

# 1 THE HELLENIZATION OF GREECE

There is nothing easier in talking about the past than to ask meaningless questions, which nevertheless still appear sensible. If we ask: ‘Where were the English when Julius Caesar invaded Britain?’ there is no answer; at that date there were no inhabitants of Britain who could be identified as ‘English’. Similarly we must beware of asking questions like: ‘When did the Greeks reach Greece?’ for this presupposes that there were any Greeks outside Greece. Yet this is a question which has often been asked and usually answered.

In both these examples the vital point is the meaning of ‘the Greeks’ or ‘the English’. I intend by these terms speakers of the Greek or English languages respectively, for if they meant simply the inhabitants of Greece or England, the questions would be superfluous. Thus my question about the Greeks supposes the pre-existence of the Greek language outside Greece, a hypothesis for which there is no evidence. The Greek language is known from documents written in Greece from the fourteenth century B.C. onwards, and at various later periods in other countries too as the result of colonizing movements; but its motherland has always been, roughly speaking, the area occupied by the present state of Greece, though perhaps not originally extending as far north as the present frontier.

However, the present domain of a language is not necessarily its original home; the Hungarian language or the Turkish, for instance, must have reached their present areas from much further east. All we can say about Greek is that it seems to have left no traces outside Greece, except where it has spread in historical times. But the existence on the map of ancient Greece of dozens of place names without a meaning in Greek strongly suggests that at one time another language was spoken there, though what this language was we have no means of knowing. Names such as *Korinthos*, *Zakunthos*, *Athānai* (Athens), *Mukānai* (Mycenae), *Knōsos* (the traditional spelling Knossos is strictly incorrect), *Amnisos*, *Tulisos* are certainly derived from one or more unknown languages previously spoken in Greece.

It is this fact, the evidence for a non-Greek-speaking population in prehistoric Greece, which has led serious scholars to ask: ‘When did the

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Greeks enter Greece?’ However, the analogies of well-known historical cases like ‘When did the English enter New Zealand?’ must not blind us to the possibility that the Greek language did not exist before this presumed event, but was formed on Greek soil, just as Modern English was formed in England out of Anglo-Saxon heavily contaminated with Norman French and a few other foreign bodies. Is there any reason why this theory should not be preferred?

The traditional view of waves of Greek-speaking warriors marching down through the Balkans to subjugate Greece is an old one, best supported by the work of an eminent Austrian linguist, Paul Kretschmer, as long ago as the end of the nineteenth century. The form in which this theory has been most often held is that there were three such waves of invaders, usually called Ionians, Achaeans and Dorians, after the classical divisions of the Greek dialects. It was even possible to date these invasions archaeologically: the Ionians would be the people who entered Greece around the twentieth century B.C., the Achaeans about the sixteenth, the Dorians about the twelfth. But this serves to expose one weakness in the theory, for it implies that the Dorians of the twelfth century were still speaking what was recognizably the same language, despite minor differences, eight hundred years after losing contact with their Ionian cousins. Parallels suggest that the differences arising over such a long period would have been far greater than those which can be observed. Although the science of glottochronology, which aims to establish the dates of prehistoric linguistic events from the comparison of dialects or related languages, is not sufficiently exact to enable us to reject the traditional view on these grounds alone, it offers a strong counter-argument. Let us therefore explore the alternative view.

This hypothesis is that the Greek language did not exist before the twentieth century B.C., but was formed in Greece by the mixture of an indigenous population with invaders who spoke another language (Chadwick, 1963). What this other language was is a difficult question. We know that Greek belongs to the great family of Indo-European languages stretching from Iceland and Ireland to the north of India, without counting their extension in comparatively recent times to the Americas, Africa and Australasia. By a comparison of the earliest recorded languages of this family it is possible to reconstruct a great deal of a prehistoric language we call proto-Indo-European, in much the same way as it would be possible to reconstruct Latin, if we did not know it, from Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian. Whether the invaders of Greece spoke pure proto-Indo-European is doubtful; but at least we can be sure of many features of their language, even if the exact stage reached in

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development at the time of their arrival is hard to predict.

When these proto-Greeks, as I shall call them, reached Greece, they mixed with the previous inhabitants, whom they succeeded in subjugating, and borrowed from them many words for unfamiliar objects; and the mispronunciation of Greek by these aboriginals led to permanent changes in the phonetics of the language. The borrowed words are particularly interesting, for they include the names of many plants and animals, as well as terms indicating a high degree of civilization, such as the word for 'bath' or the many terms to distinguish different kinds of pot. Now among the plants are the words for two trees, the cypress and the turpentine-tree. Neither of these grows freely in areas liable to hard frost, hence they are found in the Balkans north of the Aegean basin only in specially sheltered locations. It is therefore unlikely that the proto-Greeks encountered these words outside that area; but since the word for 'cypress' shows a characteristic divergence in the later Greek dialects, it is probable that the splitting of Greek into dialects, in this respect at least, took place inside Greece. Nor does this theory encounter any problems on the archaeological level. The entry of the proto-Greeks can be placed not later than the nineteenth century B.C.; there is now some evidence that the major change occurred in some places even earlier, as long ago as the twenty-second century, when many towns were destroyed and rebuilt on new lines. The changes apparent archaeologically in the sixteenth century are not necessarily to be connected with the arrival of new peoples: the chief effect seems to be an increase in the influence of Crete on Greece.

The events at the end of the Mycenaean period are a problem. Greek traditions suggest that around this time a new branch of the Greek race, the Dorians, moved into the Peloponnese. Certainly the people who occupied all except the centre of the Peloponnese in classical times called themselves Dorians, and spoke closely related dialects. But it has proved impossible to find any unambiguous trace of this movement in the archaeological record; and if they did come from northern Greece, it cannot have been from Thessaly, which seems to have shared in the Mycenaean civilization. The only area they could have started from is the north-west, and this is in keeping with the scraps of information the classical Greeks remembered about the event. But it hardly seems likely that the rugged mountains of Aetolia and Epirus could generate a large enough population to colonize southern Greece on the scale required, however weak the Mycenaean resistance. I now think that we may have to seek a much more fundamental solution to this problem, but since it lies outside the scope of this book, I propose to reserve this for further discussion.

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### *Reconstruction of prehistory*

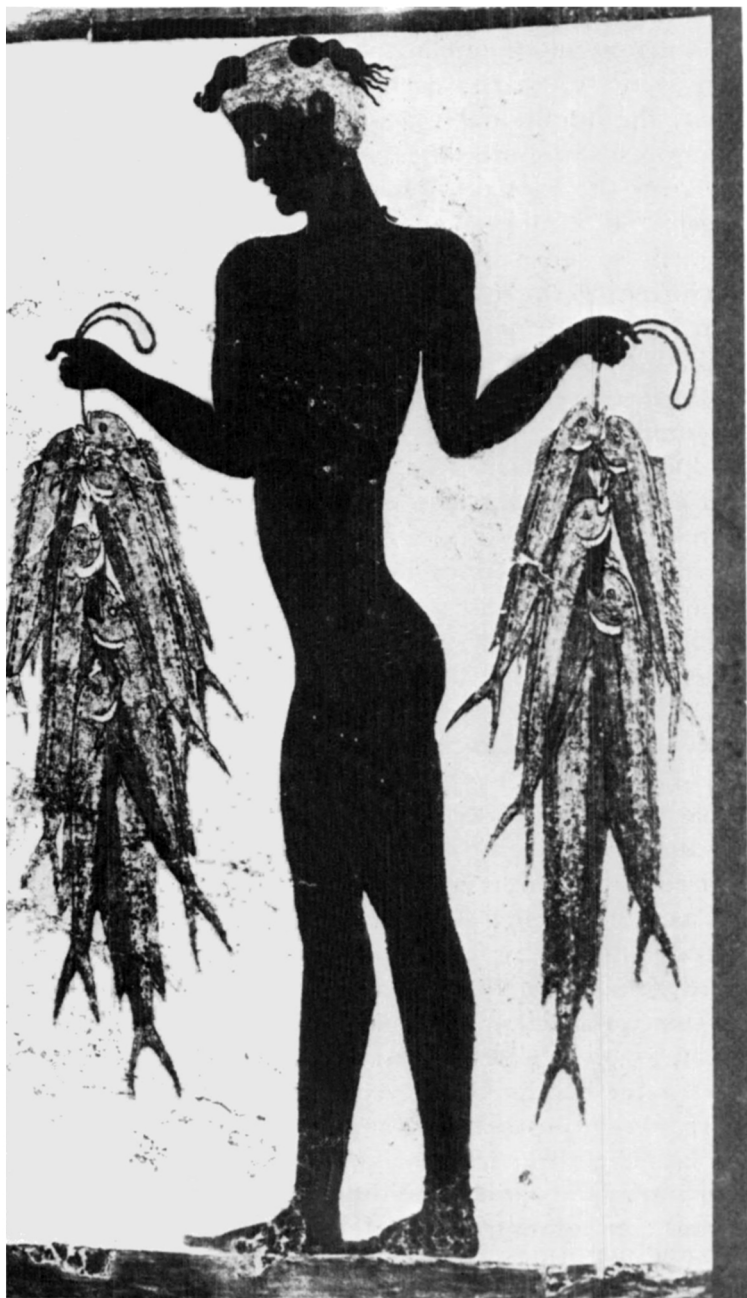
We can now attempt a summary reconstruction of the history of Greece from the twenty-second to the twelfth centuries B.C. The period begins with the incursion, from where we still do not know, of a warlike people possessing the horse, but of a smaller type than those we use now, and with a distinctive kind of pottery. These people establish themselves, perhaps first in central Greece and the north of the Peloponnese, and by mixing with the indigenous peoples create the Greek language, which is extended to the remainder of the mainland, except probably Macedonia. At what date Greek reached the islands is unclear; Thucydides (1.4) talks of Cretan supremacy in this area, and deduces archaeologically the presence of Carians (i.e., the people whom he knew as the inhabitants of south-western Anatolia) in the islands (1.8). Crete was occupied down to the fifteenth century by people who did not speak Greek, for we have their language in written form, and although we cannot securely identify it, there is no doubt that it was not Greek (Chadwick, 1967*b*, 12–15, 154–6). This is the language of the clay tablets and other inscriptions in the Linear A script, which has been found in many parts of Crete, and in traces in the Aegean islands. The Cretans certainly established themselves outside Crete: the islands of Keos (Kéa, off Attica), Kythera (Kíthira, off Lakonia), Melos (Mílos), Rhodes and above all Thera (Santoríni).

It is from Thera that we know most of the Minoan period in the islands, thanks to the immense archaeological excavations at Akrotíri undertaken recently by the Greeks under the late Professor S. Marinátos. At the moment of writing only the southern tip of what may be a large town has been exposed; yet this has revealed large complexes of buildings, streets and squares with walls standing as much as seven or eight metres high. Although none of the buildings so far explored has the typical plan of a Minoan palace, now well known from Crete, the excellent masonry and magnificent wall-paintings prove that we are dealing with more than private houses. At the least this area must have been inhabited by important officials, and it gives the impression of a Kremlin complex rather than a Buckingham Palace.

Around the sixteenth century the Minoan influence on the mainland becomes very marked. Military conquest seems unlikely; the mainlanders, who by this time might deserve the title of Greeks, were always warlike, interested in weapons and hunting, while the Minoans lived in open palaces on sites offering no natural protection. All the refinements of civilization on the mainland in arts and crafts seem to have been borrowed from Crete. The most famous Minoan sport, recorded on frescoes and

Fig. 2

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2 Fresco of a fisherman from Thera

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Fig. 3 many other works of art, was clearly connected with bulls. But there is nothing to suggest any resemblance to the Spanish *corrida de toros*, for all the human participants are unarmed. As Professor Sir Denys Page has pointed out, the traditional view of this sport must be wrong. It is physically impossible for even the most highly trained athlete to perform a somersault over the back of a charging bull, even less to be caught by another performer stationed behind the bull. The apparent positions are due to the artist's failure to show perspective. The sport must have been for the performer to excite the bull to charge him, and then at the crucial moment to leap high in the air, allowing the bull to pass harmlessly underneath, and tucking his legs up so that no contact took place, for contact with an object moving at 50 km.p.h. is likely to be disastrous. Something similar still takes place in the south of France. It must have been a thrilling sport with serious risk to the competitors, but it confirms the impression of the Minoans as a civilized, controlled people, while not lacking in courage. Small wonder that later Greek tradition looked upon the game as a sort of gory sacrifice; the people who made the word for 'foreign-speaking' mean 'barbarous' would not have allowed the Cretans an honourable sport.

Cretan art and craftsmanship, and hence no doubt artists and craftsmen, are now found freely on the mainland. I believe it is to this period that we must assign the adoption, again from the Minoans, of a script as a means of keeping accounts. So long as you manage a small estate, you may be able to exercise adequate control without written records; but as the area under your control grows, the need for an accounting system becomes imperative. This is very likely what happened in the mainland at this time (see Chapter 5); small units ruled by a local baron became amalgamated, whether by peaceful means or imposed unions, until the kingdoms resulting from them needed an army of officials to govern them and direct their production, and hence arose the need for accounts. The Minoans had long since devised a system of keeping accounts, and had gone on to use their script also for recording dedications in shrines. The Greeks borrowed from them the system of writing, both adapting it to their own language and improving the book-keeping. A very simple reform which they introduced was the practice of starting each entry on a new line, and consequently having the tablets 'tailor-made', the dimensions suiting as a rule the text that they were to carry. At this time too there is an obvious access of wealth, and the Mycenaean economy 'took off', as modern economists say. Later on we shall be examining the economic basis for this leap forward.

But all was not well in the Minoan world. During the sixteenth century



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3 Bull sports from a vase found at Hágia Triádha

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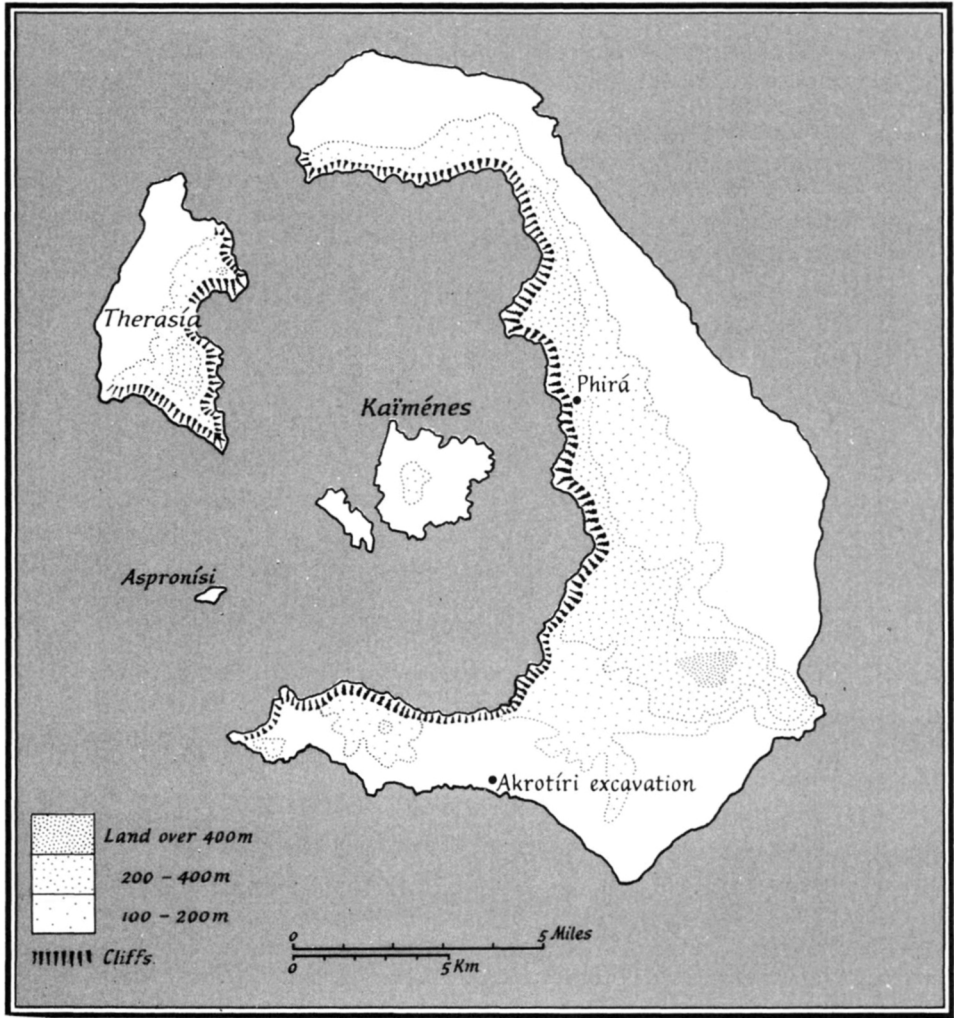
a serious earthquake caused heavy damage in Thera, and apparently simultaneously in Crete, for the same event seems to be recorded in the archaeological strata at Knossos, Phaistos and other Cretan sites. The southern edge of the Aegean is especially liable to earthquakes, for a reason which is easier to grasp now that new views of the movement of the earth's surface have been confirmed. It appears that Greece and the Aegean is carried on a very small 'plate', which is being overridden on its southern edge by the huge African plate as it moves northwards. The result is a deep trench in the sea-floor south of Crete, and frequent earthquakes around the borders of the Aegean plate. The event of the sixteenth century, following upon another a century or so earlier, seems to have been particularly severe. Yet as soon as it was over, the Minoans immediately rebuilt their towns and life continued as before; indeed there are signs of growing development and prosperity in the succeeding period.

A short time later, around 1500 according to Professor Marinátos, a further earthquake, which was not so violent as the previous one, shook Thera. But it must have been accompanied by a more alarming event, a volcanic eruption; for Thera was then a fair-sized island, about 16 km in diameter, roughly circular and rising to a huge conical mountain in the centre. The hitherto dormant volcano must have shown signs of coming to life, for the elegant buildings were abandoned, and we may conjecture that their inhabitants retreated to the greater safety of Crete. Of course, only the upper class could make their getaway; the humble people stayed on, and began to clear the ruins of the earthquake, so that they could occupy the undamaged part of the old buildings.

A short time later, to be measured in months rather than years, the anticipated disaster took place. The volcano began to erupt in earnest, and the town was covered in a deep layer of ash, from which it is now being resurrected by the archaeologists. As the eruption continued, its ferocity increased until the solid mountain was nothing but a hollow shell out of which all the molten rock had been ejected; until in a final paroxysm the whole mountain exploded and the sea rushed in. So all that survives today is a crescent-shaped sector in the east and a much smaller island which was once part of the west coast. An exploding volcano is a rare event but the eruption of Thera seems to have been closely parallel to the eruption of Krakatoa in the strait between Java and Sumatra in A.D. 1883. There was, however, one important difference; the volume of matter lost from the island, and hence the violence of the eruption, was greater in the case of Thera by a factor of at least four, possibly as much as ten, times. For other parallels we must go back to geological times, when, for instance, the island

Fig. 4





4 Thera

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of Ischia erupted in a similar way.

This scientifically attested event has given rise to much controversy. The alleged connexion with Plato's strange tale of a sunken land called Atlantis can be easily dismissed, for the Platonic account contains three major errors (size, date and position), not to mention less serious ones, if it refers to Thera; and if it is really a distant reflexion of this event, it is too distorted to be of any assistance to us in our search for the truth, though it may entertain those who enjoy guessing games.

The more important argument concerns the effects that the explosion would have had elsewhere. We can be sure that the noise was incredibly loud and alarming; Krakatoa was heard in Australia, and the whole Aegean must have been made aware of the fate of Thera by a terrifying roar. The cloud of ash ejected from the volcano will have darkened the sky for hundreds of kilometres around. But the most unpredictable effect will have been on the sea. When the outer wall of the mountain was shattered in two places and the sea rushed in, immense tidal forces were generated, and a wave, known by the Japanese term *tsunami* 'shock-wave', would have been propagated throughout the Aegean. Clear evidence of the wave exists on the island of Anáphi, 27 km to the east, in the shape of layers of pumice at heights up to 250 metres. Pumice has been reported elsewhere, for instance on the site of Nikhória in the southern Peloponnese, but although it can be identified as belonging to a stratum of this date, it clearly reached the site by deliberate cartage, for it is much too high and far from the sea to have been carried by a wave. In fact, the search for wave-damage has been disappointing. The *tsunami* caused by Krakatoa did damage and caused loss of life as far away as Hawaii; how could Thera have failed to cause far worse in the confined waters of the Aegean?

No doubt many coastal settlements were swamped, but archaeological traces are very difficult to find. Moreover, the behaviour of waves in the sea is very complex. The immediate result in the neighbourhood of the volcano would be a slight lowering of the sea level over a large area, so slight that vessels sailing near Krakatoa reported no abnormal waves. Had the Minoan fleet been at sea, it would probably have survived unscathed. But where the wave encountered shallow water, it would build up to a great height; the wave generated by Krakatoa at places reached a height of more than 30 metres. But this would not be true on all coasts, for where the water is deep close inshore, the wave is reflected back and its energy is thus gradually dissipated. Hence we must not suppose that a settlement such as Gourniá, on a low hill a few hundred metres from the sea on the north coast of Crete, would inevitably be swamped. Probably more evidence will come to light as archaeologists begin to look for it.