Introduction

1. Historical Background

The first advanced civilisation in Greece, the bronze-age Mycenaean civilisation of the second millennium, was based not on city states governed by their citizens, but on powerful kingdoms. This civilisation broke up in the twelfth century, and was followed by a dark age in which the population of Greece dwindled, partly through emigration to the islands of the Aegean and the west coast of Asia Minor, and life returned to more primitive levels.

Recovery began in the tenth century, and from *c.* 800 to *c.* 500 we have what is called the archaic period of Greek history, a semi-historical period which resembles an incomplete jigsaw puzzle in which we have the pieces to reconstruct parts of the picture but not the whole. The Greeks were now organised in some hundreds of separate states, which had developed out of the separate, self-sufficient communities of the dark age. A typical state comprised an urban centre and the agricultural land within a few miles of it; its population might be numbered in thousands, but not usually in tens of thousands. At first, it seems, these states had been ruled by kings, but there was no gulf between the kings and the nobility formed by the families which by the end of the dark age had acquired the largest quantities of good land, and before long hereditary monarchy had given way to collective government by the nobles: officials were appointed with limited tenure, to advise them there was a council of leading men, and on occasions when solidarity was important there might be an assembly of all adult male citizens.

The population of Greece grew again, to a point where states could no longer sustain all their inhabitants out of their own resources. Some reduced their population by exporting it to found colonies, mostly replica city states in places around the Mediterranean where farming land could be occupied without opposition. Some took to trade, to exchange goods of which they had a surplus for goods which they needed; and within the state, though for a long time most citizens owned some land and lived to some extent off the produce of it, men such as cobblers plying a specialised trade for a wider circle than their own household appeared. Some strong states tried to enlarge their own territory at the expense of weaker neighbours; and the nature of Greek warfare was transformed, about the first half of the seventh century, by the appearance of the heavily armed infantryman, the hoplite, and the discovery that such soldiers could be used most effectively in large numbers, in the tight formation of a phalanx. In the course of these developments some men and families enriched themselves and others were

impoverished; eventually the introduction of coinage in precious metals (now dated to the sixth century) facilitated the reckoning of wealth in terms other than of agricultural land, and the transfer of wealth from some hands to others. It ceased to seem inevitable that the families which had dominated their cities at the beginning of the eighth century should continue to dominate them for ever. The availability of a simple alphabet (introduced in the eighth century) allowed the arts of reading and writing to spread, and encouraged those who distrusted the nobles to insist that the laws of their state should be made accessible in written form.

By the middle of the eighth century Sparta controlled the whole of Laconia, in the southern Peloponnese: this was a much larger area than most states controlled, and the control was achieved by conquests which left a high proportion of the population subject to Sparta, some as free men in communities under Spartan overlordship, others reduced to a state of servitude. At the end of the eighth century Sparta made further conquests to the west, in Messenia, and probably that war and the assignment of the conquered land brought to the surface the tensions dealt with by the reforms attributed to Lycurgus. The two kings (an unusual phenomenon), the nobles and the citizens of Sparta made common cause against the subject peoples: there was a reorganisation of the citizen body; the roles of kings, council and assembly in decision-making were defined; though private property was not abolished, each citizen was provided by the state with an allotment of land and serfs to work it for him; and, though family life was not abolished, the citizens were enabled to devote themselves almost full-time to a communal military life which with the passage of time was intensified and made the Spartans increasingly different from other Greeks.

In the seventh and sixth centuries tension like that which in Sparta led to the reforms of Lycurgus resulted in the seizure of power in several cities by a tyrant (a word which originally denoted a usurper, but not necessarily a wicked one). Commonly the tyrant was a man on the fringe of the ruling aristocracy, who had been able to gain military and political experience but was in a position to win the support of those who considered themselves economically or politically oppressed. He might rule autocratically or through his state's existing political machinery; though the tyranny was often popular at first, in time it in turn was felt to be oppressive, and no tyranny lasted longer than a hundred years. The nobles were not able to recover their old monopoly of power; sometimes the overthrow of a tyranny was accompanied by a new organisation of the citizen body, superseding the old organisation through which the nobles had exercised influence; and usually all who could afford to equip themselves as hoplites achieved a measure of political power.

The world of the Greek cities, like our own, excluded children from political activity; unlike our own, it excluded women, and in normal circumstances an immigrant had no right (though he might be able by the citizens' special favour) to acquire citizenship of the state in which he settled. As well as citizens and free non-citizens the population of the state commonly included slaves, who were

owned by and would work for the state or an individual, as a free man could not without loss of dignity. Without slaves and free non-citizens the citizens (especially the poorer ones) would not have had the leisure which they did have to devote to politics. The substance, as well as the name, of politics was invented by the Greeks: as far as we know this was the first society in which states were governed not at the whim of an all-powerful ruler but by citizens who 'took it in turn to rule and be ruled' (cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, III. 1277 B 7–30, 1283 B 42–1284 A 22, VII. 1332 B 12–41), in accordance with agreed constitutional procedures, where policy was decided not by intrigue in the court or bedchamber but by debate in the council and assembly.

Sparta dominated Laconia and, in due course, Messenia by conquest; Athens dominated Attica by making all its free inhabitants citizens of Athens. Most other states remained much smaller, and Sparta and Athens found that there were limits beyond which they could not expand. But states found it convenient to establish various kinds of diplomatic relationship with one another, and larger units could be formed if the independence of the component city states was not totally suppressed. Religious unions could be established, like the Amphictyony of peoples interested in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi; in some regions, where no one city was able to predominate like Sparta and Athens, neighbouring cities gave up some but not all of their independence to form a federal state. Sparta, when frustrated in attempts to expand northwards in the sixth century, began attaching other states to herself by means of alliances in which she was in fact if not in theory the major partner, and at the end of the century she gave this collection of alliances the organisation which we call the Peloponnesian League.

The classical period of Greek history, from *c.* 500 to 323, begins with an attempt by the Persian empire to conquer Greece, and ends with the conquest of the Persian empire by Alexander the Great of Macedon. Persia had become the dominant power in the near east in the middle of the sixth century, and had incorporated in her empire the Greek cities on the west coast of Asia Minor. An unsuccessful revolt of these cities, from 498 to 493, had some support from Athens and Eretria; in a first invasion of Greece, in 490, the Persians captured Eretria but were defeated by the Athenians at Marathon; in a second, larger-scale invasion they overran northern and central Greece in 480, but their navy was defeated at Salamis in the autumn of that year and their army at Plataea in 479.

The Greek resistance to Persia was led by Sparta, and after the victory the Greeks carried the war back to Asia Minor under Spartan leadership. But the Spartan commander made himself unpopular, and not all Spartans were eager for overseas adventures, so in 478/7 Athens founded the Delian League of states willing to continue the war and liberate the Greeks still under Persian rule. By the middle of the century the Persians had been pushed as far back as Athens was able and willing to push them; and Athens had used the League to pursue her own interests as well as to fight against the Persians. When fighting against Persia was abandoned the League was kept in being, and treated increasingly as an Athenian empire. However, possessions on the Greek mainland which Athens had acquired

in the early 450s were lost in 447/6, and in 446/5 a treaty intended to last for thirty years recognised the division of the Greek world into a Spartan bloc based on the mainland and an Athenian bloc based on the Aegean.

By this time Athens had developed a self-consciously democratic form of government. Cleisthenes in 508/7 had given Athens machinery which required a high degree of participation by the citizens; the citizens came to enjoy this participation; and in 462/1 Ephialtes took away the powers of political significance exercised by the council of the Areopagus, and transferred them to organs more representative of the citizen body. Fifth-century Greeks became conscious of the differences between democracy and oligarchy. Athens imposed or encouraged democracies in the member states of the Delian League; Sparta, though not a typical oligarchy (the citizen body was a small proportion of the population, but there was a measure of equality within that body), was seen as the champion of oligarchy, and encouraged oligarchic constitutions among her allies.

After the peace of 446/5 Athens accepted that she could not expand on the Greek mainland, but did not accept any other limits to her expansion. Thus she might yet become so powerful as to threaten Sparta's position in Greece, and in 431 Sparta responded to pressure from her allies and embarked on the Peloponnesian War to destroy the Athenian empire. At first Athens seemed invulnerable to what Sparta could do against her; but in 415–413 Athens squandered her resources in an unwise campaign in Sicily, from 412 Sparta was able to enlist the support of the wealthy Persians, and in 404 Athens had to acknowledge defeat. The Athenian democracy was no longer justified by success; but oligarchic régimes in 411–410 and (set up with Spartan backing) in 404–403 were unpopular and short-lived, and in fourth-century Athens the democracy was universally accepted, if not always with enthusiasm.

Sparta decided the peace terms without consulting her allies, and her conduct then and afterwards soon made her more unpopular than Athens had been. Within a few years a reviving Athens joined several of Sparta's former allies in the Corinthian War against Sparta. Meanwhile Persia exacted her price for supporting Sparta in the Peloponnesian War: complete control of Asia Minor, including the Greek cities on the west coast. For some years Sparta fought halfheartedly against Persia to secure a better deal for these cities, but the two wars were too much for her, and in 387/6 she finally abandoned the Asiatic Greeks in the Peace of Antalcidas. This was a new kind of treaty, a Common Peace, which tried to settle all the disputes among the Greek states on the basis of freedom and independence for all except those on the Asiatic mainland; but Sparta as the deviser of the treaty tried to enforce interpretations of it which by weakening her enemies would advance her own interests. Athens acquired considerable support when in 378 she founded the Second Athenian League to resist Spartan imperialism.

But Sparta's appearance of strength belied the reality. The citizen population was declining rapidly; the army, expert at fighting on traditional lines, could not cope with opponents who developed new tactics. At Leuctra in 371 the

Theban-dominated federation of Boeotia defeated Sparta in a major battle. In the years that followed, the Boeotians supported the foundation of an Arcadian federation to the north of Sparta, and in alliance with the Arcadians liberated Messenia from Sparta; the Peloponnesian League broke up, as some members were impelled to make peace with the Boeotians but Sparta herself could not do so without acknowledging Messenia's independence; and Athens found it convenient to abandon the original purpose of her Second League and side with Sparta against Boeotia.

The sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi had been politically unimportant since the oracle had predicted success for the Persian invasion of Greece in 480, but after Leuctra Thebes tried to revive the importance of Delphi and used the Delphic Amphictyony to impose fines on her enemies, Phocis (in whose territory Delphi lay) and Sparta. The Phocians reacted in 356 by seizing Delphi, and the Amphictyons declared a Sacred War against them. Philip II of Macedon, a semi-barbarian kingdom in the north of Greece, proved stronger than any of his predecessors, gained a foothold in Thessaly, and in 346 enabled the Amphictyons to win the war. Some Greeks were happy to collaborate with Philip, but others, including Demosthenes in Athens, saw him as a threat to Greek freedom. At Chaeronea in 338 he defeated an alliance headed by Athens and Thebes, after which he imposed a Common Peace treaty and organised the mainland Greeks (except Sparta, whose continued opposition he could ignore) in the League of Corinth. A Common Peace and a league were reassuringly familiar to fourth-century Greeks, but they provided a framework through which the Greeks were subjected to Philip: for the major states, which had been accustomed to lead rather than to follow, this did represent a serious loss of freedom.

Since the beginning of the fourth century it had often been said that the Greeks' finest hour was when they were united against Persia, and that they ought to combine against Persia again. Persia was the natural next objective for a Macedon which had conquered Greece: Philip was preparing to lead the Macedonians and Greeks against Persia when he was murdered in 336; his son Alexander the Great invaded in 334, and conquered the Persian empire. Thus Greek culture and the Greek language were exported to the near east, and Greek city states, with Greek institutions and Greek and Macedonian inhabitants, were founded in various places. Alexander died in 323, with no heir capable of succeeding to his position (nominally he was succeeded by a mentally defective brother and a baby son). The more ambitious of his generals competed for power, and the empire broke up.

The period from Alexander's death to the Roman conquest is known as the Hellenistic period. Three large kingdoms emerged, those of the Antigonids in Macedon, the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria; there were smaller kingdoms in Asia Minor; and under the shadow of these warring kingdoms the Greek cities tried to assert what independence they could. In many respects life continued very much as before. The kings required flattery, and sometimes

obedience, but they often found it politic to promise that they would respect the freedom of the Greek cities, and on the Greek mainland and in the Aegean islands most cities were free from direct control by any of the kings for much of the time. Manoeuvring between an Antigonus and a Ptolemy was not unlike manoeuvring between Sparta and Athens.

Two leagues of states, based on parts of Greece which had not been prominent in the classical period, now became important: the Aetolian League and the Achaean. Unlike the Peloponnesian and Athenian Leagues, these were not dominated by single states which used them as a means of extending their own power: each began as a regional federation, and then attached to itself members from outside its own region. Aetolia developed from the backward people of the classical period to the League of the Hellenistic, and its influence started to grow after it played a leading part in repelling Gallic invaders who attacked Delphi in 279. The Achaean federation of the classical period broke up at the end of the fourth century, but it was revived from 281/0 and acquired its first member from outside Achaea, Sicyon, in 251/0.

Sparta returned to prominence briefly in the second half of the third century. In 243 king Agis IV proposed an enlargement of the citizen body and a cancellation of debts and redistribution of land, but was thwarted by his opponents. In 227 Cleomenes III remodelled the constitution in order to force through economic and social reforms; but he also challenged the leadership of the Achaean League in the Peloponnese, and in 224–222 the Achaeans enlisted the help of Macedon to defeat Sparta.

Rome first impinged on the Greek world when she made war on Illyrian pirates, and acquired Corcyra and other cities in the north-west of Greece, in 229, and announced her success at the Isthmian Games in 228. In 215 Philip V of Macedon supported Hannibal of Carthage against Rome, and from 212 Rome made alliances with Aetolia and other enemies of Philip. At the end of the Second Macedonian War, in 196, Philip's kingdom was confined to Macedon proper and he was made a 'friend' of Rome, while the Greek cities were declared to be free; in 167 the Antigonids were ousted and Macedon was divided into four republics; in 146 Macedonia was made a Roman province, with the states of Greece attached to it but not included in it.

The next stage in Rome's eastward expansion was the acquisition of western Asia Minor, as the province of Asia, when Attalus III of Pergamum bequeathed his kingdom to Rome in 133. Mithridates VI of Pontus (northern Asia Minor) overran that province and won support in Greece in 89–88, but in 66–63 Pompey the Great finally defeated him and acquired for Rome not only the whole of Asia Minor but also the Seleucid kingdom in Syria. The kingdom of the Ptolemies in Egypt came to an end with the suicide of Cleopatra VII in 30; and the anomalous position of Greece ended when it was made into the province of Achaia in 27. Even after that, Greek cities retained their traditional institutions, but now they had purely local autonomy as municipalities of the Roman empire.

2. The Texts

In choosing material for this book I have had two objectives, which occasionally have pulled in opposite directions: to give the best evidence for the various points which I wished to make, and to give a reasonable cross-section of the evidence available to the student of the Greek city states.

The Greeks rediscovered the art of writing, and adapted the Phoenician script to produce their alphabet, in the eighth century. The earliest written evidence on the city states is to be found in poetry. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, masterpieces attributed to Homer at the end of a long tradition of oral epic poetry, tell stories set in the Mycenaean world four or five hundred years earlier, and combine details from that time, details from the poet's own time and details from the intervening centuries; Tyrtaeus and Solon, involved in crises in their own cities, address their fellow citizens in verse; Theognis deplores challenges to an aristocratic society. Poetic literature continues to be relevant to our study in the classical period: fifth-century Athenian tragedy, though its plots are usually set in the legendary past, sometimes throws light on the authors' own world; and Athenian comedy of the late fifth and early fourth centuries was very much concerned with current issues.

One of the demands faced by the aristocrats of archaic Greece was that the laws should be accessible to the citizens, and from the seventh century we begin to find laws and other public documents inscribed, usually on stone, occasionally on bronze; Athens after the reforms of Ephialtes in 462/1 published documents on stone to an unprecedentedly great extent. Coins are another form of public document. The Greek cities do not provide such a rich variety of designs and legends as the Roman empire was to do, but Greek coins can tell us something about the states that issued them, and in this book I cite coins as evidence for the status of cities within a federal organisation.

Greek literature in prose began in the fifth century, and two fifth-century writers produced historical works of high quality. Herodotus wrote a history of the conflict between the Greeks and the Persians, from the 540s to the war of 480–479, on a discursive plan which allowed him to include a great variety of material on the Greeks and their neighbours in the archaic period; Thucydides wrote a history of the Peloponnesian War, from 431 to 404 (but nothing on the years after 411 was ever published), with stricter criteria of relevance than a modern reader might like, but including a sketch of the growth of Athenian power from 478 onwards. Political theory, with discussion of how states ought to be governed, is found from the second half of the fifth century (the *Athenian Constitution* preserved with the works of Xenophon argues that Athens' democracy is bad, because it promotes the interests of the bad citizens rather than the good, but is stable and good at achieving its objects); systematic analysis of how states actually were governed begins in Aristotle's school in the second half of the fourth century (the *Athenian Constitution* attributed to Aristotle, one of 158 *Constitutions*, gives a history of the development of the democracy at Athens

followed by an account of the working of the constitution in the author's own day). Further material is available to us in speeches written for debates in an assembly or trials in a lawcourt and subsequently published (no doubt in an improved version): we have a large number of Athenian speeches written between *c.* 420 and *c.* 320, and Isocrates wrote his political pamphlets in the form of speeches.

We have no more Greek speeches after *c.* 320 (until speeches were published in the very different circumstances of the Roman empire), and the poetry of the Hellenistic period avoids themes of political relevance; but large numbers of histories were written, local or general, covering a short or a long period; and large numbers of states published their documents. The greatest of the later Greek historians is the second-century writer Polybius, who was taken to Rome as a hostage, was captivated by Rome, and wrote an account of Rome's expansion between 264 and 146. Part of Polybius' history survives; it was a major source for the history of Rome written in Latin in the time of Augustus by Livy, and part of that survives.

Survival is a major problem. Since the invention of printing, texts that have been published have been made available in large or very large numbers, and have been reprinted on various occasions, so that there can be few texts published in quantity of which not a single copy from any printing now survives. The survival of Greek documents on stone or metal depends on what has happened to the objects since they were first inscribed, and on where exploration and excavation have been possible. A literary work was 'published' if one hand-written copy, or a few, passed out of the hands of the author, and it survived only if fresh copies were made in succeeding generations: the libraries of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds contained only a fraction of the works that had once been published, and we now have texts of only a fraction of the works which we know to have been in those libraries. Sometimes the fittest has survived, but not always: we possess about a third of the general history written in the first century by Diodorus Siculus; but Diodorus was not an original researcher or even a reliable summariser, and we should be much better placed if instead we possessed Ephorus and the other sources which Diodorus used. There is also the problem of accuracy. Copyists repeat their predecessors' mistakes and make new mistakes of their own, and after generations of successive copyists we cannot always be sure of recovering the words which an author originally wrote. Texts inscribed on stone or metal, or written on papyrus, are closer in time to the originals than texts in medieval manuscripts, but they too can contain errors, and they rarely survive complete with every letter legible.

Finds of papyrus, almost all in Egypt, have given us older texts of works already available in medieval manuscripts, and also works not otherwise preserved (such as the Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution*, and speeches by Hyperides). There are many works of which we have only 'fragments', quoted in works which do survive more or less complete: most of what we have of the poetry of Tyrtaeus, and all that we have of Solon, has come down to us in this

way; much of what we know of the Aristotelian *Spartan Constitution* comes from the use made of it in Plutarch's *Lycurgus* (which specifically cites 'Aristotle' in a few places, and very probably depends on this source in many more places, though we cannot be sure precisely how many). Thus works written under the Roman empire, like the geography of Strabo, the *Lives* and essays of Plutarch and the guide-book of Pausanias, owe part of their importance to what they preserve from earlier works now lost.

A few texts from a still later period are used in this book. In the later Roman empire, and the Byzantine empire which succeeded it in the eastern Mediterranean, the study of classical texts continued. Summaries of long books were made for those who did not want to read the originals (like that of Pompeius Trogus' history by Justin). Introductions (*hypotheseis*) to and commentaries ('scholia', so their writers are known as scholiasts) on texts were produced; lexica explaining names, words and institutions were compiled; one man would condense the work of a predecessor and add material from another source or contributions from his own learning. Some of these scholars perpetrated glaring mistakes, but others were intelligent men, widely read both in works which survive today and in works now known to us only through their use of them; some were men of distinction in other fields, such as Photius, the ninth-century AD patriarch of Constantinople, to whom we owe not only a lexicon but also notes made in his very extensive reading. Over fifteen hundred years separate the earliest texts used in this book from the latest, and another eleven hundred years separate the latest from today.

In this book [square brackets] are used: in the texts, to enclose explanatory matter which I have inserted; in the references, to enclose an author's name when a work was attributed to him in antiquity but probably or certainly was not written by him (in Index I these works are distinguished by an asterisk before the title). —— or – – – indicates a lacuna in the original text; ... indicates an omission by me from the original text.