

# Ancient Greece: The Archaic Period

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Objectivist Summer Conference 2009  
Boston, Massachusetts

## SYNOPSIS

Archaic Greece encompasses the centuries prior to the flowering of classical Greek culture. It subsumes intellectual and political achievements that stand as self-sufficient in their own right, but that also established the foundations of the later classical revolution. This period saw the rise of hundreds of autonomous city-states that spread Greek culture across the Mediterranean, culminating in the establishment of the democracy in Athens, and the defense of Greek independence against the Persian invasions. Poets and other intellectuals brought heroism and a respect for wisdom into the cultural forefront, spreading a respect for reason that formed the soil for the rise of philosophy.

This course is structured around three aspects of this period: its background and basic chronology; the rise of the *polis* as a political revolution; and the discovery of the self, which includes lyric poetry and philosophy, as embodied in Homer, Hesiod, Tyrtaios, Solon, Xenophanes, and Sappho. This is the first of three Greek courses planned for OCON conferences; the second will take us into the fifth-century intellectual revolution, and the third into the fourth century and the Macedonian conquests.

### Course Outline:

**Lecture 1:** Background and Basic Chronology

**Lecture 2:** The Rise of the *Polis*

**Lecture 3:** The Discovery of the Self and the Mind

## ABBREVIATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources in Translation:

- Homer, *Iliad*; *Odyssey*  
 Hesiod, *Theogony*; *Works and Days*  
 Herodotus, *The Histories*  
 Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*  
 Aristotle, *Politics*; *Constitution of the Athenians*  
 Pausanias, *Description of Greece*  
 Strabo, *Geography*  
 Plutarch, *Lives*  
 Gerber, D. E. *Greek Elegiac Poetry* (Loeb Classical Series) (for poets Tyrtaios and Solon)  
 Gerber, D. E. *Greek Iambic Poetry* (Loeb Classical Series)  
 Crawford, M. *Archaic and Classical Greece: A Selection of Ancient Sources* (1983)  
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 Kirk, G. S., J. E. Raven, M. Schofield *The Presocratic Philosophers* (1983) (for Xenophanes)  
 Carson, A. *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (2003)  
 Boardman, J. *Greek Sculpture: The Archaic Period* (1978)  
 Boardman, J. *Athenian Black Figure Vases* (1974)

### Secondary Works:

- Demand, N. *A History of Ancient Greece in Its Mediterranean Context* 2nd edn. (2006)  
 Drews, R. *The End of the Bronze Age* (1993)  
 Dunstan, W. E. *Ancient Greece* (2000)  
 Finley, M. *Early Greece: The Bronze and Archaic Ages* (1981)  
 Hall, J. M. *A History of the Archaic Greek World: ca. 1200–479 BC* (2007)  
 Jeffrey, L. H. *Archaic Greece: The City-States ca. 700–500 BC* (1976)  
 Murray, O. *Early Greece* 2nd edn. (1993)  
 Snodgrass, A. M. *Archaic Greece: The Age of Experiment* (1990)

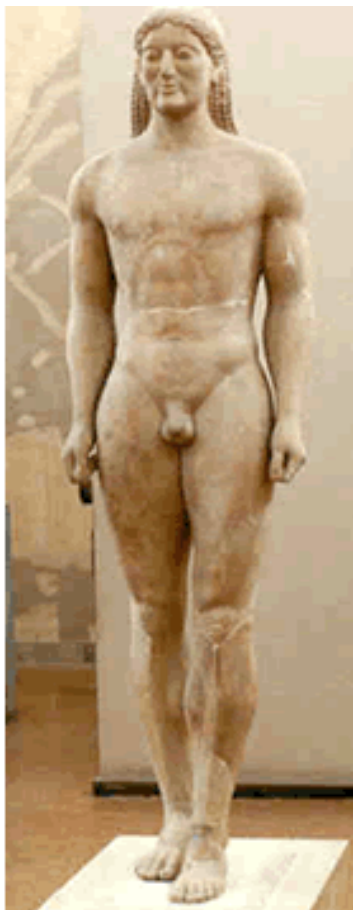
## EARLY GREEK CHRONOLOGY IN BRIEF

Date	Event
1900–1200	<b>Minoan Civilization (Crete)</b>
1600–1150	<b>Mycenean Civilization (Southern Greek Mainland, the Peloponnesus)</b>
1200	<b>“The Catastrophe”: Burning of cities in Near East and Greece</b>
1150–750	<b>Greek Dark Ages</b> Homer’s Heroic Age: <i>Iliad</i> , <i>Odyssey</i> Hesiod: <i>Theogony</i> , <i>Works and Days</i>
776–480	<b>Archaic Period: Begins with the Eighth-Century Rebirth</b>
776	Olympic Games began (traditional date)
770	Pithecusae (Italy), founded. Al Mina (Turkey, at Orontes River), settled
750–500	Age of Lyric Poets: Sappho, Alcaeus, Tyrtaeus, Archilochus, Simonides
770	Pithecusae (Italy), Al Mina (Turkey, at Orontes River), founded
750	Al Mina (Syria): Greek pottery present
ca. 750	Corinth: Bacchiadae clan rules
657	Cypselus usurps Bacchiadae in Corinth
627–587	Periander, Cypselid Tyrant of Corinth
587–584	Psammetichus, Cypselid ruler of Corinth.
734	Naxos founded (1st Greek colony on Sicily) (traditional date)
733	Syracuse (Sicily) founded by Corinth (traditional date)
728	Megara Hyblaia (Sicily) founded by Megara (traditional date)
700	The War of the Lelantine Plain (Euboia)
688	Gela (Sicily) founded by Rhodes and Crete (traditional date)
Mid-600s	Miletus founds colonies at Cyzicus, Abydos, Sinope Megara founds Astakos, Chalcedon, Selymbria, Byzantium
628	Selinus founded by Megara Hyblaia (traditional date)
600–400	Pre-Socratic Philosophy
600–500	Thales and Milesian Natural Philosophy
621	Drakon, Lawgiver (Athens)
594	Solon, Lawgiver (Athens)
580	Acragas (Sicily) founded (colony of Gela) (traditional date)
560	Pisistratus first attempt at tyranny (Athens)
546	Pisistratus second attempt at tyranny (Athens) Cyrus the Great of Persia conquers the Lydian Empire (Asia Minor)
512	Murder of Hipparchus, Pisistratid Tyranny ends (Athens)
510	Cleisthenes establishment of the democracy (Athens)
500	The Ionian Revolt against the Persians
490–479	Persian Wars: Greeks assert their political independence 490: Marathon; 480/79: Thermopylae, Salamis, Plataea

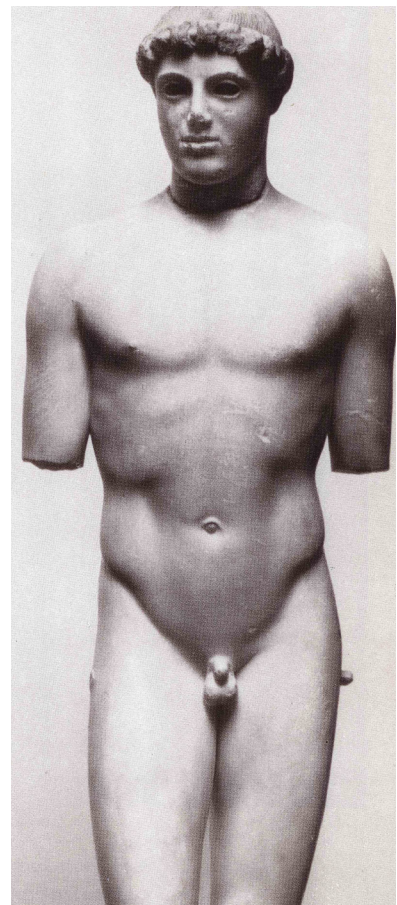
## AESTHETIC SNAPSHOT OF THE ARCHAIC CULTURAL ACHIEVEMENT



Gorgon Medusa. Temple of Artemis at Corfu. Ca. 580 BC



Grave Marker of Kroiso, ca. 530 BC



Critias Boy, Athens. Ca. 480 BC

(All maps and photos by John David Lewis)





Minoan Wall Painting  
Athens Archaeological Museum



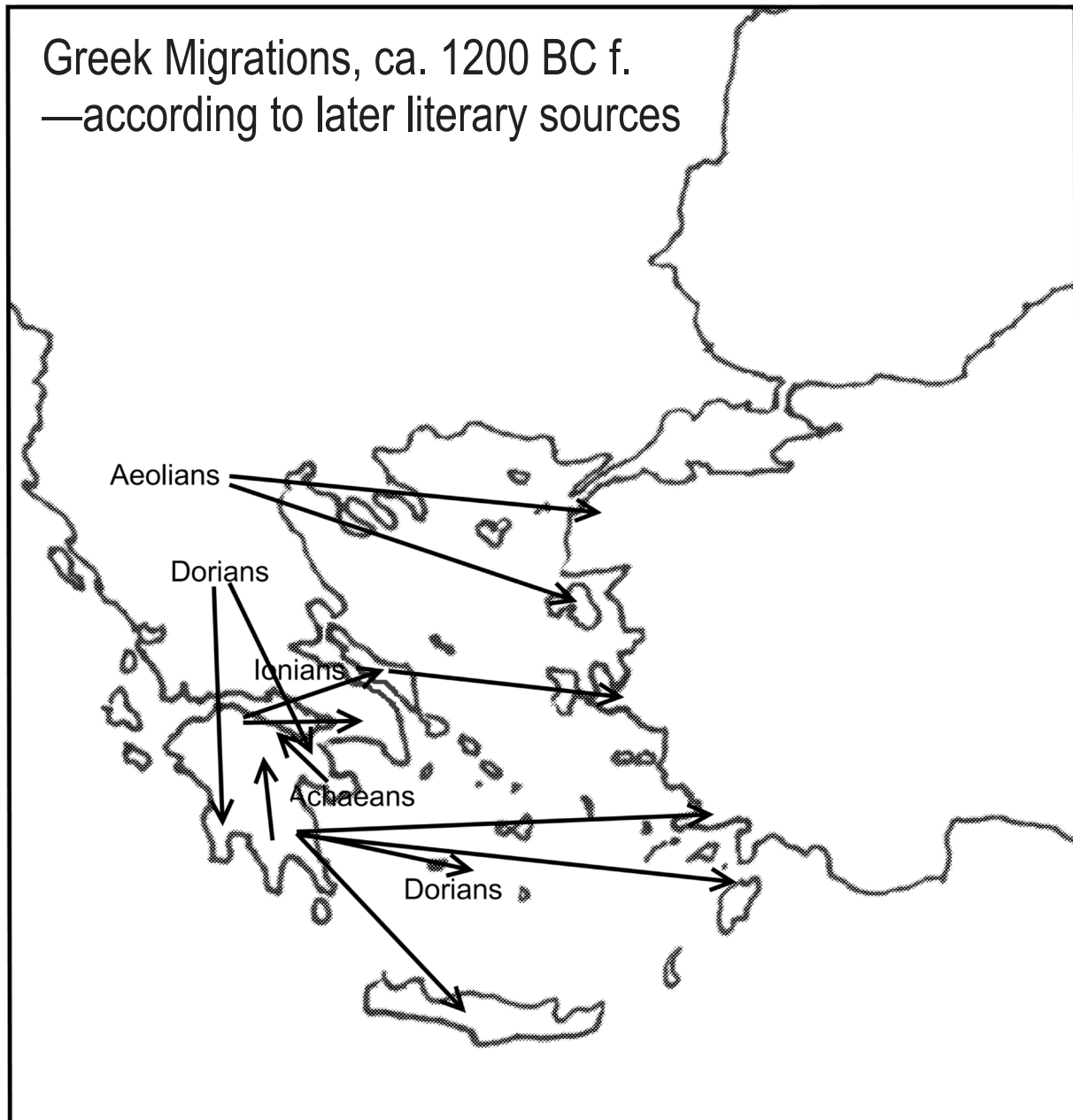
Mycenaean Death Mask  
Athens Archaeological Museum



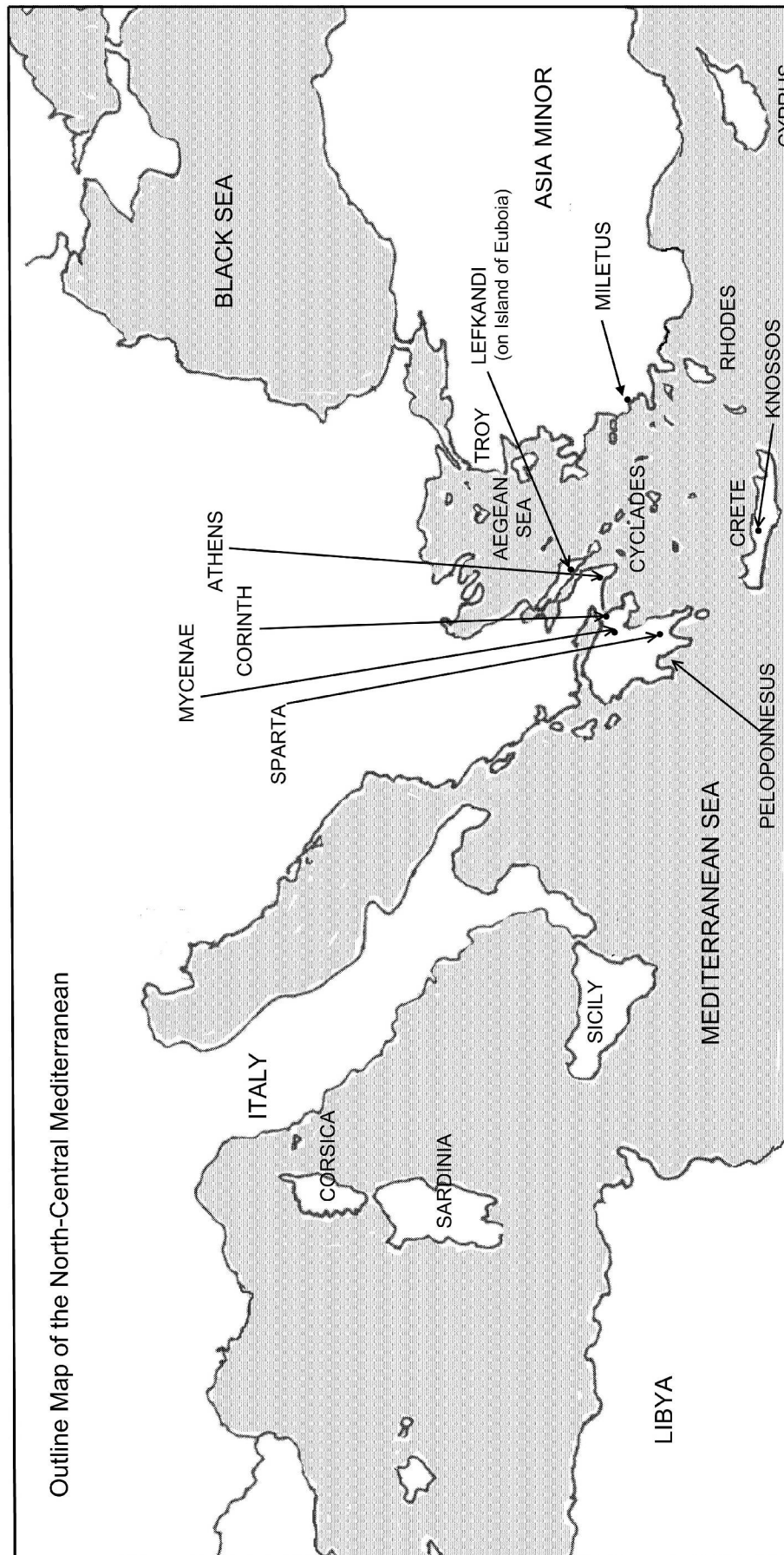
Geometric Vase  
Athens Archaeological Museum



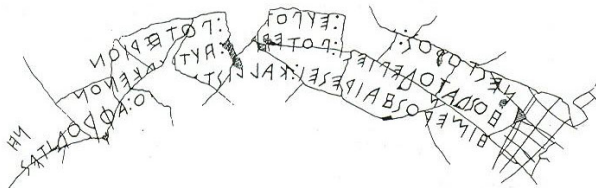
Late Archaic Kylix: Achaian, ca. 530 BC  
Museum of Rhodes











The Nestor Cup  
Rhodian Late Geometric *kotyle*  
with Euboic inscription  
last quarter 8th cent. B.C.  
Ischia, Museo  
Archeologico di Pitecusa  
Cat. 21

Reconstruction  
of the metric inscription  
on the Nestor Cup  
(Buchner, Russo 1955)

G. P. Carratelli  
The Greek World  
NY: Rizzoli, 1996

"Nestor's Cup," Pitheculsae, ca. 725 BC. Probably Rhodian.

"Nestor's cup I am, good to drink from.

Whoever drinks this cup empty, straightaway  
the desire of beautiful-crowned Aphrodite will seize."

The cup is described in Homer, *Iliad* 11.632–637:

Beside these she set a cup,  
a magnificent work Nestor had brought from home,  
studded with gold. There were four handles on it,  
around each one a pair of golden doves was feeding.  
Below were two supports. When that cup was full,  
another man could hardly lift it from the table,  
but, old as he was, Nestor picked it up with ease.