Archaic Greece

The Archaic period in Greece (800 BC – 480 BC) is a period of ancient Greek history that followed the Greek Dark Ages. This period saw the rise of the polis and the founding of colonies, as well as the first inklings of classical philosophy, theatre in the form of tragedies performed during Dionysia, and written poetry, which appeared with the reintroduction of the written language, lost during the Dark Ages. The term archaic covers these cultural aspects as well.

The termini of the Archaic period are defined as the "structural revolution", meaning a sudden upsurge of population and material goods, which occurred c. 750 BC, and the "intellectual revolution" of classical Greece.[1] The end of archaism is conventionally defined as Xerxes' invasion of Greece in 480 BC.

The sharp rise in population at the start of the Archaic period brought with it the settlement of new towns and the expansion of the older population centres. The Archaic period is also characterized by the spread of colonization along the Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts that began about 800 B.C. The reason for this phenomenon is described by Greek authors as stenochoria, "the lack of land", but in practice there were a great number of reasons: rivalry between political groups, the need for adventure, expatriation, the search for trade opportunities and so on.[2]

Etymology

The term archaic describes things belonging to ancient times and is derived from the Greek word archaikos which means primitive.[3] This term arose from the study of Greek art, where it mainly refers to styles of surface decoration and sculpture, placing it chronologically between geometric art and the classical Greek art. In the sense that it contained the seeds of classical art, it is considered "archaic". Modern historians think of the term archaic as a misnomer.[4] The archaic period in Greek history is considered to be one of the most fruitful periods of Greek history.[5]

Crisis and consolidation of the polis

Mycenaean Greece of the Bronze Age had been divided into kingdoms each containing a territory and a population distributed into both small towns and large estates owned by the nobility. The kingdom was ruled by a king claiming authority under divine right by descent from a heroic ancestor and physically established at a palace situated within a citadel, or acropolis. During the Greek Dark Ages the palaces, kings and estates vanished, population declined, towns were abandoned or became villages situated in ruins and government devolved on minor officials and the tribal structure.

By the middle of the 8th Century the societal structure of Greece had come under immense pressure and the polis was at risk of collapse. Three distinct stressors developed for each strata of archaic society. By 750 B.C. these stressors became impossible to reconcile due to an explosive growth of population in Greece, about 4% per year. These three factors were in many ways connected and tended to reinforce one another.[6]

The farmers of Greece lived under a subsistence lifestyle and were frequently subject to crop failures. Hesiod writes of many different circumstances that could befall an archaic greek farmer, all of which would force him to borrow goods from his neighbors. Failure to pay back these goods could lead to loss of the farm, debt, or enslavement of the people affected. Due to the sharp increase in population, arable farmland, which had always been scarce, now became insufficient to support all the people in Greece. 750-600 B.C. in Greece was marked by widespread famines. By 600 B.C. almost all of the farmers in Athens had been dispossessed of their property and worked as slaves on the same.

The aristoi, aristocratic families, were in constantly competing against one another to gain territory, money, or status. The elegant clothes, jewelry, pottery, artworks etc. from the archaic period were by and large made to the tastes of this part of greek society. Aristoi in the archaic period existed in a closed community of symposion, festivals, lavish
meals, and athletic games that had nothing to do with the commonwealth or farmers of Greece. However an aristoi’s status was predicated on his wealth - if he were to lose it he would also lose his nobility. The advent of sea trade routes placed the aristoi at risk of losing everything through failed overseas investments. [6]

The commonwealth the aristoi governed were repeatedly drawn in to the conflicts of the aristoi as soldiers, disrupting their lives with every new power struggle between nobles. They levied much criticism at the aristoi for neglecting the farmers and at the extravagant lifestyle which the nobility led. As overseas trade become more common in Greece some commoners found themselves very wealthy. Increasingly the newly rich common people challenged the authority of the aristoi, posing a political threat to their regional monarchies. [6]

**Reaction 1: Colonization**

As a reaction to the overpopulation, economic problems and rising political tension within Greece, between 750 B.C. to 600 B.C. many Greeks from all parts of Greece left mainland Greece by ship to establish new colonies. Some colonists went freely to escape the current tensions in Greece and some were sent there as exiles. Any given expedition consisted of about 100-200 people, mostly young men and was led by a Greek noble, searching to gain more power and wealth outside of Greece. A citizen who left Greece to go to one of these colonies gave up his citizenship in Greece in exchange for citizenship in the new colony.

These colonies were widespread, creating greek settlements in Southern Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, the south coast of what is now France, around the coast of the Black Sea, and Cyprus, to name a few. These colonies were not provinces of the poleis from which they came but independent cities entirely, who traced their heritage back to a mother polis within Greece proper. Relations between colonist Greeks and the indigenous populations of the countries they governed were mixed - some cultures met in harmony and others were conquered and enslaved by the Greeks. An important consequence of Greek colonization was the spread of Greek culture, religion, and design throughout the mediterranean, including sites that would come to great importance later in history. [6]

**Reaction 2: Tyrants**

The exceptional success of the move to colonize the rest of the Mediterranean happened in harmony with a consolidation of the Greek polis into a cohesive city-state with social and political order. This process was however frequently interrupted between the 6th and 7th centuries B.C. by numerous aristocrats. These tyrants, a greek word meaning 'unrightful ruler' tended to set up a dictatorship within the polis, raise an army, and attack other poleis in a bid to extend their influence. Tyrants were not social reformers, but in the context of their rules were forced to make laws and arbitrate disputes. A rising Greek distaste for tyrants led to the creation of alternative systems of self government, which eventually led to the Athenian Democracy. Tyrant rulers were never directly followed by pure democracies, however their behavior created the political will among the Greeks to develop a more efficient and fair system of governance. [6]

**Reaction 3: Reorganisation and consolidation of Athens**

From the beginning of the 6th century B.C. onwards many changes in the social structure and government in Greece were formalized in order to administer to the growing needs of the poleis. Certain aspects of the Athenian democracy were formalized and as Athens consolidated itself into a formal city-state political tensions grew within it.

Towards the end of the Archaic period, the power of the basileus, or king, was reduced as aristocratic gatherings such as the council of elders increased in power. The sharing of power among powerful families occurred in many poleis which saw oligarchies established. The Archaic is also a period marked by tyrants, strong rulers who seized power from the aristocracy and ruled as central, dominating figures. [7] A new form of government had evolved, the city-state, which Hellenes termed the polis. The kingdoms were not restored even though in many cases offshoots of the royal families remained. Instead each major population center became autonomous and was ruled by a republican form of government. The ancient Greek term is synoikismos, from which comes the term synoecism "conurbation",...
meaning the absorption of villages and the incorporation of their tribes into the substructure of the polis. The akropoleis became the locations of public buildings, typically temples.\[8\]

**Art**

The period takes its name from what, in art history, was considered the archaic or old-fashioned style of sculpture and other works of art and craft that were characteristic of this time, as opposed to the more natural look of work made in the following Classical period (see Classical sculpture).

**Sculpture**

Sculpture in limestone and marble, terra cotta, bronze, wood and rarer metals were used to adorn temples and funerary monuments both free-standing and in relief. The themes were mythical or from daily life. Life-size statues began suddenly at about 650 BC Three periods have been identified:\[9\]

- **Early Archaic, 660 BC - 580 BC**
  - During the period, the major sculptural forms were the kouros and its female equivalent the kore.
- **Middle Archaic, 580 BC - 535 BC**
- **Late Archaic, 540 BC - 480 BC**

**Ceramics**

In pottery, the Archaic period sees the development of the orientalizing style, which signals a shift from the geometric style of the later Dark Ages and the accumulation of influences derived from Phoenicia and Syria. Pottery styles associated with the later part of the Archaic age are the black-figure pottery, which originated in Corinth during the 7th century BC and its successor, the red-figure style, developed by the Andokides painter in about 530 BC.

Some notable distinctions an observer can use to determine if a piece is from the archaic period are the Egyptian-like "left foot forward", the "archaic smile" and the very patterned and conventionalized hair or "helmet hair".

**Conflicts**

- First Messenian War (Approximately 750-730 BC)
- Lelantine War (End of 8th century BC)
- Second Messenian War (640-620 BC)
- Periander’s destruction of Epidaurus (approx. 600 BC)
- First Sacred War (595-585 BC)
- Thirean War (mid-6th century BC)
- Spartan invasion of Samos (529 BC)
Reconstructed colour kore statue from the archaic period of Greece

- Arcadian Wars
- Athenian Republic Wars
- Greco-Persian Wars

**Important people**

**Statesmen**
- Aristomenes
- Cleisthenes
- Cleisthenes of Sicyon
- Cleomenes I
- Cypselus
- Draco (lawgiver)
- Lycurgus (Sparta)
- Peisistratos (Athens)
- Periander
- Pheidon
- Polycrates

**Epic poets**
- Homeros
- Hesiodos

**Philosophers**
- Anaximandros
- Anaximenes of Miletus
- Herakleitos
- Pythagoras
- Thales
- Xenophanes

**Lyric poets**
- Alkaios
- Alkman
- Anakreon
- Sappho
- Stesikhoros
- Ibykos
- Simonides of Ceos
- Korinna

**Logographers**
- Kadmos of Miletos
- Ekataios of Miletos
- Akusilaos
Fabulists
• Aisōpos
Sculptors
• Butades
• Ageladas
• Antenor
• Arkhermos
• Aristokles
• Bathylkes
• Bupalos
• Kanakhos
• Dipoinos and Skyllis
• Endoios
• Hegias of Athens
• Rhoicos
• Smilis
• Theodoros
Painters
• Aglaophon
• Exekias
• Anakles
• Antidoros
• Archikles
• Ergoteles
• Glaukytes
• Hermogenes
• Kaeltes
• Kleitias
• Lydos
• Nearchos
• Paseas
• Psiax
• Sakonides
• Sikelos
• Sophilos
• Sosimos
• Teisias
• Xenokles
• Andokides Painter
• Apollodros
• Epiktetos
• Euthymides
• Hypsis
• Makron
• Pheidippos
• Phintias
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- Psiax
- Sikelo
- Skythes
- Smikros

Tragic poets
- Thespis
- Phrynichos
- Khoirilos
- Pratinas

Comic poets
- Susarion of Megara (~580 BC)
- Epikharmos of Kos (~540-450 BC)
- Cratinus (~520-420 BC), also classical
- Khionides (also classical) 486 BC

References

Citations

[7] A Brief History of Ancient Greece

Bibliography


Further reading


External links

• Ancient Greece: The Archaic Period (http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/GREECE/ARCHAIC.HTM) — by Richard Hookero
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