

Democracy and Economy

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*An Inseparable Relationship
from Ancient Times to Today*

By

Emmanouil Marios N. Economou
and Nicholas C. Kyriazis

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-3404-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3404-9

*To my mother, Agoritsa
for the unwavering support she
has provided me during this
laborious but multifaceted
research journey, and to my
father's memory Nikolaos*

—Emmanouil Marios N. Economou

*To the memory of my
mother Artemis and
my father Kostas,
who inspired me
to pursue worthy causes*

—Nicholas C. Kyriazis

Volos (Greece), January 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank Professors Paul Cartledge (Cambridge University), Josiah Ober (Stanford University), George Bitros (Athens University of Economics and Business), George Tridimas (Ulster University), Nicholas Rodger (Oxford University), Victor Davis Hanson (Hoover Institution, Stanford University), Geoffrey Hodgson (University of Hertfordshire), Dimitris Kyrtatas (University of Thessaly), Carl Hampus Lyttkens (Lund University), Juergen Backhaus (Erfurt University), Karel Davids (VU University Amsterdam), Marjolein 't Hart (VU University Amsterdam), Todd Sandler (University of Texas at Dallas), Spyros Vliamos (Neapolis University), Ioannis L. Konstantopoulos (University of Piraeus), Panagiotis Liargovas (University of Peloponnesus), Panagiotis Evangelopoulos (University of Peloponnesus), Henning Hillmann (University of Mannheim), Bertram Schefold (Universität Frankfurt), Kevin Featherstone (London School of Economics), David Pritchard (University of Queensland), Vincent Gabrielsen (University of Copenhagen), Cossimo Perrotta (Lecce University), Annete Goddard van der Kroon (Ludwig von Mises Institute), Gunnar Heinsohn (Universität Bremen), Bas van Bavel (Utrecht University), Annita Prassa (Ph.D National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) and the late professor Gerrit Meijer (University of Maastricht) for their invaluable exchange of views and comments on our previous publications.

Additionally, we refer to the work of the late professor and dear friend Anastasios Karayiannis (University of Piraeus). Also, to our colleagues at the University of Thessaly and co-authors of various articles, Michel Zouboulakis, Christos Kollias, Paschalis Arvanitides, Theodoros Metaxas, George Halkos, Xenophon Paparrigopoulos, Loukas Zachilas, Stephanos Papadamou and Nikolaos A. Kyriazis.

Finally, we wish to thank Dimitri Politis who undertook the translation of most parts of the text into English and Andreas Gkouvas for his aid in the type-setting of some parts of the book. Furthermore, we wish to thank the journalists Mr. Sotiris Polyzos and Mrs. Rossana Popota and finally, the archaeologist Mr. Georgios Stamatis.

INTRODUCTION

THE OBVIOUS THAT IS NOT SO OBVIOUS

We have often heard politicians declare that ‘Democracy is not a blind alley’. Obviously, those who believe this, suffer from a profound lack of knowledge of history. Democracy always was and still remains a fragile form of government that requires much effort to forge it, for it to flourish and be preserved. First of all, it requires sound economic foundations, an economy which is growing and citizens who are prospering. The relationship between the economy, political organisation and democracy forms the core of the subject of this book.

In the course of history, democratic regimes have been the exception rather than the rule. Democracy began in certain Greek city-states toward the end of the 6th century BCE, spread the most during the 4th century, the ‘golden century’ of ancient democracy, and continued in the Greek world in some areas until well into the 2nd century BCE and the Roman conquest.¹ In Rome, until the end of the 2nd century, and the beginning of the 1st century BCE, there existed a mixed form of government, with some elements of democracy; for example, there was the *tribunes populi*, elected by the citizens, but a Senate as well, comprised of aristocrats. This is why the Roman term *res publica* (the ‘public thing’, from which derive the words republic, *république*, etc.) is not equivalent to the Greek term, democracy (*demos-kratos*: power to the people). After the 2nd century BCE, almost fifteen hundred years passed before a democratic form of government reappeared, in the original three cantons of Switzerland: Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden in 1291.

Everywhere and at all times, democracy was vulnerable and encountered enemies aiming to destroy it - oligarchs, tyrants, kings and emperors, enemies within and without. There existed, and still do, people who do not

¹ See among others, Robinson (2003, 2011), Mackil (2013), Beck and Funke (2015) and our own papers, (Kyriazis, Paparrigopoulos and Economou 2014; Kyriazis and Economou 2015a, b; Economou, Kyriazis and Metaxas 2015; Economou and Kyriazis 2015a, b, c, 2016a, b, 2018).

believe in the rights and freedom of others, who desire to concentrate absolute power in their own hands and in those of their supporters.

The Athenian Democracy encountered waves of oligarchy in 411 and in 404 BCE. In 322 BCE, democracy was abolished, but later restored, the start of a pattern that lasted until almost 229 BCE when Athens finally restored its democracy, lasting until 88 BCE when it was destroyed by the Roman general Sulla (Habicht 1999). Democracy in France, of which the French are so proud, also suffered setbacks: born with the revolution of 1789, it essentially collapsed in 1793 with Robespierre's Reign of Terror, the Consuls, Napoleon's imperialism (1805-1814), the restoration of the monarchy and the failed revolution of 1830. It was the revolution of 1848 that brought back democracy, but only for a mere three years before being rejected by Napoleon III, who reigned as emperor from 1850 to 1870.

Defeat by Prussia followed, then the Paris Commune and, finally, the restoration of democracy in 1871, only to be interrupted again by four years of German occupation during World War II (June 1940-August 1944). In total, France can count less than 150 years of democracy, compared to around 330 years of that of ancient Athens (from 510 to 322 BCE, interrupted only by the year-long reign of the Thirty Tyrants at the beginning of the 3rd century BCE, with democracy then returning, with some interruptions, and lasting up until the Roman conquest).

In many ancient Greek city-states and countries, such as those of Thessaly, Epirus and Macedonia, democracy almost never thrived.² In other cities, such as Syracuse, it functioned in short spurts (i.e., during the Peloponnesian War) as interludes between tyrannies, such as those of Gelon and Dionysius I and II and later, of Agathocles. In Cyprus, the city-states were ruled by kings. Only toward the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries have we seen democratic regimes outnumber others, though many do not enjoy the same level of democracy – compare, for example, how democracy functions in Switzerland with how it functions in Russia or Turkey.

Is democracy the best form of government? If so, based on what criteria?

For the citizens of today's democracies, a positive answer seems obvious. However, for most of history, democracy has been considered to be a sorry form of government, a political aberration, and against a religious and civil

² In Macedonia, during the last quarter of the 5th century BCE, the federation of Chalkidians was established, probably being an oligarchic regime, which by the next century had become a democratic state under the Federation of the Chalkideans (Zahrnt 2015: 356). In Epirus, during the period 231-168 BCE, the Council of the Epirotes, also a form of federated state, appears to have functioned on a democratic basis. (Cross 2015: 109-112).

order that sought kings and emperors as leaders, representative of their god (or gods) on earth, and not answerable to the laws of men. The motto *Dieu et mon Droit* (God and my Right) underscores that attitude with precision. Even at the peak of the Athenian Democracy in the 4th century BCE, most philosophers (political scientists, in today's terminology) disliked democracy, considering it a regime of the 'bad', the 'unworthy' and the 'uneducated'. The idealist forms of government they proposed, with the most well-known, that of Plato's *The Republic*, were anything but democratic.

But Athenian democracy had already demonstrated a significant virtue, that of freedom of speech. With the exception of the trial and conviction of Socrates (more for the practical consequence of his teachings rather than their content, since, having taught many of the Thirty Tyrants, he was considered responsible for the terror they had imposed), the philosophers of Athens were completely free to teach whatever they wanted, without restriction. Completely unhindered, Plato and even Aristotle to a lesser extent, were harshly critical of democracy. Yet, it was not the Athenian Democracy, but Dionysius of Syracuse who sold Plato into slavery when he had gone there to put his utopian republic into practice. And probably, in a republic such as the one he proposed, he would not have enjoyed the freedom of speech he enjoyed in Athens that allowed him to write his treatise in the first place.

The more moderate Aristotle, in his evaluation and categorisation of forms of government, classified extreme-radical democracy (with Athens as his model) as the worst form. He classified even the more moderate democracies as worse than other forms, more aristocratic. This animosity toward democracy continued on down through the Middle Ages, and only from the Renaissance onward did certain philosophers begin to rediscover its virtues, a result of access to the work of the ancient scholars, among whom though, ironically, only a few had any praise for democracy, with a prime example being Pericles' *Epitaph*, as transcribed by Thucydides.

Only in the 17th century, with the works of John Locke (such as *A Letter Concerning Toleration, Two Treatises of Government*), Spinoza (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*), etc., does a reversal in favour of more democratic principles and rights emerge. But as we shall see, actual political developments were speedier: democracy, even though in an immature expression and version, had already made its appearance in Great Britain after the Glorious Revolution in December of 1688, three years before the publication of Locke's seminal work. Spinoza lived in the United Provinces, which were implementing their own form and version of democracy – in the form of a federation – from the beginning of the 17th century. They even called their state the 'Dutch Republic'.

It was not until the 18th century, during the Age of Enlightenment, with the works of Hume (*The Treatise of Human Nature*), Voltaire (*Dictionnaire Philosophique*), Rousseau (*Du Contrat Sociale*), Montesquieu (*Spirit of Laws*) etc., that there was a reversal in favour of more democratic institutions in philosophy and political science, which helped to ignite the French Revolution. But it wasn't until the latter part of the 19th century that the trend took firmer root. Throughout that century, those hostile to democracy were many and of consequence, such as Karl Marx, who espoused the utopian concept of a dictatorship of the proletariat (though not of a communist *nomenklatura*). Moreover, at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, ideologies were imposed in Europe against national separatist movements and against democracy. In France, for example, the restoration of the monarchy was imposed (almost an irony), only to be followed by the imperial pretensions of Napoleon III.

It was only at the end of the 20th century, with the collapse of the communist regimes, that the enemies of democracy were finally in retreat. As for the criteria, the most self-evident is to compare democratic with non-democratic regimes as to their accomplishments in culture, the economy, the well-being of their citizens, as well as many more parameters.

Ober (2008) does that perfectly by comparing ancient democratic Athens with other city-states of the time, as well as with Athens during periods when it was not democratic. He demonstrates the cultural and political superiority of democratic Athens, confirming the verse from Herodotus (*Hist.*, 5.78) that:

‘The Athenians grew in power and proved, not in one respect only but in all, that equality is a good thing. Evidence for this is the fact that while they were under tyrannical rulers, the Athenians were no better in war than any of their neighbors, yet once they got rid of their tyrants, they were by far the best of all. This, then, shows that while they were oppressed, they were, as men working for a master, cowardly, but when they were freed, each one was eager to achieve for himself.’

Athenians were victorious on a single day (in 507 BCE) in two battles, over the invading Boeotians and Chalcidians, thus preserving the young democracy. The relationship between democracy and economy, and thus the well-being of the people, will be extensively analysed in many cases that follow. Our general conclusion is that there is a close interdependence between democracy and the economy: democracy usually precedes the economy, and a prosperous economy maintains and strengthens democracy and the political institutions on which it stands.

Was it inevitable that democracy was created in ancient Greece? Why there and not somewhere else?

Some scholars, such as Jacobsen (1943), Fleming (2004), Isakhan and Stockwell (2012) and Glassman (2017) have held that there existed 'proto-democratic' regimes in Mesopotamia (e.g. the ancient Sumerian city-states of Uruk, Ur and Lagash), Babylonians, and Mari and Ugarit in Syria during the period between 3500-2200 BCE (Bronze Age Period), as well as in ancient Assyria, India, China, Israel and Phoenicia. Isakhan and Stockwell's collective volume includes K.A. Raaflaub's (2012) paper on early Greece, which means that Isakhan and Stockwell recognise that 'proto-democratic values' did exist in pre-Classical Greece, but they believe that the starting point of this 'proto-democratic environment' of values in ancient Greece, dates from the Archaic Period (approximately 750 BCE) and beyond. But they do not refer to the fact that some forms of government that valued the participation of their people in decision-taking had already appeared in Greece during the much earlier Bronze Age (2800-1900 BCE).

In the Greek case, as early as the Early Bronze Age, the islanders of the Cyclades in the Aegean (proto-Cycladic civilisation, 2800-2500 BCE), fearing pirate raids, organised themselves into communities that were not ruled by any unified central administration. Each community maintained a form of autonomy and was responsible for solving its own problems. The fortifications and the coordination of works were carried out by those who had the power to assert themselves over the rest of the community, without, however, having any formal title indicating leadership. It is obvious that the organisation and well-being of these communities rested to a large extent on private initiative and the individual leadership abilities and charisma of those who were capable of taking the initiative in organisation and administration.³ The size of these communities, in early Mycenaean Greece, ranged from 600 to 1500 people. Small village communities of farmers and fishermen producing various products such as wine, pottery, metallurgy products, marble are attested (Renfrew 2010).

Something similar occurred in Minoan Bronze Age Crete. The geographical division of Crete into small units encouraged the development of scattered communities rather than a powerful centre of authority. In place of the all-powerful despot, we can assume there were communities with a popular base and direct participation of the many for the common good. During the so-called Middle Helladic period (2100-1900 BCE), before the emergence of the palatial organisation of the economy, economic life was

³ Glassman (2017: 29-43) analyses in detail the importance of leadership in the evolution of ancient societies of the pre-Classical period.

based on agriculture and animal husbandry; society was simple and static, while rich burials denote either the presence of elites or aggrandising leaders of unstable and fluid factions (Voutsaki 2010). Christakis (2011), who examined the degree and the way of gathering and distributing goods in ancient Crete, conveys this decentralised character of the administration of pre-palatial Cretan-Minoan society during the 3000-2000 BCE period. In Crete, during the Early Bronze Age (2800-1900 BCE), the basic element of each local community organisation was the small settlement, with densely-built houses, narrow streets and some natural fortification or bordering on the seaside. Moreover, during this period, the geographic fragmentation of Crete into small units contributed to the development of small, scattered centres instead of facilitating the development of a powerful centre.⁴

But it is certain that the next historical periods of 2000-1600 BCE (Middle Bronze Age) and 1600-1150 BCE (Mycenaean civilisation) are characterised by the strengthening of centralised power and a monarchical institution. More particularly, the Mycenaean period was characterised by the centrally-planned palatial economy, which had a specific hierarchy and was based on the very strong political privileges of the kings over their subordinates and subjects (Raaflaub and Wallace 2007: 23; Cartledge 2011).

The above findings indicate that there were advisory bodies (e.g. a 'council of elders') to the leaders of these communities, but no real democracy. In any event, even if, in the third millennium BCE, there had been traces of proto-democracy in the lands to the East and in Greece, it served as a transition toward absolutism - to kingdoms and empires. Democracy as a regime with specific institutions, organisational structures and operating rules, setting it apart from all other forms of government, in reality, was born in ancient Greece during the Classical Period (510-322 BCE).

On the other hand, the appearance of systems of government in Greece and Sumeria in the 3rd millennium BCE that encouraged, under certain circumstances, participation in decision-taking, reinforces the following reasoning: that the appearance of the democratic phenomenon as a political system in ancient Greece during the Classical Period should not be seen as something completely 'unprecedented', but instead, one should consider

⁴ The Collective Volume with the title *Political Economies of the Aegean Bronze Age* (ed. by D.J. Pullen, 2010, Oxbow Books) provides a detailed analysis on the organisation and the socioeconomic interactions of the communities in mainland Greece before and during the palatial organisation period.

that the first whispers of that gradually developing ‘macroculture’⁵ can be sought far back in time, in the early Bronze Age.⁶ Therefore, through an interdisciplinary, multi-faceted approach, we will analyse the creation of a new ‘macroculture’ in Greece as a precondition for the birth of democracy.

We are attempting to answer the basic question; what regime is democratic?

A contemporary response is that it is a state where there is a smooth transition of power through the results of regularly-held free elections, where citizens can express their political preferences. The ancient Greeks of democratic city-states would have considered that description anywhere from strange to insufficient. Strange, because in ancient democracies, there were no political parties, nor any surrender by citizens to representatives of their right to decide for themselves (except in rare instances, as we shall see). And insufficient, because for them, democracy, being direct, sprang from a few new, ‘magic’ words, prefaced by the syllable ‘*iso*’ (equal), words that expressed new, revolutionary political concepts, concepts worth fighting for, even dying for to defend, concepts on which rested a new civilisation and way of life. For the ancient democrats, the absence of those concepts was enough to characterise such a regime as undemocratic, or at best, semi-democratic (or, as in their terminology, ‘mixed’).⁷

These magic words were *isonomia* (equality before the law), *isegoria* (equality of all to speak, e.g. to introduce proposals for policy, laws and decrees to be voted on by the Assembly), *isokratia* (equality of civil rights, to be elected to all state positions and the courts) and *isopoliteia* (single citizenship), the preface *iso-* meaning equality.

The first concept, *isonomia*, preceded democracy, but became its basic tenet. It was an exceedingly bold and revolutionary move. Introduced to the Greek cities for the first time during the Classical Period, this concept proposed that citizens were equal before the law, and later, in an even bolder move, equal before the laws for which they themselves had voted for. Nowhere else had anything like this ever occurred.

For the Egypt of the Pharaohs, the kingdoms of Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia, the very idea that a simple farmer or craftsman could have the same

⁵ As will be further explained in detail later on, we introduce the term ‘macroculture’, meaning a system of common values, rules of behaviour and convictions that shape long-run socioeconomic structural and political status in a society.

⁶ In Chapter 2, we elaborate further this issue of the emergence and evolution of democratic values in pre-Classical Greece.

⁷ For a thorough analysis on the definition and the emergence of democracy in ancient Greece see the recent work of Cartledge (2016).

legal rights as the Pharaoh or the Great King, was sheer hubris. In Persia, as well as in all the other nations of the East, the inhabitants, even the aristocrats, were considered slaves of the ruler, who laid down the law and was the ultimate adjudicator and judge. In the Eastern despotates, the decision of the ruler could not be questioned nor be subject to negotiation by his subjects. A monarch demanded total respect and provoked awe and fear in the inhabitants of the state because of the myth that his power had divine legitimisation or even origin (Puett 2008). Such a phenomenon never existed in ancient Greece.

Equally, if not even more revolutionary, was the concept of *isegoria*, perhaps the cornerstone of ancient direct democracy. The idea that simple people could propose and decide on issues of concern to them, be it peace and war, or the economy and taxation, seemed to everyone else, dangerous, alien, even ludicrous. One can see this in Herodotus where the Persian King Cyrus states (*Hist.* 1. 153.1):

‘I never yet feared men who set apart a place in the middle of their city where they perjure themselves and deceive each other. They, if I keep my health, shall talk of their own misfortunes, not those of the Ionians.’

Here, Cyrus was referring to the function of the *agora*, the marketplace, in the Greek city-states and the free exchange of goods.⁸ Even more amazing and revolutionary, as well as incomprehensible and inconceivable to any Asian ruler, was the gradual transfer and transformation of the *agora* into the *Eccllesia* (Assembly) of the *Demos* - an ‘agora’ for the exchange and competition of ideas, where, conditionally, in most cases, the best were finally adopted. The *Eccllesia* always began with the resounding phrase, ‘*Tis agoreuein bouletai?*’ (‘Who wishes to speak?’) - the essential expression of the principle of *isegoria*.

This work, *Democracy and Economy*, is divided into three periods: it examines the past, compares it to the present and ends with proposals for the future. We attempt to highlight the parameters that propelled the emergence of the political phenomenon of democracy during the Classical Period of ancient Greece. Then we analyse its evolution, which parallels its ‘upgrade’ from the level of the city-state to that of the democratic federations, (mostly known as ‘leagues’), that coalesced in the Greek world

⁸ Napoleon Bonaparte and Hitler both dismissed the British, calling them a ‘nation of merchants’. Just as the Persians against the Athenians, so did Napoleon and Hitler encounter catastrophic consequences at the hands of such a people, making it clear ‘nations of merchants’, of free merchants and citizens, in war, are the most formidable of foes.

during the Classical and Hellenistic Periods, the likes of which today find themselves once again in fermentation.

Our approach is not limited to the birth and the first implementation of this phenomenon in the ancient Greek world. The analysis we offer here essentially covers democracy's 'journey' between countries and cultures. We analyse the revival of democracy during the Renaissance, in the first Swiss cantons after the rebellion of 1291, continuing with the rise of liberalism in England and the United Provinces in the 16th century and thereafter, and finally, with the French and American Revolutions. One must note that the final version of the US Constitution was heavily influenced in its configuration by the civic models of ancient Greece. And finally, we analyse how democracy functions in a range of contemporary models of political organisation, in countries like Switzerland, Germany, Uruguay, the USA and the European Union.

The reader will not be limited to simply one more analysis of the phenomenon of democracy in ancient Greece. We also aim to provide the opportunity, through a 'journey of knowledge', for the reader to observe the course and dynamic evolution of democracy through time and space, and to consider the impasses, as well as the prospects for development and prosperity that it offers.

The work is directed at the wider public, however, for the more advanced reader, we have included additional material in the annexes, as well as an extensive bibliography. The book is based on a series of publications in international academic journals, collective volumes and reports by both authors at international academic conferences, as well as a series of lectures by Nicholas Kyriazis at the Universities of Erfurt (2004) and Exeter (2007), and his lectures in his courses, 'Emerging Countries' at the University of Thessaly's Economics Department and 'Economy and Democracy' at the University of Piraeus' in the International and European Studies Department. A variety of the issues analysed in this book are also included by Emmanouil - Marios Economou in his courses 'Theories of Economic Evolution' and 'Defence Economics' at the University of Thessaly's Department of Economics.

The opinions and proposals contained in this book and any possible errors burden us exclusively.

PART I:

**THE DEMOCRATIC *MACROCULTURE*
AND THE BIRTH OF DEMOCRACY**

CHAPTER 1

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MYCENAEAN WORLD THAT BRINGS FORTH CREATION: DEMOCRACY AND WAR

Joseph Schumpeter, in his seminal book of 1943, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, introduced the notion of *creative destruction* into contemporary economics and political science; in other words, that destruction, for example, of old economic structures or undertakings, clears the playing field, recasting forces and resources, allowing for the creation of new economic structures and the spawning of new undertakings.

At an even broader level, the collapse or destruction of political systems provides the conditions for the creation of new ones. We will analyse this theme through the use of two concepts, *path dependence* and *macroculture*.

The former, introduced to economics by David (1985) and Arthur (1989), holds that all regimes form a system of institutions, rules, habits, organisms, etc., which, over time, becomes more and more firmly established, thus rendering the possibility of change within the regime all the more difficult. There exists, essentially, a systemic inertia, predicating today on the decisions of the past. We are tied to and dependent on the past and any change in course from the old is difficult. Nevertheless, in history, we do observe such changes. Regimes do evolve, either slowly and gradually through varying degrees of internal change, or violently and suddenly, resulting in collapse upon suffering an external threat which cannot be successfully thwarted. In such cases, creative destruction can result - not always, though, nor necessarily.

One such creative destruction occurred in 483/2 BCE with the so-called Naval Decree of Themistocles, whereby the Athenian democracy, in an attempt to deal decisively with 'external threats' - the second Persian invasion of 480-79 BCE - chose to 'turn to the sea' with the construction of Themistocles' 'wooden walls'. This action, however, radically changed the economic organisation of the Athenian city-state, shifting the emphasis away from agriculture and toward 'industry' and services, leading to the

economic and geopolitical transformation of the Athenian state, as will be shown in detail below.

For the first time, we are introducing into political science, history and economics, the concept of *macroculture*, which had been developed in the theory of Business Organisation in order to analyse the conditions that shape long run economic structural and political change. A culture is a set of institutions, laws, organisational routines, particular norms, rules, values and habits that characterise a society over a long period of time. Within this period, values interact and consolidate, constituting the general values that characterise a society. The prefix *macro* refers to the whole rather than the micro-level, as it does, say, in its use in the meaning of macroeconomics, but in relatively long historical periods. It is these ‘wholes’ that determine a macroculture and distinguishes it from others.⁹

In Ancient Greece, the Mycenaean was such a culture. Its collapse created the conditions for the creation of a new one, which bore within it, for the first time, the possibility of the birth of a democratic form of government. Mycenaean civilisation was characterised by a consolidation of relatively absolute power around the monarch, or *anax*, of each of the city-states, in his palace. Reminders of this palatial model are the ruins which we see today in Mycenae, Pylos, Tiryns, Medea, Gla, Iolcos, Sparta, Ithaca, etc. Private ownership of land and flocks and herds did exist, by the priesthood and by individuals, but the largest share of the land, flocks, herds and craft workshops belonged to the palace. Accordingly, that form of production has been called a ‘palatial economy’.

Organisation was ‘bureaucratic’, inasmuch as special ‘scribes’ (in the sense of what we call today ‘civil servants’) recorded all the activities of the palace in ‘catalogues’, as evidenced by the tablets found in the ruins of the palace at Pylos. The bulk of vital goods were produced in the workshops of the palace – metal containers, weapons, pottery, probably works of art such as statues, as well as fabrics and footwear. Archaeological findings have verified the activities of the palaces. A very basic issue for the Mycenaean monarchs (in today’s sense of the word) was that of defence (or, frequently, offence), as it was they who provided the common good ‘defence and security’. In the Mycenaean kingdoms, that was the primary role of the *anax* (the king) along with the nobility, the realm’s aristocrats, and to a very small extent and much less effectively, ordinary inhabitants (who could not yet be

⁹ We further present the concept of *macroculture* and the complete model of ‘path dependency and change’ in Annex 1, as a function of a new, emerging macroculture. The idea of collapse as the result of inadequate response to external shock (threats) has been formulated by Arnold Toynbee (1946), for example, as ‘challenge and response’.

termed ‘citizens’). What distinguished the *anax* and the aristocrats from the common people was the way in which they fought. A full suit of armour was discovered in a grave in Dendra, in Argolis; representations exist on ceramic vases as well. This is, in fact, the oldest armour ever found dating back to the 15th century BC (Image 1).

The armour found at Dendra is of bronze in successive cylindrical plates, covering the entire body, the arms, the legs, and culminating in a helmet, sometimes adorned with wild boar’s teeth. This armour reminds one of the suits of armour protecting the knights of Byzantium in the 11th century AD and those of the West in the 14th and 15th centuries AD, when the switch was made there from chainmail to plates of steel.

It was a suit of armour much more complex and complete than that worn by the citizens of the Classical Period.¹⁰ The offensive weapons of the Mycenaean nobles were the spear and the javelin, and the long sword with a blade of up to a metre in length, as evidenced by what has been found in Mycenaean tombs. Again, this is closer to the broadswords of medieval knights rather than the shorter swords of the hoplites. The armour provided a high degree of protection to its bearer. It was essentially invulnerable to the long-range weapons of the era, such as arrows, javelins, slingshot stones. Only similarly-armed nobles could challenge them (Georganas 2010; D’Amato and Salimbeti, 2011).

We believe that the myth of invincible warriors such as Achilles is an extension of the reality of the Mycenaean armour. It is possible that they also used shields made of multiple layers of cowhide, like those described by Homer, though we believe that, for the most part, the protection provided by the armour was so effective that a shield was unnecessary, just as it had become unnecessary for the knights of the 15th century. The armament of the Mycenaean nobles was ideally suited to shock tactics in close quarters, where the battle was won by the sword and the spear. This marks the beginning of the Greek tradition of the heavily-armed infantryman with his close-combat rather than long-range weapons, as opposed to those of most armies of Asia, without overlooking certain Asian kingdoms, such as the Hittite and the Assyrian, that also featured heavy infantry.

¹⁰ This suit of armour, unique of its kind in Europe, and perhaps the whole world, is on exhibit in the Archaeological Museum of Nafplion.

Image 1. The Dendra armour



Source: Personal archive

The overall armour was heavy, so as not to burden unduly the warriors bearing them before combat, it was transported to the battlefield by chariot. It appears that chariots were more frequently used as a means of transport rather than as battle vehicles, unlike those of the Egyptians and the Hittites. The Egyptians used their light and flexible chariots as ‘artillery platforms’. The ‘passenger’ on the chariot, as we can see from murals, shot his arrows from the chariot. The Hittites had developed a heavier version, with a three-man crew, a driver, an archer and a heavily-armed trooper, and which, like today’s tanks, could be used to impact and crush.

As in all Bronze Age civilisations, the cavalry had yet to make its appearance as a force. The first to introduce cavalry to the battlefield were the Assyrians, perhaps around the 8th century BCE. Homer has made us aware of the use both the Mycenaeans and Trojans made of horses and chariots. The combination of armaments and chariots of the Mycenaeans was extremely costly, though there survives no relevant cost evidence of any kind. One can claim with relative confidence, though, that the cost of this equipment separated the Mycenaean aristocrats from the people. On the battlefield, mere foot soldiers had little chance of offering resistance of any significance to the aristocrats, just as, for that matter, during most of the Middle Ages in Western Europe.

They were, of course, useful as support units during sieges, for supply, etc. But the decisive factor in any battle was the nobles who fought, as did the medieval knights, though on foot, in a series of duels, just as described by Homer. Because the long Mycenaean swords, both as slashing and penetrating weapons, required room to be used effectively, battles could not occur in densely-packed formations as they were in later times, but in looser ones and, after the first clash, in ill-defined lines. Accordingly, what essentially characterised the social and political fabric of the Mycenaean kingdoms was the economy and war. The king and his nobles stood apart from the people, with all power concentrated in their hands.

Toward the end of the 13th, beginning of the 12th centuries BCE, the Mycenaean civilisation collapsed, as much from external forces as internal. Internally, in many of the major states, dynastic rivalries led to ‘civil’ wars between and within the Mycenaean kingdoms. That is how we interpret the mythology that has survived, such as the Eteocles-Polynices clash (*The Theban Cycle*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *Antigone*, etc.) or the assassination of Agamemnon by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra in Mycenae, or the challenge of Odysseus by the suitors and the near civil conflict at the end of the *Odyssey*.

The new enemy, the Dorians who, according to the myths, were armed with iron weapons (which, if true, made them capable of easily confronting the bronze-clad Mycenaeans), conquered a foe already weakened from within. It was the end of the Mycenaean macroculture (Cartledge 2011: 20, 31, 51). There followed the so-called ‘Dark Centuries’, with a decline in population, in economic prosperity and cultural achievement. A true catastrophe¹¹, which, however, bore the seeds of creation. From the catastrophe would grow, in stages, a new macroculture which, for the first

¹¹ However, some authors, such as van Effenterre (1985), Renfrew (1988), Foxhall (1995) and Ober (2011: 7), believe that the effects of the Dorian invasion on the fate of the Mycenaean world were not as disastrous as previously believed.