

Foundations of World Civilization: Notes 18
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 Egypt, then New Kingdom Egypt
 - Phoenician traders
 - Old Palace period: 2000-1700 BCE
 - Knossos
 - frescoes, bull-jumping, storerooms for olive oil and wine
 - Linear A
 - eruption of Thera (Santorini), earthquakes, tidal waves: about 1628 BCE
 - Old palaces largely destroyed
 - New Palace period: 1700-1450 BCE
 - reconstruction even bigger and more complex
 - wide trading of fine stone and gold jewelry, ceramics, etc.
 - frescos at Avaris, which had been the Egyptian capital under the Hyksos a century or less before
 - connection between the Westcar Papyrus and Minoan civilization: despite radical differences, all part of the same world system...
- then increasing raiding, finally conquered and ruled by Mycenaean Greeks

- who used the palaces for a few centuries
- Mycenaean Greeks
 - fortified citadels, as at Mycenae
 - centers of battling small city-states
 - maritime traders by 1600 BCE
 - adopted Linear A syllabic system, modified into Linear B alphabet to write early Greek
 - this meant relatively wider-spread literacy
 - expanded control in Greece and islands, Italy, 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 led to abandonment of Mycenaean citadels and dispersal of the population
- Rise of polis (poleis) starting around 800 BCE
 - larger, more politically complex city-states developing from Mycenaean citadel centered city-states
 - highly variable
 - independent city-states, 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 expanded on land 700s – 600s BCE
 - conquering most of the Peloponnesus
 - although that is not such a big or populous space: comparable to the greater Los Angeles area, or the San Francisco Bay area including Contra Costa county.
 - 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 became 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 (other poleis did endure civil wars)
 - Solon of Athens: gave non-aristocrats (but still had to be wealthy enough!) a role in government, eliminated debt slavery, but did not redistribute land
 - later reforms added salaries to public offices so the less wealthy could participate
- 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, the Persian empire (Achaemenid Empire) was growing
 - Successor to the earlier empires of Mesopotamia
 - Median Empire (Empire of the Medes, or Persians) from about 612 to 550 BCE
 - Cyrus the Great of Persia, grandson of the last ruler of the Median Empire, took the empire by force and started aggressively expanding it
 - the Achaemenid Empire, 550-330 BCE
 - Persian wars (with Greece): 500-479 BCE
 - started with conflict in Ionia (Lydia; the western end of Anatolia), as we read in Herodotus, vs. King Cyrus of Persia
 - Athens sent a fleet, but eventually Cyrus's successor, Darius, took back Ionia
 - Darius then attacked Athens
 - Darius lost dramatically in the naval battle of Marathon, then was immediately defeated again trying to take the city of Athens
 - so the Persians retreated
 - Xerxes, next king of Persia, tried again in 480 BC
 - again lost in the naval battle of Salamis
 - The Persians gave up, and left the Greek region to the Greeks
 - leaving the Persian Achaemenid Empire further east
 - Herodotus documented these Persian wars
- this left the Greek poleis beholden to Athens for its naval defense
 - they formed 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 neatened 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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