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The eighth-century revolution

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Abstract: Through most of the 20th century classicists saw the 8th century BC as a period of major changes, which they characterized as “revolutionary,” but in the 1990s critics proposed more gradualist interpretations. In this paper I argue that while 30 years of fieldwork and new analyses inevitably require us to modify the framework established by Snodgrass in the 1970s (a profound social and economic depression in the Aegean c. 1100-800 BC; major population growth in the 8th century; social and cultural transformations that established the parameters of classical society), it nevertheless remains the most convincing interpretation of the evidence, and that the idea of an 8th-century revolution remains useful

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THE EIGHTH-CENTURY REVOLUTION

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Introduction

In the eighth century BC the communities of central Aegean Greece (see figure 1) and their colonies overseas laid the foundations of the economic, social, and cultural framework that constrained and enabled Greek achievements for the next five hundred years. Rapid population growth promoted warfare, trade, and political centralization all around the Mediterranean. In most regions, the outcome was a concentration of power in the hands of kings, but Aegean Greeks created a new form of identity, the equal male citizen, living freely within a small *polis*. This vision of the good society was intensely contested throughout the late eighth century, but by the end of the archaic period it had defeated all rival models in the central Aegean, and was spreading through other Greek communities. Only a minority of Greeks were free male citizens, but the struggles around this social category made Greek society distinctive.

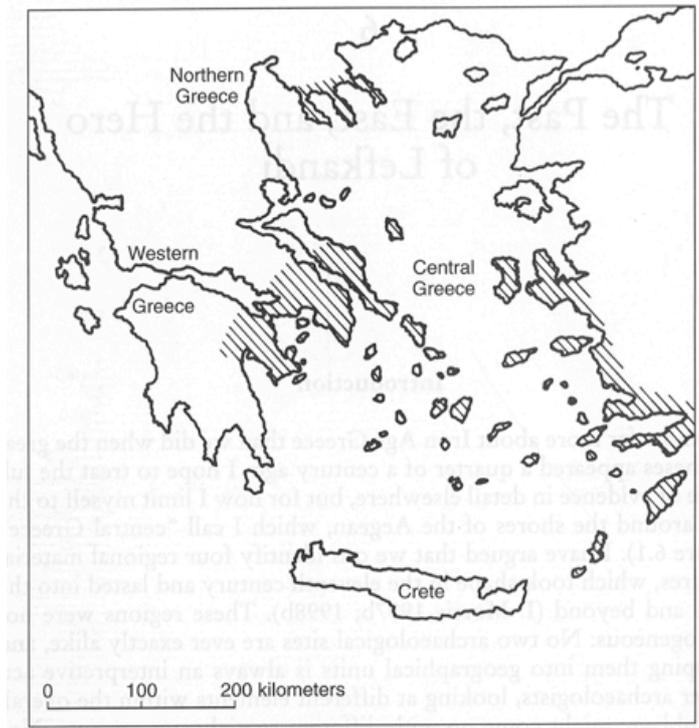


Figure 1. Four material culture regions in Aegean Greece

Ever since a post-Mycenaean Dark Age was defined in the 1890s, archaeologists have seen the eighth century as the beginning of a revival from it. In the first archaeological synthesis of early Greek history, Starr suggested that ‘the age of revolution, 750-650, was the most dramatic development in all Greek history’ (1961: 99), and Snodgrass’ interpretation of the period as a ‘structural revolution’ (1980: 15-84) has shaped all subsequent scholarship. Snodgrass argued that population growth stimulated state formation, and that Greeks made sense of the changes going on around them through artistic, poetic, and religious innovations.

In the 1990s some scholars suggested that this model exaggerated the scale of collapse after 1200 BC, the depth of the Early Iron Age depression, and importance of the eighth-

century revival.¹ They were right that the explosion of fieldwork since the 1960s had complicated the picture, although the latest synthesis (Lemos 2002) still reveals tenth-century Greece as impoverished, simple, and isolated compared to the Late Bronze or archaic ages. The critics also pointed out that Greek society continued to change throughout archaic and classical times; post-eighth-century Greece inherited much from the Early Iron and even the Bronze Age; there were variations within the Greek world; and post-eighth-century Greece had much in common with other Mediterranean societies. All these assertions were true: classical Greece did not leap fully formed and unique from Zeus' head in the eighth century in an absolute break with the past. But these criticisms of the structural revolution thesis nevertheless missed the core point: there are few episodes in world history before the industrial revolution when a society experienced such profound change in the course of a hundred years. A quarter-century of research has modified Snodgrass' model in many ways, but its core features (demography, state formation, social conflict) must remain at the heart of any balanced discussion. The 1990s revisionists systematically avoided such economic and sociological issues. The title the editors chose for this chapter — 'the eighth-century revolution' — is appropriate.

Background: the Dark Age

The destruction of the Aegean palaces around 1200 BC was part of an east-Mediterranean-wide pattern. From Egypt and the Levant to Sicily and Sardinia the following centuries saw recession, albeit at varying scales and paces; but Greece—and particularly the central Aegean—experienced the most severe collapse. Population, craft techniques, and social hierarchy declined in the twelfth and eleventh century. Standards of living fell sharply; adult heights and ages at death were lower than in Late Bronze or classical times, houses were smaller and less well built, household goods poorer, and civic amenities almost entirely absent (Morris, forthcoming a). In the 1990s many historians rejected the label 'Dark Age' for the period c. 1100-750 BC, but life in Greece in this era was more wretched than at any other time in antiquity.²

Economics

Demography

The population of Greece, defined as the Aegean basin and its overseas colonies, probably doubled in the eighth century. This is, of course, a guess, and an average; population grew more rapidly in some places, such as Euboea and Corinthia (see fig. 2), than in others, such as the western mainland. Snodgrass (1977; 1980: 18-24) once suggested from grave counts that growth reached 3-4 % per annum in Athens and Argos, meaning that population doubled every twenty years. I have argued that ritual changes inflate the number of known eighth-century graves relative to those of the Dark Age, making graves no guide to demography. However, settlement excavations and surface surveys do show that population grew. Around 1000 BC the largest communities (e.g., Athens, Knossos) had perhaps 1,500 people; by 700 BC they numbered at least 5,000.³

Greek population growth was part of a broader Mediterranean revival. Despite the difficulties of comparing survey data (Alcock and Cherry 2004), preliminary study suggests that population grew everywhere from Iran to Iberia in the eighth century (Morris, in prep.).

¹ E.g., de Polignac 1995a; Foxhall 1995; Langdon 1997; S. Morris 1992.

² See further Ch. 3, above.

³ Graves: Morris 1987; 1998a; cf. Scheidel 2004. Settlements: Scheidel 2003; Morris, in prep. Population sizes: Morris, forthcoming b.

Again, the precise timing varied, and local factors such as Assyrian deportations could have devastating consequences, but the general pattern is clear.

The reasons are less clear, although the geographical scale of the phenomenon probably rules out cultural factors (e.g., changes in marriage patterns or birth spacing) as the prime mover. Demographers generally argue that mortality rates drive sustained growth and decline, and that the exogenous disease pool and climate matter more than endogenous factors.⁴ Roman evidence suggests that ancient Mediterranean populations conformed to ‘natural fertility regimes,’ in which women began bearing children soon after menarche, and continued as rapidly as possible until death (or, for those women who lived long enough, menopause; Scheidel 2002; forthcoming). In natural fertility regimes, women’s average age at death largely determines population size.

There is some evidence that climatic changes might have increased ages at death across the Mediterranean. Between 850 and 750 BC there was a broad shift from a hot, dry sub-Boreal climate regime to a cool, wet sub-Atlantic system. According to one paleoclimatologist, ‘If such a disruption of the climate system were to occur today, the social, economic, and political consequences would be nothing short of catastrophic’ (Bradley 1999: 15). Palynology reveals countless local variations, but the general outcome was disastrous for temperate Europe, where the main factor in mortality would have been pneumonic infections in winter and the main limitation on agriculture cold weather and unworkably heavy bottomlands, but good for the Mediterranean, where the main killers were intestinal complaints in summer (Shaw 1996; Scheidel 2001) and the main agricultural problem interannual variability in rainfall (Garnsey 1988). The cooler, wetter sub-Atlantic regime exacerbated problems in Europe and eased them in the Mediterranean. Bouzek (1997) and Kristiansen (1998: 28-31, 408-10) both stress the inverse relationship between demographic patterns in Iron Age Europe and the Mediterranean, and link it to climate change.

But whatever the cause, the consequence was more mouths to feed. Doubling population usually means more than doubling society’s problems. If ninety out of every hundred people had access to a socially acceptable level of resources in 800 BC and population doubled in the absence of other changes, then only ninety out of every two-hundred would have done so in 700 BC. Unless my estimate that population doubled is very wide of the mark, we must conclude that either (a) the numbers of the poor and hungry multiplied dramatically, (b) resources were redistributed, (c) new resources were brought into use, (d) output per capita increased sharply, or (e) massive social dislocations ensued—or some combination of the above.

Responses

Three broad categories of response were available: intensification, extensification, and reorganization. *Intensification* of agricultural production became possible because population growth made more labour available. Inputs per hectare probably increased, although the ratio of producers to consumers may have worsened. Greeks may also have applied more capital per hectare. There are no signs of major technological advances, although iron tools perhaps came into wider use; the earliest examples from a domestic context date around 700 (Mazarakis Ainian 1998), though their scarcity may reflect excavators’ priorities more than technological trends. Manuring may have increased; the ‘haloes’ of sherds around sites in some Greek regions now seem certain to be refuse included in manure. But 75-80 percent of the sherds in Boeotian haloes are classical (Bintliff 2002: 30), and intensive manuring may have been a fifth- and fourth-century phenomenon.

⁴ e.g., Galloway 1986; 1988; Reher and Osona 2000.

Hanson suggests that irrigation and arboriculture increased in the eighth century (1995: 60-3, 77-81). Seeds from Miletus and Samos reveal a wide range of fruits grown in the seventh century, and olive pollen increases sharply in Messenia after the Dark Age.⁵ But direct evidence for irrigation remains elusive. Similarly, despite advances in work on agricultural terracing, little is clear about the eighth century. Study of Iron Age seeds and animal bones is in its infancy, but what data there are reveal stronger geographical than diachronic variations.⁶

The second response was *extensification*, whether internal, external, or long-distance. In many parts of Greece, population apparently fell so low in the Dark Age that good arable land was unoccupied in the eighth century. Surveys suggest that much population growth in the eighth and seventh centuries consisted of ‘internal colonization.’ In Attica, Dark Age settlement had focused on the coasts, and new sites appeared in inland areas in the eighth century. The ‘external’ approach was to take land from neighbours. The classic example is, of course, Sparta. Despite revisionist criticisms (Luraghi and Alcock 2003), most historians believe that Sparta conquered Laconia in the ninth century and reduced much of the population to helotage, then tried to reduce social tensions by repeating this in Messenia, probably in the 720s. Stories of other late-eighth-century wars may mean that other groups also tried expansion, but none was so successful.

‘Long-distance’ extensification first occurred before 750 at Pithekoussai and in 734 in Sicily, when some Greeks relocated to fertile lands far away. Many settlements no doubt failed, and even the successful ones started out small. De Angelis estimates that Megara Hyblaea increased from about 225 people in the years 725-700 BC to 2,275 by 525-500 (2003: 44). Pithekoussai grew even faster, reaching 4,000 by 700 BC (Morris 1996: 57). The large number of Corinthian, Euboean, and Milesian colonies must have reduced local problems, but we should not exaggerate colonization’s impact on Aegean population. Scheidel (2003) estimates the total number of Aegean emigrants between 750 and 650 at around 30,000, probably just 1-2 % of Aegean Greeks who lived in those years.

But colonization was not just a way to export people. The west—especially Sicily—had more arable land than the Aegean, and more reliable rainfall (De Angelis 2000). By 500 colonization more than doubled the amount of arable land owned, and vastly increased food production. Unusually large grain silos suggest that settlers at Megara Hyblaea were already producing beyond subsistence before 700. While we cannot prove that they exported grain to the Aegean, this seems very likely (De Angelis 2002).

The third possible response to demographic pressures was *reorganization*. Efficient property rights and low transaction costs can be decisive in economic growth (see North 1981). There are several stories about attempts to promote family properties in this period. There are hints of equal-sized, family-run plots in early western colonies, and Aristotle comments that Pheidon of Corinth and Philolaos at Thebes passed laws to preserve family plots, probably in the late eighth century (*Politics* 1265b13-16, 1274a31-b6). But other regimes persisted: in seventh-century Attica aristocratic *Eupatridai* apparently held most land, with the poor working it as sharecroppers, lacking secure property rights (Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens* 2.2). The most famous (and problematic) story has Lycurgus divide Laconia and Messenia equally among Spartiates, with helots working it as sharecroppers (Hodkinson 1992; 2000).

Some communities probably responded to population growth by redistributing land more equally, improving land: labour ratios and raising productivity (see Link 1991 for seventh- and sixth-century examples), and by improving property rights, as ideas of

⁵ Miletus: Stika 1997. Samos: Kucan 2000. Messenia: Zangger et al. 1997: 589-94

⁶ e.g., Klippel and Snyder 1993; Legouilloux 2000; Snyder and Klippel 2000.

citizenship became stronger. This produced varied landscapes of free, property-owning farmers, generally occupying about as much land as a nuclear family could effectively work by itself (Foxhall 2003). However, the evidence is anecdotal, and we cannot construct a systematic picture. Similarly, while there is clear evidence for trade and the expansion of Greek settlement, there is as yet no way to quantify the gains from exploiting comparative advantages.

Living standards

Despite their obscurity, Greek responses to population growth were apparently effective. The evidence is coarse-grained, but as population rose, perhaps ten-fold between 900 and 300 BC, standards of living rose even faster (Morris 2004a). Skeletal measures of age at death and stature show some decline after 1200 BC, then steady improvement across archaic and classical times. The data remain too unrefined to distinguish eighth-century trends from later archaic ones, but output apparently kept pace with population growth. The evidence for morbidity, nutritional stress, and physical injuries is more complicated, with inter-site variations overshadowing diachronic change (Morris, forthcoming a).

Data on housing are more abundant. The size and quality of houses declined after 1100 BC, from median Mycenaean sizes around 70 m² to about 50 m² in the tenth and ninth centuries. Mean house size changed little across the eighth and seventh centuries, hovering around 45-50 m², but variation around the mean increased (Table 1). Rich houses got richer, and poor houses poorer in the late eighth century. The only two large buildings from the Dark Age, the Lefkandi ‘heroon’ (c. 600 m²) and Thermon Megaron B (157 m²), seem to be special-purpose structures rather than conventional houses, but around 700 BC the ‘Great House’ (H19/22/23/28/29) at Zagora on Andros probably covered 256 m², and may have had a second floor. Only one very small house, the Smyrna trench H oval house (14 m²), is known from the Dark Age, but houses under 20 m² proliferated around 700. Interestingly, most come from Naxos, Syracuse, and Megara Hyblaea and in Sicily, where eighth-century houses were typically just 4 x 4 m., suggesting that life was harder for the first colonists than for Greeks who stayed in the Aegean, but there are also small houses at Smyrna and in Zagora area J (Morris 2004b). Exceptionally big or small houses became rare by the late seventh century. Sixth- and fifth-century houses clustered tightly around the mean, which rose to about 125 m² after 525 BC.

Construction – stone foundations with mudbrick walls in most areas, but all-stone construction in the Cyclades and Crete; thatched or flat, clay roofs – changed little across Dark Age and archaic times, but the quality of workmanship declined after 1100, then revived in the late eighth century. By 700, some houses had drains, and bathtubs appeared in the seventh century for the first time since the Bronze Age. Clay roof tiles were used occasionally in the Bronze Age, and were common on temples after 675, but only became normal on houses after 525.⁷

Overall economic trends

Eighth-century Greeks intensified, extensified, and reorganized production. The details are unclear, but trends in living standards show that their responses worked. In fact, the eighth century began one of the most sustained and rapid improvements in aggregate and per capita consumption known from the premodern world.⁸

⁷ See Darcque and Treuil 1990; Lang 1996; Mazarakis Ainian 1997; Morris 2004b; forthcoming a.

⁸ Goldstone 2002; Morris 2004a; Scheidel 2004.

We could conceptualize these responses in terms of a system finding a new equilibrium as exogenous climate changes shifted its demographic parameters. Technological, institutional, and legal subsystems all reacted, feeding back on each other to maintain balance, and triggering further responses in political and symbolic subsystems (cf. Renfrew 1972). Since the 1980s theories of this kind have lost favour in archaeology,⁹ but a systems model does make sense of Greek history, which moved from a low-level Dark Age equilibrium with a small population, poor living standards, limited hierarchy, and limited crafts to a high-level classical equilibrium (by premodern standards).¹⁰

But understanding what happened in the eighth century also requires less abstract frameworks. We need to trace how individuals and groups contested the available responses, how competition limited their choices, why certain responses emerged within the Greek world, and why Greeks reacted differently from other Mediterranean peoples to shared population growth.

Social structures

All the responses sketched above will have strained pre-existing social relationships. For example, extensification (whether internal, external, or long-distance) might create sturdy independent farmers, or support the rise of wealthy landlords, depending on who is involved and how capital is distributed; but it is unlikely simply to reproduce, on a larger scale, the relations of production that previously applied. Similarly, intensification might widen gaps between peasants with capital and those without, or might encourage kin- or village-based cooperation, again depending on how it is organized. As eighth-century Greeks scrambled to make a living, their decisions generated resistance and conflict.

State formation

A major outcome was the creation of somewhat more organized and centralized communities. I say ‘somewhat,’ because compared to most ancient states, eighth-century Greek organizations were very weak (cf. Trigger 2003: 71-275). Some historians even debate whether we should call classical *poleis* ‘stateless societies’.¹¹

Territorially extensive political organizations probably existed before the eighth century, with local chiefs (perhaps called *basileis*) having some influence within particular villages or groups of villages, and coming together in larger confederations for defense, religion, and perhaps trade (cf. Donlan 1985). These confederations probably recognized one chief as paramount ruler. Coldstream (1983) noted that Dark Age pottery styles often coincide roughly with the borders of later *poleis*, suggesting that these organizations grew out of earlier spheres of cultural and perhaps political interaction. Archaeology cannot provide direct evidence for political institutions, but the most plausible theory is that the eighth century’s challenges provided incentives for chiefs to work together more closely, forming something like primitive states; and that those chiefs who worked together successfully had advantages over neighbours who did not, forcing the neighbours either to copy them or be replaced by more organized rivals. As this process went on, offices and powers were increasingly formalized, and rudimentary states took shape.

For the purposes of this chapter I take ‘state’ to mean ‘coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from household and kinship groups and exercise clear priority

⁹ Hodder 1986: 18-33; Shanks and Tilley 1987: 31-60.

¹⁰ Saller (2002) suggests that per capita consumption peaked around 1.4 times subsistence in the western Roman Empire; I have suggested similar figures for classical Greece (Morris 2004a).

¹¹ e.g., Berent 2000; Hansen 2002.

in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories. The term therefore includes city-states, empires, theocracies, and many other forms of government, but excludes tribes, lineages, forms, and churches' (Tilly 1992: 1-2). 'The state' was normally one of many organizations within a given area, defined by its superiority over other organizations in wielding force. Its officials might claim to monopolize legitimate violence within a given area, but rarely actually did so. Rather, 'a state is an organization with a comparative advantage in violence, extending over a geographic area whose boundaries are determined by its power to tax constituents' (North 1981: 21). It makes little sense to try to set a threshold, saying that coercion-wielding organizations of a certain size and power count as states and those that are smaller and weaker do not; rather, we should imagine a continuum of organizations and the eighth century as a time when, in most parts of Greece, political organizations got more powerful. As population grew, the tempo of state formation accelerated, but Greek states remained weak by east Mediterranean standards.¹²

I suggest that eighth-century chiefs found that Dark Age institutions (whatever they were) no longer worked well. Population growth seriously affected access to land, grazing, water, housing, rituals, and decision-making. Families that had flourished under the old order now struggled; others that had struggled now flourished. Chiefs who did not deal with the conflicts this created would not last long, but ones who did resolve them, successfully managing larger groups of people, became much more powerful than Dark Age *basileis*. The challenges and opportunities were probably greatest in larger towns, like Knossos, Athens, and Argos, and in settlements like Corinth and Eretria, which grew from almost nothing to several thousand people in the eighth century.

It seems reasonable to imagine increasing tensions between villages as well as within them, with regional chiefs facing similar problems to village-level leaders. No doubt many solutions were tried, but across archaic times limited political centralization was the most effective. Local chiefs/*basileis* agreed to work together, surrendering some powers they had previously exercised within their villages in return for a share in broader powers in a larger territory. It must have taken time for the boundaries of these larger territories to crystallize, as leaders addressed various urgent questions. Should Eleusis join Athens, even though Eleusinian chiefs might be junior partners, or try to go it alone? Could Argos tolerate Asine as an independent organization? De Polignac (1995b) plausibly suggests that the placement of religious sanctuaries helped formalize frontiers in the late eighth century.

As well as working out the geographical scale of their political organizations, members of chiefly councils had to negotiate what powers they wanted central institutions to have, and what they wanted to preserve at the local level. Again, conflict was inevitable. Some chiefs may have been champions of small government, wanting the central council to be an institution of the last resort, perhaps organizing major wars, ruling on disputes that could not be resolved locally, and keeping peace between the *basileis*, but doing little else. Others may have wanted officials like the *archon* or *kosmos* to be able to replace local customs with centralized rules, extract resources, and run religion. Personalities and accidents must have played a huge role in local outcomes, yet there was a slow, overall trend toward centralization.

Most likely war was the immediate catalyst. Councils of *basileis* who could not fight off more effective neighbors would be replaced by ones who could. Councils had to mobilize and train warriors, and above all, make sure that chiefs pulled together, bringing their men to fight external enemies. We might read the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as being cautionary tales about the costs of intra-elite conflict.¹³ When Agamemnon and Achilles feuded over *timê*, only the

¹² Morris 1991; 1997; 2001a.

¹³ Among many other things: for my own views, see Morris 2001b; cf. Raaflaub 1998.

Trojans profited; when the suitors refused to act decently, Ithaca became a failed state, only saved from *stasis* by divine intervention. It is therefore not surprising that the earliest lawcodes emphasize procedure over substance (Gagarin 1986: 6-17; see also Gehrke, this volume). The code from Dreros has the top officials—the *kosmos*, the *dēmioi*, and the Twenty of the City—swear not to cooperate with anyone who tries to be *kosmos* more than once in ten years.¹⁴ Refusal to surrender offices remained a problem into the sixth century (e.g., Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens* 13.2).

The precise forms of eighth-century political organizations varied. There was a general trend toward making the old regional *basileis* figureheads or annual officials elected from an aristocratic college. Sparta, as so often, was an exception, keeping two kings with very real powers, perhaps as a compromise when villages pooled their power in the ninth or eighth century. Sometimes, as in seventh-century Athens, narrow aristocracies used state institutions to protect their own interests; elsewhere, the men who controlled state offices negotiated with the mass of citizens.

But state institutions were always weak. Confiscated property, fines, voluntary contributions, and indirect taxes on markets and harbours were their main sources of revenue in archaic times: direct taxation was always considered incompatible with freedom. States were therefore poor. They organized warfare, but individuals bore the main costs (armour, training, food). Fleets barely existed before 550. Fortifications were simple. States also paid for some religious activities, and temple-building may have been their main outlay. But sales of plunder after military victories probably covered many of the costs. These generalizations applied *a fortiori* in the eighth century. Put simply, states did not do much except keep the peace, call up the army for war, and spend windfall profits on temples. Even organizing colonial ventures may have been largely in private hands.

Egalitarianism

In addition to resistance from aristocrats eager to preserve their own powers, state officials also faced resistance from below. The strength of male egalitarianism and communal solidarity in the face of would-be rulers were, in comparative terms, the most unusual and most important features of archaic society. By 500 BC, in some *poleis* they produced *dēmokratia*, opening decision-making to mass participation.

The immediate cause of the shift in political power toward the poor in the late sixth century (Robinson 1997) was new ideas about egalitarianism, but late-archaic developments built on the eighth-century revolution, which redefined ideas of community and equality that had grown up since the eleventh century. Explaining this—the heart of the eighth-century revolution—requires a long-term approach, encompassing the whole Greek world, and combining archaeological and textual data.

After a chaotic period in the twelfth and eleventh centuries, a new ritual system formed in the central Aegean by 1000 BC. It drew a line within the community. The funerals of people of property, well-off peasants as well as chiefs, produced distinctive burials with high archaeological visibility (Morris 1987), and the worship of the gods largely, though not entirely, went on inside chiefs' houses, physically limiting the number of people who could take part (Mazarakis Ainian 1997). Poorer Greeks, excluded from both these arenas, were rendered archaeologically almost invisible.

But having divided the community into two groups, Dark Age rituals denied strong distinctions within the upper group. Burials, cult, and housing were all simple and homogeneous. The broad Dark Age elite effaced conflict, division, and difference within its own ranks. Its rituals also made sense of the post-Mycenaean world of poverty, isolation, and

¹⁴ Meiggs and Lewis 1969: no. 2; Fornara 1983: no. 11; c. 625 BC.

decline, drawing sharp lines between present and past, and the local context and the broader world (Morris 2000: 208-38).

The expansion of Mediterranean trade around 900 BC challenged this ritual system, and it broke down completely after 750, as population growth and connectivity soared. New rituals—more open, competitive, and varied—flourished. We see them at Corinth as early as 775 BC, then at Athens, Argos, and Eretria by 750. The evidence is poorer elsewhere in central Greece, but elements of the new ritual package are nonetheless widely apparent by 700. Large cemeteries open to the whole community appeared, at first with great variations in burial forms, grave goods, and monuments. Simultaneously, open-air sanctuaries proliferated, with millions of dedications, ranging from household pottery to precious metals. As noted above, people built the first really big houses, and larger numbers of really small ones. The new rituals recognized a broader community than before, and made room for difference and competition.¹⁵

This redefinition of community was the core of the eighth-century revolution. The old elite/non-elite boundary started dissolving in the central Aegean. We cannot prove that population growth caused this massive ritual upheaval, but given the responses to demographic pressure and the forces of state formation described above, the connection seems likely. The earliest literature implies conflicts between mass and elite and within the elites. There is no way to link texts directly to artifacts, but I would like to describe one possible set of connections, which, I believe, accounts for all the available evidence.

Population growth caused redistributions of power all around the Mediterranean in the eighth century (generally, see Ruby 1999). In Italy, burials suggest that the first strong chiefs emerged, and in Sardinia the Early Iron Age lords reached the peak of their wealth and power. In Sicily, southern France and eastern Spain, developments were slower, but there is also good evidence for increasingly centralized wealth and political power between 800 and 500 BC.¹⁶ In the east Mediterranean, where texts provide a fuller picture, Egypt and Assyria saw local institutions flourish at the expense of central courts in the mid-eighth century. In Assyria this phase, known as ‘the Interval’ (783-744 BC), ended with Tiglath-Pileser III’s coup and transformation of royal power, and in Egypt the Nubian 25th Dynasty also built stronger central institutions. In Anatolia, the Phrygian and Lydian kingdoms became major forces in the eighth century (Kuhrt 1995: 473-646 provides a good overview).

Only in the Aegean, it seems, did the eighth century *not* produce more powerful kings. There, local chiefs pooled their resources to form oligarchic colleges, rotating through limited-term offices. By 650, any man who would be king was marginalized as a *tyrannos*, an illegitimate usurper. The most important questions to ask about the eighth century are how and why the central Aegean moved toward male citizenship rather than kingship. I see four relevant variables: history, economics, war, and religion.

History: by 750 BC, there was a quarter-millennium-old tradition of homogeneous Dark Age elites, denying internal differences and competition in their rituals. Dark Age regional *basileis* claiming the right to command lesser local rulers must have been *primi inter pares*, with limited powers. By the eighth century this legacy of elite homogeneity, as old to eighth-century Greeks as the Enlightenment legacy is to us, may have been a serious ideological barrier for men trying to centralize power in their own hands.

¹⁵ de Polignac 1995; D’Onofrio 1993; 1995; Houby Nielsen 1992; 1995; 1996; Mazarakis Ainian 1997; Morgan 1990; 2003; Osborne 1996: 70-136; Snodgrass 1980; Whitley 1991; 1996; 2001: 77-265.

¹⁶ Italy: Bietti Sestieri 1997. Sardinia: Webster 1996. Sicily: Albanese Procelli 2003. France: Dietler 1997; Py 1993. Spain: Ruiz and Molinos 1997.

Economics: in archaic Greece, there were no very rich men. Herodotus was impressed that the Athenian Cleinias (Alcibiades' father) paid for a trireme from his own pocket in 480 BC, but also says that in the same year, a Lydian named Pythios offered Xerxes 2,000 talents of silver and 3,993,000 gold darics (8.17; 7.28). The richest eighth-century Greeks may simply have lacked the wherewithal to set themselves above rivals who wanted to keep them in check. Possibly there were extremely rich men in the ninth and eighth centuries whose estates were broken up in the seventh and sixth centuries; Homer has Eumaeus say that 'not even twenty men put together have such great wealth' as Odysseus (*Od.* 14.98-99). But the wealth he describes—59 flocks of cows, sheep, goats, and pigs, plus a treasure room guarded by an old lady (*Od.* 2.337-47; 14.96-104)—would not have impressed Lydians or Phrygians, let alone Assyrians or Egyptians. If some Dark Age aristocrats really did stand out for their wealth, we would need to explain why none of them (except, perhaps, the one buried under the Lefkandi apsidal building) left any signs of it.

War: if a handful of warriors dominated the battlefield, they might be able to centralize power. Great heroes certainly swept all before them in the *Iliad*, though Achilles' skills weakened, not concentrated, political power. Further, it seems as if Homer told stories about how he thought great heroes *ought* to act, set against a contemporary reality of mass infantry armies (van Wees 1997). Certainly in the seventh and sixth centuries there was no scope for super-warriors to slice their way through citizen armies, and this had probably been true for several centuries previously.

Religion: one of the strongest contrasts between archaic Greece and the Near East was the importance of divine kingship and priestly castes in the latter and their almost total absence in the Aegean. West Asian kings regularly claimed special access to the gods, supported by powerful temple institutions, and Egyptian kings claimed to *be* gods. Religion may have been an important source of social power in the Bronze Age Aegean, but not in archaic times. Mazarakis Ainian (1997) argues that Dark Age chiefs conducted religious ceremonies in their homes and appealed to divine authority. The earliest texts claim that good *basileis* receive wisdom and protection from the gods,¹⁷ and Martin (1984) shows that these ideas probably go back to an older hexameter advice-poetry tradition. We should probably assume that Dark Age *basileis* claimed privileged access to the gods, and that many Greeks accepted this. The separation of secular and divine power that Mazarakis Ainian traces between 750 and 700 BC was one of the most important sociological developments in Greek history.

We cannot assign primacy to history, economics, war, or religion: all four factors turned together in a tight circle, multiplying each other. They raised barriers to would-be great men who tried to exploit the new possibilities of the eighth century for their own ends. A few men succeeded, becoming the archaic tyrants so reviled in the literary tradition, but it seems important that as early as Solon and Theognis, *topoi* about tyrants insisted that they appealed to the mass of citizens for support against a corrupt aristocracy (McGlew 1993).

I suggest that as the Dark Age aristocracy fragmented in the eighth century, producing the fluidity and competition we see in the archaeological record, appeals to the poor (exemplified by the assembly debate in *Odyssey* 2) became increasingly important. Champions of old visions of an undifferentiated elite reached out across the barriers between elite and non-elite, to preserve the principle that no one aristocrat should dominate the others. The fact that kingship did not take hold suggests that, by and large, they succeeded. But the price they paid to defeat would-be kings was the collapse of the old elite/non-elite boundary. Increasingly, the old elite conceded that the whole male community now belonged to a relatively undifferentiated group. The old elite homogeneity was generalized to the entire

¹⁷ Hesiod, *Theogony* 79-93; cf. Homer, *Odyssey* 8.166-77.

resident male population, creating a new category of identity, the citizen (*politês*), and a new definition of community (*polis*).

The late-eighth-century struggles transformed older notions about class, gender, ethnicity, the past, the east, and the gods into two broadly opposed ideologies that I have called ‘middling’ and ‘elitist’ (Morris 2000: 155-91). Ancient authors do not self-identify in this way; the middling/elitist opposition is a model that simplifies a more complex and unstable reality. But this is the point of models (Morris 2000: 159-61). The simple middling/elitist contrast makes sense of a range of phenomena, from the poems themselves to coinage (Kurke 1999), burials, house design, and cult practices (Morris 1998b).

The core of the middling philosophy was the idea that all local men were more or less the same, and that all others—foreigners, women, slaves—were utterly different. The only legitimate authority came from within the local male community. Appeals to ties with gods, eastern monarchs, and ancient heroes were worthless. Elitists claimed precisely the opposite: their divine, oriental, and heroic connections set them above the rabble, and they alone should rule.

The middling poets were rich men, singing for other rich men. They were not proto-democrats. Throughout their poetry, they insisted that they should rule, but should do so as particularly wise representatives of the moderate citizen community. The first verbal expression of the middling philosophy comes in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, at the beginning of Greek literary production, around 700 BC, and the archaeological evidence for the redefinition of community makes it seem likely that these attitudes took shape over the previous generation or two, in the late eighth century. The elitist vision, I suggest, formed in opposition to middling ideologies in the same period, and the variability of the late-eighth-century archaeological record reflects the use of material culture to express competing visions of the good society.¹⁸

The issues had to be worked out separately in each of the formative *poleis*, and no two followed exactly the same path. On the whole, central Aegean communities embraced the middling ideology by 700. A stable symbolic system developed in the seventh century, featuring poor, homogeneous graves in large cemeteries. Warrior burials disappeared. Sanctuaries became the main context for spending, chiefly on elaborate communal temples. People dedicated very large numbers of poor offerings. Rich metal offerings continued until about 650, but then declined. Elaborate orientalizing motifs were tamed. Houses slowly grew larger, and their diversity declined, until by 600 nearly all were multi-room rectilinear structures around central courtyards (Morris 1998b: 13-31).

But this, like the middling ideology itself, is a model simplifying a more complex reality. At Athens, trends were reversed around 700, and distinctly old-fashioned rituals once again divided the community in the seventh century. In Ionia, some of the Cyclades, and Boeotia, the full archaic ritual package only appeared around 550, by which time Athens had returned to the general central Aegean pattern.¹⁹ In the western colonies there were planned settlements at Naxos, Syracuse, and Megara Hyblaea before 700, but few communities had the resources to build major temples for another hundred years. The large eighth-century cemetery at Pithekoussai (Buchner and Ridgway 1993) is quite like contemporary central Aegean graveyards, but few eighth-century burials are known from other sites; and in archaic and classical times, Sicilian cemeteries were more varied than Aegean ones (Jackman 2005).

Greeks outside the central Aegean and its colonies shared in some, but not all, of these developments. Cretans and western mainlanders built temples like Aegean Greeks, and westerners may have pioneered the new religious practices. Western mainland settlements and

¹⁸ Morris 1998b: 4-13; 2000: 190-1; cf. Kistler 2004.

¹⁹ Morris 1987; 1998b: 31-6; 2000: 287-305.

cemeteries remained small until the sixth century, and are poorly known; Sparta, which responded to the eighth century so distinctively, has produced almost no archaic remains other than its temples, although the recent Laconia survey (Cavanagh et al. 1996; 2003) may change that. Cretans also opened up their cemeteries like Aegean Greeks in the late eighth century, but mortuary variability increased on Crete throughout the seventh century, with warrior burials remaining popular. Warrior burials and mounds were also popular in northern and western Greece. Only at the end of the sixth century, when the elitist ideology collapsed, did regional patterns converge.²⁰ In the fifth century, broadly similar rhythms operated in material culture all over the Greek world except for Crete, which we are only now beginning to understand (Erickson, forthcoming).

Culture

There are hints in the texts that the conflicts of the eighth century were sometimes settled by violence, but the main arena of debate was probably cultural. The period saw an explosion of cultural innovation. Everything from mythology to house design was turned upside down. Archaeological sites give an impression of feverish energy. Eighth-century settlements have much thicker deposits than Dark Age ones, reflecting a frenzied level of building, demolition, and rebuilding; and they simply have *more* material culture.

Art historians regularly speak of the late eighth century as the start of an orientalizing period, when the Greeks, drawn into a wider Mediterranean world as population and trade grew, saw and adopted Near Eastern designs. This is reasonable, but the most significant development was the Aegean Greeks' redeployment of Near Eastern techniques to respond to the unique social issues of the conflicts between middling and elitist ideologies.

The most obvious example is the Greek alphabet. Greeks had known of Near Eastern scripts since at least 900, but only developed their own writing, based on west Semitic consonantal scripts, around 750 BC. The alphabet improved the script's ability to represent vowels, but the remarkable thing about the earliest Greek inscriptions is how many of them are poetic (Powell 1991: 119-86). This usually means one or two lines (mostly hexameters) scratched on pots, but since Albert Lord's pioneering work (Lord 1953), most Homerists have believed that around 700 BC someone took down by dictation the 28,000 lines of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the 2,000 lines of the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, plus countless lines of now-lost poems (Janko 1998). There are competing theories, imagining a drawn-out process of fixation without texts (e.g., Nagy 1996: 65-112), which raise interesting questions but seem less plausible.

There is little evidence for commercial writing before the sixth century and none at all for scribal bureaucracies of Near Eastern types²¹ to compare with the poetic inscriptions and the likelihood of major dictated poems. Powell (1991; 2002) has argued that the main impetus for the creation of the alphabet was to fix in writing accounts of the past, at a time when the relationship between present and past became acutely important (cf. Morris 2000: 261-7; 2001b: 81-2). The earliest poetry overwhelmingly concerns the heroic age and theogonies.

The same concern with thinking through relationships between the present and the heroic past may lie behind the explosion of figured art in the late eighth century. Greek vase painters had occasionally shown humans and animals across the Dark Age, but around 800 Corinthians and Argives adopted animal friezes, probably inspired by Eastern examples, and around 750 Athenians pioneered the use of human figures. Everything about these scenes remains controversial, but Snodgrass has made a good case that the scenes were generically

²⁰ Morris 1998b: 36-68; Whitley 2001: 231-55.

²¹ Cf. Postgate 2001 on the variety of such bureaucracies.

'heroizing'.²² Just as an adapter developed Near Eastern scripts so that particular poetic visions of the heroic past could be preserved, painters did the same with Near Eastern artistic techniques, constantly using the heroic past to think about the present. Powell suggests that Near Eastern art also stimulated the development of Greek mythology, as an attempt to make sense of the unfamiliar images now entering the Aegean (2002: 146-87).

Much in Greek myth can be traced back to Near Eastern prototypes (S. Morris 1992; West 1997), but it is hard to know whether the shared elements developed in tandem in the Bronze Age, or were Iron Age imports to the Aegean, like writing and representational art. Herodotus' stories (1.46-58; 2.54-57) that Croesus of Lydia consulted Greek oracles and that Egyptians claimed that some Greek oracles had Egyptian founders, via Phoenician intermediaries, suggest that East Mediterranean peoples inserted Greece into their own theogonies, just as Greeks inserted Italians and Sicilians into their own mythical genealogies.²³ Herodotus accepted Near Eastern and Egyptian origins for several Greek divinities, just as Elymians and Romans sometimes accepted Greek stories about their origins.²⁴

Greeks also started copying Near Eastern monumental sculpture in the late eighth century and Egyptian in the late seventh, but did not have the sort of palaces and grand mansions where such statues were commonly displayed in the East. Late-eighth-century Cretans displayed statues in cemeteries, but after 700 this practice declined, except in Attica, where tomb monuments seem to have been an important part of attempts to preserve unusual social distinctions (D'Onofrio 1982; 1988). Funerary sculpture seems to have been thought inconsistent with middling attitudes; sanctuaries were the only places where such displays were acceptable.

The way eighth- and seventh-century Greek patrons and artists took Near Eastern forms and used them in different contexts may have a lot to do with the innovation and energy of archaic Greek art. Operating outside the often-rigid institutional frameworks of Near Eastern and Egyptian palaces, Greek artists were free to experiment, and indeed had to experiment, to make these adopted media speak to their concerns. Greek craftsmen then took their hybridized styles to the west Mediterranean. In the eighth century, only small amounts of Greek material reached westerners. In Sicily, southern Italy and Sardinia natives always used these artifacts within traditional rituals,²⁵ just as Greeks had adapted Near Eastern media to their own needs, and only in the sixth century did Greek material culture have a serious impact on local ways of life.

Eighth-century Greece in comparative perspective

In the last fifteen years there has been a major shift toward Mediterranean-scale history, expressed most forcefully in Horden and Purcell's *Corrupting Sea* (2000). When Snodgrass developed his structural revolution model, it seemed reasonable to treat Greece largely on its own terms, but that is no longer the case (see Ch. 2, above). This broadening of perspectives was one of the major accomplishments of 1990s scholarship. In this chapter, I have argued that the motors of change in eighth-century Greece—demography, perhaps climate, competition, centralization—affected the whole Mediterranean, but the Greeks' responses to

²² Human figures: Hurwit 1985: 71-124; Snodgrass 1987: 132-69. Heroizing: Snodgrass 1980: 65-77; 1998.

²³ E.g., Herodotus 1.94, 166-67 (Etruscans), 7.169-71 (Iapygians); Thucydides 6.2 (Elymians).

²⁴ Hdt. 1.131; 2.43-64; Harrison 2000: 208-22.

²⁵ Sicily: Albanese Procelli 2003: 131-6. Southern Italy: Burgers 1998: 183-6. Sardinia: van Dommelen 1998: 104-12.

them—particularly the creation of egalitarian male citizenship and the set of cultural conflicts around it—were unique to the Aegean and its colonies.

But although 1970s discussions of eighth-century Greece now seem to lack a Mediterranean context, Snodgrass (1977) had in fact looked toward a much wider context, linking eighth-century Greece to archaeological debates on state formation in other parts of the world. Non-classical archaeologists only rarely take Iron Age Greece into consideration, but two aspects of the Greek case seem important for current arguments. The first is archaic Greece's peculiarity. Generalizing models trade off explanatory power against specificity, so we should not expect them to describe any particular case exactly; but archaic Greece's basic social structures seem incompatible with most models of state formation.²⁶ In the past decade comparative archaeologists have developed alternatives to neo-evolutionary models, particularly the 'dual-processual' model, recognizing the possibility of relatively unhierarchical, 'corporate' social structures like Greece (Blanton et al. 1996: esp. 2, 7) as well as more individualistic 'network' systems. The rapid improvement in living standards and growth of markets in archaic and classical Greece also challenges much conventional thought in archaeology (see Smith 2004).

Second, eighth-century Greece is not just a problematic example of a worldwide phenomenon of state formation; it is also one of the best-documented cases of the more specific process of the regeneration of complex society after collapse. Building on 1980s interest in the collapse of complex societies, regeneration is now emerging as a major research topic.²⁷ 'Collapse' and 'regeneration' are varied phenomena, making systematic comparisons difficult. But if we take Childe's (1950) famous ten criteria of civilization (urban centers, craft production, taxation, monuments, non-productive elites, writing and numeracy, practical sciences, art, long-distance trade, craft specialization) as our starting point, eighth-century Greece is one of the clearest cases of regeneration after collapse (Morris, forthcoming c).

Conclusion

The eighth century was a turning point in Mediterranean history. The Greeks were caught up in larger processes of climate change, population growth, expanding trade, and political centralization. In another essay I have called this 'Mediterraneanization,' a speeding-up of connectivity that increased competition, creating new winners and losers (Morris 2003).

One of the main advances in classical scholarship in the past twenty years has been the movement toward seeing Greece in its Mediterranean context, but a comparative approach in fact highlights the peculiarities of the Greeks, as well as the ways they belonged to a larger system. Demography and Mediterraneanization drove state formation, but central Aegean Greeks uniquely tempered this process with increasing male egalitarianism. The middling ideology obstructed the development of state powers and derailed kingship as a viable institution. In the conflicts between middling and elitist ways of seeing the world Greeks developed unusual ideas about the gods, the past, class, gender, and ethnicity. These established the parameters of archaic and classical Greek culture, providing the whole reason why we continue to study the Greeks today.

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²⁶ Morris 1997; Trigger 2003: 142-3.

²⁷ Schwartz, forthcoming; cf. Tainter 1988; Yoffee and Cowgill 1988.

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