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## THE TRADITIONS OF HISTORY

### **WHAT IS POLYKRATES TO ME? THE NECESSITY OF ARCHAIC GREEK HISTORY**

As soon as you ask why a nation's political or economic institutions, or social relations, are the way they are today, you start to delve into history. If you want to understand why the British Parliament has the powers it does, or operates in the way it does, then one of the first things you need to know is what happened in the seventeenth century with the Civil Wars and the Glorious Revolution. If you want to know why the countryside looks as it does, why country roads meander, why fields are odd shapes, you need to look back into the past history of the ownership and exploitation of the land. If you want to know why non-conformism is so strong in Wales, then you have to look at patterns of evangelism in the past, but also at patterns of political power and of economic deprivation. Studying British history is not a patriotic duty engaged in by chauvinists, it is something any inquisitive person, who wants to understand the society of which he or she is part, continually finds it impossible to do without.

But the history of a foreign country, 2,500 years ago and more? Is that not a luxury, merely a way of keeping the inhabitants of ivory towers out of mischief? Comforting though it might be to think that we can isolate our own history from what has happened to the rest of the world, we cannot. If what Parliament is in Britain today has been shaped by past events, it has also been shaped by what people have thought and written about government and its institutions. And as soon as you look into what has been thought and written on such matters in this country you find that it has been profoundly influenced by what has been thought and written elsewhere. And what has been written elsewhere has itself been shaped by what has happened elsewhere again. Because ancient Greece and ancient Rome have in the past enjoyed a special status in European thought, in a very few moves one finds oneself back with the political writings of Aristotle, and the practice of democracy at Athens. Time and again, in pursuing the history of our own society in order to understand its present forms, we find ourselves pursuing myths about ancient

Greece and through them the history of ancient Greece. John Stuart Mill was even prepared to claim that the Battle of Marathon, when the Athenians and Plataians defeated a Persian invasion force, was a more important event in English history than the Battle of Hastings.

You may imagine that, on this argument, there will be no end to the pursuit of the past: are we not entering an infinite regress that will end with us shuffling through the history of man from the stone age on? The answer to that is 'No', and it is 'No' for two very significant reasons, which themselves point up the importance of Greek history. The first is that it is only with the Greek world that we begin to get the sort of source materials that enable us to do the sort of history that lets us ask our own questions and hope to get answers. We have chronicles from earlier times, such as those available in the history books of the Old Testament, but it is from the Greeks of the classical period that we first get critical history, history that is conscious that people tell different stories about past events, history that tries to understand why events occurred and what their significance was, and is not satisfied with answers in terms of the commands of a political or religious leader. It is with the self-governing Greek states of the classical period that we begin to be able to see how a political system worked in detail, and to understand the structures of power on more than a personal level.

The second reason is still more striking. It is not entirely a European myth that in the classical Greek world we find the origins of very many features which are fundamental to our own western heritage. Whole modes of thought and expression have their fount and origin in Greece between 500 and 300 BC: self-conscious abstract political thought and moral philosophy; rhetoric as a study in its own right; tragedy, comedy, parody, and history; western naturalistic art and the female nude; democracy as theory and practice.

But this western tradition of the Greek origins of western civilisation, like the classical Greeks' own traditions about their past (see below, pp. 4–8), is also political, and no respecter of history. It is not only absurd to pretend that the buck stops dead in classical Greece, it is also to turn a blind eye to the socially embedded nature of human achievement. In Greek mythology the goddess Athene was born direct from the head of Zeus, but in ancient history as in modern history even the most startling discoveries and inventions have antecedents, and would not have occurred had previous conditions not been right. Therein lies the fascination with the Greece of the pre-classical period: can we recover the conditions which made the developments, the inventions, of the years 500 to 300 BC possible? What were the circumstances that brought about the revolution in the way the whole western world has thought and expressed itself ever since? We owe it to ourselves as humans to refuse the strategy of our tradition, a strategy which is far from politically innocent, which points to Athens' democracy as if that explained everything; and we owe it to ourselves to acknowledge the place which the heterogeneity of Greek experience within a pan-Mediterranean context had in the creation of that far from uniform classical Greek world.

If much of the attraction of studying archaic Greece lies in its *end*, and we must be unashamedly teleological, there is no less attraction in its beginning. In 1200 BC Greece looked much like any near-eastern society. The Mycenaeans were highly organised and, in their way, highly civilised. The language they spoke was Greek but, like several near-eastern neighbours, they wrote in a syllabary (so-called Linear B) and used writing to record the accounts of a complex and very hierarchical state organisation. Although their monuments and their figurative art certainly differ in detail from that of their near-eastern neighbours, it is difficult to feel that they differ in kind. But then something remarkable happened which we still cannot pretend that we understand: Mycenaean civilisation on the Greek mainland and islands collapsed. For the best part of two centuries, the traces of human occupation in Greece are exiguous, and, when the material remains increase again, the debt in material culture to the Mycenaean world is small. The Greeks kept their language, but they lost the tradition of writing it, and apart from some convenient ruined monuments upon which to hang their myths, the Greeks of the eighth century seem to have owed little other than that language and those myths to the Greeks of the twelfth century.

The Greeks of the ninth and eighth century were hardly in a 'state of nature', but they do give us a chance to see, from almost the very beginnings, the development of a political society and of a cultural identity. Through close examination of the material remains we can trace the formation and reformation of social groups, the contacts between groups both within and outside the Greek mainland, the links with other cultures of the near and middle east, and the effect which those contacts had at the material level. And, by a stroke of extraordinary fortune, we can get into the structures of thought of these communities through the survival of the two great epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, both the result of a single mind working upon materials which had been transmitted and elaborated orally over a period of centuries, and also through the two much more individual works of a single historical figure, the long hexameter poems known as the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*, by a man named Hesiod who lived in a small community in central Greece around the year 700 BC.

The challenge that faces the student of archaic Greece is this: how to understand how the small communities of men and women scattered over mainland Greece, the Greek islands, the coast of Asia Minor, and, before long, over the coasts of Sicily, south Italy, and the Black Sea too, developed from the low level of organisation and poverty of material culture that we see in the ninth century BC, to the communities that laid the foundations of the culture and political organisation of the western world of the fifth and fourth centuries. In studying the society and conditions of archaic Greece, we study also the conditions of our own emergence as a civilised society and as civilised individuals in the western world.

**HISTORY AND THE TRADITIONS OF PREHISTORY**

Knowing what questions we need answered is not difficult for archaic Greece: that is the advantage of starting from where you wish to get to, of the teleological approach. Answering those questions is a very different matter, and for much the same reason. In insisting above that understanding what happened in Greece is essential to understanding the modern western world, I have carefully focused not on archaic but on classical Greece. The confidence that we can reasonably feel about our knowledge of what happened in classical Greece, and about how classical Greek institutions worked, cannot be extended to the archaic period.

To all intents and purposes, archaic Greece is a prehistoric period, for it is a period before history was ever written. The earliest history in the western world is the work of Herodotos of Halikarnassos, written in the second half of the fifth century BC with the explicit aim of explaining how the Greeks and Persians came into conflict in what we call the Persian wars at the beginning of that century – the wars with which this book ends. Those wars are the earliest historical wars which any ancient author attempted to understand, and, whatever we think in detail of that attempt, the result is that those wars are the first wars where we can sensibly attempt to weigh up the factors which influenced either side, the first wars where we can sort out the crucial questions, even if we can never come to a definitive answer. And once Herodotos had attempted to understand the events of the generation immediately preceding his own, others, and most notably Thucydides, began to write accounts of their own times, based on observation as well as on others' stories. History had begun.

We are, of course, told plenty about Greece before the Persian wars; indeed, we are told much by Herodotos himself. But nothing that we are told comes from, or forms part of, a critical history, and we cannot treat it as if it does. What we have are traditions, and fragments of traditions, and we have them for the perfectly good reason that traditions were all that later authors had available, and that for most later authors it was the traditions that mattered. So, for Herodotos himself, the important factors which affected Greek relations with Persia at the beginning of the fifth century were what was being said about what had happened in the past and about past contacts between Greek and barbarian; whether or not what was said was true, in the sense of being an accurate account of what had taken place at some particular moment in the past, was of secondary importance at best. Herodotos does comment, from time to time, on the credibility of the stories he tells, but he tells the stories whether he believes them or not, often also carefully telling us, as itself a fact of historical importance, where he got the stories from. That perceptions are context-dependent is something some early Greek philosophers had insisted upon (below, p. 000); Herodotos' implicit recognition of this in the way he writes down his researches is one that we ignore at our peril.

It is not simply that no history of the archaic period has come down to us; no history of the archaic period was ever written. Writing half a century or so after the Persian wars, Herodotos, from Halikarnassos in Asia Minor, 'the father of history', hung his account of the achievements of Greeks and Persians, and why they came to fight each other, not on a continuous narrative of Greek events but on a narrative of Lydian and Persian history. The history of Greek cities is introduced by Herodotos as the Greek cities become relevant to his story about the eastern powers. Herodotos gives no absolute dates before 480 BC, does not deal with events in Greece before the Persian wars themselves in any chronological order, and is often vague about the relationship between one event and another, even when both events concern the same people or the same state.

All that Herodotos and later authors tell us about events down to 479 BC is derived from tradition, and tradition is of its essence selective. Stories are handed down because the teller thinks that they are worth telling, and they remain worth telling as long as they can make some impact on the understanding of the present. Present conditions determine what is remembered of the past, and how much is remembered. The shape of the past, as handed down, changes as the shape of the present changes, and an element of tradition that is once lost, because no longer relevant, can never be recovered. All who try to write history out of tradition have to try, with the paste of the imagination, to make up for the depredations of the scissors of time. And since in later antiquity, too, people attempted to write histories of early Greece, the modern scholar has additionally to distinguish traditions about past events from the accretions which ancients who related those traditions have themselves pasted on.

We can be fairly confident that Herodotos derived most of his information from live informants. He is thus an excellent guide to what the Greeks and others to whom he talked thought worth telling in the middle of the fifth century BC. Later writers may tell us what people were talking about in their own day, but very often they take over stories from Herodotos or other earlier authors, and interpret them in the light of their own interests and concerns. I will find occasion to explore what a fourth-century writer from Aristotle's school made of Herodotos when I discuss the Athenian sixth-century tyrant Peisistratos in Chapter 8. It is often important to distinguish where an extant writer got his information from, since that both tells us the date by which a particular version of past events had obtained currency and may warn us of a possible particular personal slant in the information given or its interpretation. I will sometimes in these pages note, for example, that information given to us by a writer of the early Roman empire, such as Diodoros or Nikolaos of Damascus, seems to derive from the lost work of the fourth-century BC historian Ephoros of Kyme, a writer whose interests and prejudices, already partly noted in antiquity, emerge even from the indirect testimony of those who relied on his work. But whether authors relied on live tradition or on what others had written is not so much dependent on the date at which

they wrote as on their concerns. Plutarch and Pausanias both wrote in the second century AD, but Plutarch wrote his *Parallel Lives* of Greek and Roman statesmen on the basis of what he had read, while Pausanias, although not short of book-learning, was much more heavily dependent on what people told him as he travelled around, looking at the monuments of a past age and compiling his guide to the buildings and mythology of mainland Greece.

Although there was no history in the archaic period, there were plenty of other records, and it is these which the historian today must use to answer her questions. These records take two main forms: writing became available to the Greeks in the eighth century, and from then on literature of various types survives, all in verse; and there are diverse material remains. The surviving verse literature was composed for a variety of occasions, some of it directly engaging with current events (as in Pindar's early fifth-century odes celebrating victories in games), some of it purporting to describe a mythical world. The material remains are still more various, including some written material, from casual graffiti to formal public decisions, and a rich store of images which enhances our knowledge both of what stories were told and of the apparatus of daily life. Surviving literary and material remains are as subject to systematic bias as is the evidence of tradition: only certain types of literature have survived, and these were themselves the traditional products of very restricted social groups; and only certain sorts of materials have survived, and then only from certain contexts. But the massive advantage of these materials over the material from oral traditions is that the biases which have determined their survival are very largely biases that were the product of the society which created them, not the biases of a later society using its past to reshape its present.

The history which the literature and the material remains offer is a history that is very different from that offered by tradition. Traditions offer a dynamic view of the past, they concentrate on moments of crisis and change, and because moments of crisis and change are good to think with, their lesson is readily apparent to the audience. The history which material remains and literary remains offer is not like that, for they give direct access not to change but to the state of play at a particular moment in time. What we get is a series of still pictures, not a newsreel. To create dynamic history from these still pictures is the task of the historian, and it is an extremely difficult task. It may appear easy enough to compare one assemblage of material remains with another, but, unless one can be sure that one is comparing like with like, it is perilous to draw any substantial conclusions from their difference: that the material assemblage from a house of 650 BC is impoverished compared to a temple dedication of 700 BC does not indicate that the society as a whole was impoverished between 700 BC and 650 BC. Similarly with poetic remains, where the difference in the circumstances of composition, and the group for which the poetry was composed, always has to be taken into account in comparing the assumptions made by one text with those made by another. Using both the literary and the material remains together, to create a picture

of a changing archaic society, is more perilous yet. Perilous, but a challenge precisely because possible: for both the material assemblages and the poetry were products of the same society, both are fragments remaining from a once coherent world, and our aim must be to make them cohere once more.

To resort to tradition in the attempt to make the material and poetic fragments cohere is tempting but dangerous. It is all too easy to assume, and is all too often assumed, that the picture offered by tradition is a picture of the same society from which we have the material and poetic remains, and that the material and poetic remains can, indeed must, straightforwardly fill out the picture offered by tradition, and put flesh on its skeleton of events. But this assumption is fundamentally wrong. The selection and arrangement of events in the traditions were not determined by the societies to which the traditions directly relate, but by the last person who handed the tradition on before it reached a definitive form in the literature which has survived to us. In as far as tradition can be expected to cohere with any set of material remains, it is with the remains contemporary with the last person to hand it on, not with those contemporary with the events it purports to describe.

It would be absurd, on the other hand, to discard tradition altogether; particularly absurd in a history which is interested in the archaic period not least for what it became. Much of the tradition about archaic Greece received its definitive form in the classical period, and that tradition was itself part of what made classical Greece what it was. But we cannot pretend that tradition is the same as history, and we must acknowledge the fragility of the links which connect tradition to the events it claims to record. Neither the details, nor the major outlines, of traditions can be trusted unless they can be independently corroborated. When traditions can be checked against records it can be shown that on occasions they reverse the results of wars, introduce actors who were not and often cannot have been there, claim as absent figures who were active, claim as important events of no significance, and pass over events of the utmost importance. Traditions make good telling and good reading, for they would never otherwise have been handed on from one generation to another; but although traditions tell us an enormous amount about the concerns of those, both in antiquity and since, who told and retold them, they can give us few sure historical insights into the societies which they claim to be about.

But this dry theorising about tradition needs the illumination of an example, and, by way of introducing both tradition and some of the recurrent themes of this book, it will be profitable to subject to close scrutiny the traditions about one particular historical event: the foundation of a Greek settlement at Cyrene.



## THE CASE OF CYRENE

## Using the traditions

Greekness was largely a matter of self-identification. Use of the Greek language, recognition of a particular set of gods and of particular ways of worshipping them, and claims to a common ancestry played a part in getting that self-identification widely accepted, but place of residence did not. By 500 BC Greeks could be met enjoying a variety of natural environments in settlements all round the Mediterranean, from Egypt to Spain, from North Africa to southern France or the Adriatic, as well as at more than fifty settlements on all four shores of the Black Sea (see below, pp. 23–5, pp. 111–18 and Figure 32).

If the Greek settlement at Cyrene in Libya (Figure 1), traditionally founded in 631 BC, stood out from other settlements, it did so only because it was exceedingly prosperous. But it stands out for us because of the unique wealth and unusually early date of traditions which relate to it. The earliest allusions we have to the circumstances in which Cyrene was founded come in two poems written by the poet Pindar in 462 BC to celebrate the prestigious victory of the then ruler of Cyrene, Arkesilas, in a chariot race at the Pythian games at Delphi. Then, about forty years later, Herodotos recorded for us both what the people of Cyrene told him about how their city came to be founded, and what was said by the people of the small south Aegean island of Thera (Santorini), who claimed to have sent out the people who settled at Cyrene. From the fourth century BC a decree survives in which the people of Cyrene agreed to give land and rights to people from Thera who wished to join them. In this decree they included the text which the Therans, who came as a deputation to Cyrene to request the rights, passed off as the sworn agreement made by the Therans before the settlers were sent out. Finally, what one Menekles of Barke said in the third century BC about the foundation of Cyrene happens to be preserved in an ancient commentary on one of Pindar's odes for Arkesilas. These numerous and various texts give us a chance to see what was said about the foundation both at different times and by those with different relationships to the places involved.

In one of the two odes (*Pythian Odes* 4.1–8, 259–62), Pindar refers, as might be expected in a poem celebrating a victory at Delphi, to the role of the oracle of Apollo there in guiding the founder of the settlement at Cyrene, Battos, and declaring him king. In the other (*Pythian Odes* 5.55–69, 85–93), he celebrates Battos' scaring away the lions to found the city, Apollo's role in the foundation and the establishment of 'good government without war', the piety of Aristoteles (apparently another name for Battos) in giving cult places and processions to the gods, and his burial place in the agora (civic centre and market place) (Text 1). Piety and victory go together in Pindar's odes, and Pindar regularly celebrates victors by celebrating their real or mythical ancestry, but the choice of context here is significant. Pindar's references and





Figure 1 Parties involved in the account of settlement at Cyrene.

allusions bring out that the foundation of Cyrene was in a deserted place, inhabited by wild beasts. In addition, they bring out the personal bravery of Battos and imply that good government without war at Cyrene is rule by the Battiads, and they put much emphasis on the Spartan connection. Pindar may well use Karneios as the cult epithet of Apollo because the ode was written for performance at a festival called 'Karneia', but Apollo Karneios was a god particularly associated with Sparta, and together with the rather obscure reference to a cult of the Trojan sons of Antenor, whose visit to Cyrene seems to have occurred when they were being transported by Menelaos to Sparta after the end of the Trojan war, it marks very clearly the claim of fifth-century Cyreneans to links with Sparta. Sparta was reputedly the 'mother-city' from which Thera was founded; it was also one of very few other Greek cities ruled by kings. But there may be more involved in the invocation of

We received the feast of the Karneia, with its many sacrifices, from our Theran ancestors, and now at your banquet worship the well-founded city of Cyrene. The Trojan sons of Antenor who fight in bronze armour possess it: for they once came with Helen, after they had seen their homeland going up in smoke in war. The men whom Aristoteles brought in swift ships, opening the deep path of the sea, accepted the horse-driving people with sacrifices and approached them with gifts. Aristoteles established greater groves of the gods and laid down a straight-cut paved way to resound with the hooves of horses in processions to Apollo warding off evil from men; and his own tomb lies apart at the stern of the agora.

*Text 1: Pindar, Pythian Odes 5.77–93 written to celebrate the victory of Arkesilas, Battiad ruler of Cyrene, in the chariot race at the Pythian games in 462/461 BC.*

Apollo Karneios, for both the alternative stories about how he got that epithet (Pausanias 3.13.4–5) stress the need to propitiate Apollo for harming a person or thing dear to him; in one case this is the grove from whose wood the Trojan horse, vital to the capture of the sons of Antenor, was constructed. Implicit in this story is an acknowledgement of the damage which founding a colony necessarily inflicts, and of the way in which a foundation which the god has ordered may nevertheless require propitiation of the gods. In this context, Pindar's reference to Battos as 'Aristoteles' may be intended to bring out the peculiar piety of the founder: the etymological meaning of the name ('one who brings things to the best of conclusions' or 'the one performing the best of rites') is appropriate and propitious; third-century BC Cyrene had a priest named Aristoteles performing the Karneian *telesphoria* (SEG 9.65).

Herodotos, whose purpose in asking about the past of Cyrene and in relating it to his readers was somewhat broader than Pindar's celebratory brief, tells us very much more (4.150–9). He first relates 'what the Therans say': that their King Grinnos went to Delphi to consult the oracle about something else, and was told to found a city in Libya; that when he said he himself was too old, the finger was pointed at Battos; that when Grinnos and Battos did nothing about all this Thera suffered a seven-year drought in which all but one of the trees died; that a consequent consultation with Delphi produced a further instruction to found a settlement in Libya; that the Therans then got expert advice from a Cretan purple-fisher named Korobios, from the city of Itanos, whom they paid to guide an advance party which settled temporarily on the island of Platea off the African coast; that Korobios was left on this island while the Therans went back for more men, and was saved from starvation only by a chance visit from a Samian called Kolaios who was sailing to Egypt; that the Therans raised settlers equally from each region of the island and from each family, and that two fifty-oared ships (*pentekonteres*) sailed to Platea.

Herodotos follows the Theran story with 'what the Cyreneans say': that when widowed King Etearkhos of Oaxos in Crete remarried, his new wife made life difficult for his daughter Phronime; that her father handed

When Battos reached manhood, he went to Delphi about his stutter. In reply to his question the Pythia responded: 'Battos, you have come about your voice. But Lord Phoibos Apollo sends you to found a settlement in the sheep pastures of Libya.' ... He replied in the following words: 'O Lord, I came to you to ask about my voice, but you give me other impossible commands, telling me to found a settlement in Libya. What resources do I have? What support?' But he did not persuade Apollo to give him any other command. So, when he received the same oracular response as before, Battos went away back to Thera. Afterwards things went badly for Battos himself, and for the other Therans. Not knowing the reason for the misfortunes, the Therans sent to Delphi about their present troubles. The Pythia gave an oracular response that things would go better for them if they helped Battos to found Cyrene in Libya. After this the Therans sent Battos off with two fifty-oared ships. They sailed to Libya but, at a loss what else to do, returned back to Thera. But the Therans threw stones at them as they came to land, did not allow them to put in to land, and ordered them to sail back.

*Text 2: Herodotos 4. 155–6: part of the Cyrenean version of the founding of Cyrene.*

Phronime over to a Theran trader named Themison to drown; that he evaded his oath to do so and brought her to Thera; that on Thera Phronime became concubine to one Polymnestos and bore him a son, Battos, who had a speech impediment; that Battos went to Delphi to consult the oracle about this impediment and was told to found a city in Libya; that Battos did not obey and subsequently Thera suffered ill fortune; that when the Therans consulted Delphi they were told it would be better if Battos founded Cyrene in Libya; that the Therans sent off Battos with two fifty-oared ships; that when these tried to return the Therans drove them off with stones; that Battos and his companions sailed back and established themselves on the island of Platea (see, in part, Text 2). Herodotos then claims that the story from that point, of moving from Platea to Aziris on the African coast on Delphic advice, and then from Aziris to the site of Cyrene, a place where they were told that 'the sky leaks' (see below, p. 25), on the advice of the Libyan natives, was one about which Therans and Cyreneans agreed.

There is very little in common between Theran and Cyrenean accounts down to the settlement of Platea. Both stories involve consultations with Delphi, both make Battos the leader, both agree about where the first settlement was. Otherwise the stories do very different things. The Theran story emphasises that the idea of sending settlers to Libya came from outside; that only after years of hardship did they agree to do so; that they sought expert advice first, and made a trial trip before selecting settlers; and that those selected to be settlers were chosen fairly from all regions and kin groups. The Cyrenean story, on the other hand, emphasises the royal ancestry of Battos and the charmed life of his mother; it makes founding a settlement a duty of Battos and not of the Theran community; and it suggests that once the Therans realised that Battos was to go they took steps to ensure he would not come back.

It is not difficult to see why, by some 150 years after the settlers had first arrived in Africa, the people of Thera and the people of Cyrene should tell such different stories. The Therans had an interest in keeping alive links with Cyrene, which had proved a prosperous place. It was vital for them to maintain that they had acted reasonably, and had done all that could conceivably be expected of a city which was sending out settlers in order to make sure that the settlement would be successful. The people of Cyrene, on the other hand, had made good. They had no need of Thera. They needed to assert their independence, not their dependence. What is more, until the middle of the fifth century the people of Cyrene were, very unusually, ruled by a royal family, the Battiads, who traced themselves back to the founder of the settlement (on fifth-century Cyrene see *GW* 59–63). It was strongly in the political interests of this dynasty to stress the personal role of the first Battos in the establishment of the settlement, for it was upon his special role that they based their claim to the monopoly of power.

Once we appreciate the factors which shape these stories, we can see that it is vain to seek historical truth from either account. Neither account was interested in a full and frank record of what happened; both parties were telling stories of the past to suit the present, stories that were not only selective in their memories but free in their elaboration. Some of that elaboration is transparent: every character in the story of Battos' mother has a name fitted to the role they play: Etearkhos means 'True ruler', Phronime 'Sensible woman', Themison 'The man who does what is right', Polymnestos 'The man who woos much'. The purple-fisher surely has his place in the story by his plausibility: where else would one go to look for advice about Africa than to Crete, already part-way there? And who else talk to but a man whose maritime specialism demands a knowledge of off-shore as well as in-shore waters?

The way that the past was something to be latched on to for present purposes is nicely revealed by one further curious detail, which is given as part of the Thera story in Herodotos: the tale of Kolaios the Samian. His part in the story is minor – he simply keeps Korobios alive while Korobios is waiting for the Therans to return to Platea. It is hard to see why the Therans should remember this, and it plays no structural part in the story. However, the visit to Platea is not all we are told about Kolaios. We are also told that when he left Platea, bound for Egypt, he was blown off course and through the Pillars of Herakles (Straits of Gibraltar), and landed up at Tartessos in Spain. There he made an enormous profit, presumably selling Greek objects such as the Tartessians had never seen before in return for the precious metal which they had in no short supply. On return to Samos he made a dedication at the sanctuary of Hera of a large bronze mixing bowl of Argive type, with griffin-head attachments and supported by three great bronze kneeling figures. Herodotos does not explicitly claim to have seen this object, but his description makes it very likely that he has done so, and that the story about Kolaios came attached to the bowl. What Herodotos does say is that Kolaios' visit to Platea was the origin of the great friendship between Samos and Thera

and Cyrene. It looks as if the memory of a Samian merchant's having been somehow involved in the early stages of the foundation of Cyrene has been preserved by attaching it to a tangible record of Samian trading activity, and that the Samians were able to make this claim the basis for establishing good relations with both communities (in fact Samian sub-geometric pottery has been found on Thera, suggesting that contact goes back before Cyrene's foundation).

Sometime in the fourth century BC the Therans had occasion to try to turn their links with Cyrene to material advantage. They sent a deputation to Cyrene claiming that there had been an original sworn undertaking when the first settlers were dispatched, which allowed other Therans subsequently to claim land and citizenship, and which provided that, if the new settlement was unsuccessful, the settlers could return to Thera. The Therans even produced a text of this sworn agreement (Text 3). The people of Cyrene decided not only to accept the rights of the Therans to join them but also to have the original agreement inscribed and displayed in their sanctuary of Pythian Apollo (ML 5/Fornara 18). The authenticity of the original agreement which the Therans quoted has been much discussed but to treat this question as a question of whether it was a genuine seventh-century document or a fourth-century forgery misunderstands the process by which this text was created. The sworn agreement as inscribed certainly contains some features – the claim to originate from a meeting of the Assembly on Thera, the claim that the Delphic oracle was spontaneous, the naming of the new settlement as Cyrene – which can hardly have been in a seventh-century agreement which had been made before the settlers were dispatched. More importantly, it contains nothing which does not assist the case that the Therans are making in the fourth century: it establishes that the leader was chosen by public decision, those sent out were not expelled but chosen fairly, that the Therans did not undertake the new foundation lightly, that all Cyreneans have family links to Thera, that had the settlement failed Thera would have welcomed the settlers back and given them their property. In tone, and in some details, this claimed original agreement is very close to the account which Herodotos heard from the Therans in the fifth century, and for all that it contains more formal language and some archaizing elements, it seems best understood as an elaborated lineal descendant of the same Theran oral tradition.

Why were the people of Cyrene willing to accept this version of their past, a version directly in conflict, on some matters at least, with their own traditions? We do not know the detailed political situation in Cyrene when the Theran deputation came, or how that deputation was being used in any current political debate. We can note, however, that the story which Herodotos picked up in Cyrene in the fifth century BC will have lost much of its political relevance after the fall of the Battiads perhaps in the 430s BC: it had built into it an emphasis on Battos' charmed life and the way he was specially picked out by the god to found Cyrene, an emphasis hardly appropriate once the dynasty he founded was no longer in power. The story which the Therans

The Assembly decided: since Apollo spontaneously commanded Battos and the Therans to found Cyrene, the Therans have decided to send Battos to Libya as leader of the people and king, and the Therans shall sail as his comrades. They are to sail on equal and similar terms, by family, one son to be chosen [-*lacuna*-] those in their prime and free men from the rest of the Therans [-*lacuna*-] to sail. If the settlers establish a settlement, any of their relatives who later sails to Libya is to receive citizenship and rights and a share of undistributed land. If they do not establish a settlement, and the Therans are unable to help them, but they are driven by necessity for five years, they may freely leave the land for Thera and recover citizenship and their own property. Anyone who is unwilling to sail when the city sends him out shall be liable to the death penalty and his property shall be confiscated. Anyone who harbours or conceals, either a father a son or a brother a brother, shall be liable to the same penalty as one unwilling to sail. Sworn agreements were made to this effect both by those remaining there and by those who sailed to found the settlement, and they invoked curses upon those, either among those settling in Libya or those remaining there, who broke the agreement and did not abide by it. They made wax models and burnt them and all together, men and women, boys and girls, invoked the curse that the person who did not abide by the sworn agreement but broke it should be melted and flow away like the models, both himself and his offspring and his property, but that to those who kept the sworn agreements, both those sailing to Libya and those staying in Thera, many good things should come, both to them and their offspring.

*Text 3: ML 5.23–51 The sworn agreement which the fourth-century Theran embassy to Cyrene said had been made when Battos took settlers from Thera to Libya.*

tell, by contrast, stresses the equality of the original settlers – they were to sail ‘on equal and fair terms’; such equality was normal in fifth-century and later settlements, but it is also well suited to Cyrene’s fourth-century constitution. Changing interests demand different versions of the past, and the Therans were giving the people of Cyrene a chance to recover, and adopt, a version of their past which fitted their new interests in a way which no amount of selection from the fifth-century Cyrenean tradition could match.

Yet one more stage of the rewriting of past history in terms of the interests of a particular time and place is visible in the account of the third-century-BC North African writer Menekles of Barke (*FGH* 270 F6/Fornara 17). Menekles claimed that Battos was driven from Thera after factional strife which his own faction lost, and founded Cyrene after Delphi advised him that that was better than carrying on the struggle in Thera. Menekles came from a city which tradition (Herodotos 4.160) held to have been founded from Cyrene after factional strife...

What then can we say about the establishment of a Greek settlement at Cyrene? That there was an important, but not exclusive, connection with Thera, a starring role for someone who came to be known as Battos, and a rather lengthy process of finding the ideal site, seems safe, but little else. The other elements in the stories, from Pindar on, tell us not about the original establishment, but about politics at Cyrene and the position of Cyrene in

the discourse of others in the fifth century and later. If we want to know more about what happened in the seventh century then we have to turn to archaeological data.

### USING THE ARCHAEOLOGY

There is much about the history of Greek settlement in Libya which the rather limited archaeological work that has gone on there is not yet in a position to illuminate. But what the archaeology has revealed is striking. First of all, finds of Greek objects from the first half of the seventh century BC at Ptolemais and at Cyrene itself suggest that this North African coast was not nearly as unknown before the foundation of Greek settlements as the traditions suggested. Even without excavation of the site, pottery which is almost certainly to be dated to c.650 has been found at the place most likely to be Aziris. This provides material confirmation that Odysseus' lying claim to have been shipwrecked while being taken to Libya to be sold (*Odyssey* 14.295) reflects actual Greek knowledge of the southern coast of the Mediterranean. Second, although tradition had it that other sites on the Libyan coast were founded from Cyrene, the evidence for occupation from Tocra (ancient Taukheira) and from Ptolemais seems to date back as early in pottery terms as does the evidence for permanent occupation at Cyrene – that is, to c.620 BC. The selection of pottery found in the rich sanctuary deposit excavated at Tocra differs in slight but significant ways from that at Cyrene (in particular it receives a quite different range of pottery from islands in the Cyclades, with none from Thera), which suggests independent links with the Greek world. Third, the literary tradition maintains that for some fifty years the population of Cyrene remained only the initial Theran settlers and their offspring, before a general invitation to all Greeks to join was issued: not only does this make it hard to see how Cyrene could have founded Taukheira so soon after Cyrene itself was established, but the pottery reaching Cyrene and Tocra before 580 BC came from as wide a range of sites as that reaching them after 580, and the peculiarly wide variety of pottery vessels and of personal items (pins, etc.) imported from Sparta, in particular, from soon after the foundation has led archaeologists to speculate that there must have been residents from Sparta or Lakonia from the beginning. There may have been other stories, not related by Herodotos, which did more justice to the archaeology: the second-century AD writer of a guide to Greece, Pausanias, in fact preserves the claim that a Spartan athlete, Khionis, victorious in the Olympic games in 664, 660, and 656 BC, was involved with Battos in the foundation (Pausanias 3.14.3), and an inscription known as the Lindian Chronicle (*FGH* 532 F1.17), which records dedications (many of them certainly mythical) made at the sanctuary of Athene at Lindos on Rhodes, quotes a dedication made by Lindians who took part in the settlement of Cyrene by Battos.



Archaeology therefore would seem to confirm that there is a strong political slant in the later traditions. The claim to have pioneered settlement in the unknown was good for the status of both Therans and Battiads, magnifying the achievement. Keeping non-Therans out of the story certainly suited the Thera claim to be the origin of Cyrene; it may well also have suited both internal political arguments at Cyrene and the general claim not to have been a rag-bag settlement. Claiming to be the origin of other settlements along this coast similarly suited Cyrene's claim to pre-eminence in the area. Without the literary traditions to distort our view, we would still recognise a peculiar role for Thera in the settlement of this area, for Thera pottery is otherwise rarely found outside Thera, but we would also recognise a special role for Cretans (Cretan sixth-century pottery, rare enough even in Crete itself, is found at Cyrene) and for Lakonians, and all three would have to play alongside a wide range of others. Whatever stimulated Greeks to upgrade the earlier periodic contacts with the area and settle in numbers, it was not economic pressure on, or the political initiative of, one city, let alone one man.

Archaeology and literary texts almost always pull against one another. Literary texts, and the oral or written traditions on which any particular text relies, pick out whatever is of use for their argument, tend to stress the peculiar, and are retrospective; the archaeological record does not offer a random sample of the past – not all material survives equally well, and not all actions are equally directly reflected in material culture – but it does tend, despite the bias of archaeologists towards exceptional sites, to show the run-of-the-mill, and to stress overall similarities. So, using traditions to write history demands an acute awareness of the fact that men are doing things with traditions. Sometimes doing something with a tradition means preserving valuable information; it was probably the way Cyrenean tradition in the fifth century was a support for the Battiads that preserved accurately the lengths of their reigns, and so the foundation date for Cyrene. On many occasions tradition promotes disinformation. Using archaeology runs the risk of flattening out history, of failing to perceive social or political dramas which have no direct effect on material culture. To be healthy, scepticism about what traditions tell us has to be matched with a full awareness of what archaeology can never tell us. As in this example, and as throughout this book, the literary and the archaeological pictures have to be separately constructed before they can be put together; rarely do they directly illuminate each other, but together they may in different ways illuminate the same world.

## OUR WORLD UNDER CONSTRUCTION

In 800 BC the Greek world was poor, small, and lacking in general organisation. Its communities were small, and hard pressed to survive in a hostile natural environment. Greeks had few contacts in the wider world and no special advantages, unless we count as advantages a good fund of traditional tales and

a strong line in travelling bards. By 479 BC, after turning back the attack of the Persian empire on the Greek mainland, the Greek world was extensive and dynamic, complex in organisation, increasing in population, and immensely creative. In a sense, indeed, classical Greece created the modern western world.

The story of how it came about that the impoverished and relatively isolated groups of ninth-century Greeks grew into the flourishing and vigorous Greeks of the fifth century is the story that is told here. It is a story of small groups responding to the pressures of the natural environment, turning to communities elsewhere out of need, and returning with ideas and artefacts which they mercilessly exploited and often entirely transformed, in a spirit of competition and rivalry. It is a story of how those small groups struggled to distinguish themselves and to remain distinct, as individuals within communities, as communities among other Greek communities, and as Greeks among barbarians who were at least as wealthy, as organised, and as skilled as themselves. Because the struggle to be distinct operated at every level, this story is not simply the story of the rise of the Greek city-state, of the struggle to find a political form which both enabled and restricted individual distinction in the interests of the preservation of the distinctness of the community as a whole; it is also the story of the development of cultural distinction in expression as well as in action or in identity. To tell such a story it is necessary to try to write a 'total' history, a history which recognises that politics and social organisation, social organisation and economic pressures on the means of life, economic pressures and cultural expression, cultural expression and religious cult activity, all these are part of the same story, and none can be understood without the others or studied in isolation.