CHAPTER 4: Greece and Iran, 1000 - 30 B.C.E.

I. Ancient Iran, 1000 - 500 B.C.E.

A. Geography and Resources

1. Iran’s location, bounded by mountains, deserts and the Persian Gulf, left it open to attack from Central Asian nomads. The fundamental topographical features included high mountains on the edges, salt deserts in the interior, and a sloping plateau crossed by mountain streams.

2. Iran had limited natural resources. Water was relatively scarce, and Iran’s environment could support only a limited population. Because of the heat, irrigation networks had to use underground tunnels. Construction and maintenance of underground irrigation networks was labor-intensive and advanced under a strong central authority. Iran had mineral resources - copper, tin, iron, gold, and silver - and plentiful timber.

B. The Rise of the Persian Empire

1. The Median kingdom in northwestern Iran helped to destroy the Assyrian Empire in the late seventh century B.C.E. The Persian Achaemenid dynasty was related to the Median court by marriage, and in 550 B.C.E. Cyrus overthrew the Median king and built a larger Persian empire that included Medes and Persians.

2. The Persian Empire was built up by a series of three kings: Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius I, a distant relative of the royal family. Cyrus captured the kingdom
of Lydia (546 B.C.E.), thus bringing all of Anatolia under his control, and later took Mesopotamia (539 B.C.E.).

3. Cambyses defeated Egypt and sent expeditions to Nubia and Libya. Under Darius I, the role of the Medes declined as the Persians asserted greater dominance. Darius extended the empire east to the Indus Valley and west to European Thrace.

C. Imperial Organization

1. From Darius on, the empire was divided into twenty provinces; a satrap who was related or connected to the royal court administered each province. The position of satrap tended to become hereditary. Satraps in distant provinces had considerable autonomy.

2. Provinces were required to pay annual tribute. The central government tended to hoard so much gold and silver that these metals became scarce and more expensive (Supply vs. Demand). The provinces were crossed by a system of well-maintained roads that converged on the capital city of Susa (in southwestern Iran), and garrisons were installed at key locations.

3. The Persian kings developed a style of kingship in which they were held aloof and majestic, masters of all their subjects and nobles. Kings owned and administered vast tracts of “king’s land” in areas around the empire.

4. Kings acted as lawgivers but allowed each of their subject peoples to live in accordance with their own traditions. Kings managed a central administration at the capital of Susa and also performed ceremonies at Persepolis, in the Persian homeland. Ambassadors to the capital from the far reaches of the
empire might have been away from home for a year or more to conduct their business.

D. Ideology and Religion

1. The major religions of the Persian Empire was Zoroastrianism. The origins of this religion are unclear. Tradition ascribes the Gathas (the hymns of Zoroastrianism) to Zoroaster (Zarathustra), who lived sometime between 1700 and 500 B.C.E.

2. Zoroastrianism posited the existence of dualistic universe in which the god of good, Ahuramazda, was locked in an epic struggle against the god of evil, Angra Mainyu. Zoroastrianism’s dualism may have had an influence on Judaism and thus on Christianity.

3. Darius combined the moral philosophy of Zoroastrianism with political ideology to claim that forming an empire of scattered peoples was his divinely-driven mission.

II. The Rise of the Greeks, 1000 - 500 B.C.E.

A. Geography and Resources

1. Greece is part of the Mediterranean ecological zone, an area in which all the various lands have a similar climate, similar seasons, and similar crops. This characteristic of the Mediterranean zone is highly conducive to migration and the transfer of crops, technology, and trade. The Greek culture area itself included the Greek mainland and islands and the western edge of Anatolia.
2. The areas inhabited by the Greeks relied entirely on rainfall, having no water resources sufficient for irrigation. Limited water and limited, thin arable soil meant that the area could not support large populations. Greece had few metal resources and little timber, but it did have plentiful harbors.

B. The Emergence of the Polis

1. The “Dark Age” that followed the Mycenaean period lasted from 1150-800 B.C.E. The Dark Age ended when contact and trade with the Mediterranean lands was reestablished. The Phoenicians played an important role and provided and alphabetic writing system. This began the Archaic period (800 - 480 B.C.E.).

2. One of the notable features of the Archaic period was explosive population growth. Possible causes of this population growth included the shift from a pastoral to an agricultural economy and importation of foods and raw materials. The effects of population growth included urbanization, specialization, and the development of the polis.

3. The polis (city-state) was an urban center and its rural territory. Characteristic features of the polis included an acropolis, an agora, fortified walls, and public buildings. There was no sharp distinction between urban and rural areas or their inhabitants.

4. There were frequent wars between the various city-states. The Greeks developed a style of warfare that used hoplites - a close formation of heavily armored infantry who would try to break the enemy’s line of defense. The
soldiers were mostly farmer-citizens, who served for short periods of time when called.

5. When population growth outstripped available resources, the Greeks sent excess population to colonize other areas in the Mediterranean and Black Sea. Colonization brought the Greeks into closer contact with other peoples.

6. Colonization introduced the Greeks to new ideas, but it also sharpened their sense of Greek identity. One of the most significant new developments of this period was the invention of coins in Lydia in the early 6th century B.C.E.

7. Increasing prosperity and the growth of a middle class in Archaic Greek society lead to the emergence in the mid-7th and 6th centuries B.C.E. of one-man rule by tyrants, who reduced the power of traditional elites. The tyrants were eventually rejected, and government developed in one of two directions; Oligarchy or democracy.

8. Greek religion involved the worship of Anthropomorphic sky gods, many of which represented forces of nature. These gods were worshiped at state ceremonies. Sacrifice was a central part of religious practice and helped to create a sense of community. In addition, Greek sought advice from oracles such as the oracle of Apollo at Delphi and also revered female fertility deities.

C. New Intellectual Currents

1. During the Archaic period, Greeks began to develop the concepts of individualism and humanism.
2. The pre-Socratic philosophers of the Archaic period also began to question traditional Greek religion. Instead, they tried to explain rationally why the world was created, what it is made of, and why it changes.

3. In the late sixth century B.C.E., a group of “logographers” in Ionia began to gather information on the various peoples of the Mediterranean, the founding of important cities, and the background of important Greek families. Their method of investigation/research, *historia*, was adopted by Herodotus in his *Histories*.

4. Herodotus went beyond the simple collection and recording of information to offer explanations as to why the Greeks and the Persians had gone to war. In doing so, Herodotus invented the discipline of “history” in its modern sense.

D. Athens and Sparta

1. Sparta was a polis located in the Peloponese in southern Greece. To assure its supply of food, Sparta took over the more fertile land of Messenia and enslaved the Messenians. Fear of an uprising of their Messenian slaves inspired the Spartans to create a severely ascetic and highly militarized society in which all Spartan males trained for the army and devoted their lives to the needs of the state.

2. Athens had an unusually larger hinterland (Attica) that supported a population of about 300,000 in the 5th century B.C.E. Athens went through a period of rule by tyrants in the 6th century B.C.E.

3. In the late 6th and early to mid-5th centuries B.C.E., Athens ejected the tyrant family and developed a democracy. Pericles completed the transition to
democracy in the 460s to 450s. The popular organs of government included the Assembly, the Council of 500, and the People’s Courts.

III. The Struggle of Persia and Greece, 546 - 323 B.C.E.

A. Early Encounters

1. In 499 B.C.E., the Greek cities of Anatolia, aided by Eretria and Athens, staged a five year revolt against Persian rule. This led to the Persian Wars - two Persian attacks on Greece. In the first Persian war, the generals of Darius I captured Eretria and attacked Athens (490 B.C.E.). The attack on Athens was foiled when Athenian forces defeated the Persians at Marathon.

2. In the Second Persian War, Xerxes led a large army and a fleet against the Greeks in 480 B.C.E. Many Greek city-states submitted. In southern Greece, Sparta organized the Hellenic League, an alliance of city-states that defeated the Persians. Then the Greeks, led by Athens and organized in the Delian League (477 B.C.E.), went on the offensive and drove the Persians out of most of the eastern Mediterranean (except Cyprus).

B. The Height of Athenian Power

1. The Classical period of Greek history (480-323 B.C.E.) was marked by the dominant role of Athens, which subordinated the other states of the Delian League and became an imperial power. Athenian power was based on the Athenian navy.

2. The keys to the strength of the Athenian navy were technological innovation and the use of lower-class men as rowers. The major technological innovation was the development of the trireme - a fast maneuverable 170-oar boat. The
use of lower-class rowers meant further democratization of Athenian society because these men, realizing their importance, demanded the full rights of citizenship.

3. Athens used its power to carry out profitable trade and to extract annual tribute from subject states. The wealth of the empire made it possible for Athens to construct impressive public works, put on grand festivals, and support development of the arts and sciences.

4. The two most influential philosophers of the Classical period were Socrates and Plato. Socrates turned the focus of philosophy to ethics, probed the precise meaning of words, and created the Socratic method of question and answer. He was tried on charges of corrupting the youth and not believing in the gods of the city and sentenced to death.

5. Socrates’ disciple, Plato, wrote dialogs exploring concepts such as justice, excellence, and wisdom. Plato taught that the world as we see it is a pale reflection of a higher, ideal reality. Plato’s intellectual activity is representative of the transition from oral to written culture: Plato read and wrote books, and he founded a school, the Academy.

C. Inequality in Classical Greece

1. Athenian democracy was very limited in its scope. Only free adult males participated in Athenian democracy. They accounted for about 10 or 15 percent of the total population. Women, children, slaves, and foreigners did not have the rights of citizens.
2. Slaves were mostly foreign, accounted for one-third of the population, and were regarded as property. The average Athenian family owned one or more slaves who were treated like domestic servants. Slaves provided male citizens with the leisure for political activity.

3. The position of women varied in different Greek communities. In Sparta, women were relatively free and outspoken. In Athens, women were more confined and oppressed. Athenian marriages were unequal, arranged unions of younger women to older men. The duties of a wife were to produce and raise children (especially sons), to weave cloth, and to cook and clean.

4. Because there were no meaningful relations between men and women, men sought intellectual and emotional companionship with other men. This gave rise to a common pattern of bisexuality in which older men engaged in extended social, intellectual, and sexual relationships with younger men.

D. Failure of the City-State and Triumph of the Macedonians

1. Imperial Athens aroused the resentment of other Greek city-states, which led (in 431 B.C.E.) to the Peloponnesian war - a conflict between the alliance systems of Athens and Sparta. Sparta, with a navy paid for by the Persians, finally defeated Athens in 404 B.C.E.

2. Sparta’s arrogance then inspired the opposition of the other Greek city-states. This internal conflict among the Greeks gave Persia the opportunity to recover its territory in western Asia, including the Greek communities of the Anatolian coast.
3. As the Greek city-states declined in power, the backward northern Greek kingdom of Macedonia developed into a great military power. King Philip of Macedonia strengthened his army by equipping his soldiers with longer spears, using both cavalry and infantry forces, and developing new siege equipment including catapults.

4. Philip’s son and heir Alexander (the Great) invaded Persia in 336 B.C.E. and defeated the forces of the Persian Empire. Alexander, who conquered as far as Pakistan, built his own empire in which he maintained the administrative apparatus of the Persian Empire, used Persian official as well as Greeks and Macedonians, and began to present himself as a successor to the Persian king.

IV. The Hellenistic Synthesis, 323 - 30 B.C.E.

A. The Hellenistic Kingdoms

1. After Alexander died, his empire broke up into three kingdoms, each rules by a Macedonian dynasty. The period of time covered by these kingdoms is called the Hellenistic Age (323-30 B.C.E.)

2. The Seleucid kingdom included the core area of Mesopotamia, Syria, parts of Anatolia, and peripheral possessions including Iran and the Indus Valley. The peripheral areas were entirely lost by the 2nd century B.C.E. The Seleucids maintained a Persian-style administrative system and continued Alexander’s policy of establishing new Greek-style cities.

3. The Ptolemies ruled Egypt and sometimes Palestine. They took over the highly centralized and well-controlled Egyptian administrative and taxation systems.
The Ptolemies made Alexandria their capital and actively encouraged Greek immigration.

4. The Ptolemies did not build other Greek-style cities; the lifestyle and language of the majority of the Egyptian population did not change significantly. Native Egyptians did, however, resent Greek rule, and uprisings were increasingly common from the 2nd century B.C.E.

5. The Antigonids rules Macedonia and the adjacent parts of Greece. The Spartans, however, as well as new confederations of city-states, resisted Macedonian rule, while Athens remained neutral.

6. Alexandria was the greatest city of the Hellenistic age. With a population of nearly 500,000, the Mausoleum of Alexander, the Library, and the Museum, Alexandria was a political center, a great center of learning, and a major trading city.

7. Alexandria was a Greek city. Its Greek residents enjoyed citizenship and took part in the institutions of government (the Assembly and the Council). Public baths, theaters, and gymnasiums offered residents all the amenities of Greek life. The city also had a significant Jewish population that dominated two of the five residential districts of the city.

8. Hellenization included intermarriage between Greeks and non-Greeks, the spread of the Greek language and lifestyle, and a synthesis of indigenous and Greek culture.

V. Conclusion

A. The Phoenician City-States
1. Persians managed to hold together diverse collections of peoples in part through flexibility and tolerance of local customs and laws, leaving considerable administrative duties to native leaders.

2. While the Zoroastrian religion underlined the authority of the king as an appointee of god, it also provided a public perception of justice and defence against evil.

3. Persian law and administration provided security and stability, thus fostering commerce and stability. Their ability to organize large-scale labor forces expanded water distribution.

4. Persian cultural influences fused with the remaining cultural influences of Mesopotamia. Because Persian administration relied upon the written languages of Mesopotamian, Syrian, and Egyptian subjects, the Persian language was not widely adopted over the empire.

B. The Hellenistic Period

1. The independent Greek city-states, which has caused turmoil through competition for over two centuries, became inconsequential with Alexander’s vast conquests of the Persians as well as the frontiers of northeastern Africa and western Asia.

2. Greek influence had a much more profound impact on the Middle East than did the Persian period. Although Alexander had intended to continue the Persian administrative form, his successors relied almost exclusively on Greek soldiers and administrators.
3. The Greek-style cities imposed over the expanded empire, and the adoption of alphabetic Greek writing, which led to more literacy and dissemination of information, also contributed to long-term Hellenistic influence throughout the Middle East.