CHAPTER II

The Brave New World

BARBARIAN invasions destroyed cities, but also created them. When the countryside was overrun by invaders, the natives took shelter in fortified centers. When the invaders settled down to internecine warfare, they in turn found such centers necessary to protect themselves from each other. Accordingly it is not surprising to find mention of fortified cities in the Homeric poems. Some of these cities, like Troy, may have been recollections of the Mycenaean age, but others undoubtedly belonged to later times. The city’s primary defensive function was usually indicated not only by its walls, but also by its location on top of a hill or at the foot of some spur of rock, an “acropolis” to which the citizens could flee. By Hesiod’s time, however, from a defensible refuge, the city had become also a center of trade and adjudication. Hesiod, though a farmer, was not a rustic; he and his brother had been at law before the judges of their city.

Ancient cities differed from modern ones most conspicuously in size. The Troy which Homer’s heroes are supposed to have besieged for ten years covered about four acres, an area roughly four hundred feet on a side. About Hesiod’s time Nineveh, the capital of the huge Assyrian
empire, was famous for its vast extent. It was some three miles long by a mile wide. If you started from the center and walked in any direction you could reach the city wall in about twenty minutes at most. Outside the wall, you were in the country. Some outbuildings might cluster round and occasionally grow to be small suburbs, but there was nothing like the interminable suburban area which surrounds a modern city. Usually the wall was a sharp boundary, almost as important for its psychological as for its military consequences. Inside was home, outside were the bare fields and the sea, wild animals and strange men, the graveyards and the dead and supernatural beings.

The small size of the ancient city made its people aware of their dependence on the surrounding country and its life. Many of them were farmers who walked out, often for miles, to their fields. In harvest or vintage season, when the weather was fine and labor was needed, the whole family might go out and camp in the fields till the work was done. The difficulties of transporting food in bulk and the poverty of means for preserving it made the produce of the countryside a matter of literally vital concern to the city. Available foods changed greatly from one part of the year to another. The failure of any crop meant hardship, that of a major crop, famine. The festivals and fasts of the city, therefore, the basis of its religious and civic calendar, were principally those of the agricultural year: fertility rites in the fall and winter, when the grain was planted and the vines were pruned, rites of purification and protection while the crops were growing, and celebrations at harvest time in the early summer, at vintage time in the autumn, and at the times when the first loaves of the new grain were baked, the first fruits offered, and the new wine ready for drinking.
Within the city (unless there had recently been a pestilence, as was frequently the case) life was crowded. Behind the fortifications the houses of men and gods were huddled together in confusion. The palaces of Mycenaean times had disappeared, and one- or two-room huts, square, oval, or with one square and one rounded end, served for gods and men alike down to the seventh century.

In Minoan and Mycenaean times the gods had been worshiped either in special rooms of the palaces or in natural sanctuaries, notably caves. The tradition of worship without a temple never died out: to the end of classical times a sanctuary might be no more than an enclosed area. But sometime after the invasions houses began to be built for some gods, especially in the Aegean islands where the example of Near Eastern temples may have been at work. Here large Greek temples appeared as early as the eighth century. When it became customary, perhaps also as a result of Near Eastern influence, to represent the god by a large statue, the statue was usually placed inside the temple, against the middle of the back wall, facing out. But the Greeks never generally adopted the ritual by which many Near Eastern statues were daily wakened, dressed, fed, and entertained. Sacrifices were often thought of as food for the god, but were commonly offered by burning on an altar outside. Religious assemblies were normally outside, too. So the building merely housed the statue and some utensils. It had no need of complexity. It remained, essentially, the one-room hut. At most another room or a porch, or both, might be put on the front, or on the back, and the whole surrounded by a colonnade. Such is the floor plan even of the Parthenon, the great, fifth-century temple of Athena in Athens, the masterpiece of the Greek
genius for magnificent yet simple development of a primitive theme.

Men's needs were more complex, so we find the plans of their houses developing. Sequences of three rooms, side by side or end to end, appeared in the seventh century. In the sixth century a plan utilizing an interior courtyard was adopted, probably from the Near East. It remained the standard to the end of the classical period. The house was built to the edge of the street; there was no surrounding yard. From the street one entered a passageway or outer room. Beyond this was a courtyard, off which opened the inner rooms. Most of the living went on in the courtyard. There might be a second story and, in big houses, several courtyards. In the sixth century, also, the roofs became flat (another example of Near Eastern influence?) and henceforth were used for drying food and clothes, cooking, eating, sleeping, and communications of all sorts—most houses adjoined their neighbors by party walls.

Between the houses, the streets were unpaved, crooked, and narrow (often only about ten feet wide). There was at least one open area, however, the market place or agora. Here went on not only business affairs, but gossip and official announcements, conversations, discussions, quarrels, the political and much of the social life of the city. Here too might be situated temples of popular resort. The chief temple would usually be on the acropolis, which would also be specially fortified and might be the site of other public buildings. But the nature of an acropolis was to be high and hard to climb, so buildings of everyday resort were usually located in more easily accessible areas. The agora was normally the most accessible place in the city.
The agora therefore witnessed the political development of the Greeks. That development began with loss of power by the kings to the heads of the great families, who made up their councils. This took place generally in the eighth and seventh centuries. The extent of the loss differed from place to place, but its effect was uniform: government by a single man gave way to government by the members of a small group. As the king was divested of his powers, competition for these between members of the group was probably often settled by the consideration of popular support, which came to mean by election, although candidates could be drawn only from the leading families. Election encourages hopes that the elected officials will not abuse their powers and that the privilege of rule, over a period of years, will be shared among the competitors. These hopes are more apt to be justified if offices are tenable for limited periods only. Limitation of tenure seems to have been made the rule in Athens by the end of the eighth century. By such steps the governing cliques of nobles—the "oligarchies"—in the various cities unwittingly created what were in effect constitutional laws. These "laws" first existed as practices or as understandings between the members of the ruling families. But once they had become fixed they could be appealed to, against any who neglected them, or attacked by any who wished a change. They came to be thought of as determining the form of the government. This conception of the state as shaped and governed by a body of laws which were independent of the will of the temporary ruler, but were not the utterances of some divinity, and therefore were capable of change by the people as a whole, was extremely rare in the civilizations
of the ancient Near East, but was important in Greek history from the end of the eighth century on and in the subsequent history of the western world.

Along with this internal political development of the cities went an external one. Some cities gained control of areas as much as twenty or thirty miles long. Already in the beginning of the dark ages the legendary king Theseus of Athens had united all Attica under his rule. Attica is an inverted triangle about twenty miles across the base, and thirty-five from base to tip (as the crow flies). Theseus reportedly made all its people citizens of Athens and established a common council drawn from the ruling families of the whole territory. Thus a "city-state" might differ considerably from a city and include a number of minor towns. Such city-states, rarely with so much territory, grew up around the east coast of Greece from the Peloponnese as far north as Thessaly, all over the Aegean islands, and along the western coast of Asia Minor. Only in the district at the heart of the Peloponnese—a district of which the name "Arcadia" has become proverbial for "unspoiled country"—and in the central mountains of northern Greece and, to an extent, in Thessaly, was the development of city-states delayed till the fourth century and later.

The development of city-states was both aided and limited by the geographical characteristics of Greece, the Aegean Islands, and the coast of Asia Minor, a world of small but steep mountains and tiny river valleys, with almost no large plains. The cities found their expansion limited by natural boundaries. Therefore, since they had to expand, they turned to trade and then to colonization, financing expeditions by their citizens to seize land in the countries with which trade had acquainted them.
The occasional adventurers of Homer and the summer-time sailors of Hesiod were now followed by men for whom sea travel and the exchange of merchandise were regular and major, albeit seasonal, concerns. This development was the more rapid because the areas settled by the Greeks were poor in copper (except for Cyprus) and poorer in iron. Iron came largely from the highlands of eastern Asia Minor, and two arms of Greek trade went out to meet it along the northern and southern coasts of that great peninsula. On the other side of continental Greece, merchants early established trading connections across the Adriatic with southern Italy and with Etruria, where there were also important deposits of iron. This development of Greek trade drove foreigners—notably the Phoenicians—out of the Greek markets for a while, but brought the Greeks themselves directly into contact with foreign cultures.

The Phoenician traders thus driven out retained their own trading network from their own coast across the southern Mediterranean to the northwestern corner of Sicily and the opposite promontory of Africa, thence on to Sardinia, the Balearic Islands, and the coasts of Spain. From Spain they passed beyond the pillars of Hercules into the north Atlantic, where they established at Cádiz, on the Spanish coast, an important base for their trade with Britain. In Greece itself, traces of their influence survived in a number of religious traditions, in some elements of art and, perhaps, architecture, and in the use of the Phoenician alphabet as the basis of the Greek alphabet and number system (for the letters served as numbers, too). Other Near Eastern elements in Greek culture were survivals from far earlier times, and more were now introduced as a result of
Greek contact with Egypt, the Phoenician coast, and the interior of Asia Minor.

From Asia Minor came, with other things, the art of coinage, that is, of dividing precious metals into small pieces of standard quality, the quality being guaranteed by a stamp of some individual or institution on each piece. The plentiful existence of such guaranteed pieces facilitated business. Therefore the invention (which seems to have been put to official use first in Lydia in the neighborhood of 700) was adopted during the seventh century by the Greek trading cities along the coast of Asia Minor and quickly spread across the Aegean islands to the trading cities around the Isthmus of Corinth.

The growth of trade brought with it the development of technical skills, and trade and skills together laid open to the Greeks a new and wonderful world, theirs for the taking. The western reaches of the Mediterranean and the coasts of the Black Sea were only scantily inhabited, and the inhabitants were at a level of civilization much lower than that which the Greeks had now achieved. Therefore during the two centuries from 750 to 550 the Greeks were able to follow up their exploratory trading by the establishment of colonies. In this process the trading cities played the leading roles. Of those on the Ionian coast of Asia Minor, Miletus in the eighth century explored the Black Sea, and in the seventh ringed it with colonies; Phocaea, about 600, founded Massilia (modern Marseilles) whence a string of settlements stretched along the coasts of France and Spain. The Ionian cities of Chalcis and Eretria on the island of Euboea were also great colonizers: In the west Chalcis planted the earliest Greek colony on Italy at Cumae about 750 and followed this by a cluster of
settlements on the northeast tip of Sicily and the toe of Italy; in the east its numerous colonies on Chalcidice gave that peninsula its name. Of the cities on the Isthmus and Gulf of Corinth, Corinth itself founded colonies along the savage west coast of northern Greece, and in Sicily it planted the greatest of all Greek colonies, Syracuse (734), but it established colonies also around the Aegean. Megara, at the other end of the Isthmus, founded a colony on Sicily and a cluster of settlements near the southwestern end of the Black Sea, the most famous of them being Byzantium (667). The cities along the Gulf of Corinth colonized the instep and toe of Italy so thoroughly that the area became known, with Sicily, as Greater Greece. Finally Rhodes was prominent in the colonization of the southern coast of Sicily, and the little island of Thera founded the great colony of Cyrene in Libya (630), chief of a cluster of Dorian colonies there.

All these colonies were in territories where there was no native power of sufficient size to resist the Greeks; Greek trading settlements in the Near East were on a different footing, but were part of the same general expansion. Most important of them was Naucratis in Egypt, founded in the latter half of the seventh century, the chief (and at times the only) trading port of the Greeks in that country. Miletus and the island cities of Samos and Aegina had concessions here, as did a union of the lesser cities of the Asia Minor coast and coastal islands.

This network of trading ports and colonies had a profound effect on the life of the Greek cities. The colonies served as bases for the expansion of the trading network, as sources of supply for raw materials and as markets for manufactured goods. Since Homeric times there had been
steady progress in shipbuilding, and by the sixth century merchantmen frequently carried more than a hundred tons (although they still relied for propulsion on their one, oblong, central sail). With ships of this size, bulk trade became important. The pottery of Corinth, the metalware of Chalcis and Samos, the textiles of Samos and Miletus, and the wine and oil of mainland Greece were paid for by tin from Britain and lead from Spain (shipped through Massilia), hides and grain from Sicily and southern Italy, gold and silver, timber and tar from Macedonia and Thrace, salted fish, grain and slaves from the Black Sea region, amber from the Baltic (carried across Europe to the Black Sea ports), linen and glass from Phoenicia and Egypt, papyrus and ivory from Egypt, drugs and grain from Egypt and Libya. Fostered by this traffic, many colonies became rich. Almost all were independent of their mother cities, though usually bound to them by ties of religion and sentiment. (Corinth was an exception in trying to control its colonies, and its effort led to serious difficulties.) Facing new circumstances and free to adjust to them, the colonies during the first two centuries of their history were the frontier of the Greek world. They prevented its stagnation, extended its knowledge, criticized, modified, and neglected its customs, developed its ideas to conclusions sometimes exorbitant, gave it practice in city planning both physical and legal, provided it with examples of all sorts of social experiments and their consequences, sent back to it treasures and flamboyant millionaires, patronized its artists and philosophers, and were an area of exile for its obstreperous individuals. Most important of all, they absorbed the increase of its population and themselves increased its busi-
ness. Thanks to them, the Aegean area was the center of a vast, expanding economy.

This economic expansion was reflected in the development of a brilliant oligarchic culture radically different from any the world had seen. The great families both ruled the older cities and provided the leaders of the colonial expeditions. They became wealthy and used their wealth to live luxuriously. This put their wealth back into circulation, and so continued the economic expansion. There was no great overlord, as there had been in the Near Eastern empires, to keep the local ruling class down by taxation or military pressure. Nor was the economic and intellectual environment dominated by the numerous clergy and vast endowments of great temples. The temple buildings remained of the simple sort described above. Often they had no hereditary priesthood and were served by individuals elected annually. Even when a priesthood was hereditary in some family, it was often no more than an avocation for the man who held it, requiring full-time attention only on a few annual festivals. Of course, there were exceptions. In Corinth hundreds, if not thousands, of sacred prostitutes were in the service of Aphrodite. In Delphi the oligarchy which controlled the famous oracle exercised much influence by interpreting its answers to questions on political affairs and by controlling its vast treasure; they constituted what might be called an important clerical interest in Greek politics. But these were outstanding exceptions. By and large, the Greek society which then appeared was characteristically secular. Its ruling class lived for honor and pleasure, love and adventure; wealth and political power were generally pursued as means to these.
Concern for honor and pleasure appeared in the creation of a multitude of great festivals. Greatest of all were the Olympic games, held every fourth year at Olympia in the western part of the Peloponnese. Here, protected by an international truce, came competitors from all parts of the Greek world, followed by throngs of observers, merchants, entertainers, servants, and miscellaneous hangers-on. Beside the contests (chariot and horse races, foot races, jumping, throwing the quoit and the javelin, wrestling, and boxing) and the attendant processions, sacrifices, and banquets, the games served as national fairs, where merchants, mountebanks and musicians displayed their wares, and all the world came to see and be seen. For persons living in small cities, with little privacy, personal prestige was of great importance. This was the great prize at the games. Nominally, the victor received only a wreath of wild olive, but he would be considered a public benefactor by his city, his return would be a triumph, and he would be given substantial rewards in money or privileges. So popular were the Olympic games that others were developed along the same lines, the most famous being the Pythian games at Delphi and the Isthmian and Nemean games near the Isthmus of Corinth. Also religious festivals in various cities were elaborated along the lines of the games (which themselves were nominally religious festivals) and became great public shows with contests in athletics and music and poetry as well as magnificent processions, choral songs, dances, and public feasts to supplement the sacrifices. Most famous of these were the Panathenaic festivals at Athens.

The popularity of athletic contests, and the concern for the human body which went with them, were traits already mentioned as characteristic of Minoan-Mycenaean culture.
Now they became of the greatest importance for the structure of Greek society and education.

"Society," in this world, was the society of men. Women of good family were married off young and were expected to remain in the women's quarters of their homes. They were prohibited from attending the games and many other spectacles. Marriage was a matter of arrangements, largely financial, with the father of the bride. It was thought of in terms of domestic economy and children. Children, in particular, were financial burdens; therefore—since methods of birth control were still primitive—a man often postponed marriage till his thirties and meanwhile found his sexual gratification either with slaves and prostitutes or in love. Love was conceived as, properly, a relationship between a man and an adolescent boy. In many cities it was expected that a boy between fourteen and nineteen would have a lover; the relationship was not only open and approved, but was thought an essential part of education for a boy of the upper class. The man was to initiate the boy into the customs of the world of men and to provide him an example of manliness. The center from which these love affairs began was the gymnasium, the place where men went naked (gymnai), the club frequented by the men and boys of good family. This became the starting point of higher institutional education—primarily in music and physical training—and the center for discussions of politics, literature, and eventually philosophy.

The peculiar sensibility developed by this society was brilliantly reflected in its art and literature.

As for art, it may (or may not) be fanciful to think the concerns of a predominantly male society are expressed by the naked lines and solidity of the Doric temples built in
this period, where decoration is peripheral and the beauty of the building is a function of its geometry. But there is no question that the sculpture of the seventh and sixth centuries expresses a new feeling for the male body, a new interest in its bareness, a new tactual concern for its plastic values, especially the modeling of its muscles.

At the same time, the art of these centuries shows the influence of Near Eastern trade. Especially in the trading city of Corinth there appeared a new style of pottery which luxuriated in oriental motifs—lotus flowers, palmettes, rosettes, fantastic animals, and mythological figures. The sculpture of the Ionian coast, where homosexuality was never so prominent as in the Dorian states, shows a delight in making elaborate patterns with ornaments and folds of drapery, especially of female figures, an interest in surface decoration which derives from Near Eastern art. Even in the Dorian style the basic figure of the standing male may have been derived from Egypt; its similarity to Egyptian figures makes clearer the difference of the Greek treatment, which reflects the difference of the Greek feeling for the male body.

Akin to this feeling is a more general delight in the actualities of the physical world, the variety of its shapes and textures and all the minutiae of daily life. Because of this delight, Greek work shows an increasing accuracy of observation and faithfulness of representation which culminated in a new artistic tradition radically different from that of the ancient Near East and destined to shape the aesthetic standards of the western world. The oriental motifs remained as marginal decorations, often to accentuate the simplicity of the central figures; the Near Eastern tradition of stylization continued to shape minor details—
the treatment of drapery and hair, for instance. But the major element was the new concern for the human figure and the world around it.

This concern appears with particular clarity on the Attic black-figure pottery of the late seventh and the sixth centuries. Its world is the world of the Greek aristocrat. Farming and manual labor of all sorts, the concerns of the lower classes, are rarely represented, but the picture of upper class life is almost complete. The gymnasium and the battle, the banquet and the funeral pyre, sacrifice and rape, checkers and suicide, Greeks and barbarians, deities and pet animals, women and mythological monsters—the whole world of upper-class imagination and activity bursts into life on this pottery, asserting itself in defiance of the natural limitations of painting on curved surfaces. As decoration this art is often unsuccessful. The figures are distorted by the shapes of the objects on which they are painted; the lines of the objects are broken by the horizontal stripes of the painting. The Chinese and the Egyptians had more respect for the pure beauty of the forms of utensils. The Greeks sacrificed aesthetics to their delight in representation of their multiform world.

The same delight, range of interest, and novelty of form appear in the Greek literature of the period, which shows an equally radical departure from that of the ancient Near East. The older forms continued to be produced; several second-rate epics appeared and the ancient "wisdom literature"—strings of allegedly wise sayings—was continued. (But characteristically, the most eminent writer in the form—Theognis, about 550—made it the vehicle less for traditional wisdom than for the expression of his own personality.) These older forms, though, were overshadowed by
the development of a new Greek literature reflecting the new age: choral poetry for the festivals and for celebration of victors in the games, drinking songs for the banquets, satires and epigrams attacking political opponents, patriotic and military poems. Many of these forms had sources age old in popular song, but it is characteristic of this period that they now first appear as works of art for an upper class who want more than the old, popular songs and who will remember the new, literary forms as creations of particular individuals—creations which were to shape much of the poetry of the ancient and of the modern world.

Along with the new forms went a new use of poetry for personal expression, and expression of a new sort of personality. In this growing world of Greek commerce and colonization, where old ways were being questioned and new ones introduced, the expanding economy made it possible for men to break away from the ties of family and city and live as isolated individuals. At the same time the growing wealth of the upper class and the lack of restraint on it encouraged the growth of individualism among its members. This is not to say that individualism now appeared for the first time. We saw it already in Hesiod. But Hesiod accepted the standards of his society and based his claims on them. Archilochus of Paros, in the following century, was the product of the new world, the man who lives for himself, who is in the society, but not of it, thumbs his nose at its standards, and is bitter about his loneliness. Because of this loneliness the concerns of his personal life acquire for him an absolute importance which is the essence of much personal poetry from that time to this. Deepest of these concerns is love, and the greatest literary achievement of this age was its love poetry. No earlier civilization
has left us any such poetry, and of much produced by later civilizations, little can compare with this. Supreme among the poets was Sappho of Lesbos, remembered not only for her celebration of that love between women which was the obverse of the homosexual love sung by many of these poets, but also for the passionate directness and power of her poems.

The ultimate achievement of individualism is to think for oneself. Therefore it is not surprising that in the trading cities of the Ionian coast, where the literature of individualism flourished, there appears also the beginning of systematic, rational speculation, that attempt to understand the nature of things which is basic both to science and to philosophy. The more ancient cultures had developed practical skills which testified to considerable reasoning, but when they had speculated about the nature of things they had done so in mythological terms, which do not enable those who use them to develop their thought by rational inference or criticism. The new achievement of the Greek philosophers was to apply to speculation about nature in general the rational method of observation and inference, and so to take the first step toward the reduction of human knowledge from a chaos of unrelated subjects to a single coherent system.

The beginning of this process is generally thought to have been made by Thales of Miletus. Thales was later believed to have had considerable knowledge of mathematics and astronomy and to have predicted the eclipse of 585 B.C. Whatever knowledge of these subjects he did have, he probably got from Near Eastern sources, most likely by way of Egypt, where Miletus had trading connections. Perhaps from the same sources he had the notion that water
was first of all things and that all things somehow came from it. The question was how they came. The Babylonians had said the primeval waters were a monster killed by a god who split her like a shellfish and made the sky of one half and the ocean of the other; this is pure mythology, description of physical processes in terms proper to animal life. The Egyptians had said the earth emerged from the primal waters as a hillock emerges from a receding flood; this is legend which provides no explanation of the event it reports. What Thales said we do not know, but it seems that he offered some explanation in terms of observable, natural processes, because only such an explanation would have been capable of rational discussion, of being corrected and leading others to try to correct it. And this was what it did.

Thales was followed in Ionia by a series of philosophers who attempted to solve the same problem by resorting to other primary substances and various natural processes (vaporization, condensation, freezing, the separation of particles from a suspension, and so on). From Ionia, philosophic thought was carried overseas to southern Italy and Sicily, where Pythagoras (about 525) made it the basis of a secret society for scientific research, religious theorizing, and political reform; Xenophanes (also about 525) developed the old notion of an indefinite divine power into a moral monotheism, critical of idolatry and of popular legends about the gods, and Parmenides (about 475) developed the notion that a thing either is or is not, into a doctrine of two opposing worlds, one of reality, the other of appearance.

Such speculations, as they were the ultimate expression of the period’s individualism, were also the most exclusive
side of its upper-class culture. Any free and respectable Greek with money could enter horses at Olympia; systematic speculative thought, however, required not only leisure and education, but also intelligence. Therefore philosophy, during this period, was for the few.

For the many there was the literature of native shrewdness. Aesop, famous for the fables later attributed to him, is supposed to have been a slave in Samos during the sixth century. At the opposite pole from Aesop's common sense was a widespread literature of "revelations" under the names of legendary poets and ecstasies, notably Orpheus, teaching a fantastic mythology and claiming to prepare the soul by special rites for the dangers it would run in the afterlife. From this hodgepodge of pretentious fraud and genuine poetry, primitive superstition and profound feeling, the western world derives much of its notions of heaven and hell.

The darkest side of Greek culture during the centuries of colonization was the fact that warfare was chronic. Almost every city-state repeatedly fought with its neighbors over trivial matters. Military service was the first duty of every male citizen not utterly incapacitated, and military service usually meant hand-to-hand fighting, sticking a spear into someone while he was trying to stick a spear into you. This explains much of the Greek concern for physical culture and the constant representation of military themes in Greek art.

Hence, too, the importance of the change in tactics which occurred during the seventh century. Before that time the members of the oligarchic families were the only ones who could afford full armor; against them the lightly armed troops of the poorer citizens had little chance. But
as the growth of imports lowered the price of metal and skill in metalworking became more common, it became possible for a citizen of moderate means to equip himself with a full suit of armor: helmet, breastplate, greaves, shield, short sword, and spear. Foot soldiers thus armed (hoplites) could form a solid wall of shields and spears which even cavalry hesitated to attack. By the end of the seventh century, the solid wall of hoplites became the universal and decisive military formation. The military basis for the power of the ruling families was destroyed.

At the same time the economic basis of their security, the expansion of Greek economy, was dwindling. By the end of the seventh century the best spots for colonization had already been taken; new colonies with exports to sell had to face the competition of those already established; natives were becoming civilized as a result of their contacts with Greeks and were better able to drive off new settlements. More Greeks decided to stay home, and the competition within the old Greek cities became sharper. The increase of population rapidly outdistanced both the increase of arable land and the slight improvements of agricultural technique. Consequently, increased cultivation of the same soil gradually exhausted it, and the decline of fertility is reflected by the increased concern for fertility cults in the late sixth and fifth centuries, especially, in Attica, the city’s patronage of the cults of Dionysus and Demeter. But these were not efficient soil restoratives, and the declining yield of their lands progressively impoverished the peasantry. Moreover, the growth of trade had greatly increased the wealth of the rich, who had money to invest in ships and cargoes. The introduction of coinage had made wealth easier to loan. Lending (at high rates of in-
terest) frequently led to foreclosure, and the debtor's person was often seized if his property failed to satisfy. The number of slaves was increased not only by this means but also by import, and competition from slave labor may have made the lot of the poor yet more difficult. The major trading cities were gradually filled with slaves, sold-out farmers, and small artisans on the verge of ruin and ready for revolt.

These men now began to find leaders, usually ambitious men from the upper class, where the frictions of life in a small city had almost always produced a complex pattern of feuds. From time to time a loser in such feuds saw the opportunity of putting himself at the head of the discontented poor and producing a revolution. When he succeeded he became a ruler of a different type from the oligarchs before him. They had ruled within the pattern of class conventions, the rudimentary constitutional laws described earlier in this chapter. The new ruler owed his power to a group anxious to see such conventions changed. He was not bound by them, and the Greeks accordingly referred to him by the non-Greek term tyrannos, which had previously been used to describe certain absolute rulers. The English word "tyrant" owes its connotations partly to the behavior of these tyrants, who often took advantage of their absolute power, but more to the hatred of them by the upper class from which most early Greek literature came.

Most of the big trading cities went through at least one period of tyranny in the late seventh and sixth centuries. In spite of local differences the tyrants followed a roughly uniform policy dictated by the social and economic factors which put them into power and leading to roughly uniform
results. First they launched building programs—public works to improve the economic facilities and living conditions of the city, to increase its prestige and beauty, and to make work for their supporters. Harbors, aqueducts, fountains, fortifications, and temples soon stood as monuments to their rule. Next they legislated in defense of small traders, artisans, and farmers, offering even direct subsidies or tax relief to encourage certain groups. They tried to strengthen their prestige and also indulged their tastes by maintaining brilliant courts, making great displays at the games, patronizing artists and poets and other entertainers. Thus they perpetuated the more popular aspect of the oligarchic tradition. With the same concerns they patronized religion, particularly those newer forms in which the priesthoods were not monopolized by the oligarchic families, and they turned the religious festivals to further occasions of display. To finance these policies and to satisfy their followers they often expropriated and redivided the property—especially the lands—of their opponents. Such measures often made it necessary for them to maintain a corps of guards and led to the execution or exile of their more determined enemies (if this had not been a first step). Those of their enemies who could, fled to the neighboring cities and thence intrigued against them—from this time on political exiles were an important element in the instability of Greek states. Finally these intrigues would be successful, a counterrevolution would produce its crop of executions and exiles and involve the city in more plots and sufferings.

Two major states of Greece avoided this pattern: Sparta and Athens.

Sparta had been conquered by a group of Dorians rather
late in the dark ages. After the conquest the new rulers kept
themselves aloof from the natives, whom they made serfs
(helots). Then came the pressure of increasing population.
Sparta met it, as did other Greek states, by trying to ex-
pand at the expense of her neighbors. She was unusually
successful. By the late eighth century she had completely
overrun the territory of Messenia and so had acquired all
the southern end of the Peloponnese. That her expansion
was military rather than economic may explain why her
constitutional development ended with a much-modified
dual monarchy. The success of the military expansion re-
lieved the population pressure, so she did little colonizing,
concentrated her strength at home, and became the greatest
military power of Greece. This worried her neighbors and
in the mid-seventh century they backed a revolt of Sparta’s
subject population, especially in Messenia, which gave the
Spartans such a scare that from then on their thought was
dominated by considerations of internal and external mili-
tary security.

At this time military strength was coming to mean
hoplite troops, and the essential of good hoplite tactics was
the maintainance of that wall of shields and spears un-
broken, at a run, in full armor, across irregular terrain.
This required constant practice, iron discipline, and a strong
sense of comradeship. These needs were seen all over
Greece, but Sparta saw them with particular clarity—
legend had it that the state was saved at the last moment
by a drill master. Moreover, in Sparta the need was more
constant and pressing than anywhere else because of the
necessity of holding down the subject population, which
could not be liquidated, since it did the agricultural work
that fed the state. Consequently, after the revolt, over a period of more than half a century, the state was reorganized as a military camp.

Since the helots did the work, the citizens' entire lives could be devoted to public and military duties. To prevent their developing other interests they were prohibited from engaging in agriculture, business, or any craft. Money was permitted only in the form of iron spits, so cumbersome as to be practically useless. To foster comradeship and awareness of mutual interest it was arranged that most of a man's time should be spent with his military comrades; common meals in public mess halls were made compulsory; family life was reduced to a minimum; independent intellectual and artistic activity was stamped out. To prevent the development of individualism and to inculcate the patterns of behavior required by the state, boys were taken from their homes at the age of twelve and brought up in troops. Besides the training in physical exercises and music common to most Greek states, they were taught concern for their own standing in the eyes of their fellows, respect for their elders and for rules, obedience, endurance of hardship, modesty, silence, extreme brevity of speech when speech was required, military exercises, and such arts of general utility as lying and stealing. As young men, they tried out their training in the secret police, of which the principal task was to ferret out and murder any helots who might become leaders of revolt. The goal of their training, however, was the army. To make military life more attractive all other forms of life were systematically made as bare as possible, but to prevent the army from going soft the men of military age, too, were compelled to live lives of hardship. Rewards were limited to public honors which
did nothing to make life more comfortable. Victors in the Olympic games, for instance, were rewarded by being assigned to the front ranks in battle. These measures were successful. Sparta became and long remained the most single-minded of the major Greek states, a military machine devoted to perpetuating itself.

The Spartans themselves not merely tolerated their home-made penal colony, but actually were proud of it. This is not surprising; the narrower a society, the more likely its members are to accept its standards as absolutely right. What is surprising is the admiration Sparta evoked elsewhere in Greece. Part of this admiration was due to its military success; more, to the recognition that Spartan life was a training for "virtue" in the "good, old-fashioned" sense—a sense which changes little from age to age because it is inculcated in childhood and the virtues which adults demand from children are relatively constant: concern for parental opinion, respect, obedience, endurance of hardship ("Stop crying!"); modesty, and silence. Deeper yet was the appeal to that side of the Greek character which was antithetical to the delight in life shown by Greek art and literature. Sparta before the great revolt had been in the forefront of the artistic and literary development, a luxurious state which drew to itself poets from Ionia and ivory and gold work from the Near East. Now, all such things were put away; the new pleasures were those of deliberate asceticism, of communal self-denial. Although self-inflicted sufferings are widespread in most societies and presumably gratify deep psychological drives, Greek society was singularly free of them and Greek religion offered them little justification. Therefore that side of the Spartan character which required them seized on prudential con-
siderations to justify them, and what could not be excused as superstition was applauded as wisdom. But long after the prudential considerations had ceased to exist, when Rome was in full control of the Peloponnese, the Spartan tradition of asceticism was maintained. The deep root which thus perpetuated Spartan practice also explains its hold on the Greek philosophical imagination. In Sparta we stand at the chief historical fountainhead of that ascetic ideal which was to influence, through Plato’s *Republic*, much western political thought, through the Stoic and Cynic schools of philosophy, the lives of innumerable individuals, and through monasticism, the whole structure of the western world.

Athens, like Sparta, began its expansion overland. At some time in the dark ages it brought all Attica under its rule, but instead of making serfs of the rest of the population it made them citizens and won their loyalty. Its territory, like Sparta’s, absorbed most of the increase of its population, so it, too, had no need to colonize and, for a long while, did not. This did nothing to encourage trade, and since it had more territory to farm than did most of the trading states it was not so deeply nor so early affected as they by the economic and social crisis at the end of the seventh century.

An attempt to set up a tyranny, before 630, was probably inspired by the tyrant of neighboring Megara and failed for lack of popular support. The nobles, also, gave way gradually before popular demands. Classification of the citizens by wealth replaced classification by birth; much of the law was codified and made public shortly before 621 and a legal reform was effected in 593. Solon, who accomplished this latter, seems to have been a man of justice and moderation. At least, he satisfied nobody, was much abused during his
administration and generally admired after his death. Besides passing measures for the immediate financial relief and subsequent protection of the lower classes (notably prohibition of enslavement for debt), he encouraged manufacture and trade by a series of economic measures, abolished the property requirement for participation in the meetings of the public assembly (which elected the magistrates), and reportedly constituted a final court in which the judges were a panel drawn by lot from the entire citizen body. (Among the cases which came before this court were those of ex-magistrates charged with malfeasance in office.) Finally he is said to have transferred the preparation of the assembly’s agenda from an old, upper-class council to a newly created one drawn from a much wider economic group. These measures assured lower-class control of the final court and the election of magistrates; thus they laid the basis of the democratic tradition of Athens, but they did not immediately secure democracy.

Conditions continued to be difficult, and about thirty years later a war hero named Pisistratus, who had played an important part in winning one of the recurrent conflicts with Megara, became tyrant. He followed the usual policy of tyrants with unusual moderation and success, preserved the external forms of the old government, exerted himself to improve the lot of the small farmers, won for Athens a footing in the Hellespont and a share in the Black Sea trade, successfully encouraged other Attic trade, built up the city as a show place, and died peaceably in 527. His son Hippias presently lost public sympathy, but was strong enough to hold on until 510, when Spartan assistance enabled his opponents to run him out. After a brief upheaval, a new democratic regime was established under the leader-
ship of an aristocrat named Cleisthenes, and a council of five hundred emerged as the supreme administrative authority of the state. This council soon came to be drawn by lot from all citizens and divided for administrative purposes into ten committees, each of which served a tenth of the year. Above the council was the authority of the assembly of the whole people, which retained the legislative power. The relative simplicity of governmental problems is shown by the fact that such machinery not only functioned, but enabled the Athenians to survive a war with their neighbors and to conquer some territory on the mainland northeast of Attica and on the island of Euboea. So matters stood when an ambassador from Miletus arrived in 500 to ask help for the Ionians' revolt against the Persians.