or a cup of wine poured on the ground, in the hope that the gods would favor and protect them. In more spectacular forms of sacrifice, a group of people would kill one or more animals, spray the altar with the victim’s blood, burn parts of its body so that the aroma would ascend to the gods on high, and enjoy a rare feast of meat. In this way the Greeks created a sense of community out of shared participation in the taking of life.

Greek individuals and communities sought information, advice, or predictions about the future from oracles—sacred sites where they believed the gods communicated with humans. Especially prestigious was the oracle of Apollo at Delphi in central Greece. Petitioners left gifts in the treasuries, and the god responded to their questions through his priestess, the Pythia, who gave forth obscure, ecstatic utterances. Because most Greeks were farmers, fertility cults, whose members worshiped and sought to enhance the productive forces in nature (usually conceived as female), were popular, though often hidden from modern view because of our dependence on literary texts expressing the values of an educated, urban elite.

**New Intellectual Currents**

One distinctive feature of the Archaic period was a growing emphasis on the individual. In early Greek communities the family enveloped the individual, and land belonged collectively to the family, including ancestors and descendants. Ripped out of this communal network and forced to establish new lives on a distant frontier, the colonist became a model of rugged individualism, as did the tyrant who seized power for himself alone. These new patterns led toward the concept of humanism—a valuing of the uniqueness, talents, and rights of the individual—which remains a central tenet of Western civilization.

We see clear signs of individualism in the new lyric poetry—short verses in which the subject matter is intensely personal, drawn from the experience of the poet and expressing his or her feelings and views. Archilochus, a soldier and poet living in the first half of the seventh century B.C.E., made a surprising admission:

> Some barbarian is waving my shield, since I was obliged to leave that perfectly good piece of equipment behind under a bush. But I got away, so what does it matter? Let the shield go; I can buy another one equally good.¹

**Archilochus** (ahr-KIL-uh-kuhs)

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**anthropomorphic** (an-thruh-puh-MORE-fik)

**Pythia** (PITH-ee-uh)

¹ Some barbarian is waving my shield, since I was obliged to leave that perfectly good piece of equipment behind under a bush. But I got away, so what does it matter? Let the shield go; I can buy another one equally good.
Here Archilochus is poking fun at the heroic ideal that scorned a soldier who ran away from the enemy. In challenging traditional values and exploiting the medium to express personal feeling and opinion, lyric poets paved the way for the modern Western conception of poetry.

There were also challenges to traditional religion from thinkers now known as pre-Socratic philosophers (the term pre-Socratic refers to philosophers before Socrates, who in the later fifth century B.C.E. shifted the focus of philosophy to ethical questions). In the sixth century B.C.E., Xenophanes called into question the kind of gods that Homer had popularized.

But if cattle and horses or lions had hands, or were able to draw with their hands and do the works that men can do, horses would draw the forms of the gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make their bodies such as they each had themselves.²

The pre-Socratic philosophers rejected traditional religious explanations of the origins and nature of the world and sought rational explanations. They were primarily concerned with learning how the world was created, what it is made of, and why changes occur. Some pre-Socratic thinkers postulated various combinations of earth, air, fire, and water as the primal elements that combine or dissolve to form the numerous substances found in nature. One advanced the theory that the world is composed of microscopic atoms (from a Greek word meaning “indivisible”) that move through the void of space, colliding randomly and combining in various ways to form the many substances of the natural world. In some respects startlingly similar to modern atomic theory, this model was essentially a lucky intuition, but it is a testament to the sophistication of these thinkers. It is probably no coincidence that most of them came from Ionia and southern Italy, two zones in which Greeks were in close contact with non-Greek peoples. The shock of encountering people with very different ideas may have stimulated new lines of inquiry.

Another important intellectual development also took place in Ionia in the sixth century B.C.E. A group of men later referred to as logographers ("writers of prose accounts"), taking full advantage of the nearly infinite capacity of writing to store information, began gathering data on a wide range of topics, including ethnography (description of a people's physical characteristics and cultural practices), the geography of Mediterranean lands, the foundation stories of important cities, and the origins of famous Greek families. They were the first to write in prose—the language of everyday speech—rather than poetry, which had long facilitated the memorization essential to an oral society. Historia, "investigation/research," was the name they gave to the method they used to collect, sort, and select information. In the mid-fifth century B.C.E., Herodotus (ca. 485–425 B.C.E.), from Halicarnassus in southwest Anatolia, published his Histories. Early parts of the work are filled with the geographic and ethnographic reports, legends, folktales, and marvels dear to the logographers, but in later sections Herodotus focuses on the great event of the previous generation: the wars between the Greeks and the Persian Empire.

Herodotus declared his new conception of his mission in the first lines of the book:

I, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, am here setting forth my history, that time may not draw the color from what man has brought into being, nor those great and wonderful deeds, manifested by both Greeks and barbarians, fail of their report, and, together with all this, the reason why they fought one another.³

In stating that he wants to find out why Greeks and Persians came to blows, he reveals that he has become a historian seeking the causes behind historical events. Herodotus directed the all-purpose techniques of historia to the service of history in the modern sense of the term, thereby narrowing the meaning of the word. For this achievement he is known as the "father of history."

### Athens and Sparta

The two preeminent Greek city-states of the late Archaic and Classical periods were Athens and Sparta. The different character of these two communities underscores the potential for diversity in the evolution of human societies, even those arising in similar environmental and cultural contexts.

The ancestors of the Spartans migrated into the Peloponnese, the southernmost part of the Greek mainland, around 1000 B.C.E. For a time Sparta followed a typical path of development, participating in trade and fostering the arts. Then in the seventh century B.C.E. something happened to alter the destiny of the Spartan state. Instead of sending out colonists when confronted by population pressure, the Spartans crossed their mountainous western frontier and invaded the fertile plain of Messenia (see Map 4.2). Hoplite tactics may

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Xenophanes (zeh-NOFF-uh-nee)  
logographer (loe-GOG-ruff-er)  

Peloponnese (PELL-uh-puh-neze)
have given the Spartans the edge they needed to prevail over fierce Messenian resistance. The result was the takeover of Messenia and the domination of the native population, who descended to the status of helots*, the most abused and exploited population on the Greek mainland.

Fear of a helot uprising led to the evolution of the unique Spartan way of life. The Spartan state became a military camp in a permanent state of preparedness. Territory in Messenia and Laconia (the Spartan homeland) was divided into several thousand lots, which were assigned to Spartan citizens. Helots worked the land and turned over a portion of what they grew to their Spartan masters, who were thereby freed from food production and able to spend their lives in military training and service.

The professional Spartan soldier was the best in Greece, and the Spartan army was superior to all others, since the other Greek states relied on citizen militias called out only in time of crisis. The Spartans, however, paid a huge personal price for their military readiness. At age seven, boys were taken from their families and put into barracks, where they were toughened by a severe regimen of discipline, beatings, and deprivation. A Spartan male's whole life was subordinated to the demands of the state. Sparta essentially stopped the clock, declining to participate in the economic, political, and cultural renaissance taking place in the Archaic Greek world. There were no longer any poets or artists at Sparta. In an attempt to maintain equality among citizens, precious metals and coinage were banned, and Spartans were forbidden to engage in commerce. The fifth-century B.C.E. historian Thucydides*, a native of Athens, remarked that in his day Sparta appeared to be little more than a large village and that no future observer of the ruins of the site would be able to guess its power.

The Spartans rarely put their reputation to the test, practicing a foreign policy that was cautious and isolationist. Reluctant to march far from home for fear of a helot uprising, the Spartans sought to maintain peace in the Peloponnesian League, a system of alliances between Sparta and its neighbors.

Athens followed a different path. In comparison with other Greek city-states, it possessed an unusually large and populous territory: the entire region of Attica. Attica contained a number of moderately fertile plains and was ideally suited for cultivation of olive trees. In addition to the urban center of Athens, located some 5 miles (8 kilometers) from the sea where the sheer-sided Acropolis towered above the Attic Plain, the peninsula was dotted with villages and a few larger towns.

Attica's large land area provided a buffer against the initial stresses of the Archaic period, but by the early sixth century B.C.E. things had reached a critical point. In 594 B.C.E. Solon was appointed lawgiver and was granted extraordinary powers to avert a civil war. He divided Athenian citizens into four classes based on the annual yield of their farms. Those in the top three classes could hold state offices. Members of the lowest class, who had little or no property, could not hold office but were allowed to participate in meetings of the Assembly. This arrangement, which made rights and privileges a function of wealth, was far from democratic. But it broke the absolute monopoly on power of a small circle of aristocratic families, and it allowed for social and political mobility. By abolishing the practice of enslaving individuals for failure to repay their debts, Solon guaranteed the freedom of Athenian citizens.

Despite Solon's efforts to defuse the crisis, political turmoil continued until 546 B.C.E., when an aristocrat named Pisistratus* seized power. To strengthen his position and weaken the aristocracy, the tyrant Pisistratus tried to shift the allegiance of the still largely rural population to the urban center of Athens, where he was the dominant figure. He undertook a number of monumental building projects, including a Temple of Athena on the Acropolis. He also instituted or expanded several major festivals that drew people to Athens for religious processions, performances of plays, and athletic and poetic competitions.

Pisistratus passed the tyranny on to his sons, but with Spartan assistance the Athenians turned the tyrants family out in the last decade of the sixth century B.C.E. In the 460s and 450s B.C.E. Pericles* and his political allies took the last steps in the evolution of Athenian democracy, transferring all power to popular organs of government: the Assembly, Council of 500, and People's Courts. From that time on, men of moderate or little means could hold office and participate in the political process. Men were selected by lot to fill even the highest offices, and they were paid for public service so they could afford to take time off from their work. The focal point of Athenian political life became the Assembly of all citizens. Several times a month proposals were debated there; decisions were openly made, and any citizen could speak to the issues of the day.

*helot (HELL-ut)  Thucydides (thoo-SID-ih-dees)

Pisistratus (pie-SIS-truh-tuhs)
Pericles (PER-eh-kleez)
Early Encounters

Cyrus’s conquest of Lydia in 546 B.C.E. led to the subjugation of the Greek cities on the Anatolian seacoast. In the years that followed, these cities were ruled by local groups or individuals who collaborated with the Persian government so as to maintain themselves in power and allow their cities to operate with minimal Persian interference. All this changed when the Ionian Revolt, a great uprising of Greeks and other subject peoples on the western frontier, broke out in 499 B.C.E. The Persians needed five years and a massive infusion of troops and resources to stamp out the insurrection.

The failed revolt led to the Persian Wars—two Persian attacks on Greece in the early fifth century B.C.E. In 490 B.C.E. Darius dispatched a naval fleet to punish Eretria and Athens, two states on the Greek mainland that had given assistance to the Ionian rebels, and to warn others about the foolhardiness of crossing the Persian king. Eretria was betrayed to the Persians by several of its own citizens, and the survivors were marched off to permanent exile in southwest Iran. Next on the Persians’ list were the Athenians, who probably would have suffered a similar fate if their hoplites had not defeated the lightly-armed Persian troops in a short, sharp engagement at Marathon, 26 miles (42 kilometers) from Athens.

Xerxes (Khshayarsha, r. 486–465 B.C.E.) succeeded his father on the Persian throne and soon turned his attention to the troublesome Greeks. In 480 B.C.E. he set out with a huge invasionary force consisting of the Persian army, contingents summoned from all the peoples of the Persian Empire, and a large fleet of ships drawn from maritime subjects. Crossing the Hellespont (the narrow strait at the edge of the Aegean separating Europe and Asia), Persian forces descended into central and southern Greece (see Map 4.2). Xerxes sent messengers ahead to most of the Greek states, bidding them to offer up “earth and water”—tokens of submission.

Many Greek communities acknowledged Persian overlordship. But in southern Greece an alliance of states bent on resistance was formed under the leadership of the Spartans. This Hellenic League, as modern historians call it, initially failed to halt the Persian advance. At the pass of Thermopylae in central Greece, three hundred Spartans and their king gave their lives to buy time for their fellows to escape. However, after seizing and sacking the city of Athens in 480 B.C.E., the Persians allowed their navy to be lured into the narrow straits of nearby Salamis, where they lost their advantage in numbers and maneuverability and suffered a devastating defeat. The following spring (479 B.C.E.), the Persian land army was routed at Plataea, and the immediate threat to Greece receded.

The collapse of the threat to the Greek mainland did not mean an end to war. The Greeks went on the offensive. Athens’s stubborn refusal to submit to the Persian king, even after the city was sacked twice in two successive years, and the vital role played by the Athenian navy, which made up fully half of the allied Greek fleet, earned the city a large measure of respect. The next phase of the war, designed to drive the Persians away from the Aegean and liberate Greek states still under Persian control, was naval. Thus Athens replaced land-based, isolationist Sparta as leader of the campaign against Persia.

In 477 B.C.E. the Delian League was formed. It was initially a voluntary alliance of Greek states eager to prosecute the war against Persia. In less than twenty years, League forces led by Athenian generals swept the Persians from the waters of the eastern Mediterranean and freed all Greek communities except those in distant Cyprus (see Map 3.5).

The Struggle of Persia and Greece, 546–323 B.C.E. By scholarly convention, the Classical period of Greek history (480–323 B.C.E.) begins with the successful defense of the Greek homeland against the forces of the Persian Empire. Ironically, the Athenians, who had played such a crucial role, exploited these events to become an imperial power. A string of successful campaigns and the passage of time led many of their Greek allies to grow complacent and contribute money instead of military forces. The Athenians used the money to build up and

Eretria (er-EH-tree-uh)  
Thermopylae (thuhr-MOP-uh-lee)  
Salamis (SAH-lah-miss)  
Plataea (pluh-TEE-uh)  
Delian (DEE-ih-yuhn)
staff their navy. Eventually they saw the other members of the Delian League as their subjects and demanded annual contributions and other signs of submission from them. States that tried to leave the League were brought back by force, stripped of their defenses, and rendered subordinate to Athens.

Athens’s mastery of naval technology transformed Greek warfare and politics and brought power and wealth to Athens itself. Unlike commercial ships, whose stable, round-bodied hulls were propelled by a single square sail, military vessels could not risk depending on the wind. By the late sixth century B.C.E. the *trireme*, a sleek, fast vessel powered by 170 rowers, had become the premier warship. The design of the trireme has long been a puzzle, but the unearthing of the slips where these vessels were moored at Athens and recent experiments with a full-scale replica manned by international volunteers have revealed much about the trireme’s design and the battle tactics it made possible. Rowers using oars of different lengths and carefully positioned on three levels so as not to run afoul of one another were able to achieve short bursts of speed of up to 7 knots. Athenian crews, by constant practice, became the best in the eastern Mediterranean.

The emergence at Athens of a democratic system in which each male citizen had, at least in principle, an equal voice is connected to the new primacy of the fleet. Hoplites were members of the middle and upper classes (they had to provide their own protective gear and weapons). Rowers, in contrast, came from the lower classes, but because they were providing the chief protection for the community and were the source of its power, they could insist on full rights.

Possession of a navy allowed Athens to project its power farther than it could have done with a citizen militia (which could be kept in arms for only short periods of time). In previous Greek wars, the victorious state
had little capability to occupy a defeated neighbor permanently (with the exception, as we have seen, of Sparta’s takeover of Messenia). Usually the victor was satisfied with booty and, perhaps, minor adjustments to boundary lines. Athens was able to continually dominate and exploit other, weaker communities in an unprecedented way.

Athens did not hesitate to use military and political power to promote its commercial interests. Athens’s port, Piraeus, grew into the most important commercial center in the eastern Mediterranean. The money collected each year from the subject states helped subsidize the increasingly expensive Athenian democracy as well as underwrite the construction costs of the beautiful buildings on the Acropolis, including the majestic new temple of Athena, the Parthenon. Many Athenians worked on the construction and decoration of these monuments. Instead, the building program was a means by which the Athenian leader Pericles redistributed the profits of empire to the Athenian people and gained extraordinary popularity.

In other ways as well, Athens’s cultural achievements were dependent on the profits of empire. The economic advantages that empire brought to Athens indirectly subsidized the festivals at which the great dramatic tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides and the comedies of Aristophanes were performed. Money is a prerequisite for support of the arts and sciences, and the brightest and most creative artists and thinkers in the Greek world were drawn to Athens. Traveling teachers called Sophists (“wise men”) provided instruction in logic and public speaking to pupils who could afford their fees. The new discipline of rhetoric—the construction of attractive and persuasive arguments—gave those with training and quick wits a great advantage in politics and the courts. The Greek masses became connoisseurs of oratory, eagerly listening for each innovation, yet so aware of the power of words that sophist came to mean one who uses cleverness to distort and manipulate reality.

These new intellectual currents came together in 399 B.C.E. when the philosopher Socrates (ca. 470–399 B.C.E.) was brought to trial. A sculptor by trade, Socrates spent most of his time in the company of young men who enjoyed conversing with him and observing him deflate the pretensions of those who thought themselves wise. He wryly commented that he knew one more thing than everyone else: that he knew nothing. At his trial, Socrates was easily able to dispose of the charges of corrupting the youth of Athens and not believing in the gods of the city. He argued that the real basis of the hostility he faced was twofold: (1) He was being held responsible for the actions of several of his aristocratic students who had tried to overthrow the Athenian democracy. (2) He was being blamed unfairly for the controversial teachings of the Sophists, which were widely believed to be contrary to traditional religious beliefs and to undermine morality. In Athenian trials, juries of hundreds of citizens decided guilt and punishment, often motivated more by emotion than by legal principles. The vote that found Socrates guilty was fairly close. But his lack of contrition in the penalty phase—he proposed that he be rewarded for his services to the state—led the jury to condemn him to death by drinking hemlock. Socrates’ disciples regarded his execution as a martyrdom, and smart young men such as Plato withdrew from public life and dedicated themselves to the philosophical pursuit of knowledge and truth.

This period encompasses the last stage in Greece of the transition from orality to literacy. Socrates himself wrote nothing, preferring to converse with people he met in the street. His disciple Plato (ca. 428–347 B.C.E.) may represent the first generation to be truly literate. He gained much of his knowledge from books and habitually wrote down his thoughts. On the outskirts of Athens, Plato founded the Academy, a school where young men could pursue a course of higher education. Yet even Plato retained traces of the orality of the world in which he had grown up. He wrote dialogues—an oral form—in which his protagonist, Socrates, uses the “Socratic method” of question and answer to reach a deeper understanding of the meaning of values such as justice, excellence, and wisdom. Plato refused to write down the most advanced stages of the philosophical and spiritual training that took place at his Academy. He believed that full apprehension of a higher reality, of which our own sensible world is but a pale reflection, could be entrusted only to “initiates” who had completed the earlier stages.

The third of the great classical philosophers, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), came from Stagira, a community on the Thracian coast. After several decades of study at Plato’s Academy in Athens, he was chosen by the king of Macedonia, Philip II, who had a high regard for Greek culture, to be the tutor of his son Alexander. Later, Aristotle returned to Athens to found his own school, the Lyceum. Of a very different temperament than Plato, who had been drawn to mysticism and metaphysical speculation, Aristotle sought to collect and categorize a vast array of knowledge. He lectured and wrote about politics, philosophy, ethics, logic, poetry, rhetoric, physics, astronomy, meteorology, zoology, and psychology, laying the foundations for many modern disciplines.

Piraeus (pih-RAY-uhhs) Aristophanes (ah-ruh-STOFF-eh-neze)
Inequality in Classical Greece

Athenian democracy, the inspiration for the concept of democracy in the Western tradition, was a democracy only for the relatively small percentage of the inhabitants of Attica who were truly citizens—free adult males of pure Athenian ancestry. Excluding women, children, slaves, and foreigners, this group amounted to 30,000 or 40,000 people out of a total population of approximately 300,000—only 10 or 15 percent.

Slaves, mostly of foreign origin, constituted perhaps one-third of the population of Attica in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E., and the average Athenian family owned one or more. Slaves were needed to run the shop or work on the farm while the master was attending meetings of the Assembly or serving on one of the boards that oversaw the day-to-day activities of the state. The slave was a “living piece of property,” required to do any work, submit to any sexual acts, and receive any punishments that the owner ordained. In the absence of huge estates, there were no rural slave gangs, and most Greek slaves were domestic servants, often working on the same tasks as the master or mistress. Close daily contact between owners and slaves meant, in many cases, that a relationship developed, making it hard for Greek slave owners to deny the essential humanity of their slaves. Still, Greek thinkers rationalized the institution of slavery by arguing that barbaroi (non-Greeks) lacked the capacity to reason and thus were better off under the direction of rational Greek owners.

The position of women varied across Greek communities. The women of Sparta, who were expected to bear and raise strong children, were encouraged to exercise, and they enjoyed a level of public visibility and outspokenness that shocked other Greeks. Athens may have been at the opposite extreme as regards the confinement and suppression of women. Ironically, the exploitation of women in Athens, as of slaves, is linked to the high degree of freedom enjoyed by Athenian men in the democratic state.

Athenian marriages were unequal affairs. A new husband might be thirty, reasonably well educated, a veteran of war, and experienced in business and politics. Under law he had nearly absolute authority over the members of his household. He arranged his marriage with the parents of his prospective wife, who was likely to be a teenager brought up with no formal education and only minimal training in weaving, cooking, and household management. Coming into the home of a husband she hardly knew, she had no political rights and limited legal protection. Given the differences in age, social experience, and authority, the relationship between husband and wife was in many ways similar to that of father and daughter.

The primary function of marriage was to produce children, preferably male. It is impossible to prove the extent of infanticide—the killing through exposure of unwanted children—because the ancients were sufficiently ashamed to say little about it. But it is likely that more girls than boys were abandoned.

Husbands and wives had limited daily contact. The man spent the day outdoors attending to work or political responsibilities; he dined with male friends at night; and usually he slept alone in the men’s quarters. The woman stayed home to cook, clean, raise the children, and supervise the servants. The closest relationship in the family was likely to be between the wife and her slave.
attendant. These women, often roughly the same age, spent enormous amounts of time together. The servant could be sent into town on errands. The wife stayed in the house, except to attend funerals and certain festivals and to make discreet visits to the houses of female relatives. Greek men justified the confinement of women by claiming that they were naturally promiscuous and likely to introduce other men's children into the household—an action that would threaten the family property and violate the strict regulation of citizenship rights.

Without any documents written by women in this period, we cannot tell the extent to which Athenian women resented their situation or accepted it because they knew little else. Women's festivals provided rare opportunities for women to get out. During the three-day Thesmophoria* festival, the women of Athens lived together and managed their own affairs in a great encampment, carrying out mysterious rituals meant to enhance the fertility of the land. The appearance of bold and self-assertive women on the Athenian stage is also suggestive: the defiant Antigone* of Sophocles' play who buried her brother despite the prohibition of the king; and the wives in Aristophanes' comedy Lysistrata* who refused to have sex with their husbands until the men ended a war. Although these plays were written by men and probably reflect a male fear of strong women, the playwrights must have had models in their mothers, sisters, and wives.

The inequality of men and women posed obstacles to creating a "meaningful" relationship between the sexes. To find his intellectual and emotional equal, a man often looked to other men. Bisexuality was common in ancient Greece, as much a product of the social structure as of biological inclinations. A common pattern was that of an older man serving as admirer, pursuer, and mentor of a youth. Bisexuality became part of a system by which young men were educated and initiated into the community of adult males. At least this was true of the elite intellectual groups that loomed large in the Greek world. It is hard to say how prevalent bisexuality and the confinement of women were among the Athenian masses.

The emergence of Athens as an imperial power in the half-century after the Persian invasion aroused the suspicions of other Greek states and led to open hostilities between former allies. In 431 B.C.E. the Peloponnesian War broke out. This nightmarish struggle for survival between the Athenian and Spartan alliance systems encompassed most of the Greek world. It was a war unlike any previous Greek war because the Athenians used their naval power to insulate themselves from the dangers of an attack by land. In midcentury they had built three long walls connecting the city with the port of Piraeus and the adjacent shoreline. At the start of the war, Pericles formulated an unprecedented strategy, refusing to engage the Spartan-led armies that invaded Attica each year. Pericles knew that, as long as Athens controlled the sea lanes and was able to provision itself, the enemy hoplites must soon return to their farms and the city could not be starved into submission by a land-based siege. Thus, instead of culminating in a short, decisive battle like most Greek hoplite warfare, the Peloponnesian War dragged on for nearly three decades with great loss of life and squandering of resources. It sapped the morale of all of Greece and ended only with the defeat of Athens in a naval battle in 404 B.C.E. The Persian Empire had bankrolled the construction of ships by the Spartan alliance, so Sparta finally was able to take the conflict into Athens' s own element, the sea.

The victorious Spartans, who had entered the war championing "the freedom of the Greeks," took over Athens' s overseas empire until their own increasingly highhanded behavior aroused the opposition of other city-states. Indeed, the fourth century B.C.E. was a time of nearly continuous skirmishing among Greek states. One can make the case that the independent polis, from one point of view the glory of Greek culture, was also the fundamental structural flaw because it fostered rivalry, fear, and mistrust among neighboring communities.

Internal conflict in the Greek world allowed the Persians to recoup old losses. By the terms of the King's Peace of 387 B.C.E., to which most of the states of war-weary Greece subscribed, all of western Asia, including the Greek communities of the Anatolian seacoast, were conceded to Persia. The Persian king became the guarantor of a status quo that kept the Greeks divided and weak. Luckily for the Greeks, rebellions in Egypt, Cyprus, and Phoenicia as well as trouble with some of the satraps in the western provinces diverted Persian attention from thoughts of another Greek invasion.

Meanwhile, in northern Greece developments were taking place that would irrevocably alter the balance of power in the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia. Philip II (r. 359–336 B.C.E.) was transforming his previously backward kingdom of Macedonia into the premier military power in the Greek world. (Although southern Greeks had long doubted the "Greekness" of the rough and rowdy Macedonians, modern scholarship is inclined

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**Thesmophoria** (thes-moe-FOE-ree-uh)

**Antigone** (an-TIG-uh-nee)

**Lysistrata** (lis-uh-STRAH-tuh)
to regard their language and culture as Greek at base, though much influenced by contact with non-Greek neighbors.) Philip had made a number of improvements to the traditional hoplite formation. He increased the striking power and mobility of his force by equipping soldiers with longer thrusting spears and less armor. Because horses thrived in the broad, grassy plains of the north, he experimented with the coordinated use of infantry and cavalry. His engineers had also developed new kinds of siege equipment, including the first catapults—machines using the power of twisted cords that, when released, hurled arrows or stones great distances. For the first time it became possible to storm a fortified city rather than wait for starvation to take effect.

In 338 B.C.E. Philip defeated a coalition of southern states and established the Confederacy of Corinth as an instrument for controlling the Greek city-states. Philip had himself appointed military commander for a planned all-Greek campaign against Persia, and his generals established a bridgehead on the Asiatic side of the Hellespont. It appears that Philip was following the advice of Greek thinkers who had pondered the lessons of the Persian Wars of the fifth century B.C.E. and had urged a crusade against the national enemy as a means of unifying their quarrelsome countrymen.

We will never know how far Philip’s ambitions extended, for an assassin killed him in 336 B.C.E. When Alexander (356–323 B.C.E.), his son and heir, crossed over into Asia in 334 B.C.E., his avowed purpose was to exact revenge for Xerxes’ invasion a century and half before. He defeated the Persian forces of King Darius III (r. 336–330 B.C.E.) in three pitched battles in Anatolia and Mesopotamia, and ultimately campaigned as far as the Punjab region of modern Pakistan.

Alexander the Great, as he came to be called, maintained the framework of Persian administration in the lands he conquered. He realized that it was well adapted to local circumstances and familiar to the subject peoples. At first, however, he replaced Persian officials with his own Macedonian and Greek comrades. To control strategic points in his expanding empire, he established a series of Greek-style cities, beginning with Alexandria in Egypt, and he settled wounded and aged former soldiers in them. After his decisive victory at Gaugamela in northern Mesopotamia (331 B.C.E.), he began to experiment with leaving cooperative Persian officials in place. He also admitted some Persians and other Iranians into his army and into the circle of his courtiers, and he adopted elements of Persian dress and court ceremonial. Finally, he married several Iranian women who had useful royal or aristocratic connections, and he pressed his leading subordinates to do the same.

The Hellenistic Synthesis, 323–30 B.C.E.

At the time of his sudden death in 323 B.C.E. at the age of thirty-two, Alexander apparently had made no plans for the succession. Thus his death ushered in a half-century of chaos as the most ambitious and ruthless of his officers struggled for control of the vast empire. When the dust cleared, the empire had been broken up into three major kingdoms, each ruled by a Macedonian dynasty—the Seleucid, Ptolemaic, and Antigonid kingdoms (see Map 4.3). Each major kingdom faced a unique set of problems, and although the three frequently were at odds with one another, a rough balance of power prevented any one from gaining the upper hand and enabled smaller states to survive by playing off the great powers.

Historians call the epoch ushered in by the conquests of Alexander the “Hellenistic Age” (323–30 B.C.E.) because the lands in northeastern Africa and western Asia that came under Greek rule tended to be “Hellenized”—that is, powerfully influenced by Greek culture. This was a period of large kingdoms with heterogeneous populations, great cities, powerful rulers, pervasive bureaucracies, and vast disparities in wealth—a far cry from the small, homogeneous, independent city-states of Archaic and Classical Greece. It was a cosmopolitan age of long-distance trade and communications, which saw the rise of new institutions like libraries and universities, new kinds of scholarship and science, and the cultivation of sophisticated tastes in art and literature. In many respects, in comparison with the preceding Classical era, it was a world much more like our own.

Of all the successor states, the kingdom of the Seleucids, who took over the bulk of Alexander’s conquests, faced the greatest challenges. The Indus Valley and Afghanistan soon split off, and over the course of the third and second centuries B.C.E. Iran was lost to the Parthians. What remained for the Seleucids was a core in Mesopotamia, Syria, and parts of Anatolia, which the Seleucid monarchs ruled from their capital at Syrian Antioch. Their sprawling territories were open to attack from many directions, and, like the Persians before them, they had to administer lands inhabited by many different ethnic groups organized under various political and social forms. In the countryside, where most of the

Seleucid (sih-LOO-sid)  Ptolemaic (tawl-uh-MAY-ik)  Antigonid (an-TIG-uh-nid)  Antioch (AN-tee-awk)
native peoples resided, the Seleucids maintained an administrative structure modeled on the Persian system. They also continued Alexander’s policy of founding Greek-style cities throughout their domains. These cities served as administrative centers and were also the lure that the Seleucids used to attract colonists from Greece. The Seleucids desperately needed Greek soldiers, engineers, administrators, and other professionals.

The dynasty of the Ptolemies* ruled Egypt and sometimes laid claim to adjacent Syria-Palestine. The people of Egypt belonged to only one ethnic group and were fairly easily controlled because the vast majority of them were farmers living in villages alongside the Nile. The Ptolemies were able to take over much of the administrative structure of the pharaohs and to extract the surplus wealth of this populous and productive land. The Egyptian economy was centrally planned and highly controlled. Vast revenues poured into the royal treasury from rents (the king owned most of the land), taxes of all sorts, and royal monopolies on olive oil, salt, papyrus, and other key commodities.

The Ptolemies ruled from Alexandria, the first of the new cities laid out by Alexander himself. Alexandria was situated near to where the westernmost branch of the
Nile runs into the Mediterranean Sea and was meant to be a link between Egypt and the Mediterranean world. Like the Seleucids, the Ptolemies actively encouraged the immigration of Greeks from the homeland and, in return for their skills and collaboration in the military or civil administration, gave them land and a privileged position in the new society. But the Ptolemies did not seek to plant Greek-style cities throughout the Egyptian countryside, and they made no effort to encourage the native population to adopt the Greek language or ways. In fact, so separate was the Greek ruling class from the subject population that only the last Ptolemy, Queen Cleopatra (r. 51–30 B.C.E.), even bothered to learn the language of the Egyptians. For the Egyptian peasant population laboring on the land, life was little changed by the advent of new masters. Yet from the early second century B.C.E., periodic native insurrections in the countryside, which government forces in cooperation with Greek and Hellenized settlers quickly stamped out, were signs of Egyptians' growing resentment of the Greeks' exploitation and arrogance.

In Europe, the Antigonid dynasty ruled the Macedonian homeland and adjacent parts of northern Greece. This was a compact and ethnically homogeneous kingdom, so there was little of the hostility and occasional resistance that the Seleucid and Ptolemaic ruling classes faced. Macedonian garrisons at strong-points gave the Antigonids a toehold in central and southern Greece, and the shadow of Macedonian intervention always hung over the south. The southern states met the threat by banding together into confederations, such as the Achaean League in the Peloponnese, in which the member-states maintained local autonomy but pooled resources and military power.

Athens and Sparta, the two leading cities of the Classical period, stood out from these confederations. The Spartans never quite abandoned the myth of their own invincibility and made a number of heroic but futile stands against Macedonian armies. Athens, which held a special place in the hearts of all Greeks because of the artistic and literary accomplishments of the fifth century B.C.E., pursued a policy of neutrality. The city became a large museum, filled with the relics and memories of a glorious past, as well as a university town that attracted the children of the well-to-do from all over the Mediterranean and western Asia.

In an age of cities, the greatest city of all was Alexandria, with a population of nearly half a million. At the heart of this city was the royal compound, containing the palace and administrative buildings for the ruling dynasty and its massive bureaucracy. The centerpiece of this construction was the Library of Alexandria, which was not only a center for the study and preservation of the works of the ancient world but also a hub of international trade and commerce.
was the magnificent Mausoleum of Alexander. The first Ptolemy had stolen the body of Alexander while it was being brought back to Macedonia for burial. The theft was aimed at gaining legitimacy for Ptolemaic rule by claiming the blessing of the great conqueror, who was declared to be a god. Two harbors served the needs of the many trading ventures that linked the commerce of the Mediterranean with the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. A great lighthouse—the first of its kind, a multistory tower with a fiery beacon visible at a distance of 30 miles (48 kilometers)—was one of the wonders of the ancient world.

Alexandria gained further luster from its famous Library, which had several hundred thousand volumes, and from its Museum, or “House of the Muses” (divinities who presided over the arts and sciences), a research institution that supported the work of the greatest poets, philosophers, doctors, and scientists of the day. The existence of such well-funded institutions made possible significant advances in science, both in the systematization and extension of earlier work. Some of the greatest achievements were in mathematics and astronomy. The mathematical writings of Euclid* (ca. 276–194 B.C.E.) and the astronomical text of Claudius Ptolemy (second century C.E.), each a grand synthesis of Greek accomplishments in these areas, were highly influential in Europe and the Islamic world into early modern times. Aristarchus* (ca. 310–230 B.C.E.) calculated the distances and relative sizes of the moon and sun. He also argued against the prevailing notion that the earth was the center of the universe, asserting that the earth and other planets revolved around the sun, a view that would not be accepted for another 1,800 years. Eratosthenes* (ca. 276–194 B.C.E.) made a surprisingly accurate calculation of the circumference of the earth. While the claim is often made that the Greeks had a strong predilection for abstract theorizing rather than experimental verification and practical application, experience was put to use in some fields. Archimedes* (ca. 287–211 B.C.E.) invented many mechanical devices, including the screw pump for extracting underground water, and developed a technique for determining the volume of an object. Galen* (ca. 129–210 C.E.), a Greek physician of the Roman era, conveyed the legacy of Greek medical knowledge to subsequent ages.

Greek residents of Alexandria enjoyed citizenship in a Greek-style polis with an Assembly, a Council, and officials who dealt with purely local affairs, and they took advantage of public works and institutions that signified the Greek way of life. Public baths and shaded arcades were places to relax and socialize with friends. Ancient plays were revived in the theaters, and musical performances and demonstrations of oratory took place in the concert halls. Gymnasiums offered facilities for exercise and fitness and were places where young men of the privileged classes were schooled in athletics, music, and literature. Jews had their own civic corporation, officials, and courts and predominated in two of the five main residential districts. Other quarters were filled with the sights, sounds, and smells of ethnic groups from Syria, Anatolia, and the Egyptian countryside.

In all the Hellenistic states, ambitious members of the indigenous populations learned the Greek language and adopted elements of the Greek way of life, because doing so put them in a position to become part of the privileged and wealthy ruling class. For the ancient Greeks, to be Greek was primarily a matter of language and lifestyle rather than physical traits. In the Hellenistic Age there was a spontaneous synthesis of Greek and indigenous ways. Egyptians migrated to Alexandria, and Greeks and Egyptians intermarried in the villages of the countryside. Greeks living amid the monuments and descendants of the ancient civilizations of Egypt and western Asia were exposed to the mathematical and astronomical wisdom of Mesopotamia, the elaborate mortuary rituals of Egypt, and the many attractions of foreign religious cults. With little official planning or blessing, stemming from the most part from the day-to-day experiences and actions of ordinary people, a great multicultural experiment unfolded as Greek and Middle Eastern cultural traits clashed and merged.

**Conclusion**

Profound changes took place in the lands of the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia in the first millennium B.C.E. Persians and Greeks played pivotal roles. Let us compare the impacts of these two peoples and assess the broad significance of these centuries.

The empire of the Achaemenid Persians was the largest empire yet to appear in the world. It was also a new kind of empire because it encompassed such a wide variety of landscapes, peoples, and social, political, and economic systems. How did the Persians manage to hold together this diverse collection of lands for more than two centuries?

The answer did not lie entirely in brute force. The
Persians lacked the manpower to install garrisons everywhere, and communication between the central administration and provincial officials was sporadic and slow. They managed to co-opt leaders among the subject peoples who were willing to collaborate in return for being allowed to retain their power and influence. The Persian government demonstrated flexibility and tolerance in its handling of the laws, customs, and beliefs of subject peoples. Persian administration, superimposed on top of local structures, left a considerable role for local institutions.

The Persians also displayed a flair for public relations. The Zoroastrian religion underlined the authority of the king as the appointee of god and upholder of world order. In their art and inscriptions, the Persian kings broadcast an image of a benevolent empire in which the dependent peoples contributed to the welfare of the realm. Certain peoples with long and proud traditions, such as the Egyptians and Babylonians, revolted from time to time. But most subjects found the Persians to be decent enough masters and a great improvement over earlier Middle Eastern empires such as that of the Assyrians.

Western Asia underwent significant changes in the period of Persian supremacy. First, the early Persian kings put an end to the ancient centers of power in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Egypt. Then, by imposing a uniform system of law and administration and by providing security and stability, the Persian government fostered commerce and prosperity, at least for some. Some historians have argued that this period was a turning point in the economic history of western Asia.

Most difficult to assess is the cultural impact of Persian rule. The long-dominant culture of Mesopotamia fused with some Iranian elements. The resulting new synthesis is most visible in the art, architecture, and inscriptions of the Persian monarchs. The lands east of the Zagros Mountains as far as northwest India were brought within this cultural sphere. It has been suggested that the Zoroastrian religion spread across the empire and influenced other religious traditions, such as Judaism, but Zoroastrianism does not appear to have had broad, popular appeal. The Persian administration relied heavily on the scribes and written languages of its Mesopotamian, Syrian, and Egyptian subjects, and literacy remained the preserve of a small, professional class. Thus the Persian language does not seem to have been widely adopted by inhabitants of the empire.

Nearly two centuries of trouble with the Greeks on their western frontier vexed the Persians but was probably not their first priority. It appears that Persian kings were always more concerned about the security of their eastern and northeastern frontiers, where they were vulnerable to attack by the nomads of Central Asia. The technological differences between Greece and Persia were not great. The only difference that seems to have been of significance was a set of arms and a military formation used by the Greeks that often allowed them to prevail over the Persians. The Persian king's response in the later fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. was to hire Greek mercenaries to use hoplite tactics for his benefit.

The shadow of Persia loomed large over the affairs of the Greek city-states for more than two centuries, and even after the repulse of Xerxes' great expeditionary force there was perpetual fear of another Persian invasion. The victories in 480 and 479 B.C.E. did allow the Greek city-states to continue to evolve politically and culturally at a critical time. Athens, in particular, vaulted into power, wealth, and intense cultural creativity as a result of its role in the Greek victory. It evolved into a new kind of Greek state, upsetting the rough equilibrium of the Archaic period by threatening the autonomy of other city-states and changing the rules of war. The result was the Peloponnesian War, which squandered lives and resources for a generation, raised serious doubts about the viability of the city-state, and diminished many people's allegiance to it.

Alexander's conquests brought changes to the Greek world almost as radical as those suffered by the Persians. Greeks spilled out into the sprawling new frontiers in northeastern Africa and western Asia, and the independent city-state became inconsequential in a world of large kingdoms. The centuries of Greek domination had a far more pervasive cultural impact on the Middle East than did the Persian period. Alexander had been inclined to preserve the Persian administrative apparatus, leaving native institutions and personnel in place. His successors relied almost exclusively on a privileged class of Greek soldiers, officers, and administrators.

Equally significant were the foundation of Greek-style cities, which exerted a powerful cultural influence on important elements of the native populations, and a system of easily learned alphabetic Greek writing, which led to more widespread literacy and far more effective dissemination of information. The result was that the Greeks had a profound impact on the peoples and lands of the Middle East, and Hellenism persisted as a cultural force for a thousand years.

**Key Terms**

- Cyrus
- Darius I
- satrap
- Persepolis
Suggested Reading


We are fortunate to have an abundant written literature from ancient Greece, and the testimony of the ancients themselves should be the starting point for any inquiry. Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon chronicled the history of the Greeks and their Middle Eastern neighbors from the sixth through fourth centuries B.C.E. Arrian, who lived in the second century C.E., provides the most useful account of the career of Alexander the Great. Among the many collections of documents in translation, see Michael Crawford and David Whitehead, eds., Archaic and Classical Greece: A Selection of Ancient Sources in Translation (1983). David G. Rice and John E. Stambaugh, eds., Sources for the Study of Greek Religion (1979); Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, eds., Women’s Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation (1982); Thomas Wiedemann, ed., Greek and Roman Slavery (1981); Michael M. Sage, Warfare in Ancient Greece: A Sourcebook (1996), and Michael Gagarin and Paul Woodruff, Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists (1995), are specialized collections. The Perseus Project (www.perseus.tufts.edu) is a remarkable internet site containing hundreds of ancient texts, thousands of photographs of artifacts and sites, maps, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and other resources for the study of Greek (and Roman) civilization.

Victor Davis Hanson, The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization (1995), emphasizes the centrality of farming to the development of Greek institutions and values. Eric A. Havelock, The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present (1986), and Rosalind Thomas, Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece (1992), explore the profound effects of alphabetic literacy on the Greek mind.


Notes

Document-Based Question
Power and Authority in Iran and Greece

Drawing on the following documents, analyze the methods used by Persian and Greek rulers to exert and legitimize their authority.

**Document 1**
Painted Cup of Arcesilas of Cyrene (photo, p. 92)

**Document 2**
Map 4.1 The Persian Empire (p. 94)

**Document 3**
View of the East Front of the Apadana (Audience Hall) at Persepolis, ca. 500 B.C.E. (photo, p. 98)

**Document 4**
The Persian Idea of Kingship (Diversity and Dominance, pp. 100–101)

**Document 5**
The Acropolis at Athens (photo, p. 106)

**Document 6**
Excerpt from Herodotus (p. 109)

**Document 7**
Hellenistic Cameo, Second Century B.C.E. (photo, p. 118)

*How do Documents 3 through 7 demonstrate the importance of cultural continuity in establishing power and authority? What additional types of documents would help you understand how Greek and Persian rulers legitimized their authority?*