

The Unity of the City-State Culture of Ancient Greece

The unity of all the Greek city-states can best be illustrated by an example. We possess a small treatise on the geography of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, written in the fourth century BC and wrongly attributed to the geographer Skylax of Karyanda, who really lived 200 years earlier, which is why it goes under the name of Pseudo-Skylax.¹ It is organised as a *periplous*, i.e. a journey by sail along the coasts of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and the writer enumerates, region by region, the most important settlements along the coast. In all, 733 toponyms are quoted, and most of them are classified, directly or indirectly, as *poleis*.² Pseudo-Skylax begins his voyage at the Pillars of Hercules (Gibraltar) and goes along the coasts of Spain, France, Italy and Illyria, as far as the river Acheron in southern Epeiros ‘where Hellas begins to be continuous’. Then the voyage goes all the way south round Greece to the river Peneios in north Thessaly ‘where continuous Hellas ends’.³ Then it goes via Macedon, Thrace, Skythia, Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, Libya and North Africa, and so back to the Pillars of Hercules. In his classification of cities Pseudo-Skylax distinguishes between Hellenic and barbarian, i.e. non-Hellenic, *poleis*. In the first and the last sections a Greek colony is called a *polis Hellenis*, while *polis* without qualification means a barbarian city: but in the central section, the section about Greece proper, a *polis* means a Hellenic city, and the addition *Hellenis* is superfluous. The list of Hellenic *poleis* is far from exhaustive—and does not pretend to be—but the whole treatise rests on the assumption that the Hellenic city-states comprise all Greek settlements in the whole Mediterranean. Hellas is not just ‘continuous Hellas’, i.e. roughly modern Greece and the west coast of Asia Minor, where all *poleis* were Hellenic, but is also the whole colonial world, where Hellas is divided up into

little bits, all of them *poleis* divided from one another by territories inhabited by 'barbarians'. The division into Hellenic *poleis* and barbarian *poleis*,⁴ and the conception that all Hellenic *poleis* belong together, is found in all our sources,⁵ and can be traced back to the fragments we have of the oldest Greek historical geographer, Hekataios of Miletos, who wrote his description of the inhabited world at the end of the sixth century BC.⁶

In contrast to many other city-state cultures, the Greek *poleis* did not lie together in one large region so that communication between them could be by land. In this respect the Greek *poleis* were like the Phoenician and the Malayan ones: most Archaic and Classical Greek *poleis* were on the sea, and only in the Hellenistic period did the Greeks found a long row of colonies well into the Persian Empire and far from the coasts of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Most early Greek city-states were by the sea or near the sea, 'like frogs round a pond' in Plato's vivid phrase.⁷ And his remark is borne out by Pseudo-Skylax, who lists his *poleis* in the order in which they lie along the coast: only occasionally is his list interrupted by the standard comment, 'there are also some *poleis* inland'.⁸

As the world looks today, it is sea that divides and land that binds together, but in antiquity it was the other way round: communication was easiest by sea, and land communication was complicated and costly.⁹ The Greeks were a seafaring people, and after *polis* it is *limen*, the harbour, that is the commonest term for settlement in Pseudo-Skylax.¹⁰ With Classical Sparta as the one notorious exception, the ancient Greek city-state was anything but a society of xenophobic stay-at-homes. The Greeks were, on the contrary, unbelievably mobile and unbelievably easy-going about letting strangers settle in their cities.

(a) From the eighth to the third century BC new *poleis* were created all the time, both in Greece and outside it: they were founded as colonies (*apoikiai*), usually by settlers sent from the big *poleis* in Greece, which were consequently regarded as a colony's 'mother-city' (*metropolis*). Many of the colonies subsequently got reinforcements of new colonists, partly from their own *metropolis* but also from other *poleis*.¹¹ Most of the colonies were politically independent of the mother-city, but there were strong religious and cultural links, kept alive by constant communication between colony and mother-city.¹² A large colony might often itself found new colonies

in the region, thus acquiring a double status, as both a *metropolis* and an *apoikia*.¹³

(b) Many individual Greeks moved from one *polis* to another. Often they were traders or craftsmen, but the numerous civil wars also resulted in large groups of citizens being sentenced to exile or living as refugees in neighbouring city-states.¹⁴ So besides citizens and the slaves of citizens there was in every *polis* a large population of free non-citizens who had settled in the city either permanently or for a period of years and were very seldom admitted to citizenship.¹⁵

(c) The army of a city-state was primarily a citizen militia, but it could be supplemented by professional mercenaries, and in the Classical and Hellenistic periods many Greeks served for years on end as mercenaries in foreign armies.¹⁶

(d) Inter-regional trade, especially sea trade, was a striking characteristic of the Greek city-state culture: trade was made necessary by the high degree of urbanisation, another typical feature, which also characterises other city-state cultures amongst our thirty-seven.¹⁷

(e) It was not only trade that caused Greeks to leave their native place for a more or less long period: Delphi and the other famous Greek oracles were consulted every year by thousands of people, who had often travelled for weeks to obtain the god's answers to their questions,¹⁸ and thousands of Greeks met at two- or four-year intervals at the great pan-Hellenic festivals. At the Olympic Games there may have been as many as 40,000 or 50,000 spectators.¹⁹

This constant and intense communication between Greeks all over the Mediterranean world was the precondition for the ability of the Greeks who lived outside Greece to retain their ethnic identity, including their conviction that, as Greeks, they were superior to the barbarians who surrounded them.²⁰ In some colonies the colonists were virtually all males, who married and had children by local women.²¹ But the Greeks described all non-Greeks as *barbaroi* or *barbarophonoi* (people speaking something unintelligible). They did not bother to learn the languages of other peoples,²² and it was the women and the slaves who had to learn the language and conform to the culture of their husbands and owners. The colonies of ancient Greece are a rare example of it being the father's language that became the children's mother-tongue, and there are very few known cases where Greek colonists adapted themselves to the local

language and culture and finally stopped speaking Greek or feeling themselves to be Greeks.²³

In spite of the enormous distance from Spain to the Caucasus, the Greeks held fast to the conviction that they were a single people, and according to Herodotos (8.144.3) there were four things that bound them together: common origin, common language, common sacred places and cults, and common customs and traditions.

(a) Common origin was a myth: like most other peoples, the Greeks believed that at some time the human race had been wiped out by a flood sent by the gods, that the sole survivors were Deukalion and his family, and that all Hellenes were descended from Deukalion's son Hellen.²⁴ Although entirely mythical, this sense of a common origin must not be underrated: on the other hand, it should be stressed that the Greeks did not see themselves as a superior *race*. When the Greeks went on about how they were superior to all barbarians physically and mentally, they justified this by climate and surroundings: with its temperate climate Greece was the best place in the world, where its people combined *dianoia* (intelligence) with *thymos* (spirit). The hot climate of the East promoted intelligence, but was inimical to spirit, while the cold of the West gave people freedom of spirit, but was inimical to their intelligence.²⁵

(b) If one takes into account the enormous spread of Greek civilisation, there were astonishingly few dialects, and there was relatively little difference between them.²⁶ If we can trust our sources, all Greeks could understand each other.²⁷ In his account of the *Anabasis*, the expedition against Persia, Xenophon tells of Prince Kyros, who in 401 BC assembled a mercenary army of Greeks 10,000 strong and marched eastwards to push his brother off the throne. The soldiers came from many different city-states and spoke different dialects, but when the army was called together each soldier addressed his fellow soldiers without interpreters, whereas interpreters are mentioned as soon as the Greeks come into contact with the Persians or other 'barbarians'.²⁸ Similarly, at Athens in the People's Court any non-local could speak his own dialect and expect to be understood by the jurors.²⁹ 'In the Archaic and Classical sources there is practically no evidence that local dialects were ever a hindrance to mutual comprehension':³⁰ the only source that qualifies this assertion is Thucydides in his description of the Eurytanes, a tribe in inner Aitolia 'who were extremely difficult to understand and who lived on raw meat' (3.94.5).

After Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire, the Greeks founded several hundred colonies in the Near East; nevertheless, the Greeks in the Hellenistic Age still maintained a strong linguistic convergence: they all used the same written form, a combination of the Attic and Ionian dialects. This new 'dialect' was called *koine* (common language), and it seems to have lived up to its name. As to the spoken language, we are almost entirely in the dark, but here, too, it seems that the dialects had to give way to a kind of standard Greek.³¹

(c) The 'common cult-places' that Herodotos speaks of were partly the great oracles that all the Greeks sought advice from, in Dodone, Delphi, Lebadeia, Abai, Oropos and Didyma,³² partly the places that held pan-Hellenic competitions in sport, music, drama and recitation: Olympia, Delphi, the Isthmos and Nemea.³³ Herodotos' reference to common cults shows that the cults and the set of gods that turned up at the festivals must have had so much in common that they can all be regarded as manifestations of one and the same religion—a view to which the Greeks themselves gave expression in the sources we have.³⁴

(d) Common customs and traditions can cover everything from recitation and reading of Homer to the use of coinage or the building of peripteral temples. In this connection we will limit ourselves to one example. Sporting contests were a feature of Greek culture that distinguished them from all their neighbours.³⁵ The Games were pan-Hellenic, which meant that all Greeks could participate—but also that *only* Greeks could participate. A participant had to state what *polis* he came from, and a victor was named in his proclamation as a citizen of the city-state he belonged to.³⁶ Amongst the Olympic victors whose names are preserved, 177 out of 736 came from Greek city-states outside Greece proper.³⁷

So the Greeks had a common culture and a fixed belief that they were a single people. And that justifies the proposition that all 1,500 *poleis* belonged to one and the same city-state culture, a proposition formulated with force and brevity by the poet Poseidippos: 'there is only one Hellas, but there are many *poleis*' (fr. 30, *PCG*).

However, it must not be concluded that the city-state was a specifically Greek institution, a form of society that distinguished Greeks from barbarians. That is a view that can be read in modern works,³⁸ but, with Aristotle as the sole exception, it is not what the Greeks themselves believed. Aristotle argued that the only true humans

were adult Greek males who were citizens of a *polis*, and that the *polis* was a specifically Greek form of society such as barbarians did not have the capacity to create.³⁹ But in Herodotos, Thucydides, Xenophon, Pseudo-Skylax and all the other sources we hear of hundreds of 'barbarian' *poleis*. The word *polis* is often used in the sense of 'city' rather than 'state'; but it is also often used of 'barbarian' city-states, e.g. Rome or the Etruscan or Phoenician city-states.⁴⁰ To use the word *polis* of a barbarian city was naturally often as misleading as when the Greeks identified foreign gods with their own, and called, e.g., the Skythian god Geitosyros 'Apollo';⁴¹ but the language and concept the Greek writers used do not show that the Greeks themselves felt that their own division into *poleis* was one of the characteristic differences between Greeks and barbarians.

5

The Rise of the Ancient Greek City-State Culture

Modern historians are still in conflict over the chronology of the Greek city-states. Can the *polis* be traced back to the Mycenaean Age? Or did it arise in the Geometric period? And if one settles for the latter view, one still has to take a position about whether it began as early as c.900 BC or as late as 700. No consensus has yet been reached as to where and when the earliest *poleis* are to be found; and there is even less agreement still as to when the later ones died out.

In what follows I shall argue for the now widespread opinion that the Greek *polis* was not destroyed by the Macedonians at the end of the Classical period but continued as the leading form of state and society all through the Hellenistic Age and through most of the Roman Imperial period.¹ The *polis* died out only in late antiquity after a period of decline of several hundred years: its disappearance was gradual and imperceptible, as had been its arrival on the scene more than 1,000 years earlier.

We have three distinct types of evidence that can cast light on the rise of the *polis*: (1) etymological study of related words in other Indo-European languages; (2) literary and inscriptional sources from the eighth to the sixth century BC; (3) physical remains of early settlements.

(1) *Etymological evidence* An etymological investigation of the word *polis* is extremely important because by extrapolation it can take us back to the time before the oldest written sources. An earlier variant of *polis*, *ptolis*, is perhaps to be found on a Mycenaean tablet in the form *po-to-ri-jo*; but unfortunately, the word is only a part of a proper name,² so we have no idea what *po-to-ri-jo* meant in Mycenaean. Comparison with other Indo-European languages gives bet-

ter results. The Greek word *polis* is cognate with Old Indian *púr*, Lithuanian *pilis* and Latvian *pils*.³ In all three languages its original meaning is ‘fortified place’, but in Old Indian it developed into ‘city’, while the original meaning stayed in the two Baltic languages.⁴

So we can conclude that *polis* originally meant a fortified place, and that idea is supported by our earliest written sources, where *polis* is sometimes used synonymously with *akropolis* in the sense ‘fortified place’. But while *akropolis* signifies both an eminence used as a settlement and a fortified eminence with no settlement,⁵ *polis* seems always to have meant a settlement, high-lying and usually fortified,⁶ not just a high-lying place of refuge.

Remains of such fortified settlements from the period c.1000–800 BC are found at Dreros and Anavlochos in Crete,⁷ and in numerous other places where we have remains from the Proto-Geometric and Geometric periods.⁸ We shall never have it confirmed, but it is a qualified guess that such settlements were called *polis* by their inhabitants.⁹ The Indo-European terminology points to the conclusion that the original meaning of the word *polis* was not ‘city’ or ‘state’ but ‘fortified place’, specifically a small fortified settlement on a height.

This brief survey of the word *polis* shows that the question ‘How old is the *polis*?’ is meaningless in so short a form. In the sense ‘fortified place’, *polis* may indeed have a history stretching back to Mycenaean times; but that is not what historians mean when they ask how old the *polis* is: they want to know how old the Greek city-state is, i.e. how far back we can trace the *polis* that we know from the Archaic and Classical sources. But even in this form the question is hard to answer, because the development of the form of a society is a process that often stretches over hundreds of years. When is it appropriate to call a settlement a city? And when is it appropriate to call its political organisation a state?¹⁰ The only way forward is to cut the Gordian knot and set up a provisional definition (or, rather, a provisional ‘ideal type’) of the Classical Greek *polis* and ask how far back in history that form of state and society can be traced. Thus: a *polis* was a small institutionalised self-governing society, a political community of adult male citizens (*politai* or *astoi*), who along with their families lived in a—usually—fortified city (also called *polis* or sometimes *asty*) or in its hinterland (*chora* or *ge*) along with two

other sets of inhabitants, free non-citizens (*xenoi* or often *metoikoi*) and slaves (*douloi*).

It is still a disputed question whether the *polis* in that sense can be traced back to the Mycenaean Age. I am one of those who believe that there was a break in development at the end of the Bronze Age and that we should not expect any continuity in types of society.¹¹ It cannot be excluded, however, that each of the Minoan palace-cities on Crete was the centre of a city-state in the New Palace Period (c.1750–1550 BC),¹² so that Crete at the beginning of the late Bronze Age ought to be counted amongst the city-state cultures; but with the sources we have, we cannot take the Mycenaean palaces in Knossos, Pylos, Mykenai, Thebes and Athens to have been centres of city-states that disappeared in the Dark Ages but reappeared in the ninth and eighth centuries.¹³ The *polis* seems to have arisen in the Geometric period, c.900–700, not by devolution as a result of the collapse of the Mycenaean states but by evolution as a result of a great rise in population, prosperity and civilisation. City formation and state formation took off at more or less the same time, and with constant interaction between them. So to answer the question ‘When did the *polis* arise?’ we must begin c.500 BC and work backwards as far as the sources will take us.

(2) *Written sources* The oldest pieces of inescapable evidence that individual named communities were called *poleis* in the sense of city-state are Thasos (named by Archilochos¹⁴), Sparta (named by Tyrtaios¹⁵) and Deros on Crete (named in the oldest Greek law preserved on stone¹⁶). In these sources *polis* is used both to mean ‘state’, with reference to the political community of citizens, and to mean ‘city’, with reference to the urban centre.¹⁷ All three sources are more or less contemporaneous, going back to the middle of the seventh century BC, and we can therefore take as our starting-point that c.650 BC must be the *terminus ante quem* for *polis* as a city-state.

What about Homer? Fifty years ago Moses Finley—and many in his wake—believed that there was no trace of the Classical *polis* in the Homeric poems. The word *polis* or *ptolis* is certainly to be found in the poems, but only in the sense of a fortified settlement, not one that could be called a city or a state in the later sense of those words.¹⁸ Nowadays everybody accepts that *polis* in the sense of city-state *is* to be found in the poems,¹⁹ and there can be no doubt at all that a public that listened, in the sixth century BC, to

a recitation of the *Odyssey* would instinctively have seen the *polis* of the Phaiakians as a Greek colony founded by Nausithoos (*Od.* 6.7–10, 262–72); and the description in the *Iliad* of the two *poleis* on the shield of Achilles (*Il.* 18.490–540) would at once have been understood as a description of contemporary fortified cities.

The problem is that we cannot give a precise date to the Homeric poems. Comparison with epic poems in other civilisations shows that orally transmitted verse is being refashioned all the time, until one particular version gets frozen by being written down.²⁰ The written version is like a coin-hoard: the latest coin dates the hoard to a few years before the hoard was deposited, while the oldest coins may have been struck hundreds of years earlier. Similarly, the society and material culture described in an epic that has been transmitted orally may belong to different layers and create a mixture of new and old.

Here is just one example, one usually not noticed by historians.²¹ The Homeric *polis* is full of palaces,²² and sometimes has a temple as well.²³ The Homeric palaces are, up to a point, reminiscent of the ones that have been excavated at Pylos, Mykenai, Tiryns and Knossos.²⁴ Those palaces disappeared at the end of the Bronze Age, c.1200–1100 BC, and the earliest known Greek palace in a *polis* is that of Dionysios I at Syracuse c.400 BC.²⁵ Temples, by contrast, are unknown in the Mycenaean civilisation, but are the best-known form of monumental architecture in Greece from the second half of the eighth century onwards.²⁶

There are not many temples in the Homeric *polis*, but they are mentioned in the description of Troy and of the city of the Phaiakians on the island of Scheria. It is pretty unlikely that an early *polis* had both a palace and a temple inside its walls. The Greeks who listened to recitations of Homer c.600 BC would hear about all the wonderful palaces, but there would be virtually no mention of temples: yet, when they went home after the recitation, what they saw were temples and never palaces. It would be mistaken to look for any historical city that corresponded altogether to the *polis* described in Homer. Homer must be read as poetry.²⁷ In many ways the poems reflect the society of the eighth and seventh centuries BC: temples are just one example. But the Homeric *polis* also included reminiscences of walled palaces of the Bronze Age and of weapons and chariots used in the Mycenaean Age.²⁸ And we can also conjecture that the epic poets had a vague idea of the great cities of the

Near Eastern empires—for example, Babylon and Nimrud—and those three different elements were mixed up also with fairy-tale cities that were products of poetic fantasy. To sort out the strands in such a complicated net is well-nigh impossible and will not be attempted here.

We cannot, therefore, expect the picture of the society described in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to be historically correct. In Book 2 of the *Iliad* are listed all the contingents of the Greek fleet that sailed to Troy, in a long sequence traditionally known as the Catalogue of the Ships (*Il.* 2.484–759). These lines contain the largest collection of named *poleis/ptoleis* in the Homeric poems. But the listed *poleis* are not city-states; they are cities that are part of larger states ruled by kings. Crete is thus described as an island with a hundred *poleis*, all ruled by Idomeneus (*Il.* 2.645–52). Close study of the cities listed in the Catalogue of the Ships shows also that they mostly belonged to the Mycenaean Age, not the Geometric or the Archaic.²⁹ There are, naturally, some exceptions—as in my comparison of the poems with a coin-hoard—and such exceptions show that the poems do not give a true picture of the world of the Mycenaean states either.³⁰

Worst of all, perhaps, is that we cannot fix any *terminus ante quem*, because we do not know when the poems were written down. Some historians are taken with Barry Powell's idea that the Greek alphabet was created by a man from Euboeia c.800–750 BC with the specific purpose of writing down the Homeric poems.³¹ But a much later dating is championed by Minna Skaftø Jensen, who argues that the Homeric poems were written down in Athens only in the sixth century BC in connection with the Peisistratid reform of the festival of the Panathenaia.³²

The conclusion of this investigation is that I cannot be a party to the prevailing ideas of a 'Homeric Society' understood as a society of the early Iron Age described in the Homeric epics with an astonishing consistency and no disturbing anachronisms of any significance.³³ My cautious conclusion is that in the written sources the essential elements of the Classical *polis* can be traced back to c.650 BC as a *terminus ante quem*.³⁴

(3) *Archaeological remains* In Homeric studies it is new interpretations of well-known texts that cause the picture to change. The case is different when we come to archaeological research in Greece, where newly found remains of cities and settlements can take us a

step or two forward—or, rather, back. Many early settlements have been found on islands in the Aegean: Zagora on Andros, Koukounaris on Paros, and Vathy Limenari on Donoussa, to name just some of the more important. Most are little fortified settlements on the slopes of a mountain. They appeared and flourished c. 1000–700 BC, but had all been abandoned by c. 700 BC.³⁵ Were they centres of the earliest *poleis* we know? If *polis* is understood as a fortified place or a little fortified settlement, the answer is ‘Yes’. But if *polis* is understood as an early form of a Classical *polis*, the answer is rather, ‘Well . . .’. There is no trace of administrative structures,³⁶ and the material remains cannot tell us anything about the political organisation of those early settlements: we have no idea how Zagora was governed. It may have been a small self-governing community, but without the political institutions that are a prerequisite for us speaking of city-states; or Zagora may have been the political centre for the whole of Andros, or a settlement in a much bigger state covering many of the Kyklades: we don’t know and probably never will.

So the little fortified Iron Age settlements in the Aegean cannot get us any further: but study of the Greek colonies *can* do so, especially the ones in Sicily and south Italy, which were the earliest founded by the Greeks. Until recently historians were agreed that the rise of *poleis* in Greece was a precondition for the founding of all the colonies outside Greece.³⁷ Today the opposite viewpoint is gaining support: that the *polis* arose as a *result* of colonisation, and that it was the rise of *poleis* in the colonies that was the efficient cause of their rise in Greece proper.³⁸

In every single case Greek colonisation led to the founding of a city, to a confrontation between the local inhabitants and the Greek colonists, who came to form the privileged citizen body, and to the introduction of laws and political institutions for the new society. All three functions are central elements in a *polis* in the sense of a city-state. Colonisation may have resulted in all three being accentuated and developed earliest in the colonies and then being copied back at home shortly after.

It is in any case certain that in the Greek colonies in Sicily and south Italy there are remains of imposing city centres, which in some cases can be traced right back to the foundation of the colony in the eighth century BC or the immediately succeeding period.³⁹ Syracuse and Megara Hyblaia are two striking examples.⁴⁰ And all

those colonies are known as self-governing communities as far back as our written sources go, i.e. to the end of the sixth century BC. By combining the archaeological evidence for city formation in the eighth century with written evidence of their status as *poleis* in the sixth, we can conclude that those colonies were *poleis* in the Classical sense of the word either simultaneously with their foundation or shortly afterwards. Syracuse and Megara Hyblaia must thus have been *poleis* in the sense of city-states from their foundation in 734 and 728 BC respectively, or at any rate from 700 BC.

The sending out of colonists was not necessarily an action taken by the state. Colonists might well go out on their own initiative from a community that was not itself yet urbanised (compare the foundation of the Irish city-states by Norwegian Vikings) and had not even yet created a real state for itself (compare the Anglo-Saxon colonisation of England in the Iron Age).⁴¹ The despatch of colonists from Corinth in 734 BC may not necessarily have been a political decision by the citizens of Corinth.⁴² It is also worth noting that the people of Achaia in the northern Peloponnese were very active in colonisation in the eighth century, while Achaia itself does not seem to have been organised in *poleis* before the end of the sixth.⁴³

The question of *when* the Greek city-state culture began goes with the question of *where* it began. There is much to suggest that the *polis* arose c.850–750 BC more or less at the same time as the Greeks borrowed the Phoenician alphabet and developed a written language. Some of the oldest *poleis* we know were in Cyprus, side by side with city-states founded by the Phoenicians. The Greek cities Paphos and Salamis had city walls already in the eighth century BC and were neighbours of Kition, which was a colony founded by Phoenicians from Tyre. It is a likely supposition that the *polis*, both as city and as state, arose in Cyprus with the Phoenician city-states as models.⁴⁴

Alternatively, one might think that the *polis* arose, or at any rate developed, in connection with the founding of the earliest Greek colonies in Sicily and South Italy and spread out from there to the regions the colonists came from: Euboea, Achaia and the Isthmos.⁴⁵ And the theory that the *polis* arose in connection with colonisation can also be linked to the eastern part of the Greek city-state culture. In Asia Minor Ionia was colonised by Greeks in the Dark Age 1050–800 BC; and although new archaeological discoveries are all the time

extending our knowledge of that period, those centuries are still so dark that we simply do not know how and when the colonisation of Ionia took place. But we do know that Smyrna was a fortified city already in the ninth century BC, and that Miletos was *c.*700.⁴⁶ If the Ionian cities in the early Archaic Age were self-governing communities, we can conjecture that the *polis* arose in connection with the Ionian colonisation of Asia Minor in the early Iron Age.⁴⁷

A third possibility would be to stick to the traditional idea that the beginning of the Greek city-state is to be sought in the eastern part of Greece proper, i.e. the region *from* which colonisation originated:⁴⁸ Chalkis and Eretria in Euboeia, Corinth and Megara on the Isthmos, Sparta in Lakedaimon, Argos in the Argolid, Athens in Attika, and some of the Aegean islands, including Paros, Naxos and Crete. Crete especially has been pointed to very recently as the island where Greek city-state culture began. The oldest laws that have come down to us come from city-states in Crete, and some of the oldest known fortified settlements were on high places in the eastern part of Crete. Continuity between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age is also much closer on Crete than anywhere else in Greece.⁴⁹ If one chooses Crete as the cradle of Greek city-state culture, one needs also to reconsider to what extent the city-states in the first millennium BC are the refoundation of a city-state culture of the second Millennium BC. Crete, and Greece as a whole, may thus have been one of the places where there have been city-state cultures in two different periods.⁵⁰

With the sources we have at present, it is not possible to make a secure choice between the different suggestions. And we must not forget that they are not impossible to combine: perhaps further research will show that a fusion of several suggestions is the best explanation. But one thing is certain: the city-state did not arise all over the Greek world at one go.⁵¹ Even if we are in doubt about the origins of the city-state, we can find traces of its development—for example, by shifting our focus from *c.*800–700 BC to *c.*600–550, for which we have more sources. In the first half of the sixth century BC there were *poleis* everywhere along the shores of the Aegean and on the islands off its coast. The colonies in the western Mediterranean, along the north coast of the Aegean, and in the Black Sea region were also *poleis*. But the western and northern part of Greece proper and the lands in south-western Asia Minor lay outside the Greek city-state culture. In the Peloponnese it seems

likely that there were no *poleis* in Achaia, Elis or Messenia, and except for a few Corinthian colonies there were no *poleis* in western Greece in Lokris, Aitolia, Akarnania and Epeiros. It is doubtful whether there were *poleis* in Thessaly or the neighbouring regions. And in south-west Asia Minor there were a few Greek colonies in Karia and Lykia, but otherwise those regions were Hellenised only in the late Classical and Hellenistic periods.⁵²

The End of the City-State Culture in Ancient Greece

The lack of agreement as to when the epoch of the Greek city-states came to an end is even greater than that as to its beginning. Some historians still hold that the city-state flourished in the Archaic and Classical periods but was destroyed by the Macedonians in the second half of the fourth century BC. Independence (*autonomia*) is regarded as the most important characteristic of a city-state, and city-states lost their independence at the beginning of the Hellenistic period.¹ Indeed, it is often supposed that the city-state disappeared at a single blow, the blow being the Battle of Chaironeia on 7 Metageitnion = 2 August 338,² probably at *c.* 3 o'clock in the afternoon when the defeat of the Thebans and Athenians by the Macedonians under Philip II was a reality—and that was what rang the referee's bell for the city-state.

That point of view goes closely with the belief that, by losing their *autonomia*, the city-states lost their identity as *poleis*. But many city-states were already subordinate to other city-states 150 years before the defeat of Chaironeia, and *autonomia* was not, ever, an irreducible characteristic for a *polis* to be a *polis*.³ Even in the Archaic Age there were *poleis* that were dependencies: for example, the *poleis* of the Lakedaimonian *perioikoi*, which were dependencies of Sparta, and Corinth's colonies on the west coast of Greece, which were founded in the seventh and sixth centuries BC, but remained always politically dependent on Corinth.⁴ By the beginning of the fifth century BC most *poleis* probably were autonomous, and most of the city-states along the western coast of Asia Minor were autonomous after the battles of Salamis, Plataiai and Mykale. But at that time the very concept of *autonomia* may not yet have arisen, and by the time, from the middle of the fifth century, that *autonomia* became a key concept in Greek affairs,⁵ more and more *poleis* were

losing their independence. Many became members of the Delian or the Peloponnesian League, and both these leagues developed into empires, in which Athens and Sparta respectively reduced the members to dependent status.⁶ And many *poleis* joined in federal states. In the hundred years between c.450 and 350 BC hundreds of city-states changed status from being independent states to being parts of a federal state (called *koinon* or *ethnos*) which normally comprised all the *poleis* in a region. In the middle of the fourth century BC we find such federal states in Boiotia, Phokis, Lokris, Thessaly, Epeiros, Aitolia, Akarnania, Achaia and Arkadia.⁷ And finally the city-states on the west coast of Asia Minor went back to being under Persian rule as they had been before the Persian Wars; and by the King's Peace in 386 the Greeks were forced to recognise the sovereignty of the king of Persia over all the *poleis* of Asia Minor.⁸

There is no historical atlas with a map of Greece c.350 BC that shows which *poleis* were independent and which had lost their *autonomia* either by being dominated by one of the leading city-states or the king of Persia or by becoming part of a federal state. Such a map would reveal that the independent *polis* was already no longer the commonest type of state in Greece when Macedon became a major power under Philip II. What disappeared under Philip II was not the city-state but the hegemonial *polis* of the type of Athens or Sparta or Thebes. Those *poleis* were undeniably deprived of their status as major powers: the other cities hardly noticed the difference, whether they were dominated by Athens or fell beneath the sway of the king of Macedon or some other Hellenistic prince. The Greek view of the *polis* was that it was a community of citizens as to their political institutions: a *polis* was a self-governing community. But self-government does not necessarily imply independence.

In the sense of a self-governing community, the *polis* lived on through the Hellenistic Age and long into the Roman Imperial period.⁹ But at the same time the concept of *autonomia* changed its meaning: it no longer implied full independence, but simply self-government. On the other hand, *autonomia* became a much more conspicuous concept in the relations between city-states after the King's Peace in 386 BC and in the relations between city-states and monarchies in the Hellenistic Age. *Autonomia* was with ever greater frequency bound up with *polis*. In the Hellenistic kingdoms all *poleis* were actually subordinate to the ruling monarch, but in

different degrees. Many *poleis* were tribute-paying and so formally subordinate to the king, but many were formally free, independent states. The typical 'independent' *polis* was now a democracy (*demokratia*) that had its freedom (*eleutheria*) and self-government (*autonomia*) guaranteed by royal rescript published by the Hellenistic king in whose kingdom the city-state lay.¹⁰ The history of the autonomous city-state did not end in the middle of the fourth century BC: on the contrary, that is when it began. In Roman times democracy was succeeded by oligarchy: the central political institution became the Council (*boule*) instead of the Assembly of the People (*ekklesia*), and a city-state was now ruled by a local aristocracy whose members occupied all the city's significant offices of state.¹¹ But the *polis* was still a self-governing community consisting of a city and its hinterland.

The 'decline and fall' of the Greek city-state culture occurred in late antiquity. The emperor Diocletian (AD 284–305) created a centralised bureaucracy, which set much narrower limits to what was left of city-state self-government.¹² And in the western part of the Roman Empire many cities sickened or completely disappeared as a result of the early medieval migrations. In the eastern half, by contrast, there were *poleis* that still had the characteristics of city-states in the fifth century AD, and even into the sixth. Here it was especially the Christian bishops who were hostile to the self-government of the cities:¹³ the Church went on the offensive against the pagan political institutions and demanded that its members avoid the city square, the *agora*, which the pagan writers regarded as the heart of a city.¹⁴ Corresponding to the nature of pagan religions, every *polis* had its own religious festivals and its own pantheon of gods: but now the pagan gods were abolished by a religion that did not permit local variations. But the decline and fall of the city-state was a long-drawn-out process, and the *polis* was still an important political institution under Justinian (AD 527–65): Prokopios recounts how an African town was raised to the status of a *polis* by imperial decree in 533. But after Justinian there are no more traces to be found of city-states in the political sense of the word.¹⁵

How *Poleis* Arose and Disappeared

(a) *poleis* arose either by an existing city changing its political status or by a new self-governing city being founded. In Greece most *poleis* arose by natural growth: it was, mostly, a long drawn-out and almost unnoticeable process, and with the sources we have, it is impossible to say exactly when the inhabitants of a city began to feel themselves to be citizens of a *polis*.

With the exception of regions of western Greece, most of the *poleis* in Greece arose during the Archaic period, many so early that *polis* had not yet become a key concept in political thought. The lack of source material is an insurmountable hindrance to our ever being able to trace the beginnings of the hundreds of city-states in Greece that our Classical sources characterise as *poleis* with a long history behind them.

However, many *poleis* had a foundation myth. It was typical of the Greeks that they did not conceive the emergence of a *polis* as the result of a continuous evolution, but believed that it had been created by the deliberate intervention of a named person (or god). The Thebans in the Classical period believed that their *polis* had been founded at the dawn of time by Kadmos, a brother of Europa whom Zeus had seduced in the shape of a bull;¹ and the Athenians believed it was Theseus who, a thousand years back, had founded Athens both as city and as state, having the whole of Attika as its territory.² Through their foundation myths the *poleis* of Greece proper came to resemble their colonies, which could regularly trace their foundation to a person, the person who had brought the first colonists and was regarded as a 'hero' after his death.³

It is striking that there is not a single source of the Classical period that talks of a new *polis* arising naturally. By that period there was a fully developed concept of a *polis* and a whole set of criteria for distinguishing a *polis* from a village:⁴ only a *polis* could have a victor in the pan-Hellenic games;⁵ only a *polis* could designate a citizen

of a neighbouring city as its *proxenos* (a kind of consul to act on behalf of the citizens who were visitors in a neighbouring city);⁶ only a *polis* could designate a *theorodokos* (a citizen whose duty it was to meet and house envoys (*theoroi*) sent, for example, from Delphi to announce the holding of the Pythian Games);⁷ only a *polis* could declare war or make peace or join a federation or become a member of a federal state; only a *polis* could strike coins, etc.⁸ Some of those characteristics must have implied the recognition by other *poleis* of a city as a *polis*.⁹ In both the Hellenistic period and the Roman Imperial period a community could achieve the status of *polis* by royal rescript or imperial decree.¹⁰ And the emperor could also deprive a community of its status as a *polis*.¹¹ What, then, was done in the Classical period? It was as late as the fifth and fourth centuries BC that the *polis* became the prevailing form of settlement and political organisation in the west Greek regions of Epeiros, Akarnania and Aitolia;¹² but even in the quite extensive sources we have for the history of western Greece in the Classical period there is still not a single example of an existing community at a given moment acquiring the status of a *polis*.¹³

The founding of a *polis* took place either by colonisation (*apoikismos*) or by coalescence (*synoikismos*). Colonisation implied emigration over a long distance of a group of people to a place where the colonists could settle. That is how Kyrene was founded as a colony from Thera c.630 BC.¹⁴ Synoecism implied emigration from a group of closely set neighbouring settlements to a place in the vicinity or an unoccupied place where a new *polis* was founded or to an already existing *polis* whose population was powerfully increased by the immigration.¹⁵ An example of the founding of a new city is Megalopolis, founded in 368 by the synoecism of a number of cities in southern Arkadia;¹⁶ an example of immigration into an already existing *polis* is the synoecism in Boiotia by which a set of small unfortified neighbouring cities were incorporated by Thebes in 431 at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War.¹⁷

Most of the *poleis* outside Greece were colonies, but some had arisen naturally, typically by a local community turning itself into a Greek *polis*.¹⁸ In Greece proper, on the contrary, a few *poleis* were founded as colonies,¹⁹ others arose by synoecism,²⁰ but by far the majority arose by smaller communities growing and turning into *poleis*. In one or two cases colonisation was combined with synoecism: for example, the founding in 426 of Herakleia in the

region known as Oiteia at the mouth of the River Spercheios.²¹ Sometimes a colony had its population reinforced by the sending of new colonists from Greece, as in the case of the (alleged) 60,000 colonists sent to Syracuse in 341 BC²² Another known example of an existing *polis* having its population increased by immigration from neighbouring cities is the synoecism by which King Mausolos in c.370 BC re-created Halikarnassos as his city of residence.²³

(b) While many have written about when the *poleis* arose, their demise is one of the neglected problems of Greek history.²⁴ Since a *polis* was partly a city and partly a state, we can choose between two forms of demise: (a) a *polis* could disappear as a state but continue its existence as a city, or (b) a *polis* could disappear as a city by being levelled to the ground and as a state by its population being killed or reduced to slavery or forcibly transferred to another city. This latter form of demise was often accompanied by the destruction of the physical city itself and the dismantling of its walls. And if you look at the sources, you encounter the following variants. (1) The entire population of the city-state is put to death. (That was the fate of Sybaris in 510 BC²⁵.) (2) All males are put to death, but the women and children are sold into slavery (that form of destruction is called in the sources *andrapodismos*, and notorious examples are the Spartan destruction of Plataiai in 427 BC and the crushing by Athens of the island of Melos in 415²⁶.) (3) Such males as survived the conquest are sold as slaves along with the women and children. (That form of *andrapodismos* was used by Philip II to deal with the Olynthians in 348 BC and by Alexander the Great to deal with the Thebans in 335²⁷.) (4) The whole population is forcibly transferred to another city. (In 484 BC the tyrant Gelon of Syracuse caused the whole population of Kamarina to move to Syracuse, but Kamarina was refounded with new inhabitants in 461. In 483 the population of Megara Hyblaia was moved to Syracuse, and the deserted city was still in ruins when Thucydides wrote his history at the end of the fifth century BC²⁸.) (5) The population of a *polis* is forced to flee and settle in small villages in the hinterland of the *polis*, a process described in the sources as *dioikismos*. (When the Spartans conquered Mantinea in 385 BC, they made the population move out to the four villages in which they had originally lived, and when Philip II in 346 conquered the Phokians in the Third Sacred War, twenty-two Phokian *poleis*

were turned into villages, which were allowed to have no more than fifty households each.²⁹) (6) A *polis* disappears because its entire population emigrates. (In c.650 BC the entire population of Kolophon transferred their city from Ionia in Asia Minor to Siris in Italy; Kolophon was abandoned for some years, though it was soon populated again³⁰.) (7) The population of a *polis* takes part in a synoecism whereby another city is founded or consolidated. (The small unfortified Boiotian cities Skolos, Skaphai, Hysiai and Erythrai were joined up to Thebes in 431 BC at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War³¹.) (8) A *polis* changes its status and becomes a village (*kome*) or a commune (*demos*) in the territory of another city-state. (Pallantion in Arkadia is known in Classical sources as a *polis*, but was a *kome* in the Roman period until in the second century AD it recovered its status as a *polis* by imperial decree.³² Grynchai and Styra were in the fifth and fourth centuries BC little *poleis* on Euboea, both members of the Delian League; but in the fourth century they fell under the large *polis* of Eretria, and subsequently turn up in the sources as merely communes (*demoi*) in the territory of Eretria³³.) (9) A *polis* disappears as the result of a natural catastrophe. (A huge earthquake in the Corinthian Gulf in 373 BC caused a tidal wave that destroyed the city of Helike in Achaia³⁴.)

If one studies the rise of the city-states and their extinction together, one obtains a constantly changing picture of the world of the Greek *poleis*. New *poleis* arose in the two Greek periods of colonisation: in the Archaic Age hundreds of *poleis* were formed along the coasts of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and in the Hellenistic Age several hundred *poleis* were founded in the Persian Empire, covering the whole of the Near East from Asia Minor to the Indus. In Greece the number of *poleis* in the regions facing the Aegean declined, while new *poleis* arose in western Greece in Epeiros, Akarnania and Aitolia. On Euboea the number of *poleis* fell from more than twelve in the Archaic period to four in the fourth century BC,³⁵ and in Arkadia in 368 BC a number of *poleis* disappeared as a result of the synoecism that led to the founding of Megalopolis.³⁶ Other large *poleis* created by synoecism in the Hellenistic Age were Thessalonike in 316 BC and Demetrias in 294: in both cases a large number of little *poleis* vanished as a result.³⁷

In all this kaleidoscopic picture, one thing stays constant: the Greeks maintained their city-state culture all through antiquity, and no one made the least attempt to assemble all the city-states

into a territorial macro-state like the Greece that arose in the nineteenth century. Such an idea would have been as foreign to the ancient Greeks as abolishing slavery.³⁸ The rise of larger political units took the form of leagues of city-states, which soon broke up again, or federations, which were more stable in structure. A federal state usually comprised all the *poleis* in a region; and when the Greeks chose this solution, it was doubtless because a federal state permitted the retention of the *polis* as the essential political unit.³⁹ In particular regions small *poleis* were often swallowed up by larger ones, but the result of such unification was always a bigger *polis*, never a territorial state in the modern sense.

Of course, the biggest *poleis* might well expand to a size that transcended the city-state. The taking over of all Lakedaimon and Messenia turned Sparta into a *polis* of more than 8,000 km²; and Syracuse under Dionysios I (405–367 BC) dominated the whole of eastern Sicily, a territory of more than 10,000 km²; and Kyrene in Libya acquired a territory of more than 4,000 km². But in all three cases these small empires were built on one *polis* that had many smaller *poleis* in its territory as dependencies: even in this case the *polis* remained as the primary form of political organisation.

What is a *Polis*? An Investigation of the Concept of ‘*Polis*’

After our detailed investigation of the chronology of the Greek city-state culture and its expansion, it is time to return to the question: what *was* a *polis*? The answer depends on whether the questioner wants to look at the Greek *polis* with the eyes of a modern historian or to find out what the Greeks themselves thought a *polis* was.¹ I have chosen the second approach.² What follows is, therefore, about the Greeks’ understanding of themselves, and in such an investigation the written sources must take centre-stage, and an attempt must be made to analyse the words and concepts that the Greeks used to describe the institution. We must begin, therefore, with the question: what does the word *polis* signify? What concept lies behind the word? And what society does it apply to?

The Greeks knew quite well that they used the word *polis* with more than one meaning, and the sources show that in the Archaic and Classical periods the word had two main senses: (1) settlement and (2) community.³ As settlement a *polis* consisted of houses; as community it consisted of people:⁴ one is a concrete physical sense, the other more abstract and personal. Moreover, the sources show that not every settlement or community was a *polis*. As settlement, a *polis* was primarily a large nucleated settlement, i.e. a city; as community it was an institutionalised political community, i.e. a state.⁵

A study of all the occurrences of the word *polis* in the Archaic and Classical sources—there are some 11,000⁶—reveals that both the topographical and the personal use of the word had different sub-meanings. (1) In the meaning of ‘settlement’ *polis* is used (a) synonymously with *akropolis*, a small, usually fortified settlement on an eminence (see 40); and (b) synonymously with *asty*, just meaning a town; or (c) synonymously with *ge* or *chora*, meaning a territory

(*polis* plus hinterland). (2) In the meaning of ‘community’ *polis* is used (a) synonymously with *politai*, the adult male citizens; (b) synonymously with *ekklesia* or *demos*, as the city’s assembly or some other of its political institutions; or (c) synonymously with *koinonia*, the political community in a more abstract sense.⁷

But not all these senses of *polis* are equally important and well attested. (1a) The original sense ‘fortified place’ (*akropolis*) is already rare in the Archaic and Classical periods, and is found mostly on inscriptions in certain traditional archaizing formulas of publication.⁸ It disappears altogether in the Hellenistic period; and in the Roman period only learned scholars knew that *polis* had once meant the same as *akropolis*.⁹ (1b) *Polis* meaning a town is exceedingly common, and in some writers accounts for more than half of all occurrences.¹⁰ (1c) Territory as the primary meaning of *polis* represents only a tiny percentage of all occurrences.¹¹ (2a–c) The three commonest uses of *polis* in the sense of political community or state are closely related, and are really only different aspects of the same meaning.¹² In (2a) and (2b) *polis* is used in a more concrete sense, in (2c) in a more abstract one, just as we nowadays use the word ‘state’ sometimes in the sense of a set of people, the body of citizens, sometimes of the power of the state, i.e. its political institutions, and sometimes of the state as an abstract political person.¹³ The different meanings often overlap, especially when *polis* is used as a generic term.¹⁴

It is always stressed—quite rightly—that an ancient Greek city was inextricably linked to its hinterland,¹⁵ and *chora* (the land) is also the word in our sources that is most frequently linked with *polis*.¹⁶ But they can be opposed in some cases, in different variations according to whether *polis* is being used as city or as state, and according to whether *chora* is being used as hinterland or as territory. (a) When *polis* means a state (a city plus its hinterland), *chora* means territory, of which the city is a part; (b) but when *polis* means a city, *chora* means the hinterland as contrasted with the city. So (c) *polis* in the sense of state is used as a generic term for *chora* (hinterland) plus *polis* (city), and (d) *chora* in the sense of territory can be used as a generic term for *polis* (city) plus *chora* (hinterland).¹⁷ This complex use of what linguists nowadays call participatory opposition¹⁸ is illustrated in table 1. The Greek use of *polis* and *chora* as antonyms indicates a striking difference

TABLE I

<i>polis</i> (state)		<i>chora</i> (territory)	
<i>polis</i> (city)	<i>chora</i> (hinterland)	<i>polis</i> (city)	<i>chora</i> (hinterland)

between the ancient Greek *polis* and a modern European state. The words for 'city' and 'country' occur in many modern languages as antonyms: City/country in English, Stadt/Land in German, cité/pays in French, by/land in Danish etc. In ancient Greek it was the word for 'city' (*polis*) that came to mean 'state',¹⁹ whereas in modern European languages it is the word for 'country' that is used to mean 'state'. In ancient Greece a war was always between two *poleis*, never two *chorai*,²⁰ and the word *polis* was used in all the contexts where we would nowadays use the word 'state':²¹ today it is always the word for the country that is used, never the city. The most plausible explanation of this difference is that the typical *polis* had only one city, which was also its political centre, whereas the countries that grew up in the Middle Ages had neither a political centre nor a capital city: the king and his court travelled from city to city and from castle to castle,²² so that it was not possible to identify the power of the state with a specific locality in the state and the state could only be identified with the whole country, as aforesaid.

If we move from the meaning of the word to its referent, and consider all the places where it is used about Greek societies, we observe that *polis* in the sense of territory almost always means the territory of a city-state (city plus hinterland) and only exceptionally a whole region or other large territory. In the sense of state, *polis* almost always means a city-state, and almost never a federation of *poleis* or a monarchy or empire.²³ *Polis* used of large states occurs practically only when *polis* is being used as a generic term for a set of states of which most are city-states, though some can be what we call territorial states. In some 98 per cent of all occurrences, *polis* is used either in the sense of a settlement, for what we call a city, or in the sense of a political community, for what we call a state. The word often has both significations at once,²⁴ so the word 'city-state' is an extremely precise translation of *polis* and not an anachronistic mistranslation, as it has become fashionable to allege.²⁵

So a *polis* was part city, part state. The word *polis* has two different

meanings: when we hear that a river runs through a *polis*,²⁶ we do not notice that *polis* can also mean a state, and when an alliance is formed between a set of *poleis*, we do not notice that the alliance is between cities.²⁷ Nevertheless the two meanings are inextricably linked, because they always have the same referent: if *polis* is used meaning a city, it is not every city that is called a *polis*, but only a city that is known in other contexts as the political centre of a *polis* in the other sense, the sense of 'state'.²⁸ And contrariwise, if *polis* is used in the meaning of state, other sources always show that that state has a city as its political centre, a city called a *polis* in the sense of 'city'.²⁹ These two observations run counter to two prevailing views: that there were numerous *poleis* (in the sense of state) that did not have a city at their centre;³⁰ and, conversely, that there were *poleis* (in the sense of city) that were not the political centre of a state.³¹ Study of all the named Greek states that are called *poleis* disproves both contentions, and underpins the thesis that every *polis*-city was the centre of a *polis*-state, and every *polis*-state had a *polis*-city as its political centre.

On the other hand, not every town or city was called a *polis*. Nowadays we distinguish between large cities (or towns)³² and smaller villages. Correspondingly, the Greeks used *polis* or *asty* of what we—in a historical context—call towns or cities,³³ whereas the smaller settlement was called a *kome*.³⁴ Nor was every political community a city-state. In the larger *poleis* the citizens were divided into territorial and/or kinship-based political groupings.³⁵ The city-state of Eretria on Euboeia was divided into some sixty territorial communes (*demoi*), but at the same time the citizen body was also divided into six kinship-based tribes (*phylai*).³⁶ *Demoi* and *phylai* were what we should call units of local politics, while a *polis* was a self-governing (but not necessarily independent) community.

The Greek perception of a *polis* as a community of citizens inhabiting a city has its reflection also in the names they gave their city-states. Nowadays we use place-names to serve as the names of states: the Greeks preferred to name their *poleis* with an *ethnikon*, an adjective used as a noun derived from the place-name, indicating the people rather than the land.³⁷ *Danmark* (Denmark) is the name of the state, and to match this toponym we have the adjective *dansker* (a Dane), which in the plural form *danskerne* (the Danes) signifies the people who live in that state. The largest city in Boiotia in antiquity was *Thebai* (Thebes), and derived from the toponym

was the adjective *Thebaios* (Theban), which in the plural form *Thebaioi* (the Thebans) designated the citizens of that city-state and, in a more general sense, the city-state itself.³⁸ Nowadays it is Denmark (and not the Danes) that is a member of the United Nations: in antiquity it was the Thebans (and not Thebes) that was the leading state in the Boiotian Federation.³⁹ This difference in naming conventions highlights two differences between modern states and the city-states of antiquity. (a) In our conception of the state, the main weight is given to the territory of the state, its land, and so the toponym is the name of the state. The Greeks placed the main weight upon the people of the state, and so used the *ethnikon* as the name of the state.⁴⁰ (b) In our concept of 'state', a state is a land, not a city: the Greeks conceived of a state as a city and thought less about its territory, and that again goes with the fact that all political institutions were situated in the city (*polis* in the 'city' sense of the word), and that a high proportion of the population was in fact resident in the city.⁴¹ Hence the name of a state (e.g. the Thebans) was derived from the place-name of the city (Thebes) and not from the place-name of its land. The only modern European states called by the name of a city and not a whole land are Andorra, Luxembourg, Monaco and San Marino—and they are, actually, city-states just like the Greek *polis*.

While an *ethnikon* like *Thebaioi*, plural, meant the city-state itself, it was used in the singular, *Thebaios*, by the citizens of a city-state as a kind of surname. The name of a Greek person consisted of a first name plus father's name in the genitive, but a citizen could have as a third element the *ethnikon* of his city-state, which he would use whenever his name had to be listed side by side with the names of citizens from other *poleis*. An Olympic victor in 368 had his name inscribed on the base of the statue erected to commemorate his victory. It reads thus: 'Aristion Theophilou Epidaurios', i.e. 'Aristion Theophilos' son from Epidaurios'.⁴² In the Classical period only adult male citizens could use their state's *ethnikon* as a surname, so when we meet an *ethnikon* derived from the name of a city, we can conclude that the said person was a citizen of the relevant city-state.⁴³ That is actually one of the characteristic features of the ancient Greek city-state culture. It is relatively common in the languages of some other cultures to use place-names and derivatives of place-names as personal names (though not much in English), but such names mostly designate the place where the person (or his an-

cestors) were born, e.g. Welsh, London or Selby. The Greeks were, as far as I know, the only people to use a person's 'extra' name as an indication of political status, and that naming habit shows how great an importance citizenship had in the city-state culture of ancient Greece.⁴⁴