

Chapter 4 Notes – *Greece and Iran, 1000-30 B.C.E.*

Chapter Thesis: The Greek and Persian empires of the sixth to fourth centuries, B.C. shared common factors such as languages with the same Indo-European origins, and although both came into conflict and rivalries often as a clash of civilizations, both also served as a bridge between people and cultures that had not come into contact before, catalyzing cultural synthesis.

I. *Ancient Iran, 1000 – 486 B.C.E.:* Although our knowledge of ancient Iran is limited by the lack of a complete written record, from what we know from the Greek perspective as well as archaeological discoveries reveal the largest empire of its time between western Asia and southern and Central Asia.

- Persians of Iran created largest empire of the sixth century B.C., continuing the legacy of Mesopotamian culture
- Introduced uniquely Iranian political and economic organizational aspects to western Asia with this empire

A. Geography and Resources: Surrounded by natural barriers of mountains and filled with salty deserts, lakes, and marshes fed by mountain streams, Iran's geography caused a concentration of population in the northwest and a difficulty beginning agricultural settlements.

- Zagros Mountains to the west, Caucasus Mountains and Caspian Sea north/northwest, Afghanistan's mountains and Baluchistan Desert to east/southeast, and Persian Gulf to the southwest
- Northeast Iran is least protected by natural boundaries, vulnerable to Central Asian nomads
- High mountains at edges, salt deserts to the interior, mountain streams draining to marshes and salt lakes in interior
- Geography caused low population density (also applies today); mineral resources included copper, tin, iron, gold, and silver

B. The Rise of the Persian Empire: The original people groups in western and central Asia occupying modern Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan first gave rise the Median civilization, followed by the beginning of the massive empire of the Persians led by King Cyrus.

- Many ancient groups of people collectively known as "Iranians" due to their cultural similarities migrated across central and western Asia; Medes were the first to begin a complex political system in the northwest around the 2nd millennium B.C.
- King Cyrus and the Achaemenids of Persia united various Iranian tribes and overthrew the Median monarch in 550 B.C. but kept the law and political system of the Medes in place; only years later would conquer Lydia and Anatolia

- Western Iranian societies had family-based organization traced through patriarchs
 - Cyrus followed by Cambyses (ventured to Egypt and Nubia) and Darius I (overthrew Cambyses and extended Persian control all the way to the Indus Valley)
- C. Imperial Organization: Persian political organization was refactored during the reign of Darius I, who overthrew Cambyses and led significant military conquest; under him, the empire was divided into twenty provinces which were governed independently but with tribute to the king and his court.
- Darius I considered the second founder of Persian Empire for his conquests and reorganization of political structure
 - Under Darius, twenty provinces were under a Persian **satrap** or governor chosen by family relation, autonomy was varying dependent on distance from central Persia
 - A system of well-maintained roads connected outside provinces to the heart of the empire
 - Court and King in Persia ruled luxuriously in their palaces with multiple royal wives and abundant riches
 - **Persepolis** was a ceremonial capital undertaken by Darius I as a series of palaces, halls, and barracks for the king and was occupied by his son Xerxes
- D. Ideology and Religion: Much of Darius' success in Persia could be attributed to his claiming of a divine responsibility to rule and conquer by their god of Zoroastrianism, which had a single benevolent god and emphasized honesty and the beauty of nature.
- The vision for Persia, according to Darius, was to be different from the Assyrians by having their subjects work willingly for the king
 - Their god, "Ahuramazda," according to the people's beliefs, gave Darius a mandate to be king over the Persians in their religion of **Zoroastrianism**
 - Darius used theology to justify his political ideology to win the support of his people by assuming a "divinely-appointed task"
 - Zoroastrianism may have later had an effect on Christianity and Judaism for its similar characteristics but almost disappeared with defeat of Achaemenid dynasty in the fourth century B.C.
- II. *The Rise of the Greeks, 1000-500 B.C.E.*: With a rivalry with the Persian empire spanning two centuries, the Greeks spread across the land around them and the Mediterranean to secure more resources they lacked, trade, and political crisis.
- A. Geography and Resources: In lands that stretch across the Aegean Sea, Greece has a Mediterranean climate able to support limited agriculture (best in fertile valleys of Ionia), but an ancient civilization that depended on seafaring trade to have access to raw materials such as timber, grains, and metals.
- Atlantic Ocean to west, Alps to north, Syrian Desert to east, Saharan Desert to south

- Mediterranean climate, with hot air from the Sahara during the summer and ocean storms during the winter
 - Greeks had limited arable land and depended heavily on rainfall for their crop yields (more rainfall in the northern region)
 - Many natural harbors, along with difficult land transportation and the need for raw materials pushed Greeks to take to sea transport in their small ships
- B. The Emergence of the Polis: During the Archaic period of Greek history after the Dark Age, Greeks influenced by Phoenician traders began independent city-states known as a “polis,” which were often in conflict with one another and ruled by tyrants.
- Following the Dark Age of Greece after Mycenaean collapse, the breakdown of old institutions from the Middle East adapted in Mycenae opened the door for new organization forms in Greece
 - Phoenicians began visiting the area during the Archaic period of Greek history, and the Greeks soon adapted Phoenician symbols in their own alphabet (often seen as the first true alphabet) and their artistic ideology
 - Dramatic increases in population occurred during this time and villages became urban centers called individually, a **polis**, which consisted of a center and the rural territory it controlled
 - Hundreds of thousands of the polis entities cropped up naturally from the internally isolated geography, each polis was in frequent conflict; **hoplite** warfare was a kind developed during this time and depended on a close formation
 - Militaries comprised of private citizens, and as a result, campaigns would be before or after major agricultural seasonal cycles
 - Because of overpopulation beginning in the city-states, some sent out groups to colonize, willingly or not; surplus population decreased relieved political pressure and tension
 - During mid-seventh and sixth century B.C., **tyrants** began to seize city-states and take control, unwittingly led to **democracy** by the push of people and privilege of wealthy members of society
 - Greek gods were anthropomorphic and required sacrifice to be appeased
- C. New Intellectual Currents: During a time of sweeping changes across Greece, political development was not the only advancement; technology, philosophy, writing, and astronomy flourished in this time period as we know from the logographers who wrote of the era.
- Changes during Archaic period resulted in new technology and sociopolitical development
 - Individuality emerges from lyric poetry, philosophers began rejecting traditional religion, and astronomy advanced
 - “Logographers” from Ionia began writing on wide ranges of topics, famous logographer **Herodotus** with *Histories*

D. Athens and Sparta: After the Archaic time period of Greece, the Classical period saw large city-states such as Athens and Sparta emerge, with very distinct foreign policies, histories, and political institutions.

- Most significant city-states of Classical period in Greek history were Athens and Sparta
- Instead of colonization, Spartan city-state began invading neighboring city-states such as Messenia, and culture changed to one of a military camp, making their military the best in Greece
- Spartan citizens forbidden to engage in commerce, all were utilized for the needs of the state
- Athens had an usually large territory with many in population, had fertile plains good for cultivation of olive trees
- Political turmoil marked Athens, a social class system was established to avoid civil war; tyranny ruled Athens and began with Pisistratus until **Pericles** in 460-450 B.C. ruled in democracy (also aided by Spartans driving out tyrants)

III. *The Struggle of Persia and Greece, 546 – 323 B.C.E.*: During the fourth and fifth centuries B.C. were a series of conflicts between the empires of Persia and Greece, affecting the history of western Asia and the Mediterranean and other civilizations of the time.

- A. Early Encounters: After a series of wars such as the Persian Wars and a history of Greek subjugation to the Persians, Greece reversed this beginning with Athens refusal to submit to the Persians and their navy which allowed them to drive the Persians away.
- B. The Height of Athenian Power: The Athenian navy allowed them to not only have a distinct advantage in wartime but also in exchanges with other civilizations in trade across the Mediterranean. As a result, philosophy and science were accelerated in Athens and cultural achievements were made during this time.
- C. Inequality in Classical Greece: In Classical Greece present also with societal advancements were social digressions, especially in relation between men, women, husbands, and wives.
- D. Failure of the City-State and Triumph of the Macedonians: The Peloponnesian War, fought by the Athenians and Spartans against the Peloponnesian League, resulting in disaster and downfall for Athens.

IV. *The Hellenistic Synthesis, 323 – 30 B.C.E.*: The Hellenistic Age was ushered in after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C. and was characterized by Roman rule of the Greek peninsula but a preservation of Greek culture, now known as “Hellenistic” at this point.