
UNIT 10 FORMATION OF STATES AND EMPIRES – A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

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10.1 INTRODUCTION

In Block 2 you have already studied about Mesopotamia and Egypt the two major bronze age civilizations which had emerged by about 3000 BC. In the next five hundred years or so these civilizations acquired greater sophistication and became increasingly complex. Their influence extended to neighbouring areas of West Asia. In Sumeria (the southernmost part of Mesopotamia where the earliest bronze age civilization evolved), city-states gradually grew into petty-kingdoms. Some of these, as for example Ur, tried to extend their control over large parts of Sumeria. By 2350 BC the whole of southern Mesopotamia, i.e. Sumeria and Akkad (the comparatively backward area lying just north of Sumeria), became a politically unified entity for a short period under the Akkadian ruler Sargon (Sharru-kin). The Egyptian state, which was territorially quite extensive from an early date, also consolidated its position during these centuries. As a political unit Egypt was relatively more compact and remained confined to the Nile valley and surrounding areas. It was only occasionally that attempts were made to bring some of the adjoining parts of West Asia under Egyptian rule.

In this Unit we will discuss the changes and developments in adjoining regions of Mesopotamia in the subsequent centuries. In the first millennium BC new empires and states emerged not only in Asia but in other parts of the world also. This Unit would provide you a general introduction to the formation of states and empires in West Asia region. More specifically it would help you in understanding the conditions that were prevailing prior to the establishment of the Persian Empire.

10.2 BACKGROUND TO THE EMERGENCE OF EMPIRES

With the growth of bronze age technology both Egypt and Mesopotamia had established relationships of exchange with those parts of West Asia which could regularly supply goods such as metal (especially copper and tin, but also gold and silver) and wood, which were in short supply in these two centres of civilization. These relationships led to contacts with the less advanced communities which lived on the margins of settled agrarian societies. We know that Anatolia (roughly corresponding the Asian part of modern Turkey), Lebanon, and areas lying south of the Caspian Sea were important for procuring copper, tin and wood. We have evidence, for instance, of the existence of colonies of Mesopotamian merchants in central Anatolia who were involved in this trade. Records which have survived from one such settlement at Kanesh (modern Kultepe, Turkey), north of the Taurus mountains, indicate that the rich Anatolian deposits of copper were being systematically exploited much before c. 2000 BC. The thriving trade in minerals speeded up Anatolia's transition to the bronze age. Anatolia became the home of another great bronze age civilization, the Hittite civilization (c. 1800-1200 BC). Of course the historical roots of this civilization lay in the social development of Anatolia itself. However, one can be certain that the influence of Mesopotamia and Egypt acted as a catalyst for the development of neighbouring areas.

10.2.1 Tribal Migration

The second half of the third millennium BC (i.e. c. 2500-2000 BC) was a period of large-scale tribal migration throughout most of West Asia and the eastern part of Central Asia. Numerous tribes and/or ethnic and linguistic groups were on the move, mingling with or displacing earlier settlers. Some of these groups were nomads in search of better means of subsistence or were looking for fresh pastures for their animal herds; many were dislocated by other tribal groups; several were pushed out of their original habitations due to the pressure of settled agrarian societies. This process continued with great intensity for nearly 1500 years and brought about many changes in West Asia, Egypt and the lands of the eastern Mediterranean zone.

The history of these tribes is obscure. However their interaction and conflict with the great civilizations of the region was reflected in some contemporary historical records. Historians have used the clues available in these records to reconstruct the tribal movements. It has been found convenient to classify these tribes on a linguistic basis. The languages of the tribes can be grouped into two broad divisions: Indo-European and Semitic. There are a few linguistic groups which do not fall into either category. The prominent Semitic tribes were the Amorites, who were to be found in Syria and parts of Mesopotamia; and the Canaanites in Syria and Palestine. One branch of the Canaanites, the Phoenicians, settled along the Lebanese coast and played a key role in the expansion of trade in the Mediterranean. The Indo-Europeans included the Indo-Aryans, the Nesians (who settled in Anatolia and developed the Hittite civilization), the Greeks and the Mitanni. Besides, there were the Hurrians and the Kassites whose languages were neither of Indo-European nor of Semitic origin.

10.2.2 State Formation

Social differentiation and state formation among these tribes led to the emergence of a large number of new states in northern Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, Anatolia and the eastern Mediterranean (Crete) and, later, in Iran. The new ethnic groups formed a major component of the ruling classes of these states. These states borrowed several features of Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilization such as writing, military techniques, and administrative organization. Thus, even though they were dominated by tribal groups which were relatively backward in terms of their social development, many of the recently formed states made very rapid progress. The Amorites contributed to the establishment of a Babylonian empire in Mesopotamia, the Nesians founded the Hittite empire in Anatolia, and the Phoenician settlements grew into city-states along the Lebanese coast.

10.3 EMERGENCE OF EMPIRES

A new type of state, which may loosely be referred to as an 'empire', began to emerge, initially in West Asia, from around 1800 BC onwards. As a type of state the empire encompassed a fairly large territory which was not confined to a given geographical zone; was usually (though not always) monarchical; had extensive military resources; and was based on the collection of a large tribute. Every empire had a core area as its political centre, and the ruling class of the empire belonged overwhelmingly to this core area. Though some élites from other parts of the empire might be coopted into the ruling class, it was the élites from the core area who were dominant. Often the élites from the core area came from a specific ethnic or tribal group and had kinship bonds among themselves. The bulk of the tribute flowed to the core area.

An empire was a geographically extensive entity which brought together diverse peoples and communities within a single, unified political unit. This obviously involved the creation of elaborate bureaucratic structures for governance and systematic collection of taxes, development of communication facilities, and maintenance of huge armies. There had to be legal systems which could accommodate the varied requirements of the communities which inhabited the empire, many of these communities being at different levels of social development. Since it was not possible under the given historical conditions for pre-modern empires to carry out centralization beyond a certain point, considerable autonomy had to be allowed to local and regional élites to regulate the day to day affairs of their respective areas. This was especially true of territories which were not part of the core area. Such territories might, for all practical purposes, be left free to manage their internal affairs as long as tribute was paid on a regular basis. In fact outlying areas were rarely integrated on a long-term basis and their subjugation depended upon the success of occasional military campaigns.

Empires were the result of military conquests carried out over an extended period. It was through conquest that the ruling élite of an area could establish its domination over other areas. The process of conquest and expansion could at times go on for several generations till a stage was reached beyond which it was just not possible to expand further given the specific limitations of pre-modern empires. The sheer logic of empire-building necessitated the

mobilization of a large well-trained army and resources to sustain such an army. Regular expansion provided more resources and each expansion made it both possible and necessary to have an even bigger army. Thus empire-building, appropriation of large surpluses in the form of tribute, and maintaining huge armies were all closely interlinked.

From around 1800 BC onwards we find a number of states located in West Asia attempting to build up large empires. These attempts were being made at regular intervals in different parts of the region. Initially the Babylonian state in Mesopotamia and, somewhat later, the Hittite state in Anatolia were successful at bringing large territories under their control. Hittite raids were responsible for the destruction of the first Babylonian empire. Yet from a historical point of view it was the Mesopotamian experiment which was to have far-reaching consequences. The Assyrians, who were one of the people settled in northern Mesopotamia created a mighty empire—the Assyrian empire—which lasted for several centuries and became the model for many of the other early empires of the region.

10.4 THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE

It was under the First Dynasty of Babylon that Mesopotamia became a great power in West Asia. This dynasty was founded by Sumu-abum (1894-1881 BC). The sixth ruler of the dynasty, the famous Hammurabi (1792-1749 BC), unified southern Mesopotamia and then extended his control over large parts of northern Mesopotamia. Hammurabi created an empire and his successor, Samsu-iluna (1749-1712 BC) expanded the empire by adding new territories. This empire is usually referred to as the 'Old Babylonian Empire'. Although the empire began to decline after Samsu-iluna, henceforth Babylon was to remain the main political centre of southern Mesopotamia, for which reason ancient southern Mesopotamia is designated as Babylon while referring to the history of this region from the period of the Old Babylonian Empire onwards.

Babylon (*Bab-ilani* or 'gate of the gods') was one of the many Amorite settlements which had come up in Akkad, in northern Mesopotamia and in Syria. The Amorites, who are placed in the large group of tribes called Western Semites, played a crucial role in developing the Old Babylonian Empire. Akkadian became the official language of the empire and continued to be the main language of Mesopotamia for many centuries. Several features of Sumerian and Sumero-Akkadian civilization, such as the cuneiform script and religious practices, were adopted by the Amorites/Western Semites. Monarchical traditions which had evolved under powerful Sumerian and Akkadian rulers, as for example Sargon and the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur, formed the basis of the concept of monarchy in the Babylonian empire.

As has already been mentioned, the Old Babylonian Empire eventually collapsed as a result of Hittite raids (c. 1600 BC). Soon afterwards another tribal people, the Kassites (known as Kanshu in Akkadian records), who certainly included an Indo-European component, established themselves as the rulers of Mesopotamia. The Kassites were earlier settled in the area of the Zagros mountains. They took advantage of the disturbed conditions following Hittite raids and set up a new kingdom in Mesopotamia which lasted from c. 1595 to 1157 BC. The Kassites ruled from Babylon. They maintained and continued Mesopotamian traditions. At the same time they brought with them

horse-rearing skills, which they had learnt earlier, and are credited with having popularized the use of the horse in Mesopotamia. Kassite power was mainly concentrated in the south while the north was controlled by different groups, of whom the Mitanni were the most noteworthy, till about 1350 BC.

10.5 THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

Around c. 1350 BC a significant new development took place in northern Mesopotamia. This was the rise of Assyria, which was to have a profound impact on the history of West Asia. The Assyrians founded a vast empire which dominated West Asia for several centuries. We may say that it was the Assyrians who really inaugurated the ‘age of empires’.

During the course of the tribal movements which we have referred to above, numerous Semitic groups had moved into and occupied northern Mesopotamia. Some of the groups which settled in the Upper Tigris area came to be known as Assyrians. The people whom we refer to as ‘Assyrians’ consisted of Semitic immigrants and the original inhabitants of the area. They got their name from *Ash-shur*, the main god worshipped by them. Although *Ash-shur* was the name by which their most prominent city and subsequently their empire was known, modern historians usually designate the city as ‘Assur’ and the kingdom and the people as ‘Assyria’ and ‘Assyrian’ respectively, whereas *Ash-shur* is used primarily while referring to the god of the Assyrians.

10.5.1 Territorial Expansion

The Assyrian state rose to prominence following the end of Mitannian domination over northern Mesopotamia. Having brought most of the Upper Tigris area under their rule by about 1300 BC, the Assyrians began to expand westwards into Syria under king Shalmaneser I (1274-1245 BC). They also threatened the Kassite kingdom of Babylon. The Assyrians enlarged and consolidated their power under the successors of Shalmaneser I. Eventually the Assyrian king Tiglathpileser I (1115 – 1077 BC) conquered Syria, extracted tribute from the Phoenician cities on the Lebanese coast, and subjugated Babylonia, thereby making Assyria a great power in West Asia. This was the first phase of the rise of the Assyrian empire.

The newly created Assyrian empire was disrupted by fresh tribal incursions during the tenth century, but had recovered by about 900 BC. From c. 900 BC onwards the Assyrians steadily expanded their influence and established the ‘New Assyrian Empire’. The real founder of the New Assyrian Empire was Ashurnasirpal II (883-859). Ashurnasirpal II attempted to restore the Assyrian empire to the size that it had attained under Tiglathpileser I. He consolidated Assyrian hold over northern Mesopotamia and undertook several military campaigns into Syria. Ashurnasirpal II built a new capital near Assur, named Kalhu (modern Nimrud) as the seat of his government. He was succeeded by his son, Shalmaneser III (858-824). Shalmaneser III carried out numerous campaigns in Armenia, Syria, Palestine, and the areas lying along the Persian Gulf. However, he was unable to make any significant additions to Assyrian territories. Shalmaneser III failed to annex Syria, but Babylon accepted nominal Assyrian overlordship (Babylonian rulers were allowed to remain on the throne so long as they accepted Assyrian suzerainty). Thereafter Assyrian power declined for several decades till the time of Tiglathpileser III, one of the most

outstanding Assyrian kings. The reign of Tiglathpileser III (744-727) witnessed a revival of the empire. In fact it was under Tiglathpileser III and his successors that the Assyrian empire reached its greatest extent.

Tiglathpileser III succeeded in annexing Syria and a large part of Palestine to the Assyrian empire. He reasserted Assyrian supremacy over Babylon. In the east he crossed the Zagros mountains and conquered the region of Iran which was then known as Media (the history of Media will be discussed in greater detail below). In other words Tiglathpileser III created a vast empire extending from the Mediterranean coast to the Caspian Sea and from the Taurus and Zagros mountains to the Persian Gulf. Assyrian power continued to grow under his successor Sargon II (721-705). Sargon II's descendants (the Sargonid dynasty) ruled down to 612 BC when the empire was destroyed. Under the Sargonids the city of Nineveh (Ninua) became the capital of the empire.

10.5.2 Administrative and Military Apparatus

Tiglathpileser III was instrumental in developing an elaborate administrative and military apparatus for the Assyrian empire. This stabilized the empire for nearly a century. An important objective of Tiglathpileser III was to centralize the structure of the Assyrian state and to strengthen monarchical authority. The conquered territories were constituted into administrative districts. These units or districts were placed under 'governors' who were directly answerable to the king. The 'governors' had extensive administrative, financial, judicial and military authority in their respective areas. They were responsible for the collection of taxes and the regular flow of tribute to the centre. Further they were expected to mobilize troops for the Assyrian army.

One of the most important achievements of Tiglathpileser III was the formation of a well-trained standing army. Assyrian rulers had so far relied on troops supplied by big landowners of Mesopotamia. These were invariably peasants and slaves from the core areas of the Assyrian kingdom, who were forced to serve as soldiers for the duration of a military expedition. Tiglathpileser III realized that a permanent professional army was essential in order to control and expand his vast empire. Troops were now recruited from different parts of the empire and provincial 'governors' were entrusted with the task of raising armed contingents from the territories under their jurisdiction. Instead of being a loose formation in which different types of troops were all mixed up, the army was now divided into separate units. Each unit had specialized military duties. Chariot units and the cavalry had a special place in this new type of army. The infantry was mainly recruited from Anatolia and Syria-Palestine, while there were camel riders from Arabia. These measures resulted in a significant increase in the size and effectiveness of the Assyrian army.

It was with this new army that Tiglathpileser III was able to conquer territories which had earlier never formed part of the Assyrian empire, such as Media in northern Iran. It has been pointed out that the need to find resources for such a large standing army itself required constant campaigns of conquest. Igor Diakonoff has remarked that Tiglathpileser's reform of the Assyrian army was based on its being kept permanently active and sustaining itself by plunder. Moreover, since there was greater emphasis on chariots and the cavalry, the army needed to have an assured supply of horses. The people living in the mountain pastures of northern Iran specialized in horse-rearing. The annexation

of Media placed a major source for the supply of horses at the disposal of the Assyrians.

Tiglathpileser III also initiated a ruthless policy of large-scale transfers of populations from one part of the empire to another as a strategy to minimize the possibilities of rebellion within the empire. People or communities living in one part of the empire would be uprooted from their original areas of settlement and forcibly settled in another part of the empire. This was often the fate of territories which were subjugated after a fierce military contest. In Iran, for instance, almost 65,000 persons were deported at the end of a campaign in 744 BC. This policy of mass deportation was one of the reasons for the intense hatred which subject peoples of West Asia had for the Assyrian empire, something that is reflected in the Old Testament of the Bible. Nevertheless, Tiglathpileser III laid the foundations of a powerful empire and his Sargonid successors continued with his traditions. These traditions provided the inspiration and framework for many of the subsequent empires in the area.

10.6 MIGRATIONS, CONFLICTS AND NEW PHASE OF EMPIRE BUILDING

A new phase of empire building began in the mid-seventh century BC in West Asia with the rise of the Median empire which was succeeded by the much larger Achaemenid empire. The core areas of these empires were located in Iran. The Achaemenid empire may be regarded as the first 'world empire' in the sense that it had a vast territorial extent, encompassing Egypt, most of West Asia (barring the Arabian peninsula, but including Anatolia) and extended from Aegean Sea in the west to the Hindukush mountains in the east. It lasted for more than two centuries, till it was destroyed by Alexander the Great.

As a result of several centuries of tribal migrations a large number of new tribes, especially those belonging to the Indo-Iranian or Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European people, moved into Iran in the latter half of the second millennium BC. Iran came to be inhabited predominantly by tribes of the Indo-European linguistic family. By about the eighth century BC these tribes were dispersed throughout Iran (including parts of present-day Afghanistan) completely altering the linguistic character of the lands lying between the Zagros mountains in the west and the Hindukush mountains in the east, and between the Caspian Sea in the north and the Persian Gulf in the south. This phenomenon was more conspicuous in the eastern parts of Iran whereas in the west pre-Indo-European elements survived for somewhat longer. Nevertheless, by the seventh century BC Iran had acquired a high degree of linguistic and cultural uniformity.

Many of the Iranian tribes had given up their nomadic lifestyle and adopted a sedentary existence. Different parts of Iran came to be associated with specific tribal groups. The Medes were settled in the area lying south-west of the Caspian Sea; the Persians in the region of Fars, i.e. south-western Iran; the Parthians east of the Caspian Sea; and the Bactrians north of the Hindukush. Apart from their linguistic affinity, these tribal groups also shared many cultural and religious traditions. With the rise of Zoroastrianism (c. sixth century BC) in the eastern settlements and the spread of this belief to other parts of Iran, the ties which linked the Iranian tribes were further strengthened.

The Iranians succeeded in exploiting the natural resources of the region more efficiently than earlier settlers and developed a new pattern of subsistence based upon specialized animal husbandry and better utilization of water resources. As we have already noted, Media specialized in horse-rearing. Rearing of the double humped camel became an important feature of the Bactrian economy. Goats and sheep were reared in arid and semi-arid zones. This specialized animal husbandry was combined with traditional cattle-rearing. Historians have drawn attention to the fact that horses and camels played a significant role in the growth of the Iranian economy at this stage. They helped to expand trade and exchange both by facilitating travel and bringing commodities for exchange. These animals augmented the surplus available to the communities which bred them. Horses and camels increased the overall mobility of the tribes. In the case of the Medes, horses ensured their initial economic and military superiority, without which they could not have created an empire. In agriculture the Iranians initiated new irrigation techniques to optimize the use of water. This they did by introducing underground canals which prevented the water from rapid evaporation. An extensive network of such canals (called *qanat* in Iran and *karez* in Afghanistan/Central Asia) was created in the entire region. The construction of such a network required greater cooperation within and among the agrarian communities, which in turn led to the growth of a more complex social and economic organization.

These were the historical conditions in which the Median kingdom came into existence. Media (Iranian *Máda*; Akkadian *Madáí*) was the ancient name for north-western Iran, roughly the triangle formed by the modern cities of Zanjan, Hamadan and Tehran. Towards the end of the eighth century BC the Median tribes settled in this area were living in fortified villages, some of which subsequently developed into urban centres. The tribes came together as a confederacy at the beginning of the seventh century BC. We have already referred to Assyrian military expeditions into this area, and the annexation of Media by Tiglathpileser III. Later, taking advantage of the weakening of Assyrian control the Median tribes constituted themselves into a confederacy. This would have helped the Medes to fight the Assyrians more effectively. Although we have very little information about the early phase of the rise of the Median kingdom it would seem that in c. 675 BC the tribes were unified by a ruler named either Phraortes (Fravarti) or Khshathrita (675-653 BC). Initially he may have been an elected king, chosen from among the chieftains of the Median tribes and clans. As such he would just have been the first among equals. However, as soon as Khshathrita had consolidated his position he further increased his authority and established a hereditary monarchy. Khshathrita was succeeded by his son Uvakhshtra, known as Cyaraxes in Greek sources—the name by which he is more familiar (we will be generally using conventional Greek versions of Iranian names in order to avoid confusion).

The Medes suffered a setback for a brief period when their kingdom was conquered by a nomadic people called the Scythians. Scythian domination lasted from c. 652-625 BC. In c. 625 BC Cyaraxes eliminated the Scythian chiefs and re-established the Median state. He founded a powerful Median kingdom and expanded it by annexing many of the neighbouring parts of Iran. The event which transformed this new kingdom into an empire was the conquest of Assyria.

Cyaraxes (625-585 BC) made use of the existing resources of Media to create a regular standing army along the lines of the Assyrians. The army was divided into separate units with specific functions. There were infantry units, cavalry units and units of specialist archers. It may be recalled that the Medes were expert horse-breeders and easy access to horses greatly increased the strength of their army. With this army Cyaraxes extended his territories beyond the Median homeland. Several parts of the Iranian plateau, as for instance Fars, came under the Medes. It is likely that Cyaraxes undertook expeditions as far as Bactria in the east, but there is no hard evidence to suggest that this region was incorporated within the empire.

For the invasion of Assyria the Medes allied themselves with Babylonia. Assyrian authority over Babylonia had weakened under the later Sargonids and in c. 626 BC Babylonia reasserted its independence. This was the time when a new dynasty rose to prominence in southern Mesopotamia. The rulers of this dynasty are usually referred to as the Chaldean kings. They had their origins in Chaldea (Kaldu in Assyrian), the ancient name for the marshland in the southernmost part of Mesopotamia. The Chaldean king Nabopolassar (626-605 BC) captured Babylon from the Assyrians. Under the Chaldeans Babylonia became a major power in West Asia for nearly a century. This is known as the New Babylonian Empire that reached its zenith under Nabopolassar's son Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BC). The resurgence of Babylonia was reflected in its outstanding achievements in the fields of science, culture, art and architecture. There are several references to these events in the Old Testament of the Bible. In biblical literature Chaldean is used as a synonym for Babylonian.

The Medes and the Babylonians formed an alliance against their common enemy, Assyria, at a time when the power of Assyria was declining. The widespread resentment in West Asia against the oppressive policies of the Assyrians and the huge burden they had placed on their subjects resulted in intense hostility against the small Assyrian ruling elite, facilitating the downfall of the empire. The Assyrian empire was destroyed as a result of the combined onslaught of the Medes and the Babylonians. Cyaraxes invaded Assyria and occupied its leading cities in 612 BC. Nineveh was captured and its palaces were burnt down. The Assyrian state survived only in name for another three years with its centre in Harran in northern Mesopotamia. Then in 610 BC the Medes and the Babylonians together invaded Harran and put an end to the Assyrian state. Assyria itself was partitioned between the Medes and the Babylonians, although some historians are of the view that the Medes did not occupy any territory but only took with them a huge booty. A substantial portion of the enormous wealth which the Assyrians had accumulated for centuries was now at the disposal of the Medes and considerably enhanced their resources. The wars against Assyria also flooded Media with slaves (*maniya* was the term used for slave). Babylonia now became the dominant power in Mesopotamia.

Unfortunately we hardly have any information about the organization of the Median state or its administrative structure. It would appear that the empire was loosely organized and that the aristocracy drawn from the leading families of the Median tribes continued to wield considerable authority. Eventually it was this aristocracy, or rather a section of it, that undermined the position of the king and paved the way for the overthrow of Median rule. The city of

Ecbatana or Agbatana (modern Hamadan) was the capital of the empire. Since Media was a relatively backward region as compared to Mesopotamia, it borrowed many features of Mesopotamian civilization. Babylonian culture left a strong imprint on Media. Its ruling class adopted several Babylonian customs. At this time early Zoroastrianism was making inroads into Iran from the east.

Cyaxares was succeeded by his son Astyages (Ishtumegu) who ruled from 585 to 549 BC. Not much is known about the reign of Astyages. The Median empire continued to expand under Astyages. Some of this expansion was at the expense of Babylon. It may be mentioned here that the New Babylonian Empire had reached its climax under Nebuchadnezzar II. Most of Mesopotamia (including Assyria) had come under Babylonian rule and Syria-Palestine was added to the empire. However the Babylonians found it difficult to control Palestine. This was partly due to frequent rebellions in this area and partly due to Egyptian military intervention. Egypt was at this time attempting to bring Palestine under its control. There had been two Jewish kingdoms in Palestine since around the ninth century BC: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem was the capital of Judah. In 722 BC Israel, i.e. the northern kingdom, had been subjugated by the Assyrians. However Judah had survived. Then in 597 BC Nebuchadnezzar II besieged and captured Jerusalem. Thousands of Jews were forcibly deported to Babylon and a heavy tribute was extracted from Judah. The Babylonians invaded Judah a second time in 586 and destroyed Jerusalem. Babylonian influence was now supreme in Palestine. For a short time Babylon was the centre of a vast empire in West Asia. This empire did not last very long and came to an end within a few decades after Nebuchadnezzar II. The centre of political gravity in West Asia shifted from Mesopotamia to Iran.

Significant political changes were taking place within the Median empire at this time. Astyages had expanded the empire, but he was facing internal problems. For reasons which are not very clear a section of the Median aristocracy had become hostile to the Median king and plotted to overthrow him. Some provincial elites who were not Medes were also involved in this plot. These provincial elites included Cyrus (Kurash), 559-29 BC, the semi-independent ruler of the region of Parsa (modern Fars). This region was located south of Media in south-western Iran. Parsa was a part of the Median empire and Cyrus was subject to the overlordship of Astyages. Cyrus was probably related to Astyages. Cyrus belonged to the Achaemenid dynasty which traditionally ruled over Parsa. The Achaemenids were descended from Achaemenes (Hakhamanish), an Iranian warrior chieftain of the seventh century BC. They were subsequently subjugated by the Medes.

In the mid-sixth century BC the Achaemenids under Cyrus revolted against the Medes. In this they had the support of the section of the Median aristocracy which was opposed to Astyages. Cyrus defeated Astyages and occupied the Median capital Ecbatana in 549 BC. This brought the Median empire to an end. The territories ruled by the Medes now came under Achaemenid rule.

As we have already noted the Achaemenids created a vast empire in West Asia. This empire lasted for about two centuries, c. 549-330 BC. We will examine the Achaemenid empire in more detail in the next Unit.

10.7 SUMMARY

In this Unit we provided a general introduction to the process of formation of States and Empires. The second half of third millennium BC witnessed large scale tribal migration in West Asia and eastern part of central Asia. In due course social differentiation and state formation gave rise to large number of new states in the region. The empires encompassed fairly large territories transgressing geographical zones with some what developed administrative structures. The Babylonian and Assyrian empires have been discussed in brief. The emergence of Median Kingdom is also given some space in our discussion. The territories under Median kingdom later on came under the Achaemenid rule and developed into Persian empire the mightiest empire of the region. This Achaemenid empire will be discussed in detail in the next Unit (Unit 11) of the this Block.

10.8 EXERCISES

- 1) Write a brief note on the background of the emergence of empires.
- 2) Discuss the main characteristic features of early empires.
- 3) Analyse the administrative and military apparatus developed under Assyrians.
- 4) How did Cyaraxes strengthened the Median Kingdom?

UNIT 11 THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

Structure

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Expansion and Consolidation of the Empire
 - 11.2.1 Cyrus
 - 11.2.2 Cambyses
 - 11.2.3 Darius I
- 11.3 Administrative Reorganisation
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11.1 INTRODUCTION

As we saw in the previous Unit, the Medes were the first empire-builders in Iran. However it was the Achaemenids who created the first Iranian world empire. Within a few decades of the replacement of Median rule by Achaemenid rule, the region of Fars (Parsa) in Iran had become the centre of a huge empire which included most of West Asia, Anatolia and Egypt—one of the most extensive empires of the ancient world. Parsa, which more or less corresponds to the province of Fars in modern Iran, was called Persis by the ancient Greeks. Since Parsa or Persis was the homeland of the Achaemenids, their empire came to be known as the Persian empire and Iran itself was identified with Persia (Iran was referred to as Persia till very recently). Thus in antiquity the place of origin of the Achaemenids was adopted as the name for the entire Iranian plateau by the Greeks and subsequently by other peoples as well.

In this Unit we will discuss some of the salient features of this empire. The expansion and consolidation of this biggest empire of the region was accomplished in a span of fifty years. The administrative apparatus and the system of control on the extensive territories was one of the major achievements. This was achieved through developing a mechanism of decentralized governance. We will study the growth of language and means of communication and development of a common language in such a heterogeneous region. We will devote some space to the standardization of monetary system and coinage which was probably the first such attempt covering such vast territories as in Persian empire. We will also discuss growth of a new religion and tradition of religious tolerance a unique achievement during this age.

11.2 EXPANSION AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE EMPIRE

The territorial expansion and consolidation of the Persian empire was accomplished in more than fifty years. A number of rulers contributed in the whole process. However, Cyrus the great and Darius I stand out as the key figures in the process of expansion and consolidation.

11.2.1 Cyrus

After Cyrus (generally referred to as Cyrus the Great to distinguish him from other rulers of the same name) had overthrown Astyages he continued with many of the features of the Median state. Like the Medes the Persians too were initially a confederacy of several Iranian tribes settled in Parsa. They were closely linked with the Medes. The overthrow of Astyages did not imply a sudden disruption of the Median state. Cyrus combined in his person the unified kingship of the Median and Persian tribal confederacies. In view of the active support which Cyrus had received from a section of the Median aristocracy in the struggle against Astyages, he allowed the Median elite to have a share in political power. The Median aristocracy was not immediately dislodged and continued to perform various functions in the new Achaemenid state. Over a period of time the Persian element became more pronounced in the governance of the empire. Simultaneously, the state became more centralized and monarchy as an institution became more powerful.

Having stabilized his position Cyrus immediately embarked upon an ambitious programme of expansion. The Achaemenids rapidly filled the political vacuum that had been created in West Asia by the disappearance of the Assyrian empire. Their expansion, however, was on a much bigger scale. The Babylonians were unable to consolidate their hold over the territorial acquisitions of Nebuchadnezzar II. In fact Babylon seems to have lacked the resources to build an empire that could have lasted for a long duration. The Medes under Astyages had already begun to encroach upon Babylonian possessions. The successors of Nebuchadnezzar II were unable to resist these onslaughts. They eventually succumbed to the Achaemenids who became the real successors to the Assyrian empire.

Cyrus first concentrated on the conquest of Anatolia. The Median rulers had been attempting to subdue the states of Anatolia, especially the kingdom of Lydia. There were at this time several states in Anatolia, of which Lydia was the most powerful. This was one of the states that had emerged in the region after the collapse of the Hittite empire. The Lydian language was closely related to the Hittite language. Croesus, who ruled over Lydia from 561 to 545 BC, was responsible for making Lydia the paramount power in western Anatolia. Lydia under Croesus is credited with having been the first state in history to issue coins on a regular basis.

Croesus exercised nominal suzerainty over the Greek settlements on the west coast of Anatolia. These Greeks were collectively referred to as Ionians (see Unit 12). The Ionians lived in self-governing city-states. They had formed a confederacy to pool together their resources and defend themselves. Cyrus first tried to persuade the Ionians to revolt against Lydia. When this strategy failed he invaded Lydia and succeeded in defeating Croesus in 545 BC. Lydia, and with it most of western Anatolia, became a part of the Achaemenid empire. Following this the Ionian states were also annexed. Cyrus's territories now extended to the shores of the Aegean Sea. During the next fifty years the Achaemenids launched a series of military expeditions to bring the entire Aegean and mainland Greece under their control. In Anatolia Sardis, the capital of the erstwhile Lydian Kingdom, became the seat of Achaemenid authority in the region.

The next phase of Achaemenid expansion resulted in the conquest of

Mesopotamia. We have already referred to the decline of the New Babylonian Empire under the successors of Nebuchadnezzar II. Nabonidus (556-539 BC) was the reigning Babylonian king at the time of Cyrus. Babylon was invaded and captured by Cyrus in 539 BC. This was a major event in the history of ancient West Asia and is mentioned in many contemporary records including the Old Testament and a cuneiform inscription dating back to the time of Nabonidus (called the 'Nabonidus Chronicle'). Cyrus allowed the Jews who had been deported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar II to return to their homeland. This might have been related to his policy to create a friendly buffer between Egypt and the Achaemenid possessions in Syria-Palestine. Nevertheless his action earned him the reputation of being a just and tolerant ruler. Cyrus pursued a liberal policy with regard to the religious and cultural traditions of many of the people he conquered. Apart from facilitating the return of the Jews, he showed respect for Babylonian traditions. Contemporary Greek writers also speak favourably of him. Cyrus seems to have been generally held in high esteem in antiquity.

With the victory over Babylon, all of Mesopotamia as well as Babylonian territories in Syria-Palestine were incorporated within the Achaemenid empire. This completed the shift in political gravity in West Asia from Mesopotamia to Iran, a process which had started under the Medes. We do not possess much information about Achaemenid expansion in the east under Cyrus. It is likely that Bactria (Baktrish) was added to the empire and that by the time Cyrus died Achaemenid rule extended to the Hindukush mountains.

11.2.2 Cambyses

Cyrus died in 529 BC while on a military expedition. He was succeeded by his son Cambyses (Kambujiya), 529-522 BC. Not much is known about the brief reign of Cambyses, except that he was mainly preoccupied with campaigns in Egypt. Under Cambyses Egypt was added to the Achaemenid empire. He invaded Egypt c. 525 and quickly defeated the Egyptian ruler Psamtek III, who belonged to the XXVIth Dynasty of Egypt, also called the Saite dynasty after Sais which was the place of origin of the dynasty. The Saite dynasty was already on the verge of collapse due to internal problems. This might account for the ease with which Cambyses conquered Egypt.

Later Greek accounts of Cambyses are highly prejudiced. They portray him as a mad and tyrannical ruler who had no respect for Egyptian traditions. This is not confirmed by the Egyptian evidence that has come to light in the past few decades. Cambyses took over the throne as a traditional Egyptian ruler and adopted the symbols associated with the pharaohs in order to legitimize his authority. Persian rule over Egypt lasted for nearly two centuries, i.e. till Alexander the Great's conquest. In the context of Egyptian history the Achaemenids are designated as the XXVIIth Dynasty, indicating an element of continuity from the Saite to the Persian period.

Cambyses is supposed to have undertaken a series of military expeditions into some of the areas surrounding Egypt proper. Most of these expeditions seem to have ended disastrously. These setbacks undermined his position in Iran itself. The last days of Cambyses are shrouded in mystery but the available evidence indicates that he was faced with revolts in his homeland. The long absence of the king from Iran and reports of his military failures must have

encouraged these revolts. Cambyses died in 522 BC while still in the midst of dealing with the upheaval. The events following his death are even more confusing. This confusion is largely due to the fact that soon after the death of Cambyses a different branch of the Achaemenids usurped power. The political crisis in the Achaemenid state towards the end of Cambyses's reign facilitated this development. It is hardly surprising that in this situation different versions of what actually happened were put forward.

According to one version a person by the name of Gaumata declared himself as king. Gaumata is said to have claimed that actually he was Smerdis (Bardiya), the younger brother of Cambyses. A group of nobles then killed the fake Smerdis (i.e. Gaumata). This version holds that Smerdis had already been killed by Cambyses much earlier and that Gaumata was impersonating Smerdis. Another version states that Cambyses was succeeded by Smerdis, who had not been killed, and that it was the real Smerdis who was overthrown. In any case it is clear that there was a conspiracy by some of the prominent Achaemenid officials (referred to in contemporary records as the conspiracy of 'seven' nobles). The leader of this conspiracy was Darius I (Darayavaus). The coup was successful and Darius I became the ruler of the Achaemenid empire in 522 BC.

11.2.3 Darius I

Darius I (522-486 BC) was the son of Hystaspes (Vishtaspa), who was a leading Persian official, probably a provincial governor. Hystaspes was descended from a collateral branch of the Achaemenids. It was this branch which ruled from 522 BC onwards. Darius I was the most outstanding of the Achaemenid rulers. Under him the extensive territories acquired by Cyrus and Cambyses were systematically organized to create a stable empire. Till about 519 BC Darius was engaged in restoring order and reasserting Achaemenid authority in regions which were in rebellion. It may be mentioned here that after the death of Cambyses the Medes had attempted to break away from the Persian empire and Gaumata/Smerdis had the support of the old Median aristocracy of Ecbatana. Within a year of occupying the throne Darius had put down the Median revolt.

Darius continued the process of expansion, both in the east and the west. In the east the empire extended upto the Hindukush mountains and the outlying territories in this region were properly integrated with the empire. In the west a large part of the Aegean Sea and perhaps Thrace came under Persian control. Efforts were made to strengthen Persian control over coastal areas in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Aegean Sea. Ships were stationed in the Persian Gulf and a navy was maintained off the Anatolian coast. It should be borne in mind that the military strength of the Persians lay primarily in their land-based army. Darius also carried out campaigns in the Greek peninsula, but was unable to annex the states of mainland Greece. For the Greeks of the classical period (c. 500-338 BC) the Persians were a constant political and military factor to be reckoned with.

The historian Herodotus who wrote an account, in Greek, of the encounter between the Persians and the Greeks is a major source for the Achaemenids. Herodotus was born c. 485 BC at Halicarnassus located on the south-west coast of Anatolia. Halicarnassus was an Achaemenid territory. His famous

history is essentially a narrative of the westward expansion of the Persian empire. Herodotus had travelled widely (Greece, Egypt, Mesopotamia etc.) before writing his account. Most of his information about Persia was derived from contemporary Greek sources and from some prominent people who had been connected with the Persian court. Another Greek source, though not very reliable, is the *Persica* of Ctesias. Ctesias belonged to Cnidus, situated just south of Halicarnassus in south-western Anatolia. He was taken as a prisoner by the Persians during the course of a military campaign and became a doctor at the Persian court, where he stayed for about seventeen years (till c. 397 BC). His account is frequently at variance with that of Herodotus. The consensus among modern scholars is that much of the information contained in *Persica* is inaccurate.

Darius I himself has left behind a record of the opening years of his reign in the form of a large trilingual inscription carved on the face of a cliff at Behistun in western Iran. This inscription, known as the 'Behistun inscription', is in the Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian (Akkadian) languages. It provided the key for the decipherment of the cuneiform script. The inscription is accompanied by a massive relief carving of Darius. The Behistun inscription and Herodotus's history are the two main written sources for this period.

We have noted that Herodotus was largely concerned with Persian military campaigns against Greek states. At this time the Greek-speaking world consisted of numerous states which were spread over a sizable area extending from western Anatolia in the east to southern Italy in the west and included the Aegean islands, Thrace, the Greek peninsula, Crete and Sicily. Sparta and Athens were the two most prominent states on the mainland. They were also militarily the most significant (see Unit 12). Anatolia was already a part of the Achaemenid empire and the Persians had acquired a foothold in the Greek world by subjugating the Ionian states. The Persian attempt to establish supremacy over the Greeks was a prolonged affair which continued almost till the end of the classical period. However Persian military campaigns in mainland Greece were confined to the beginning of the classical period.

As soon as Darius had put down rebellions in the empire he embarked on an expedition in Thrace (c. 513 BC). He crossed the Sea of Marmara into Europe and placed a Persian garrison at the southern extremity of Thrace. At the same time he sent messengers to various Greek states, including Sparta, demanding that they acknowledge him as their ruler. The Greek response to this move was not favourable. Subsequently Darius had to turn his attention to the Ionian states in Anatolia. These states revolted against the Persians in 499 BC. The Ionian revolt lasted for about six years and was eventually crushed. The support extended to the Ionians by some states of the Greek mainland became one of the reasons for Darius to launch a full-scale invasion of the mainland. The coast of Thrace had been secured earlier and from here the Persians moved into Macedonia and then southwards in the direction of Athens. There is reason to believe that the elite of many Greek states were won over by the Persians and that they were integrated into the empire by being given leading positions in regional administration and the army. Nevertheless Darius's invasion ended in failure. The Persian army was defeated by the Athenians at the battle of Marathon (490 BC).

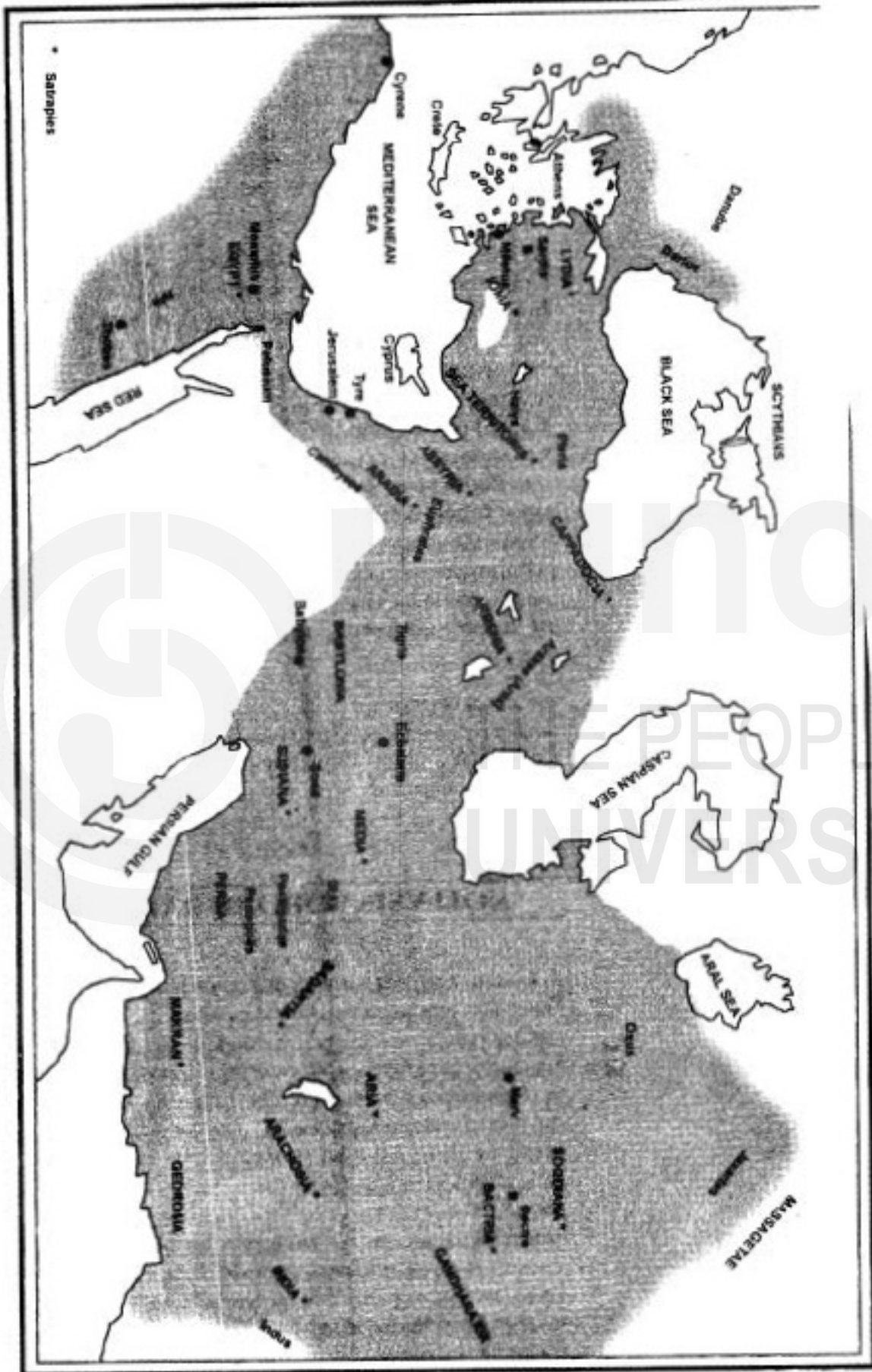
(Khshayarsha), 486-465 BC, renewed the invasion of the Greek mainland. He made elaborate arrangements for this purpose. These included setting up supply depots, laying of roads, construction of bridges, and securing allies. Xerxes attempted a two-pronged attack from both land and sea. The Persians were routed at sea by the Athenian navy in the battle of Salamis (480 BC). This was the turning point of the war. It dashed Persian hopes of controlling the Aegean Sea. The battle of Salamis was followed by a decisive victory of the combined Greek armies on land, at Plataea (479 BC). At Plataea the Greek troops were led by Sparta. The Persians completely withdrew from the Greek mainland after these reverses. Though there were no further military offensives into this region, from the point of view of the Greeks the Achaemenids continued to be a factor. Moreover, given their presence in Anatolia the Persians tried to interfere in Greek affairs whenever they got an opportunity to do so. For several decades during the fourth century BC they enjoyed a position of virtual hegemony over the Greek states. Yet in territorial terms Anatolia marked the extremity of the empire in the west.

11.3 ADMINISTRATIVE REORGANISATION

During the rule of Darius I the Persian Empire was the largest empire of the period. Its territorial expansion included Asia minor, Armenia, Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Persia, Northern part of Arabia, Afghanistan, Turkistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tazakistan, Macedon, parts of Indus Valley and a number of smaller regions. Administrative governance of such a vast empire required an effective administrative apparatus. Darius I set about to undertake the job.

His lasting achievement was reorganization of the Achaemenid empire. He welded into a compact political unit the farflung territories inherited by him. A regular system of tribute realization was instituted in order to ensure sufficient resources for supporting the centralized administrative structure of the state and a large army. A powerful monarchical state emerged under Darius with a vast amount of wealth concentrated in the hands of a very small ruling elite. This elite was increasingly drawn from prominent Persian families (especially the immediate family of Darius) who now completely monopolized political power, at least at the central level. The prestige and authority of the king was crucial for legitimizing the enormous power exercised by the imperial elite. An elaborate court ceremonial emphasized the majesty of the king. The evolution of the monarchical state under the Achaemenids was influenced by Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian monarchical traditions. In turn Achaemenid traditions were adopted or imitated by later rulers including Alexander the Great and his successors.

A prominent feature of the organization of the Achaemenid empire was its division into a number of provinces governed by 'satraps' (*khshatrapavan*). Greek texts use the term 'satrapy' to designate a Persian province. The division of the empire into satrapies goes back to the Median era when these units corresponded to the respective conquered lands. Darius I made satrapies the basic unit of administration at the provincial level. Henceforth the boundaries of satrapies did not necessarily coincide with the original boundaries of conquered lands. However, they were often named after the principal people who inhabited them. A satrap could be a semi-autonomous provincial ruler or



Map 1

a high official appointed by the king. In either case satraps had wide-ranging authority within their own domains, but were subject to overall supervision by the imperial government through civil and military officials appointed directly by the king.

Herodotus enumerates twenty satrapies while the Behistun inscription has a list of twenty-three satrapies. Some of these can be easily identified—as for example Parsa (Persis), Babairus (Babylon), Yauna (Ionia), Mada (Media), Armina (Armenia), Sparda (Sardis, i.e. Lydia), Parthava (Parthia), and Bakhtrish (Bactria). As has been pointed out some of these satrapies were already established prior to Darius. Darius gave to the satrapies a concrete shape as units of provincial administration. It was in this form that the satrapies survived for several centuries, though with some modifications. Alexander took over the satrapy structure when he conquered the Persian empire and the structure remained more or less intact in the successor states as well.

The ruler enjoyed the absolute power over the territories of the empire through the army and appointment of Satraps. The Satraps were supposed to keep regular contact with the rulers through frequent correspondence. The kings had special officials to keep a vigil called ‘listeners’ the ears of the king. They sent reports from provinces. The Satraps were to look after local administration, maintain law and order and contingents of Army.

The large size of the Satrapies at times made Satraps powerful and encouraged them to rebel. The situation demanded regular attention of the ruler because of the vast size of the empire.

The organization of a powerful army also provided the king with striking capability and help in suppressing the rebellions. The Persians formed the core of the army with men from other nationalities joining in. The elite group of the army most loyal to the king was termed ‘Imperishable Ten Thousand’ comprising of Persian spearmen and cavalry.

The empire was territorially too large to be efficiently governed from a single fixed capital. The king usually found it necessary to move one major administrative centre to another. This was particularly the case with the early Achaemenid rulers. Once Achaemenid rule had stabilized under Darius and his successors, preference was increasingly shown for Susa (Shush) in south-western Iran. Darius built a large palace at Susa and in the following centuries this city was the ‘normal recognized centre of government’ of the Achaemenids. Babylon retained its prominence both due to its strategic location and its historical importance. Babylon was, in fact, the foremost urban centre of the empire. In Parsa proper the Achaemenids developed an impressive imperial city which was known to the Greeks as Persepolis (modern Takhi-i-Jamshid). Darius and his successors constructed a series of grand palaces at Persepolis. This city primarily served a ceremonial purpose. This was the place where the kings celebrated the New Year festival and where local chieftains made ritual offerings of tribute. It has been suggested that the main treasury of the Achaemenid rulers was located at Persepolis. The magnificent royal city was destroyed by Alexander the Great, but the remains which still survive point towards the huge dimensions of the palace. Large blocks of stone were used to construct the palace. The walls are decorated with relief carvings. There were several rows of pillars. Persepolis is one of the finest examples of Achaemenid art and architecture.

The Achaemenid rulers were buried near Persepolis, at a place called Naqsh-e Rostam. Persepolis was situated close to the city of Pasargadae which was founded by Cyrus the Great as the capital of the Persian empire. Under the early Achaemenids the old Median capital, Ecbatana, still had considerable significance as an administrative centre. As already noted, Sardis was the main centre of Achaemenid government in western Anatolia.

11.4 SYSTEM OF COINAGE

The Achaemenids ruled over an empire which was inhabited by diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. It is remarkable that they were able to keep the empire unified over a long period of time despite this diversity and heterogeneity. Darius introduced a uniform coinage, standardized weights and measures, and promoted a new script to make the empire more cohesive. A uniform coinage with a high level of metallic purity promotes economic activities and exchange. At the same time circulation of this currency over a wide area is an assertion of political authority. The conquest of Lydia, the first state in history to issue coins on a regular basis, had a profound impact on Achaemenid monetary development.

The striking of coins was at this time a relatively new phenomenon. Issuing of coins by the state implied stamping pieces of precious metal (in convenient units of predetermined size, weight and purity) with symbols that signified the authority of the government and guaranteed the value of each piece. This was preceded by, and closely linked to, a long process of standardization of weights and measures. Over a period of nearly two centuries the Assyrian and Babylonian empires had achieved such standardization. The Achaemenids inherited the Babylonian standard that was widely prevalent in most of West Asia. Silver was the main standard for worth, i.e. the value of other precious metals as well as goods was measured in terms of their value in relation to silver. The metal was used for exchange without being coined. Fine silver was simply weighed for the purpose of exchange. Nevertheless the standardization of weights was crucial for developing a generally acceptable system of determining the worth of goods for exchange, and was an important prerequisite for the introduction of coinage.

The Babylonian weight standard was based on a sexagesimal system of multiples (the origins of which go back to the Sumerian civilization) in which 1 biltu ('talent') of 29,472 grams equaled 60 manu ('minae'); 1 manu of 491.2 grams equaled 60 shiqu ('shekels'); and 1 shiqu of 8.18 grams equaled 2 zuzu ('drachmae'). This standard was revised by Darius I (c. 515 BC) so that henceforth the weight of the talent was 30,240 grams, that of the mina was 504 grams and that of the shekel was 8.40 grams. The coins of Darius were based on the revised shekel. Coinage was an innovation which the Achaemenids borrowed from the Lydians.

A somewhat different system had evolved in western Anatolia, especially under Lydian influence. Here gold (often in an impure form), rather than silver, was initially the standard for worth. The earliest coins to be issued were struck out of an alloy of gold and silver (electrum). Electrum was available as a natural alloy in many parts of western Anatolia. Lydia and probably some of the Greek settlements in Anatolia began issuing electrum coins around 600 BC. By the time of Croesus Lydia had a bimetallic currency. Croesus is credited with this

reform. This meant that both gold and silver coins were issued and that the state established a fixed exchange rate between the two. The fixed rate of exchange between gold and silver as metals was expressed in the form of a guaranteed exchange rate between gold and silver coins.

When Lydia was annexed by the Achaemenids the type of gold and silver coins which were most common in the region were of a type referred to by historians as 'light Croeseids'. These were struck separately in gold (weight 8.05 grams) and silver (weight 5.40 grams). The 'light Croeseids' remained in circulation within Persian territories in the west for several years after the conquest of Lydia, and were even minted by the Achaemenids for some time. It was under Darius that coins of a different design began to be issued—both in silver and gold. These were the first truly Achaemenid coins and were minted at Sardis, the former capital of Lydia and headquarters of the Persian territories in western Anatolia. The silver coins were known to the Greeks as siglos (from shiqu or shekel, though their actual weight was different), while the gold coins of Darius are referred to as 'Darics'. The gold Darics conformed to the shekel and weighed 8.40 grams (the weight of the revised shekel) while the silver siglos were of the same weight as the former silver Croeseids (5.40 grams). The exchange rate was 1 gold Daric = 20 silver sigloi. The evidence from coin hoards indicates that the circulation of coins issued by Darius and his successors remained confined mostly to the western portions of the empire, particularly Anatolia. Apart from Achaemenid coins Athenian coins too were in circulation in this region. In other parts of the empire uncoined precious metal remained the medium of exchange.

The standardization of coinage, weights and measures helped the trading activities. A unified large empire with comparative security provided markets for large scale trading activities. We get evidence of fairly good quality artisanal production with craftsmen of different nationalities engaged in production of goods.

11.5 LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

In order to rule over an empire inhabited by so many different linguistic groups the Achaemenids needed to evolve a link language which would facilitate communication. Darius actively pursued a policy for encouraging the development of such a link language. It is generally recognized that the most widely spoken language of the empire was Aramaic. Aramaic was originally spoken by some of the tribes living in northern Mesopotamia. The use of Aramaic had steadily grown in the Assyrian empire and the language had subsequently penetrated the New Babylonian empire. In other words, Aramaic (with the various dialects derived from it) was already spoken by a large proportion of the population in Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine by the time the Persian empire came into being. What is more, Aramaic had emerged as the main language of trade in West Asia. It is not surprising that Darius and his successors promoted the use of Aramaic throughout the empire. An Aramaic script had also evolved which, because of its simplicity, could be used for a variety of purposes. This was an alphabetic script of twenty letters. It was derived from the Phoenician script and influenced the development of many other scripts of West Asia, including Hebrew.

Whereas Aramaic was essentially the language of the common people, the

language of the Achaemenid elite was a form of Persian which is designated as Old Persian. This may be regarded as the official language of the Achaemenid state. Old Persian was the language used in inscriptions and royal proclamations. The cuneiform script of the Mesopotamians was modified for writing Old Persian. Darius categorically states in one of his inscriptions that he invented a new cuneiform script. Though the process of adapting cuneiform to suit the requirements of Old Persian might have begun earlier it was probably completed under Darius. However, Aramaic (both language and script) was the main language of official documents and day-to-day imperial communication. The Aramaic script was sometimes also used for writing Old Persian. It needs to be noted that several other languages (Elamite, Babylonian, Egyptian etc.) were routinely used for official purposes, of which the trilingual Behistun inscription is an outstanding example.

11.6 RELIGION

The fast expansion of the Persian empire brought a large number of territories inhabited by people of different faiths and beliefs. The attitude of the Achaemenid state was open towards them. The Achaemenid state had a well-deserved reputation for religious tolerance. Although by the time of Darius I Zoroastrianism had become the dominant creed of the Persian elite, the religious traditions of the several communities which inhabited the empire continued to thrive. This was a key element of Achaemenid policy towards the conquered people's right since the time of Cyrus the Great. Cyrus definitely seems to have protected local cults as is apparent from his support to the Jews. He also helped to rebuild some of the sacred shrines of the Babylonians, for example the temple of the moon-god at Ur.

Personally Cyrus might have accepted some Zoroastrian rituals, but we have little information on this point. It is certain that under Darius Zoroastrianism had come to occupy a prominent place in the religious life of the Persian ruling class. The rise of Zoroastrianism goes back to the seventh century, or perhaps even earlier, when the prophet Zarathustra (Zardusht, Zarat-ushtra) taught the main tenets of this religion. Most scholars are of the view that Zarathustra lived and preached in north-eastern Iran. The semi-nomadic people of this area were his earliest followers. From here the ideas and beliefs of Zarathustra spread to other parts of Iran. We know that Zoroastrianism had made a lot of progress among the Medes.

During the course of its evolution Zoroastrianism incorporated some of the older Iranian religious traditions, including some aspects of polytheism. Zarathustra had taught a monotheistic doctrine, the fundamental feature of which was the worship of Ahura-Mazdah. As this doctrine developed, the universe was seen as being governed by two opposing forces. On the one hand are the forces of light and goodness, and on the other are the forces of darkness and evil. A cosmic struggle is constantly going on between the two. The forces of light and righteousness are represented by Ahura-Mazdah. Ahura-Mazdah is worshipped as the divine creator and lord of wisdom. The worship of fire is an important component of Zoroastrian ritual. Fire symbolizes light in the struggle against darkness. Subsequently some other divinities were accommodated within Zoroastrianism. It is significant that whereas Darius usually projected himself as a worshipper of Ahura-Mazdah he patronized some ancient Iranian cults as well.

Despite his adherence to Zoroastrianism Darius continued with the liberal policy of Cyrus. He is known to have respected Greek gods and goddesses. A Greek inscription from Darius's reign records his regard for Apollo. The successors of Darius too, by and large, left non-Iranian cults undisturbed. At the same time Zoroastrianism emerged as the official religion of the state. In other words it became an integral part of the state apparatus. This development was linked to the growing importance of the Magi, a hereditary priestly class which began to monopolize Zoroastrian rituals especially at the official level. The Magi had become quite powerful under Xerxes and their influence continued to grow. However the religious outlook of the Achaemenid state remained remarkably eclectic right till the end.

11.7 DECLINE OF THE EMPIRE

The Achaemenid empire flourished for more than 200 years with minor ups and downs. Every time a ruler died there was some sort of upheaval in different satrapies. The revolts in different regions occurred intermittently and were suppressed. Skirmishes on the borders were also taking place and making small dents but by and large the empire remained intact. The biggest blow came in the form of the attack of Alexander.

The Achaemenid empire came to an end as a result of the invasion of Persian territories by Alexander the Great. The Achaemenid ruler at this time was Darius III (336-331 BC). Alexander inflicted a series of defeats on the Persian army, beginning with the battle of Granicus (334 BC) in western Anatolia. Following this battle western Anatolia became a Macedonian territory. Subsequently Alexander moved toward Syria and defeated the Persian army led by Darius III at Issus (333 BC). Egypt was taken in 331 BC. Alexander then marched towards the Tigris and after crossing it defeated Darius at the battle of Gaugamela (331 BC). While Darius fled to Ecbatana, Alexander captured Babylon, Susa and Persepolis. As a symbolic act, marking the end of the Persian empire, Alexander ravaged the city of Persepolis. Darius himself was assassinated in 330 BC. Alexander the Great's conquests in effect amounted to the conquest of the Achaemenid empire. The consequences of these conquests will be discussed in the next Unit in the context of the history of ancient Greece.

11.8 SUMMARY

In this Unit we have discussed the process of the expansion and consolidation of the largest Persian empire of the period. Cyrus and Darius I played a key role in its formation. The division of the empire into administrative units called satrapies provided it certain stability. Satraps worked as an organised bureaucracy to sustain it. Standardization of the coinage and safe transportation of merchandise gave a fillip to economic activity.

Darius and his successors promoted Aramaic as a link language for the empire. Zoroastrianism which incorporated some of the older Iranian traditions became the most dominant religion. However, it was not forced on all regions of the empire and state followed a policy of high degree of religious tolerance.

The empire after flourishing for more than 200 years declined as a result of the invasion of the Alexander the Great around 334 BC. The empire gradually

disintegrated. In the 3rd Century A.D. we again witness the rise of another mighty empire – the Sasanid Empire in Iran.

11.9 EXERCISES

- 1) Give a brief account of the expansion of the Persian empire under the rule of Cyrus and Darius I.
- 2) Analyse the system of satrapies in the Achaemenid empire.
- 3) Write a brief note on the standardization of coinage in the Persian empire.
- 4) Write a short notes on:
 - (i) Aramaic
 - (ii) Zoroastrianism



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UNIT 12 ANCIENT GREECE

Structure

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Geographical Features
- 12.3 The Early Greek Civilizations
 - 12.3.1 The Minoan Civilization
 - 12.3.2 The Mycenaean Civilization
 - 12.3.3 The Dark Age
- 12.4 The Archaic and Classical Period
 - 12.4.1 Conflict of Landed Aristocracy and Peasantry: Reforms Start
 - 12.4.2 Transition to Democracy
 - 12.4.3 Conflict with Persia: Formation of Delian League
 - 12.4.4 Democratic Political Structure: Emergence of Deme
 - 12.4.5 Slave Labour
 - 12.4.6 Development of Philosophical Thought
 - 12.4.7 The End of the Classical Period
- 12.5 Summary
- 12.6 Exercises

12.1 INTRODUCTION

While the Achaemenids were building a vast empire which extended in the west to the shores of the Aegean Sea and included many Greek settlements of Anatolia, in Greece itself a brilliant civilization was taking shape. The pattern of development of ancient Greece represents an exception during the age of empires. Greece was unique in that it was the centre of a great civilization but did not develop into an empire or even a territorially large political state. The historical experience of Greece therefore needs to be examined from the point of view of its distinctiveness.

Circa 500 BC marks the beginning of the classical age of Greece, the most glorious phase of ancient Greek civilization. The classical age lasted from c. 500 BC to the Macedonian conquest of the Greek states in 338 BC. The classical age represented the culmination of a long historical process during which the foundations of Greek civilization were laid. By about 2000 BC the large island of Crete in Greece had emerged as the centre of the first bronze age civilization in Europe. This was the Minoan civilization which flourished between 2000 and 1400 BC.

In our discussion in this Unit first we will familiarise you with the geographical spread of the Greek Civilization. This would be followed by a chronological development of Greek civilization. This has been divided into two major sections i.e. i) Early Greek Civilization and ii) Archaic and Classical Period. The former has three main epochs the Minoan Civilization, the Mycenaean Civilization and the Dark Age. The latter has been discussed together in one section. In this section we have taken note of specific developments and features of whole period. The most important feature of the period is conflict of landed

aristocracy with peasants, and transition to democracy. Formation of Delian league and emergence of Deme are other important events. In the end a brief account of the development of philosophical thought in Greece would be provided.

12.2 GEORAPHICAL FEATURES

Before we proceed to examine the evolution of Greek civilization it would be useful to outline the geographical features of Greece. It should be noted that when we speak of ancient Greece we are referring to an area that was much larger than the present-day state of Greece. The Greek world in antiquity encompassed western Anatolia, Thrace, the islands of the Aegean Sea, Crete, Cyprus, mainland Greece, southern Italy and Sicily.

Mainland Greece is an irregularly shaped peninsula in south-eastern Europe, enclosed by the Ionian Sea in the west, the Aegean Sea in the east and the Mediterranean Sea in the south. The southern part of the peninsula is in the shape of a palm which extends into the Mediterranean. This is known as the peloponnese. The Peloponnese is almost an island, separated from the rest of the mainland by the Gulf of Corinth. A thin strip of land connects the north-eastern corner of the Peloponnese with the mainland. The prominent ancient city of Corinth is located at the junction of the Peloponnese and continental Greece. Beyond the narrow strip of land which forms the bridge between the Peloponnese and the mainland lies the region of Attica in the east. Attica is bound by the Aegean Sea on all sides. Athens is situated in Attica. To the north-west of Attica is the area called Boeotia. Thebes was the dominant city of Boeotia. Further north, along the Aegean coast, is the region of Thessaly. Moving in a clockwise direction from Thessaly we come to Macedonia and Thrace. Macedonia was the home of Alexander the Great. Thrace, part of which now constitutes the European zone of Turkey, is the easternmost part of southern Europe. It is separated from Asia by the Sea of Marmara. Crossing the Sea of Marmara brings one to western Anatolia. Western Anatolia and the Greek Peninsula lie on either side of the Aegean Sea.

The Aegean Sea was the geographical nucleus of the ancient Greek world. In the Aegean Sea itself there are a large number of islands of varying sizes. Off the west coast of Anatolia are some large islands such as Lemnos, Lesbos, Chios, Samos and Rhodes. Then there is a group of islands concentrated in the southern Aegean. The islands of this group are collectively called the Cyclades. The large rectangular island of Crete is situated south of the Peloponnese and the Cyclades. It may be mentioned here that Greek settlers had also colonized some areas of southern Italy and Sicily. These settlers are collectively referred to as Western Greeks.

12.3 THE EARLY GREEK CIVILIZATIONS

The early Greek Civilizations would be discussed in three parts the Minoan Civilization, Mycenaean Civilization and the Dark Age.

12.3.1 The Minoan Civilization

In deciding the chronology of ancient Greece the Minoan Civilization can be considered as the first bronze age civilization of the region. The civilization

emerged towards the end of third millennium BC and flourished till around 1400 BC. The civilization came to light in the early 20th century through the efforts of Sir Arthus Evans who conducted the diggings in the region. This was named after the legendary king Minos of the Crete mythology. The ruins are available in a number of towns the most prominent being Knossos, Phaistos and Mallia. It seems that palaces were the most prominent structures in these centres. Besides being centres of political authority the palaces were also centres of economic activity.

Sheep rearing and wool production were main produce of rural economy. Wheat, grapes and olives were main agricultural products. The goods were brought from rural areas to the cities for redistribution and trade. It seems that the Minoans had trading links with Egypt, Anatolia, the Lebanese Coast, Cyprus and Aegean through the sea routes. The Minoans had developed writing. The script remains undeciphered. It has been named Linear 'A'. It seems to have been used for trade and exchange.

The Minoan civilization of Crete came to an end around 1400 BC. Natural calamities, triggered by a major volcanic eruption in the southern Aegean, might have caused its sudden collapse. Eventually Crete was overwhelmed by colonizers from mainland Greece who, while they borrowed some aspects of Minoan civilization, developed a new bronze age civilization—the Mycenaean civilization.

12.3.2 The Mycenaean Civilization

Whereas Crete was the centre of the Minoan civilization, the Mycenaean civilization was a product of mainland Greece. This civilization, which flourished between c. 1600 and 1200 BC, came to light as a result of the pioneering excavations of Heinrich Schliemann. The civilization is named after the site of Mycenae (Mykenai) situated in the north-western corner of the Peloponnese. Other major Mycenaean sites are Tiryns, Pylos, Thebes, Orchomenos and Knossos.

When we speak of the Mycenaean we are not referring to a single political entity but several distinct settlements which formed separate states. These states were ruled by warrior chiefs. The chiefs usually bore the royal title wanax (oranax) and ruled over their territories from fortified palace complexes which dominated the Mycenaean urban centres. A powerful warrior aristocracy and an elaborate bureaucracy constituted the ruling elite. The fortified palace complexes exercised extensive control over the respective economies of the Mycenaean states through centralized bureaucratic structures. This bureaucracy regulated virtually every aspect of the economy. The Mycenaean had an extensive foreign trade. Oil, pottery and textiles were their main exports. They imported gold, copper and tin. Society was highly stratified with the ruling elite having access to a large surplus. The Mycenaean chiefs were buried in large beehive shaped tombs (*tholoi*) or in large chamber tombs. The resources that would have to be mobilized for constructing these tombs, as well as the fine craftsmanship of the objects found in them, leave us in no doubt as to the wealth possessed by many of the Mycenaean chiefs/kings.

The Mycenaean have left behind abundant written records which provide us with details about the role played by the palaces in the economy. The

Mycenaeans evolved a script which is referred to as the Linear B script. The Linear B script was deciphered in 1952 by Michael Ventris. Ventris found that the language of the script was an early version of the Greek language. The Mycenaeans were among the earliest Greek-speaking people to settle in the peninsula. The Greeks were a branch of the Indo-European people and their migrations must be viewed in the context of the tribal movements of the third millennium BC which we have discussed in Unit 10. The language of the Mycenaeans was somewhat different from that spoken by later Greek settlers and is labelled by scholars as 'proto-Greek'. This is the language of the Linear B script.

The Linear B records that have survived are mainly in the form of clay tablets. They are invariably inventories or accounts and contain no references to political history or religious practices. They were obviously compiled by palace officials to keep track of the surprisingly large number of transactions that the palace had to undertake in order to regulate a wide range of economic activities. The fact that the script exhibits a great deal of uniformity throughout the Mycenaean area shows that the bureaucracy, or at least the professional scribes, were drawn from a close-knit group with links extending over several parts of the peninsula.

The Mycenaean civilization lasted till c. 1200 BC. Another round of tribal migrations coincided with the simultaneous collapse of bronze age civilizations in the eastern Mediterranean by 1200 BC. In the traditional periodization of ancient Greek history the four centuries from 1200 to 800 BC are referred to as the Dark Age. Mycenaean cities went into decline, the Linear B script disappeared and trade was disrupted. It was traditionally believed that Dorian invasions (Dorians were a Greek-speaking tribe which settled in the southern Peloponnese where Sparta is located) were responsible for the destruction of the Mycenaean civilization, although this picture has now been completely revised. Source material for this period is rather scanty. Hence the use of the term 'Dark Age' for this period.

12.3.3 The Dark Age

The Dark Age lasted for nearly four centuries, coming to an end in c. 800 BC. The significance of this date is that around this time two great Greek epics, *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were written. Their composition is attributed to a poet by the name of Homer. These epics mark a turning point in Greek history. With *Iliad* and *Odyssey* written records are once again available for ancient Greece after a long gap. Apart from their great literary merit, these epics are a very rich historical source. The two works are part of the tradition of epic poetry. The main theme of *Iliad* is the war of a coalition of Greek states against the state of Troy (the ruins of ancient Troy are located in the northwestern corner of Anatolia). According to the story narrated in the epic this war, known as the Trojan war, lasted for ten years. *Odyssey* recounts the adventures encountered by Odysseus, one of the heroes of the war, on his homeward journey after the conclusion of the campaign. The epics give us some idea about various aspects of contemporary religion, mythology, beliefs, food habits and dress.

Scholars earlier held the view that *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were inspired by events which had taken place in the Mycenaean age and spoke about that period. There can be no doubt that some of the stories in these epics are derived from the Mycenaean era. They show an awareness of an earlier civilization in which

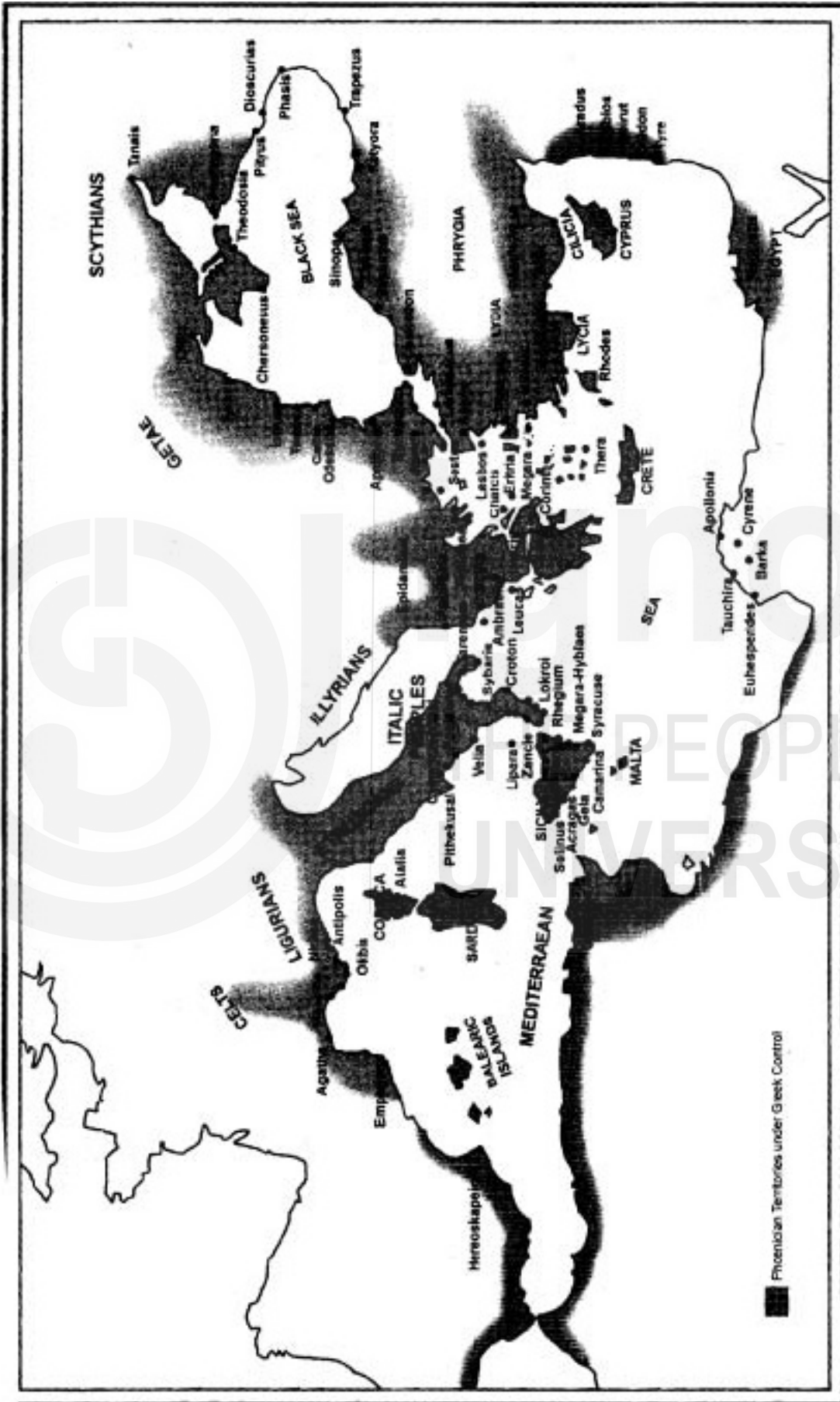
great heroes, kings and warriors lived. It was therefore thought that the Homeric epics were essentially a portrayal of Mycenaean society. The reinterpretation of these poems, particularly in the light of the more exhaustive archaeological evidence, has allowed scholars to view *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as compositions of the Dark Age. The actual details of everyday life contained in them relate to the closing phase of the Dark Age and these indicate a break with the Mycenaean social formation.

Historians now divide the Dark Age into two sub-periods: i) 1200 to 1050 BC and ii) 1050 to 800 BC. In the first sub-period Mycenaean urban centres declined and there are signs of extensive depopulation. The archaeological evidence reveals a sharp decline in population between 1300 and 1100 BC. Settlements are fewer and are smaller in size. Tribal migrations, at times violent, were also taking place in this period. The Mycenaean economy based on centralized regulation by the palace bureaucracy collapsed around 1200 BC. With it written records in the Linear B script also disappeared. Long distance trade was disrupted making it difficult to procure copper and tin for producing bronze objects. The reasons for this kind of widespread disintegration are still not clear and continue to be debated by scholars.

A little before 1000 BC a new economy and social structure began to emerge in Greece. By this time tribal migrations had resulted in Greek speaking people occupying the entire peninsula. Simultaneously the Aegean islands and the western coast of Anatolia were incorporated in the Greek linguistic zone. Southern Italy was also in the process of being colonized. The major Greek dialects evolved in this period. There were three major dialects: Ionic, which included the subdialect Attic spoken in Athens; Doric; and Aeolic. A significant feature of this period was the introduction and dissemination of iron technology from c. 1000 BC onwards. This period marks the transition to the iron age. The origins of iron technology remain obscure. However the archaeological evidence that has accumulated over the years indicates that Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia pioneered the use of this metal. It is not difficult to explain the rapid advance of iron in Greece once the technology became available. The people of the area had to depend wholly on imports for their supplies of copper and tin. The decline of eastern Mediterranean trade after 1200 BC created problems for Greek metallurgy because the supply of copper and tin could not be maintained. The introduction of iron offered a viable alternative. Since Greece had adequate deposits of iron ore the Greek states with their limited resources would have preferred the use of this metal rather than exchange their meagre surpluses for imported copper and tin. Iron technology became one of the factors that contributed to the recovery which took place in the period between 1050 and 800 BC.

The end of the Dark Age saw the revival of writing in Greece. We have seen that the Linear B script had already disappeared with the collapse of Mycenaean civilization. When the Greeks began using a script towards the end of the Dark Age it was a new script. This script was borrowed from the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians had evolved a script (c. 1500 BC) which was based on the phonetic principle. The symbols in this script stood for different sounds, i.e. it was an alphabetic script. The Greeks adopted the Phoenician script and modified it to suit their language. The Homeric epics were written in the new Greek alphabet.

Greek society as reflected in the Homeric epics was very different from that of



Map-2

the Mycenaean period. It was simpler, largely self-sufficient with little trade or exchange, and did not have powerful kings. In the latter half of the Dark Age the Greeks were divided into a large number of petty-states. These states were ruled by kings or chiefs with limited authority. They had to share political power with other members of the elite. In many states, such as Athens, monarchical rule had come to an end by the beginning of the Archaic Period and was replaced by oligarchical political structures.

12.4 THE ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL PERIOD

The period following the Dark Age is referred to as the Archaic period (c. 800 – 500 BC). The foundations of classical Greek Civilization were laid in this period. The period from 500 BC to 338 BC is generally referred as the classical age of Greece. Some prominent changes take place in archaic and classical period and need specific discussion. However, the division into these two periods is not always very sharp and there is lot of overlapping and continuity in various aspects of society, economy and culture. In view of this we would like to discuss it as one broad period of ancient Greece. The developments and institutions of the whole period would be analysed in this section. Wherever the features are clearly demarcated and can be distinctly confined to either of the periods it would be mentioned during the course of our discussion.

12.4.1 Conflict of Landed Aristocracy and Peasantry: Reforms Start

The Archaic Period (c. 800 – 500 BC) witnessed an intense conflict between the landed aristocracy and the peasantry throughout Greece. The origins of this struggle may be traced to the latter half of the Dark Age when historical changes had placed landowning aristocrats in a strong position. Between c. 800 and 600 BC the landed aristocracy consolidated its hold over land and the political structures of the Greek states. This led to the impoverishment of the small landholders. In their desperation the small landholders put up a tough fight against the aristocracy. The constant upheavals caused by this struggle reached a point of crisis by c. 600 BC. Sections of the aristocracy realized that unless some way was found out of the crisis their own prosperity would be threatened. Consequently they were forced to initiate reforms which incorporated concessions to the peasants.

We have some information on the reforms undertaken at Athens. The evidence from Athens is supplemented by references to other states and shows that similar historical developments were taking place in large parts of Greece. In 594 BC the Athenians resorted to the solution of nominating an arbitrator, named Solon, to carry out reforms. On the basis of a consensus Solon was vested with wide-ranging powers for a specified duration. The most radical reform of Solon was the abolition of debt bondage. This had emerged as one of the most serious problems faced by the peasantry. Impoverished peasants, who often had meagre holdings located in difficult terrain such as hillsides, had to take loans from wealthy landowners. When poor peasants failed to repay their debts they were forced into bondage. Laws pertaining to repayment of loans had stringent provisions which required a person who was unable to pay back a loan to accept bondage to the creditor. Peasants were thus simultaneously being

deprived of their land and were being reduced to the status of slaves. The major demands of the peasantry were redistribution of land and abolition of debt bondage. The abolition of debt bondage under Solon implied that henceforth Athenian free peasants could not be enslaved if they failed to repay their loans. The existing debt of the peasants was cancelled.

Nevertheless, Solon did not carry out redistribution of land. He did, however, introduce changes in the political system which gave ordinary Athenians the right to participate in government. We will discuss these later in the context of the evolution of Greek democracy. The abolition of debt bondage prevented the enslavement of the impoverished peasants, but in the absence of land reforms the aristocracy continued to possess a disproportionately large share of cultivable land. After 594 BC there was a shortage of rural labour. The big landowners, who required labour to cultivate their large holdings, solved this problem by increasingly employing slaves brought from outside.

Not surprisingly there were fresh upheavals in Athens within a few decades of Solon's reforms. Similar conditions prevailed in other states where incomplete reforms or no reforms had taken place. In these disturbed conditions some political leaders carried out a series of coups and assumed dictatorial powers in their respective states. This development completely altered the nature of governance in a large number of Greek states. The events at Athens typify the process. Peisistratus was the person responsible for the coup at Athens. He first attempted to seize power in 561, but was unsuccessful and had to flee from the city. He eventually managed to succeed in 545 BC. Peisistratus installed himself as supreme ruler of the city, setting aside existing constitutional arrangements and defying oligarchical institutions.

What was emerging was a new form of government for which contemporaries used the term 'tyranny'. Rulers like Peisistratus who had usurped power in this manner were called 'tyrants'. A significant aspect of Greek tyranny was that it had considerable popular support, mainly from among the impoverished peasantry and from groups which had accumulated wealth through trade but had traditionally no access to political power. When Peisistratus seized power he took over public wastelands that had been occupied by the aristocracy and distributed these among the small or dispossessed peasants. He also confiscated the property of some of the rich landowners who had gone into exile following the establishment of tyranny and gave these to needy farmers. The policies pursued by Peisistratus had a twofold outcome. First, the position of the peasantry was stabilized. Second, the monopoly of the entrenched landed aristocracy over the political structure was broken. Peisistratus died in 527 BC. He was succeeded by his son Hippias.

This appeared to be an attempt to transform tyranny into dynastic rule and caused much resentment among the people. In any case, the historical relevance of tyranny was now over. In 510 BC Hippias was overthrown. This date marks the beginning of classical democracy at Greece.

12.4.2 Transition to Democracy

In the Classical Period, and subsequently, the Greeks referred to the age of tyranny with intense dislike. Yet it should be borne in mind that tyranny speeded up the transition from oligarchical rule to democracy. The tyrants helped to

undermine the institutions through which the aristocracy has so far exercised political power. This phenomenon was not confined to Athens alone. At Corinth the tyrant Periander came to power c. 600 BC. A little before Periander, Cypselus had overthrown the Bacchidae--the ruling aristocratic group at Corinth. We also have information about other tyrants. Polycrates became tyrant of Samos c. 545 BC and Lygdamis seized power at Naxos around the same time.

The tyrants were instrumental in doing away with the traditional hereditary basis of political power. The Greek aristocracies were close-knit hereditary elites. They enjoyed power not merely because of their wealth but more significantly by virtue of their birth. The aristocratic families automatically held all executive, judicial, and military positions. That is why we refer to the political structures of the Greek states during the Archaic Period as being oligarchical in nature. The tyrants struck at the roots of this oligarchical control, thereby creating conditions for the transition to democracy. During the course of the Archaic Period a number of Greek states evolved into democracies. Some of the earliest democracies that we have information about were those of Chios and Megara where democratic institutions had come into existence around c. 600 BC.

Even though the degree of democratization varied from state to state, it would not be incorrect to say that in Greece by the beginning of the Classical Period common people participated in the political process to a much greater degree than what we find in other contemporary societies. This was a fundamentally new system of government, especially for societies with class differentiation. *Polis* was the term most frequently used to denote those political entities in ancient Greece which had some aspects of democratic functioning. The forms of government of the various *polis* (plural *poleis*) ranged from purely oligarchical on the one hand, to the mature democracy of Athens on the other. In between stood the states, probably the majority, with elements of oligarchy combined in varying proportions. The states about which we have information do not show any homogeneity in the structure of the *polis*. Athens and Sparta had emerged as the two leading *poleis* in Greece by the beginning of the Classical Period. The historical evidence is also quite uneven. While we have many details about Athens, and to a lesser extent Sparta, contemporary sources tell us very little about important democracies such as Corinth and Syracuse.

The *polis* was territorially a small political entity. The size of the population was also relatively small. Given the constraints of ancient society, democracy would not have been functional had the *polis* been large either territorially or in terms of its inhabitants. This point needs to be emphasized because Greek democracy was a direct democracy. In modern democracy the people choose their representatives who then legislate and govern on their behalf. In ancient Greece, democracy implied participation by all the citizens in the basic organ of the democratic system, namely the assembly.

The concept of citizenship was a restricted one. Only the indigenous, native, residents of a *polis* (and their descendants) were recognized as citizens. Citizenship rights did not extend to all inhabitants, not even all the free inhabitants. Firstly, women were excluded. Only male adults enjoyed the privilege of being citizens in the political sense. Secondly, all those who were not original residents of the *polis*, or were considered outsiders for some reason

or the other (e.g. if they were a conquered community and had been deprived of their political rights), did not form part of the citizen body. In Sparta the free non-citizens were called perioikoi; at Athens they were known as metics (*metoikoi*). Many of the traders settled at Athens were metics. Of course slaves had no rights whatsoever.

One should add here that only citizens could own land. There was also a close link between citizenship rights and military service. The Greek states did not maintain standing armies of professional soldiers. To a large extent this was because they lacked the resources for financing such an army. All free adult males of the community were expected to render military service. In other words, the citizens were simultaneously soldiers. Citizens had to equip themselves with their fighting gear out of their own resources, something that was possible only if they possessed some land. The backbone of the Greek armies was the hoplite infantry (foot-soldiers). The overwhelming majority of the hoplites were small and middle farmers. We could say that Greek armies were essentially armies of peasant-citizens.

The citizens of the Greek *polis* could exercise their right to participate and vote in the assembly, which was the basic right of citizenship, by personally attending the meetings of the assembly. One had to actually go to the meetings of the assembly, usually held in some open space in the city-centre, in order to exercise this right. Such a conception of democracy would have been unworkable if the respective Greek states possessed a big area or a large population. The actual task of governance was carried out through a smaller body, the council. With the decline of monarchy, real power had passed into the hands of oligarchical councils dominated by the hereditary landed elite.

Given its nature and large size the assembly could not meet very frequently. Even when it met it could only debate and vote on few issues. This gave the council wide ranging authority for intervening in the functioning of the assembly. Usually the council convened the assembly (unless dates were traditionally fixed), prepared its agenda, and guided its sessions. To some extent this was intended to be a check on the assembly. The council was a very powerful body in most states and though in many cases its membership was monopolized by the landed aristocracy yet at least at Athens it had become genuinely representative by c. 500 BC.

Athens has a special significance in any discussion on Greek democracy due to the scope of its accomplishment. Moreover, our knowledge about the political structure of Athens is more extensive than that of other states. It may be stated at the outset that in terms of the development of its democratic structure Athens was an exception rather than the rule in ancient Greece. We have already stated that Solon made changes in the political system which gave ordinary Athenians the right to participate in the government. His reforms (594 BC) represent an important stage in the evolution of Athenian democracy. Solon revived the Athenian assembly which had not met for a long time and had ceased to function. He simultaneously constituted a new Athenian council called the *boule*. This council had four hundred members and it superseded the old oligarchical council. The old Athenian council, called Aeropagus, was an organ of the aristocracy. Membership of the latter body was traditionally monopolized by a hereditary elite known as the 'Eupatridae'. The Aeropagus was not abolished, but its functions were curtailed till eventually it ceased to play an

important role. The *boule* now became the main centre of political power. Membership of the *boule* was based on property qualifications and not on hereditary right, which in itself was an innovation.

Solon divided the Athenian citizens into four classes. The property or wealth possessed by a citizen determined the class in which he was placed. Right at the top were the *pentacosiomedimni*, who possessed land which yielded at least 500 *medimnoi* (a unit for measuring the quantity of grain) of wheat, or its equivalent value in wine or oil. Next were the citizens whose land yielded at least 300 *medimnoi* (*hippeis*). The third category was that of owners of land yielding at least 200 *medimnoi*. Those belonging to this class were called the *zeugitai*. The *zeugitai* were small and middle peasants who also constituted the main strength of the Athenian hoplite infantry and could not therefore be easily ignored. Right at the bottom were the *thetes* who had property yielding less than 200 *medimnoi*. The *thetes* were the poor peasantry. We can see that political participation was intimately tied up with landownership and the amount of land owned by a citizen determined his place within the political structure.

Membership of the *boule* was open only to the first three classes. The impoverished sections, i.e. the *thetes* were excluded from the council. In other words the council was essentially a body of the rich and middle peasantry. Qualifications for public offices corresponded to the four-fold class division. The first two classes held the principal political and military offices. The *zeugitai* held minor offices. The *thetes* only had the right to participate in the meetings of the assembly.

After the overthrow of Hippias in 510 BC the political structure was further reformed. The crucial democratic reforms at the beginning of the classical period are attributed to Cleisthenes, who for some years was the most important political figure at Athens following the end of tyranny. A brief outline of some of the key political events in Greece during the Classical Period might be useful for a better understanding of the evolution of the political structure of Athens in this era.

12.4.3 Conflict with Persia: Formation of Delian League

Greek history in the latter half of the sixth century BC has to be viewed against the backdrop of the westward expansion of the Persian empire. We have already discussed this in detail in Unit 11. Persian expansion into western Anatolia, the Aegean and mainland Greece coincided with the phase of tyranny and the beginning of the Classical period at Athens. Between c. 500 and 480 BC the states of the Greek peninsula were locked in a fierce contest with the Achaemenids. Sparta was at this time the foremost military power on land. Athens was the main naval power, though it also had a fairly strong army. The Athenians had built a strong navy which played a leading role in the conflict with Persia. Themistocles was the architect of Athenian naval strength. The Greeks pooled together their resources under the leadership of Athens and Sparta in order to resist the Persian onslaught (for details of Persian campaigns in Greece refer to Unit 11).

Whereas the decisive battles of Salamis (480 BC) and Plataea (479 BC) had halted the Persian advance into the Aegean Sea, the threat of further Persian campaigns still remained. The Greek states were aware of the need to pool

together resources on a long-term basis to thwart further invasions. No state had the capacity to fight the Persians entirely on its own. On the Peloponnese there was a strong military alliance under the leadership of Sparta. With this arrangement the Peloponnesians were better placed to defend themselves. The problem was much more serious for the Aegean islands and the coastal states since they had no such mechanism. It was as a solution to this problem that Athens, after Salamis and Plataea, took the initiative to form a confederation of states under its own leadership (487 BC). This confederacy has come to be known as the Delian League. The Delian League derived its name from the island of Delos where the common treasury of the confederacy was located. The primary objective of forming this confederacy was to maintain a strong navy in the Aegean Sea. The members of the Delian League made regular contributions for this purpose.

Once the Persian threat receded, the Athenians transformed the character of the League. They used their dominant position within the League to utilize its resources for promoting its own interests. From a voluntary confederation the Delian League gradually became an empire ruled by the Athenians. The contributions to the League now became enforced tribute payable to Athens. The wealth that the empire, and control over the Aegean Sea, brought to Athens was crucial for sustaining its democratic institutions in the Classical Period and keeping discontent in check.

Having established its hegemony over the Aegean, Athens tried to expand its empire by including the Peloponnese in it. This brought it into conflict with Sparta. A prolonged military contest between the two states ensued. This is known as the Peloponnesian War which lasted from 431 to 404 BC. By 404 BC Athens had been defeated by Sparta and its navy was destroyed. For several decades after that Sparta remained the major Greek power, though it was subsequently challenged by Thebes. The conflicts among the Greek states after the Peloponnesian War gave the Persians an opportunity to interfere in their affairs, and thus to become politically dominant in Greece.

12.4.4 Democratic Political Structure: Emergence of Deme

The hundred years between the overthrow of Hippias and the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian war witnessed the growth of a highly evolved democratic political structure at Athens. This structure owed a lot to the initiatives of Cleisthenes (c. 507 BC). Athenian citizens had been traditionally divided into four Ionian tribes. These traced their descent from the tribes or clans which had originally settled in Attica. Following the political reforms of Solon, each tribe sent one hundred members to the *boule*. Cleisthenes did away with the kinship principle for grouping the citizens, and replaced it with ten residential tribes or *phylai*. These new *phylai* were based on a radically new concept. The *phyle* to which a citizen belonged was determined by the place where he resided and not by his kinship ties.

The primary unit of the democratic structure established by Cleisthenes was the 'deme'. Every citizen was first and foremost a member of a particular deme. The deme was the smallest geographical unit into which the *polis* of Athens was divided for political purposes. There were 139 demes in all. The demes were responsible for maintaining registers of citizens. They had their own local elected governments, including an assembly and officials. The local

governments were headed by the *demarchos*. Cleisthenes reformed the *boule* as well. The strength of the council was raised from four hundred to five hundred members. Fifty members were selected from each of the ten *phylai*. Membership of the *boule* was thrown open to all citizens, including *thetes*. Any citizen over the age of thirty was eligible for membership of the *boule*. The main executive and military officials of the *polis* were the *archons*. Ever since monarchy had come to an end in Athens the *archons* had been the chief executive and military officers. Throughout the Archaic Period the aristocracy had monopolized these posts. During the Classical Period the archonship was gradually made an elective post and it became possible for ordinary citizens to hold these positions. Despite its limitations, Athenian democracy was an outstanding achievement.

12.4.5 Slave Labour

A distinctive feature of ancient Greek civilization was the widespread use of slave labour in various sectors of the economy. There is evidence of the presence of large numbers of slaves in other ancient civilizations, such as those of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia and the Hittites. The Mesopotamian and Hittite law codes indicate that institutionalized slavery existed in these civilizations. However the scale of slavery was qualitatively different in ancient Greece. Here for the first time in history slave labour was used extensively for production. The initial pool of slaves was formed of prisoners of war. This source was supplemented from within the community by those who were enslaved due to their inability to pay loans (debt bondage). Nevertheless wars brought captive slaves in much larger numbers. The earliest slaves in Greece, as in other societies, were women. Women slaves formed a significant portion of the workforce in Mycenaean palaces. For example, the palace at Pylos had at least 550 women engaged in textile production. In the Linear B tablets the term used for slaves is *doeri*. The Homeric epics also contain numerous references to women being enslaved during wars.

By the Archaic and Classical Periods slaves were to be found in every sector of production, especially in mining, handicrafts and agriculture. Some historians are of the view that the role of slavery in Greek agriculture has been exaggerated and that the agrarian economy depended mainly on the peasantry and free labour.

At the end of the Dark Age Sparta was already using slave labour on a scale that was unprecedented. Sparta had annexed the territory of Messenia located in the southern Peloponnese and had converted the entire population of this area into slaves. The Spartans introduced a peculiar form of slavery called 'helotry'. Helots were slaves who were owned collectively by the entire Spartan community. Agricultural land in Messenia was divided into holdings called *kleroi* and allotted to Spartan citizens. These holdings, alongwith the land already possessed by the Spartans, were cultivated with the labour of helots. Since there was considerable social differentiation in Sparta, the *kleroi* were not distributed equitably. The aristocracy got a much bigger share.

The distribution of helots was regulated by the state. The state assigned a certain number of slaves to each family depending upon its requirements for labour. **The difference between helotry and other types of slavery was that helots were not owned individually.** Moreover, they were allowed to maintain family ties. The children born to the helots had the same status as their parents.

This meant that Sparta was able to meet its requirements of slave labour from among the Messenians for several generations. It should not be assumed that helotry was a more humane form of slavery as some scholars have suggested. Helotry was a more primitive form of slavery which in turn reflected the relative backwardness of Spartan economy. Private property was not fully developed in Sparta and there were many tribal survivals in its social organization. Helotry was prevalent in other Greek states as well, as for instance in Thessaly, Crete and Argos. In other parts of Greece privately owned slaves increasingly became a typical feature of Greek society and economy. Several terms were used to describe such slaves, the most common being *doulos*.

In Athens slaves were mostly privately owned. These slaves were regarded as property and bought and sold in the market as commodities. The prosperity of Athens during the Classical Period rested on the expansion of slave labour. Historians have offered figures for Athenian slaves during the fifth century BC ranging from 60,000 to 110,000. It has been estimated that of these, nearly 20,000 to 30,000 worked in the Athenian silver mines. Besides agriculture and mining, slaves dominated handicraft production and were engaged in various kinds of domestic and menial work. It is necessary to emphasize that while there was slave labour in every sector of the economy, free labour was also to be found in all types of production (see also the discussion on Roman slavery in Unit 13).

12.4.6 Development of Philosophical Thought

The ancient Greece may be credited with a very rich intellectual contribution. Due to constraints of space it would not be possible for us to go into detailed analysis of the Greek philosophical tradition. We intend to familiarise you with some basic factual information on the philosophical thought that developed in Greece. Their intellectual tradition touched many aspects of human society and knowledge. History, Philosophy, Mathematics and Medicine were some of the main areas influenced by the ideas of the Greek thinkers. The development of democratic traditions in Greece helped in creating an environment conducive to intellectual discourse and growth.

The Ionian School of thought (c. 600 BC) was one of the earliest philosophic tradition. Thales, Anaximandes and Anaxemenes were the main proponents of this school. They were mainly concerned with the basic elements of nature (air, water earth) and their driving force. Pythagoras, an outstanding thinker believed in the transmigration of the soul and laid emphasis on achieving harmony for the soul. He was involved with the study of nature, musical scale and mathematics. However, he is most famous for his geometrical theorem which states that, in a right angled triangle, the square of the length of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. Hippocrates was one of the outstanding thinker of the classical period in the area of medicine. He gave medicine a scientific foundation replacing magical cures. He believed in treating diseases by diagnosing on the basis of examining the symptoms scientifically.

Herodotus (c.484 – 425) is called ‘the father of history’ for giving it a distinct identity as a branch of knowledge. History which was treated as a mix of facts, fiction, myths, legends, fables and anecdotes was given a new meaning based on authentic facts and their verification. He wrote detailed accounts of Persian wars. He widely travelled and gathered information about various

countries. He always verified and evaluated his information before writing his accounts.

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are considered as the most towering thinkers of the classical Greek Philosophy. Socrates (469 - 399 BC) is credited with a shift from thinking about nature to thinking about the nature of human existence. The refinement of various categories of philosophy was his major contribution. His student Plato (427 – 347 B.C.) established an academy at Athens and taught philosophy. He is regarded as an ‘idealist’. He argued that things have no independent existence outside our minds and believed that experience is unreal, only ideas are real. He influenced later Arab and Western thought in a big way. Plato’s disciple Aristotle (384 – 322 B.C) held ideas which were different from those of his teacher. He disagreed with Plato’s view that experience was unnecessary to understand reality. He was a keen student of Science and studied plants and animals. Both Plato and Aristotle were opposed to the idea of involving masses in all decision making processes. They held the view that people have a limited role to play in the government. This was, to some extent, a reflection of the thinking of the elite in Athens who believed in curtailing democratic rights.

12.4.7 The End of the Classical Period

The Classical Period came to an end in 338 BC when the Macedonians subjugated the *poleis* of the Greek peninsula and the Aegean Sea. Macedonia, just as other regions located north of mainland Greece, had been a relatively backward area. Using improved military techniques and the resources of the Macedonian plains, king Philip II (382-336 BC) created an empire which eventually included the Greek states of the peninsula and the Aegean. In 338 BC Philip defeated the Greek city-states at Chaeronea and placed them under Macedonian rule. With the Macedonian conquest the era of the *polis* came to an end. As a political entity the *polis* ceased to exist after 338 BC. Philip II was succeeded in 336 BC by his son Alexander the Great who founded a vast empire.

Alexander launched a massive expansionist programme following his accession. His primary aim was to destroy Persian power in West Asia so as to consolidate Macedonian rule over the entire region. By 330 BC Alexander had conquered the Persian empire after defeating the last of the Achaemenid emperors (Darius III). His subsequent campaigns brought him to the banks of the Indus. Alexander died at Babylon in 323 BC. The eastward expansion of the Macedonian empire under Alexander had made Anatolia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Iran, Afghanistan and some parts of Central Asia and northwest India, Macedonian-ruled territories. Following the death of Alexander some of the outlying regions of the empire were lost but the greater part of Alexander’s territories remained under Macedonian control.

Alexander had left no heir to his vast empire and had made no arrangements for appointing a successor. A bitter power struggle among his leading officials and military commanders (referred to as the ‘Diadochi’ or successors) broke out after his death. This struggle lasted almost till 275 BC. The empire was eventually partitioned among three of the Diadochi—Seleucus, Ptolemy and Antigonus. The dynasties of these successors ruled over their respective portions of the empire: the Seleucids in Iran, Mesopotamia and Syria; the Ptolemies in Egypt; and the Antigonids in Macedonia.

The period from the death of Alexander and the founding of the Seleucid, Ptolemaic and Antigonid empires down to the time when Rome became the supreme power in the eastern Mediterranean (c. 300 to 30 BC) is referred to as the Hellenistic age. The successor states which came into existence as a result of the division of Alexander's empire are called Hellenistic kingdoms. The Hellenistic kingdoms were governed by a Macedonian/Greek ruling elite and Greek became the official language of Iran, West Asia, Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean. Greek also became the chief language of intellectual discourse in this area. The Hellenistic kingdoms created conditions for disseminating the accomplishments of classical Greek civilization over a large part of West Asia and in Egypt. Since the Asian and north African territories of the Hellenistic kingdoms were centres of grand ancient civilizations, the Greek ruling classes of these empires adopted several customs of their subjects. This gave rise to a dynamic cultural tradition which may be conveniently labelled as Hellenistic civilization.

12.5 SUMMARY

The Greece as we mentioned earlier is a unique case in the age of empires as it was a centre of great civilization but did not develop into an empire. In this unit we tried to give an overview of around 2000 years of ancient Greece. It is not possible to give details of all aspects of such a great civilization in one Unit. We have, therefore, confined our discussion to some of the salient features of Greek Civilization. In the early phase which is roughly upto c.800 BC we studied the development of Minoan, Mycenaean and Dark Ages.

The Archaic and classical periods witnessed some significant social and political developments. Conflict of peasantry and landed aristocracy and subsequent transition to Greek democracy were important changes. The period between 500 BC and 480 BC witnessed regular conflict with Persian empire. As a result attempts were made in Greek states to pool together their resources to face the external aggressions. Confederacy so formed came to be known as Delian League. During classical period democratic political structures got strengthened with the formation of Deme. Extensive use of slave labour in various sectors of production was one of the unique features of Greek history during the classical period. We also provided a brief account of the development of philosophical thought in particular contributions of Herodotus, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The end of the classical period of Greek history has been discussed in the last section of the Unit.

12.6 EXERCISES

- 1) Give a brief account of the early Greek Civilizations.
- 2) Write 100 words each on:
 - (i) Iliad and Odyssey
 - (ii) Linear 'B' script
- 3) Discuss in brief the nature of conflict of aristocracy with peasantry and how it culminated in the establishment of democracy.
- 4) Write brief notes on:
 - (i) Delian League
 - (ii) Deme
- 5) What were the main features of the institution of slavery in ancient Greece?
- 6) Write in 100 words the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers.

UNIT 13 THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Structure

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 The Roman Expansion
 - 13.2.1 The First Phase
 - 13.2.2 The Second Phase
- 13.3 Political Structure and Society
 - 13.3.1 Social Orders and the Senate
 - 13.3.2 Officials of the Republic
 - 13.3.3 Struggle Between Patricians and Plebeians
 - 13.3.4 The Assembly
 - 13.3.5 Conflict of the Orders
 - 13.3.6 Social Differentiation in Plebeians
- 13.4 Conflicts and Expansion
 - 13.4.1 Professional Army and War Lords
 - 13.4.2 Wars for Expansion
 - 13.4.3 Struggle of War Lords with the Senate
- 13.5 Slavery
- 13.6 Summary
- 13.7 Exercises

13.1 INTRODUCTION

You have read in Unit 12 that Alexander the Great created a vast, but shortlived empire, which was partitioned soon after his death. Following the end of the Persian empire, and with the disruption of the unity of Alexander's Macedonian empire, a new political entity rose to prominence in the Mediterranean region. This was the Roman empire which became the largest and most enduring empire in antiquity. The nucleus of the empire lay in Italy and subsequently it encompassed the entire Mediterranean world. Roman expansion into the Mediterranean began soon after the break-up of the Macedonian empire. By this time the city of Rome in Italy had succeeded in bringing almost the entire Italian peninsula under its control.

Rome was among the many settlements of Latin-speaking people in Italy. Latin forms part of the broad Indo-European group of languages. In the period after c. 2000 BC several Indo-European tribes were settled in Italy and these intermingled with indigenous groups such as the Etruscans. Both the Latins and the Etruscans played an important role in the early phase of the history of Rome. Rome, located on the banks of the Tiber river in the central part of Italy not far from the western coast of the peninsula, was traditionally supposed to have been founded in 753 BC. According to the traditional history of the city, settlements on seven hills along the Tiber river were enclosed by a wall in 753 BC. This became the city of Rome. However, the historicity of this date has not been established. The archaeological evidence suggests that the city was first fortified at a much later date, c. 550 BC. It is around this time that the population of the settlements on the seven hills began to expand. The low-

lying area around the hills was initially covered with swamps and these had to be drained before the foothills could be inhabited. The rural settlements enclosed by the wall soon grew into a major urban centre.

Our knowledge of the early history of Rome is rather sketchy. According to tradition Rome had become a republic by 510 BC. Monarchy was abolished. After this date the city was ruled by an oligarchy consisting of the wealthy Latin aristocracy of Rome. This makes the Roman empire very different from the other empires which we have discussed in the previous units. The Roman empire was unique in that for nearly five centuries it had a republican form of government and was not ruled by a monarchy. The government was headed by two magistrates, called Consuls, who were elected annually. The main instrument of aristocratic power was the oligarchical council or Senate. The Senate was the supreme body of the Roman Republic. There were also assemblies of citizens, though at the beginning of the Republic they had almost no share in governance. The last hundred years of the republic witnessed the rise of professional army. The segments of this army were controlled by war commanders and were loyal to them rather than the State. These commanders or war lords had regular conflicts with each other and also as a group with Roman State. Large scale use of slave labour was also one of the important features of Roman republic

13.2 THE ROMAN EXPANSION

The Roman Republic lasted around 500 years from c. 510 to 27 BC. It was during this period that the city state grew into a huge and powerful empire. The growth came through series of wars and conflicts. The expansion was achieved over a long period of time in two distinct phases.

13.2.1 The First Phase

In the first phase of its expansion Rome was engaged in bringing the entire Italian peninsula under its control. This phase lasted for more than two centuries, from c. 500 to 280 BC. Rome began by establishing its supremacy over central Italy. It forged alliances with the Latin-speaking people of the area. These alliances provided the Romans with resources for successful campaigns against non-Latin states. The crucial event in the struggle against non-Latin states of central Italy was the conquest of Veii in 396 BC after almost ten years of struggle. Veii was an Etruscan city situated close to Rome and was for a long time its main rival. The victory over Veii placed the land and wealth of Veii at the disposal of Rome. Rome could now pursue its expansionist programme more aggressively. A little later the Celts invaded Rome and destroyed it. They withdraw with lots of booty. This was a serious setback. The Romans recovered soon and established their supremacy in warfare. They succeeded in bringing large parts of central Italy under them.

Having brought most of central Italy under its rule by c. 295 BC, Rome turned its attention to southern Italy. In the previous unit (Unit 12) we referred to the presence of Greek settlements in this part of Italy. The Greek states of southern Italy strongly resisted Roman expansion. Eventually after some fiercely fought battles these states were subjugated by the Romans. This completed the first major phase of Roman expansion. At the end of this phase the entire peninsula was directly or indirectly subject to Rome.

13.2.2 The Second Phase

The Romans were now in a position to embark upon a second phase of expansion the objective of which was to extend Roman influence to the Mediterranean. This immediately resulted in a conflict with the Carthaginians who at this time dominated the western Mediterranean. Carthage, strategically located on the north African coastline (in modern Tunisia), was originally a Phoenician trading settlement which had been founded sometime in the ninth century BC. This had grown into a vast empire which included large parts of the western Mediterranean (including Sicily, Spain etc.). When Rome tried to annex Sicily after having consolidated its position in southern Italy, it got involved in a prolonged military contest with the Carthaginian empire. It should be borne in mind that Roman expansion into the western Mediterranean could only have taken place at the expense of Carthage. For over a century Rome fought a series of wars against the Carthaginians.

The wars between Rome and Carthage are known as the Punic Wars. There were three Punic Wars (First Punic War, 264-241 BC; Second Punic War, 218-201 BC; and Third Punic War, 149-146 BC). By the end of the Third Punic War the Carthaginian empire had been completely destroyed and the city of Carthage itself was occupied. Carthaginian territories were annexed by Rome. The territories taken over during the course of the Punic Wars were reorganized into Roman provinces—the Roman provinces of Sicily, Spain and Africa (Africa was the name given to the province consisting of Carthage and its adjoining territory situated in north Africa, broadly corresponding to present-day Tunisia).

Simultaneously, the Romans had brought Macedonia and the Greek states under their control. The Antigonids who ruled over Macedonia were defeated (167 BC) and subsequently in 147 BC Macedonia was annexed by Rome. Macedonia became another Roman province and the Greek states were placed under indirect Roman rule, supervised from Macedonia. Soon Roman influence extended to Egypt as well. Egypt was, as you might recall, ruled by the Ptolemaic dynasty. It became a Roman protectorate which implied that it could no longer pursue an independent foreign policy. Western Anatolia too had passed under Roman rule and was constituted into the province of Asia (not be confused with the continent of Asia). Thus, by the middle of the second century BC the entire Mediterranean was directly or indirectly under the Romans. The Roman empire continued to expand for more than two centuries after this, but the main contours of its territorial orbit were already well-defined. The Mediterranean Sea remained the nucleus of the empire. Before we look at the subsequent expansion of Rome, it is necessary to examine the Roman political structure and the society on which it was based.

13.3 POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIETY

The early Romans had kingship along with the senate and assembly. The senate wielded many powers and there were regular conflicts with the kings. In 510 BC monarchy came to an end at Rome and a republican state was established which lasted till 27 BC. At the beginning of the Republic political power was monopolized by the Roman aristocracy. Now, almost complete power was vested in the Senate an oligarchical council. Membership of the Senate was open only to the aristocracy.

13.3.1 Social Orders and the Senate

Here one would like to draw attention to a distinctive feature of Roman social organization. Roman society was marked by a permanent division of the inhabitants (citizens) into two *orders*: the patrician order and the plebeian order. The patricians constituted a small close-knit hereditary elite while the plebeians were the common people. However both the orders were included in the category of citizens. The division of the Romans into two orders has a few similarities with the Indian caste system. This division had a permanency which resembles the permanency of being born into a particular caste. A citizen was born a patrician or a plebeian. A plebeian could not become a patrician just by acquiring wealth or political power. For a long time intermarriage between the two orders was prohibited by law. The patricians were the economically, politically and socially dominant group in Roman society. Being born a patrician meant automatic access to wealth, political power and a high social and ritual status. Patricians had extensive control over Roman religion. Many of the important priesthoods remained closed to the plebeians almost till the end of the Republic.

Right since the beginning of the Republic the Senate, which was the main organ of the state, was monopolized by the patricians. Only patrician males could be members of the Senate. The plebeian citizens (and all women) were excluded from it. In the early Republic the Senate had 300 members. In the later Republic the number went up to 600. Membership of the Senate was by cooption, i.e. the original members themselves chose additional or new members. The initial members must have been the heads of powerful aristocratic families who had overthrown the monarchy. Membership of the Senate was for life. The Senate had wide-ranging powers, most of which were not formally defined. The overwhelming majority of senators were big landowners. In other words, the Roman Republic was ruled by a landed patrician aristocratic oligarchy.

13.3.2 Officials of the Republic

As mentioned earlier, the highest officials of the Republic were two annually elected magistrates known as Consuls. They presided over the Senate and performed executive, judicial and military functions. It should be noted that the Consuls were elected by an assembly of all the citizens (which included the plebeians) and not by the Senate. Consuls could seek re-election without any restrictions. Till 367 BC only patricians could become Consuls. In 367 BC, following a prolonged struggle, one of the consulships was thrown open to the plebeians. This provision remained a mere formality for a long time because the patricians controlled the electoral process and could manipulate the choice of candidates. It was only in the late Republic that plebeians actually started getting elected to the consulship. This was the only way in which a plebeian could enter the Senate since a Consul was automatically made a senator. Towards the end of the Republic some privileged plebeians were thus able to become members of the Senate.

The Roman Republic had several other elected magistrates who looked after various aspects of governance. There were two very powerful magistrates called Censors. They were elected once in every five years and held office for eighteen months at a time. During their tenure they had to carry out a census of Roman

citizens. This was very different from the modern concept of a census. It was confined only to citizens. The Censors recorded the names of citizens and the amount of property possessed by each citizen. The census determined the eligibility of a citizen, depending upon the value of his property, to hold various elective offices of the Roman state. The Censors also controlled public morality and had the right to take action against any citizen who violated norms of public morality. The Censors had a few additional functions such as leasing out public lands and granting state contracts. All these functions combined to make the censorship a very powerful office. In the early Republic only patricians (mainly former Consuls) could be elected as Censors. Later, just as in the case of the consulship, plebeians too became eligible for the censorship. Besides the Consuls and the Censors, there were numerous junior magistrates, as for example Aediles and Quaestors. These magistrates were also elected. All magistrates served in an honorary capacity (i.e. they did not receive any remuneration from the state).

13.3.3 Struggle Between Patricians and Plebeians

The history of the early Republic was marked by a constant struggle between the landed aristocracy and the common people. While on the one hand the patricians tried to concentrate all political power in their hands, on the other hand the plebeians began to assert themselves and demanded that they should also have a say in the political process. The system evolved by the patricians after the establishment of the Republic completely denied the plebeians any say in the government. It is not difficult to see why the peasantry could not be easily ignored. The Roman aristocracy had to seek the support of the peasantry for defending the city and subsequently for expansion in Italy. Roman military organization was heavily dependent on the peasants who constituted the main fighting force. The army comprised unpaid soldiers who were primarily recruited from the peasantry. The soldiers had to supply their own fighting equipment. All able-bodied male adults had to render military service. We have seen that this was the pattern of military organization in Greece as well. As Rome began to expand, the need to have the support of the peasant soldiers increased. Initially the peasantry derived some minor benefits from this expansion, but it was the patrician aristocracy that was the main beneficiary of the empire. The growth of the empire made the aristocracy fabulously wealthy and widened the gap between the rich and the poor. In the early phase of Roman expansion the peasantry was able to extract major political concessions. Through these concessions a small section of the plebeians (the peasants were invariably plebeians) got some share in political power.

13.3.4 The Assembly

Given the role which the plebeians played in the Roman military structure, they were able to successfully organize themselves to struggle for their demands. The political system of the city of Rome included a tribal assembly which had been in existence since the time of monarchy. The members of this assembly were all male adults of the tribes which originally inhabited Rome.

Comitia Curiata

The Roman assembly, i.e. the assembly of all citizens, was called *comitia curiata*. When the patricians assumed power and set up an oligarchical state

the *comitia curiata* more or less ceased to function. It continued to exist formally but had no real power.

The *comitia curiata* was organized on the basis of kinship-based social units called *curiae* (singular *curia*) into which the original inhabitants of Rome were divided. The *curiae* were extended clans which included both patricians and plebeians. According to the information that we have, during the early Republic the total number of *curiae* was thirty. These were grouped into three tribes. Each tribe contained ten *curiae*. The patricians were able to control the proceedings of the *comitia curiata* by choosing appropriate presiding officers. Voting in the assembly was not based on the principle of 'one member, one vote'. Each *curia* voted collectively so that only the opinion of the *curia* as a whole was expressed. Using their kinship ties patricians were able to influence the opinions of the respective *curiae*. They would speak on behalf of the entire *curia*. Most of the citizens were thus reduced to the status of observers. The participation of the bulk of the members gradually became so irrelevant that eventually one official representative from each *curia* was sent to attend its sessions and vote on matters placed before it.

In view of the inegalitarian nature of the *comitia curiata* it could hardly be expected that this assembly would reflect the interests of the plebeians. As a result of growing pressure from the plebeians the citizens were regrouped to form a new assembly.

Comitia Centuriata

This assembly was called *comitia centuriata*. The *comitia centuriata*, like the *comitia curiata* was an assembly of all Roman citizens (patricians and plebeians). The difference between the two organs lay in the manner in which the citizens were grouped. In the *comitia centuriata* the citizens were grouped into 'centuries'. A century was the smallest unit of the Roman army and was technically supposed to consist, as the term indicates, of one hundred men though in practice the number might have varied. In the initial stages the *comitia centuriata* resembled a military formation. There were 193 centuries in all. The 193 centuries were grouped into five classes. These classes were constituted on the basis of property qualifications. The 193 centuries were not distributed equally among the five classes. The largest number of centuries were placed in the first three classes, which were the classes of the aristocracy and the big landowners. In the *comitia centuriata* the century was a notional unit. Each century did not have the same number of citizens. The centuries of the first two classes had very few citizens in them. At the other end were the propertyless citizens. These citizens were labelled as *proletarii*. The *proletarii* were placed in the lowest class. This class, though numerically very large, was assigned just one century. With this kind of classification the participation of the poorer citizens in the assembly had no meaning at all. Since voting in the *comitia centuriata* was by centuries and not on the principle of 'one man, one vote' (each century counted as one vote), the aristocracy and big landowners had more votes even though they were numerically in a minority. The procedure and functioning of the assembly was also strictly regulated by the patricians.

The *comitia centuriata* was probably formed (or became important) around 450 BC. For most of the republican period this was the main assembly of citizens. Consuls and Censors were elected by the *comitia centuriata*, and all

legislation had to be approved by it. War and peace were the prerogative of this assembly. The *comitia curiata* now only looked after a few matters of a social and religious nature.

Concilium Plebis

Whereas the *comitia curiata* and the *comitia centuriata* were assemblies of all Roman citizens, there was also an assembly consisting only of plebeians. This plebeian assembly was known as the *concilium plebis*. The *concilium plebis* discussed issues which concerned the plebeians. Soon this plebeian assembly got institutionalized and evolved its own structure. It had regular procedures and elected its own officials. In 494 BC the plebeians forced the Roman state to formally accept two officers elected by the *concilium plebis*, known as Tribunes, as spokesmen of the plebeians. The responsibilities of the Tribunes gradually multiplied leading to an increase in the number of officials with this title. By 448 BC there were ten Tribunes. The Tribunes were elected annually by the *concilium plebis*. For the wealthier plebeians this became a much sought after office. Being elected Tribune gave to a plebeian some access to political power, something that was otherwise not possible at the beginning of the Republic.

13.3.5 Conflict of the Orders

In the traditional periodization of the history of ancient Rome, the two centuries or so from 510 to 287 BC are referred to as the period of ‘conflict of the orders’ (patricians and plebeians). The recognition accorded to the Tribunes in 494 BC was one important phase in this conflict. After this development there were four other major landmarks in the struggle of the plebeians.

- i) One of the foremost demands of the plebeians was that there should be a written code of law so that there was no arbitrary exercise of judicial authority. In the absence of written laws the patricians had consistently abused their judicial powers. The plebeians threatened the Senate that they would not perform military service if it not initiate steps to create a proper legal framework for the Roman state. The Senate set up a ten-member commission (‘decemvirs’) presided over by Appius Claudius. The commission prepared a set of laws for the Romans. This set of laws is known as the Code of the Twelve Tables. It was introduced in c. 450 BC, around the same time as the establishment of the *comitia centuriata*. The Twelve Tables were the basis of Roman law. Unfortunately, the full text of the Twelve Tables has not survived. This code reduced the scope for arbitrary exercise of judicial authority by the patricians.
- ii) The second landmark was the provision whereby one of the consulships was opened to the plebeians in 367 BC. The actual election of a plebeian to the post of Consul came much later. Since the Consuls were elected by the *comitia centuriata* (in which the patricians held the majority of votes) and the names of candidates had to be proposed by senators, it was not easy for a plebeian to be elected to the highest magistracy of the Roman state. It was only in the last hundred years of the Republic that plebeians began to regularly hold consulships. These plebeian Consuls became members of the Senate via the consulship. By utilizing this route a handful of senatorial plebeian families rose to prominence in the late Republic (e.g. the Gracchus brothers and Mark Antony).

- iii) Another crucial reform was introduced in 326 BC. Roman law had a very harsh provision which related to the strict enforcement of formal contracts or *nexum*. If a Roman entered into a formal agreement or *nexum* while contracting a loan in which the debtor's person was pledged as security, failure to honour the agreement resulted in debt bondage. Debts incurred due to frequent participation in wars, as well as to meet diverse economic needs, had made indebtedness a chronic peasant problem. When the peasants and other poor people were unable to repay their loans they were enslaved. *Nexum* thus became a device for the big landowners to convert free peasants into unfree labour. The abolition of *nexum* was thus a crucial issue for the plebeians. In 326 BC a law was enacted which prohibited the enslavement of Roman citizens for non-repayment of debts.
- iv) The fourth, and politically the most significant, landmark in the conflict of the orders during the early Republic was a step taken in 287 BC which gave the plebeian Tribunes full-fledged magisterial powers. There seems to have been a serious crisis at this stage which culminated in another threat by the plebeians to withdraw from military service. The political crisis at home coincided with the plan to subjugate the Greek states of southern Italy. By a law of 287 BC the decisions of the *concilium plebis* were made binding on the Roman state. Henceforth the Tribunes were authorized to enforce the decisions of the *concilium plebis* with the full sanction of the Roman state, with appropriate punishments for violation. This legislation greatly increased the clout of the *concilium plebis*. Its decisions had full legal authority. Correspondingly, the tribuneship became a powerful magistracy. The events of 287 BC are supposed to have brought to an end the conflict of the orders.

It needs to be emphasized that the Senate—the membership of which remained predominantly patrician—never gave up its preeminent position within the Roman state. It made a few concessions by allowing the assemblies of Roman citizens and the *concilium plebis* to have some say in the affairs of the Roman state. But the Senate retained its overall control over the decision-making process. This gave rise to new contradictions which eventually brought about the end of the Republic.

13.3.6 Social Differentiation in Plebeians

At the beginning of the Republic most of the plebeians had been peasants. By the late Republic the plebeian order had become socially differentiated. At one end was a tiny elite among the plebeians. This elite had used political concessions to gain access to power and wealth. A handful of plebeian senatorial families came into existence which enjoyed almost the same status as the patrician aristocracy. This small section of the plebeians had fully become a part of the ruling oligarchy of Rome by the late Republic. The plebeian elite had little in common with the rest of the plebeians and was no longer interested in struggling for the rights of the peasantry.

At the other end were the propertyless citizens. In the early Republic most of the plebeians had owned some land, but by the third century BC many of them had lost their holdings. In the *comitia centuriata* the propertyless citizens were placed in the single century allotted to the *proletarii*. In between the plebeian elite and the landless class stood the peasantry. The Roman small peasants

were called *assidui*. The *assidui* constituted the bulk of the Roman infantry. The abolition of debt bondage in 326 BC had placed restrictions on the enslavement of peasants for non-repayment of loans. However, the peasants continued to lose their landholdings. This situation was further aggravated due to their participation in wars of expansion that went on for many centuries. After 146 BC the struggle of the peasants centred around the question of land reforms. The question of land reform had assumed urgency not only due to the desperate condition of the *assidui* but also because without land peasants were unable to mobilize resources to render military service. Land reforms were unacceptable to the aristocracy. Due to their violent opposition, it was just not possible to carry out any redistribution of holdings.

13.4 CONFLICTS AND EXPANSION

The republic experienced some unique changes during last hundred years of its existence. The most important of these was the creation of a professional army under individual commanders. These armies were fiercely loyal to their commanders. These commanders led campaigns for enhancing their powers and resources. The commanders with increase in their powers entered into conflicts with each other as well as the senate to control the republic. In this section we have a brief discussion on these important developments.

13.4.1 Professional Army and War Lords

In the Roman republic small land holding peasants were the main strength of the army. These soldiers had to arrange their own weapons and battle gear. The desperate condition of peasants, as discussed in the previous section had implications for the army also.

The opposition to land redistribution and the dwindling size of the *assidui* class necessitated an immediate solution to the problem of recruiting soldiers. Landless citizens could not be made to render military service out of their own resources. Earlier, a partial solution had been found by raising auxiliary contingents from subjugated territories. A portion of the cavalry was also maintained at state expense. In 100 BC Marius who held the post of Consul for several terms and was a leading political and military figure, introduced changes in the military organization of Rome by inducting paid troops. Roman soldiers now began to receive a salary from the state. The creation of a professional standing army which was commanded by military leaders drawn from the aristocracy gave a new dimension to the political conflicts in Rome. Previously the *assidui* soldiers would return home after a campaign and go back to their fields. Paid soldiers were permanently engaged in campaigns and were stationed for long periods outside Italy in distant parts of the empire. The army units developed an identity and cohesiveness which was not present earlier. The units were fiercely loyal to their commanders to whose planning and strategy they attributed their achievements. This was particularly the case with the more successful commanders. Victory in war gave a chance to the soldiers to loot and plunder.

With large well-trained armies under them the military leaders of the aristocracy could violently assert themselves for controlling the Roman state. There were several such commanders in the period between 100 BC and 27 BC: Marius himself, Sulla, Crassus, Pompey, Julius Caesar, Mark Antony and Augustus.

The army was increasingly deployed to suppress discontent and to promote the interests of the aristocracy. It was also used in the personal factional conflicts of the aristocracy. The army itself became a factor in the politics of Rome.

The disappearance of the *assidui* as a class transformed the character of the Republic. Roman citizens in central Italy were now mainly propertyless plebeians. Having no means of subsistence at their disposal they congregated in the city of Rome where cheap rations were available. Considering that most of the *proletarii* could not afford even subsidized grain the Roman state began to distribute free grain to the most destitute citizens. It has been estimated by c. 50 BC about 320,000 citizens were receiving free grain. These impoverished *proletarii* could be easily manipulated by the aristocracy in their political conflicts.

13.4.2 Wars for Expansion

The social and political developments at Rome in the late Republic coincided with major military campaigns in West Asia. In continuation of the objective to bring the Hellenistic kingdoms in this region under its control, Rome had been constantly intervening in the affairs of the western Mediterranean region and West Asia. Macedonia had been annexed, the Greek states had been forced to accept Roman supremacy, western Anatolia had been organized as the province of Asia, the Seleucids (who now ruled only over Syria) had been defeated in war, and Egypt was made a protectorate. The Romans had to maintain a very large army in the east in order to consolidate their position and to crush resistance. The command of this vast army became a matter of dispute among the political and military leaders of Rome. Marius, had been given charge of the campaigns in the east for some time. He was opposed by Sulla who at that time headed the most conservative group within the patrician aristocracy. Sulla was stationed in the east and he refused to hand over command to Marius. Instead, he marched to Rome with the army and tried to forcibly seize power. As a result a Civil War broke out between the supporters of Sulla and Marius.

In this Civil War, which lasted from 88 to 82 BC, Sulla soon got the upper hand. His task was made easier by the death of Marius in 86 BC. Following this he carried out military campaigns in Anatolia and Greece and was successful in putting down the resistance to Roman occupation in the area. This added to his prestige and increased his hold over the army. He used his power to become absolute ruler of the Roman empire. Sulla returned to Rome in 82 BC and with the help of the army brutally suppressed his opponents. In 81 BC he got himself appointed Dictator (this was a formal position in the Roman state and carried with it absolute authority; a Dictator could be appointed to deal with an emergency, but could not hold this office for more than six months). Sulla defied the rule according to which six months was the maximum period for which a Roman Dictator could retain this office. He extended his dictatorship indefinitely. Sulla retired in 79 BC due to personal reasons and died the following year.

The dictatorship of Sulla was a turning point in the history of the Republic. From now on powerful military commanders, or 'warlords', controlled the Roman empire. The violent conflicts of these warlords speeded up the collapse of the Republic. The military situation was critical at the time of Sulla's

retirement. The east had not been fully pacified and Rome was faced with a major revolt in the west. Some of the supporters of Marius had launched a movement against Sulla's dictatorship. The province of Spain was the main centre of this revolt. The movement developed into a guerrilla war under the leadership of Sertorius. Between 80 and 72 BC the province was virtually independent. Within Italy itself a major slave uprising broke out in 73 BC and went on till 71 BC. This uprising, which was led by a slave named Spartacus, was the biggest slave revolt in Graeco-Roman antiquity. The Spartacus revolt, as it is called, engulfed a large part of southern Italy and could only be crushed after very heavy fighting.

In this situation Rome had to carry out military mobilization on a massive scale. The military campaigns of this critical period brought four warlords to the forefront of Roman politics: Lucullus, Crassus, Pompey and Julius Caesar. Their struggle for power dominated the closing years of the Republic. All four derived their strength from the armies which they commanded and the prestige that they gained due to their victories. They were also prominent figures in the politics of Rome. Pompey was responsible for the defeat of Sertorius, Crassus suppressed the Spartacus revolt and Lucullus led several successful campaigns in the east. In 70 BC Crassus and Pompey strengthened their political position by getting elected as Consuls for that year. Julius Caesar was sent to Spain to restore order in the province after the victory over Sertorius.

In 67 BC Lucullus was recalled from the east and subsequently retired from public life. This left three warlords—Crassus, Pompey, and Julius Caesar. Pompey was now sent to replace Lucullus. He was given extensive powers which were more wide-ranging than those of any other Roman military commander before him. He was fully authorized to settle the east in whatever manner he considered appropriate. By 63 BC Roman authority over Anatolia was fully established. Following this Pompey managed to annex the Seleucid territories in Syria. Syria became a Roman province with headquarters at Antioch. These developments made Rome a major political power in West Asia.

13.4.3 Struggle of War Lords with the Senate

The Roman Senate attempted to curb the power of Pompey and the two other leading warlords, Julius Caesar and Crassus, but eventually failed to do so. This was mainly because the Senate was unable to exercise complete control over the armies which these three warlords commanded. Nevertheless the tussle between the Senate and the warlords created a serious political crisis. Against the backdrop of this crisis Pompey, Julius Caesar and Crassus joined hands to take over the Roman state. The three warlords formed a coalition in 60 BC. This coalition is referred to as the First Triumvirate (the term 'triumvirate' signified that authority was equally divided among the three). The historical significance of the Triumvirate can only be understood when we realize that the constitutional machinery of the Republic had broken down by this time and there was no effective government at Rome. Pompey, Crassus and Julius Caesar tried out a new experiment by concentrating all power in their hands. The entire authority of the Roman state was vested in the Triumvirate. The other institutions of the Republic were not abolished but they were made ineffective.

The Triumvirate was renewed in 56 BC. However, soon after 56 BC this arrangement began to face problems. Crassus was killed in a battle in northern Mesopotamia (53 BC). Thereafter relations between Pompey and Julius Caesar deteriorated. The struggle for power between them led to a full-fledged civil war. Pompey was defeated in 48 BC and fled to Egypt where he was murdered. Julius Caesar was now the supreme warlord of Rome. In 48 BC he became Dictator with extensive powers. In 47 BC he was made Dictator for ten years. Caesar's attempt to become absolute ruler was challenged by some sections of the aristocracy. He was murdered in 44 BC. The leaders of the conspiracy to assassinate Caesar belonged to the faction of the aristocracy which wanted to prevent Julius Caesar from converting the Republic into a monarchy. It is a matter of debate whether or not this was the ultimate aim of Julius Caesar. Yet there can be no doubt that he was trying to alter the basic structure of the Republic and this was resisted violently.

The supporters of Julius Caesar quickly reorganized themselves under the leadership of Mark Antony, Lepidus and Octavian Caesar. Mark Antony was one of the most prominent allies of Julius Caesar while Lepidus was 'master of the horse' (an important office linked to a Dictator) during the dictatorship. Octavian was a grand-nephew of Julius Caesar and was recognized as his adopted son. Mark Antony, Lepidus and Octavian formed a new triumvirate, known as the Second Triumvirate, in 43 BC. Within a year the Triumvirate had suppressed all opposition. Brutus and Cassius were defeated in battle (42 BC). Soon afterwards, Lepidus was forced to retire from the Triumvirate, leaving Mark Antony and Octavian complete masters of the empire. Subsequent differences between the two led to a power struggle which culminated in an open war. The struggle for power between the two coincided with further Roman campaigns in the east. Mark Antony sought the support of Cleopatra, the Ptolemaic ruler of Egypt. The combined forces of Mark Antony and Cleopatra were defeated by Octavian at Actium on the western coast of mainland Greece in 31 BC. Mark Antony and Cleopatra were dead by 30 BC and Octavian had a virtual monopoly of political power in Rome. In 27 BC Octavian assumed the title Augustus (exalted), the name by which he was henceforth known. He simultaneously declared himself as *Princeps*, i.e. the first and foremost citizen. 27 BC formally marks the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Principate.

Augustus was the supreme ruler of the Roman empire for four decades till his death in AD 14. He successfully transformed the character of the Republic—a process which had begun as early as 81 BC under Sulla's dictatorship. Augustus was careful not to hurt the sentiments that the people had for Roman republican traditions. These traditions had a history of several centuries and could not be immediately abandoned. Most of the political institutions of the Republic were retained and the designations of most of the public officials remained the same as before. Augustus himself did not assume any royal title. *Princeps* merely implied first citizen. In fact it might not have been apparent to his contemporaries that a monarchical form of government was coming into existence. It is only when we place the Augustan era in a historical context that we can understand the implications of his actions and see how he replaced the Republic with a monarchy.

It needs to be pointed out that Roman monarchy under the Principate had

some very unusual features which were in fact products of the long republican past of Rome. Whereas Augustus managed to fundamentally alter the nature of the Republic we must bear in mind that the final transition to a monarchical form of government was actually completed in a period spread over several generations. For a very long time Augustus and his successors maintained the fiction that the Republic had not come to an end. In theory the authority of the emperor (i.e. *Princeps*) was not derived from any divine right to rule but was based on the consent of the citizens. The ruler was supposed to be the embodiment of the Republic. In practice this meant that a ruler had to have the sanction of the Senate and the army. Unlike most of the other republican institutions which existed only in name, the Senate did retain some authority after 27 BC. Though there were no formal rules about how the emperor was to be chosen (dynastic successions were an exception, rather than the rule), recognition by both the Senate and the army gave the stamp of legitimacy to an emperor and made his rule relatively stable. The three main components of the new political structure were the emperor, the Senate and the army. The success of Augustus lay in ensuring that a proper balance of power was maintained between these three components. The stability that he imparted to the new arrangement allowed the Principate to survive for nearly 250 years.

The Roman empire continued to expand under the Principate till AD 117 when it reached its greatest territorial extent. The empire included Spain (including present-day Portugal), Gaul (modern France and Belgium), Britain, Italy, and all of central and eastern Europe south of the river Danube. Romania, situated across the Danube, was also a Roman territory. In the east the empire encompassed Anatolia, Syria, Palestine, parts of northern Mesopotamia and Egypt. In northern Africa Roman rule extended to all the territories located between the Sahara desert and the Mediterranean sea. The entire Mediterranean was politically unified for several centuries under the Romans and was vital for sustaining its economy. Control over the Mediterranean facilitated long-distance trade and communications.

13.5 SLAVERY

We have noted that large-scale slavery was an important feature of the Greek social formation. However it was in Rome that slavery reached its most extensive development in the ancient world. The Roman aristocracy had acquired vast landed estates in the western portion of the empire (especially in Spain, Gaul and Italy). The conquest of these territories opened up new possibilities for the expansion of slavery. The agrarian economy of western Europe was dominated by the huge landed estates known as *latifundia*. The estates of big landowners in classical Greece bear no comparison with the size of the *latifundia*. In Greece large holdings ranged in size from 75 to 100 acres. Estates above 100 acres were unusual. The *latifundia* of the Roman aristocracy were normally several thousand acres in size. The big latifundists possessed holdings amounting to several hundred of thousands of acres.

Agricultural labour on the *latifundia* was carried out by slaves. The possibilities for the expansion of slavery were quite limited in Greece due to the small size of land holdings. Now the *latifundia* could absorb ever-increasing numbers of slaves. War and piracy sustained slave supplies for these estates. It has been estimated that in the Italian peninsula itself the slave population rose from

600,000 to 3 million between 225 and 43 BC. The consolidation of Roman rule in the western provinces under Augustus and his immediate successors led to the extension of agriculture and of slavery in Spain and Gaul. The era of peace and stability ushered in by the Augustan age allowed the Roman ruling class to amass huge fortunes.

Roman law recognized slaves as a form of property. The commonly used term for a slave was *servus*. Slaves were commodities, bought and sold in the market in the same way as cattle. Slave labour was to be found in every sector of the Roman economy. Agriculture, mining, and handicraft production were the sectors in which they were the most numerous. Slaves accounted for as much as ninety per cent of handicraft production. Slaves were also employed as clerks in government offices. The majority of the slaves worked on *latifundia*. Agricultural slaves, as well as slaves engaged in mining, were often bound by chains. The Roman State used force to keep a strict control over the slaves. Special care was taken to disperse them and prevent formation of any solidarity among slaves. They spoke different languages and had no kinship ties. In spite of the strict control of the state we come across many uprisings and revolts of these slaves. We have evidence for three major slave revolts. The first (136 – 132 BC) took place in Sicily. The second such revolt on this island occurred in 104 – 120 BC. One of the most serious of slave revolt took place in around 73 – 71 BC called Spartacus revolt which started in Capua (near modern Naples). All these were ruthlessly suppressed. In no society throughout human history did the use of slaves attain the same magnitude as in ancient Rome. Rome, like Greece, was not just a society with slaves, but was a slave society. Graeco-Roman society during antiquity may be regarded as a slave society because slave labour was employed on a large scale in production.

13.6 SUMMARY

In this unit you have gone through around five hundred years of the history of Roman republic. It is very difficult to provide details of all aspects of this period in one unit. We, therefore, confined our discussion to select specific features and major landmarks.

The major expansion of the Roman empire took place over a long period of time with first phase upto 280 BC and the second till the middle of the 2nd century BC. Fresh campaigns for expansion in West Asia and Africa took place in the last century of the period under study (in this unit). The main emphasis was given to the political structure and social organisation in the Roman empire. The social orders, the Senate and the Assembly was analysed. The conflict of social orders led to the empowerment of the plebeians in Roman society. Rise of a professional army influenced the course of history of the last century. The large scale use of slaves in all sectors of the economy was another significant feature of the Roman republic. Roman civilization was so critically dependent upon slave labour that when the supply of slaves declined by the end of the second century AD, the economy began to face serious problems. These economic problems coincided with a political crisis which eventually resulted in the decline of the Roman empire itself. The history of this decline will be discussed in another unit ('Late Roman World') in Block 5.

13.7 EXERCISES

- 1) Write a brief note on the expansion of Roman empire in the early phases.
- 2) Who were patricians? How they managed to dominate plebeians in Roman Society?
- 3) How was *Comitia Centuriata* different from *Comitia Curiata*?
- 4) Discuss the four major achievements of the conflict of the orders.
- 5) Discuss the process of the rise of a professional army. How it affected the Roman republic.
- 6) Write a short note on the institution of slavery in the Roman republic.



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GLOSSARY

Cuneiform Inscription	Wedge shaped writing usually on clay tablets practiced in Ancient Babylonian inscriptions.
Hittites	The inhabitants of Hittite kingdom in Asia Minor. The Hittite empire flourished between 17 th and 12 th Century BC.
Ionian/States	Urban settlements along with coast of the Black Sea, developed centres of Greek Civilization (8 th to 6 th Century BC)
Linear B Script	The script which was used by Mycenaeans. It was an early version of Greek Script. It has survived in the form of clay tablets.
Lydia	One of the important kingdoms of ancient Anatolia. In the sixth century BC, it became a major power. Development of coined money is an important contribution of Lydia.
Medes	One of the earliest Iranian inhabitants of Media in Persia. The Median empire flourished between 6 th to 8 th Century BC.
Oligarchy	State governed by small group of persons who yield all the powers in running the state.
Phoenician	Inhabitants of Phoenicia (ancient name for part of coast of Syria) or its colonies.
Sexagesimal System	of sixtieths of sixty; reckoning or reckoned by sixtieth parts of fractions with denominators equal to power of 60 as in the division of hour into 60 minutes and minute in 60 seconds.
Tholoi	Large beehive shaped tombs which were used for the burial of Mycenaean chiefs.
Tribute	Payment of money or other commodities of value paid by one ruler to another at fixed periods as an acknowledgement of submission or price for protection or by virtue of some treaty. This is obligatory payment.

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