

Early Greek History: 2,000 BC – 300 BC

I. Controversy over origins

There are two views of how ancient Greece was originally settled. There is (1) the conventional view and (2) the revised Ancient view. According to the conventional view a group of nomads, identified with the Kurgan culture and living somewhere to the north of the Black Sea, moved into Greece around 2,000 BC. The Kurgans are believed to have overwhelmed the native Greek tribe, referred to as the Pelasgians. Furthermore, the conventional view holds that the Pelasgians had no written language of their own but rather adopted the language of the Indo-European speaking Kurgans. The historical significance of the conventional view is that it traces the origins of ancient Greece **entirely** to European/Aryan roots. The alternative hypothesis, the revised Ancient view, is that the native Pelasgian tribe mixed on at least two occasions with African-Semitic speaking people. The historical significance of the revised Ancient hypothesis is that it traces some of the ancestors of the Greeks to people who have African-Semitic blood.

If you have studied any world history in high school, you have probably been taught the conventional view of the origins of ancient Greece. In this section, I present the evidence for the alternative, more controversial hypothesis, the revised Ancient view. In my opinion the alternative explanation is plausible. Therefore, it deserves a hearing. I start by mentioning the fact that ancient historians endorsed the revised Ancient view. For example, the 5th c. BC (c. 450 BC) historian, Herodotus in his *History* Bk. vi, ch. 55 maintains that African people conquered Greece. He writes:

“How it happened that Egyptians came to the Peloponnese [in southeast Greece, see map of ancient Greece], and what they did to make themselves kings in that part of Greece has been chronicled by other writers. I will add nothing, therefore, but proceed to mention some points, which no one else has yet touched upon.”

Thus, Herodotus speaks in favor of the hypothesis that Egyptians actually settled parts of Greece. As settlers, the Egyptians were likely to have intermarried with native Greeks.

The strongest additional evidence for there being some African-Semitic blood in the ancient Greeks derives from two sources: linguistic and archeological. I discuss first the linguistic evidence.

The linguistic evidence arises in connection with the problem of explaining the relationship between Indo-Hittite and Indo-European. These two dialects have a common linguistic basis and also have significant linguistic differences. The conventional view explains the commonality between the two dialects by saying that Indo-European speaking Kurgans moved not only into Greece c. 2,000 BC but also at approximately the same time moved into the Arabian Peninsula (roughly where Palestine, Lebanon, Israel, Iraq and Iran now are. See map of the Mediterranean region.). Having arrived in the Arabian Peninsula, the Kurgan speakers of Indo-European intermarried with the natives who spoke Semitic. Thus, according to the conventional view, the dialect of Indo-Hittite arises from the fusion of the Kurgan's Indo-European with the native Semitic, which is an Afro-Asiatic dialectic. But proponents of the revised Ancient view argue that this explanation of the relationship between Indo-European and Indo-Hittite cannot adequately account for either (1) the differences between Indo-European and Indo-Hittite or (2) the commonality between, on the one hand, the latter two dialects and,

on the other hand, Afro-Asiatic. Consider first the claim about the differences. The conventional view cannot account for the differences for two combined reasons. First, there is evidence of the differences just a few hundred years after the supposed entry of the Indo-European speaking Kurgans into the Arabian Peninsula. Second, linguists argue that a few hundred years is not sufficient time for the differences between the dialects to have emerged. Because of these shortcomings in the conventional view, proponents of the revised Ancient view offer an alternative theory about the relationship between Indo-European and Indo-Hittite. Instead of supposing that Indo-Hittite emerges from Indo-European, the revised Ancient view postulates that Indo-European emerges from Indo-Hittite. Proponents of the revised Ancient view go on to explain the emergence of Indo-Hittite in the following way. Agreeing with the conventional view, the revisers maintain that Indo-Hittite first emerges in the Arabian Peninsula. But they part company with the conventionalists on the matter of the time of its emergence. Whereas the conventionalists date the emergence to 2,000 BC, the revisionists date it to roughly 6,000 BC, 4,000 years earlier. In the revisionists view, the emergence of Indo-Hittite is partly the result of an agricultural migration of a nomadic tribe from Ethiopia, in Egypt that began sometime after 8000 BC. The Ethiopian nomads crossed the Red Sea and moved into the so-called Arabian Peninsula. The nomadic tribe is believed to have spoken a dialect of Afro-Asiatic. But after the tribe arrives in the Arabian Peninsula it merges with the Canaanites, a tribe that also lived in the Arabian Peninsula and spoke Semitic, another dialect of Afro-Asiatic. From this mixture of two Afro-Asiatic dialects, Indo-Hittite emerges. That is, in the revisionists' view, Indo-Hittite emerges from the fusing or mixing of the nomad's Afro-Asiatic dialect and the Canaanites' Afro-Asiatic dialect,

Semitic. Furthermore, according to this revised Ancient view, sometime after 6,000 BC the now Indo-Hittite speaking group of nomads moves up into Greece; and, their Indo-Hittite dialect is adopted by the population native to Greece, the Pelasgians. The Indo-Hittite speaking nomadic tribe also moves into the northern Balkan Peninsula (north of Greece and east of the Black Sea. See map of the Mediterranean area.) In this way, they carry their dialect, Indo-Hittite, to the area of Russia that borders the Black Sea. As a result of this migration into the Black Sea area, the nomad's dialect evolves into Indo-European. Lastly, sometime even later roughly around 2,000 BC some of now Indo-European speakers, the Kurgans, move back down from the Black Sea area into Greece and intermarry with the native Greek, Indo-Hittite speaking Pelasgians. So in the revised Ancient view the Pelasgians mix on at least two occasions with African-Semitic speaking people. The first time is when the Indo-Hittite nomadic tribes move out of the Arabian Peninsula sometime after 6,000 BC. The second time is when ancestors of that tribe who now speak Indo-European move back down south into Greece, around 2,000 BC. In light of the revised account of the origins of Indo-Hittite, we can now consider the revisionist's claim that their view of the origins of Indo-Hittite better explains the differences between Indo-European and Indo-Hittite. It can do this because it posits that Indo-Hittite emerges in the Arabian Peninsula much earlier than it is thought to have emerged in the conventional view. It emerges in 6,000 BC rather than 2,000 BC. Therefore, there is a longer period of time between its emergence in the Arabian Peninsula and the emergence of Indo-European from it in the Black Sea region. This longer, roughly 4,000 year rather than 300 year period, is sufficient time for the observed differences between the dialects

to take shape. Thus, the revised ancient view's explanation of the differences between Indo-Hittite and Indo-European is more plausible from a linguist's point of view.

The revised Ancient view also does better than the conventional view when it comes to explaining the commonality between, on the one hand, Indo-Hittite and Indo-European, and on the other hand, Afro-Asiatic.

Only Indo-Hittite, Indo-European languages (e.g. French, German, Italian, English, Ancient Greek) and dialects of Afro-Asiatic (e.g. Semitic, Chadic, Berber and Egyptian) have definite articles: terms such as "the." In contrast, languages such as Japanese, Chinese, Hungarian, Basque have no term that functions as our word "the" functions. On the conventional view, this shared feature of Indo-Hittite and Indo-European, on the one hand, and Afro-Asiatic, on the other hand, is either a matter of chance or the result of the Indo-Europeans having borrowed the definite article from the Indo-Hittite speakers in the Arabian Peninsula around 2,000 BC.

But chance is the best explanation only if we can find nothing better. And the "borrowed" hypothesis is not entirely plausible because it is not common for language speakers to borrow from other languages fundamental features of their own language. Language users typically borrow place names, names for mountain ranges and for bodies of water from neighboring people as the result of trade and migration. But they do not tend to borrow the more basic elements of a language, such as the use of verb tenses, distinctions between active-passive voices, and (in the revised Ancient view) demonstrative reference by means of articles. Rather, it seems more likely that such basic linguistic features originate within the language in question. Accordingly, the revised Ancient view explains the similarity in a different way. It assumes that Indo-

Hittite, not Indo-European, is the older dialect. Moreover, although we can explain the commonality regardless of which language emerged first, if we suppose that it was Indo-Hittite that is the source of Indo-European, then the fact that the two languages share a basic feature with Afro-Asiatic dialects can be better explained. For if this is the direction of origination, then the feature of having a definite article could be explained as a feature that was passed on from Afro-Asiatic to Indo-Hittite to Indo-European as a result of its (Indo-Hittite's) ancestry in Afro-Asiatic. So in the revised Ancient view the dialects share this feature in common feature because the dialects are members of the same language group. And this explanation of the common feature accords with the more typical explanations of how basic similarities among dialects arise.

To summarize the discussion so far. I have argued that there are problems with the conventional view of how ancient Greece was settled. The problems concern an inability to adequately account for (1) the differences between Kurgans' Indo-European and a related dialect, Indo-Hittite, and (2) the similarity between the latter two dialects and Afro-Asiatic. The revised Ancient view can plausibly explain both of the relationships by its hypothesis that Indo-European emerged from Indo-Hittite, a dialogue that in turn evolved out of an Afro-Asiatic dialect. If then the revised Ancient view is correct, the settlers of the ancient Greece had some Afro-Asiatic blood.

In addition to the just discussed linguistic evidence for the revised Ancient view, there is linguistic and archeological evidence that Egyptians conquered the mainland area of Greece known as the Peloponnese (see map of ancient Greece). Specifically, there is reason to believe that in about 1720 the Hyksos tribe, which ruled Egypt from 1720-1575 BC, invaded Argos on the Peloponnese. Argos is the location of the earliest Greek

civilization—the Mycenaean civilization, which emerged in 2,000 BC. The evidence of an Egyptian invasion is as follows. First, the ancient historian Herodotus and at least one other ancient historian, Diodorus of Sicules, attests to an Egyptian conquest of Greece. Second, scholars of ancient Greek have been able to trace back to Indo-European roots about 50% of the vocabulary of ancient Greek—a language that emerged between 1600-1500 BC in Greece. Another 25% of its vocabulary can be traced back to Semitic roots. There remains, however, about 25% of the vocabulary of ancient Greek that can be shown to have Egyptian roots. For example, there are accepted Egyptian roots for the Greek words for king, chariot, sword, bow, march, armour and honor. Moreover, these words with accepted Egyptian roots belong to the political, legal and administrative vocabulary of ancient Greek. This is in contrast to the fact that the words given Indo-European roots belong predominately to the vocabulary of family life. For example, there are accepted Indo-European roots for the words for father and mother. The fact that the Greek words with Egyptian roots and the Greek words with Indo-European root belong to different parts of the Greek vocabulary fits well with the supposition of a conquest of the Peloponnese by the Egyptian Hyksos. For one would expect that the political, legal and administrative vocabulary would be that of the conquering people, whereas the vocabulary for family life would be native to the original settlers. This is, in fact, the relationship between Anglo-Saxon and French in English. The Norman French conquered the English Anglo-Saxons. Consequently, English has the French “advocate” (a term for a lawyer) and the Anglo-Saxon “chicken,” rather than the Norman term “foul.” So by examining the roots of words of classical Greek, we can discern an Egyptian influence on the language.

There is also archeological evidence that points to a Hyksos invasion. There is evidence in Crete of destruction and rebuilding of palaces at the postulated time of the Egyptian conquest in Greece, namely, 1720 BC. Also, there is in Crete remnants of large, elaborate shaft graves similar to the graves of the kings excavated at Mycenaea in Greece. So the conquerors may well have plundered Crete on their way to Greece. Moreover, the shaft graves excavated at Mycenaea, the graves reputed to be those of the earliest Mycenaean kings, date to the period between 1730-1650 BC. Given that the hypothesized conquest by the Hyksos is put at 1720 BC, the shaft graves could be the conquerors' tombs, since they date to no more than 70 years after the hypothesized conquest. The fact that there were swords in these graves also supports the idea that the graves were those of the Hyksos invaders, since it was the Hyksos who introduced swords into Greece.

To sum up the evidence for an Egyptian conquest of Argos on the Peloponnese area of the Greek mainland. There is the fact that the political, legal and administrative portion of the ancient Greek vocabulary has Egyptian roots and also the fact that grave-sites worthy of kings were found to contain artifacts that can be traced to the Egyptian Hyksos tribe. Although this evidence of early settlement and later conquest by Afro-Asiatic people is not so strong as to prove that the ancient Greeks had Afro-Asiatic ancestors, it shows, I think that the hypothesis has to be taken seriously.

II. The Mycenaean Period through the Dark Ages 1,450 – 750 BC

There is little disagreement over the subsequent events in early Greek history. The Mycenaeans, descendents of the Kurgans, conquered Crete in 1,145 BC, destroyed Troy, their economic rival, in 1,184 and in turn, were overcome by an Indo-European

tribe, the Dorians, in 1,100 BC. The Dorian invasion of mainland Greece caused a migration of the wealthier Greeks to the coast of Asia Minor (see map of ancient Greece). For the remaining Greek population on the mainland living conditions worsened; and Greece as a whole experienced a 400 year period of what is called the Dark Ages (from 1100-750 BC).

During this 400 year period, living sites declined from approximately 320 to 40. This means that 280 living sites were lost over a 400 year period. In terms of population, this is a loss of about two-thirds of the population. The decline in population was accompanied by a loss of some typical human skills. Grave sites that can be dated to this period have in them no metal implements and only animal bones. And building materials dating to this period attest to living structures of mud-brick rather than the limestone blocks of the Mycenaeans. From this evidence, it is inferred that the people had neither agricultural nor architectural skills. It is also clear that they lost the ability to write and to do representational art.

III. Revival (800 BC – 500 BC)

Beginning around 800 BC there is a cultural revival: a return to agriculture, a revival of trade with the Phoenicians and Syrians, and tribal unification into city states. The first philosophers, Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes also can be dated to this period of time. These first philosophers lived and worked in Miletus, a city state on the coast of Asia Minor (see more detailed map of Ancient Greece).

Beginning in about 600 BC the history of ancient Greece becomes primarily the history of Athens. In 594 Solon was the political leader, archon, of Athens. In this capacity he instituted a series of democratic, political reforms. Among other things, he

altered social class qualifications, substituting wealth for birth as the factor that determined membership in a social class. Class membership in turn determined political rights and military obligations. Members of the higher social classes were eligible for both the higher political offices and the more desirable military positions, the generalships and the cavalry. The male members of the lower social classes could serve only in the citizen assembly and as foot soldiers or rowers for the Athenian navy. Solon also required that the laws be written down and posted. Most importantly, he abolished the practice of debt slavery. As a result of this latter reform, no Athenian citizen could be made a slave in Attica.

Solon's reforms were followed by reforms instituted by an Archon named Cleisthenes. It was Cleisthenes' policies, instituted in 503/502, that established Athens as a full democracy. To pave the way for this change, Cleisthenes divided the citizens of Athens into 10 tribes, each tribe consisting of an equal number of people, people who were drawn from and, therefore, who represented Attica's three regions: the city (Athens), the coast and the interior. Because each of the ten tribes drew its members from each of the three regions of Attica, each tribe had city members who could without having to travel represent the tribe at the general meetings of the assembly in Athens. Moreover, the fact that each tribe had representatives at the meeting of the assembly meant that every tribe stood an equal chance of having some of its members serve on the governing council, since council members were selected by lot at the meeting of the general assembly. The members of the governing council then drew lots to select the Archon, the chief political leader of Attica. Only the offices of general and chief of finance were filled by vote. So in effect Athens was a pure democracy, although it

probably goes without saying that only the male citizens could attend assembly meetings and, thereby, be included in the drawings for political office.

IV. Persian Wars (499 BC – 479 BC)

Athens came to political prominence in Greece as a result of her defeat of the Persians in two wars that were separated from one another by a ten-year period. The Persians first invaded Greece in 494 BC. Their declared reason for the invasion was the fact that Athens had supported Miletus, a Persian colony on the coast of Asia Minor, in its attempted revolt against Persian in 499. As payback, Darius, King of Persia, sent a fleet to Greece. The fleet was led by Darius' general Datis, a Persian noble, and Artaphernes, Darius' nephew. The fleet landed at the Marathon (see more detailed map of ancient Greece.) The Persians planned to march from Marathon to Athens. But the Greeks, lead by Miltiades and numbering far less than the Persians, defeated the Persians at Marathon.

The Battle of the Marathon was significant for at least two reasons. The first reason is that there was a Greek messenger (Pheidippides) who ran about 25 miles, from Marathon to Athens, to announce the defeat of the Persians. At the end of the run he died of exhaustion. The marathon runs done by athletes today are named in honor of the Greek runner, Pheidippides. The second reason is that the battle of the Marathon marked the first time in history that a military battle was won as the result of military strategy and not as a result of superior force. The commander of the Greek army, Miltiades, had been the Persian appointed ruler in Miletas. So he was familiar with Persian tactics. He knew that the Persians would place their strongest troops in the middle of the battle lines and their

weakest troops on the flanks. So he did just the opposite, catching the Persians off guard. Thus, the Greeks were victorious, losing only 194 men while enslaving 6400 Persians.

It was 10 years before the Persians attempted a second invasion of Greece. This time Xerxes, Darius' son, commanded the expedition into Greece. According to Herodotus' history of the Persian Wars, the Persians numbered about 200,000 men and 800 triremes (ships). The Athenians, who were aware of the Persian preparations, were persuaded by Themistocles, the Archon at this time, to add 200 new warships to their own fleet and to train additional naval personnel. As the Persians made their way along the Aegean coast, the Greeks met and gave command of their land troops to the Spartans under King Leonidas. Themistocles commanded the naval forces. Since the Persian land forces would have to go through the pass at Thermopylae (see the more detailed map of ancient Greece), King Leonidas waited there with his Spartan troops. Though the Spartans held off the Persians for two days, a Greek traitor led some of the Persians through the mountains to the rear of the Spartans. Seeing his position was hopeless, Leonidas had half of his forces retreat. By the end of the day, the remaining Spartans, along with Leonidas, had perished. The Spartan's courageous defense of the pass is immortalized in the words of the Greek poet, Simonides: "Stranger, go tell the Spartans that we lie here obedient to their laws."

The Athenians managed, however, to defeat this second attack of the Persians. While Leonidas' men were holding off the Persians at Thermopylae, Themistocles had the Athenian fleet meet the Persian fleet in the narrow waters between Salamis and Athens (see more detailed map of ancient Greece). Being better sailors and having swifter ships than the Persians, the Athenians corralled the Persians against the coast and

by the day's end were victorious. Fearing that news of the Persian naval defeat would trigger an uprising against the Persians in Asia, Xerxes retreated and sailed home to Persia.

The defeat of the Persians by the Greeks ushered in 50 years of peace and prosperity for Greece. Athens, in particular, was now the major sea power in the Mediterranean; and, it was also the leader of the Greek defensive confederacy known as the Delian League. So Athens experienced what is referred to as the Golden Age of Classical Greece.

The Golden Age (479 – 431 BC)

During this 50 year period, Athens was very prosperous. She collected tribute money from the other Greek city states in exchange for the promise of defense in the event of another Persian invasion. She also had the service of many slaves, taken as a result of having defeated the Persians. The great number of Persian slaves who replaced Athenians as laborers made it possible and also necessary for these Athenians to work at the expense of the city-state. Many served as paid jurors, others as dockworkers, some as guards for the city, some as crew for the triremes, and some as armed troops. The money for these workers came from the tribute money collected from the members of the Delian League. This money was also used to rebuild the Parthenon, Athen's main temple, dedicated to the god Zeus and situated on the Acropolis. The remains of this most impressive structure are tourist attractions in Athens today.

Pericles, who was Archon during this period of prosperity, encouraged not only the building projects but also artistic and educational activities. The most famous of the Greek playwrights wrote and had their plays performed at this time. These playwrights

included the dramatists Sophocles (496-406 BC) and Euripides (485-406 BC) and the comic playwright Aristophanes. Among the educators, the sophists were the most well-known. They included Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias, and Thrasyarchus. All of these men were teachers of rhetoric and are mentioned (mainly in a critical manner) by Plato in his Socratic dialogues. Socrates was also active during this period. In fact, the very best source for a glimpse of the wealth, leisure and past-time pursuits of upper class Athenian of the Golden Age is Plato's group of early (Socratic) dialogues.

The Peloponnesian Wars 431 – 404 BC

The Persian Wars marked not only the beginning of Athen's cultural renaissance but also the onset of its imperialistic policies. It was Athen's imperialism that eventually led to its wars with Sparta—the Peloponnesian Wars—and, in consequence, to its ultimate loss of political power. Athen's loss of power came about in the following way.

Despite having thoroughly defeated the Persians in 469 BC, Athens took no steps to dissolve the Delian League, the defensive league of Greek city-states from which she received tribute money. This money, as was mentioned above, was used by the Athenians to support a large number of citizens who performed public service tasks and also to support public works projects, such as the rebuilding of the Parthenon. It is believed that the Athenian government needed the tribute money to support these public work projects because the Persian slaves were now performing the household and manufacturing tasks that had once been performed by the ordinary Athenian citizen. So the Athenian citizens now had to have jobs paid for by public money. Consequently, Athens did not allow those allies who wanted to withdraw from the Delian league to do so. In fact, when several of the league members, including Miletus, Naxos, and Euboea,

attempted to withdraw from the league, Athens restrained them by force. So in effect Athens retained control over less powerful city-states mainly by force and for economic reasons. But the Athenian plan to retain control of the Delian League by force ultimately failed. For Sparta, urged on by Corinth, an economic rival of Athens, declared war on Athens. The best account of the specific causes and actual events of the war can be found in Thucydides' *Peloponnesian Wars*.

As Thucydides outlines the wars, during the first ten years Sparta invaded Attica each year at harvest time. In response to these invasions, the rural Athenians withdrew into the city of Athens. Athen's own policy was to get control of the water routes around Sparta. Athen's intention was to cut off trade routes to Sparta and to Spartan allies. But Athens experienced a severe set back in 430 BC when a devastating plague broke out in the city. The plague killed hundreds of Athenians and also killed Pericles, the Athenian Archon at the time and a relatively able leader.

With strength failing on both sides, Athens and Sparta concluded a truce, called the Peace of Nicias in 421 BC. But the peace was short lived. Athens, under the leadership of Alcibiades, decided to attack Sicily and Syracuse in order to cut off all imports from the western Mediterranean into Sparta. In 415 BC Alcibiades set out for Syracuse. But his political rivals in Athens condemned him on a charge of impiety and ordered him banished. Rather than be returned to Athens for trial, Alcibiades fled to Sparta and divulged to the Spartans the Athenian battle plan. So Sparta sent reinforcements to Syracuse; and, the Athenian fleet was completely destroyed on the coast of Syracuse in 413 BC. Though Athenian resources were now almost completely depleted, the weakness and poverty of Sparta prolonged the war for another ten years.

Finally, in 406 BC the Athenians were decisively defeated by the Spartans. In 404 BC, Athens agreed to the Spartan peace demands. It pulled down its defensive walls; and, it destroyed its naval fleet, with the exception of 12 ships. Athens was also forced to join the Spartan league. But Sparta did not require that the Athenians adopt an aristocratic form of government. Hence, the Athens retained its local democratic government. But Athens had been so weakened by the war that it was easily conquered by Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. And thus the once vibrant cultural life of this first democracy came to a final end.