The Rise of the Polis

The Greek Dark Ages,
The Emergence of the City State
Collapse and Rebirth

- Ca, 1200 – 1100 BC
  - Mycenaean's overthrown
  - Iron wielding invaders
  - Known settlements ca. 1200 BC = 320
  - Ca. 1075 BC = 40
  - Linear B Greek disappears
  - Mycenaean's migrate to Anatolia (?)

- Athens:
  - One of few centres to remain stable
Lefkandi

- **Ca. 1200 BC**
  - Vibrant Mycenaean trading post
- **1100**
  - Abandoned
- **900 BC**
  - Flourishing again
  - Trading with Athens, Macedon and Aegean Islands
- **Transition Period:**
  - Tombs show Bronze Age charioteers in association with Iron weapons
Theories of Change

- Economic Theories:
  - Reduced trade = shortage of bronze.
  - Iron use increases in response.

- Social Theories:
  - Disappearance of Charioteer elite
  - Power vacuum – social chaos
  - Reorganized communities emerge

- Power Theory
  - Bronze elite overthrown by Iron invaders
  - Iron invaders unable to maintain status
THE GREEK DARK AGE
CA. 1100 – 776 BC
Archaic Period

- Ca. 776 - 479 BC
  - Emergence of the Greek Polis
  - Steady increase in economic activity
  - Steady increase in population
  - Spread of literacy
  - Colonization
  - Political upheaval (*stasis*)
  - The emergence of the Hoplite warrior
The Polis

- By 750 BC:
  - Polis already exists in rudimentary form
  - Monarchies all but gone
  - Collective of the wealthiest
  - Oligarchy
  - Built on defensive principles
Polis design

- Hilltop fortifications:
  - Not palaces but public spaces
  - Acropolis

- Near but not on the coast
  - "It is obviously better both for ensuring an abundance of necessities and for defensive reasons that the state and its territory should have access to the sea" (Arist. *Pol*. 7.6)
Polis design
Acropolis of Athens
Polis:

- “...its main features are small size, political autonomy, social homogeneity, sense of community and respect for law.” (OCD)
- “The state belongs to the class of objects which exist by nature, and man is by nature a political animal.” (Arist. *Pol.* 1253a1)

- The “political domain” is formed when people “...meet together in an assembly, to discuss matters of common interest” (p.52)

- Detienne’s thesis is that this practice can be traced to the temple.
Detienne argues that the assembly for religious observances is the origin of the political domain, but...

“Agamemnon sent the criers round to call the people in assembly; so they called them and the people gathered thereon. But first he summoned a meeting of the elders at the ship of Nestor king of Pylos” *Iliad* i.48
The political domain is formed in the assembly of the soldiers. The fact that each member of the hoplite class had ready access to weapons was not a threat to internal concord and stability, but rather the guarantor.
Definition of a Polis

1. Was an autonomous city-state not dependent upon any national association.
2. Was formed and maintained specifically for the betterment of an homogenous social group.
3. Had, as its centre (both civic and commercial) a Marketplace (*agora*).
4. Controlled the agricultural territory (*chora*), including villages, of various size.
5. Had a participatory citizenry
6. Was subject to the Rule of Law and capable of defining that law.
7. Was capable of defending its territory and sovereignty with a citizen army.
Mycenaean Monarchy

- Each centre ruled by a king (*Basileus*)
  - But a king can rule several towns
    - Ie: Agamemnon’s offer to Achilles
  - Each town ruled by a Lord (*Aristeus, Anax*)

- Primus inter pares:
  - A king can be a subject of another king.
  - Independent kings can unite for war under a single commander
However...

- Greek culture remained stratified:
  - Aristocracy:
    - Descendants of the warrior elite
    - Maintained the Aristocratic Ethos
    - Crisis subsistence insurance
  - Demos:
    - A new self-aware middle class
  - Thetes:
    - Still and always... the poor.
The New Warrior

- Disappearance of warrior elite
  - Chicken-and-egg?
  - Warrior elite replaced by citizen soldier
- Increase in prosperity
  - The middle-class farmer could afford weapons
- Place Identity
  - Men were now able to defend themselves...
  - Willing to defend a place
Emergence:

- 710 BC at Argos
- Earliest panoply
- 720 at Athens
- Earliest depiction in art
Panoply

- Concave shield (*hoplon 36”*)
- Corinthian Helmet (with horse hair plume)
- Tunic (*kiton*)
- Cuirass
- Greaves
- Thrusting Spear
- Slashing Sword
- Total: +/- 70 lbs.
The Hoplite Phalanx
Phalanx
Battle

- Based on agreed a set of rules
- Open plain
- One short clash of massed infantry:
  - Two phalanxes charge and clash
  - Agreement of victory/defeat
  - Post-battle truce
Synoicism

- The consolidation of several small towns into a single polity centred on the largest city.
- Big fish/ little fish story?
- What happens to the *Basileus* of the small town? Does *synoicism* explain the emergence of the oligarchic council?
Political Theory

- Thucydides i.8
- “...For the love of gain would reconcile the weaker to the dominion of the stronger, and the possession of capital enabled the more powerful to reduce the smaller towns to subjection.”
Colonization: The Polis as Parasite

- **Overpopulation**
  - Caused by increased prosperity
  - Colonies promote more trade

- **Availability**
  - Under population of region

- **Capability**
  - Ships
  - Weapons
Methods

- **Metropolis (Mother City)**
  - Chooses the site
  - Selects an *Oikistes*
  - Decides who can (and will) go

- **Apoikia (colony)**
  - *Oikistes* distributes land
  - Culturally and politically tied to the Metropolis
Expanded Greek World
Trade Routes

Phoenician Trade Routes
Greek Trade Routes