

Foundations of World Civilization: Notes 16  
**The early Greek Mediterranean and Herodotus**  
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- We have seen the rise of complex societies and early empires in several regions
  - Mesopotamia and Anatolia
  - Egypt
  - Indus and China, but not discussed in class
- Now we look at the beginning of the classical period
  - the bridge from these early developments to the medieval and modern world
  - the rise of interaction, “globalization” in some regions
    - for us, particularly the Mediterranean and adjacent western Asia
- Egypt
  - unification around 3050 BCE
  - sequence of unified kingdoms and intermediate periods to 1077 BCE
  - late period of disunity and unity under various foreign rulers (but still rich, powerful, and an intellectual center): 1077-525 BCE
  - 525 BCE: conquered by Persia, incorporated into Persian Achaemenid empire
- Phoenicians
  - sailing by 2500 BCE
  - alphabetic script by 1500 BCE
  - maritime dominance 1200-800 BCE
- Crete: Minoans
  - centrally located big, rich island
  - begin to be a maritime trading power by 2200 BCE
  - part of the same world as
    - Middle Kingdom, then New Kingdom Egypt
    - Phoenician traders
  - Old Palace period: 2000-1700 BCE
    - Knossos
    - Linear A
  - eruption of Thera (Santorini), earthquakes, tidal waves: about 1628 BCE
  - New Palace period: 1600-1450 BCE
  - then increasing raiding, finally conquered and ruled by Mycenaean Greeks
- Mycenaean Greeks
  - fortified citadels, as at Mycenae
    - centers of battling small city-states
  - maritime traders by 1600 BCE
  - adopted Linear A syllabic system, adjusted to Linear B alphabet to write early Greek
    - this means relatively wider-spread literacy
  - expanding control in Greece and islands, Ital, Sicily, Anatolia 1500-1100 BCE
  - conquered and ruled formerly Minoan Crete around 1450 BCE

- Trojan War with Phoenician king Priam about 1200 BCE
- increasing chaos in Eastern Mediterranean 1100-800 BCE leads to abandonment of Mycenaean palaces and dispersal of the population
- Rise of polis (poleis) around 800 BCE
  - larger, more politically complex city-states developing from Mycenaean citadel centered city-states
  - highly variable
  - independent, in contrast to huge state that still existed in Egypt, repeated empires in Persia, Anatolia, Central Asia...
  - Herodotus attributed this to the poverty of the rocky landscape
- Sparta expanding on land 700s – 600s BCE
  - conquering most of the Peloponnesus
  - reduced others to surplus-supplying helots
  - helots outnumbered Spartans 10 to 1 in the 500s BCE
  - austere, militarized society to control all this
  - moderated but continued into 300s BCE...
- Athens becomes rich on maritime trade in 600s BCE
  - Attica: adjacent landmass to Peloponnesus
  - rival to Sparta
  - “democratic” rule by wealthy, aristocratic landholders
  - rural poor approached rebellion in early 500s BCE at Athens (did fight civil wars elsewhere)
  - Solon of Athens: gives non-aristocrats (but still must be wealthy enough!) a role in government, eliminates debt slavery, but does not redistribute land
- Greek colonization
  - first of Aegean islands and Ionia (Lydia): western end of Anatolia
  - then further, to Cyprus, Egypt, north Africa, Italy, Sicily, south coast of modern France and Spain
  - all coastal, accessible by ship
  - most founded 750-550 BCE
  - relieving population pressure
  - colonies came from specific poleis, but often drew leaders from others, were pretty independent
- Meanwhile, Persian empire was growing
  - Persian wars of the 500-479 BCE
  - start with conflict in Ionia (Lydia), as we read in Herodotus, vs. King Cyrus of Persia
  - Athens sends a fleet, but eventually Cyrus’s successor, Darius retakes Ionia
  - Darius then attacks Athens
  - loses dramatically in naval battle of Marathon, then defeated trying to take the city of Athens
  - Xerxes, next king of Persia, tries again in 480 BC
  - again loses in the naval battle of Salamis
  - restoring Greek region to the Greeks, leaving the Persians further east

- Herodotus documented these Persian wars
- this left Greek poleis beholden to Athens for its naval defense
  - form the Delian league
  - other poleis mostly paid Athens for naval defense
  - Athens got rich, the rest got resentful
  - Pericles role 461-429 BCE in advancing Athenian democracy was financed by this
  - salaries for government service
  - huge public works projects
  - support for the arts
- this led to the Peloponnesian war between Greeks, with one faction led by Sparta against the faction loyal to Athens...
  - that's for next time
- Herodotus
  - First carefully collected, systematic narrative of the past intended to be “true”
    - not literary, mythological, etc.
  - yet includes gods, fate, the Delphic oracle is always right (if sometimes misleading)
    - history is neatenened a little into a coherent narrative
  - but not just history: also recorded long descriptions of foreign places, customs, environments, achievements, etc.
    - often seem like digressions
    - particularly famous: his long section on Egypt, one of our few extended descriptions by outside observers who actually saw (late) Egyptian culture in action
      - and could ask Egyptians about their practices
    - but a few comments show that Herodotus knew that and put them there intentionally
      - as background, context
      - he found these descriptions just as important (well, almost) as the battles and kings
      - much as our textbook has sections on Greek literature, government, philosophy, etc. in addition to the growing and collapsing empires
  - meant to be read aloud to an audience, at least when first presented
  - even-handedly treats all sources as potentially true
    - cites sources, saying who said what
    - tries to evaluate which is most correct, when possible
    - often with his own observations of places and things
    - and by noting confirmation from other sources, and other kinds of arguments
    - non-Greeks (“barbarians”) are not inferior, just different
  - based on wide travels and lots of interviews
  - “Father of history” as well as “Father of lies”
    - because he reported many things just as he heard them
    - his coverage of Egypt, for example, is so incorrect in so many details that I have resisted the temptation to give you extracts of it
  - Note that Herodotus is not above putting morals in his stories
    - and having seen the awful Persian war, he was opposed to war

- he has Croesus say to Cyrus:
  - “The one to blame is the god of the Hellenes; it is he who encouraged me to go to war. Otherwise, no one could be so foolish as to prefer war to peace: in peace sons bury fathers; in war fathers bury sons.”

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