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Introduction

I Greek society

The study of the history of ancient Greece is both exciting and infuriating – exciting because of the inherent interest of the way in which Greek society organised itself, and because the members of that society still seem able through their writings to communicate as individuals with us who are the inheritors of much which they created; infuriating because in the course of transmission over two and half millennia much information has disappeared, and because the information which remains often shatters on inspection the first impression of similarity between the Greeks and ourselves.

We hope that the texts and other sources presented here will provide a coherent and comprehensible picture of ancient Greece; certain things, however, need some comment.

The characteristic institution of the Greek world was the *polis*, a small, independent community consisting of an urban nucleus, or *astu*, and territory, or *chōra*. Although a few Greeks chose to spend much or all of their lives away from the place of their birth, for most Greeks existence outside their *polis* was unthinkable. An exile was prepared to go to almost any lengths to secure his return and if a *polis* was destroyed by one great power and restored by another, as sometimes happened, the survivors of the destruction returned to re-people their home. If a colony (*apoikia*) was destroyed, its men were likely to return to the *polis* which had sent them out. A *polis*, indeed, *was* its citizens (*politai*): thus in two significant incidents at the turn of the fifth and fourth centuries, Nikias can tell the Athenian army in danger of being stranded in Sicily (see Ch. 22) that they could constitute themselves into a *polis*; and the Greek mercenaries, who actually found themselves stranded in Central Asia by the death of the Persian pretender for whom they had fought (see **252**), behaved like a *polis* on the move as they fought their way back to Greece.

Second, the religious basis of the Greek *polis*: with the possible (but by no means certain) exception of some philosophers, being a member of a *polis* was for a Greek inseparable from worshipping the gods of that *polis*. At the same time, Greek values depended on the context of the *polis*. It is

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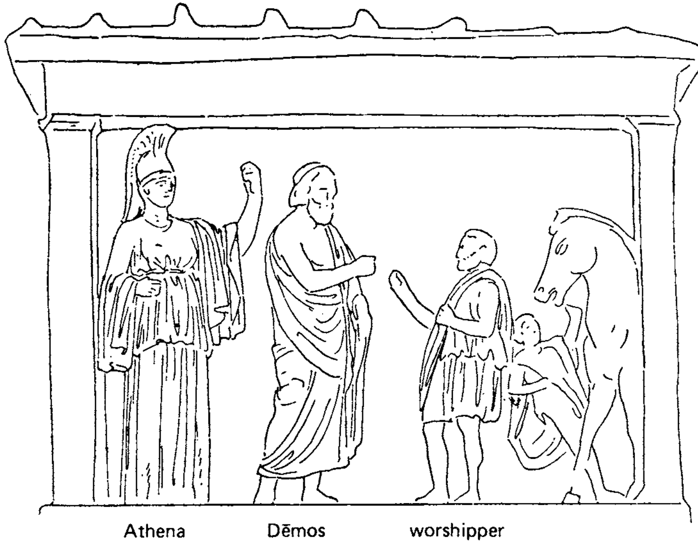

1 Cult relief (S. Reinach, *Repertoire de reliefs grecs et romains* II (Paris, 1912), 332

not surprising that one important facet of the emergence of the *polis* was the achievement of ascendancy of the gods of the *polis* over the gods of the countryside, and the insertion of many important rural cults into the political framework of the community. The characteristic manifestations of Greek religion, cult statue, temple and altar, are already taken for granted by Homer. Furthermore, the practices of Greek religion were quite unlike those of the Judaeo-Christian tradition; a priest was not given any special training and his presence was not necessary for the performance of sacrifice, yet no *polis* was without its priests and the fact that the priests were the priests of the *polis* is crucial. A whole dimension of Greek life, which came forcibly to the front of the stage in 415 (see **214**), is missing if one does not place the religion of a *polis* at the centre of one's understanding of it. Again, the Greeks did not distinguish as we do between myth and history; their stories, *mythoi*, about their gods merged imperceptibly into their stories about what we call their early history; and throughout their history, their myths served to represent and explain their cosmology, their value system and their society. The tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and others (see p. 7) were primarily acts of worship, which characterised and investigated the relationship of men as moral beings to the gods and to other men.

The aim of the *polis* was normally self-sufficiency; and the geological and climatic uniformity of much of the Mediterranean world meant that large-scale transfer of commodities, with one general and one particular

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Excerpt
More information

exception, was not necessary. The general exception is provided by the different metals; some parts of the Greek world had none and none had all that were necessary. It was indeed the search for metals that led to the rediscovery of the outside world after the Dark Ages (see **14**). The particular exception is provided by Athens, which by the middle of the fifth century contained a population larger than could be fed from the resources of Attika; dependence on imported corn was the consequence.

But for most of the Greek world trade was a marginal activity. It was, moreover, marginal not only in quantitative terms; at Athens and as far as we can tell elsewhere trade was largely in the hands of outsiders, not *politai*. The values of the *polis* were predominantly those of farmers and soldiers.

The organisation of production was also vastly different from our own: insofar as production was not in the hands of men who owned and lived without additional labour off their own land or their own business, labour was not characteristically provided by men who worked for a wage; of course, this practice existed, but the characteristic form of additional labour, certainly in Athens from the late sixth century, was slave labour, the labour of men (and women) whose *persons* were owned and controlled by another (see **162**). This is not to say that slaves formed numerically the largest group of labourers in the Greek world as a whole – apart from the existence of labourers for a wage, there were also people in bondage for debt and freed slaves bound to perform services for their former masters; and since some areas of the Greek world never achieved the clear distinction between *politēs*, free non-*politēs* and slave which emerged at Athens, labour provided by means of various forms of customary dependance continued to exist, not to mention the labour of a once free population, now enslaved, exploited by Sparta (see **44**). And when the Greeks moved to settle areas outside Greece, they often reduced the native population to a form of dependence between free and slave (see **19**).

The parenthetical addition of 'women' in the previous paragraph draws attention to another point in which the Greek world was radically different from our own. Neither progressive Athens nor conservative Sparta, nor any other *polis*, conferred even the smallest political role on women; this fact was invariable, though their social role and their function in relation to the transmission of property varied widely. When the Athenian comic poet Aristophanes (see p.8) in two of his plays explored the possibility of rule by women, it was just a fantasy, parallel in its genre to the occasional speculations by philosophers on the possibility of a world without slaves.[1]

1 See J. P. Gould, 'Law, custom and myth: aspects of the social position of women in classical Athens', *JHS* 100 (1980), 38–59.

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The unit which lay between a man and a society was of course the family, understood always in a much more extended sense than the nuclear family normal in the modern western world. It was the family which presented a man for registration as a *politēs* and which guaranteed whatever qualifications of descent or ownership of land were necessary. Within this uniformity, however, there was enormous diversity, illustrated by the fact that at Sparta women became substantial owners of property, while at Athens a woman who became an heiress was forced to marry her nearest male agnate, both divorcing their existing spouses if they had them, in order to return property to the family.

It is indeed precisely the diversity of ancient Greece that we wish to emphasise. Particularly in the fifth and fourth centuries, the period called classical from the supposed perfection of the art which it produced, it is all too easy to talk of Athens and think one is talking of Greece. Politically fragmented, socially at various stages of development, economically diverse, archaic and classical Greece was a mosaic of *poleis*, not a nation.

The Greeks indeed defined themselves only in relation to barbarians who were not Greeks, and then with some difficulty: the criteria were largely linguistic, hardly cultural and not at all racial. Even the rule that one Greek should not enslave another was far from universally observed. The *polis* was at the centre of a man's life, consisting above all of the men who composed its citizen body and only secondarily involving a geographical location – the Athenians, the Spartans, and not Athens, Sparta; to see this it is only necessary to read together Thucydides' account of the disaster which befell the Amprakiots in 426 (III. 109–113) and his account of the Athenian disaster in Sicily (VIII. 1). It is as a presentation and interpretation of the Greek *polis* that we should like this book to be seen.[2]

II The sources

While it is certainly possible to acquire a more or less adequate knowledge of the major events and main characteristics of a period of history from books and articles written about it by modern scholars, the serious student must be prepared to come to grips at first hand with the original texts and documents which those scholars have themselves consulted. This primary source-material falls under two obvious head-

2 For a selection of important recent work on the 'deep structure of ancient Greek thinking about the social nature of man' (J. P. Gould), with which we are not primarily concerned see R. L. Gordon (ed.), *Myth, religion and society. Structuralist essays by M. Detienne, L. Gernet, J. P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet* (Cambridge, 1981).

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ings: (a) written (sometimes called literary) sources and (b) archaeological finds, including inscriptions and coins.

(a) WRITTEN SOURCES

This rubric covers a large and disparate body of material, united only by the means of its transmission to us – the fact that it has been handed down to the age of printing only by repeated copying and recopying in a manuscript tradition[3] – and by the fact that *where it exists* (and often it does not, for particular topics or even whole periods or areas of enquiry) it is usually the type of evidence from which the historian tends to expect, and sometimes gets, the most. Indeed the most obvious way of pinpointing the beginning of the History of a people or society, as opposed to its Prehistory, is to link that demarcation with the appearance of literacy there, and hence with the production sooner or later of what comes to serve as the historian's written source-material; written either at or near the time of the events in question or else (more usually) with reference back to them; written either with an eye to posterity or else (more usually) for consumption and effect at the time. On this criterion, at any rate, Greek History may be deemed to begin in the eighth century, for it was then that Greeks started to write their own language in an alphabetic script (see **4**).

Homer

At first this new and useful facility of reading and writing, in accordance with its Phoinikian origins, perhaps served mainly commercial ends, but before long it had its impact too upon less ephemeral products of the Greek experience – specifically upon two massive epic poems or songs, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The Greeks themselves ascribed them to the authorship of one man, HOMER (Homeros), but if any single individual(s) did play a decisive role in bringing them to completion, that fact is less important for the historian than the clarification, during the modern era of scholarly work, of their essential nature and origins. They were not in fact 'written' – by Homer or anyone else – in the same sense that Vergil wrote the *Aeneid* or Milton *Paradise Lost*; they evolved, as the culmination of several centuries of oral, pre-literate poetic composition and performance, in a highly stylised and formulaic manner, by many generations of creative bards who passed on the subject-matter (and their own skills in transmitting and extending it) from one to another.[4] The whole process was a dynamic one, creative rather than merely repetitive,

3 See on this L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: a guide to the transmission of Greek and Latin literature* (second edition, Oxford, 1974).

4 See in detail G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge, 1962).

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until a crucial conjunction of events occurred in the eighth century: (*a*) the two songs attained to such monumental size and scope as to be hardly capable of further extension, or even satisfactory preservation, by oral techniques, and (*b*) the art of writing made its (re)appearance in the Greek world. On the debit side this meant the end of the creative phase of epic composition – for it is an anthropological commonplace that the advent of literacy has a destructive impact on such oral poetry; but it meant also that the two enormous songs could indeed at last be 'written', i.e. written down, before the techniques and circumstances that had given rise to them had utterly died away.

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* thus constitute the earliest written source-material for the historian of Greece; however, their character and origins, as just described, present him at the outset with an interpretative dilemma. They purport to depict the world of Mycenean Greece (*c.*1400–*c.*1150), and do indeed make mention of artefacts and institutions which belong to that early period. Some scholars have therefore been content without further ado to see them as a reflection of, and thus a source for, the Mycenean period – the fourteenth, thirteenth and twelfth centuries.[5] In 1954, however, M. I. Finley (in *The World of Odysseus*) put forward the view that Homeric society was essentially that of the *tenth* century, the so-called Dark Age which followed the collapse of the Mycenean palace-civilisation; and his thesis received striking and unforeseen support from the decipherment, between 1950 and 1955, of the Mycenean Linear B script, which gave scholars contemporary documentation from Mycenean Greece itself and revealed it to be a society significantly different from that depicted in the Homeric poems.[6] Since the controversies of the 1950s detailed work on the poems, hand in hand with archaeology, has come to appreciate them as an anachronistic amalgam of the institutions and artefacts of all the centuries during which they were growing to their maturity. But one may still ask whether in basic essentials they are rooted in one period or another; and although some scholars emphasise the obstacles to such a belief (see especially A. M. Snodgrass, 'An historical Homeric society?', *JHS* 94 (1974), 114–25), more generally Finley's positive answer to the question, once heretical, is now very much the orthodoxy; indeed many today would advocate a date even later than his and think of the ninth rather than the tenth century. If this is correct (as the authors of this book believe), the *Iliad* and perhaps especially the *Odyssey* become sources of prime importance for the evolution of archaic Greek society out of the

5 E.g. A. J. B. Wace and F. H. Stubbings (eds.), *A Companion to Homer* (London, 1962).
6 See J. Chadwick, *The Decipherment of Linear B* (second edition, Cambridge, 1967).

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preceding Dark Age; and we have utilised Homeric evidence accordingly (see **2, 5, 6, 9, 14, 17**).[7]

Other evidence from poetry

Given the nature of its composition, the epic represented an inevitably impersonal, collective poetic effort rather than a single voice; but the rest of archaic Greek poetry, or what survives of it, is very much a matter of distinctive personalities and individual viewpoints.[8]

First, certainly in time (*c.*700) and arguably in importance also, comes HESIOD (Hesiodos), who lived at Askra in Boiotia, though he tells us that his father had migrated there from Kyme in Asia Minor. Poems of various sorts, all written in the epic vocabulary and metre, were ascribed to him in antiquity, but his main interest for the historian lies in his authorship of the *Works and Days*, an idiosyncratic miscellany of moral advice and practical wisdom, and our first direct insight into the problematical social conditions of the early archaic period (see **10**); he is also the source of much of our knowledge of early Greek agriculture (see Austin and Vidal-Naquet, *Economy* nos. 10 and 31). Indeed many of the poets of this epoch, writing in an unprecedentedly subjective mode, give us evidence direct or indirect of the social and (increasingly) political tensions and changes of their time – in Sparta (TYRTAEUS: **45, 49**), in Athens (SOLON: **66–68**), in Megara (THEOGNIS: **21, 36**) and across the Aegean in Mytilene (ALCAEUS: **24**). Others, however, preferred to see and to emphasise order rather than conflict, continuity rather than change: thus the Sicilian IBYCUS (**33**) and – prolonging the archaic ethos into the middle of the fifth century – the Boiotian PINDAR (Pindaros) (**12**) still sang of the epic heroes, in songs to honour men who still aspired to emulate their virtues and achievements.[9]

But otherwise Greek poetry was never to be so personal again – not at any rate until the Hellenistic period, which lies outside the scope of this book. Instead the classical period, and particularly the fifth century, saw in Athens the flowering of genres of poetic expression and performance in which the concerns of the individual gave way to the concerns of the whole community: political genres in the purest Greek sense of the term, poetry of and for the *polis*. At the centre of the life of any *polis* was its

7 The second edition of *The World of Odysseus* (London, 1977) takes account of developments in the argument since 1954; see especially Appendix 1, 'The world of Odysseus revisited'. For studies of 'Homeric' values which acknowledge a debt to Finley and follow his general approach see especially A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: a study in Greek values* (Oxford, 1960), chs.2–3, and *Moral Values*, ch.2; and see **5–6**.

8 See in general M. L. West in K. J. Dover (ed.), *Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford, 1980), ch.3.

9 On Pindar see C. M. Bowra, *Pindar* (Oxford, 1964).

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calendar of religious festivals; and it was at the festivals in Athens, in the late sixth and early fifth centuries, that *dramatic* poetry first took on recognisable shape. In celebration of the god or goddess, sets of stage plays, both tragedies and comedies, came to be submitted in annual competition. The products of this might well have been purely ephemeral – for each play was performed only the once; yet what actually evolved, during the course of the fifth century, was a succession of enduring poetic and dramatic masterpieces.[10] After such sixth-century pioneers as Thespis (whence our word 'thespian'), the first of the three great names in Attic tragedy is Aeschylus (525/4–456); and his two successors-in-chief are both represented in this book: SOPHOCLES (**158**) and EURIPIDES (**160**). Only rarely were their subjects overtly contemporary ones – Aeschylus' *Persians* of 472 being the obvious surviving example; in so far as it is temporally located at all, the world which tragedy inhabits is akin to the Homeric one, and can only be described as the world of myth;[11] yet even so the nature of the genre was such as to reflect indirectly many of the contemporary political and moral issues prominent at the time of writing. The use of this sort of evidence by historians has sometimes been heavy-handed, but it would be folly to ignore it.[12] As to comedy, its supreme exponent was ARISTOPHANES, whose eleven surviving plays give us invaluable insights into the social and political fabric of Athens between 425 and 388 (see **147, 156, 160, 163, 180, 201, 211, 261**). The genre was a uniquely uninhibited and eclectic one, but within a plot, usually, of escapist fantasy a preoccupation with contemporary issues and personalities is plain to see; and every historian of the period must attempt to evaluate the evidence, biased and distorted as it often is, that these plays provide.[13]

Fifth-century prose

Meanwhile, however, various genres of *prose* literature had been developed also; and these, necessarily, will usually provide the historian with his most direct sources of literary evidence. Prose-writing had evolved in the *poleis* of sixth-century Ionia, as part of an intellectual revolution which had been taking place there: a range of enquiries into

10 See in general K. J. Dover in *Ancient Greek Literature* (n.8, above), ch.4.

11 See B. M. W. Knox, *Word and Action: essays on the ancient theater* (Baltimore, 1979), ch.1, 'Myth and Attic Tragedy'.

12 For some guidance in this see K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality* (Oxford, 1974), 14–18.

13 For recent discussions of the problems here see Meiggs, *Empire*, 391–5; de Ste Croix, *Origins*, 232–4 (with the criticisms of G. A. H. Chapman, *Acta Classica* 21 (1978), 59–70) and 355–76; Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, 18–33. On the genre in general see K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (London, 1972) and *Ancient Greek Literature* (1980), ch.5.

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the observable phenomena of the world had begun to be undertaken, all of them written in prose rather than verse, as almost a declaration in itself of the supremacy of rational thought and investigation over the unexaminable nexus of religion, magic and superstition.[14] This progressive climate had given rise to what the Greeks called *historia* – asking questions.

With the benefit of hindsight we can separate *historia* into various strands. In its earliest and most austere form we should describe it as philosophy, a combination of natural science and metaphysics, with the city of Miletos producing the three great figures – Thales (see **92**), Anaximandros and Anaximenes. But in the fifth century its scope increasingly extended into ethical and political philosophy (the questions raised by the life of human beings as individuals and members of society), in the hands of men whom for convenience we collectively call the Sophists (*sophistai*).[15] Not more than a tiny fraction of their writings survives; for an example here see **243** (DEMOCRITUS); but their influence can be traced in broad terms upon a surprisingly large proportion of the literature, both prose and poetry, of the second half of the fifth century. Just as important, by now, as the *substance* of an argument or enquiry was its *form*, and hence its power to convince, right or wrong; and a fair, if not very distinguished, example of these newly-formulated rules of rhetorical presentation would be the Athenian 'OLD OLIGARCH' (see **135, 140, 143** (with Intro.), **160**).

For our purposes, though, it is more germane to note that there had been developing meanwhile another aspect of *historia* which during the course of the fifth century becomes our principal source of written evidence: genuine historical research and exposition, as we ourselves would understand it. Again Ionia was the place of origin, for there in the late sixth century the new spirit of rational investigation had been interacting with the epic tradition of story-telling and song. Precise beginnings are obscure, but it is clear enough that beside the epic poets and reciters had appeared a crop of writers for whom enquiry into the doings of men, as opposed to gods or heroes, was the chief concern; again their medium was prose, not verse, and these *logographoi* (as they were called), such as another Milesian, Hecataeus (see **102**), were instrumental in furthering an intellectual curiosity and a tradition of disinterested research designed to satisfy it which continued throughout the fifth century and on into the fourth (see below). Their names and their (almost entirely lost) works, opening up fields of study which today we should term geography, ethnography, mythography, etc., need not

14 See on this G. E. R. Lloyd, *Magic, Reason and Experience: studies in the origins and development of Greek science* (Cambridge, 1979).
15 See in general W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge, 1971).

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be recited here; more important is to introduce the two fifth-century historians of major stature who dominate any source-book of this kind, as will be obvious from the Index, and whose achievements in their different fields remained unequalled ever after – HERODOTUS of Halikarnassos, and the Athenian THUCYDIDES.

Herodotus,[16] the earlier of the two (born in the 480s), put a lifetime of travel and tireless curiosity to the service of a great historical work of unprecedented size and scope, best described in the words of his own preface: 'this is an exposition of the *historia* of Herodotus of Halikarnassos, its object to ensure that the passage of time does not erase the past from men's minds and that the great and astonishing achievements of both Greeks and *barbaroi* [see 1] do not go unsung, and to find out in particular why the two peoples made war upon each other'. The work culminated, therefore, in a full-dress narrative of the two unsuccessful Persian invasions of Greece (in 490 and 480: see Ch. 10) – but not before Herodotus had incorporated into it, with apparently effortless ease, a whole mass of historical, ethnographical and anecdotal material relating to Greece and the Near East (including Egypt) during the sixth and early fifth centuries. This was the product to some extent, it would seem, of his reading in the works of the *logographoi*, but for the most part the fruits of his own travels and enquiries, his own first-hand *historia*. A consummate story-teller (albeit in prose) in the epic manner, Herodotus could nonetheless evaluate his material with a rational scepticism inherited from the Ionian natural scientists and philosophers, and speak in an ironic tone of stories which seemed to him implausible (the *locus classicus* is VII. 152); so his ancient title of Father of History is not unjustified. In so far as his standards of accuracy and level of insight fall below our modern expectations, they do so in any case very largely by (unfair) comparison with his indubitably more sophisticated successor Thucydides (born *c.*460–455), the historian of the great Peloponnesian War of 431–404.[17] With Thucydides too his aims and objectives in writing are best

16 Work on H. published up to 1966 is reviewed by G. T. Griffith in *Fifty Years (and Twelve) of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford, 1968), 184–8 and 227–9; since then the most important study is C. W. Fornara, *Herodotus: an interpretative essay* (Oxford, 1971). See also A. D. Momigliano, *Studies in Historiography* (London, 1969), ch.8, 'The place of Herodotus in the history of historiography'; G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *Greece and Rome* 24 (1977), 130–48.

17 There are brief bibliographical surveys by Griffith, *Fifty Years (and Twelve)*, 188–92 and 229–32, and (more fully and idiosyncratically) by K. J. Dover, *Thucydides* (*Greece and Rome*, New Surveys in the Classics no. 7, 1973). See also de Ste Croix, *Origins*, 5–34, and M. I. Finley's introduction to recent editions (since 1972) of the *Penguin Classics* translation by Rex Warner. An indispensable aid to our understanding of Thuc. and our use of his work is A. W. Gomme, A. Andrewes and K. J. Dover, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* (5 vols, Oxford, 1945–1981); see especially Gomme's long introduction to Vol. 1 (pp. 1–87).

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