

Classical Civilizations in Greece and Persia

The purpose of [my research] is to prevent the traces of human events from being erased by time, and to preserve the fame of the important and remarkable achievements produced by both Greeks and non-Greeks. . . .

—Herodotus, *The Histories*. Trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (New York: Penguin Group, 1972).

While Egypt was in its Middle Kingdom, Babylon was rising in Southwest Asia; the Harappans were giving way to the Aryans in India, and the Shang dynasty was on the horizon in China. At the same time a distinctive Greek culture was developing at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. The origins of this culture were in the Minoan and Mycenaean kingdoms. Many centuries later, as the Greek historian Herodotus wrote in his *Histories*, Greek culture would flourish in several city-states, giving rise to a Golden Age of innovative ideas in philosophy, literature, and art. After the Golden Age ended, two powerful military leaders emerged: Philip II and then Alexander the Great. Each spread Greek culture as they conquered lands in and around the Mediterranean and Southwest Asia. These areas, influenced by classical Greek culture, became known as the Hellenistic kingdoms.

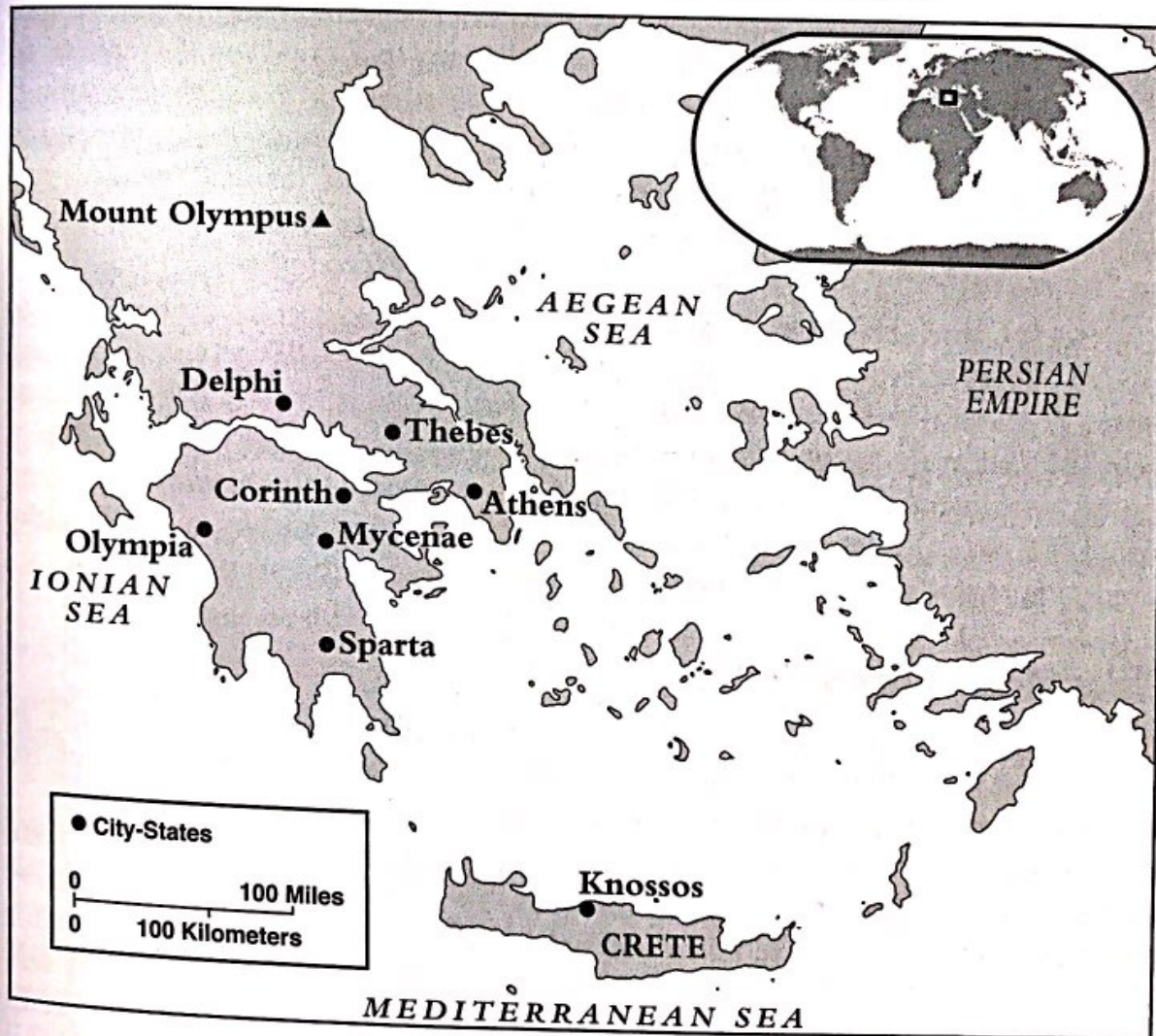
Early Mediterranean Civilizations

Two cultures that emerged on the islands and along the northern coast of the eastern Mediterranean Sea had long-term impact. They provided a foundation for later developments in Greece.

Crete The Minoans lived on an island in the Aegean Sea called *Crete*. Because they had many harbors but little fertile soil, they relied on trade, and grew rich through trade with Greece, Phoenicia, Egypt, and Asia Minor. They decorated their homes with paintings and other decorations. The Minoans built a beautiful city on Crete called *Knossos*—for a while, the wealthiest city on the Aegean. No writing from the *Minoan civilization* in Crete has been deciphered, but the existence of artifacts all around the Mediterranean testifies to Cretan influence in the period around 2000 B.C.E. The wealth of the Minoans, their skill as builders, and their experience as seafarers gave rise to stories of a legendary King Minos in Knossos and of Daedalus and the maze.

Mycenae The city of *Mycenae*, on the mainland of Greece, was probably never conquered by the Minoans, yet it contained artifacts revealing a number of Minoan cultural influences. In addition, the presence of amber from the north and ivory from Syria are testimony to Mycenae's widespread trade in the area. Both the Minoan and the Mycenaean civilizations declined in what is sometimes called a "dark age" starting around 1100 B.C.E. and lasting until about 750 B.C.E. However, their arts and culture, as exemplified in frescoes, statuettes, jewelry, and even the presence of indoor plumbing at the *Knossos Palace* complex, continued to spread to the Greek mainland, Southwest Asia, and North Africa. This spread of culture would become an ongoing example of continuity, not only in the Mediterranean area and Southwest Asia, but also throughout emerging Europe.

CRETE, MYCENAE, AND GREEK CITY-STATES



Rise of the Greek City-States

Geography's influence on Greece is easy to see. The Greek mainland is a giant peninsula that juts into the Mediterranean, and the surrounding waters include many small islands. These islands and the mainland's long, irregular coastline made seafaring and trade important. Traveling on Mediterranean sea lanes, Greeks transported grain, timber, gold, and other metals from one point to another, growing prosperous and connecting cultures as they did. Like sea-faring cultures throughout history, the Greeks became open to new ideas and technology from their trading partners. For example, when Phoenicians developed an alphabet that made writing and reading easier, the Greeks quickly adopted it with all the benefits of more efficient communication.

Geography also shaped Greek politics. Numerous islands, mountainous terrain, and lack of rivers separated one Greek tribe from another. The disconnected terrain long prevented the Greek people from uniting under one government. Instead, they usually had independent local governments. Greece was separated into *poleis* (city-states; singular—*polis*). Over the course of Greece's history, these *poleis* would at times be allies and at times be enemies. Access to the sea also helps to explain how Greece developed in competition with an expanded Persian empire, a competition that resulted in the great *Persian Wars* of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. These wars were described in *The Histories* by the first great Greek historian, *Herodotus*.

Social and Political Systems Citizenship of a *polis* was confined to males—Greece was a patriarchy—and only free ones. Slaves and foreigners could not be citizens. A *polis* could call upon its citizens to defend their lands as *hoplites* (infantry members), sometimes fighting against other *poleis*. Different *poleis* in Greece had different types of government. In a *monarchy*, a king ruled the state. In an *aristocracy*, nobles ruled. In an *oligarchy*, a few wealthy landowners and *merchants* ruled. In a *democracy*, all citizens participated.

Sparta's Military Society

Two of the most powerful *poleis* were *Sparta* and *Athens*. While both were city-states, they differed greatly from each other. Sparta remains famous for developing a society organized around producing a powerful military.

Sparta's focus on developing soldiers began with child-rearing. Boys were taken away from their mothers beginning at age seven and raised with extensive training and endurance lessons to make them solid soldiers. To prepare them for the harsh life of a soldier, boys suffered physical abuse, went without food, and were ridiculed for showing any sign of weakness. When grown, men served in the active military or in the reserve until age 60.

With Spartan men serving in the military, *Spartan women* ran their households with greater freedom than did other Greek women. Free Spartan women received an education, could own property, and were not secluded in their homes. They won praise for staying fit and participating in athletics so they would bear healthy sons to increase the size of the army. A significant responsibility for women was the inculcation of Spartan values in their children.

For example, children learned the values of the state religion, which developed around the kings, who also served as the supreme priests.

To enable men to serve in the military and women to focus on bearing children and raising them to be soldiers, Spartan society relied on *helots*, or slaves, to do agricultural labor needed to feed everyone. Helots were generally captives resulting from Spartan raids on their neighboring inland.

Keeping helots under control and supporting the military were key functions of the Spartan government. The government was run by an oligarchy that shared power between two kings. Ideas originating from outside the polis were discouraged as destabilizing, and social life was tightly controlled. Spartans believed that top-down government power was necessary for a stable and prosperous society.

Athenian Democracy

Today, Sparta is remembered for creating a military society and *Athens* for its political and intellectual achievements. Early governments of Athens were *monarchies*, followed by a period of aristocracy. *Solon*, a reform-minded aristocrat who lived in the sixth century B.C.E., became known as a wise ruler who improved life in Athens. He is credited with setting free many Athenians enslaved for debt and limiting the amount of land any one man could own.

Politics As Athens and other Greek city-states increased their trade with one another, they developed prosperous merchant classes. However, the merchants resented those who held a monopoly on political power. As men of wealth and property, merchants thought that they should have more of a voice in government. When the *aristocrats* refused these demands, the merchants joined small farmers to support *tyrants*—leaders who seized power with the people's support. By 650 B.C.E., tyrants had overthrown the aristocrats in most city-states.

At first, the tyrants were popular. They lowered taxes and ended the practice of enslaving people who could not pay their debts. They also gave citizens a greater voice in matters that affected their lives. Over time, though, some tyrants alienated their supporters by abusing their power.

Democracy During the 500s B.C.E., most Greek city-states overthrew their tyrants. Some poleis returned to governments ruled by aristocrats or kings, but Athens and others turned to democracy. For a while, Athens was a *direct democracy*, a government in which all citizens could vote directly on laws and other issues in a large assembly. By contrast, in a *representative democracy*, citizens elect leaders to represent them and give those leaders powers to make laws and govern. The democratic Athenian government was comprised of nine top officials called *archons*, a council of nobles, and a citizen assembly.

Pericles Perhaps the most famous name of all in the Greek government was that of *Pericles*, whose period of rule in Athens is sometimes called the Golden Age (461–429 B.C.E.) During his reign, the *Parthenon*, a great temple in Athens that had been destroyed in war with Persia, was rebuilt. Pericles is credited with reforms to government such as transfer of power to an assembly.

He created the Council of 500, which served as an ongoing government of Athens, and he developed the People's Courts, which ruled on charges of legal violations.

Women For women and slaves in Athens, life was hard. They were excluded from government service and from voting. Women could not own any property beyond personal items. They did not receive an education. If women had matters to settle in court, they had to employ a male guardian. Upper-class women always had to be accompanied by a man when they left home. Early marriages and exclusion from most of public life kept women isolated. Women were believed to be intellectually inferior to men and thus incapable of being satisfying relationship partners. (Test Prep: Create a chart comparing the treatment of women in Greece with their treatment in Egypt and China. For Egypt see page 27; for China see page 101.)

Athenian Philosophy

Perhaps as a result of having seaports and welcoming trade connections with the outside world, new ideas flourished in Athens. The arts, mathematics, and literature created by Athenians formed the basis of academic disciplines still studied in schools worldwide. Two epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, have been recited, read, and studied every since they were presumably composed by a Greek poet named Homer around the ninth century B.C.E. .

Socrates One influential Greek thinker was *Socrates*. His emphasis on continually asking questions to systematically clarify another person's ideas and to identify the core of them became known as the *Socratic Method*. Socrates was eventually put to death by the Athenian government for questioning the state religion.

Plato A student of Socrates, *Plato*, kept his teacher's ideas alive. Plato opened a school called the *Academy*, where he taught students to question the nature of ideas such as good, evil, justice, and beauty. Departing from the oral tradition of philosophy, Plato wrote *dialogues*, teachings presented as discussions between Socrates and his pupils. In the dialogue known as *The Republic*, Plato described an ideal society ruled by a government that rested upon a concept of justice and ethical values. While many Athenians advocated democracy, Plato did not. Instead, in *The Republic*, Plato envisioned a society composed of workers, warriors, and "philosopher kings." This last group would be intelligent and rational enough to make decisions for the good of the whole state.

Aristotle One of Plato's students, *Aristotle*, also became a famous Athenian philosopher. Aristotle wrote on a range of topics, from how to organize government to the qualities of good literature. He might be best known for his ideas about ethics. Aristotle believed in avoiding extremes in behavior. For example, moderate courage was a virtue. Too little courage made one a coward; too much made one fool-hardy. Aristotle called this emphasis on moderation the *Golden Mean*.

Aristotle emphasized gaining knowledge through *empiricism*, trusting what one learned from observation and evidence of the senses, rather than emphasizing intuition or religious beliefs. Aristotle also focused on *logic*, the science of the formal principles of reasoning. However, unlike modern scientists, Aristotle and other Greeks did not emphasize experiments. An additional contribution by Aristotle was his work *Poetics*, which for the first time set down definitions of tragedy and comedy in the theater, as well as definitions of epic and lyric poetry. Such systematic writings about philosophy, literature, and the arts constituted a new development in the Mediterranean world. The ideas of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek thinkers provided the foundation for European thought for centuries. (Test Prep: Write a paragraph comparing Greek philosophers with influential thinkers in other cultures. See page 100 for Confucius and page 9 for Zoroaster.)

Athenian Religion and Culture

Greek religion was based on an influential set of myths. Through these stories, rather than through specific teachings about ethics, most Greeks expressed their ideas about right and wrong behavior and the role of gods in their lives. Books and movies about Zeus, Hercules, Odysseus, and other Greek mythological figures remain popular today. Over time, as contact increased between Greeks and other groups, such as Persians and Egyptians, Greek religion became more *syncretic*, combining ideas from different sources. For example, the deity Serapis combined elements of the Greek Zeus, the Egyptian Osiris, and other deities into one.

Greek religion and literature were closely connected. Attendance at religious functions, of which theater was often a part, was considered a civic duty. Some Greek playwrights, including *Euripides* and *Sophocles*, used the myths of the gods as convenient literary devices for their plays. Although the term "satire" comes from a later Roman form of drama, there were certainly satirical sections in the Greek *comedies*, plays in which a character triumphs over hardship. The most prolific author of comedies was *Aristophanes*, who wrote 40 plays, including *Lysistrata* and *The Birds*.

Aeschylus and *Euripides* wrote *tragedies*, dramas that deal with death, war, justice, and the relationships between gods and ordinary people. For example, *Prometheus Bound* by *Aeschylus* tells the tale of how *Prometheus* steals fire from *Zeus*, gives it to humans, and then suffers eternal punishment. *The Trojan Women* by *Euripides* describes how Athenians slaughtered people they captured in the Trojan War. Greek tragedies and comedies influenced *William Shakespeare* of the sixteenth century and continue to influence modern playwrights today.

Architecture and Art Religion was also connected to the distinctive Greek architectural style, a style exemplified by the *Parthenon* in Athens. This massive stone building, rectangular but elegant, featured rows of tall columns on all sides and was topped by a slanted roof. In a panel sitting along the top of the columns, artists carved friezes illustrating Greek myths.

The Olympic Games Religion also provided the context for athletic competitions. Unlike modern sports, which emphasize keeping records of who ran the fastest and who jumped the farthest, Greek sports emphasized rituals. For example, before competing, athletes would provide offerings to show their respect for the gods. Beginning around 776 B.C.E., the Greeks held Olympic games every four years. Athletes from all the city-states gathered in one spot, Olympia, to compete in various sports. Wars among the city-states commonly would be suspended for the duration of the games so that athletes and spectators could assemble. Thus, even though there was not a centralized state of Greece, the Olympic Games helped create a common feeling of "Greekness." The games continued for over one thousand years, ending around 400 C.E. The games were restarted in 1896.

Greek Colonies

Starting around the eighth century B.C.E., the Greek city-states began establishing colonies around the Mediterranean, partly because the Greeks' population growth was outstripping the food supply. Some Greeks moved willingly to the colonies, others less willingly. The reluctant ones drew lots to see who would emigrate.

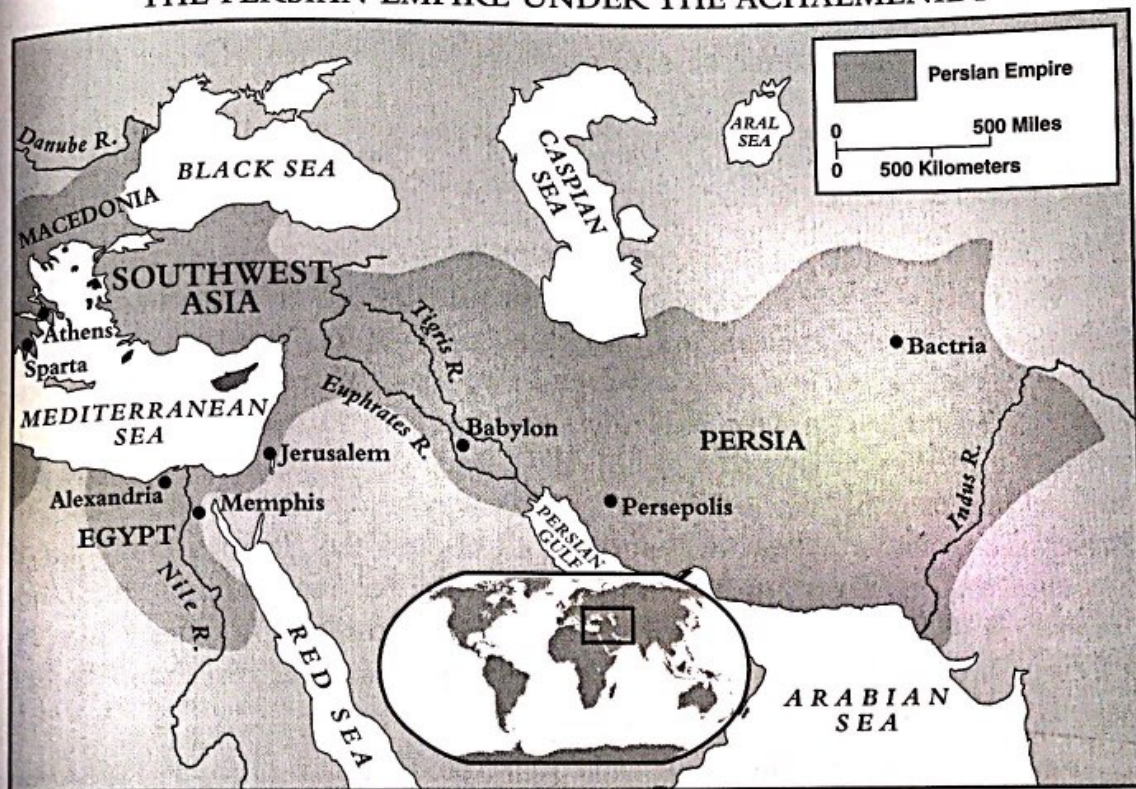
In a typically Greek spirit of independence, the colonies were allowed a large measure of autonomy, but each maintained a shared culture with its home city-state. Some of the largest of these colonies were located on the island of Sicily at *Syracuse* and *Agrigentum*, on the Italian Peninsula at Naples, on the coast of France at Marseilles, and on the western coast of Asia Minor.

Geography had a decided impact on the Greek city-states, as it has on every state. French historian Fernand Braudel wrote that "the poor, precarious soils along the Mediterranean, combined with an uncertain, drought-afflicted climate, spurred ancient Greek and Roman conquest." Additionally, the arid and temperate climate of Greece allowed for outdoor teaching in the schools of philosophy such as Plato's Academy. Further, the climate provided an ideal setting for outdoor theater competitions where highly developed literary genres such as tragedy and comedy appeared. Access to the sea encouraged colonization and trade, interactions that exposed the Greeks to new ideas that brought change while maintaining elements of Pan-Hellenic continuity.

Persian Empire

Beginning in 559 B.C.E., under the leadership of *Cyrus the Great* (ruled 559–529 B.C.E.) the *Persians* conquered most of the lands from the Aegean Sea (west of Turkey) to the borders of India. After 30 years of rule, Cyrus was succeeded by his son *Cambyses*, who conquered Egypt and parts of Southeast Europe. Their empire became known as the *Achaemenid Empire*, sometimes called the First Persian Empire. It united three of the earliest centers of civilization—Mesopotamia, Egypt, and India—into one powerful empire, covering a territory almost the size of the United States. It was the largest, most diverse empire the world had yet seen, including more than 70 distinct ethnic groups

THE PERSIAN EMPIRE UNDER THE ACHAEMENIDS



The Reign of Darius Like rulers in Egypt and China and other places, Persian rulers supported their legitimacy with claims that they ruled by divine right. However, their power rested upon their own abilities to build and hold an empire. Ruling such a large empire in an era when transportation and communication were so slow required new ways of thinking about power. Under *Darius I* (ruled 522–486 B.C.E.), Persia divided lands it conquered into provinces so that the king's policies announced in the capital of Persepolis could be administered throughout the empire. Then, rather than simply demand the loyalty of rulers who were selected locally, Darius created a new position—*satrap*, a ruler of a province who was responsible to the emperor, not to local leaders. Finally, inspectors, called “The Eyes and Ears of the King,” traveled to each province and reported to the king on the behavior of the satraps. The provincial structure, with satraps and inspectors, created an efficient administrative bureaucracy.

To pay for this bureaucracy, Darius instituted regular tax payments. The flow of tax dollars into the government enabled the Persians to fund several magnificent projects under Darius.

- The capital city, *Persepolis*, which was located in what is now Iran, became a celebrated city, featuring an impressive royal palace and celebrating the artistic traditions of several groups in the empire.
- The *Royal Road*, which spanned some 1,500 miles across the empire, was the most famous of the network of roads built to encourage trade. Darius added an efficient courier service with postal stations along this road.

- Darius also instituted the construction of *caravanserais*, which were combination inns and markets for people traveling the Royal Road by camel caravan.
- The empire instituted a *common currency* that was accepted across the empire. This made trade simpler thereby uniting the empire and promoting prosperity.

Toleration While Persians centralized political power, they did not try to enforce religious and cultural uniformity in their empire. Darius I, in particular, allowed ethnic groups to retain their cultural identity and tolerated religious diversity as long as people paid their taxes and contributed soldiers to the military force to maintain the empire. His successor, *Xerxes* (519–465 B.C.E.) built a Gate of All Nations (also called Gateway of Xerxes) at an entrance to Persepolis to show that he was honoring all his subjects. Persian toleration of diversity was an unusual policy, one that made the Persian Empire unlike other empires of its time. (Test prep: Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting religious toleration under the Persians with later examples of the policy. See page 152 for Islamic rule in Spain.)

Religious Beliefs One of the most important legacies of the Persians was the spread of *monotheism*, the belief in only one god. Although monotheism also appeared in other cultures, most people in Southwest Asia were polytheistic before the Persian prophet *Zarathustra* (c. 660 B.C.E.–583 B.C.E.) began teaching a new faith, *Zoroastrianism*. This faith was based on belief in only one god, Ahura Mazda, or the “wise lord.” The religion also believed in a god of darkness and other lesser gods, none of which were to be worshipped. Zoroastrianism also taught the concepts of *heaven and hell*. After death, good people would be rewarded in heaven, while the evil ones would be punished in hell. Originally, priests called *magi* had passed Zarathustra’s teachings orally from generation to generation. Then later, a collection of written texts based on Zarathustra’s beliefs, the *Avestas*, was produced, which helped spread the religion. Zoroastrianism’s monotheistic principle and other teachings may have shaped the development of Judaism and Christianity.

Society Persian society had much the same social stratification as earlier empires of the region. However, because of its size, it had a larger class of educated, well-paid government workers. This bureaucracy included accountants, administrators, tax collectors, and translators.

Similarly, the number of slaves in Persia was much greater than in other empires. Farmers owned slaves, using them as agricultural laborers, and their numbers increased as agricultural production increased. Other slaves were servants to city-dwellers, and still others were owned by the government and used to build roads, large buildings, and irrigation systems throughout Persia.

Even though Persian society was patriarchal, women were allowed to own and manage property, and if they worked in a shop, they were allowed to keep their wages. Common Persian women engaged in economic activities,

including weaving textiles and trading them for food for their families. Divorce was possible. Some aristocratic Persian women wore veils, mainly to advertise their social status.

Environment and Technology The Persians irrigated their fields, as did other civilizations in Southwest Asia. The Persian method, however, was innovative: underground canals, called qanat, were used to reduce the evaporation of the water as it traveled to the fields. Qanat were especially common in the arid Iranian Plateau of central Persia.

Trade The Persians conducted much trade along the Persian Road and other land routes. They also conducted trade by sea. For example, ivory and gold came from Turkey; cedar and woolen fabrics from Phoenicia; wine and oil from Greece; and grain, textiles, and papyrus from Egypt.

Persia vs. Greece

As the Greek city-states expanded east and the vast Persian empire expanded west, the two clashed over territory. The conflict began in Asia Minor. In Asia Minor, Persians occupied several Greek colonies. Around 499 B.C.E., some of these conquered Greek areas rebelled in campaigns known as the *Persian Wars*. Athens and Sparta formed an alliance to help the rebel colonies. In 490 B.C.E., at the city of *Marathon* in mainland Greece, an outnumbered Athenian army defeated the Persian forces of Darius, who then withdrew from Greece.

Xerxes again tried to push westward. He organized a force of thousands and attacked Greece, defeating a few hundred Spartans and their allies at the *Battle of Thermopylae*. After their victory, the Persians captured and burned Athens. In reaction, the Athenians and their allies formed the *Delian League*. When the Persians later met the Athenians at sea, the Athenians won the naval *Battle of Salamis*. Soon, the Greeks won other sea and land battles, forcing the Persians to retreat to their homeland.

Decline of Persia The cost of the battles with the Greeks severely damaged the Persian Empire. Further, Xerxes began to take a less tolerant attitude toward non-Persians in the empire. Together, these forces began to undermine the strength and public support for the Persian Empire.

Athens-Sparta Rivalry The alliance among Greek city-states did not last. Athens expected other city-states to pay taxes to it, which the latter resented. Chief among these was Sparta, which revolted against Athens, beginning the *Peloponnesian War* (431–404 B.C.E.). With the help of its Greek allies in the *Peloponnesian League*, Sparta defeated Athens and became the dominant power in Greece.

The Rise of Macedonia

As Persia weakened and the Greeks divided, a new power arose in Macedonia, a region on the northern edge of the Greek world. *Philip II* resolved to conquer and unite the Greek city-states and then conquer Asia Minor. He quickly

conquered all of the Greek city-states except Sparta. However, Philip II's further plans were cut short when he was assassinated in 336 B.C.E. He was succeeded by his son Alexander, who immediately began the conquests that would earn him the name *Alexander the Great* and extend Greek influence all the way to India.

Alexander and the Hellenistic World During Alexander's 13-year campaign, he governed his far-flung conquests by picking native residents to help him rule. For example, in present-day Iran he allowed local Persian administrators to run that part of the empire. Alexander cemented his relations with leaders in the area by marrying several Persian women and urging his leading generals to do the same. In Egypt, he founded the great city of *Alexandria*, which would become a center of Hellenistic culture and a major seaport. (The historical *Hellenistic Period* takes its name from the Greek word *Hellenes*, meaning "Greeks.") The *Ptolemy dynasty* eventually built a library at Alexandria, the largest library of the ancient world, as well as the Alexandrian Museum, a place where scholars did research.

As a result of Alexander's conquests, Greek language, architecture, mythology, and philosophy became widespread. Small colonies of Greeks were established all over the Hellenistic world, even as far as Bactria, a region in what is now Afghanistan. The continuity of Greek culture held strong even as Greek governmental unity declined. An example of such continuity can be seen in the Greco-Buddhist art from the areas in South Asia, another region visited by Alexander's forces. Temples show influences in Greek columns and some statues show the Buddha in Greek clothing.

Formation and Fall of the Kingdoms Alexander's death in 323 B.C.E. at the age of 32 ushered in a time of chaos. The central administration of the empire collapsed. Alexander had failed to designate an heir, so his generals battled with one another to establish their own kingdoms. Instead of one powerful empire, the Greek-influenced lands became divided into several. Chief among the generals/rulers were the *Seleucids* in Asia and the *Ptolemies* in Egypt. Smaller monarchies controlled Pergamum in Asia Minor, the area around Sparta, and the area around Athens. These regions would eventually fall to the Roman Empire. For example, Athens and other city-states fell to the Romans in the first century B.C.E. The break-up of the Greek empire did not mean the end of Greek culture. Much of it was adopted by the Romans. Greek teachers and doctors were highly prized as slaves in Rome because they transmitted a culture admired by the Roman upper classes. (Test Prep: Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting Alexander Darius. See page 59.)

Other Empires in Persia

Though the great Achaemenid empire of Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes ended, their ideas lived on. The later rulers of Persian lands kept many of their innovations in administration.



Source: Walters Art Museum / Wikimedia Commons



Source: Thinkstock

Greece, along with India, developed some of the first forms of drama. Greek plays (upper) were often simple productions that taught that people had to suffer to learn. In contrast, Indian drama (lower) often used dance and frequently had happy endings.

Seleucids The *Seleucids* who ruled Persia from 305 to 83 B.C.E. encouraged Greeks and Macedonians to settle there as colonists. They kept Achaemenid's bureaucratic system, but the satraps often revolted against their Macedonian rulers. The Seleucids lost control of their eastern lands to the Parthians and were finally replaced by the Romans.

Parthians Originally nomadic peoples from Central Asia, the Parthians ruled over what is now Iraq, Iran, and much of the land bordering western India, beginning in 247 B.C.E. Their capital city was Ctesiphon. They kept the Achaemenid's satrap system of governing. In the first century C.E., they prevented the Roman Empire's army from marching east beyond Syria. Neither side could conquer the other. Border towns and surrounding areas would change hands as victories were won by one side or the other. In 224 C.E., the Parthians were defeated by the *Sassanids*.

Sassanids During the Sassanid dynasty (224–651 C.E.), the government promoted Zoroastrianism and persecuted Christians, whom it suspected as being sympathetic toward the Christian Roman Empire. The Sassanid Empire was large but not as large as the Parthian Empire had been. For example, it did not control Armenia (to the north) nor Bactria (to the east).

Comparing the Greek and Persian Empires

Persia and Greece established the two great empires of the eastern Mediterranean area. They shared many similarities. Both empires covered large territories. They had wide cultural influence. They allowed most women few rights, although some women did become influential in Achaemenid court.

The two empires had very different religious traditions. Darius of Persia had the following inscription carved in three languages on a monument: "I am Darius, the great king . . . from antiquity . . . by the grace of Ahuramazda." Note that he attributed his reign to Ahuramazda, the one deity of the Zoroastrians. In contrast to the Persians' monotheism, the Greeks had a pantheon of gods. They had gods and goddesses for each aspect of life.

Greeks and Persians also viewed unity within their empires differently. The Persians showed high tolerance for diverse customs and traditions throughout their empire. They had one emperor in control, though they allowed for local autonomy. In contrast, the Greeks were more united culturally through language, religion, and traditions such as the Olympic games. However, the Greeks were less united politically. The city-states fought one another and joined together only when threatened with invasion.

The two empires demonstrate the power of syncretism. They became more alike during the Hellenistic period. For example, when Alexander the Great conquered territories from the Persians, he adopted their system of local administration. In addition, the excellent postal system of the Persians, combined with the use of coins that developed around the Mediterranean, facilitated trade that made the entire region more prosperous. Trade helped form a cultural synthesis of Persian astronomy and Zoroastrianism with Greek language, literature, gods, mystery cults, and various styles of government. The blending of these elements shaped the context for the next great empire of the Mediterranean world: the Roman Empire.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: WAS ALEXANDER GREAT?

Whether historians consider Alexander great or not depends on which aspects of his life strike them as most important. Victor David Hanson, reviewing several recent books on Alexander, described the range of views from “drunken . . . psychopath” to “the Aristotelian who tamed Asia . . . with gentle firmness and romantic elán.”

Praise One of the first historians to write about Alexander was the Roman historian Arrian Flavius Arrianus, who was impressed by the Macedonian’s conquests. Arrian lived about four centuries after Alexander in an empire that inherited much of its culture from the Greeks. To Arrian, Alexander was a great leader who united people under his rule, created a large area where trade could flourish, and brought peace between long-time rivals Greece and Persia. Like many Romans, Arrian seemed little bothered by the costs of creating a large empire.

The Cost of Conquest But these costs did bother English historian George Grote. Writing in the late 1800s, Grote was appalled by the bloodshed that resulted from Alexander’s drive to win personal glory. Alexander executed thousands of conquered soldiers or villagers at a time. Maybe hundreds of thousands of people died in the wars Alexander carried out. To Grote, Alexander and his father, Phillip, were simply “brutalized adventurers.”

More recently, Paul Cartledge combined aspects of both Grote and Cartledge in his evaluation of Alexander. Alexander was certainly brutal, but his brutality was common for his times. And his conquests, once completed, offered the possibility, according to Cartledge, of a “peaceful, multi-ethnic coexistence.”

Critical Views Two other British historians were less forgiving than Cartledge. Peter Green pointed out that many of the benefits brought by Alexander vanished upon his death. “The empire he built collapsed the moment he was gone; he came as a conqueror and the work he wrought was destruction.” Alexander brought peace and unity, but only briefly. After his death, his generals fought one another and broke up his empire. Whatever the benefits that Alexander brought, they did not survive long enough to be worth the costs. And John Keegan, the preeminent military historian of the past century, concluded that Alexander’s “dreadful legacy was to ennoble savagery—to which all who opposed his will were subject—in the name of glory.”

KEY TERMS BY THEME

CULTURE: WRITERS & LITERATURE

Herodotus
The Histories
Homer
Iliad
Odyssey
Plato
The Republic
Aristotle
Poetics
Avestas
Aristophanes
Aeschylus
The Trojan Women
Euripides
Sophocles

CULTURE: ARCHITECTURE

Parthenon
Persepolis
Knossos Palace

CULTURE: PHILOSOPHY & RELIGION

Socrates
Socratic Method
Academy
Golden Mean
logic
empiricism
syncretic
Zoroastrianism
Zarathustra

ENVIRONMENT

qanat

STATE-BUILDING: LEADERS

Cyrus the Great
Delian League
Cambyses
Darius I
Xerxes
Peloponnesian League
Philip II
Alexander the Great
Solon
Pericles
Ptolemies

STATE-BUILDING: GOVERNMENTS

Poleis (polis)
monarchies
aristocracy
oligarchy
tyrants
democracy
direct democracy
representative
democracy

STATE-BUILDING: KINGDOMS AND WARS

Crete
Knossos
Minoan civilization
Mycenae
Syracuse
Agrigentum
Persian Wars
Marathon
Battle of Thermopylae
Battle of Salamis
Persians
Achaemenid empire
Seleucids
Parthians
Sassanids
Athens
Sparta
Alexandria
Hellenistic Period

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

hoplites
archons
helots
satraps
aristocrats
merchants
Spartan women

ECONOMICS

caravanserai
common currency
Royal Road

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

Questions 1 to 3 refer to the passage below.

“The manner of life in such a State is that of democrats; there is freedom and plainness of speech, and every man does what is right in his own eyes, and has his own way of life. Hence arise the most various developments of character; the State is like a piece of embroidery of which the colors and figures are the manners of men, and there are many who, like women and children, prefer this variety to real beauty and excellence. The State is not one but many, like a bazaar at which you can buy anything. The great charm is, that you may do as you like; you may govern if you like, let it alone if you like; go to war and make peace if you feel disposed, and all quite irrespective of anybody else. When you condemn men to death they remain alive all the same; a gentleman is desired to go into exile, and he stalks about the streets like a hero; and nobody sees him or cares for him. Observe, too, how grandly Democracy sets her foot upon all our fine theories of education—how little she cares for the training of her statesmen! The only qualification which she demands is the profession of patriotism. Such is democracy;—a pleasing, lawless, various sort of government, distributing equality to equals and unequals alike.”

Socrates, as reported by Plato in *The Republic*, c. 380 B.C.E.

- 1 Socrates is most critical of the Athenian government because he thinks it
 - (A) is too willing to condemn people to death
 - (B) expects all people to be just alike
 - (C) fails to treat all people equally
 - (D) suffers from too much individualism
2. Which type of government would Socrates have most likely supported?
 - (A) a military dictatorship like that of Sparta
 - (B) a representative democracy like the one established by Pericles
 - (C) a monarchy ruled by an educated and rational “philosopher-king”
 - (D) a direct democracy like the one established by Athens during the fourth and fifth centuries B.C.E.
3. Why was the system described by Socrates not a true democracy?
 - (A) The system was patriarchal, allowing only free males to participate in the democracy.
 - (B) While upper-class women could vote on issues affecting Athens, lower-class women were prohibited from voting.
 - (C) Slave men were allowed to vote, but their vote only counted half as much as that of a free-born male.
 - (D) Voting rights were only extended to educated men and women.

Questions 4 to 6 refer to the passage below.

“Then Cyrus (Emperor of the Persian Empire from 559 to 530 B.C.E.) . . . appointed various overseers: he had receivers of revenue, controllers of finance, ministers of works, guardians of property, superintendents of the household. . . . But when it came to those who were to be his fellow-guardians for the commonwealth, he would not leave the care and the training of these to others; he regarded that as his own personal task. He knew, if he were ever to fight a battle, he would have to choose his comrades and supporters, the men on his right hand and left, from these and these alone; it was from them he must appoint his officers for horse and foot. If he had to send out a general alone it would be from them that one must be sent: he must depend on them for satraps and governors over cities and nations; he would require them for ambassadors, and an embassy was, he knew, the best means for obtaining what he wanted without war.”

Xenophon, Greek historian, *Cyropaedia: The Education of Cyrus*,
c. 370 B.C.E.

4. The passage above provides evidence that the Persian Empire under Cyrus, and later, Darius
 - (A) had a highly centralized and elaborate bureaucracy
 - (B) used diplomacy as the main method of expanding the territory of the Empire
 - (C) relied on men who were chosen by the Empire’s assembly of ministers to conduct diplomatic negotiations or to lead the Empire’s army into battle
 - (D) refused to collect taxes or build public works projects
5. The officials mentioned in the passage most likely were able to keep in close contact with the Persian Emperor with the help of
 - (A) the gatekeeper of the Gate of All Nations
 - (B) the divine visions of the prophet Zarathustra
 - (C) the postal service along the Royal Road
 - (D) Greeks who served the emperor
6. The “controllers of finance” would most likely be associated with
 - (A) forcing people to accept Zoroastrianism as the state religion
 - (B) establishing a common currency within the Empire
 - (C) developing profitable trade routes
 - (D) engineering roads and other public works projects

Questions 7 and 8 refer to the images below.



Source: World Imaging / Wikimedia Commons

The Buddha (far left) depicted in a scene showing the conversion of Nanda, the Buddha's half-brother, to Buddhism. Sculpture found in the city of Hadda in modern-day Afghanistan.



Source: PHG / Wikimedia Commons

A banquet scene with wine and dancing. Sculpture found in the city of Hadda in modern-day Afghanistan.

7. These Greek-style clothing shown in these sculptures best supports which of the following interpretations?
- (A) Alexander the Great spread Hellenistic culture to South and Central Asia.
 - (B) Buddhism and Greek culture both originated in Persia.
 - (C) Hellenistic culture originated in South and Central Asia.
 - (D) Buddhists had traveled to Greece sometime before the era of Alexander the Great.
8. The sculptures are examples of syncretism because they show
- (A) similar scenes to each other
 - (B) elements of different cultures coming together
 - (C) religious leaders and celebrations
 - (D) how common people lived their lives

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Use the passages below to answer all parts of the question that follows.

“For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.”

Aristotle, *Politics*, c. 340 B.C.E.

“Nature herself intimates that it is just for the better to have more than the worse, the more powerful than the weaker; and in many ways she shows, among men as well as among animals, and indeed among whole cities and races, that justice consists in the superior ruling over and having more than the inferior.”

Plato, *Gorgias*, c. 380 B.C.E.

- a) Identify ONE example from the Greek city-states of attitudes toward society and social structure.
- b) Identify ONE example from Persia of attitudes toward society and social structure.
- c) Identify ONE counterargument to the ideas presented in the above passages using evidence from either the Greek city-states or Persia.
2. Answer all parts of the question that follows.
- a) Explain ONE cause of the Persian Wars.
- b) Explain ONE effect of the Persian Wars.
- c) Explain ONE effect of the Peloponnesian Wars.

THINK AS A HISTORIAN: RECOGNIZE CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

One way historians make sense of the events of the grand sweep of history is to identify what remains relatively constant and what changes noticeably over time. *Which TWO statements below most clearly comment on continuity or change?*

1. Sparta is remembered for creating a military society in which boys underwent rigorous training as soldiers.
2. Women, slaves, and foreigners could not be citizens in the poleis of early Greece.
3. The years from Socrates to Aristotle marked the start of a new way of thinking about ideas.
4. Greece's many small islands and long, irregular coastline made seafaring and trade important in ancient Greece.
5. During the Persian Wars, Greek city-states rebelled against Persian rule and eventually forced the Persians to retreat, ushering in an era of fortune.

WRITE AS A HISTORIAN: USE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Chronos was the Greek word for time that is measured by sundial or clock—that is, orderly and predictable. From that comes the word *chronological*. A chronological approach examines events in the order in which they occur. *Which THREE of the sentences below cue you that the writer's approach is chronological?*

1. A distinctive Greek culture developed in the early Mediterranean civilizations; centuries later in the Golden Age, Greek culture would flourish again.
2. Infighting among city-states in Greece ended a period of fortune, partly caused by Athens' demand that the other city-states pay it taxes.
3. During his 13-year campaign, Alexander's conquests included Egypt, which eventually became a center of Hellenistic culture.
4. Greece was so influential in the Hellenistic world that its influences showed in South Asia's art, architecture, and clothing.
5. Early governments of Athens were monarchies, followed by a time in which aristocrats ruled.