

# HISTORY OF GREECE.

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## PART II.

### CONTINUATION OF HISTORICAL GREECE.

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#### CHAPTER IX.

##### CORINTH, SIKYON, AND MEGARA.—AGE OF THE GRECIAN DESPOTS.

**T**HE preceding volume brought down the history of Sparta to the period marked by the reign of Peisistratus at Athens; at which time she had attained her maximum of territory, was confessedly the most powerful state in Greece, and enjoyed a proportionate degree of deference from the rest. I now proceed to touch upon the three Dorian cities on and near to the Isthmus—Corinth, Sikyôn, and Megara, as they existed at this same period.

Even amidst the scanty information which has reached us, we trace the marks of considerable maritime energy and commerce among the Corinthians, as far back as the eighth century B.C. The foundation of Korkyra and Syracuse, in the eleventh Olympiad, or 734 B.C. (of which I shall speak far-

Early commerce and enterprise of the Corinthians.

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ther in connection with Grecian colonization generally), by expeditions from Corinth, affords a good proof that they knew how to turn to account the excellent situation which connected them with the sea on both sides of Peloponnesus: and Thucydides<sup>1</sup>, while he notices them as the chief liberators of the sea in early times from pirates, also tells us that the first great improvement in ship-building—the construction of the trireme, or ship of war, with a full deck and triple banks for the rowers—was the fruit of Corinthian ingenuity. It was in the year 703 B.C., that the Corinthian Ameinoklês built four triremes for the Samians, the first which those islanders had ever possessed: the notice of this fact attests as well the importance attached to the new invention, as the humble scale on which the naval force in those early days was equipped. And it is a fact of not less moment, in proof of the maritime vigour of Corinth in the seventh century B.C., that the earliest naval battle known to Thucydides was one which took place between the Corinthians and the Korkyræans, B.C. 664<sup>2</sup>.

Oligarchy  
of the Bac-  
chiadæ.

It has already been stated, in the preceding volume, that the line of Herakleid kings in Corinth subsides gradually, through a series of empty names, into the oligarchy denominated Bacchiadæ or Bacchiads, under whom our first historical knowledge of the city begins. The persons so named were all accounted descendants of Hêrakilês, and formed the governing caste in the city; intermarrying usually among themselves, and choosing from their own number an annual prytanis, or president, for the

<sup>1</sup> Thucyd. i. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. i. 13.

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administration of affairs. Of their internal government we have no accounts, except the tale respecting Archias the founder of Syracuse<sup>1</sup>, one of their number, who had made himself so detested by an act of brutal violence terminating in the death of the beautiful youth Aktæôn, as to be forced to expatriate. That such a man should have been placed in the distinguished post of Cækist of the colony of Syracuse, gives us no favourable idea of the Bacchiad oligarchy: we do not however know upon what original authority the story depends, nor can we be sure that it is accurately recounted. But Corinth under their government was already a powerful commercial and maritime city, as has already been stated.

Megara, the last Dorian state in this direction eastward, and conterminous with Attica at the point where the mountains called Kerâta descend to Eleusis and the Thriasian plain, is affirmed to have been originally settled by the Dorians of Corinth, and to have remained for some time a dependency of that city. It is farther said to have been at first merely one of five separate villages—Megara, Heræa, Peiræa, Kynosura, Tripodiskus—inhabited by a kindred population, and generally on friendly terms, yet sometimes distracted by quarrels, and on those occasions carrying on war with a degree of lenity and chivalrous confidence which reverses the proverbial affirmation respecting the sanguinary

Early condition of Megara.

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch, *Amator. Narrat. c. 2*, p. 772; Diodor. *Fragm. lib. viii. p. 26*. Alexander *Ætolus* (*Fragm. i. 5*, ed. Schneidewin), and the Scholiast. *ad Apollon. Rhod. iv. 1212*, seem to connect this act of outrage with the expulsion of the Bacchiadæ from Corinth, which did not take place until long afterwards.

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character of enmities between kindred. Both these two statements are transmitted to us (we know not from what primitive source) as explanatory of certain current phrases<sup>1</sup>: the author of the latter cannot have agreed with the author of the former in considering the Corinthians as masters of the Megarid, because he represents them as fomenting wars among these five villages for the purpose of acquiring that territory. Whatever may be the truth respecting this alleged early subjection of Megara, we know it<sup>2</sup> in the historical age, and that too as early as the fourteenth Olympiad, only as an independent Dorian city, maintaining the integrity of its territory under its leader Orsippus the famous Olympic runner, against some powerful enemies, probably the Corinthians. It was of no mean con-

<sup>1</sup> The first account seems referred to Dêmôn (an author of about 280 B.C., and a collector of Attic archæology, or what is called 'Ἀθηδὸγγραφός. See Phanodêmi, Dêmônis, Clitodêmi, atque Istri, Ἀθηδῶν, Fragmenta, ed. Siebelis, Præfatio, p. viii.–xi.), and is given as the explanation of the locution—ὁ Διὸς Κόρυθος. See Schol. ad Pindar. Nem. vii. ad finem; Schol. Aristophan. Ran. 440: the Corinthians seem to have represented their Eponymous hero as son of Zeus, though other Greeks did not believe them (Pausan. ii. 1, 1). That the Megarians were compelled to come to Corinth for demonstration of mourning on occasion of the decease of any of the members of the Bacchiad oligarchy, is, perhaps, a story copied from the regulation at Sparta regarding the Periœki and Helots (Herodot. vi. 57; Pausan. iv. 14, 3; Tyrtæus, Fragm.). Pausanias conceives the victory of the Megarians over the Corinthians, which he saw commemorated in the Megarian *θησαυρός* at Olympia, as having taken place before the first Olympiad, when Phorbas was life-archon at Athens: Phorbas is placed by chronologers fifth in the series from Medon son of Codrus (Pausan. i. 39, 4; vi. 19, 9). The early enmity between Corinth and Megara is alluded to in Plutarch, De Malignitate Herodoti, p. 868, c. 35.

The second story noticed in the text is given by Plutarch, Question. Græc. c. 17, p. 295, in illustration of the meaning of the word *Δορύξενος*.

<sup>2</sup> Pausanias, i. 44, 1, and the epigram upon Orsippus in Boëckh, Corpus Inscript. Gr. No. 1050, with Boëckh's commentary.

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sideration, possessing a territory which extended across Mount Geraneia to the Corinthian Gulf, on which the fortified town and port of Pêgæ, belonging to the Megarians, was situated ; it was mother of early and distant colonies,—and competent, during the time of Solon, to carry on a protracted contest with the Athenians, for the possession of Salamis, wherein, although the latter were at last victorious, it was not without an intermediate period of ill-success and despair.

Of the early history of Sikyôn, from the period when it became Dorian down to the seventh century B.C., we know nothing. Our first information respecting it, concerns the establishment of the despotism of Orthagoras, about 680–670 B.C. And it is a point deserving of notice, that all the three above-mentioned towns—Corinth, Sikyôn, and Megara—underwent during the course of this same century a similar change of government. In each of them a despot established himself : Orthagoras in Sikyôn; Kypselus in Corinth; Theagenês in Megara.

Early condition of Sikyôn.

Unfortunately we have too little evidence as to the state of things by which this change of government was preceded and brought about, to be able to appreciate fully its bearing. But what draws our attention to it more particularly is, that the like phenomenon seems to have occurred contemporaneously throughout a large number of cities, continental, insular and colonial, in many different parts of the Grecian world. The period between 650 and 500 B.C., witnessed the rise and downfall of many despots and despotic dynasties, each in its own separate city. During the succeeding interval be-

Rise of the despots.

tween 500 and 350 B.C., new despots, though occasionally springing up, become more rare: political dispute takes another turn, and the question is raised directly and ostensibly between the many and the few—the people and the oligarchy. But in the still later times which follow the battle of Chæroneia, in proportion as Greece declining in civic not less than in military spirit, is driven to the constant employment of mercenary troops, and humbled by the overruling interference of foreigners—the despot with his standing foreign body-guard becomes again a characteristic of the time—a tendency partially counteracted, but never wholly subdued, by Aratus and the Achæan league of the third century B.C.

Earliest  
changes of  
government in  
Greece.

It would have been instructive if we had possessed a faithful record of these changes of government in some of the more considerable of the Grecian towns; but in the absence of such evidence, we can do little more than collect the brief sentences of Aristotle and others respecting the causes which produced them. For as the like change of government was common, near about the same time, to cities very different in locality, in race of inhabitants, in tastes and habits, and in wealth, it must partly have depended upon certain general causes which admit of being assigned and explained.

In the preceding volume I tried to elucidate the heroic government of Greece, so far as it could be known from the epic poems—a government founded (if we may employ modern phraseology) upon divine right as opposed to the sovereignty of the people, but requiring, as an essential condition,

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that the king shall possess force, both of body and mind, not unworthy of the exalted breed to which he belongs<sup>1</sup>. In this government the authority, which pervades the whole society, all resides in the king: but on important occasions it is exercised through the forms of publicity: he consults, and even discusses, with the council of chiefs or elders—he communicates after such consultation with the assembled Agora,—who hear and approve, perhaps hear and murmur, but are not understood to exercise an option or to reject. In giving an account of the Lycurgian system, I remarked that the old primitive Rhetræ (or charters of compact) indicated the existence of these same elements—a king of superhuman lineage (in this particular case two coordinate kings); a senate of twenty-eight old men, besides the kings who sat in it; and an Ekklesia or public assembly of citizens, convened for the purpose of approving or rejecting propositions submitted to them, with little or no liberty of discussion. The elements of the heroic government of Greece are thus found to be substantially the same as those existing in the primitive Lycurgian constitution; in both cases the predominant force residing in the kings, and the functions of the senate—still more those of the public assembly—being comparatively narrower and restricted: in both cases the regal authority being upheld by a certain religious sentiment, which tended to exclude rivalry and to ensure submission in the people up to a certain point, in spite of misconduct or deficiency in the reigning

<sup>1</sup> See a striking passage in Plutarch, *Præcept. Reipubl. Gerend.* c. 5. p. 801.

individual. Among the principal Epirotic tribes this government subsisted down to the third century B.C.<sup>1</sup>, though some of them had passed out of it, and were in the habit of electing annually a president out of the gens to which the king belonged.

Peculiarity  
of Sparta.

Starting from these points, common to the Grecian heroic government, and to the original Lycurgian system, we find that in the Grecian cities generally the king is replaced by an oligarchy, consisting of a limited number of families, while at Sparta the kingly authority, though greatly curtailed, is never abolished. And the different turn of events at Sparta admits of being partially explained. It so happened that for five centuries neither of the two coordinate lines of Spartan kings was ever without some male representatives, so that the sentiment of divine right, upon which their pre-eminence was founded, always proceeded in an undeviating channel. That sentiment never wholly died out in the tenacious mind of Sparta, but it became sufficiently enfeebled to occasion a demand for guarantees against abuse. If the senate had been a more numerous body, composed of a few principal families, and comprising men of all ages, it might perhaps have extended its powers so much as to absorb those of the king: but a council of twenty-eight very old men, chosen indiscriminately from all Spartan families, was essentially an adjunct and secondary force: it was insufficient even as a restraint upon the king, still less was it competent to become his rival; and it served indirectly even as a support to him, by preventing the formation

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch, Pyrrh. c. 5. Aristot. Polit. v. 9, 1.



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of any other privileged order powerful enough to be an overmatch for his authority. This insufficiency on the part of the senate was one of the causes which occasioned the formation of the annually renewed Council of Five, called the Ephors; originally a defensive board like the Roman Tribunes, intended as a restraint upon abuse of power in the kings, but afterwards expanding into a paramount and irresponsible Executive Directory. Assisted by endless dissensions between the two coordinate kings, the Ephors encroached upon their power on every side, limited them to certain special functions, and even rendered them accountable and liable to punishment, but never aspired to abolish the dignity. That which the regal authority lost in extent (to borrow the just remark of king Theopompus<sup>1</sup>) it gained in durability: the descendants of the twins Eurysthenês and Proklês continued in possession of their double sceptre from the earliest historical times down to the revolutions of Agis III. and Kleomenês III.—generals of the military force, growing richer and richer, and revered as well as influential in the state, though the Directory of Ephors were their superiors. And the Ephors became in time quite as despotic, in reference to internal affairs, as the kings could ever have been before them; for the Spartan mind, deeply possessed with the feelings of command and obedience, remained comparatively insensible to the ideas of control and responsibility, and even averse to that open discussion and censure of public measures or officers which such ideas imply. We must

<sup>1</sup> Aristot. Polit. v. 9, 1.

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recollect that the Spartan political constitution was both simplified in its character and aided in its working by the comprehensive range of the Lycurgian discipline, with its rigorous equal pressure upon rich and poor, which averted many of the causes elsewhere productive of sedition—habituating the proudest and most refractory citizen to a life of undeviating obedience—satisfying such demand as existed for system and regularity—rendering Spartan personal habits of life much more equal than even democratical Athens could parallel, but contributing at the same time to engender a contempt for talkers, and a dislike of methodical and prolonged speech, which of itself sufficed to exclude all regular interference of the collective citizens, either in political or judicial affairs.

Discontinuance of kingship in Greece generally.

Such were the facts at Sparta ; but in the rest of Greece the primitive heroic government was modified in a very different manner : the people outgrew, much more decidedly, that feeling of divine right and personal reverence which originally gave authority to the king. Willing submission ceased on the part of the people, and still more on the part of the inferior chiefs, and with it ceased the heroic royalty. Something like a system or constitution came to be demanded.

Comparison with the middle ages of Europe.

Of this discontinuance of kingship, so universal in the political march of Hellas, the prime cause is doubtless to be sought in the smallness and concentrated residence of each distinct Hellenic society. A single chief, perpetual and irresponsible, was noway essential for the maintenance of union. In modern Europe, for the most part, the different