

# GREECE

IN THE MAKING

1200 - 479BC

ROBIN OSBORNE



SECOND EDITION

ROUTLEDGE HISTORY OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

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## GREECE IN THE MAKING, 1200–479 BC

*Greece in the Making* is an accessible and comprehensive account of Greek history from the end of the bronze age to the classical period. The first edition of this book broke new ground by acknowledging that, barring a small number of archaic poems and inscriptions, the majority of our literary evidence for archaic Greece reported only what later writers wanted to tell, and so was subject to systematic selection and distortion. This book offers a narrative which acknowledges the later traditions, as traditions, but insists that we must primarily confront the contemporary evidence, which is in large part archaeological and art-historical, and must make sense of it in its own terms.

By reading later traditions in the light of what we now know of early iron age Greece from archaeology and of what early Greek poetry, including the Homeric epics, reveals, this book creates a new history of this crucial period in which the Greek city-states developed the political and cultural forms which gave birth to the earliest democracies and to such seminal literary forms as Greek tragedy.

In this second edition, as well as updating the text to take account of recent scholarship, and reordering some material, Robin Osborne has addressed more explicitly the weaknesses and unsustainable interpretations which the first edition chose merely to pass over. He now spells out why this book features no 'rise of the *polis*' and no 'colonisation', and why the treatment of Greek settlement abroad is necessarily spread over various chapters. Students and teachers alike will particularly appreciate the enhanced discussion of economic history and the more systematic treatment of issues of gender and sexuality.

**Robin Osborne** is Professor of Ancient History at the University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of King's College Cambridge and of the British Academy. He has published widely on ancient Greek history, archaeology and art, including *Classical Landscape with Figures: The Ancient Greek City and its Countryside* (1987), *Archaic and Classical Greek Art* (1998), and *Greek History* (Routledge Classical Foundations, 2004).

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MAKING,  
1200–479 BC

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FOR JOHN,  
AFTER ALL THESE YEARS



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## PREFACE

This book has been a long time in the making. The list of those who did not write the Methuen book on Archaic Greece is a distinguished one: H. A. Ormerod and H. T. Wade-Gery were supposed to write for the old Methuen series, and J. K. Davies was initially commissioned to write for the new. That I have ended up at the end of this line I owe to Fergus Millar, who has waited patiently, has encouraged persistently but gently, and has read, and commented extensively on, the whole book.

Since Ormerod was commissioned in the 1920s, our understanding of archaic Greece has been immeasurably transformed several times over, not simply by the work of archaeologists but also by work on oral traditions. In the 1930s the leading protagonist in the use of archaeology to illuminate early Greek history was my Corpus predecessor Alan Blakeway, samizdat copies of whose lectures on the theme long influenced thinking on the subject in Oxford. Blakeway's own untimely death, and the untimely deaths of too many of his colleagues both before and during the Second World War, took the heart out of the archaeology of Iron-Age Greece in Britain. But in recent years interest in the area has been revived, in no small part as a result of the giant's stride forward in the bold use of the archaeological record to understand eighth-century BC Greece made by Anthony Snodgrass's *Archaic Greece: The Age of Experiment* of 1980. Here I attempt to consolidate that advance, and at the same time to face, more determinedly than has previously been done, the fact that what literary texts tell us about the events of the years before the Persian wars is a product of what individuals and groups in the fifth century BC found it in their interest to tell, and not of what actually happened.

This book ends with the Persian wars. That is the conventional point at which to end histories of archaic Greece, and it is the point at which Simon Hornblower's *The Greek World 479–323 BC*, the successor volume to this in the series, begins. But I will argue, in 1.4 and in the epilogue, that the Persian wars mark a change both in the nature of Greek history and in the nature of the source material from which Greek history can be written. I begin, less conventionally, with the Dark Age of the twelfth to ninth centuries BC. I have begun there, rather than with the traditional beginning of Greek history in 776 BC, because it is following the fall of the Mycenaean palaces that the greatest discontinuity in the archaeological record occurs, and because, for all that many things change in eighth-century Greece, there is no fundamental change in the sources for the study of Greek society in the eighth century.

Although there is a line of argument running through the book, I hope that it will be of service to those interested only in part of the world which it surveys.

Such readers are, however, advised that they should read the opening chapter before attempting to use the rest of the book. Discussion of various topics, such as trade, is inevitably spread over the book, and readers are encouraged to make use of the index in order to put these discussions together again. I have endeavoured to ensure that my text adequately indicates the basis for the views which it expounds; my text has not been written in opposition to ‘rival’ histories and I have not made any attempt systematically to signal how my views relate to those expressed by other scholars who have written on the same topics. I hope that readers will find the different choices which other scholars writing about the period make in their histories *more* interesting, rather than less, as a result of reading this book. But I hope, even more strongly, that they will go away and read the Greek sources, Homer, Hesiod, Herodotos and the rest, with a new fascination and new insight. Throughout I have employed, rather than footnotes, a running bibliography, to be found at the end of the book and to be read in parallel with the chapters. This bibliography is intended to suggest the best place for an English-speaking reader to go for further information on the topics discussed; it is not intended to be exhaustive, and has not been limited to works which argue for the view of the particular issue which my text has adopted.

I am grateful to Jim Coulton, Franco De Angelis, Henry Kim, Irene Lemos, John Lloyd, David Percik, Oliver Taplin, and Stephen Todd for assistance with various topics and criticism of various draft chapters. Many other colleagues have influenced this book in less direct ways, through the stimulus of their work and through conversation, and I am grateful to them all for the generosity with which they have shared information and views. My pupils over the past decade have contributed more than they would guess to the arguments presented here, and if some parts are better constructed than others it is as a result of their work. I owe the felicitous title to my daughter Elizabeth. I am particularly grateful to Simon Hornblower, who read and commented on the whole of the first draft and whose sensitivities to style and content have not only saved me much embarrassment but have saved the reader from a much more turgid book. My knowledge of Thasos and the Cyclades has been enhanced with the assistance of the British Academy, of Sicily with that of the Oxford University Craven Committee, and of Khios and Samos with that of Corpus Christi College; I gratefully acknowledge the help of all these bodies.

In November 1977, as an undergraduate at King’s College Cambridge, I wrote an essay in answer to the question ‘Account for the differences between Coelius Antipater 11 and Livy 21.21 and between Quadrigarius 10(b) and Livy 7.9.8f’. All down the margin at one point my supervisor wrote: ‘We have a homeostatic oral culture here – aristocrats jealously hoarding their claims to pedigree and never in a position to sort out consciously where fact merged with pious fiction. The past is adjusted to the present, but not necessarily consciously or at any controllable level?’ That remark has lived with me ever since and might stand as the epigraph to this book, which is dedicated to that incomparable supervisor, John Henderson, in the hope that he may find it a step in the right direction.

*Corpus Christi College Oxford  
October 1995*

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The first edition of this book has enjoyed a dozen years of use and abuse. My chief aim in revising this book has been to increase its usefulness to all sorts of readers. I have attempted to bring the bibliographical notes up to date, to clarify arguments which readers have found difficult to follow, to signal more clearly why it is that certain traditional topics of discussion do not figure here (notably 'colonisation' and 'the rise of the *polis*'), to offer more systematic discussion of the economy and of gender relations, and to facilitate the use of the book as a textbook by reversing the orders of Chapters 2 and 3. I have not attempted to defend myself against those who dismiss my account as one that is simply sceptical; I can only ask that they read more closely. I am grateful to all who offered suggestions and in particular to Paul Cartledge, Simon Hornblower, and Peter Rhodes for both detailed corrections and more general challenges to my views to which I have attempted to respond.

It is a particular pleasure to have been able to make these revisions back in the collegial company of John Henderson.

*King's College Cambridge*  
*September 2008*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AA</i>	<i>Archäologische Anzeiger</i>
<i>ABSA</i>	<i>Annual of the British School at Athens</i>
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>AM</i>	<i>Athenische Mitteilungen</i>
<i>ANE</i>	Amélie Kuhrt, <i>The Ancient Near East</i> (London, 1995)
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
<i>BICS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>
<i>BR</i>	T. J. Cornell, <i>The Beginnings of Rome</i> (London, 1995)
Buck	C. D. Buck, <i>The Greek Dialects</i> (3rd edn, Chicago, IL, 1955)
<i>CEG</i>	P. A. Hansen (ed.), <i>Carmina Epigraphica Graeca saeculorum VIII–V a. Chr. n.</i> (Berlin, 1983)
<i>FGH</i>	F. Jacoby, <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> (Berlin and Leiden, 1923–)
Fornara	C. W. Fornara (ed. and trans.), <i>Archaic Times to the End of the Peloponnesian War. Translated Documents of Greece and Rome</i> , vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1983)
<i>GW</i>	S. Hornblower, <i>The Greek World 479–323 BC</i> (3rd edn, London, 2002)
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> (Berlin, 1873–)
<i>JDAI</i>	<i>Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of the Hellenic Society</i>
<i>LSCG</i>	F. Sokolowski (ed.), <i>Lois sacrées des cités grecques</i> (Paris, 1969)
<i>ML</i>	R. Meiggs and D. M. Lewis (eds), <i>A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century BC</i> (rev. edn, Oxford, 1988)
<i>OJA</i>	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>P. Oxy.</i>	<i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i> (London, 1898–)
<i>PCPS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society</i>
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>

# THE TRADITIONS OF HISTORY

## **WHAT IS POLYKRATES TO ME? THE NECESSITY OF ARCHAIC GREEK HISTORY**

As soon as you ask why a nation's political or economic institutions, or social relations, are the way they are today, you start to delve into history. If you want to understand why the British Parliament has the powers it does, or operates in the way it does, then one of the first things you need to know is what happened in the seventeenth century with the Civil Wars and the Glorious Revolution. If you want to know why the countryside looks as it does, why country roads meander, why fields are odd shapes, you need to look back into the past history of the ownership and exploitation of the land. If you want to know why non-conformism is so strong in Wales, then you have to look at patterns of evangelism in the past, but also at patterns of political power and of economic deprivation. Studying British history is not a patriotic duty engaged in by chauvinists, it is something any inquisitive person, who wants to understand the society of which he or she is part, continually finds it impossible to do without.

But the history of a foreign country, 2,500 years ago and more? Is that not a luxury, merely a way of keeping the inhabitants of ivory towers out of mischief? Comforting though it might be to think that we can isolate our own history from what has happened to the rest of the world, we cannot. If what Parliament is in Britain today has been shaped by past events, it has also been shaped by what people have thought and written about government and its institutions. And as soon as you look into what has been thought and written on such matters in this country you find that it has been profoundly influenced by what has been thought and written elsewhere. And what has been written elsewhere has itself been shaped by what has happened elsewhere again. Because ancient Greece and ancient Rome have in the past enjoyed a special status in European thought, in a very few moves one finds oneself back with the political writings of Aristotle, and the practice of democracy at Athens. Time and again, in pursuing the history of our own society in order to understand its present forms, we find ourselves pursuing myths about ancient

Greece and through them the history of ancient Greece. John Stuart Mill was even prepared to claim that the Battle of Marathon, when the Athenians and Plataians defeated a Persian invasion force, was a more important event in English history than the Battle of Hastings.

You may imagine that, on this argument, there will be no end to the pursuit of the past: are we not entering an infinite regress that will end with us shuffling through the history of man from the stone age on? The answer to that is 'No', and it is 'No' for two very significant reasons, which themselves point up the importance of Greek history. The first is that it is only with the Greek world that we begin to get the sort of source materials that enable us to do the sort of history that lets us ask our own questions and hope to get answers. We have chronicles from earlier times, such as those available in the history books of the Old Testament, but it is from the Greeks of the classical period that we first get critical history, history that is conscious that people tell different stories about past events, history that tries to understand why events occurred and what their significance was, and is not satisfied with answers in terms of the commands of a political or religious leader. It is with the self-governing Greek states of the classical period that we begin to be able to see how a political system worked in detail, and to understand the structures of power on more than a personal level.

The second reason is still more striking. It is not entirely a European myth that in the classical Greek world we find the origins of very many features which are fundamental to our own western heritage. Whole modes of thought and expression have their fount and origin in Greece between 500 and 300 BC: self-conscious abstract political thought and moral philosophy; rhetoric as a study in its own right; tragedy, comedy, parody, and history; western naturalistic art and the female nude; democracy as theory and practice.

But this western tradition of the Greek origins of western civilisation, like the classical Greeks' own traditions about their past (see below, pp. 4–8), is also political, and no respecter of history. It is not only absurd to pretend that the buck stops dead in classical Greece, it is also to turn a blind eye to the socially embedded nature of human achievement. In Greek mythology the goddess Athene was born direct from the head of Zeus, but in ancient history as in modern history even the most startling discoveries and inventions have antecedents, and would not have occurred had previous conditions not been right. Therein lies the fascination with the Greece of the pre-classical period: can we recover the conditions which made the developments, the inventions, of the years 500 to 300 BC possible? What were the circumstances that brought about the revolution in the way the whole western world has thought and expressed itself ever since? We owe it to ourselves as humans to refuse the strategy of our tradition, a strategy which is far from politically innocent, which points to Athens' democracy as if that explained everything; and we owe it to ourselves to acknowledge the place which the heterogeneity of Greek experience within a pan-Mediterranean context had in the creation of that far from uniform classical Greek world.

If much of the attraction of studying archaic Greece lies in its *end*, and we must be unashamedly teleological, there is no less attraction in its beginning. In 1200 BC Greece looked much like any near-eastern society. The Mycenaeans were highly organised and, in their way, highly civilised. The language they spoke was Greek but, like several near-eastern neighbours, they wrote in a syllabary (so-called Linear B) and used writing to record the accounts of a complex and very hierarchical state organisation. Although their monuments and their figurative art certainly differ in detail from that of their near-eastern neighbours, it is difficult to feel that they differ in kind. But then something remarkable happened which we still cannot pretend that we understand: Mycenaean civilisation on the Greek mainland and islands collapsed. For the best part of two centuries, the traces of human occupation in Greece are exiguous, and, when the material remains increase again, the debt in material culture to the Mycenaean world is small. The Greeks kept their language, but they lost the tradition of writing it, and apart from some convenient ruined monuments upon which to hang their myths, the Greeks of the eighth century seem to have owed little other than that language and those myths to the Greeks of the twelfth century.

The Greeks of the ninth and eighth century were hardly in a 'state of nature', but they do give us a chance to see, from almost the very beginnings, the development of a political society and of a cultural identity. Through close examination of the material remains we can trace the formation and reformation of social groups, the contacts between groups both within and outside the Greek mainland, the links with other cultures of the near and middle east, and the effect which those contacts had at the material level. And, by a stroke of extraordinary fortune, we can get into the structures of thought of these communities through the survival of the two great epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, both the result of a single mind working upon materials which had been transmitted and elaborated orally over a period of centuries, and also through the two much more individual works of a single historical figure, the long hexameter poems known as the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*, by a man named Hesiod who lived in a small community in central Greece around the year 700 BC.

The challenge that faces the student of archaic Greece is this: how to understand how the small communities of men and women scattered over mainland Greece, the Greek islands, the coast of Asia Minor, and, before long, over the coasts of Sicily, south Italy, and the Black Sea too, developed from the low level of organisation and poverty of material culture that we see in the ninth century BC, to the communities that laid the foundations of the culture and political organisation of the western world of the fifth and fourth centuries. In studying the society and conditions of archaic Greece, we study also the conditions of our own emergence as a civilised society and as civilised individuals in the western world.



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