

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08220-4 - A History of Greece: To the Death of Alexander the Great

John Bagnell Bury

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTORY

GREECE AND THE AEGEAN

THE rivers and valleys, the mountains, bays, and islands of Greece will become familiar, as our story unfolds itself, and we need not enter here into any minute description. But it is useful at the very outset to grasp some general features which went to make the history of the Greeks what it was, and what otherwise it could not have been. The character of their history is so intimately connected with the character of their dwelling-places that we cannot conceive it apart from their land and seas.

Of Spain, Italy, and Illyricum, the three massy promontories of *The* which southern Europe consists, Illyricum in the east would have *Illyrian* closely resembled Spain in the west, if it had stopped short at the *(or Balkan)* north of Thessaly and if its offshoot Greece had been sunk beneath *peninsula.* the waters. It would then have been no more than a huge block of solid land, at one corner almost touching the shores of Asia, as Spain almost touches the shores of Africa. But Greece, its southern continuation, has totally different natural features, which distinguish it alike from Spain the solid square and Italy the solid wedge, and make the eastern basin of the Mediterranean strikingly unlike the western. Greece gives the impression of a group of nesses and islands. Yet in *Character* truth it might have been as solid and unbroken a block of continent, *of Greece :* on its own smaller scale, as the massive promontory from which it juts. Greece may be described as a mountainous headland broken across the middle into two parts by a huge rift, and with its whole *the Gulf of* eastern side split into fragments. We can trace the ribs of the frame- *Corinth ;* work, which a convulsion of nature bent and shivered, for the service, as it turned out, of the human race. The mountains which form *the moun-* Thessaly's eastern barrier, Olympus, Ossa, and Pelion ; the mountains *tain ribs ;* of the long island of Euboea ; and the string of islands which seem to hang to Euboea as a sort of tail, should have formed a perpetual mountainous chain—the rocky eastern coast of a solid promontory.

Æ

B

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08220-4 - A History of Greece: To the Death of Alexander the Great

John Bagnell Bury

Excerpt

[More information](#)

imaginary reconstruction. Again, the ridges of Pindus which divide Thessaly from Epirus find their prolongation in the heights of Tymphrestus and Corax, and then, in an oblique south-eastward line, deflected from its natural direction, the chain is continued in Parnassus, Helicon, and Cithaeron, in the hills of Attica, and in the islands which would be part of Attica, if Attica had not dipped beneath the waters. In the same way the mountains of the Peloponnesus are a continuation of the mountains of Epirus. Thus restoring the framework in our imagination and raising the dry-land from the sea, we reconstruct, as the Greece that might have been, a lozenge of land, ribbed with chains of hills stretching south-eastward far out into the Aegean. If nature had given the Greeks a land like this, their history would have been entirely changed; and by imagining it we are helped to understand how much they owed to the accidents of nature. In a land of capes and deep bays and islands it was determined that waterways should be the ways of their expansion. They were driven as it were into the arms of the sea.

IM-PORTANT GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES. 1. The Great Inlet (Gulf of Corinth). The most striking feature of continental Greece is the deep gulf which has cleft it asunder into two parts. The southern half ought to have been an island—as its Greek name, “the island of Pelops,” suggests—but it holds on to the continent by a narrow bridge of land at the eastern extremity of the great cleft. Now this physical feature had the utmost significance for the history of Greece; and its significance may be viewed in three ways, if we consider the existence of the dividing gulf, the existence of the isthmus, and the fact that the isthmus was at the eastern and not at the western end. 1. The double effect of the gulf itself is clear at once. It let the sea in upon a number of folks who would otherwise have been inland mountaineers, and increased enormously the length of the seaboard of Greece. Further, the gulf constituted southern Greece a world by itself; so that it could be regarded as a separate land from northern Greece—an island practically, with its own insular interests. 2. But if the island of Pelops had been in very truth an island, if there had been no isthmus, there would have been from the earliest ages direct and constant intercourse between the coasts which are washed by the Aegean and those which are washed by the Ionian Sea. The eastern and western lands of Greece would have been brought nearer to one another, when the ships of trader or warrior, instead of tediously circumnavigating the Peloponnesus, could sail from the eastern to the western sea through the middle of Greece. The disappearance of the isthmus would have revolutionised the roads of traffic and changed the centres of commerce; and the wars of Grecian history would have been fought out on other lines. How important the isthmus was may perhaps be best illustrated by a

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08220-4 - A History of Greece: To the Death of Alexander the Great

John Bagnell Bury

Excerpt

[More information](#)

GREECE AND THE AEGEAN

3

modern instance on a far mightier scale. Remove the bridge which joins the southern to the northern continent of America, and contemplate the changes which ensue in the routes of trade and in the conditions of naval warfare in the great oceans of the globe. 3. Again, if the bridge which attached the Peloponnesus to the mainland had been at the western end of the gulf, the lands along either shore of the inlet would have been accessible easily, and sooner, to the commerce of the Aegean and the orient; the civilisation of north-western Greece might have been more rapid and intense; and the history of Boeotia and Attica, unhooked from the Peloponnesus, would have run a different course.

The character of the Aegean basin was another determining condition of the history of the Greeks. Strewn with countless islands it seems meant to promote the intercourse of folk with folk. The Cyclades, which, as we have seen, belong properly to the framework of the Greek continent, pass imperceptibly into the isles which the Asiatic coast throws out, and there is formed a sort of island bridge, inviting ships to pass from Greece to Asia. The western coast of Lesser Asia belongs, in truth, more naturally to Europe than to its own continent; it soon became part of the Greek world; and the Aegean might be considered then as the true centre of Greece.

The west side of Greece too was well furnished with good harbours, and though not as rich in bays and islands as the east, was a favourable scene for the development of trade and civilisation. It was no long voyage from Corcyra to the heel of Italy, and the inhabitants of western Greece had a whole world open to their enterprise. But that world was barbarous in early times and had no civilising gifts to offer; whereas the peoples of the eastern seaboard looked towards Asia and were drawn into contact with the immemorial civilisations of the Orient. The backward condition of western as contrasted with eastern Greece in early ages did not depend on the conformation of the coast, but on the fact that it faced away from Asia; and in later days we find the Ionian Sea a busy scene of commerce and lined with prosperous communities which are fully abreast of Greek civilisation.

The northern coast of Africa, confronting and challenging the three peninsulas of the Mediterranean, has played a remarkable part in the history of southern Europe. From the earliest times it has been historically associated with Europe, and the story of geology illustrates the fitness of this connexion. Western Europe and western Africa were once united by bridges of continuous land, in the days when Sahara was a sea; and this ancient continent, which we might call Europo-Libya, was perhaps inhabited by peoples of a

*II. The Aegean.**The west.**III. Position of Greece in regard to Africa. Land-bridges in the Mediterranean in the*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08220-4 - A History of Greece: To the Death of Alexander the Great

John Bagnell Bury

Excerpt

[More information](#)

pliocene period :
(1) at Gibraltar;
(2) Italy—Sicily—
Tunis (and possibly (3) Greece—Cythera—Crete—Cyrenaica).

homogeneous race, who were severed from one another when the ocean was let in and the Mediterranean assumed its present shape. Sicily, a remnant of the old land-bridge, has always been for Italy a step to, or a step from, Africa ; while Spain needs no island to bridge her strait. It is uncertain whether there was also another bridge connecting the Greek peninsula and Crete with the Libyan coast ; but Crete at all events seemed marked out to be a stepping-stone for Greece, as Sicily was for Italy. Now in prehistoric ages there was a lively intercourse between the Aegean and Libya, and Crete served this purpose ; but in historic times the eastern peninsula was not drawn by the same necessity, as the two western, into contact with the opposite continent. It should be noticed that in the prehistoric intercourse of Crete and the Aegean with Libya, the African coast was fulfilling the same rôle which we see it play in the full light of history. It has always been a road by which peoples of Asia crept westward to confer their civilisation, or impose their yoke, upon peoples of Europe. There is no doubt that the historical Egyptians had entered Egypt from the Red Sea ; it is possible that they came from Babylonia ; and thus even in the fourth and the third millenniums, when ships plied between Egypt and Crete, northern Africa was already performing her office of bringing Asia to Europe.

IV. Greece suitable for small states.

Greece is a land of mountains and small valleys ; it has few plains of even moderate size and no considerable rivers. It is therefore well adapted to be a country of separate communities, each protected against its neighbours by hilly barriers ; and the history of the Greeks, a story of small independent states, could not have been wrought out in a land of dissimilar formation. The political history of all countries is in some measure under the influence of geography ; but in Greece geography made itself pre-eminently felt, and fought along with other forces against the accomplishment of national unity. The islands formed states by themselves, but, as seas, while like mountains they sever, may also, unlike mountains, unite, it was less difficult to form a sea than a land empire. In the same way, the hills prevented the development of a brisk land traffic, while, as we have seen, the broken character of the coast and the multitude of islands facilitated intercourse by water.

Climate and productivity.

There is no barrier to break the winds which sweep over the Euxine from the Asiatic continent towards the Greek shores and render Thrace a chilly land. Hence the Greek climate has a certain severity and bracing quality, which promoted the vigour and energy of the people. Again, Greece is by no means a rich and fruitful country. It has few well-watered plains of large size ; the cultivated valleys do not yield the due crop to be expected from the area ; the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08220-4 - A History of Greece: To the Death of Alexander the Great

John Bagnell Bury

Excerpt

[More information](#)

GREECE AND THE AEGEAN

5

soil is good for barley but not rich enough for wheat to grow freely. Thus the tillers of the earth had hard work. And the nature of the land had consequences which tended to promote maritime enterprise. On one hand, richer lands beyond the seas attracted the adventurous, especially when the growth of the population began to press on the means of support. On the other hand, it ultimately became necessary to supplement home-grown corn by wheat imported from abroad. But if Demeter denied her highest favours, the vine and the olive grew abundantly in most parts of the country, and their cultivation was one of the chief features of ancient Greece.

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS OF GREECE AND THE HEROIC AGE

Where the history of the Greeks should begin. (Zeus = Heaven.) It is in the lands of Thessaly and Epirus that we first dimly descry the Greeks busy at the task for which destiny had chosen them, of creating and shaping the thought and civilisation of Europe. The oakwood of Dodona in Epirus is the earliest sanctuary, whereof we have any knowledge, of their supreme god, Zeus, the dweller of the sky. Thessaly has associations which still appeal intimately to men of European birth. The first Greek settlers in Thessaly were the Achaeans; and in the plain of Argos, and in the mountains which gird it about, they fashioned legends which were to sink deeply into the imagination of Europe. Here they peopled Olympus, under whose shadow they dwelled, with divine inhabitants, so that it has become for ever the heavenly hill in the tongues of men. And here their bards must have sung hexameter lays; though that marvellous metre was not brought to perfection till folk and legends had passed eastward overseas to another land. The invention of the hexameter was one of the most brilliant strokes of Greek genius. Perhaps it was invented by the Achaeans; no other people at least has so good a claim. We may be sure that hexameter lays were sung in the halls of the lords of northern Argos, and it is from minstrels who sang at the banquets of their descendants in a new home that we gain our earliest picture of those ancient Aryan institutions which are common to the Greeks and ourselves.

Northern Argos.

The first contribution of the Greeks to European culture: hexameter verse.

The history of the Greeks should begin with a picture of the life of these first conquerors of northern Greece. We would fain see them at work as they forged the legends, and made the songs, which became the groundwork of the national religion and national literature of their race. We would fain go back still further and visit them in their older, unknown and forgotten home among the mountains of Illyria. But these chapters of the story are lost; we can only guess at them from the results. On the other hand, we know that when the Greek conquerors came down to the coasts of the Aegean they

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08220-4 - A History of Greece: To the Death of Alexander the Great

John Bagnell Bury

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CHAP. I BEGINNINGS OF GREECE AND THE HEROIC AGE 7

found a material civilisation more advanced than their own ; and it has so chanced that we know more of this civilisation than we know of the conquerors before they came under its influence.

SECT. I. EARLY AEGEAN CIVILISATION (3rd millennium B.C.)

In Greece, as in the other two great peninsulas of the Mediterranean, we find, before the invader of Aryan speech entered in and took possession, a white folk not speaking an Aryan tongue. Corresponding to the Iberians in Spain and Gaul, to the Ligurians in Italy, we find in Greece a race which was also spread over the islands of the Aegean and along the coast of Asia Minor. The men of this primeval race gave to many a hill and rock the name which was to abide with it for ever. Corinth and Tiryns, Parnassus and Olympus, Arne and Larisa, are names which the Greeks received from the peoples whom they dispossessed. But this Aegean race, as we may call it for want of a common name, had developed, before the coming of the Greek, a civilisation of which we have only very lately come to know. This civilisation went hand in hand with an active trade, which in the third millennium spread its influence far beyond the borders of the Aegean, as far at least as the Danube and the Nile, and received in return gifts from all quarters of the world. Ivory came from the south, copper from the east, silver and tin from the far west, amber from the regions of the north. The Aegean peoples therefore plied a busy trade by sea, and their maritime intercourse with the African continent can be traced back to even earlier times, since at the very beginning of Egyptian history we find in Egypt obsidian, which can have come only from the Aegean isles. The most notable remains of this civilisation have been found at Troy, in the little island of Amorgos, and in the great island of Crete.¹

*Early
Aegean
trade.*

*(Obsidian
in east
Melos.)*

At the time when the kings of the Twelfth Dynasty were reigning in Egypt, Crete was a land of flourishing communities and was about to become, if it had not already become, a considerable sea power. It was now fulfilling, more fully than it was to fulfil in future ages, the rôle which geography might seem to have imposed upon it, of forming a link between eastern Europe and the African continent. The intercourse of Crete with Libya was more than a mere inter-

*Crete (12th
dynasty in
Egypt
2778-
2565 B.C.).*

¹ Also in Melos, Siphnos, and other islands ; at Tiryns ; at Athens ; and elsewhere. It has been supposed that Amorgos and other Aegean islands were at this time inhabited by Leleges, a people who in historical times dwelled in the Myndian peninsula of Caria (see below, pp. 36 and 48). The reason is (besides tradition) that we find in historical Lelegia box-like tombs ("cist-graves") which resemble the graves of Amorgos.

change of wares, or the goings and comings of merchants. It would seem that men from Crete made settlements on the African coast, and that men from Libya took up their abode in the Aegean island. The Libyans and Cretans may have been bound together by a remote brotherhood of race, whereof neither could be conscious ; at all events, wherever the Libyans settled they were soon amalgamated and became one race with the native Cretans.

Phrygian elements in Crete. But there seems to have been an inflow of settlers from the north as well as from the south. The Phrygians, a race of Aryan speech, which had planted itself in the south-eastern corner of Europe along with their brethren the Thracians, were already passing across the Hellespont into the north-western corner of Asia. And some of them seem to have ventured still farther south. They ventured to Crete ; it is possible that they ventured to Greece, and perhaps to Africa. In Crete they left memorials of their settlement by such

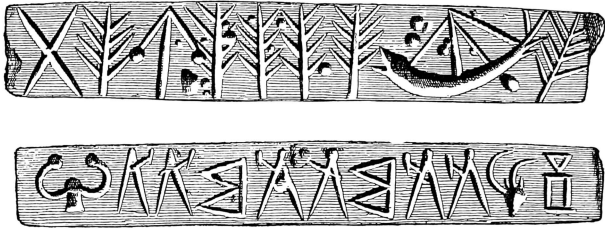


FIG. 1.—Two sides of a white steatite Seal, with writing (Crete).

local names as Ida and Pergamon ; but they too, like the Libyans, seem to have amalgamated with the natives. Thus by the beginning of the second millennium Crete was already an island of mixed population. Phrygian and Libyan elements were blended with the original Cretan stock ; only in the eastern corner there was no mixture, and the pure-blooded natives of this region were distinguished in later times as the True Cretans.¹

Eteocrêtes.

The art of writing in Crete : two systems. The Cretans hold a distinct place in the history of civilisation by inventing the first method of writing that was ever practised in Europe. We find indeed that two modes of writing were used in the island in the third millennium. One of these was a system of picture-writing, in which every word was represented by a hieroglyph ; and this system seems to have been used by the original inhabitants. The other was in use throughout the whole island, and it was not entirely of native origin. It consisted of linear signs, of which each probably denoted a syllable ; and, although some of these signs may

¹ They preserved their old language till historical times. See below, p 136.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-08220-4 - A History of Greece: To the Death of Alexander the Great
John Bagnell Bury
Excerpt
[More information](#)

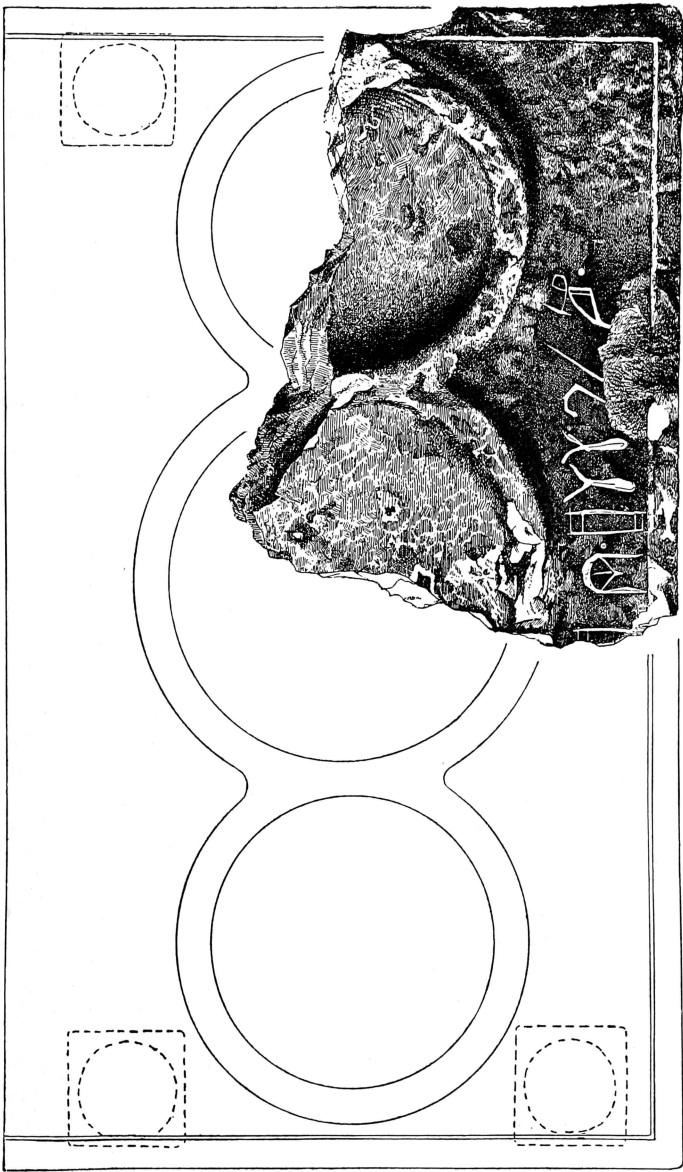


FIG. 2.—Table of Offerings, with inscription, found in the Dictaeon Cave (Crete).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08220-4 - A History of Greece: To the Death of Alexander the Great

John Bagnell Bury

Excerpt

[More information](#)

have been indigenous, the system was certainly improved and supplemented by symbols borrowed from Libya and Egypt. The influence of Egypt made itself felt in the ceremonies of religion as well as in the art of writing; and a table of drink-offerings, which was discovered in the Dictæan cave—afterwards associated with Zeus,—copied from similar Egyptian tables and inscribed with Cretan writing, is a striking proof at once of the intercourse of Crete with Egypt, and of the use of writing within the borders of Europe, in the third millennium.

In the same period, at the other extremity of the Aegean, near the southern shore of the Hellespont, a great city flourished on the hill of Troy. It was not the first city that had been reared on that illustrious hill, which rises to the height of about 160 feet, not far from the banks of the Scamander. The earliest settlement, fortified by a rude wall of unwrought stone, can still be traced; and some of its primitive earthware and stone implements have been found. An axe-head of white nephrite seems to show that in those remote days there was a line of traffic, however slow and uncertain, between China and the Mediterranean; for this white jade has been found only in China. On the ruins of this primeval city arose a great fortress, girt with a wall of sun-baked brick, built on strong stone foundations. There were three gates, and the angles of the walls were protected by towers. The inhabitants of this city lived in the stone and copper age; bronze was still a rarity. Their pottery was chiefly hand-made. The art of the goldsmith had advanced far, if a treasure of golden ornaments really belongs to this settlement,

Troy (the hill now called Hissarlik, "fortress"). The oldest city.

The SECOND CITY.



FIG. 3.—Lead figure found in the Brick City of Troy.