Ancient and Medieval History

history of ancient Greece

Greece was never a single nation but was a series of independent states, often in conflict. The Greek world existed until 30 BCE, when Ptolemaic Egypt (the last major Hellenistic kingdom) came under Roman rule. Early Greek history (particularly 8th century BCE and earlier), before the advent of alphabetic writing, is dependent solely on archaeological evidence, with limited credence given to mythological accounts. Later Greek history, based increasingly on written accounts, is more certain. Most dates before 600 BCE are approximate, while dates after this period can still be subject to problems and dispute.

Minoan and Mycenaean Civilizations

This period is the Bronze Age, 3300–1050 BCE.

Dating Methods

Earliest farming settlements in mainland Greece and Crete date from the 7th to 4th millennium BCE (the Neolithic Period and Copper Age). The Bronze Age began around 3300 BCE, characterized by the use of copper alloy or bronze for tools and weapons. Since the early 20th century, the Aegean Bronze Age has tended to be divided into three chronological periods, a tripartite system that was originally intended to mirror the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms of Egypt. The Aegean also tends to be divided into three geographical regions for this period: mainland, Cyclades and Crete. The dating continuously undergoes revision, and the phases (often referred to in abbreviated form) are no longer distinct. Relative chronology is based mainly on pottery styles, and it is not often possible to use absolute dates, even with the availability of some radiocarbon dates.

Crete

In Crete the Bronze Age begins with the Minoan culture, named after the legendary king Minos. The earliest phase is the Prepalatial Period, to about 2200 or 2000 BCE. It is divided into Early Minoan I (EMI), Early Minoan II (EMII) and Early Minoan III (EMIII); the latter is a transitional phase overlapping with Middle Minoan IA (MMIA).

The next period (ca. 2200 or 2000 – ca. 1700 or 1600 BCE) is the First Palace Period (or Old Palace Period), equating approximately to Middle Minoan IB (MMIB), Middle Minoan IIA (MMIIA), Middle Minoan IIB (MMIIB) and Middle Minoan IIIA (MMIIIA). Vast palaces were built across Crete during the First Palace Period. The end of the first palaces ca. 1700 BCE may have been due to a severe earthquake (or series of earthquakes) or to warfare and conquest, with Knossos emerging as the leading center.

The next phase (ca. 1700 or 1600 – ca. 1500 BCE) is the Second Palace Period, equating approximately to Middle Minoan IIIB (MMIIIB), Late Minoan IA (LMIA) and Late Minoan IB (LMIB). During the Second Palace Period the palaces were promptly rebuilt, including at Knossos, Mallia, Phaistos and Zakros. A system of writing known as Linear A was also developed. In this period Minoan influence (though probably not settlement) is apparent elsewhere in the Aegean, including the mainland. The enormous eruption of the Thera (Santorini) volcano (which brought about the legend of the lost city of Atlantis) was once thought to have marked the end of the Second Palace Period, causing the destruction of the palaces on Crete ca. 1500 BCE. This date is no longer accepted, and the eruption is generally believed to have occurred before the end of Late Minoan IA and Late Helladic I (around 1630or 1620 BCE). Indeed, the eruption may not have had such devastating consequences as was once thought. Instead, the palaces and other settlements on Crete could have continued for over 100 years, only then being destroyed by devastating fires or severe decline and prolonged abandonment. Internal conflict is the most likely explanation; an invasion by mainland Mycenaeans is no longer an accepted view, even though they apparently invaded Crete shortly after this period of decline.

The Third Palace Period (ca. 1500–ca. 1200 BCE) equates approximately to Late Minoan II (LMII) and part of Late Minoan III (LMIIIa1, LMIIIa2, LMIIIB). In the Third (and last) Palace Period on Crete, Knossos was powerful, exerting influence over a wide area of the Aegean. It is debatable whether the Mycenaens ever controlled Crete. Linear B was adopted, and the last palace at Knossos was destroyed by fire, preserving the Linear B archives (written on clay tablets). This may have occurred ca. 1400 BCE along with the destruction of other Cretan palaces, or it may have been at the end of LMIIIA2 (late 14th century BCE) or even as late as LMIIIB.
late as 1200 BCE.

The Postpalatial Period, from ca. 1200 to ca. 1050 BCE, is approximately equivalent to Late Minoan IIIC (LMIIC). Previously occupied sites did continue in use, but they were fewer in number, with apparent depopulation.

Cyclades

In the Cyclades Islands there are various dating schemes, the simplest termed "Cycladic": Early Cycladic I (ECI), Early Cycladic II (ECII) and Early Cycladic III (ECIII) are all equivalent to the Prepalatial Period. The Middle Cycladic (MC) is partly equivalent to the First Palace Period, with the later part equivalent to the Second Palace Period. Late Cycladic I (LCI) and Late Cycladic II (LCII) are also equivalent to the Second Palace Period. Late Cycladic III (LCIII) is equivalent to the Third Palace and Postpalatial Periods.

Mainland

On the mainland various dating schemes exist for the Bronze Age, the most common being termed "Helladic" and usually divided into three: ca. 3000–ca. 2100 BCE is Early Helladic, ca. 2100 or 2000–ca. 1550 BCE is Middle Helladic and ca. 1580–ca. 1100/1050 BCE is the Late Helladic or Mycenaean period. The Prepalatial Period comprises Early Helladic I (EHI), Early Helladic II (EHII) and Early Helladic III (EHIII). The First Palace Period comprises the early part of Middle Helladic (MH). The Second Palace Period comprises the later part of Middle Helladic, as well as Late Helladic I (LHI) and Late Helladic IIA (LHIIA). Possibly because of Minoan influence and trade, a ruling class became established at Mycenae and elsewhere on the mainland, represented by much wealth and rich burials, and probably by the first palaces on the mainland.

On the mainland the Third Palace Period comprises the Late Helladic IIB (LHIIB) and Late Helladic III (LHIIIA1, LHIIIA2, LHIIIB1 and LHIIIB2), while the Postpalatial Period is Late Helladic IIIC (LHIIIC). The Third Palace Period was the main Mycenaean period, with the mainland becoming more important than Crete. Several palaces (such as Tiryns, Mycenae, Pylos and Thebes) and many new settlements were established. The 14th and 13th centuries BCE especially were the Heroic Age of the poets, when legends and oral traditions were mixed with some element of truth. During this time many of the palaces were protected by massive fortifications, probably in preparation for sieges. The threat may have been from afar or from neighboring states.

From about 1250 BCE a breakdown of settled conditions began in the eastern Mediterranean, Egypt and Asia Minor, and ca. 1220 BCE level VIIa of Troy was destroyed. This was a time of great insecurity, and in ca. 1200 BCE there was widespread destruction and/or abandonment of many major Mycenaean sites and palaces. Like Crete, some sites did continue to be inhabited for several decades, but they were far fewer in number. Following the final collapse of Mycenaean culture, it used to be believed that the Dorians (Indo-Europeans from the Danube area) invaded much of mainland Greece from approximately 1200 to 1000 BCE. It is no longer accepted that the invasion caused the major dramatic collapse of Mycenaean civilization, and such an invasion is not supported by the archaeological evidence. Climate-shift may have been responsible, leading to crop failure, famine and social collapse.

Dark Age to Geometric

The Dark Age, a period about which little is known except from the archaeological record, is equivalent to the end of the Bronze Age and the Iron Age (ca. 1110–900 BCE). There was a greatly diminished population, poor material culture and buildings that left few surviving remains, and no written records, as it was a nonliterate society. From 1050 to 950 BCE the Ionian Greeks and other Greeks migrated from the mainland to the Aegean Islands and Asia Minor's west coast. Most inhabitants of mainland Greece (except Arcadia) in the Classical Age called themselves Dorian Greeks. The terminology used by scholars for this period is imprecise, with much disagreement. Despite the term "Dark Age," some such settlements were evidently quite prosperous at this time. There also seems to have been a division into separate political organizations, which become clearer in the ensuing Archaic Age. The term "Geometric" is usually applied to the period 900–700 BCE when describing pottery, and at this time the population appears to have increased.

Archaic Age
This period is ca. 750–479 BCE, when the Persian invasions ended, although the dates of this period are disputed, and some prefer 780–480 BCE. The cities of Chalcis and Eretria in Euboea emerged as the leading settlements in Greece. From 800 BCE the Greeks began to travel far afield and colonized many parts of Europe and Asia Minor, mostly by sea, because of the increasing population and consequent land shortage. Chalcis and Eretria were responsible for the earliest colonies, and in 733 BCE Corinth followed with colonies at Corcyra and Syracuse. The Lelantine War between Chalcis and Eretria for the fertile Lelantine Plain broke out around 730 BCE and developed into a conflict involving many Greek states, leading to the disintegration of Euboea's power.

From about 730 BCE Corinth emerged as the most advanced city in Greece. Other important cities included Corinth's neighbors Sicyon and Megara, as well as Aegina, Samos, Miletus, Athens and Sparta. From the mid-7th century BCE there were revolts to overthrow some aristocratic city governments. In Corinth around 657 BCE, Cypselus became the first tyrant to overthrow an aristocratic government. Similar revolts followed in Megara and Sicyon, and an attempted revolt by Cylon in Athens failed in 632 BCE. Although tyrannies seem to have been widespread in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, Sparta's hereditary kingship and unique system of rule endured. Thought to have been established by Lycurgus in the early 7th century BCE, Sparta's system resembled one in Crete and had probably developed from earliest times.

In the years following 625 BCE Sparta and then Athens dominated mainland Greece. Many tyrannies were overthrown (such as at Corinth) and were replaced by oligarchic governments or democracies. Economic problems in Athens were addressed by Solon, the archon in 594 or 593 BCE, who refused the role of tyrant. Nevertheless, Peisistratus became tyrant of Athens from ca. 560 BCE, succeeded by his sons Hipparchus and Hippias, the former subsequently assassinated and the latter forced into exile. Cleisthenes then undertook reform at Athens, and by the end of the 6th century BCE Athens became very powerful and came into conflict with Sparta. By now Sparta was head of an alliance (the Peloponnesian League, but known then as "the Lacedaemonians and their allies"), which included all states of the Peloponnesian except Argos.

By the 6th century BCE Greek settlements existed in Asia Minor, northern Africa, Egypt and the Mediterranean basin. Some colonies were established for political purposes and for trade. Many were agricultural settlements, owing to overpopulation and a shortage of suitable fertile land on mainland Greece. Athens did not participate in colonization, as it had sufficient agricultural land, and Sparta had only one colony (Taras), until Heraclea Trachinia in the mid-5th century BCE.

In 546 BCE the Persians under Cyrus the Great conquered Lydia and came into contact with the Ionian Greek cities of Asia Minor. Conflict with Persia dominated the late Archaic Age (until 479 BCE). In 513 BCE Darius the Great invaded Thrace and Scythia. Persia came to control Thrace as far as Macedonia, as well as Asia Minor, the Middle East, Egypt, and northern Africa as far as Cyrene (beyond which was the Phoenician colony of Carthage, a threat to Greek Sicily and southern Italy). In 499 BCE the Ionian Greeks revolted against Persian control. Sparta refused to help, but Athens and Eretria sent assistance. The Persians crushed the revolt and destroys Miletus (494 BCE). In 492 BCE the Persians under Mardonius took Thasos and campaigned in Thrace. In 490 BCE Darius again attempted to invade Greece, probably to punish Athens and Eretria, but was defeated by Athens at the battle of Marathon with the loss of 6,400 Persian troops but only 192 Athenian Greeks.

The Persians did not invade again for another 10 years, this time under Xerxes. In Athens, Themistocles became an influential leader and prepared for another Persian invasion by building new trireme warships and fortifying Piraeus. Thirty-one Greek states attended a conference at Sparta in 481 BCE and one at the Isthmus of Corinth in spring 480 BCE, forming an alliance that is today known as the Hellenic League, because the Greeks used the word Hellenes to describe themselves, and led by Sparta to combat the Persians. Also in 480 BCE the Persians invaded Greece for a second time and defeated the Greeks at Thermopylae and Artemision (Euboea). They moved through central Greece, and were supported by Thebes. Athens was next taken by the Persians, but the Persians were finally defeated at the naval battle of Salamis in the channel between the island of Salamis and the Greek mainland. Possibly on the same day in 480 BCE, Sicilian forces under Theron and Gelon at the battle of Himera (north coast of Sicily) defeated the Carthaginians under Hamilcar.

Xerxes sailed to Asia Minor to prevent a revolt there, and his general, Mardonius, moved north to Thessaly for the winter. In 479 BCE a combined Greek force defeated the Persians under Mardonius at the battle of Plataea and then moved to Thebes, where the town was besieged and its leaders executed for supporting the Persians. In Ionia the Greeks revolted against the Persians. The Hellenic League now incorporated island states such as Chios, Lesbos and Samos. The Greeks sailed to Asia Minor and defeated the Persians at Mycale (near Samos). Sestus (base of the Persians) was then attacked and destroyed by Xanthippus (479/478 BCE).

**Classical Age**
Delian League

The 5th and 4th centuries BCE are regarded as the Classical Age of Greece, from the end of the Persian invasions to the accession of Alexander the Great (479–336 BCE). In 478 BCE Pausanias was sent with an allied fleet to recapture Byzantium from the Persians, but was recalled by Sparta. From 478 BCE Athens rose to power, particularly under Pericles, and replaced Sparta as leader of the Greeks. Sparta's displeasure when Athens began to rebuild its walls lessened after Themistocles was ostracized (ca. 471 BCE) and Cimon became powerful. Athens became leader of a group of allies called the Delian League, set up to fight against the Persians. The Delian League, also known today as the "Confederacy of Delos," (because it was based on the island of Delos) was known in the 5th century BCE as "The Athenians and their allies." Developed from the Hellenic League, its treasury and meeting place were at Delos. Some states contributed money and others contributed ships, and its money was administered by Athenian officials known as hellenotamiai (treasurers of the Greeks). Until 461 BCE the Delian League forces were led by Cimon who was pro-Spartan. The Delian League undertook various activities against Persia and also for and against its own members, including besieging and capturing Eion (476 BCE), clearing Scyrus of pirates (475–473 BCE) and subjugating a revolt at Naxos (469 BCE).

Although the battle of the Eurymedon (in southern Asia Minor) in ca. 467 BCE removed the Persian threat, Athens continued the Delian League. Revolts by member states were suppressed, including one by Thasos in 465 BCE. Sparta offered to help Thasos, but was prevented by a devastating earthquake and a revolt by the helots of Messenia. Cimon, whose offer to send Sparta assistance from Athens was rejected, was ostracized in 461 BCE. From that date the Delian League was gradually converted into an Athenian Empire. Athens adopted a greater imperialist strategy, using the Delian League to pursue its own interests, which attracted opposition from Sparta and Corinth. From ca. 460 to 446 BCE the First Peloponnesian War was fought between Athens and the Peloponnesian League (involving mainly Corinth). The Delian League treasury was moved to Athens in 454 BCE. With the influence of Cimon, a five year truce was signed between Athens and Sparta ca. 451 BCE.

Cimon renewed attacks on Persian-held territory, and the Persians were finally defeated at the battle of Salamis off Cyprus in 449 BCE. A peace treaty (called the Peace of Callias) between Athens and Persia was negotiated in 449 or 448 BCE. In the treaty, Athens agreed not to attack Persian territory, and the Greeks of Asia Minor were to be autonomous. From 450 to 446 BCE Athens undertook colonization in the form of cleruchies, including Thurii in southern Italy and Amphipolis in the northern Aegean. In 446 BCE Sparta invaded Attica but then withdrew. The First Peloponnesian War was settled the same year, and peace between Athens and Sparta lasted 15 years.

At this point there was little justification for the prolonged existence of the Delian League, but Athens forced the allies to continue paying tribute. From 445 BCE Athens and Sparta drifted toward war. In 435 BCE Corinth and Corcyra fought over Epidamnus. Athens intervened, but the 30-year peace treaty between Athens and Sparta held. In 432 BCE, Potidaea (a colony of Corinth) revolted from the Delian League. The Peloponnesians and Athenians sent forces; the Athenians were victorious and then besieged Potidaea. Sparta subsequently declared war in 431 BCE.

Second (or Great) Peloponnesian War

The first part of the war (431–421 BCE) was the Archidamian War (after Archidamus II). Attica was invaded annually by the Peloponnesians, but its population was concentrated at Athens and Piraeus within the defensive walls. When plague broke out in Athens, leading to the death of Pericles, Cleon became the dominant leader. After Brasidas and Cleon were killed in 422 BCE, Athens and Sparta wanted peace, and a 50-year truce (Peace of Nicias) was signed in 421 BCE.

When Sparta's allies refused to ratify the treaty, Athens, Argos, Mantinea and Elis formed an alliance. Corinth and Megara formed a new alliance with Sparta. The Spartan alliance was victorious at the battle of Mantinea (418 BCE). Sparta and Argos then agreed on an alliance, and then Alcibiades played an important part during the Peloponnesian War (until the battle of Notium in 406 BCE). In 416 BCE Athens conquered the independent island of Melos, and in 415 BCE sent a huge expedition to Sicily to help Segesta against Selinus (an ally of Syracuse) and to cut off supplies to the Peloponnesians. Before the expedition embarked, nearly all the stone herms at Athens were mutilated, which caused an outrage and resulted in accusations against Alcibiades. In 414 BCE the Athenians attempted to besiege Syracuse; reinforcements were sent under Demosthenes, but Athens suffered disastrous defeats in 413 BCE.

Meanwhile Sparta established a fortified base at Decelea, north of Athens, which controlled routes to Boeotia and Attica. This base facilitated invasions into Attica, which severely affected Athenian trade, mining and agriculture. The final phase of the
Peloponnesian War (to 404 BCE) is therefore called the Decelean War; it was fought almost entirely at sea in the eastern Aegean. In 412 BCE Sparta signed the Treaty of Miletus with Persia, surrendering to Darius II the Greek communities in Asia Minor in return for support in its war against Athens. Consequently, Athens made Samos its naval base. An oligarchic revolution in 411 BCE overthrew the democracy in Athens. The soldiers and sailors at Samos declared themselves the true government of Athens, and full democracy was restored in 410 BCE.

Athens gained several naval victories against Sparta in 411 BCE, and the Spartan fleet was destroyed. Sparta sued for peace, but was rejected by Athens. Persia assisted Sparta financially in building a new naval fleet, and consequently Lysander of Sparta defeated the Athenians at the naval battle of Notium (near Ephesus). Athens then defeated Sparta at the naval battle of Arginusae, but executed its own victorious generals for failing to pick up survivors. Athens was finally defeated at the naval battle of Aegospotami (405 BCE) and was then besieged at Piraeus. In 404 BCE Athens surrendered to Sparta and had to suffer the loss of its navy, destruction of the Long Walls, loss of foreign territories, and an alliance with Sparta. An oligarchy of Thirty Tyrants was established, who acted ruthlessly against the democrats. The democrats seized Piraeus (403 BCE), and civil war ensued, with the subsequent restoration of full democracy. However, the political power of Athens was lost.

**Corinthian War**

About this time in Sicily (405 BCE), Dionysius I became tyrant of Syracuse with Spartan help, which caused disquiet in Corinth. Despite the cessation of the Peloponnesian War, interstate conflict continued in the Greek world, with the rise in power of lesser states such as Thebes. In 400 BCE Sparta assisted the Persian Cyrus against his brother Artaxerxes II. The Greek cities of Asia Minor called on Sparta to assist them against Persia. Agesilaus II went to their aid, but his campaign was cut short by the Corinthian War (395–386 BCE), in which Athens, Argos, Thebes and Corinth (backed by Persia) fought against Sparta. In 394 BCE Sparta won land battles, but was defeated at sea in the battle of Cnidus by a Persian fleet under the Athenian admiral Conon. In 393 BCE the Long Walls of Athens were rebuilt, and some territory was recovered. In 390–389 BCE Athens made alliances with Thasos, Samothrace and many cities of Asia Minor. Persia then joined Sparta to defeat Athens in a naval battle in the Hellespont. In 386 BCE the Corinthian War was terminated; the King's Peace was signed at Sardis by the Persian king Artaxerxes II and the Greek states. The peace was to be enforced by Sparta, with any dangerous alliances broken up. All states were to be autonomous, Persia was to keep Asia Minor and Cyprus, Thebes was to give up leadership of the Boeotian Confederacy, and Athens had to abandon plans to regain its Empire. It was also called the Peace of Antalcidas, because of the prominent involvement of the Spartan Antalcidas.

**Rise of Thebes**

In 382 BCE Sparta seized the citadel of Thebes (Cadmea), and in 379 BCE destroyed the Chalcidic Confederacy (a group of settlements in Chalcidice centered on Olynthus) for infringing on the King's Peace. Athens established the Second Athenian League (or Confederacy) in 378 BCE against this Spartan aggression. The new league defeated Sparta in a naval battle off Naxos in 376 BCE. In 371 BCE another treaty known as the Peace of Callias was signed by all Greek states except Thebes; in the same year Thebes defeated Sparta (which had invaded Boeotia) at the battle of Leuctra, which ended Spartan military domination and the Peloponnesian League. In 370/369 BCE Thebes extended its influence over Thessaly and intervened in the Peloponnesse, reestablishing Messenia as an independent state, which deprived Sparta of its helots and its economic base. An alliance of states was set up against Sparta (Arcadian Confederacy), with a new capital at Megalopolis. Thebes was also active in the north and in the Aegean. The power of Thebes collapsed in 362 BCE at the battle of Mantinea, which was fought against the Spartans, Athenians and Mantineans, when the Theban leader Epaminondas was killed.

**Rise of Macedonia**

In 359 BCE Philip II became king of Macedonia, which had been weakened by dynastic struggles. Macedonia subsequently became the dominant power in the Greek world. In order to facilitate access to the sea and to gain control of the gold mines of Mount Pangeus, Philip II repeatedly came into conflict with Athens (including the capture of Amphipolis in 357 BCE and Methone in 354 BCE). Athens embarked on the Social War (357–355 BCE) against allies of the Second Athenian League who had revolted, while Sparta attempted in vain to recover Messenia. Philip II took advantage of the situation. He gained the support of the Chalcidic Confederacy by capturing Potidaea and handing it over to Olynthus (356 BCE). He intervened in the Third Sacred War against Phocis (355–346 BCE), and in 349–348 BCE he attacked the Chalcidice promontory, destroying Olynthus and enslaving its inhabitants, with little opposition from Athens.
In 346 BCE Athens and Philip II made peace (Peace of Philocrates), although Philip crushed the Phocians later that year. He besieged Perinthus and Byzantium (340–339 BCE), which had revolted from the Macedonian alliance, but failed to take either. In 339 BCE he took part in the Fourth Sacred War, and in 338 BCE inflicted a devastating defeat on Thebes and Athens at the battle of Chaeronea. He then summoned a congress of Greek states at Corinth, with another in 337 BCE, in which he put forward his military plans to attack Persia. His assassination in 336 BCE led to the accession of Alexander the Great.

Hellenistic Period

The term "Hellenistic" describes the period from the accession of Alexander the Great in 336 BCE to the final conquest of the Greek world by Rome in 30 BCE—a period of about 300 years. During this time city-states such as Athens declined, but there was a huge expansion of Greek territory into non-Greek areas as far as Afghanistan, with the establishment of numerous monarchies, the founding of many Greek cities, and a shift of the cultural center to Alexandria in Egypt. On his accession Alexander acted against the tribes of the lower Danube and suppressed a revolt in Greece, in which he destroyed Thebes, killing and enslaving its inhabitants (335 BCE). Alexander next pursued Philip II's plan to invade the Persian Empire; within 12 years he had conquered as far as the steppes of Russia, Afghanistan and the Punjab, all of which became part of the Hellenistic world. All Hellenistic rulers throughout his empire came to use the title "king."

Age of the Successors (Diadochi)

After Alexander's death there was a struggle among his former generals (the Successors, diadochoi—literally, the inheritors) to retain control of Alexander's empire (323–301 BCE), initially by the regent Perdiccas. From 321 BCE Ptolemy I had established Egypt as a separate kingdom. Greek states including Athens tried to revolt against Macedonia, but were defeated by Antipater in the Lamian War (323–322 BCE), and Athens was occupied by the Macedonians. In 320 BCE Perdiccas died, and Antigonus I tried to gain control of the Empire. The other generals—Cassander, Lysimachus, Ptolemy I and Seleucus I—formed alliances against Antigonus I and his son Demetrius I Poliorcetes. By 306 BCE Alexander's family had been eliminated, and the Successors claimed the title of king in their own areas. Demetrius I Poliorcetes and Antigonus I were defeated at the battle of Ipsus in 301 BCE, so destroying any chance of holding together Alexander's empire.

Formation of Hellenistic Kingdoms

Demetrius I Poliorcetes became king of Macedonia in 294 BCE, but was defeated and captured in 285 BCE by Seleucus I when trying to regain Asian territories. Lysimachus and Pyrrhus of Epirus took over Macedonia (288 BCE), but Lysimachus was defeated and killed in 281 BCE by Seleucus I. Pyrrhus was pushed back to Epirus and then intervened in Sicily and southern Italy against Rome. By about 275 BCE three main Hellenistic kingdoms had emerged—Macedonia, Egypt and the Seleucid Empire. The Ptolemies held not only Egypt, but also Cyrene, Coele-Syria, Cyprus, the Aegean Islands and parts of Asia Minor. The Antigonids held Macedonia and dominated parts of Greece. The Seleucids occupied the largest kingdom, holding northern Syria, parts of Asia Minor and Persia, and Babylonia. The 3rd century BCE saw conflicts between these kingdoms and the emergence of a new Greek kingdom when the Attalids (centered at Pergamum) established independence from the Seleucids.

From 334 to 264 BCE Rome gradually expanded its control of Italy, and from 264 BCE it began expansion into Sicily, Corsica and Sardinia. Rome then became involved in the First Punic War, a result of Carthaginian expansion in Spain. From 220 to 167 BCE Rome brought much of the Mediterranean area under its control. Sicily became a Roman province in 211 BCE, and other areas followed.

Greece and Macedonia

In 268 BCE the Chremonidean War started, in which Athens and Sparta (supported by Ptolemy II) unsuccessfully revolted against Antigonus II of Macedonia. Athens was taken by the Macedonians (262 BCE). In 251 BCE Aratus freed Sicyon and united it with the Achaean Confederacy against Macedonia. In 249 BCE Alexander of Corinth revolted against Antigonus II, declaring Corinth independent. In 243 BCE Aratus of Sicyon freed Corinth from the Macedonians (who had regained control there), but in 222 BCE he joined with Antigonus III to defeat Cleomenes III of Sparta at the battle of Sellasia.

In 221 BCE Philip V became king of Macedonia. He became involved in two Macedonian wars against Rome (in 215–205 and 200–197 BCE). He was defeated at the battle of Cynoscephalae in Thessaly in 197 BCE, and harsh penalties were imposed. Perseus became king of Macedonia in 179 BCE and fought the Third Macedonian War against the Romans (171–168 BCE), in
which he was defeated. Macedonia was then divided into four republics by Rome (167 BCE), and it became a Roman province in 148 BCE after the defeat of the pretender Andriscus. In 146 BCE the actions of the Achaean Confederacy led to Corinth being sacked by Rome and the rest of Greece becoming part of the Roman province of Macedonia. In the First Mithridatic War against Rome, Mithridates VI of Pontus liberated much of Greece, which led to the Roman general Sulla besieging and sacking Athens (86 BCE).

**Seleucid Syria**

The Ptolemies and Seleucids fought six Syrian wars, mainly in the 3rd century BCE, over possession of Coele-Syria. Civil war was also waged between Seleucus II and his younger brother Antiochus Hierax. In the east the empire started to disintegrate, and Bactria became an independent Greek kingdom ca. 240 BCE. In 223 BCE Antiochus III became Seleucid king. He attempted to conquer Syria and Palestine but was defeated at the battle of Raphia by Ptolemy IV in 217 BCE. Antiochus emulated Alexander the Great in his expedition as far as India and on his return, he and Philip V of Macedonia attacked Ptolemy V in the Fifth Syrian War (202–195 BCE), with the Seleucid Empire finally gaining Coele-Syria. Antiochus invaded Greece and was consequently attacked by the Romans and defeated in 189 BCE at Magnesia ad Sipylum. In the Peace of Apamea, Antiochus had to give up much of Asia Minor, and the Seleucid Empire was no longer a Mediterranean power.

Antiochus IV became king in 175 BCE, and the Sixth Syrian War against Egypt took place (170–168 BCE), followed by a revolt of the Jews under Judas Maccabaeus (from 167 BCE). Numerous dynastic struggles and civil wars followed, and in 64 BCE Pompey made Syria a Roman province at the end of the Third Mithridatic War.

**Ptolemaic Egypt**

Six Syrian wars were fought against the Seleucids, and ca. 202 BCE Ptolemy lost Coele-Syria. The Ptolemies suffered from dynastic struggles from the time of Ptolemy VI (170 BCE). In 96 BCE Cyrene was bequeathed to Rome by Ptolemy Apion; it was made a Roman province in 74 BCE, with Crete becoming part of the province in 67 BCE. In 59 BCE Ptolemy XII ceded Cyprus to Rome. Cleopatra VII formed an alliance with the Roman Mark Antony, which ended in her suicide in 30 BCE. Egypt, which had been bequeathed to Rome in 87 BCE, became the Roman province of Aegyptus in 30 BCE.

**Other Territories**

In 133 BCE Attalus of Pergamum bequeathed his kingdom to Rome, and it became the Roman province of Asia in 129 BCE. Mithridates VI of Pontus occupied much of Greece and Asia Minor and fought three Mithridatic wars against Rome (88–63 BCE). When he committed suicide his kingdom became part of the new Roman province of Bithynia et Pontus (Bithynia had been bequeathed to Rome in 74 BCE by Nicomedes IV). Commagene, the last minor Hellenistic kingdom, did not become part of the Roman province of Syria until 72 CE.

**Further Information**

**General**


**Archaic and Classical**

Hellenistic


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