The Rise of the Polis

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

- Ca, 1200 – 1100
  - 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
The Greek Dark Age

- Ca. 1100 BC - 776 BC
Archaic Period

- 776 BC – 479 BC
- Emergence of the Greek Polis
- Steady increase in economic activity
- Steady increase in population
- Spread of literacy
- Colonization
- Political upheaval
- The emergence of the Hoplite warrior
The Polis

- By 776 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
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

- 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.
The Hoplite Revolution
The New Warrior

- Disappearance of warrior elite
  - Chicken-and-egg?
  - Warrior elite replaced by citizen soldier
  - Citizen soldier makes elite moot
- 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

- Easy to train and assemble
- Cannot be broken by chariots or cavalry (head on)
- Can only be stopped by another phalanx
Phalanx
Phalanx

- Just like the polis, the phalanx depends upon the cooperation and mutual support of many men
Battle

- Based on agreement of and adherence to a set of rules
- Open plain
- One short clash of massed infantry:
  - Two phalanxes charge and clash
  - Agreement of victory/defeat
  - Post-battle truce
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. Operated under Laws and was capable of defining those Laws.
However...

- **Greek culture remained stratified:**
  - **Aristocracy:**
    - Descendents of the warrior elite
    - Maintained the Aristocratic Ethos
    - Crisis subsistence insurance
    - Reserved the Right to Declare the Law!
  - **Demos:**
    - A new self-aware middle class
  - **Thetes:**
    - Still and always... the poor.
Synoicism

- The consolidation of several small towns with a larger city into a single polity centred on that large 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 Philosophy

- 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 Metropolis
  - Citizenship
Expanded Greek World
Trade Routes