

The Culture of Archaic Greece in Athens, Sparta and Miletus

800- 480 B.C.

Lecture Summary: In this lecture we are going to dive into the culture of Archaic Greece at a time of emergence out of the dark ages and into a period of political, social and economic experimentation. We will look at the development of the Greek Polis (sometimes translated problematically as “city-state”) and compare the political and social structures of three of those poleis: Athens, Sparta and Miletus. Our work here today is to connect the early small states of the early Iron Age to what is now emerging out of the Aegean and to see the beginnings of the development of democratic rule and its many political forms.

I. Where are we in time?

800-400 BC The Rise of the Greek polis

c.750 BC Homeric epics transcribed

725-650 BC Hoplite tactics become standard

c.600 BC Militarization of Sparta

600-500 BC Emergence of the Milesian School (pre-Socratic philosophy)

594 BC Solon’s reforms in Athens

546 Cyrus of Persia conquers Lydia and controls the Greek cities of Ionia.

510 BC Overthrow of Peisistratid tyrants in Athens

499-494 Ionian Revolt

490 Battle of Marathon

II. Where are we in the world?

III. The Dark Age in Greece

- a. Mycenaean decline
- b. Depopulation
- c. The Greeks and their gods
- d. The idea of hubris
- e. Foreign contacts and the rise of the *polis*
 - i. Phoenician influence
 - ii. alphabet
 - iii. seafaring
 - iv. Rapid population growth
 - v. The polis (city-state)
 - vi. The *asty*—the urban community
 - vii. The *khora*—the land
 - viii. *Synoikismos*—bringing together of dwellings

IV. Archaic Greece

(800–480 B.C.E.)

- a. “Age of Experiment”—a new dynamism
- b. Colonization and Panhellenism

- i. Expansion of the Greek world (*Magna Graecia*)—new contacts and trade
 - ii. A new awareness of common culture and outlook—Hellenes
 - 1. Panhellenism
 - a. Oracle of Delphi
 - b. Games at Olympia (776 B.C.E.)
 - c. Dating events by “olympiads”
 - c. Hoplite warfare
 - i. Common foot soldiers supporting aristocratic warriors
 - ii. Carried spears of short swords and the large round shield (hopla)
 - iii. The phalanx
 - d. Formation of a “hoplite class”
 - i. Every polis needed a hoplite force
 - ii. Ranks filled by farmers who could afford armor
 - iii. Wanted a share in the political decisions of the polis
 - e. Aristocratic culture and the rise of tyranny
 - i. Pursued wealth and power as well as a distinctive culture
 - ii. Officeholding and the symposium
 - iii. The aristocratic identity
 - f. A new elite—problems
 - i. Violence between aristocratic groups
 - ii. *Tyrannos*—someone who seized power and ruled outside traditional framework
 - iii. The tyrant had to satisfy the hoplites
 - iv. Important path from aristocracy to democracy
 - g. Lyric Poetry
- V. Athens
 - a. Athens
 - b. Identity
 - c. Agricultural economy
 - d. Government
 - i. Landed aristocracy
 - ii. Elected magistrates and the council of state
 - 1. Nine archons held executive power (civil, military, judicial, and religious functions)
 - iii. Areopagus Council—elected the archons
 - e. Political Change
 - i. Debt slavery
 - ii. Political factions
 - iii. The failed coup of Kylon (632 B.C.E.)
 - iv. Drakon (621 B.C.E.)—“setting the laws”
 - v. “draconian” punishments

- VI. Sparta
 - a. Helots and *Spartiate*
 - b. Helots outnumbered *Spartiate* ten to one
 - c. The problem of revolts
 - d. *Spartiate* could not engage in trade or farm their own land (distractions)
 - e. Protectors of the “traditional constitutions” of Greece
 - f. Demographic flaws
- VII. Miletus
 - a. Commercial, cultural, and military power of Ionia (Asia Minor)
 - b. Strong Hellenic identity shaped by Near Eastern influence
 - c. Ionia and Lydia—cross-cultural exchange
 - d. Ionians Hellenize interior of Asia Minor
 - e. Strong trading interests (Black Sea and Egypt)